LIVELIHOOD ADAPTATION, PUBLIC ACTION
AND CIVIL SOCIETY:
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE[1]

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Summary

The political dimensions of sustainable livelihoods are explored here, drawing on the livelihood adaptation literature in India and Sub-Saharan Africa. The focus is on adaptation to short-term shocks and the negative consequences of longer-term change in livelihood strategies. Relationships of social exclusion, in particular gendered relationships with the state, formal and informal civil society, are found to be key in determining the effects of interventions into livelihood systems for different stakeholders. The very different configurations of public action, civil society and community involvement in reinforcing livelihood activities are compared, to see whether there are useful lessons to be transferred between the regions. The complexity of these relationships and the importance of societal differences between the two regions indicate that no single model offers an optimum relationship between the state and civil society in livelihood adaptation. However, many policy initiatives are advocated for Sub-Saharan Africa as a result of their success in India, without considering differences in formal and informal institutional arrangements. Attention needs to be paid to these underlying institutional arrangements, and to the outcomes of public or social action on livelihood activities for different stakeholders.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives

This paper is concerned with the interface between livelihoods and public and social action. It is a preliminary exploration of the political dimension of sustainable livelihoods based on a review of the disparate literature which addresses changes in the relationship between public action, activities undertaken by civil society, and livelihood adaptation. Literature from sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and India is reviewed, in order to contrast the very different roles of public action and civil society in the two contexts and to see whether there are useful lessons to be transferred. This comparison highlights the complexity of state-society-community relations: there is no single model to explain them nor a theoretical optimum 'balance' between state and societal contributions to livelihoods. Such diversity is especially significant given the tendency to assume that Indian public action is a model for SSA, especially in dealing with drought and famine. Many policy initiatives and interventions now being advocated and tried in SSA have long been carried out in India, but surprisingly little account is taken of the precise constellation of state-society-community relations in each context, which is a key determinant of success or failure. In comparing states and societies of such fundamental difference, any conclusions need to be treated with caution.

Interest in state-society-community relations arises in the context of growing concern about the ways in which poor people adapt their livelihoods to short-term shocks and longer-term change. This preoccupation reflects a shift in development thinking in the 1980s and 1990s away from externally imposed, often blueprint solutions towards a more iterative approach between development professionals' prescriptions and poor people's own developmental capacities. It indicates recognition and some understanding of the ways in which poor people manage and change their livelihoods in response to stresses and opportunities. Potentially, it implies an approach to rural development which builds on poor people's successes and enables them to avoid - or find alternatives to - some of the deleterious effects of unsustainable changes in their livelihoods.

Few would now contest this paradigm shift, which is increasingly tied to the idea of longer-term environmental and economic sustainability and to stronger links between relief and development. Coupled with it are changing perceptions of which agents are best equipped to plan for and carry out developmental change. Inevitably, debate has tended to polarise around top-down, public action on the one hand and bottom-up, participatory, local action on the other. In SSA, the state has become increasingly marginalised in this debate: either because of its perceived inefficacy and retreat or because the very idea of a centralised, often undemocratic state is seen to be at odds with the new paradigm. Conversely, civil society has become the darling of rural developers, offering an

apparently alternative and acceptable agency to bring about bottom-up development. Paradoxically, though, in SSA the favoured type of civil society is often itself external: foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In India there is not such a stark dichotomy between the state and civil society. Indigenous formal civil society is much more developed than in Africa and has a longer history of independent action, albeit often in alliance with the state. The Indian state's developmental capacity is also much greater and there is nothing akin to the crisis of confidence and legitimacy which many African states are undergoing.

This 'either/or' view of the state and civil society which influences so much rural development thinking around the pursuit and promotion of sustainable livelihoods is artificially distinct from debates raging in other parts of the development arena, especially concerning the role of the state and civil society in processes of democratisation. Even the recent attention to institutional aspects of sustainable development, focusing on the all-important informal institutions which are determinants of so many of the poor's livelihood decisions, has given inadequate consideration to the complexity and diversity of relationships between state and non-state sources of institutional control. The state is here to stay, and civil society in its many hues looks set to continue enjoying its renaissance in development thinking.

Understanding the relationship between the state and civil society is of central importance in identifying ways in which policy can be reformed to support poor people's own developmental capacities. An important policy implication of the paradigm shift is how to reinforce people's own attempts to adapt their livelihoods. In times of livelihood shocks, exactly how indigenous adaptation should be reinforced and what happens when this is done has received little attention, not least because concrete examples of policy implementation are rare. Most of the literature sees reinforcement as an intrinsically good thing, with general suggestions about policy instruments but little specific analysis regarding either conflicts and trade-offs between rich and poor, or men and women, or adults and children in processes of reinforcement, or the most appropriate division of responsibility between the state and civil society. The shift to more participatory development since the 1980s implies reinforcing longer-term livelihood adaptation. Our premise is that participatory development is impossible without understanding the underlying institutions or rules of the game between different stakeholders.[3] It is these underlying rules which need to be changed if policy reform and implementation are to succeed. This is not to suggest a universal 'solution'. Both the

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[3]   In exploring the relationship between adaptation and institutional change, North's (1990) distinction between institutions and organisations is a useful means of differentiating between the prevailing rule systems (institutions) within which organisations operate. These organisations are likely to be the focus of attempts by outsiders to reinforce adaptive strategies.

process of rule change and subsequent implementation will engender conflict and necessitate negotiated outcomes.

1.2 Livelihood adaptation and social exclusion

Our first point of entry is livelihood adaptation - the dynamic process of constant changes to livelihoods which either enhance existing security and wealth or try to reduce vulnerability and poverty. Positive adaptation is by choice, can be reversed if fortunes change, and usually leads to increased security and sometimes wealth. It is concerned with risk reduction and is likely to involve an intensification of existing livelihood strategies or a diversification into neighbouring livelihood systems. Our concern here is negative adaptation, which is of necessity, tends to be irreversible, and frequently fails to contribute to a lasting reduction in vulnerability. It occurs when the poor are forced to adapt their livelihoods because they can no longer cope with short-term shocks and need to alter fundamentally the ways in which they subsist.

Our second point of entry is how the relations people have with the state and civil society during the process of livelihood adaptation are differentiated by gender and other forms of social exclusion. Links between the state, civil society and the poor are variable, complex and highly differentiated in terms of the degree of access, reciprocity, exploitation and marginalisation both within communities and in community relations with the state and different parts of civil society. Social exclusion may be the direct result of institutional rules, but it also arises from self-exclusion in recognition of the rules conspiring against profitable and sustainable participation. Although much of the literature does not refer directly to social exclusion, there is a frequent concern with 'marginal groups' and, latterly, a preoccupation with understanding who is normally socially excluded and the terms of that exclusion (particularly when it is gender-based).[4] Linked to this is how changes in livelihood systems, particularly negative shocks, differentially affect those who are anyway socially excluded.

The capacity of poor people within communities in risky environments to adapt their livelihoods to a variety of types of stress and to make do with apparently very limited opportunities for diversifying sources of income has been the concern of anthropologists for many years.[5] But much recent work on livelihood adaptation errs on the side of socio-economics, with only passing reference to the importance of gender, ethnicity, family and community structure in how people adapt. There are a number of exceptions to this socio-economic bias. In South Asia, the importance of caste in defining

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[4] For a discussion of social exclusion and a review of the literature, see Rodgers and Figueiredo 1994 and Rodgers *et al.* 1995.

[5] D'Souza 1989; Campbell 1990; Jodha 1991.

adaptive options is emphasised (Lingam 1994). In SSA, ethnicity has implications for adaptive capacity in times of stress (Brown 1991). Kinship and friendship ties revealed by anthropological research are vitally important for adaptive processes in all societies, especially for women who are excluded from more formal channels of access to resources.[6] Patron-client relationships are important for both men and women, but they operate in highly gendered ways (Richards 1990). Other forms of intra-community exchange exist to assist adaptation: for example, intricate and multi-dimensional informal credit, savings and transfer systems exist in most poor societies, especially for groups excluded from formal credit mechanisms.[7]

Gendered differences in adaptive capacity are acute. Women tend to own less valuable assets and have less access to lucrative employment than men. They are also weaker partners in bargaining over household (and often community) resources in times of scarcity.[8] Traditional expectations and home-based responsibilities further reduce women's options for adapting.[9] Even though they may pursue the same strategies as men (e.g. migration, diversification of income sources, borrowing), they do so under different institutional rules. The key constraints on women's adaptive capacity are linked to ownership of assets and access to income, common property resources (CPRs), social support institutions, government and NGOs.[10] Access to CPRs, for example, is a key determinant of adaptive capacity and frequently depends on rights derived from birthplace and kinship ties. These resources can provide subsistence for women unmediated by dependency relationships on young adult males (Agarwal 1992).

Issues of gender bias in livelihood strategy pursuit in Africa receive cursory attention in the literature,[11] but in South Asia they have been much better documented. Concepts of intra-household entitlements and co-operative conflict have been developed as one approach to these issues, and suggest that women and men engage in a complex bargaining process when their livelihoods are under stress (Sen 1987). Negotiation can result in positive adaptation, but in extreme circumstances it can result in women, and their dependent children, being abandoned when they no longer have any means (or entitlements) left with which to negotiate. An important by-product of these negotiations is that children too are affected early in the cycle, further differentiating the capacity for and experience of livelihood adaptation within the household along generational lines. As women must spend more and more time on subsistence activities, children (particularly girls) take over their domestic roles.

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[6]   Chen 1991; Adams 1993.

[7]   Schampers 1984; Longhurst 1986.

[8]   Appadurai 1984; Kabeer 1991.

[9]   Brown 1991; Anderson 1994.

[10]   Agarwal 1990, 1991; Chen 1991.

[11]   There are some important exceptions, e.g. Campbell and Trechter 1982; Vaughan 1987; Brown 1991.

Similarly, tasks are transferred from younger to older and more infirm household members. There are many refinements of this model, which emphasise less the end result of co-operative conflict than the processes which lead to gender-differentiated pursuit of adaptive strategies.[12]

Just as biases in intra-household resource allocation vary significantly between cultures, so do the ways in which women strive to overcome them. Female-headed households, in particular, develop gender-specific means of coping with livelihood stress as well as of achieving longer-term adaptation.[13] Although women may have developed alternative means of adapting, which by-pass some of these constraints, many are under threat (Gray 1993). Moreover, these options for diversification are class-specific: poor women are often doubly constrained, being barred from many of the options available to wealthier ones (Kerner and Cook 1991). It is important to note, however, that caste and other forms of social differentiation can militate against wealthier women adapting their livelihoods. Seclusion of high caste women, for example, can severely limit their options for seeking employment outside the home.

Gendered differences in adaptive capacity matter because in places where there are intense gender biases, tried and tested options for reinforcing adaptation may not work. Grameen Bank-type credit schemes, for example, which are successful in some Indian states, tend to fail in places where gender biases are particularly acute because women cannot use credit effectively because of their highly restricted access to productive and other entitlements, determined by discriminatory institutional rules both within the household and outside. Studies of refugee populations have been quicker to recognise the gender-specific needs of reinforcing indigenous strategies.[14] The need to target women in livelihood strategy reinforcement has also emerged from the wider debate on linking relief and development, on the grounds that developmental objectives (including gender-aware planning) should not be forgotten in emergency situations (Watson 1994). These gendered analyses imply - but rarely address directly - the importance for effective policy of exploring underlying institutional rules which adversely affect women.

