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Address all inquiries to

Institute for Development Studies
University of Nairobi
P.O. Box 30197
00100 GPO
Nairobi, Kenya.
Telephone: 254 020 338741/337436
Mobile: 0733-524903
0722-499706
Fax: 254 020 222036
Email: director-ids@uonbi.ac.ke
URL: www.uonbi.ac.ke/faculties/ids

IDS Working Paper No. 544

NEGOTIATING LIVELIHOODS

**An Analysis of Rural Household Resources and their
Utilisation in Nyamira District, Mid South-Western Kenya**

by

Edward Ontita
Department of Sociology
University of Nairobi

Technical Editor: Kibisu-Kabatesi

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Abstract

The failures of rural development policy to bring about widespread improvement of rural livelihoods have never been adequately examined and explained. There exist knowledge gaps on how poor people arrive at livelihood priorities and deal with concomitant policies as well as how they perceive, mould and use resources to service their livelihood priorities and lifestyles. Hence this exploratory study has been designed to examine poor people's livelihood priorities, the relevant policies and their responses to those policies. Furthermore the study will explore the poor people's perceptions, production and co-production of resources and how they use them to service their livelihood priorities. Following that the study will from the poor people's perspectives isolate and explain viable and non-viable livelihood outcomes.

The study is stimulated by the theoretical and practical challenges in understanding the multiple meanings of resources and the implications of those to rural livelihood construction. The theoretical challenge stems in part from the now dominant view in livelihood studies that resources constitute five capitals on the bases of which, specific outcomes including increased income, food security, optimal natural resource use and well-being are sought. This study goes beyond and challenges this materialist view of rural life (based on the livelihoods approach) to investigate villagers' material and non-material resources and how these are moulded to earn a living. This way the study explores the observation that livelihood is about more than just material resources and outcomes.

The practical challenge that this study responds to relates to the relative ignorance about poor peoples' resources and lifestyles. What do the rural poor have and what do they pursue in life? Thus, poor peoples' livelihoods should be demystified and their resources and lifestyles explored to capture their view of viable livelihoods and how they seek them.

This study proceeds on the premise that villagers create and re-create resources through naming and re-naming them, but also struggle to extend resource meanings while defending existing ones and hence, embrace new opportunities and as a result get involved in more complex relationships, identifications and lifestyles. This is not a phased process but often a contemporaneous one. Accessing resources is therefore, more dynamic and at times more subtle than implied in the livelihoods approach. On the basis of this theoretical position, the study holds that actors struggle with and within institutions as well as negotiate the entry of modern technology, the state and markets in their everyday lives. These nodal points then constitute arenas of contests over resources and thus sites of inquiry.

Rural Household Resources and Livelihoods: Locating the Study Problem

Introduction

The centrality of resources in people's endeavours to make a living cannot be overemphasized. It is universally accepted, however, that resources are scarce and that demand for them is always higher than their supply. All over the world competition for resources has been intense throughout history. Wars have been fought over resources and many conflicts are simmering around the world over the same. But even as this is the case, there are initiatives in many parts of the world working to push governments, especially in poor countries, to make essential resources available to enable poor people meet their basic needs as a matter of right (Conway *et al.* 2002:3). For example, in fact the 1998 session of the United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on the status of women stated that land rights discrimination is a violation of human rights (FAO 2002:9).

Years after such a weighty declaration by a United Nations agency, poverty and inequality are biting deeper in Africa. Following the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) initiated by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), Africans, especially the rural poor¹ have been contending with falling job prospects, falling agricultural output, collapsing infrastructure and shrinking public services (Francis 2000:55) as well as increasing input prices and poor market chances (Bryceson 2000:2). It is also argued that agricultural stagnation has harmed the rural poor in Sub-Saharan Africa by creating food shortages and higher prices that have reduced their ability of the poor to afford to buy food and find work (Khan 2001:8).

In Kenya, fifty per cent of the rural population live in poverty (Kenya 1996; 2001), even when the country's small-scale agricultural sector has been praised as a

showcase in Africa (cf. Heyer 1981; Francis 2000). This presents a contradiction in terms of where poverty and prosperity appear to co-exist in the same rural areas. This contradiction is partly explained by the fact that the rural poor are not homogeneous groups anywhere (cf. Ellis 2000, Khan 2001 and Chambers 1990). As Khan (2001:2) has pointed out; “these differences among the poor reflect highly complex interactions of cultures, markets and public policies”. These interactions are not fully understood and especially how they relate to resources given that markets and public policies for instance, are about the distribution of resources. Therefore, the issue of heterogeneity amongst the rural poor leads us to questions about what the poor consider resources and how they access and apply them to make a living?

There is no consensus in the literature on answers to some of the questions raised. However, the concept of rural household resource remains elusive. In most of the literature, these resources are understood as assets or capital and identified in terms of an assets pentagon consisting of the physical, natural, human, social and economic (Carney 1998, Farrington *et al.* 1999, DFID 2000, Ellis 2000, Swift and Hamilton 2001, and Alumira 2002). Deconstruction of the various assets is scanty. Attempts in this direction by Reardon and Vosti (1995) end up with a list of components of the various assets such as natural resources as comprising soil, water and biodiversity, without elaborating on the social processes and forces that create heterogeneity of value that flows from homogenous resources. Other studies indicate that access to the assets is essential to the improvement of livelihoods (cf. FAO 1998, 2002 and Shackleton *et al.* 2000). Although they have concentrated on land almost to the exclusion of other resources, other studies (Melmed-Sanjak and Lastarria-Cornhiel 1998; FAO 2002; Francis 2002) show that actual access

is problematic. In terms of application of the resources to make a living, recent research emphasizes that transforming structures and processes within the contexts where the poor operate influence the strategies they adopt (DFID 2000). Another area of convergence is that the ways in which people make their living are constantly changing (Elliot 1994, Murray 1998, Francis 1998; 2000 and Slater 1999). This is in spite of the fact that the directions and actual forms of change are not agreed on either. For example, while Elliot (1994) attributes change to local physical environment and economic changes in the local, national and global levels; Murray (1998;1999) locates the change in local politics and land reform. As for Ellis (2000) and Nooteboom (2003) risks and adversities push the poor to diversify their strategies and activities for making a living.

Overall therefore, little is known about what the rural poor regard as resources and the meanings they attach to them. Wallman (1984:22-25) takes the view that resources are not only and not always material objects. Following Belshaw (1967)², Wallman occupies the position that time, knowledge, symbolic systems, skill, organization, and the goals, values, and valuations of the actor are equally important. Wallman further holds that not everyone classifies or evaluates the same resources in the same way, and that any person may not do so consistently. In this regard, normative views of resources as capital or assets do not as well suffice. The challenge is to unravel the cultural underpinnings of resources. What processes shape rural people's perception, identification and labelling of resources? How is an actor's identity related to what they define as a resource? What causes actors' resource identification and labelling to shift over time and space? How do they manoeuvre to access resources?

Except for land, which has been significantly studied, much less is known about how the poor access and mould whatever it is that they identify as resources. According to Francis (2002:30-34) identities and historical experiences are important in accessing resources, and hence, in inclusion or exclusion from resources. Francis (ibid) and FAO (2002:6) identify institutions as shaping access to resources (although evidently by resources they have in mind money and land) to the extent that "some (actors) have more resources, and more room for manoeuvre". Other institutions that have a bearing on actors' access to resources include markets and the state (Melmed-Sanjak and Lastarria-Cornhiel 1998) as well as interpersonal networks (Francis 2000:62-64; Bryceson 2000: 4 and Khan 2001: 10; Southwold-Llewellyn 2001). Related to the issue of networks is Long's notion of "springboards (as) major sets of relationships that provide individuals with a means by which they initiate new branches of activity" (Long 2001a:148-15). The concept of springboards is very close to Berry's (1993) portrayal of networks as potential channels of access to income and opportunity. Verschoor (1997:153) found out that where markets closed out people on resources, they successfully turned to kinship networks to access them.

In general, work on these institutional processes has either been at the level of macro considerations or micro-level analysis with regard to one or two specific resources especially land identified a priori by researchers. Therefore, the unfinished business in this area includes following through what actors define as resources to how they access and mould them. Concerning all what actors call resources, we ask questions about all factors that shape access and use; how does the cultural process of accessing resources unfold? How does identity shape access to, moulding and application of resources? What other micro, macro and global factors come into play in the process of seeking to access, mould and use resources?

What contests ensue over resources and where are the boundaries? What sort of coalitions build to seek and/or defend resources? How do micro-level conflicts over resources evolve and how are they managed? How are resources finally applied to make a living?

Strategies that actors apply to make a living are not under-studied by any standards. Many studies (Slater 1999, de Haan 2000, Francis 1998, 2000, 2002; Ellis 2000 and Toufique 2001) have delved into the strategies rural people employ to make a living. The studies link actors' access to resources with the livelihood strategies they devise arguing that as a result they intensify (increase unit output) or extensify agriculture (increase scale); diversify into non-farm activities or migrate when they can no longer cope on the farm (Swift and Hamilton 2001:86). This line of analysis proceeds on the assumption that actors "struggle to increase the quantity and diversity of their assets" (Alumira 2002:5). But this is not the whole picture. As Swift and Hamilton (2001:87) point out, "livelihood outcomes are not merely a function of capital endowment, the range of choices available and the way they are traded off against one another; they also depend on very specific local and even personal factors which can not be generalized".

Hence, such issues as identity may shape the way resources are applied to make a living in terms of what an actor is comfortable with and considers conventional. Nevertheless, an actors' identity may clash with conventions and lead up to improvised strategies to make a living. Holland *et al.* (1998:17) shows that 'improvisations' are expected outcomes when people are simultaneously engaged with or pushed by contradictory discourses. They further argue that improvisations are impromptu actions but when they are systematized and taken up as symbols,

they become potential beginnings of an altered identity. This means that improvisations may become the starting points of new activities (cf. Shackleton *et al.* 2000:1) and logically of links to hitherto unknown resources. Consequently, there is need to shed more light on the apparent complex links between actors' identities, the way they label and mobilize resources, and improvisations both of strategies and ultimately of resources. Equally, there is need to explore and explain what actors consider success or failure in making a living and how such outcomes unfold over time and space.

Problem statement

Enhancement of rural resource use has been carried out through rural development programmes in many parts of the developing world as a way of fighting rural poverty. For this reason, rural development has been central to the policy agendas of many African governments since independence in the 1960s. In Kenya, efforts at rural development first concentrated on settler agriculture but shifted with the launch in 1955, of the Swynnerton Plan for the intensification of African agriculture, to include the former African reserves. Since then, the state and development partners have formulated and implemented many intervention programmes to further rural development in Kenya. Every development plan or development policy framework paper since independence has, therefore, touched in some way on attempts to tackle poverty and in particular rural poverty. In 2001, the government in collaboration with development partners drafted a poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP), which was redrafted into the Economic Recovery Strategy Paper in 2003 that is due for implementation.

While all the policy work proceeded, poverty and inequality in rural Kenya grew. In fact, most of the foregoing rural development policy initiatives have largely failed given that more than 50 per cent of the rural population in the country live in poverty (Kenya 1996; 2001). This failure of rural development initiatives has not been adequately explained. Some of the reasons offered for the failures are insufficient and include the assertion that poor people possess inadequate assets and returns to them are low (Khan 2001). It is not clear whether or not the concept 'assets' fully captures all that the poor consider resources. Little is known about the various dimensions of poor people's resources and how they are moulded to earn a living. Much less is known about how poor people arrive at livelihoods priorities and their responses to concomitant policies. Thus, in searching further for explanations on the apparent failure of rural development policy initiatives, one dimension for possible exploration is poor people's livelihood priorities and the policies that affect them. Related to this is how poor people encounter and respond to these policies in their everyday life. Equally important are the poor people's perceptions of resources and how they create, mould and use them to service their livelihood priorities.

Poor people's livelihood priorities and the policies that affect them as well as their responses to those policies in their everyday lives should be determined to help locate historical and existing contradictions in rural development policy. With these contradictions and discontinuities in mind, it may be possible to redesign rural development policy to respond more accurately to rural poor people's livelihood priorities. In examining poor people's perceptions, creation, moulding and use of resources to service identified livelihood priorities, it is possible first; to illuminate on the starting points and organisation of poor people's livelihoods and second; to

confront existing frameworks for identifying and discussing resources, in particular the livelihood approach with empirical data, with a view to testing their efficacies. This is particularly important given that the concept 'resources', has been treated as axiomatic in most development discourse. Besides, the livelihood approach which puts resources at the centre of the development debate is a recent notion that requires to be tested.

Hence, this paper will examine poor people's livelihood priorities, the relevant policies and their responses to those policies in Nyamira District. Furthermore, the study will explore the poor people's perceptions, production and co-production of resources and how they use them to service their livelihood priorities. Additionally, the study will, from the poor people's perspectives, isolate and explain viable and non-viable livelihood outcomes.

Research questions

Main research question

What are villagers' livelihood priorities and relevant policies, and how do they perceive, identify and/or create or co-create resources, mobilise them to devise opportunities for constructing livelihoods and; how do they evaluate and explain the outcomes of their livelihood pursuits?

Sub-questions

- 1. What are villagers' livelihood priorities?** Which policies affect them? How do the villagers respond to those policies in their everyday lives?

2. **What to villagers is a resource and what does it constitute?** What meanings do they assign to resources?
3. **How do villagers access/create resources?** How are variations in access to resources explained? How does limited access / inaccessibility evolve and how is it handled?
4. **How is resource use organized to earn a living?** What influences the behavioural strategies chosen? Which challenges and opportunities are encountered and how are they handled? What alternative/improvised strategies do they employ to earn a living? How is success or failure explained?

Research objectives

Main objective

The main objective of this study is to examine villagers' livelihood priorities and the policies that affect them, their perspectives of what resources are and how they access and mould them, the strategies they employ to *inter alia* mobilize those resources to earn a living and the implications of those strategies for their identities, lifestyles and successes or failures.

Specific objectives

1. To determine villagers' livelihood priorities, the policies that affect them and their responses to those policies in their everyday lives.
2. To examine villagers' perspectives of resources by analysing how they define them, the (practical & symbolic) meanings they assign and how those are related to their identifications and avenues of access.

3. To identify villagers' processes of access to and/or creation of resources by analysing corresponding opportunities or constraints, and how they are encountered during the life cycle.
4. To examine resultant resource moulding and use strategies to gain insights into the inspiration behind particular livelihood pathways chosen, and how their successes or failures are explained.

Study justification

Rural poverty is on the increase in Kenya, and yet there is no consensus on what poverty really means. There are those who argue that poverty describes in standard ways those people surviving on less than one dollar per day (Maxwell 1999; Ashley and Maxwell 2002). Others see poverty as best described in terms of inadequate assets and the low returns to them (Khan 2001; Ellis 2000). This latter perspective is informed by the livelihoods approach and is fairly dominant in development discourse these days. However, rural poverty and inequality cannot be explained fully in terms of differential access to assets including dollars. Equally, livelihood is not just about accumulation of assets; it is also about non-material motives and activities. Furthermore, poverty is diverse and complex and best explained in terms of life cycle experiences.

This study thus departs somewhat from previous livelihood or poverty studies that focused on poor people's income levels, what assets they owned or had access to (Ellis 2000), food security (Omosa 1998) or factors that hinder poor people from exiting poverty (such as Ellis and Kutengule 2003), to focus on poor people's lifestyles and how they mould and mobilise resources broadly defined to include both material and non-material. The study proceeds on the premise that a challenging

thing to know about poor rural people today is not only whether they own or have access to certain assets such as land and finance; but how they co-produce resources, how they improvise opportunities, how they spend time and how they harness and disseminate information, how they deal with their environment in order to meet their consumptive needs and to enhance their identity and self-esteem.

The study is stimulated by the theoretical and practical challenges to understand the multiple meanings of resources and the implications of those to rural livelihood construction. The theoretical challenge stems in part from the now dominant view in livelihood studies that resources constitute five capitals seen primarily as enhancing rural economic activity to elicit specific outcomes including increased income, food security, optimal natural resource use and well-being³. This view narrows rural life into a materialist enterprise largely ignoring its non-materialist aspects. Hence, the study attempts to investigate villagers' material and non-material resources and how they mould them to earn a living and in effect explore the view that livelihood is about more than just material resources and outcomes. The practical challenge that this study responds to, has to do with the almost systematic ignorance about poor people's resources and lifestyles. For instance, in a recent World Bank poverty assessment mission to Kenya, government officials linked poverty with illiteracy, whereas villagers said the poor were often educated (Narayan and Nyamwaya 1996). The government officers described the poor as "lazy, idle, drunkards, criminals, prostitutes, poor thinkers and uncaring about the future". By contrast, villagers described the poor as "religious and hard-working, deeply worried about their security and future". Poor peoples livelihoods need to be demystified and their resources and lifestyles explored to capture their view of viable and improved livelihoods and how they seek them. How is viability or success evaluated, and

how does it occur or fail? Which lifestyles facilitate success and which ones constrain it? How is failure explained and how is it confronted in everyday life?