1.3 Formal and informal civil society

Civil society is of central significance to livelihood adaptation - particularly negative adaptation - because it is the organisations and associations formed by those who are disenfranchised or disempowered by the state which constitute civil society (Bayart 1986). But the term 'civil society'

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[12] See Agarwal 1990 for a discussion of these refinements.

[13] Jiggins 1986; Agarwal 1991; Benería and Feldman 1992.

[14] Martin and Mends-Cole 1992; Walker 1994.

does little to illuminate the heterogeneous range of formal and informal organisations and institutions which operate in the non-state sector and influence livelihood adaptation. This complexity necessitates that civil society be analysed in the plural (Fatton 1995). To try and order this diversity, we distinguish between **formal** and **informal** civil society.

- Formal civil society is comprised of visible, legally recognised organisations and institutions. Active engagement with the state - whether as collaborators or opponents - characterises these organisations, which include foreign and indigenous NGOs, business associations, independent trade unions, and well-resourced and established community organisations. When such organisations are indigenous, leaders (and sometimes members) are often the elites of dis-enfranchised social groups (e.g. unemployed graduates in Africa, or literate members of poor communities in India), even though the organisations' aims tend to be populist.

- Informal civil society, in contrast, is made up of less defined and less visible rules and alliances based on kinship, caste, class and gender, which operate within and outside the household. It refers to the more organised elements of communities, easily identifiable by insiders but often invisible to outsiders. The institutional rules of informal civil society are not so frequently converted into organisational 'players' as those in formal civil society.

These different types of civil society are parts of a spectrum of more and less formalised institutions and organisations, not distinct entities. Community organisations, for example, usually begin at the informal end of the spectrum, but can become part of formal civil society as their organisational capacity grows as they gain access to external resources and legal recognition.

Our particular concern is with those parts of civil society - whether formal or informal - which have the capacity to protect and reinforce livelihoods. Most attention is paid to formal civil society and its relationship to the state. Despite its key role in livelihood adaptation, informal civil society is generally marginalised by the state's and formal civil society's attempts to support such adaptation. It is also extremely difficult to observe, measure or make generalisations about informal civil society, and hence analytically easier to ignore it. This informal civil society, though often based on customary practices, is by no means static. As livelihoods become more vulnerable, or indeed more secure, people voluntarily change or are forced to renegotiate the alliances and networks on which they depend. Critically, in the absence of public action, people depend on informal civil society.

1.4 State-society-community relations

A stark disciplinary divide separates livelihood adaptation from studies of relations between the state and civil society, which have been the concern principally of political scientists. The role of civil society *vis-à-vis* the state in SSA has gone through a number of changes since independence. Greatest attention has been paid to formal civil society organisations in urban contexts. Foreign civil society in particular, manifested by international NGOs, thrived in SSA in the 1980s, especially in the aftermath of the 1984 drought in much of East and West Africa. A large part of the debate revolves around NGOs (or the associations which they spawn and promote), as the most visible and often the most vociferous actors within civil society. Since the late 1980s, democratic change has gone hand in hand with a more active interest in local formal civil society as an agent of political change, although its contribution is greatly contested (Fowler 1993). Most important of the criticisms levelled against it is that civil society does not exist in splendid isolation from the state: associational life is a function of the state, social incoherence and economic decline, and many civil society organisations are a mirror image of the predatory state (Fatton 1995). Marginalised people deal with this not by embracing formal civil society but by developing strategies which generate alternative economic opportunities and an alternative society, with parallel social and religious institutions (the constantly evolving informal civil society). Greater political pluralism has tended to shift emphasis away from the view that civil society can replace the state, or that it is irrelevant to wider political processes. Civil society is not a magic wand that can create or reinforce democratic institutions overnight. Much like the state, it can support or undermine democratisation, depending on the interests of those involved. The more diverse and active civil society is, the greater the chance that it will enhance political pluralism, if not necessarily democratisation.

The recent burst of interest in formal, especially foreign, civil society in SSA gives the impression that associational life is new - or that if it did exist before, it was impotent. In fact, the rural poor in SSA normally have their own enduring political systems and African societies are comprised of multiple linkages and networks which run vertically and horizontally: this is the only way in which people have been able to sustain their livelihoods (Bayart 1993). Informal indigenous organisations were more or less ignored by international actors during authoritarian regimes and in the run up to democratisation, and were undermined by state authorities. They have nevertheless proved remarkably resilient, especially as post-adjustment states become ever more ineffectual in providing even basic levels of material welfare. The rural poor have responded by building up informal political and economic mechanisms to adapt. Democratic regimes have ceased some of the more excessive forms of destruction of informal 'traditional' institutions and organisations, which remain the most

influential part of civil society for the majority of the rural poor. Informal civil society continues to be largely excluded from discussions of the contribution of civil society to democratisation, often because it is seen as irrelevant, backward and hence intrinsically undemocratic, but also because of a preoccupation with (international) NGOs' catalysing role.[15]

The picture is very different in India. There is much less debate about civil society stepping into the breach created by the so-called (and grossly over-estimated in SSA) 'retreat' of the state, owing to the Indian state being better established and having greater legitimacy than many of its African counterparts. Formal civil society in India is principally indigenous and thus is not subject to many of the criticisms levelled at foreign civil society in SSA. The relationship between the state and civil society in India has fluctuated between close alliance and outright opposition since independence. Formal civil society and its antagonistic relationship with the Indian state has recently received a great deal of attention in the political science literature.[16] In this debate livelihoods are not addressed, but social exclusion as a political process is, especially in terms of how an array of social movements based on caste, gender, class, religion or ethnicity oppose the state.[17] Formal organisations and associations also directly challenge the state on the grounds that it is the chief perpetrator of social inequality.[18] Informal civil society is often viewed as an arena of intra-community inequality: social and cultural institutions are referred to only indirectly, as sources of conflict and objects of change. Where livelihood adaptation is directly addressed in the Indian literature, by contrast, 'community participation' is invoked as a solution to democratising the management of state reinforcement of livelihoods, particularly where this concerns improving the management of natural resources.[19] As in the political science literature on new social movements in India, current orthodoxy on livelihood adaptation allows informal civil society a merely marginal appearance; in the livelihood adaptation literature it is viewed as little more than an aggregation of households, rather than as a set of institutions.

Starting from the premise of the distinction between informal and formal civil society, we perceive the relationship between these two and the state in terms of three overlapping domains of institutional control, illustrated schematically in Figure 1. The closer civil society is to the state, the more formalised it becomes. Civil society is informal where it overlaps with community but not the state. Where the state and community overlap, it usually via the participation of elites. Participation between community, civil society and the state occurs when the three domains overlap, in the centre

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[15]   See Davies (forthcoming, 1998) for a more detailed discussion of these issues. See also Fatton 1995; Gyimah-Boadi 1996.
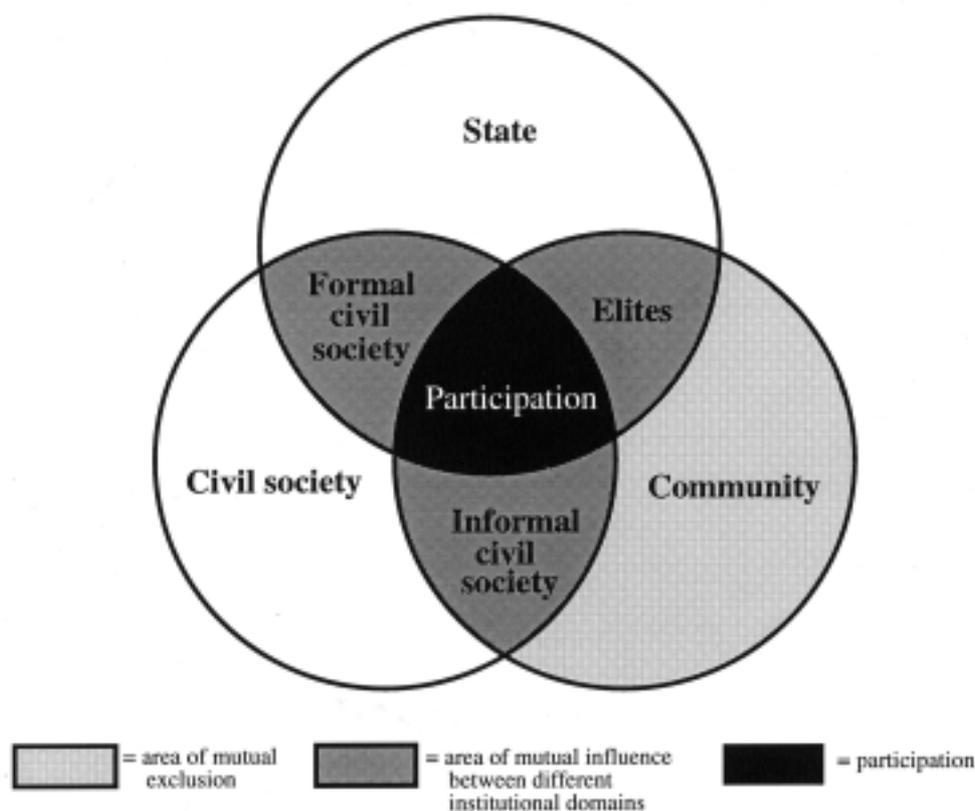
[16]   Sharma 1996; Srikanth 1996.

[17]   Omvedt 1993; Sathyamurthy 1996.

[18]   J.A. Whitehead 1990; Palriwala and Agnihotri 1996.

of the diagram. As the shaded areas on the diagram show, elites and members of formal and informal civil society exert mutual influence over neighbouring domains of institutional control. These 'socially included people' have access to and influence over the state, formal and informal civil society and/or community. Such people include: members of ruling political elites; economically powerful actors; members of dominant ethnic or caste groups; civil servants and the armed forces; active members of formal civil society; and sometimes locally powerful traditional leaders. Those members of the community who are included in neither elites nor informal civil society are 'socially excluded people'. They include: the poor; members of marginal ethnic or low-caste groups; and often women, irrespective of their social and economic status. Their children are equally socially excluded. And in societies where girl children are less valued than boys, girls are socially excluded even in wealthy or high-caste households.

Figure 1: The relationship between the state, formal and informal civil society and community

Most of the links between the socially excluded and the state, formal and informal civil society are weak. This is not to discount the possibility of purposive changes to strengthen institutional relationships that would normally be weak. These include: state or NGO interventions which target the poorest, women or other socially excluded groups; links between formal and informal civil

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[19]   Jodha 1991; Prasad 1993; Someshwar 1993.

society when NGOs or the state actively build on those existing customary institutions which seek to reach excluded people in implementing their programmes; or mechanisms within informal civil society designed to protect the most vulnerable from destitution.