Francis (2000:7) has shown that the ways actors decide to use resources depends on, among others their beliefs and values. This means that resource use is a matter of style. The unfolding, evolving and moulding of these resources is equally hinged on people's lifestyles. Taking into account the material and non-material dimensions of livelihoods, this study proceeds to explore these lifestyles and the factors that shape them (cf. Long 2001a:54). The main thrust of this study is thus to identify the poor people's livelihood priorities and the policies that affect them, and in the backdrop such dynamics and complexities locate the material and non-material things that are fundamental to the lives of the poor rural people, how they come to assume such importance and are mobilized to earn a living.

Rural Household Resources and Livelihoods:

A Theoretical Exposition

Resources form a handle for earning a living. Resources have, however, been discussed casually in development debates and often the concept handled as axiomatic. The livelihood approach⁴ represents a major attempt to place resources at the centre of development debates. This section examines the relevance of the livelihood approach for rural resource studies. The section commences by locating resources in the livelihood approach and showing their conception in the form of an asset pentagon. This is followed by an analysis of how, from the livelihood perspective, people are thought to disconnect from resources, that is, how vulnerability sets in. It is argued that from this perspective, people's access to resources is determined by structural factors such as policies, and trends such as agricultural prices and shocks like diseases. These structural factors also affect the manner in which resources are utilised to make a living. The applicability of the livelihood approach is considered and a case made for extending it in order to cover the study question more appropriately. The section ends with a detailed reflection on the extension to the approach.

The livelihoods approach to resource studies

The livelihood approach has gained prominence especially since the beginning of the 1990s and has been associated mostly with the work of the department for international development (DFID) of the United Kingdom. According to Swift and Hamilton (2001:82), the livelihood approach "is an analytic framework, which seeks to improve our understanding of how people use the resources at their disposal to construct a livelihood". A livelihood is here understood as:

Comprising the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (Chambers and Conway, 1992)⁵

The approach involves identifying and analysing four main social domains: (1) the assets that sustain the livelihoods; (2) the contextual and institutional setting that frames access to and use of resources; (3) the emerging livelihood strategies; and (4) the particular livelihood outcomes that result (cf. Francis 2000; Swift and Hamilton 2001; Ellis 2000; Carney 1998 and Scoones 1998).

The issue of assets is hinged on the assumption that people pursue a range of livelihood outcomes such as health and food security, by drawing on a range of assets to pursue a variety of activities or strategies (Farrington *et al.* 1999:2). The framework applies a pentagon imagery to conceive people as holding at least five types of assets or capitals. The five types of capitals include, financial, human, natural, physical and social (Ellis 2000, DFID 2000, Farrington *et al.* 1999 and Swift and Hamilton 2001). According to Swift and Hamilton (2001:84) financial capital includes money in savings and access to credit. Ellis (2000:34) indicates that financial capital may be held in substitute, that is, in a form other than savings or access to credit. He points out that in Sub-Saharan Africa, livestock often constitute a store of wealth and a buffer against bad times, showing that although they are less liquid than say a cash deposit in a bank, when sold they are easily convertible to other forms of capital or into consumption. Whatever financial capital

is and its necessity for livelihood construction how do poor people define, locate and mobilize it to earn a living? How is it related to other resources among the poor in the rural areas?

Human capital is seen as constituting demographic and gender structures, the body of education, skills and knowledge, good health needed to produce effectively (Swift and Hamilton 2001). Hebinck and Bourdillon (2001:5) add creativity, experience and drive towards experimentation to the list. According to Ellis (2000:34) demographic dynamics such as fertility, mortality, migration, age structure and aging imply that household human capital composition changes constantly. Thus in this approach human capital is not just a census figure, it is more dynamic. However, does human capital feature among poor rural people or is it taken for granted? If it features, how is it harnessed in every day life?

Swift and Hamilton (2001:84) indicate that natural capital comprises of "natural resources including the stocks and flows and environmental services available in particular agro ecological settings". Ellis (2000:32) sees these to specifically include land, water and biological resources that are utilised by people to generate means of survival. Ellis adds that natural capital is not static and that it is enhanced once brought under human control that increases its productivity. He distinguishes between renewable and non-renewable resources and shows that in most rural settings, renewable resources are the foci. He notes that agro ecological potential occurring in a gradient of between low and high, has implications for spatial diversity of livelihood niches. How then, do the rural poor mould natural capital, and what affects the manner in which they define its various aspects and consume or utilize them?

Physical capital includes infrastructure and transport (Swift and Hamilton 2001:84). Hebinck and Bourdillon (2001:5) on their part see physical capital as encompassing food stocks, livestock, tools and machinery. Ellis (2000:33) identifies physical capital as producer goods, (in contrast to consumer goods) whose role is to create a flow of outputs into the future. His list of physical capital constitutes infrastructure and transport. He adds that “items considered to be ‘consumer durables’ for high income groups, such as refrigerators or sewing machines, are physical capital when they are purchased as a means of generating a future flow of income” by people in lower income groups. The challenge is to examine how this relates to the daily lives of poor rural dwellers.

The notion of social capital, relates to community and wider social claims on which actors can draw by virtue of their belonging to social groups of varying degrees of inclusiveness in society (Ellis, 2000:36). Ellis further adopts Swift’s (1998:8) conceptualisation of social capital as “made up of both networks of ascriptive and elective relationships between individuals, which may be vertical as in authority relationships, or horizontal as in voluntary organisations, and of the trust and expectations which flow within those networks”. In general, the livelihood approach views social capital as arising from the connectedness of people not just at the micro-to-macro levels, but also internationally. But as Ellis (2000) points out the reciprocity that comes with that connectedness is often hidden or becomes clear during serious livelihood crisis. Ellis also alludes to the view that social capital dynamics create ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ and sometimes result in ‘social exclusion’. Is this a reality in the every day lives of the rural poor and what value does it add to their livelihoods?

Overall, the livelihood approach proceeds on the premise that assets or capital are the building blocks of livelihoods. As Swift and Hamilton (2001:85) argue, capital endowments of different actors determine their livelihood options and explain much of the diversities in livelihoods strategies. But the relationship between capital endowments and livelihood options is not a straightforward one. The context within which endowment occurs and decisions made on strategies to follow, are important.

DFID (2000) conceived livelihoods in relation to a vulnerability context, which includes shocks such as droughts, trends such as demographic changes and seasonality such as off-farm employment. According to Farrington *et al.* (1999:2) transforming structures and processes also influence livelihood options. The structures are thought of as the various levels of government and private sector that actors interact with. Processes on the other hand encompass laws, policies, culture and institutions framing people's activities as they go about their lives. Ellis (2000:30-40) on his part, combines the vulnerability context with transforming structures and processes under the concept of 'mediating processes'. He then views mediating processes in terms of endogenous factors that is social relations, institutions and organisations and of exogenous factors such as economic trends and policies, and unforeseen shocks like floods, pests and diseases. Ellis concludes that the endogenous factors modify access to resources while the exogenous factors provide the context within which actors devise livelihood strategies, arguing that mediating processes unfold over time often with ruptures of stresses and strains.

Swift and Hamilton (2001:84-85) keep close to the conceptualisation by Ellis, viewing the exogenous factors as settings or contexts for livelihood construction, although they subsume organisations and social relations under institutions, and

argue “different institutional arrangements frame access to and use of resources differently for different groups”. Swift and Hamilton bring strong institutional arguments to the livelihood approach maintaining that institutions influence the distribution of capitals and access to strategies as well as shaping actors’ responses to contextual changes. This study takes the view that actors negotiate with and within institutions, so that these become arenas of contest rather than reference points in livelihood struggles.

In the livelihood approach, strategies are conceptualised in terms of three broad categories. These are agricultural intensification of extensification, livelihood diversification and migration (Scoones 1998, Swift and Hamilton 2001, Ellis 2000 and Shankland 2000). Scoones (1998:9) points out that the three core strategies are often presented as static and hence, that they need unpacking to distinguish different dynamics and outcomes. Scoones argues, for instance, that agricultural intensification or extensification may be capital-led or labour-led, livelihood diversification may be a coping mechanism for shocks or stress or it may involve more permanent adaptation of livelihood activities. Equally migration may be voluntary or involuntary, and its implications for agriculture are diverse. In general people pursue different strategies at different times and for different reasons. Shackleton *et al.* (2000:1) aver that strategies may depend on the assets available and the livelihood outcomes being sought. Thus, as Scoones (1998:10) points out, the degree of specialisation or diversification may relate to resources available and the risks accompanying various options. Actors are therefore, viewed as often weighing options and drawing on experience to make the best of their situations. In that sense then, benefits accruing from “particular strategies at different levels would depend on broad social norms and on internal management within the household”.

Different writers within this approach have conceived livelihoods outcomes differently. DFID (2000) listed the livelihood outcomes sought as including higher income, increased well-being, reduced vulnerability, improved food security and more sustainable use of the natural resource base (Farrington *et al.* 1999). Ellis (2000:30-40) agrees with the same argument showing that livelihood strategies have two types of outcomes: first, livelihood security including income level, income stability, seasonality and degrees of risk, and second; environmental sustainability like soils and land quality, water, rangeland, forests and biodiversity. The dilemma as to whether livelihood outcomes should be seen as given in every situation appears to be settled by DFID (1999) which indicates that outcome indicators should be negotiated with particular groups, meaning then that these would vary with actors. Thus, what livelihood outcomes do poor rural dwellers pursue? Do they, as the livelihoods approach implies; pursue food security and economic wellbeing? In a nutshell, do the rural poor seek to live by bread a lone?

The Livelihoods Approach and how people lose command over resources

People fail to secure livelihoods when they have no access to or control over resources, or when the resources available are inadequate or of poor quality. Thus as Shackleton *et al.* (2000:1) argue, "the ability to access various combinations of assets helps to determine how vulnerable or robust a livelihood may be". Livelihoods tend, therefore, to rotate around access to and utilisation of resources. The livelihood approach, among other things, identifies constraints to this process (cf. Swift and Hamilton (2001:90-91). The nature of social relations, institutions and organisations associated with actors are thought to influence access to and utilisation of resources to earn a living. Shocks and trends also affect people's access to resources besides framing their application of the limited resources that may be available.

At the macro level, Khan (2001:6-7) has linked failure to secure livelihoods with a variety of factors ranging from political instability and civil strife to corruption, market imperfections and external shocks. More importantly, Khan identifies certain policies that work against the rural poor. These include urban bias in public investment in infrastructure and the provision of safety nets, implicit and direct taxation of agricultural inputs and products, and favouring commercial holders and cash crops over subsistence farmers and food crops. The effects of these policies not only include denying the poorer rural folks access to resources but also squeezing their livelihood opportunities thus making them poorer and dispossessing them off key resources in the medium to long term. If in the process the poor lose arable land and or livestock they almost certainly lose their network with kin and community as well. This is because as Shackleton *et al.* (2000:3) explains, livestock and arable land provides the gifts shared between relatives, friends and neighbours, which serve to bond kinship and community relations. Therefore, with land and capital gone community labour sources, bases for barter and gifts also disappear. The poor end up with less resources and their room for manoeuvre is restricted (cf. Francis, 2002:27).

Ellis and Kutengule (2003) pick some of the foregoing issues in more details using research findings from rural Malawi. They found out that livestock ownership was low in the villages they studied because livestock theft had become widespread and thus blocked a major pathway for climbing out of poverty. Ellis and Kutengule also identify another constraint on the rural poor people's way out of poverty as the many formal and informal taxes and levies that they pay to persons in authority in the course of their everyday life. These may take the form of "a basket of grain,

poverty
(Stone)

or a bucket of fish, or a container of local brew” given to village headmen or traditional leaders, besides many market place or crop-specific taxes and dues levied on produce in the local markets. Ellis and Kutengule conclude that:

‘Multiple official and hidden payments and restrictions mean that the little opportunity to generate cash wealth in villages is either discouraged by institutional blockages, siphoned off by those in authority, making it difficult to generate resources that could be used for investment in new branches of activity’. (p. 1507)

In this sub-section it has been shown that the livelihood approach explains many issues regarding how people slip into livelihood insecurity. Many of the explanations revolve around accessibility or the lack of it, to resources. Micro and macro level processes are shown as mediating access to resources. Besides mediating access to resources, these processes also shape the ways in which these resources are utilised, that is, the livelihood strategies adopted. In particular, at all levels, these processes disadvantage certain actors while they advantage others in terms of resource allocation and ultimately their room for manoeuvre in constructing livelihoods. Social identity and historical experiences were shown to play a role in access to resources, justice and invariably to livelihood opportunities and lifestyles. Consequently, social relations structures at various levels of society are also an admissible factor in terms of accessing, retaining and utilising resources, as well as multiplying those resources and opportunities. The approach also appears to locate resource access or use constraints in market distortions as well as policy dislocations in favour of powerful local and national interests.

The relevance of the livelihoods approach for resource studies

The relevance of the livelihood approach to this study rests on the central place it gives issues of access to and utilisation of resources to make a living. The thrust of the argument is that people's access to resources provides bases for devising certain strategies to earn a living. Resources then, become the building blocks of livelihoods. The approach also explains how actors access varying resources given the mediating processes they encounter. In devising livelihoods strategies, actors have to contend with micro and macro factors including shocks and trends. Thus it follows that outcomes will be diverse. The approach therefore, gives a broad view of the central place of resources in people's struggles to earn a living and to that end provides a good framework for this study.

Despite the aforementioned utility of the livelihood approach in explaining the centrality of resources in people's struggles to earn a living, it has some shortcomings. First, the approach's conception of resources as constituting various assets or capitals echoes an economicist *vecuè* and therefore, presents the pursuit of livelihoods as materialist. The assumption appears to be that people are always striving to maximize gain and that they continually calculate which move has the highest returns (cf. Alumira 2002:5); which is not always true in practice. For instance, social capital is perceived to hinge on "trust relationships that facilitate economic exchange" (Bryceson 2000:5).

In particular, the approach conceptualises both livelihoods and resources narrowly. Livelihood pursuits are presented as largely aimed at increased income, food security, sustainable resource utilisation and well-being. Income and food security have been elaborated, and proponents have significantly delved into sustainable use of resources; but the issue of well-being is obscured. What it entails is not clear and

even less clearer is how it relates to the other outcomes. Some of the literature also refers to “outcomes that people consider important” (DFID 1999) and “successful or less successful livelihood strategies” (Carswell 2000:3). While it is not clear what these entail, the approach has not dealt with the issue of how and why in relatively homogeneous circumstances some actors have more successful livelihoods and others do not. Additionally, the approach appears to overstate quantifiable or more obvious livelihood outcomes such as income, food security and natural resources. This logic downplays more qualitative or symbolic and subtle outcomes such as self-esteem, identity and lifestyle, which are no less important in people’s lives. Resources are equally defined narrowly in terms of assets or capital, hence, anything useful but which does not fit into the categories may not be considered a resource. How is time to be treated for example? As labour, is time a human or a financial resource? How about time spent visiting a neighbour or chatting it away at a roadside kiosk?

The issues of power and agency were almost ignored at the initial stages of building the livelihood approach. These have, however, been built in over time especially through the strengthening of the institutional role in the approach (cf. Leach *et al.* 1999 and Watson 2003). Leach presents institutions as shaping access to and use of resources, but also as results of contests and negotiations between differentiated social actors. The question is whether this goes far enough in bringing into focus actor responses to disadvantaging power structures. Is access to resources therefore, fully explained in the Leachian institutional perspective for example (cf. Swift and Hamilton 2001:91)? This question brings to focus the issue of whether what passes as institutional meanings of resources even at levels as low as villages and households coincide with individuals’ conceptualisations. If this coincidence is not neat, then

institutions⁶ as mechanisms of definition and access to resources are only part of the story. The rest of the story may be sought further a field including in individual and household creativity to improvise resources and activities, and the identity destination they seek or defend.