Recent emphasis on institutional aspects of the relationship between livelihoods, the state and civil society reflects an increasing interest in institutions in development thinking. Institutions have always been a significant part of some disciplinary approaches, but their significance is now recognised across disciplinary divides. Institutions matter because they determine who is included or excluded and because they define the differing domains of control in state-society-community relations. Understanding the institutional rules which connect the three provides a point of entry for trying to integrate the normally micro-level analysis of livelihood adaptation to the meso level of civil society and through to the macro level of much public action. These include rules regarding: resource ownership and use; access to markets (including labour markets), to development or emergency aid, to formal social security systems or informal social networks; gendered divisions of labour, and so on. The prevailing rule systems mark out differences between stakeholders in the diagram (the included and the excluded) and legitimate negotiated, as well as imposed, inequality between them. Once again, it is vital not to forget the key area of informal civil society: community-level institutional rules govern the extent to which people are able to renegotiate their entitlements and extend their capabilities and functionings in order to adapt in those domains where the state or formal civil society do not exercise full control or lack legitimacy. This is the case, for example, in much management of CPRs, which relies on a combination of formal (state) and informal (customary) rules.[20]

Relationships between the state, society and community are constantly evolving. Institutional change is contingent upon changes within the state and civil society, as well as upon explicit attempts to reform rules between them. Thus changes in states' regime type may lead to a more supportive environment for non-state actors (as in the case of parts of recently democratised SSA), or the state may actively seek to co-opt civil society to carry out certain functions normally associated with public action. Conversely, in the absence of effective state action formal civil society may step in to fill the gap (the justification used by many foreign NGOs and donors in their famine relief programmes) or informal civil society may have to revise or create rules in the absence of an effective external institutional framework. Livelihood shocks are often triggers for changing institutional relationships. War is an obvious example, but social disruption coupled with declining state legitimacy in times of famine can also bring about change. We explore the nature of institutional

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[20]   See Ostrom 1990; Bromley 1992.

change in greater detail below. What emerges clearly from the literature is that some aspects of institutional control are highly resistant to change, especially those which perpetrate social exclusion, including exclusion on the grounds of gender.

1.5 Structure

To order this diverse literature, we focus on three themes:

1. the relationship between the three domains of institutional control of the state, civil society and communities, especially areas of overlap between them;

2. the importance of institutional change in redrawing the map of relations between public action, civil society and livelihood adaptation; and

3. the significance of social inclusion and exclusion in determining who gains and who loses from participation in this relationship.

Very little work directly addresses the relationship between state and civil society institutions and livelihood adaptation; much of that which does so can be broadly categorised into: responses to livelihood shocks, notably drought and famine, and responses to longer-term livelihood changes, especially environmental change. We have limited our review to drought and famine literature for shocks (Section 2)[21] and to natural resource management (NRM) literature for longer-term change (Section 3). In the concluding section, we focus on the implications of the evidence provided in the literature for four specific areas of debate.

2. RESPONSES TO LIVELIHOOD SHOCKS: THE CASE OF FAMINE MITIGATION

2.1 Introduction

Evolving perceptions of famine, and the lag between them and policy change and practice, have influenced the nature of public action and formal civil society responses to livelihood shocks. Until the early 1980s, such responses were based on the assumption that famines are time-bound events, resulting from a lack of available food. This view was substantially revised in the light of Sen's (1981) entitlement thesis and subsequent refinements thereof,[22] as well as detailed histories of what

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[21] The shock of war and its causal links to famine is increasingly important in SSA. We have excluded this literature from our analysis, but see Duffield 1991; Keen 1994a; Hendrickson *et al.* 1996.

[22] Swift 1989; de Waal 1990; Devereux 1996.

actually happens during famines.[23] The entitlement approach to famine stresses that people are vulnerable to starvation when they face food entitlement - not simply food availability - decline, focusing attention on the complexities of famine, especially the highly varied and differentiated entitlements on which people depend. Paying greater attention to the evolution of famine, and how famine-prone people themselves cope with it by juggling and diversifying their entitlements, has shown that famine is a longer-term process in which the bases of livelihoods are eroded. The assumption that it is starvation which characterises famine has also been challenged, on two counts: first, famine-prone people commonly distinguish between famines that kill and those which are less severe, but nevertheless have serious deleterious effects on livelihoods. Second, recent research has shown that social disorder and breakdown rather than acute undernutrition or starvation may create the conditions under which fatal epidemics can thrive - the so-called health crisis model of famine.[24]

These conceptual revisions indicate that famine is not analytically separate from longer-term changes to livelihoods. There is something fundamentally wrong with the livelihoods of those who are recurrently vulnerable to food insecurity and famine.

2.2 Public action

Changes in the practice of relief have lagged well behind progress in understanding what really happens during famines. Most public action to mitigate famine in India and SSA regards famine as an aberration. In SSA, responses continue to be characterised by too little arriving too late and take inadequate account of the impact of famine on longer-term livelihoods (Buchanan-Smith and Davies 1995). In some cases, this distinction between emergency famine relief and longer-term livelihood security is conscious and explicit: it is argued that effective state action must provide a minimum safety net to prevent starvation, even if the state is unable to tackle its underlying causes, and that the effectiveness of **famine** relief risks being undermined if it is not distinct from wider policy initiatives. This is mirrored in bureaucratic divisions between relief and development in state and civil society organisations. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that famine relief in Africa reveals an overwhelming preoccupation with the logistics of food stock management and food aid distribution (Drèze 1988a), emphasising the management of feeding people in famine conditions rather than of trying to support their livelihoods.[25]

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[23] For SSA in the 1980s, see de Waal 1989; Field 1993; Keen 1994a. For accounts of other famines, see Greenough 1985; Vaughan 1987; Akong'a 1989; Dyson 1989; Kynch and Sibbons 1993; Sibbons 1995; Kynch 1996.

[24] De Waal 1989, 1990; Dyson 1989; Jaspars and Young 1995.

[25] Amstader and Eriksen 1994a, 1994b; Berger and Koons1994a, 1994b; Greene and Herrick 1994a, 1994b.

In India there is greater emphasis on state institutional structures which pre-empt mass starvation and social disorder, and thus succeed in preventing famine if not widespread undernutrition and food insecurity. The significance of public action in reducing vulnerability to famine has been amply documented by Drèze and Sen (1989), the clearest exposition of the relationship between an individual's extended entitlements and the contribution of public action. Their model was developed in the Indian context, and although it has been applied to SSA it remains driven by an essentially Indian conception of state capacity and the legal right to freedom from death by starvation. These preconditions are fulfilled to a much greater degree in India than in Africa, although Drèze and Sen are more optimistic than many about the prospects for effective public action in Africa. While the relative success of India is inevitably compared with the failures of most African relief efforts, the Indian model is justifiably criticised as being an expensive, inefficient and inequitable means of preventing severe food crisis (Box 1).[26]

Box 1: The Indian model

The success of India's famine prevention is attributed to: the **political will to prevent famine; political accountability if the state fails to react**; and mediating factors such as a **free press and other strong civil institutions** (Drèze and Sen 1989).

It is closely linked to Indian state capacity, as well as to the view that, in a functioning democracy in which the press and other media openly criticise government, it is political suicide for the state to allow famine to take hold. It follows that there is a strong political will to ensure that state capacity to respond is maintained and that contingency plans are made, financed and activated in a timely fashion. Conversely, it is precisely because of authoritarianism and censorship that some African states can afford to have famines. Even though rulers never starve themselves, democracy spreads the penalty of famines to political elites.

Of critical importance is the political and social basis on which the state intervenes, making the Indian model inappropriate in many other contexts. This model is highly historically, culturally and socially specific. In India, democratic freedoms are less important than a specific politically negotiated right to be free from famine. The Indian nationalist movement chose famine as an issue with which to discredit the British imperial government, such that the legitimacy of the post-colonial government depends on preventing it. Freedom from famine is part of a social contract, developed through political struggle. In stark contrast, there has been little or no opportunity for famine prevention to emerge as a right in Africa because famine has never been politicised in the same way that it was in India: consequently there is no social contract between rulers and famine-prone people, nor any means of holding the powerful to account if they fail to respond (de Waal 1996).

Sources: McAlpin 1987; Drèze and Sen 1989; Longhurst 1992; de Waal 1996.

The picture is much more blurred in Africa than in India - not surprisingly, given the vast number of states. In the droughts of both the early 1970s and the mid-1980s, the state was widely held to have failed to prevent famine, particularly in Ethiopia and Sudan.[27] The failure of African states is due to

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[26]   Torry 1986; Venugopal 1992.

[27]   Cohen and Lewis 1987. See also Cutler 1991 on Ethiopia; and Keen 1994a on Sudan.

sins both of commission and of omission. Either governments have actively promoted famine as a means of suppressing political opposition, or they have constrained external agencies' attempts to prevent famine through a lack of capacity and political will. Lack of political accountability of authoritarian states and of good government in general, and the preponderance of civil and regional conflicts, have been earmarked as key reasons for state failure.[28] The failure of donors to respond and the premising of emergency relief on good political relations between donors and recipient governments, themselves often contingent upon strategic interests of donor states, have exacerbated the failure of the African state (Cutler 1991). This has diverted attention away from state-society-community relations in favour of state-donor-foreign NGO relations.

Failures may have been overstated, however, as the sizeable body of literature dealing with African successes testifies.[29] But even where success has been noted, the picture is far from clear. Botswana should provide the basis for a cross-regional and -cultural analysis of the possibilities of exporting the Indian model, but Botswana is atypical (in terms of wealth, political system and population size), and any lessons are of limited general value. Moreover, behind the rhetoric of successful relief operations in Botswana, the reality is that the politically unrepresented *Basarwa* people and other socially excluded groups were barely reached by relief resources (Simmons and Lyons 1992). This is strikingly resonant of the inability of the Indian Public Delivery System to reach the genuine poor, with subsidised food rations and other benefits accruing to the urban middle class.[30]

The timing of response is also a key distinction between famine relief in India and Africa. The 1987 drought in India, the worst for a hundred years, was widely held to have vindicated Indian famine prevention policies as famine was avoided. The lateness of response in Africa, by contrast, has been a recurrent theme in the literature, especially since the mid-1980s, analysed principally in the context of why improved early warning systems have failed to trigger more timely response. Whereas failure to respond in the mid-1980s was widely attributed to a lack of timely information, by the early 1990s it was clear that it was the institutional relations of control between donors, foreign civil society, African states and famine-prone people which explained the 'missing link' between famine early warning and response. Lack of state capacity to respond, of appropriate state bureaucratic structures, and political accountability, coupled with adversarial relations between African states, international donors and foreign civil society all conspire against constructive state-society-community relations to support livelihoods in times of shocks (Buchanan-Smith and Davies 1995).

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[28]   Duffield 1991; Keen 1994a.

[29]   Cohen and Lewis 1987; Drèze 1988a; von Braun *et al.* 1991; Longhurst 1992; Simmons and Lyons 1992. For a more ambivalent view, Amstader and Eriksen 1994a; Teklu 1994; Bush 1995.

[30]   Deolalikar 1991; Venugopal 1992.

The most appropriate type of public action is a hotly contested issue. Emergency food aid alone serves little purpose in the absence of a more comprehensive package of measures to protect people's entitlements during shocks to enable them to preserve their productive capacity for the future; to address social and health crises; and to promote entitlements in non-drought years to enable people to build up their own cushions against shocks. Most drought-based public action in India is concerned with the prevention of starvation rather than the protection of livelihoods. When linked to the contradictions in state policies relating to natural resources, which tend to weaken the ability of the poor to cope with food crisis, it is clear that it is less worthwhile to protect or promote entitlements themselves than to extend the institutional environment in which rules regarding entitlements are made (Agarwal 1990). Where public action is well-developed there is scope for evolution from emergency feeding towards food entitlement support. This takes a number of forms, including protection of purchasing ability through public works and public distribution systems with subsidised or stabilised food grain prices, and the promotion of entitlements through employment guarantee schemes, such as in the drought-prone state of Maharashtra. Of interest here is the way in which it becomes possible to promote the entitlements of those who are normally socially excluded. During the 1985-7 drought in Gujarat, significantly higher levels of participation were achieved among members of lower castes and women than higher castes and men, with women outstripping men in each occupational group (Drèze 1988b).