Application of the livelihood approach to this study

The livelihood approach is a good point of departure in understanding how rural actors in Kenya give meaning to resources, mobilise and apply them to earn a living. However, because of its very broad coverage of issues and the shortcomings outlined above, an attempt is made in this sub-section to re-orientate the approach by re-defining, re-emphasising or extending some of its key concepts in order to provide a firmer theoretical anchorage for this study.

This study acknowledges that *resources* form building blocks for rural livelihoods. Likewise the study underscores the central view of the approach that resources take material and social attributes. The study, however, departs from the view that resources constitute five types of assets or capitals – human, social, physical, financial and natural – and takes the position that a livelihood resource is wider than all the five capitals put together or singly. Resources are also not fixed, they evolve; attributes that were less useful yesterday may be more useful today as people's knowledge and meanings of reality shift (cf. Peach and Constantin 1972). Therefore, villagers give meanings to resources and use them as such. For example a piece of land may have many meanings to a villager – pastureland, cropland, woodlot, gravesite or shrine – and the label that the villager picks provides the usage option of the land. In this sense then, villagers create resources through *giving meaning* to phenomena in dynamic ways. Creating resources is a social process done in

league with experience and history, values, norms and identity and cooperatively with other individuals and groups. But villagers may also create resources through improvisation (cf. Scoones 1998:8). This improvisation may be legitimately within existing norms; values or social identity or it may be 'unruly', contradicting the very essence of society. If it is 'unruly', and the practice enlists followers it becomes the genesis of new identities, (cf. Holland *et al.* 1998) resources, rules and practices. These processes of creating resources are complex and dynamic and are by no means smooth. They involve contests and struggles with established rules and practices.

The livelihood approach holds that access to resources determines how a living is earned (cf. Ellis 2000:9-10). The approach also maintains that social relations, institutions, social organisations, trends and shocks mediate access to resources (ibid; DFID 1999; 2000). Given the argument developed so far that villagers continually create and re-create resources, the issue of access becomes almost redundant. But walking that avenue would mean that villagers were self-sufficient and isolated from the rest of society, which is not the case. Villagers interpenetrate other spheres of society in the course of their every day life through markets, interpersonal networks and other social organisations. These diverse spheres of society have their own rules, but these rules do not circumscribe human behaviour, otherwise social life would be so predictable as to warrant no study.

Thus the issue of power both in the resource creation and use becomes central to the study. Power is viewed as a constraint to some people and a useful resource to others. Thus, Leach *et al.* (1999:226) point out that resource "claims of social actors positioned differently in power relations may be highly contested". Even

people who appear to be powerless have a way of resisting domination and exploitation by the powerful that they interact with in their everyday life. Scott (1985) has shown that the weak engage in passive resistance against their exploiters through acts that are informal and often covert as well as through thought and symbolism, which thaws the symbolic miasma that blocks radical thought. Therefore in the rural areas the poor are continually contesting the claims of powerful actors on resources. They win here, they lose there and the struggle continues. The character and meaning of these struggles among the rural poor is central to this study.

This study holds that the struggles often move to the level of institutions “operating at multiple-scale levels from micro to macro, which influence who has access to and control over what resources, and arbitrate contested resource claims” (Leach *et al.* 1999). These institutional processes almost always skew resource distribution. Institutions often favour actors allied to powerful coalitions and penalize those without political protection. As Berry (1989) and Haugerud (1995) indicate, seeking access to resources through state power via patronage remains a major possibility in many parts of Africa. Francis (2002:30-32) also found out that in South Africa mechanisms for equitable dispute settlement were skewed often on the bases of the social identities or historical experiences of the actors dealt with. Those who had newly settled in the villages were disadvantaged in sharecropping arrangements and even in the amounts of land allocated for compounds than those perceived as indigenous. This was mainly because dispute resolution and land distribution revolved around the chief and local bureaucrats who had developed their own patronage systems. These shaped the livelihood options and strategies available to actors in very significant ways.

This study then proceeds on the premise that villagers *create and re-create resources through naming and re-naming them, but also struggle to extend resource meanings while defending existing ones and hence, embrace new opportunities thus getting involved in more complex relationships, identifications and lifestyles*. This is not a phased process but often a contemporaneous one. This brings us to the theoretical position that accessing resources is more dynamic and at times more subtle than implied in the livelihood approach. This study therefore, embraces institutions as central in understanding resources, but rather than admit them as 'determinants'⁷, they are considered protagonists in the struggles (cf. Berry 1989) to extend meaning and embrace new opportunities. In understanding resources as opportunities the imagery of creating them through naming and re-naming makes sense. Likewise the view that opportunities are taken rather than accessed emphasises the issue of struggles and protection of opportunity in the course of pursuing livelihoods. In seeking to understand resources and institutions in these ways I hope to capture how people through giving meaning create and recreate opportunities (cf. Wallman 1984) and defend them often in subtle ways (cf. Scott 1985). This line of analysis also provides room to isolate and examine institutional implications of more obvious aspects such as externalisation, scientification and state centralisation, (Long 2001a:42) for processes of resource evolution.

The view taken in this study, that users in this case villagers create resources and that this process evolves and unfolds in different directions in the course of which new opportunities are embraced, fundamentally challenges the concept of livelihoods strategies/activities as presently constituted in the livelihood approach. The approach takes the position that villagers pursue livelihoods through any aggregation or dis-

aggregation of three given strategies: agricultural intensification or extensification, diversification or migration (Ellis 2000; Swift and Hamilton 2001 and DFID 2000). These strategies are apparently hierarchical with returns and security rising as one move from agriculture to migration. However, there are situations where the logical option (considering livelihood approach) in a villager's livelihood trajectory is migration, but that is not a possibility either physically or via remittances and therefore, the villager hangs in there surviving in some inconceivable manner (cf. Bryceson 2000:6). Such scenarios escape the logics of livelihoods strategies as conceived in this approach and call for a closer look at what rural people seek in life. The sorts of identity, values, statuses and self-actualisation that they seek and the tasks they devise to arrive at those. To capture these complex dynamics this study employs the concepts of identity and symbolism to attempt an understanding of where rural dwellers are headed and the tasks devised (lifestyles) to see them through. This line of analysis is particularly important in examining how villagers arrive at their livelihood priorities and how they respond to relevant policies in the course of pursuing those priorities. Identity may order tasks pointing to the interpersonal networks to embrace and the ones to distance from, and thus the lifestyle to follow (cf. Long 1968).

If identity and symbolism show us where actors are headed, that is, the lifestyles they wish to follow then those are the livelihood outcomes sought. Following our conception of resources as evolving and unfolding in the hands and minds of actors and that using them is a matter of struggles and lifestyle, then livelihood outcomes are not separate from people's everyday tasks but intertwined with them in a manner that resource creation for self or for others may at the same time be an outcome in the form of a gift, a ritual or self-esteem. These phenomena are again better captured

through the concepts of identity and symbolism. Lifestyles are hinged on identity so that identity shifts help actors to anchor extended or new lifestyles in subtle ways without appearing to cause contradictions and conflict (cf. Long 1968).

In conclusion, the livelihoods approach has the strength of putting resources at the centre of the development debate. The approach also attempts to capture the reality of the poor and the complexities of rural life as well as locate actors in the micro and macro arenas. Key among the weaknesses of the approach is the conception of resources as assets hence presenting them as material only, ignoring the non-material aspects such as gifts, sacrifices and sacred sites. Equally the compartmentalisation of resources as assets is narrow and ignores overlaps. The approach generally takes a determinist view of people's reality thus depicting them as passive and externally driven in their lives. Livelihood strategies are shown as for physical survival, ignoring issues of personal preferences and identity for example. The approach also privileges material livelihood outcomes such as food, income and wellbeing; ignoring non-material outcomes such as self-esteem, security and identity. In view of the foregoing and other weaknesses the approach needs to be extended in order to capture the study question more appropriately. Central to the extension of the approach is recognition of the actor-oriented perspective as a counter-weight to the determinist view adopted in the livelihoods approach. This means as already alluded to, that actors are endowed with varying power and abilities to take action. They are therefore continually negotiating and struggling in life. These struggles occur within and between institutions including markets and the state including relevant policies, as well as with technology domains. The struggles and negotiations are also patterned in terms among others of identity and lifestyles. This conceptualisation fills gaps in and strengthens the livelihoods approach with a

view to providing a robust approach with which to study rural household resources. The strength of the extended approach lies in recognising both material and non-material resources and livelihood outcomes.