Advocates of tackling famine in SSA with public works schemes modelled on those in India note that the use of public works in Africa is more widespread than is generally believed, but is less well-documented than Indian schemes.[31] The aims and content of these schemes vary, from Kenya's long-standing general public works to food security-specific systems in Zimbabwe, Botswana and Ethiopia. Botswana and Kenya are held up as examples of success along the lines of the Indian model (Box 2), but there are drawbacks: gaps occur in the extent of coverage in Botswana, while the Kenyan public works record in the 1985-7 drought was criticised for public institutional weakness which rendered the planned employment generation scheme ineffective, as well as for fostering dependency among pastoralists.[32] A fundamental problem with exporting public works is that they are based on the assumption of a labour-surplus economy, certainly true of India, but not in much of SSA, especially the most drought-prone parts. This is particularly damaging for women, who may find their workload doubles when participating in public works.

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[31]   Von Braun *et al* 1991; von Braun 1992.
[32]   Longhurst 1992; Kilby 1993.

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Box 2: The successful African state

Botswana and Kenya are encouraging examples of African public action to prevent famine. During the droughts of the 1980s in Botswana, steady economic growth and supplementary poverty alleviation programmes were the setting in which price stabilisation, some targeted food distribution and rural public works strategies were pursued. The relatively open decision-making environment and managed but competitive electoral system in Botswana are credited with providing the context within which such success is possible. Policy-makers are characterised as willing to listen, to experiment with policy choices, and to make adjustments when necessary, all of which are linked to the flexibility and responsiveness of the political system, which in turn shapes its effective and preventive relief work.

That famine was averted in the wake of the severe 1984 drought in Kenya was attributed to swift government response and administrative competence in co-ordinating food supplies. Information systems and political commitment, starting at high levels, combined with the use of existing local government and commercial systems to ensure that logistical and decision-making obstacles were minimised, were the keys to Kenya's success.

Sources: Cohen and Lewis 1987; Teklu 1994.

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2.3 Formal civil society

Indigenous formal civil society is not accorded a significant role in famine mitigation. In India the scale and visibility of the state dwarfs the important but often informal lobbying and advocacy role played by some indigenous formal associations in times of famine (Box 3). In Africa the dominance of international NGOs, in alliance with donor agencies, contrasts with the Indian picture. International NGOs delivering humanitarian relief on behalf of donors stepped into the breach created by the lack of public action in response to the droughts of the mid-1980s (see Davies *et al.* 1991). Despite criticisms of its efficacy (Curtis *et al.* 1988), foreign civil society has been firmly at the forefront of famine mitigation in Africa ever since, developing more recently to include the growing number of wars in SSA and the humanitarian disasters which ensue (Borton 1996). Many have sought to revise the nature of their interventions, integrating upstream by investing in famine early warning systems and downstream by attempting to link their relief and development efforts.

Box 3: Formal civil society in India: SEWA in Gujarat

The scale of public relief works in the mid-1980s drought in Gujarat was massive and dwarfs actions taken by NGOs and other civil society institutions. The role played by SEWA (the Self-Employed Women's Association) suggests that three direct actions contributed to the relief effort:

- arranging transport and sale of fodder from south Gujarat to several villages in the study area;
- constructing a cattle trough;
- providing subsidised seeds, fertiliser and fuel.

SEWA also played a particularly significant advocacy and monitoring role, involving:

- lobbying local government officials;
- convening a consortium of NGOs to lobby at the state level;
- monitoring drought conditions and the official response.

While the limitations of indigenous formal civil society in dealing directly with famine are clear, grass-roots social action groups in which the poor are direct participants may have particular relevance, in complementing the role played by some political parties.

Source: Chen 1991.

The primary institutional linkage for foreign NGOs engaged in famine relief operations is donors, which channel aid through their 'own' NGOs as a means of side-stepping incumbent governments; retaining control over resources without directly infringing sovereignty; and pressurising governments which are deemed unsuitable by virtue of being undemocratic, corrupt, or involved in conflict (Box 4).

Box 4: Formal civil society and the state in SSA: USAID in Malawi and Zambia

USAID's response to the 1991-2 drought in Zambia has been evaluated as a model of effective relief management. The severity of the drought and the magnitude of the food gap could have led to widespread famine. Good donor-state relations were of central importance, as well as timeliness, creative cost-saving mechanisms for pooling donor resources, supporting the market system to provide sufficient food without disrupting structural adjustment activities, and well-designed food-for-work programmes. Through USAID, NGOs effectively delivered targeted emergency food, with a co-ordinating organisation helping more inexperienced NGOs.

Relations between USAID and the government of Malawi were less productive. The relief operation was evaluated as being largely successful, despite problems with timeliness, targeting and national government participation. Starvation and migration were prevented and agricultural production recovered, despite the government's insistence that it retain control of food allocation and distribution in order, according to USAID, to reap political benefit from free food distribution. It was recommended that the degree of donor control in resource allocation and relief programme management should be based on the recipient government's capabilities, legitimacy, and accountability to its citizens.

Sources: Berger and Koons 1994a, 1994b.

The predominance of formal foreign civil society has brought a number of problems in its wake. These NGOs can be extremely powerful, especially *vis-à-vis* African governments in times of crisis, in access to international emergency aid and media, and in their capacity to exert pressure on reluctant donors: criticisms have been levelled at them for by-passing the state and undermining fragile state structures (Buchanan-Smith 1990). Their strength and increasing capacity to respond since the mid-1980s is in stark contrast to the patchy improvement in public action. Although donor agencies have invested in improved public action in SSA (e.g. funding national early warning systems and, on occasion, emergency stocks), the option of turning to foreign civil society in times of crisis has created the conditions under which donors can justify withdrawing investment in contingency planning and building up state capacity, on the grounds that foreign NGOs can be called in on an as-needed basis. Failure to build up national public action renders famine-prone countries in SSA uniquely vulnerable to the vagaries of the international aid system, including declining availability of food aid and diversion of scarce emergency resources away from SSA to more strategically and politically attractive emergencies, notably in Eastern Europe. For all the activity in famine mitigation in the late 1980s in SSA, there is no guarantee that African states will be any better equipped to prevent famine by public action when the next widespread drought hits than they were in the mid-1980s.

For the international NGOs, becoming the preferred contractors of large food aid donors is a mixed blessing. It increases massively their resources and international visibility and provides them with an humanitarian justification for working in countries with authoritarian regimes; but it also threatens their independence from home governments and has led them down a path of providing relief rather than development, from which it has been difficult to retreat. To regard large international NGOs as 'civil society' is to miss the point: they are not indigenous; they are not always independent from donors and, on occasion, the state; and they lack the accountability at local levels which could be expected to serve as a counter to ineffective policies. There are exceptions, and many pride themselves on good and improving links to local levels, as well as with the state (see Box 6 below). One role increasingly identified for foreign civil society is mediating between local communities, the state and international donors, especially in times of conflict.[33] But this is itself problematic, given the uneven and at times tenuous links and legitimacy that these organisations have with the various stakeholders involved.

In the (primarily African) famine relief evaluation literature there is an almost total absence of indigenous formal civil society institutions. Occasional mention of local civil society organisations

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[33]   Bradbury 1994; Natsios 1995.

limits their involvement to a distributional rather than a planning role, often 'assisting' foreign civil society. Local NGOs were marginalised in the international NGO relief juggernaut of the 1980s, at times existing only on paper and unable to tap into the vast resources of donors, who retained their preference for international NGOs. Once the drought mania had subsided, formal foreign civil society organisations continued to flourish when supported by donor funds. Not only could these organisations deliver famine relief, but international donors increasingly viewed them as the answer to their own failures in project implementation and as complementary to their new focus on macro-level policy adjustment rather than direct intervention at the micro level. This was especially so in countries where structural adjustment programmes reduced state capacity to provide services, but failed to produce a private sector capable of and willing to take over from the state. To a far lesser, but nevertheless significant, extent some donors and international NGOs sought to promote local NGOs, in the name of building up capacity in formal civil society, but this has not really changed the landscape of famine relief.[34] In the drought in southern Africa in the early 1990s, indigenous organisations and local government were used to good effect in the distribution of aid.[35] They rarely, if ever, play the advocacy role adopted by their Indian counterparts.

2.4 Informal civil society

Informal civil society structures are marginalised in discussions of famine relief. The dominance of public action in India and foreign formal civil society in SSA has exacerbated this tendency. Foreign NGOs and donor agencies, as well as the state, need to justify their relief activities, and so overstate their own importance and it is assumed that informal civil society is incapable of coping with severe shocks. Informal civil society did, however, enjoy something of a resurrection in the aftermath of the famines in SSA in the mid-1980s. Critics of large-scale relief operations point to the wide range of effective coping strategies used to deal with shortages, which are rarely if ever taken into account by relief planners.[36] In SSA, interest in coping strategies was rekindled in order to understand why it was that some people had survived when many had not.[37] Subsequent studies have shown just how complex and at times effective informal civil society can be, especially in the absence of other alternatives.[38]

The Indian literature on adaptive strategies is more diffuse and recently has focused much less on shocks than on longer-term adaptation. Emphasis is placed on the increasing strain under which such

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[34]   Abdel Ati 1993; Borton 1994; Natsios 1995; Edwards and Hulme 1996.

[35]   Amstader and Eriksen 1994a, 1994b; Callihan *et al.* 1994.

[36]   De Waal 1989; Keen 1994b; Davies 1996.

[37]   Corbett 1988; Frankenberger and Goldstein 1990.

[38]   Adams 1993; Devereux 1993; Kelly and Buchanan-Smith 1994.

strategies are coming (Jodha 1981). In the Aravallis mountains of Rajasthan, for example, strategies were described by colonial administrators a hundred years ago; today the strategies are broadly similar, but returns to them are declining especially for the most vulnerable groups (Saint 1988). There is also a fairly well-developed body of literature relating specifically to coping with drought in dryland India, focusing on earlier stages of food crisis.[39] Both Indian and African literatures, limited as they are, tend to counter the view that people are helpless victims of famine inevitably in need of public action, especially when delivered as emergency relief.

The significance of informal civil society for famine relief operations is threefold. First, much of the logic of public action and of emergency relief operations undertaken by foreign civil society begins from the premise that famine-prone people have no alternative to external interventions. This, for example, colours perceptions of the availability of 'free' labour for food-for-work schemes. Second, by undervaluing the role of informal civil society, external interventions miss the opportunity to build on what is already happening and can ignore or by-pass indigenous drought management, further undermining their efficacy (Jodha 1981). There are few examples of trying consciously to reinforce coping strategies as part of a drought relief operation, of which Oxfam in Turkana is one (Birch 1994). Third, if famine-prone people's priorities during famine are to preserve assets, this has direct implications for the nature and timing of response. It suggests that a central plank of famine mitigation policy should be to build capacity at the household level for prevention of future food insecurity, rather than allowing the productive resources of already poor people to be run down before intervening. This involves an understanding of famine as part of a downward spiral of impoverishment and increasing vulnerability rather than as a one-off event (Davies 1996). More recent interventions, especially those in southern Africa in the early 1990s, appear to have taken this on board by promoting post-crisis recovery (Greene and Herrick 1994a, 1994b).

Advocates of reinforcing indigenous coping strategies also need to recognise their limitations. In vulnerable livelihoods, strategies traditionally reserved for periods of unusual stress are increasingly depended on more often, becoming so-called adaptive strategies, reducing the robustness of the safety net in bad years (Davies 1996). There is some literature in which what Fatton (1995) calls the 'uncivil' nature of civil society in Africa is exposed: community coping mechanisms can be exploitative and reproduce the inequalities in society in 'normal' times (Keen 1994b). In Mali, wealth or inclusion in lineage structures are important determinants of who is involved in the redistribution systems within the moral economy, with those excluded generally being those who need resources

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[39] Chen 1991; Jodha 1991.

most, but who are either construed as outsiders or are not wealthy enough to invest in social networks (Adams 1993).

Little attention is paid to the relationship between informal civil society and public action or the activities of foreign civil society. It is generally assumed that in India the effectiveness of the state's redistribution mechanisms in times of food crisis has undermined customary systems for coping with crisis, although there is very little systematic documentation of this process. Greater attention has been paid to how institutional relationships between formal civil society and the state have changed as a result of public action, especially a corresponding growth in the strength of more formal, organised civil associations and groupings (Box 5).

Box 5: Informal civil society and the state in famine management in Maharashtra: 'they would let us die if they thought we would not make a noise about it'

Well-established though the right to famine relief is in India, direct civil action to assert this right is what gives it substance. Strikingly, the best-documented cases of such action in crisis times are not mediated by formal civil society. Direct public pressure by drought-affected people in Maharashtra in 1973 made the prevention of famine a chief preoccupation of government. Employment for all was not only a clear instruction of the Bombay Scarcity Manual, it was also a perceived right which millions of poor men and (especially) women were determined to claim - if necessary by marching, picketing, and rioting. As one labourer aptly put it, 'they would let us die if they thought we would not make a noise about it'. Relief operations, particularly employment programmes, were the focus for a great deal of radical political activity, especially on the part of rural women. Witnesses pointed out that the increase in the number of organised attacks/strikes left officials and elites feeling that the situation was out of control. On occasions direct action was taken against traders, most notably when a gathering of thousands of peasants served an ultimatum on sugar barons which successfully forced them to contribute to the relief fund.

Sources: Mody 1972, Drèze and Sen 1990.

Direct civil action is mentioned much less frequently in the African context. While cases such as Oxfam in the Zambian drought of 1992-3 show the potential for strengthening the channels of accountability and responsiveness (Box 6), there is very little evidence of Africans **demanding** relief as a legal right. Foreign civil society appears to mediate between famine-prone people and their own civil society and the state, and there is little analysis of the negative consequences of such a strategy for independent African famine mitigation capacity.

A much more common view of what has happened to informal civil society in SSA is that although state-provided security has greatly improved food security, it has undermined local food security arrangements (Swift 1993). In other words, the customary arrangements by which poor rural households protect themselves against risk, primarily through linking themselves to more secure households providing labour and political support on terms favourable to the richer party, are being

undermined. It follows, then, that where there has been less effective public action and only intermittent emergency operations by foreign civil

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Box 6: Informal civil society, formal civil society and the state: Oxfam in Zambia

The 1992-3 drought in Zambia was successfully managed due to the positive collaboration between the government and the NGO community.

Key features of the Oxfam drought programme were:

- supporting capacity-building among Zambian groups and NGOs to prepare for and respond to emergencies;
- ensuring that issues of gender and sustainability were incorporated into responses;
- communication, including of explanations of causes and implications of disasters for vulnerable people to donors and policy-makers;
- encouraging community participation and giving voice to local perceptions of problems, especially amongst the most vulnerable sections of the population.

In one area, 70,000 households were involved in government-led maize distribution programmes (70% of which were maintained by women). Food-for-work programmes tailored to the needs of communities were planned, implemented and monitored by community structures and district groups, with varying degrees of success. More generally, use was made of the increasing openness of government and strength of media, lobby groups and the judiciary to encourage the development of civil society institutions. At the level of drought-affected villagers, channels for challenging and communicating with state structures were opened up, giving civil servants practical experience of dealing with drought-affected people, and the people themselves the experience of dealing with officialdom.

Source: Pushpanath 1994.

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society, local customary arrangements have not declined to the extent that they have in places where public action is more effective. This would suggest that informal civil society is expected to cope with food crises **more** effectively in Africa than in India. This is a very important supposition, but there is no systematic comparative research to show that this is indeed the case.

2.5 Social exclusion and livelihood shocks

Social inclusion or exclusion plays a major part in determining access to additional resources - whether provided by the state or by civil society - in times of livelihood shocks. There is apparent consensus in the literature that African societies are less sharply internally differentiated than those in India, but that more important than relative degrees of social exclusion is that the bases for it differ between and within cases. The substantial literature on class, caste and gender biases in resource distribution in India shows that the **direction** which social exclusion takes is not altered in times of

crisis; if anything, it is intensified.[40] To better understand how crises affect socially excluded groups, it is important to assess how bonds and relationships are recreated in the face of economic stress, rather than focusing on single units of analysis such as the individual or the household (Shipton 1990). This is amply demonstrated by the account of gender relations in the Malawi famine of 1949 (Box 7).

Box 7: Gender and social change in famine: historical evidence from Malawi

While features of Malawian matrilineal society were already under attack by colonial authorities and 'progressive' African elites, the famine of 1949-50 rendered women's traditional responsibility for feeding the nuclear household unit increasingly difficult. Women, almost completely excluded from wage labour, were dependent on their husbands for food. The most vulnerable were those without male support, for whom the colonial authorities took no direct responsibility during the famine. It was only after pressure from village headmen and chiefs that the authorities decided that these women might be eligible for free food.

The suffering of women in the famine was constructed as much around government famine relief policy as it was around marriage and kinship structures. Women began to redefine the duties of men more widely and to use the courts to uphold their rights to male support. While public policy was able to extend women's legal entitlements to their husband's support for their family, the existence of a dual household economy was not taken into account, and women with non-providing husbands were not visible as famine victims.

Source: Vaughan 1987.

At a conceptual level, the entitlement approach offers a means of understanding how gender is implicated in food crisis as it forces consideration of alternative aggregations of individuals, and draws attention to the discriminatory impact of famine on social groups (Kynch 1996). Official discourses on famine, however, tend not to disaggregate the household, other than making the occasional mention of the need (or not) to target women and children or women-headed households for supplementary health and nutrition support. There is some discussion as to whether or not women are in fact disadvantaged *vis-à-vis* men in famines. Even relatively affluent women joined public works in the Maharashtran drought of 1972-3, although the majority were poor (Drèze 1988b). Employment-based relief strategies can have some important advantages from the point of view of intra-household distribution, given the high involvement of women in public employment programmes in India, and the generally positive effects of this involvement on their position within the family (Drèze and Sen 1990).

Within informal civil society, studies of coping strategies indicate that the burden of coping within the household during famine is likely to fall differently on members in relation to their gender-based entitlements, with implications for intra-household relations. A study of the 1943 famine in Bengal

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[40]   D'Souza 1989; Kynch 1994; Byrne 1995; Agarwal 1997.

documented how women and children were abandoned by male household heads; those who 'coped' did so mainly by begging or prostitution (Greenough 1985). The institutional rules regarding the extended entitlements of women and children either changed in the crisis; or, although a last resort, abandonment was understood to be justifiable within the Bengali cultural logic of priority being given to the survival of the male household head to continue the family line. But public action also affects these processes. The Indian state intervenes directly in gender roles and relations in times of food crisis, having shifted focus from protection of individual entitlements to the family as the unit of relief policy (Kynch 1996). The role of the state in the Malawian famine of 1949 (see Box 7 above) also shows how famine may act as the catalyst for social change and crystallise tendencies in the direction of change.

If famine changes the institutions governing entitlements, the possibility for intervention which extends those entitlements to socially excluded people beyond their customarily low level seems clear. But the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that livelihood shocks render those who are already vulnerable even more so, by reducing endowments, exchange entitlements, and access to external sources of support, thus decreasing the individual's overall command over food. Bargaining power over intra-household resource distribution is also linked to endowment and entitlements, so that when these are unequally distributed crisis also impinges at the intra-household level (Agarwal 1990). Although this is still the subject of much debate, gender and child biases are known to exist in household food allocation in parts of South Asia, even in normal times. Agarwal argues that:

> "what view we take of the family - the despotic one or the co-operative-conflict one - could point to essentially different policy conclusions. Under the former, one could, for instance make a case for strengthening the economic position of the benevolent male head of household to enable him to better support his wife and children ... Under the latter view, women are seen as active (if disadvantaged) agents in the arrangements of reciprocity within the family, one would make a case for strengthening their fall-back positions and bargaining power within the family" (Agarwal 1990: 392).

That there is scope for redefining entitlement allocations in ways which strengthen the fall-back positions of those most vulnerable is given support by public works and employment guarantee programmes in India, in which women's rights to labour are enforced, and in some cases introduced, by the state, providing them with direct (and not male-mediated) entitlements in the form of guaranteed employment (*ibid*).

2.6 Key institutional relationships in livelihood shocks

Returning to our three themes, this review of the literature on famine and drought as examples of livelihood shocks indicates a number of key institutional relationships between the state, civil society and community. Where public action is highly developed and reasonably effective (in India), it downgrades the significance of formal and informal civil society to people confronting livelihood shocks. In general, public action does not seek to build on existing informal civil society's capacity to cope, but instead creates an alternative set of entitlements (to wage labour or to food). This may be an effective strategy provided that public action is reliable, and reliability is underpinned by the perception of a legal right to such entitlements, as well as the means to enforce it. Given the emphasis of public action on the immediate effects of shocks, rather than on their causes and longer-term consequences, this approach reinforces the tendency to separate relief from development and thus does not fit well with indigenous risk management practices. Similarly, where formal civil society is the key player, and when it is foreign, as in SSA, it is the role of public action which is undermined. Most interventions by formal foreign civil society also marginalise informal civil society, although there is evidence to show that greater account is now taken of existing customary institutions, albeit still at a largely rhetorical level. Informal civil society predominates where neither formal civil society nor public action intervene in a consistent and reliable fashion: this is, in fact, the reality for most famine-prone Africans. Nowhere does a mutually reinforcing relationship between the three domains of institutional control appear to have been developed, even though the literature suggests that this would be the most stable and effective basis for managing livelihood shocks.

The key institutional relationships depend to a large extent on which of the three domains is dominant. Thus where public action predominates, the state calls the shots both for international emergency aid and for local civil society. Foreign civil society does not feature significantly, other than as an adjunct to public action. How livelihood shocks are managed mirrors wider institutional relationships within the national political economy: thus in India the political colour of the state government will have a determining effect on some aspects of public action, whereas central government will fix the parameters within which this happens, irrespective of local differences (e.g. in price regulation). Similarly caste and gender biases permeate famine relief programmes just as they do other aspects of Indian policy implementation, and attempts to target marginal groups meet with very mixed success. In SSA, in contrast, where foreign civil society in alliance with donors is paramount, key institutional relationships may have little to do with either state policy or informal civil society. They depend instead on negotiation between donors and international NGOs, and between both of these and the government. It is from here that the sense of alienation of emergency relief juggernauts from the wider political economy and society originates. It also explains the failure

to build up African state capacity to respond to repeated famines. Despite the frustration of foreign civil society and international donors with the failure of the African state to improve its public action, external investment remains essentially driven by external interests, with informal civil society is as the unrecognised default mode. Marginalised when external agents are active and largely ignored by government, it is the only option available to famine-prone people when the dependent relationship between the state and external support falters. Consequently, people continue to invest heavily in their own insurance mechanisms.

In terms of institutional change, there is recognition in the literature that this state of affairs is unsustainable and not conducive to effective famine mitigation, and there are examples - especially from the southern African droughts of the early 1990s - which indicate some shift in attitudes of donors, foreign civil society and governments. Yet there is nothing to indicate that the key relationships have changed in a fundamental enough way to guarantee that famine is avoided in the future. This is due, in part, to the overwhelming contribution of war to the incidence of famine in recent years in SSA, which in many ways has provided a justification for not embarking on a sustained effort of institutional change on the grounds that this would be impossible in times of conflict.