This section has so far shown how engagement with the livelihood approach enables us to redefine certain concepts and extend the approach to cover the research question more accurately. To recapitulate, livelihood outcomes transcend the economic to encompass the symbolic such as identity, self-esteem and actualisation. Hence, there are symbolic resources and of necessity symbolic activities such as gift giving and rituals, all of which should be captured to provide a better perspective of resource evolution and use as well as livelihood pursuits. The rest of this section will detail the concepts with which the livelihoods approach is extended to address the research question and which have already been alluded to. These concepts are institutions, externalization, scientification, identity and lifestyles. Hence forth, an operational definition of livelihood and resources will be adopted, followed by a consideration of the unit of analysis and the study proposition.

Struggles with and within institutions

Early institutional analysts attempted to understand the behaviour of African producers in terms of their moral economies and group rationalities (cf. Lubeck 1992:525). Lubeck further argues that African producers operate in risky and uncertain conditions hence, their responses to material incentives and market forces often contradict the expectations of state planners and rational choice assumptions. Pursuing this line of argument, Hyden posits that the peasant mode presents an economy in which the affective ties based on common descent and residence prevail – an ‘economy of affection’ (Hyden 1980:18–19). In this type of economy economic

behaviour is not motivated by individual profit alone, but is embedded in a range of social considerations that allow for access to opportunities and benefits in ways that are impossible in modern capitalist or socialist formations. This corresponds to the 'moral economy' (Haugerud 1984:11) where neo-classical emphasis on individual rationality and market criteria of profit maximisation are irrelevant, and production, consumption, distribution and exchange are socially shaped. Hyden's and Haugerud's caricatures of 'affection' and 'morality' as bases of economic behaviour and hence, an egalitarian Africa have been contested as empirically flawed. Economic behaviour in rural Africa is socially constructed, may be more strongly so than in other settings, but the free for all economy implied does not exist.

In her later work, Haugerud (1995:134-6) delves into client relations that occur in interpenetrating domains of kinship and politics. She shows that "material flows in Kenya's patron-client pyramids reproduce in part familiar cultural patterns in which a few individuals become prosperous and maintain material exchanges with subordinates". In this, Haugerud presents institutions as powerful mediators in actors' struggles to access resources. Institutions are from this perspective, understood as "regularised patterns of behaviour that emerge from underlying structures or sets of rules in use" (Leach *et al.* 1999:237). These rules are made and remade through people's practices (*ibid*). Therefore, as the rules change so do regularized patterns of behaviour and practices shift. People's practices have to do with their access to and utilisation of resources.

△ As Berry (1989:41) indicates, people's ability to generate a livelihood depends on their access to productive resources and their ability to control and use resources

effectively. Besides, utilisation of resources occurs in the backcloth of institutions. Berry also maintains that access is hinged on participation in a variety of social institutions, as well as on material wealth and market transactions. It is through institutions such as social networks that actors access resources, knowledge and information (cf. Barth 2002). These are crucial in the construction of livelihoods. Thus institutions as Watson (2003:291) put it, are structures of power. They constitute arenas of contest over resources. According to Berry (1991, p.11 cited in Lubeck 1992:527) "to cope with increasing economic instability and decline ... people pursue influence and opportunity through shifting alliances or by contesting the boundaries or structures of the networks themselves". Therefore, institutions do not confer resources and opportunity on a silver platter, people struggle and negotiate with each other, sometimes seeking to interpret institutional positions afresh. When they succeed, change occurs and in its wake new opportunities for winners and yet, perhaps constraints for losers. The losers in these processes, however, are only left weaker not down and out. So they re-position themselves anew to face the future. This leads us to a broader conceptualisation of institutions to cover not just access to and utilisation of resources but also the dynamics and complexities involved in the ensuing processes. This broader view is summarized by Watson that "institutions encompass sets of enduring ideas, rules (formal and informal) and practices (*de jure* and *de facto*), as well as organisations and decision-making groups" (Watson 2003:291).

In this broader conceptualisation, the institutionalists' view on resource allocation is captured by Lubeck (1992:526) thus:

*'Producers often choose to allocate resources – land, labour and credit
– for the reproduction of groups (i.e. households, lineages, Islamic*

brotherhoods, or cultural associations) precisely because these diversified investments guard against environmental risk, market uncertainties, and the political instability associated with planning in a way that assures that they recover a small surplus at the very least. These behaviours reproduce an insurance-like network of moral obligation at the expense of greater surpluses earned by specialised, profit-making strategies'.

Social relations therefore, appear to come into play at different times and for different reasons, but also with a variety of implications. By attempting to take care of risks, uncertainties and instability, actors end up with productivity levels below the 'optimum'. The intention however, is not accumulation but a minimum surplus to re-invest in the interpersonal networks. This is in the hope that groups invested in presently will be useful in case of difficult in the future. But more importantly, they continually provide channels for accessing or defending control over resources (cf. Berry 1989). Nevertheless, that is only part of the story; villagers may not always see their engagement in interpersonal networks as investments or insurance-like endeavours. In many instances they engage in networks to do their part in life without necessarily expecting returns. In doing their part they re-affirm their identities and self-actualise. This angle requires further exploration in this study as well.

Berry (1989) provides at least four elements of the institutional approach to resource studies in rural Africa. First, that perpetuation of access to resources via social identity leads to further investment in institutions as potential channels of access. For instance, labour-exporting areas apply farm resources to educate their children and to control emigrant ones, all in anticipation of remittances. Migration itself

depends largely on the use of interpersonal networks such as of kin to find work, land or establish businesses in a new area (Berry 1989:46). These are the actions that are assumed to lead to below optimum productivity at both ends of the migration phenomenon.

A second element is that if investment in social groups rises faster than production capacity, 'returns' to such investment will tend to decline. Thus with such institutional devaluation, incentives to invest in them reduce, but the proliferation of access channels makes it difficult for people to withdraw from them (Berry 1989:51). However, recent field evidence such as Francis (2002:7) indicate that divestiture in social relations actually occurs, arguing that "(unemployed) young people find it difficult to acquire the resources needed to form or sustain households". This view is in conflict with others that see interpersonal networks as crucial in availing resources such as information and logistical support (cf. Francis, 2000), opportunities for accessing labour, land and security (Berry 1993:169-179) and bases of social action (cf. Harris 2002; Uphoff and Wijayaratna 2000). Thus interpersonal networks constitute 'springboards' – major sets of relationships that provide individuals with a means by which they initiate new branches of activity (cf. Long 2001a). These conflicting views call for detailed studies of the place of these networks in people's struggles to mould and improvise resources and livelihood opportunities in everyday life.

A third element is that the inclusive mode of labour management and recruitment associated with investment in institutions as channels of access may promote unproductive patterns of resource use. Berry (1989: 48) argues that this presents certain dilemmas. First, if resources are fixed, an inclusive approach to recruitment

on the basis of social identity for example implies less for each and reduced fortunes for all. Second, labour is not effectively supervised so that productivity is low and they often cause environmental degradation.

The fourth element relates to the state and Berry (1989:44-45) shows that state power could be used to manipulate rules of access to land, labour and capital. As a result struggles to access the state become a pre-condition for doing business successfully. According to Long, (2001a: 42) this constitutes increased 'centralisation' of the state. Long indicates that this process coordinates the interrelations between various institutions and assists in resolving attendant conflicts. But as Francis (2002:31) has argued, formal institutions are also shaped by informal practices governing resource access and use such as discriminatory practices governed by patronage relations and other power inequalities. Hence, the state presents uneven avenues to a myriad other resources such as credit, formal employment, information, education and security⁸.

Long (2001a:42) provides two additional elements of the institutional approach as broadly conceived above. The first is 'externalisation', which describes how production tasks are increasingly taken over by external bodies. The second element is 'scientification', which identifies the growing importance of modern technology. Following this Long contends that:

"The institutional approach aims to show how integration into an external network of institutions, which develops its own 'coordinated rationality', undermines independent forms of production and decision-making".