Whichever domain of institutional control predominates, those who are socially excluded prior to the onset of livelihood shocks will be the hardest hit when disaster strikes. Public action and foreign civil society both emphasise the need to target the most vulnerable in times of crisis, although definitions of vulnerability tend to reflect prevailing ideologies. Thus, there are relatively few examples of attempts to disaggregate the household in recognition of gendered access to very scarce resources in SSA, and although there are more in India it is not clear that women are necessarily better off as a result. Informal civil society varies greatly in the emphasis it places on helping those in greatest need. There is nothing intrinsically welfarist about customary risk management strategies, and they too reflect prevailing demarcations of the included and excluded.

3. LONGER-TERM LIVELIHOOD CHANGE: THE CASE OF NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

3.1 Introduction

There is a vast body of research on longer-term negative livelihood adaptation: our concern here is with how state, society and community interactions influence such changes. Whereas in the literature on famine mitigation there is a clear theme of the roles of public action and, to a lesser extent, civil society, most work on longer-term livelihood change takes environmental impact as the point of

entry. The important exception to this, on which we focus here, is the reconceptualisation of the role of the state in NRM in light of past failures. But the emphasis is less on state-society-community interactions than on equity in the Indian literature, and on environmental sustainability in Africa. Decentralisation of management systems is a theme common to both. Little, but increasing, attention is paid to the social and political institutions implicated in NRM or to social and cultural change as a result of livelihood adaptation. This is especially true of the literature on SSA, where the crucial social dimension of change to livelihoods has until recently been downplayed. Exceptions to this are research on the gendered dimension of environmental change and natural resource use.

3.2 Public action

Traditionally, livelihoods have not been the point of departure for public action to support longer-term livelihood adaptation. It is environmental degradation which has driven policy-makers' agendas, leading to a wide range of policy initiatives to conserve (usually by restricting access to) key resources in SSA and India. But these policies have often been based on over-estimates of the severity of degradation and misunderstanding of the ways in which people manage - and sustain - their resources (Leach and Mearns 1996). The inefficacy of such policies inform much current debate. In general, it is the failure of public intervention in NRM in India and Africa which is now documented. Failures at the expense of livelihoods include: excluding people from the resources on which they depend, often using policing powers and tactics;[41] inappropriate centralisation and consequent mismanagement of resources; and tenure reform which has reduced access to (especially common property) resources, often disproportionately for those who are already resource-poor,[42] particularly pastoralists, poorer households, ethnic minorities and women.[43] Even state action which has sought to address problems of resource scarcity and unequal distribution, especially irrigation policies and land tenure reform, has had primarily negative effects on the most vulnerable. Case studies of forestry (mis)management in francophone West Africa illustrate this (Box 8).[44] It is as a result of the failure of the centralised state as policeman to protect natural resources that analysis has shifted towards a more people-focused approach to state intervention.

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[41] Brara 1989; Meintjies 1995; Chhatre 1996.

[42] Thomson 1994; Stiles 1995; Unruh 1995; Devereux 1996.

[43] Anderson and Grove 1987; Harbeson 1990; Helland 1990; Campbell 1991; Meintjies 1995; Pointing 1995.

[44] Thomson 1994; Brinkerhoff 1995.

> **Box 8: Forest resources and the state in SSA: the case of Mali**
>
> The shortcomings of the Malian forestry policy can be traced to the creation in 1935 of the Mali Forestry Service as a policing operation with paramilitary powers of enforcement. Incentives to fine illegal users of forest resources turned into a *de facto* taxation system, which led to corruption and extortion. Corruption in turn facilitated environmentally damaging behaviour, as villagers interpreted fines as the price of resource access. Even the shift in the 1980s towards adding extension work to the forest officials' police role failed, as villagers did not perceive any fundamental change, and the officials themselves were without institutional backup to perform these roles. The Service was detested by rural people, but was insulated from public outrage under a military dictatorship.
>
> Its perceived role as the protector of the environment against the environmentally degrading behaviour of the ignorant and irresponsible agriculturists and pastoralists has been hard to change since the shift from authoritarian to more democratic rule, although many of the Forestry Service's excesses have been curbed, either by public opposition or by government ruling. Attempts to reform the Service are still under way, coupled with a more fundamental revision of the way in which NRM is structured in Mali. But the legacy of the Forestry Service as rural police who actively conspire to undermine livelihoods is likely to persist in the eyes of rural people.
>
> *Sources:* Moorehead 1991, Brinkerhoff 1995, Degnbol 1996.

One exception to historically inappropriate policies is water resource management, where state interventions are often designed specifically to encourage positive livelihood adaptation through intensification. These interventions are not unconditionally successful, as the extensive literature on the impact of state irrigation policies in India on the poor and on social movements which contest such policies shows.[45] A number of generally negative themes emerge, many of which emphasise the reinforcement of existing social relations of inclusion and exclusion (Box 9). Large state-sponsored irrigation projects in India have long been the sources of much conflict between the state, NGOs, social movements and local communities, and often generate political mobilisation. Intra-community inequalities in water resource access are mirrored at regional levels: just as individuals with political clout tend to benefit from such interventions, so do politically influential areas or ethnic groups (McCully 1996).

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[45]   Ghosh 1987; Bhatia 1992; Ramanathan 1991; Maloney and Raju 1994; Sheth 1994; Corell and Swain 1995; Fisher 1995.

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Box 9: Water resources and the state in India

Water is a highly politicised issue in arid and semi-arid rural India. In Maharashtra, for example, sugar cultivation and sugar co-operatives using canal-based flow irrigation form a particularly powerful political lobby. Larger landowners benefit most from state-sponsored changes in irrigation systems. For example, sugar-cane cultivation benefits disproportionately from the block system of canal-based irrigation even though sugar-cane cultivators make up only 2% of the population, and 80% of them cultivate no more than one to two acres. Moves to redistribute water access more equitably have met with resistance from the sugar lobby. The lack of organised and united rural poor interests has made it impossible to challenge this lobby successfully.

Smaller landholders may also lose out indirectly from state interventions. Reasons for the inequity in benefits derived from water resource interventions in Gujarat include the facts that: modern irrigation systems are viable only for large land holdings; access to credit is crucial; the poor are less able to manage risk; and property rights mean that the landowner has unlimited access to water from his (rarely her) land.

The scope for small landholders to benefit from modern interventions is in general severely limited, while the overall availability of groundwater is also reduced by these extractive systems.

Sources: Sathe 1986; Bhatia 1992; Agarwal 1997.

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Studies of pastoral communities in SSA provide a microcosm of the overall debate about livelihood adaptation and public action. Concern focuses on the vulnerability of their livelihoods and on their marginalisation from wider society, on the basis of productive exclusion. There is less research on Indian pastoralists, explained by the more numerous and varied bases of social differentiation and exclusion. Traditionally, in SSA, the perceived over-exploitative and environmentally damaging effects of pastoral livelihoods have been the concern of policy-makers and researchers. Pastoralists have been held responsible for destroying the environment on which they depend by accumulating excessive numbers of animals and overgrazing pastures. This view has informed much public policy, for example the influential UNEP Conference on Desertification in 1976 (Fratkin 1991). And, not surprisingly, much public action based on such perceptions has deleterious effects on pastoralists. Further, many states have abrogated pastoral land tenure and assigned use rights of former grazing lands to non-pastoral peoples, reflecting not only an anti-nomad ideology but also the usual lack of pastoral representation among political elites (Horowitz and Jowkar 1995). Privatisation and new forms of group tenure feature centrally in studies of public action and NRM. The impact of such changes in tenure arrangements on pastoral livelihoods varies, but is generally viewed as unsatisfactory.[46] The imposition by the Somalian state, for example, of new tenure systems on pastoralist communities has blocked indigenous tenure development and adaptation in response to changing circumstances (Unruh 1995). This theme is echoed in the critical assessments of land tenure reform in dryland India, in which the ill effects of supposedly redistributive privatising reform are felt

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[46]   Fratkin 1991; Lane 1994; Ndagala 1994.

in the form of land use intensification and reduced access to natural resources as a by-product of CPR privatisation.[47] Criticisms of land tenure reform programmes in both regions also echo those of water resource management in India: political positioning plays a role in determining who benefits from land reform, as was the case in Kenya in the 1960s, when the government allocated the best pasture lands to progressive and pro-KANU Maasai.[48] Well documented examples include: national agricultural policies favouring cultivation in West Africa and Sudan, which deliberately reduced access to grazing lands; promoting privatisation of formerly communal lands in Kenya; and forced settlement and the introduction of mechanised farming in Tanzania (Bovin and Manger 1989). Most of these policies are promoted in the name of environmental conservation or improved food security, but research indicates repeatedly that they result in the further erosion of livelihoods (*ibid.*).

The views both of pastoralists-as-degraders and of policy-as-policing have now been substantially challenged. There is a lack of scientific basis for the fears of desertification and pastorally-induced degradation more generally (Swift 1996). Studies by anthropologists in particular have long emphasised the functionalist nature of the relationship between pastoralists and their environment: their activities are well-adapted, rather than inherently destructive.[49] Pastoralism is now understood as a dynamic adaptation to a difficult environment (Helland 1994). The new rangeland ecology emphasises how pastoralists in drylands are highly adapted to local environmental conditions and have sophisticated systems of NRM to maintain the productivity of the environment as well as the sustainability of their livelihoods (Scoones 1994).

This shift in thinking is slowly filtering through to policy-making processes. Conservation strategies are unlikely to succeed unless the livelihoods of the poor are taken into consideration, which in turn implies a more participatory approach to policy formulation and implementation.[50] But this shift has brought a new set of problems in its wake, especially the difficulties inherent in promoting more community-based state policies for NRM in communities which are themselves highly socially divided, stratified and inequitable. Recent work on environmental entitlements has sought to redress the optimism evident in much work advocating more community-based management systems and to explore systematically social differentiation within communities in the context of NRM (Leach *et al.* 1997).

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[47] Brara 1989, 1992; Jodha 1992; Shanmugaratnam 1994; Agarwal 1997.

[48] Fratkin 1994; Horowitz and Jowkar 1995.

[49] Fratkin *et al.* 1994; Behnke and Scoones 1992.

[50] Jodha 1991; Pasha 1991; Ghai 1993; Thomson 1994; Köhler-Rollefson 1995; Meinzen-Dick *et al.* 1995; Leach *et al.* 1997. For discussions of participation in various types of NRM in India, see Singh 1992; Shanmugaratnam 1994; and in SSA, see IIED 1994.

3.3 Formal civil society

The involvement of formal civil society in NRM is very different to its role in famine mitigation. First, the domination of foreign NGOs in alliance with international donors is not nearly so marked in SSA. Although foreign NGOs have become very active in NRM projects and programmes since the 1980s, the basis on which they intervene is not akin to the relief juggernauts which characterise emergency famine relief operations. They are highly critical of the impact of public action on the environment and strong advocates of the people-as-effective-managers lobby, but have sought to work with local structures to a much greater extent than is the case in famine-related interventions. Indeed, much of the move towards greater integration of relief operations has come from recognition that foreign NGOs' more locally grounded NRM activities have been more successful than their relief operations in bringing about sustainable changes to people's livelihoods. Against this, emergency situations militate against precisely the kinds of mode of operation which render NGOs' NRM-based programmes successful: long lead times; a process approach to planning; sustained participation with local communities and between foreign and local civil society; incremental implementation; and the ability to select zones of intervention.

Second, the distinction between formal and informal civil society is much less clear in the context of NRM than famine mitigation, because formal civil society (both foreign and local) has sought to build on indigenous management systems in bringing about effective NRM. Even in SSA, there is a stronger relationship between the state and local formal civil society in the context of NRM than in famine mitigation. Although local formal civil society was systematically undermined or ignored by policies driven by the people-as-degraders approach, there has been a significant shift in many state attitudes towards local management organisations and institutions in recent years. The distinction between formal and informal civil society is nevertheless worth retaining, not least because of the importance of formal legal recognition for ensuring that indigenous institutional arrangements are legitimated by the state.

Recent research emphasises the devolution of power over NRM to local levels. The so-called 'third wave' of democratisation in SSA has added credence to this, as well as theoretically bringing about the conditions under which devolution of power may take place. This takes a number of forms, from involving those generally politically and socially excluded from decision-making (e.g. pastoralists in land tenure reforms or poor, low-caste Indians in watershed management projects) to the establishment of civil institutions which aim to secure some power in management, such as the *Pani Panchayat* in India. In the Sahel, new NRM policies and practices are emerging that redraw the

boundary between state and civil society, because policy frameworks that allocate sole responsibility for NRM to the state bureaucracy have failed. In the forestry sector, many Sahelian countries are in the process of revising NRM policies and institutional arrangements to reflect a co-management strategy that includes local communities, often with NGOs as intermediaries.[51] The message to policy-makers is clear: decentralisation of power in NRM is central to effective reinforcement of livelihood adaptation strategies.

There are a number of more or less successful cases of civil society involvement in NRM. As an experiment in local community NRM, CAMPFIRE offers valuable lessons (Box 10). In Mali, community involvement in a CARE project began to consider with local communities the potential for reinvigorating the *Ogokana* (a pre-existing community-based organisation that once played an important role in local-level natural resource decisions). The project played a mediating and advocacy role, promoting discussions between local communities, *Ogokana* members, and government representatives (Painter 1994). Further positive accounts include that of the Purros Project in Namibia, in which a local NGO (Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation) works with pastoral communities to enable them to benefit directly from wildlife resources and tourism (Hitchcock 1995). Women's involvement was also noted: the funds generated were to be allocated equitably among household members after women objected to the original plan to distribute these to male household heads.

Box 10: Formal civil society involvement in NRM: the case of CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe

One of the best-documented examples of civil society involvement in local community NRM is CAMPFIRE (the Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources) in Zimbabwe. The best known effort in Southern, if not all, Africa to alter the colonial legacy of state control over relations between local communities and their environments, this initiative is one of the few cases in which the working relationship between different levels of the state, local communities and NGOs in SSA has been explored.

The aim of CAMPFIRE is to restore management and benefits of wildlife, and increasingly other natural resources, to local communities. While the official literature gives prominence to local community involvement, the role of the state is of concern. The power to decentralise authority to district councils resides with the central Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management, while NGOs are relatively little involved in the case studies available, despite the strong influence of international environmental agencies and interests on the policy environment.

A further area of concern is the extent to which intra-community differences are taken into account. There is evidence that programme design tends to disregard ethnic and livelihood system differences, with the result that benefits are unevenly spread. The implications are that the CAMPFIRE model is less able to involve all sections of the community than is suggested, but also that the difficulties of doing so are great.
Sources: Derman 1995; Madzudzo and Dzingirai 1995.

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[51]   Brinkerhoff 1995; Degnbol 1996.

It is striking how much more highly politicised the inclusion of the community at management level is in India than in Africa, involving direct and at times violent confrontation with the state. This provides an interesting point of comparison with the perception of poor Indians that they have a legal right to famine relief, so absent in SSA. For example, the *Mukti Sangarsh,* a strong village-level movement in Maharashtra, confronted the government over an irrigation scheme which would deliver uneven benefits (Omvedt and Patankar 1991). Gender, or at least the status of women, was addressed as an explicit concern by the actions of both the *Mukti Sangarsh* and URMUL (Box 11). The political importance of such collective action should not, however, be overestimated. Environmental NGOs in India have a much stronger impact on implementation than on policy (Potter 1996).

Box 11: Formal civil society and NRM in India: URMUL in Rajasthan

To create awareness among the public and develop alternative strategies for the Indira Gandhi Canal in Rajasthan, the Uttari Rajasthan Milk Union Trust (URMUL) organised workshops and demonstrations, including the *Nahar Yatra* (Canal March) in 1991, to highlight and present the concerns of affected villagers about settlement policy to planners. Participants included villagers, the media, academics, government officials and funding agencies. Although discussions were wide-ranging, from the status of women and land settlement policy to new structures for administering the canal system, the concrete difficulties of employing participatory solutions were admitted. The chief problem appeared to be the lack of institutions capable of mediating between the bureaucratic machine of the Canal Project, and those whom it affected most.

Sources: Ramanathan 1991; Shanmugaratnam 1994.

3.4   Informal civil society

There are two determining sets of institutional relationships which affect the inclusion of informal civil society in NRM: customary management systems for managing natural resources and the links between these and the rest of informal civil society; and the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups from these systems. Contrary to the assumption of much past state policy, rural people do have highly developed mechanisms for managing key and scarce resources, and these reflect wider differences within communities. Solutions to the marginalisation of customary management regimes are not, then, simply a matter of involving 'the community' in NRM, because communities are themselves divided, stratified and inequitable.

Changes in the way resources are managed are both affected by, and in turn affect, social organisation. Cases of pastoralists in Africa suggest that highly uneven benefits accrue to community members as a result of restrictions on rangelands and water resources. The shift towards private ranches to promote intensification, for example, has excluded women and benefited richer households disproportionately. Gender relations are substantially altered (often with negative impacts for women) by state policies, for example through male migration, which turns women into *de facto*

heads of household units whose livelihoods are increasingly insecure,[52] or through policies which promote beef production at the expense of dairy production (traditionally a more female domain). In more internally differentiated Indian communities, increased female economic dependence on male household members emerges from the degradation, privatisation and statisation of village commons (Agarwal 1997). Similar effects on social organisation result from diversification, particularly greater reliance on wage labour and commercialisation of farming. Disrupted gendered production relations can become sources of conflict and negotiation, as shown in one Tanzanian case study in which Chagga women diversified into commercial activity, but with much opposition from men (Box 12).

Box 12: Informal civil society and diversification: Chagga women in Tanzania

Increased commercialisation of local agriculture and their exclusion from the wage labour market led Chagga women to attempt to offset their loss of household economic power by brewing beer commercially. Income from this beer was normally used for household expenditure (still regarded as a wife's responsibility) and for education, mainly of daughters, as a sort of retirement fund.

During the economic crisis of the 1980s control of this income became a hotly contested issue: while men regarded it as part of a general household fund over which they had control, women understood it to be necessary for basic household reproductive needs, and very much their own. This became a public issue, with village courts adjudicating between women brewers and male beer shop owners. In one case, the local branch of the women's organisation (UWT) had lent the male-run village co-operative beer shop its start-up costs in order to establish access to a secure outlet for their product; the money had, however, been squandered by the male village leadership, who were unwilling or unable to repay the loan. The women's organisation sued the (male) village co-operative members.

Source: Kerner and Cook 1991.

Importing 'the community' into NRM is often posited as a panacea for very complex problems. The idea that local communities can constitute the basic organisational unit for NRM, in which indigenous systems of management are integrated with modern management practices, overestimates the degree of cohesion within a community. Failure to account for intra-community differentiation can undermine community-based management regimes.[53] That community-level management of natural resources is not a guarantee of sustainability or equal access should be clear from the criticisms regularly levelled at the *Panchayati Raj* system of management in India. These structures are unable to represent the interests of the community as a whole: transferring control of CPRs to them did not lead to the evolution of a community-based or indeed any other system of management. *Panchayat* leaders tend to be unreformed members of the former rural aristocracy, and the dominance of traditional elites in its offices tends to present it to communities as an extended arm of the government (Shanmugaratnam 1994). Even where election to this local arm of government is

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[52] Horowitz and Jowkar 1995; Pointing 1995.

[53] For the case of CAMPFIRE, see Derman 1995; Madzudzo and Dzingirai 1995.

reserved for women or scheduled castes, traditional divisions within communities remain. Conflict between different classes over access to CPRs brings out the partisan nature of the *Panchayat*, when it is usually found to favour the better off (Agarwal 1990). There are, however, a handful of counter examples of institutions which benefit the poor (Box 13).

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Box 13: Informal civil society and common property resources in India

While informal civil society in India appears to be dominated by rich elites, there are indications that the institutional rules governing natural resource access are neither cast in stone, nor do they necessarily benefit the rich only. The informal nature of institutional rules is noted in one account of conflict over changing CPR access rights in rural West Bengal. Certain rights are customarily those of the poor, such as gleaned grains and fallen fruits, even where these are from otherwise private lands. Increasing pressure on land has meant tightened control of even these resources. One of the poorest women in the study noted that rules were changing about gleaning rights: 'If the crop is good the rich let us in, if not they don't' (Beck 1995: 174). While resources from private land are formally private property, according to poor people, custom demands that some of these products are open access. Denial of these informal rights was protested about by embarrassing the rich in public and defying the privatisation of CPRs by continuing to collect.

The rules of informal civil society appear to be as much a product of negotiation and conflict between classes as a set of 'traditional' norms. Resistance is mounted to imposed change because poor or powerless people feel that the implicit acceptance of certain rules governing their livelihoods has been withdrawn, and they are the losers.

Source: Beck 1995.

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Discussion of internal community conflicts arises much less frequently in the African than the Indian context. Until recently there has been a failure to consider adequately conflicts within communities in SSA which are often hidden from outsiders and not as publicly evident as caste differentiation in India, although as local NRM schemes are tried out in Africa their significance quickly becomes apparent. Local-level NRM, particularly where the central resources of land and water are concerned, takes different forms in India and Africa, on the basis of these different public perceptions: in SSA, there remains a tendency to overestimate the sense of 'community'. Participatory management of natural resources requires a close look at different stakeholders, if it is not to reproduce the same institutional bases for exclusion which normally govern access to resources. Invoking participation is therefore no solution to the problem that the institutions which govern allocation of resources are skewed in most communities. Participation under such conditions may mean little more than cheap or free labour on the part of participants, while decisional power remains in the hands of others. Such division occurs as much along gendered lines as according to other forms of social differentiation (Ahmed 1995).

3.5 Social exclusion and longer-term livelihood change

Public action, formal and informal civil society all tend to reinforce existing forms of social inclusion and exclusion in NRM. There are, however, rarely documented grey areas, in which relatively powerless people have negotiated informal usufructuary rights (see Box 13 above). These are often overlooked in changes undertaken by the state or formal civil society. The tendency to formalise the control and management of natural resources, particularly CPRs, can reduce the access of already marginalised groups, with the result that even interventions designed with redistributive intentions may have the effect of exacerbating uneven access to resources, constraining rather than reinforcing the livelihood strategies of those most at risk. In India, the ill effects of public action to distribute CPRs among the poor were, ironically, inspired by considerations of social justice.[54] Cases from Namibia indicate that formalising 'fuzzy' entitlements through individualisation of CPR rights both destroys social cohesion and is economically stratifying, and that formalisation merely entrenches gendered (among other) inequalities in terms of land access and tenure security rather than tackling them (Devereux 1996).