The approach is criticised for a number of reasons such as presenting rural populations as passive and faced by overwhelming external forces, understating inter-agency conflicts and struggles that take place between farmers' organisations and governments or private institutions. Another criticism is that the approach eschews power structures at regional or national levels (Long, 2001:43). This study attempts to deal with these shortcomings by working with institutions both as arenas of contests and as objects and outcomes of struggles and negotiations over resources and opportunity.

Externalisation: Engagement with markets

Long (2001a:95) has shown that "the analysis of commoditisation processes among peasant populations concerns the impact of increasing commercialisation and integration of farming enterprises and households into the wider capitalist economy". The challenge here then, is to eschew the external determinism implied and "examine how non-capitalist institutions and cultural forms may mediate the effects of commoditisation" (ibid. p.104). Hence, the need to follow actors sometimes in the flux of negotiation and bargaining as well as in the swing back and forth from immersion into capitalist waters in order to document their experiences. Such processes may have implications for resource creation, how actors prioritise their livelihoods and how they eventually deal with policies that they encounter in their everyday lives.

Ever since Swynnerton (1955:8) in his plan to intensify the development of African agriculture in Kenya undertook to provide high-priced cash crops to the African farmers the market has remained a major ally to most of them. This is especially because of the inputs from outside the farm and community (see Pearse, 1980:2).

In fact, Haugerud (1995:156) has noted that for most Embu farmers in Kenya, crop production is both a means of acquiring food to meet family consumption needs, and an important source of cash income. She further notes that although many farmers grow export cash crops such as coffee and cotton, few substitute such non-edible crops for food production entirely; concluding that they diversify rather than specialize. Engagement with markets is therefore, cautious and far from comprehensive. This study will examine how markets enter poor people's life worlds especially since cash crops such as tea and coffee abound in the study areas.

However, in the formative years of cash cropping there was a large number of barriers. Van Zwanenberg (1972:47-48) has shown that contrary to widespread opinion in the literature, Africans responded quickly, positively and creatively to the opportunities to produce saleable goods for the domestic market. Yet, they received little positive help in the shape of extension and infrastructure and were discriminated in the export market. Contrary to this, and perhaps because of it, Hyden (1980:10) found out that African Peasants were less integrated in the cash economy than peasants were elsewhere.

It appears that for farmers to be able and willing to participate in the market their food supply must be assured first. For instance, De Wilde *et al.* (1967:173) reported that the smallholder farmers of the Bugisu District of Uganda could not share fully in the benefits that flowed from the introduction of Arabica coffee because they were not enabled to increase the yields of their food crops, particularly of bananas, and thus release more land for coffee. Correspondingly, FAO (1983:62) and World Bank (1990:33) observed the same trend with regard to farmers in Nigeria and Tanzania respectively. Nevertheless, food has also headed for the

market. In Kenya's Murang'a district for example, Mackenzie and Taylor (1989:125) found out that even after the rise of cash crops women's responsibility for food production continued to be vital, but on limited land due to competition from cash crops. This meant fewer (but consistent) surpluses for sale in local markets and reduced access to cash for women as they seldom share in the cash crop income.

Whatever the entry point to the market, be it food or conventional cash crops, the final result is that incorporation into the market turns out to be closely linked to how resources evolve and are utilised, and ultimately how livelihoods are put together. With regard to Swaziland, Sikhondze (1995:73) has indicated that by the 1970s, rich rural cotton farmers made profits that were reflected in the improvement to their homes and farming equipment, accumulation of cattle and provision of health services and schools. Due to entry into the market via food and cash crops more and more aspects of interaction in rural areas such as labour are likely to be monetized. In Swaziland, Sikhondze (1995:91) found out that most cotton farmers utilised labour drawn from the poverty-stricken members of the extended family who were in return supported in food, clothes and shelter. These rich farmers did not prefer communal labour because it was difficult to supervise and subject it to one's will. This should not imply though, that extended family labour is homogeneous and exploited without resistance. But labour arrangements are a matter of style reflecting a farmer's identity shifts over time and perceived levels of success in life (cf. Long 1968 with regard to Jehovah Witness farmers' shifting interactions with kin labour).

The foregoing labour arrangements, whether payment for it is in cash or in kind, may become a boon for enhanced multi-pronged farming. For example, Haugerud (1995:153) argues that those members of wealthy households are less likely than those in poorer households to engage in casual or daily wage labour. Wage employment is both the primary agent and product of rural differentiation. Labour whether it is casual or salaried is offered by actors who make certain considerations and this study will go beyond *a priori* determination of whom it benefits to understand the basis, evolution and experiences in strategies that involve labour provision for pay or within some social arrangement such as extended family. Questions of identity, trust and lifestyle again come into play.

In both agricultural and pastoral communities livestock constitute a basis of livelihood construction. Cliffe (1982:265) has shown that in the pastoral mode of production, ownership of livestock was often markedly unequal, and confined to men, but often some adult males with families owned none or less than would guarantee subsistence. This led to dependence and subservience to large herders, either as part crop cultivators, or as herders of someone's animals (either as "tenant-keepers" or as junior family members). Although requiring substantial capital outlays to establish, the rise of exotic dairy cattle in the study areas presents new livelihood opportunities. The question to address is how actors have confronted these opportunities in the context of their networks and how this is ordered by or has ordered social relations especially with regard to 'tenant-keeping'. The relevant to deal with has to do with the policies that affect tenant-keeping and how villagers deal with them in order to involve themselves with the practice smoothly.

For rural producers, land is the basic means of production and Haugerud (1995) has indicated that its accumulation constitutes a major basis of wealth. But as Kabwegyere (1974:116-128) indicates, land is not an economic bone of contention unless it is scarce. He further argues that in Buganda, land became scarce with the introduction and entrenchment of colonialism. Subsistence relations were threatened and in a large measure replaced by cash relations. The state was created on insecurity and inequality. In South Africa, Francis (1998) also found out that land was crucial in rural people's livelihoods.

The proposed study will explore and describe the process of market incorporation (the attendant contradictions notwithstanding) via food and cash crops as well as how that incorporation is related to labour. Associated with this is the role of migrant labour in local livelihoods especially concerning remittances, provision of information and logistical support for livelihood tasks. This is particularly important because as Hayami (1998) has shown market and state information is imperfect in developing countries. Networks also assist in access to market information although those of dominant groups may outdo and disadvantage those of poorer and weaker members of society (cf. Grawert 1998). This presents an analysis site in the area of inter-network relations and contests in resource organization. The place of education and training in refining migrant and local labour for participation in the wider labour market will be examined. Another pertinent issue to be analysed is how, why and to what extent actors have mediated the processes of commoditisation and market incorporation over time. Cattle and land ownership will also be viewed in terms of the changes that it undergoes in the face of market forces and the attendant implications to the unfolding of resources and their use in constructing livelihoods.

Scientification: Engagement with modern technology

Proponents of the modernization theory conceived technology as the driving force in social change and development. They envisaged the spread of modern technology (Biggs and Farrington 1991:12) in every sector in the Third World to propel it through 'stages of economic growth' to the ultimate stage of high mass consumption some day, and then, development would have occurred (Rostow 1960).

It is in the backdrop of the foregoing, that Pickering (1983:3) was to maintain that the most effective way of both alleviating poverty and promoting overall economic growth is to raise the productivity of small farmers by narrowing the gap between knowledge in biological processes on the one hand and the practices of the majority of farmers on the other. Hill and Hardin (1971:18), World Bank (1990:33) and Sikhondze (1995:85) argue for credit systems for the modernization of agriculture in terms of inputs such as fertilizers, certified seed, cash crops and marketing. Technological determinism of the type advocated by Pickering (1983) has been criticized on account of presenting technology as culturally neutral (Long, 2001) and of necessity users as culturally passive. In fact, Long (2001a:13) shows that social actors must not be depicted as "passive recipients of interventions", and he argues that they process information and strategise in their dealings with various local and outside actors. This study therefore, understands technology as a knowledge domain, which actors encounter, translate and/or mediate in the course of building livelihoods. The challenge is for this research project to document those processes and experiences and how livelihoods have developed around them. In particular, the study looks at how resources evolve and opportunities emerge as a result of encounters with the modern technologies and other forms of external interventions.