Social exclusion is overwhelmingly concerned with issues of gender bias in the NRM literature, revolving around the gendered relationships people have to their environment. Public action is very often insensitive to these differences and civil society normally reflects wider forms of inclusion and exclusion in its NRM regimes. The literature on CPRs provides a useful summary of some of the main debates which arise on the gendered nature of NRM. Women's roles in subsistence activities which draw on CPRs are now well-documented, as are the adverse ways in which changing patterns of institutional control over natural resources can affect women's livelihoods. Indian research suggests that as a food security system for the very poor and vulnerable, declining availability of CPRs affects women, children and the elderly most, as they represent an independent source of food or income (Agarwal 1990). Women are not universally reliant on CPRs, nor solely non-commercial, reproductive and subsistence-oriented, but nevertheless it is often the adverse impact on women of state-sponsored regime change which emerges most clearly as a theme in both regions.[55]

State interventions in NRM suffer from the usual problems of gender-insensitive planning: inaccurate or biased assumptions about gender divisions within livelihood systems seem to lay the groundwork for unfavourable outcomes for women's livelihood strategies. There is far more Indian than African literature dealing with the gender biases embedded in state interventions in NRM. There are significant regional differences between the kind and level of impact on women of restricted access to

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[54]   Brara 1992; Shanmugaratnam 1994; Agarwal 1997.
[55]   Leach 1992; Ahmed 1995; Joekes 1995.

CPRs. At the household level, women in Africa have generally been more involved with agricultural production than women in India, so dependence on CPRs may be less central to their livelihoods than it is for Indian women. Their rights to natural resources are also better established. In times of food scarcity, however, the significance of CPRs to African women is critical, especially as they are initially responsible for managing household food deficits. CPRs are also governed by different institutional rules in India and Africa: whereas tribe, ethnic group, locality and kinship are central in Africa, caste, class and gender seem to play a greater part in determining allocation of use rights in India (Agarwal 1997).[56]

Although a significant proportion of gendered literature is about the impact of CPR decline on women, an (unintentional) consequence of this may be to reinforce a view of women's livelihood strategies as subsistence-oriented, in contrast to more commercial and 'modern' male livelihoods. Characterising women as 'victims' of modernisation means ignoring the resistance they have on occasion mounted to inappropriate public action. This, in turn, implies that public action and interventions by civil society should not reinforce what are perceived to be women's subsistence coping strategies where diversification into commercial production may be more economically sustainable.[57]

3.6 Key institutional relationships in longer-term livelihood change

Returning once again to our three themes, it is clear that the nature of the relationship between the state, formal and informal civil society and community is markedly different in the context of NRM. As in the case of famine mitigation, the state in SSA has a long history of failure of successful public action, but has made significant progress in recent years. Change has come about via an alliance with civil society, much less dominated by foreign NGOs (although they remain important players). The significance of informal civil society is recognised to a far greater degree in NRM than in famine mitigation, and cases of trying to build on customary management systems are well-documented. In India, although the state engages in a wide range of public action to change NRM policies, this does not receive the same broadly positive evaluation as its famine mitigation activities. Indeed, the Indian state is viewed in a way much more akin to its African counterparts in the sphere of NRM, although it has intervened on a larger scale, over a longer time span and in more diverse ways. Formal civil society in India has played a key role in promoting more livelihood-sensitive NRM strategies, although it too does not escape criticism. In SSA, formal civil society remains weak, but not as marginalised as in the context of famine mitigation. In terms of the balance between the differing

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[56]   See Derman 1995 and Madzudzo and Dzingirai 1995 for case studies on the implications of ethnic/tribal differences in the CAMPFIRE community NRM initiatives in Zimbabwe.

domains of institutional control, longer-term livelihood changes are to a far greater degree moving in the direction of a partnership between the three than is the case with famine mitigation.

This is due to the complexity of institutional relationships which govern NRM, as well as to a longer history of failure and policy reform in response to it, especially in India. Few would now argue that successful NRM can be brought about without taking account of customary management regimes, although this is a recent change. In the Sahel, for example, state policies continued to undermine them until the early 1990s. Moreover, the progress of change and optimism about state capacity to enter into constructive partnerships should not be over-estimated. Much renegotiation of institutional relationships remains to be done before livelihood adaptation is pursued by the state, civil society and community in mutually reinforcing ways.

This will be especially problematic because of the complexity and significance of social inclusion and exclusion in determining who gains and who loses from participation in NRM. Particularly striking are class, caste and gender biases in public and civil action to reinforce people's livelihood strategies. Throughout the Indian literature there are references to the conflicting interests of rich and poor, to the differential access to supposedly communal water resources of different castes, and to the expropriation of state-provided support and resources by elites, often with the collusion of local government officials. In Africa, this is less well documented, but as attempts are made to renegotiate institutional relationships social divisions become increasingly apparent. The growing emphasis on community-based management systems and community participation in NRM does not adequately address these social divisions and their implications for successful policy.

4.   CONCLUSIONS

The consequences of the interaction between state, society and community for livelihood adaptation are rarely directly addressed. But, as this review of literature shows, various pieces of the jigsaw have been analysed and empirically documented. The danger is either to focus on two of the three domains of institutional control, or to oversimplify where all three come together under the rubric of 'community participation'. Much more needs to be found out about how change in one part of the institutional jigsaw affects other parts. The implicit message of much of the recent literature, reflecting the paradigm shift towards more participatory development, is that partnerships between state, society and community offer the best route for improving the sustainability of the poor's livelihoods. Yet the literature also implies that the ways in which the three domains of institutional control operate militate strongly against such partnerships.

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[57]   See also A. Whitehead 1990; Baker 1995; Kerner and Cook 1991.

The first reason for this is that the ascendance of the state undermines community capacity. Thus, in India informal civil society's capacity to reinforce adaptation has been weakened by effective public action, sometimes in alliance with formal civil society, while in Africa provision of social and economic insurance by informal civil society is comparatively highly developed, filling the gap left by an ineffectual state and relatively weak indigenous formal civil society. There is surprisingly little detailed analysis of this issue in the literature, although the implicit assumption on the livelihood shocks side is that it is true. In SSA, it is largely attributed to the failure of public action and the mixed success of foreign formal civil society, and the striking disarticulation between the two. Thus informal civil society still operates by default. In some cases, there is a tendency to over-estimate the resilience of indigenous capacity to respond to livelihood shocks, although recent literature correctly demonstrates that for the most vulnerable people this capacity is being eroded, in both SSA and India.[58] In India, the issue is rarely addressed directly, but the growing 'dependence' of poor people on public action is inferred. Positively, this can be construed as testimony to the effectiveness of public action; negatively it emphasises the marginalisation of the poorest, who are neither reached by public action nor able to rely on informal civil society. Despite its key role in livelihood adaptation, informal civil society is generally marginalised by the state's and formal civil society's attempts to support adaptation, especially in times of shocks. The second reason is that formal civil society, especially when it is foreign, can be a major obstacle to the development of mutually reinforcing relations and positive institutional reform between the state and livelihoods. The key determinant here appears to be whether or not civil society is foreign. The case of famine mitigation in SSA supports this argument, although one cause for optimism is demands for improved links between relief and development. It is striking, however, that whereas analysts of famine are moving (albeit slowly) towards better integration of relief and development policies, those concerned with longer-term livelihood change rarely think about the effects of shocks on such change. The need to link relief and development originated in response to criticisms that relief efforts were artificially and detrimentally hermetically sealed from longer-term developmental efforts. The logic arises from acceptance of famine as a process in which people's entitlements are eroded and their livelihoods rendered more vulnerable. Although the need to strengthen links is regarded as an intrinsically good thing, the obstacles to it are formidable - especially in SSA, where both donors and governments conspire to maintain the separation for their own ends.[59] In India, the distinction between relief and development is less stark because the state is the main instigator of interventions in both. Explicit linking occurs in public works programmes such as the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Maharashtra, which reduces (or is expected to reduce) the element of insecurity in people's livelihoods.

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[58] See Agarwal 1990 for an outline of the limited literature available on this.

There is, however, some basis for optimism about the emergence of more mutually supportive partnerships. It appears that it is longer-term adaptation in both SSA and India which is more amenable to a constructive relationship between public action, civil society and communities than are short-term shocks. This may be due to the nature of shocks and the inability of outsiders to view them as part of the normal portfolio of change in livelihoods. There are prospective changes towards incorporating informal civil society into both the state's and formal civil society's planning and implementation in the context of NRM and there are clear examples of success. This suggests that scope for mutually reinforcing partnerships between public action and informal civil society does exist; indeed, in SSA in particular, there is considerable optimism about the prospects for fundamental reforms in the ways in which the two interact. A note of caution is needed, though, as the barriers to building successful partnerships are great, not least because of the highly differentiated nature of informal civil society. There is little indication that such change is either widespread or is including socially excluded groups, or indeed that such changes are permeating other forms of longer-term livelihood adaptation. In India, reliance on the state to assist in times of livelihood shocks is entrenched as a political right, and it is from this basis that formal and informal civil society interact with the state in times of famine. Yet, despite well-documented cases of the failure of public action to prevent famine, most attempts to build on indigenous capacity and social action to contest inappropriate state activities are concerned with longer-term changes.

There is no guarantee that such partnerships will reduce gender inequalities. In Africa women are most disadvantaged in formal institutions but greater opportunities for adaptation exist in civil society, whereas in India women are disadvantaged in both formal and informal institutions. The general case against both public action and civil society is certainly well borne out by the literature, where there are extensive cases of the gender-insensitivity of interventions and policies exacerbating existing gender biases and at times creating new ones. Informal livelihood strategies which are not governed by legal or formally recognised entitlements are usually the most vulnerable, as in times of change these are the first 'rights' to be abrogated, as well as the first to be ignored in planning. This is part of a wider tendency to reinforce the marginalisation of those who are anyway socially excluded. Conversely, there is strong evidence, especially from India, that the socially included tend to be the greatest beneficiaries of public action and, at times, action by formal civil society too, despite the often stated objective of both to target poor and marginalised people.

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[59]   See Maxwell and Buchanan-Smith 1994 for a discussion of these issues.

A range of institutional mechanisms for retaining and reinforcing social exclusion are well detailed in both the Indian and African literatures, although the bases for such exclusion differ in each case. There is less literature on gender biases in SSA than in India, but scope for gendered adaptation in informal civil society does seem greater than in India. In India in particular, but also in SSA, it is clear that strong civil society institutions by no means guarantee women's full inclusion into community structures in which the rules that govern livelihoods are made. Some argue that women in both regions are willing and able to organise to defend interests which they perceive as legally or traditionally theirs. But this presupposes a starting position from which women's livelihoods are relatively secure in the first place.

The state has a potentially strong role to play in extending women's legal entitlements to secure incomes in times of livelihood system changes or at crisis points, as there is no intrinsic reason why times of crisis and change should alter power relations within communities and between civil society and the state. Alternatively, some argue that it is precisely at times of crisis that those relationships are most volatile, implying that there is space for reinforcement of adaptive strategies which successfully undermine some of the institutional bases for social and political exclusion. The state already attempts measures aimed at redistribution and reducing inequality in the realm of NRM (in India), for example, but these are very often failures. Inadequate knowledge about what marginalised people (women, minority ethnic groups, etc.) normally (or currently) do in terms of their livelihoods, and the capacity for corruption in the state system, mean that very often the institutions which formerly governed resource use are replaced with ones which are even less equitable or sustainable.

The ways in which institutions both respond to and drive changes in livelihood systems are crucial to understanding the interaction between public action, formal and informal civil society and communities, including the different kinds of individuals within them. Effective policy needs to be much better aware of how institutions influence local people's decisions (for better and for worse) and to actively explore possibilities for alliances between these three domains of institutional control. The greatest success in adaptation is likely to come about by mutually reinforcing partnerships between all three, including the habitually marginalised informal civil society. This set of institutions, contrary to much conventional wisdom, is dynamic and adaptable and has the potential to be built on and improved in alliance with formal civil society and the state.

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