Sikhondze (1995:85) has noted that even government organizations, which promoted the improvement of the rural economy of Swaziland, displayed gross inequality in the technical assistance, they extended to farmers. Demonstrators, for example, paid more attention to already developed and progressive farmers at the expense of those who were still very poor. It is for this kind of reasoning, perhaps, that Hyden (1980:10) has shown that income disparities in rural Africa are not primarily due to ownership of land being in the hands of a few people. Often, it is simply a matter of differential skills in using the land, so that, those who have accessibility to better technologies will raise their production and hence their incomes and statuses. Hyden may be confronted with Ley's (1977) assertion that it is the "prosperous farmers who keep buying plots of land" from the poor, hence making it an instrument of impoverishment. But Swift and Hamilton (2001:87) have argued that livelihood outcomes are not merely a function of capital endowment. There are subtle struggles that go on between the weak and the powerful in rural areas, which go beyond land and technology to embrace issues of identity and values (cf. Scott, 1985). Hence, this study will undertake an ethnographic study of constraints and opportunities at the actor-technology interface as well as attempt to examine resource and activity improvisations that emerge at those points.

In general, therefore, the contradictions in encounters with technologies cannot be located in the ignorance or conservatism of producers. Rather, in the entire social reality in which the producers find themselves and how they respond in diverse ways to the same situations in order to innovatively create resources and secure livelihoods. Thus, it is important to note Havens and Flinn's (1975:18 in Pearse 1980:16-17) argument that rather than concentrate on 'the problem of the

backward peasant', who can not keep up with advance in technology, who is resistant to change, and so on, research should be "a critique of the respective societies and their institutions, and their failure to provide circumstances and facilities enabling the small cultivator to embody the fruits of scientific research in his system of production" (Havens and Flinn, op. cit.). This type of structuralist characterization will be followed in this study through an actor-oriented analysis to document 'lived experiences'. Thus the study will illuminate on the translation of technologies into resources and ultimately into livelihood opportunities. A primary question here is about actors' aspirations and goals because of or in spite of encounters with these technologies and other development interventions and how this whole process relates to the ways in which they put together their livelihoods. This kind of conception is premised on the view that modern technology constitutes a cultural force and stream of knowledge for villagers to contend with, and this is what development is about.

Different people understand development differently, but Rodney's (1973) definition links it with technology and is in line with the present study. He defined development at two levels: at the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. At societal level development implies that members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. This capacity is dependent on the extent to which they understand nature (science), on the extent to which they put that understanding into practice by devising tools (technology), and on the manner in which work is organized. Herein rests a conception of technology as part of a people's culture. Whether or not actors perceive development as externally or locally generated relates to how they arrive at their livelihood priorities and the tasks they undertake

to achieve them. Given that the rural poor have their own culture and technology, means that the entry of modern technology represents a potential contradiction that leads to negotiation and struggles. Describing and explaining these contradictions, negotiations and struggles is a major aim of this study.

Identity

This study shares Holland *et al.* (1998:5) premise that “identities are lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualised as they develop in social practice and also as psycho-historical formations that develop over a person’s lifetime and motivating social life”. Holland *et al.* (1998:5) add that identities “are important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being”. Siebers (2004:75) holds that identity formation includes the ways people constitute themselves in the World, how they render themselves and their relations with others meaningful, how they construct their narratives of self, enact their images of self, and perform their identifications in order to get things done. These explications relate to the perspective developed so far of resources as unfolding and being moulded in village everyday life and imply that the social processes constitute knowledge clashes in labelling and consequently utilising resources. These processes are dynamic and complex leading to clashes between individual and group identities, as well as negotiations or redefinitions of group identities often to rationalise deviating individual identity. This means that an actor’s social identity may be different from the actual lived identity of that subject (cf. Kearney, 1996:146-47). As Siebers (2004:78) points out, relations between personal identity and group or collective identity cannot be taken for granted. The questions worth exploring in this study include how these relations shape or are shaped by the creation and use of resources and the livelihood outcomes the rural poor seek. Portes (1995:12) captures this

view when he argues that networks influence the goals of individuals and the means and constraints in their paths. Portes further argues that “depending on the characteristics of their network and their personal positions within them, individuals may be able to mobilize a significant amount of resources, escape close scrutiny of their selfish behaviour, or on the contrary, be tightly bound by group-enforced expectations”. However, in everyday life all in the network have a way of chipping away at expectations as well being part of enforcement mechanisms all in the name of deriving certain varied benefits and belonging.

An individual actor usually has a social identity as a teacher, peasant, commercial farmer or businessman, but what are their actual lived identities? A teacher may have several other identities such as petty trader, peasant, drug dealer or brewer and distributor of local brew simultaneously or sequentially. These may translate to the moulding and utilisation of resources in a completely different manner from official assumptions concerning the main identity as a teacher for instance. As Bryceson (2000:5) has shown for many people in rural Africa, “non-agricultural activities have imperceptibly snowballed from ‘filler’ cash-earning tasks, to year-round activities providing ready cash”. But all these individual identities that are often contradictory produce tensions that have to be dealt with on a daily basis. These have implications to the interpersonal networks that evolve around individuals, the resources co-produced and the livelihood outcomes sought. This study therefore, looks at villagers’ actual lived identities to describe and explain how these ‘composite and often contradictory identities’ (Holland *et al.* 1998:8) are formed and reproduced, the resources that unfold in the process and how these relate to the pursuit of livelihoods.

Composite identities result from contests with social identity and its constraining character in everyday life. Some of these contests may lead to 'improvisations' (Holland *et al.* (1998:15-18) which are expected outcomes "when people are simultaneously engaged with or pushed by contradictory discourses" (Holland *et al.* 1998:17) as occurs when rural people are confronted and negotiate with external forces such as modern technology, state policy or markets. Holland *et al.* (1998) further argues that improvisations are impromptu actions but when they are systematised, conventionalised and taken up as symbols, they become potential beginnings of altered identity. With altered identity then, come new waves of resource evolution and moulding, utilisation and activities as well as lifestyles. Even as these improvisations occur, 'social legitimacy' (Bryceson 2000:5) based on agrarian values is of concern. Thus agrarian values such as food self-sufficiency and livestock keeping for symbolic purposes are points of intergenerational contestations that are important in processes of labelling, moulding and mobilising resources for livelihood construction.

Another dimension of identity to be looked at is the place of cultural identity such as ethnic, clan and religious affiliation in the creation and application of resources (cf. Seur 1992). Religion in particular, provides acceptable reasons for behaviour changes in rural areas such as abandoning certain traditional rituals, distancing from certain local and kinship networks or embracing new networks (cf. Long 1968). Religious affiliation also points to particular lifestyles and ultimately to resources, practices and local networks embraced or repudiated. Religions such as Christianity discourage certain traditional rituals while traditional religions encourage them; whichever choice an actor makes has implications to the lifestyles they adopt and the manner in which they relate to resources.

Lifestyles

The idea of lifestyles is closely related to that of identity, because the former is constructed among other things on the basis of the latter. Following the theoretical orientation developed so far which focuses on resources as unfolding and being moulded by actors, a lifestyle is understood as the process of moulding opportunities into some coherent everyday life practices that are satisfying, continuous and promising in terms of identity affirmation, resource flows, relative consistency with prevailing institutional regimes and self-esteem. According to Hebinck and Bourdillon (2001:7) the notion of lifestyles helps us take the issue of “livelihoods beyond the confines of economic activities only to incorporate issues pertaining to people’s cultural repertoires such as value choices, status, senses of identity vis-à-vis other types of actors and local forms of organisation”.

Stretching livelihood beyond the confines of economic activities only, implies that symbolic resources and tasks are also incorporated. This helps the livelihood approach to capture certain aspects of peoples’ lives such as culture including such attributes as beliefs, identity, festivals and sacred sites, which are important for explaining people’s decisions and choices (cf. Adato and Meinzen-Dick 2002). These cultural repertoires are important components of lifestyles because they form bases for ordering life in a given way and hence, producing a style. According to Nootboom (2003:218) “a style is both an institutionalised pattern and a construction of an individual through negotiations within the household, neighbourhood and family”. Nootboom adds that styles may be inherited, but that they are equally constantly reproduced and ‘restyled’ by the changing needs and orientations of villagers. The point here, therefore, is that a livelihood style is a result of a villager’s history; present opportunities and predicaments, as well as

their aspirations vis-a-vis the cultural repertoires that they contend with. The emphasis is that livelihood styles are not just founded on economic rationality but embedded in cultural processes that relate to both material and non-material outcomes. For example, Portes (1995:13) has shown that part of the reason for granting gifts in the same organization or community includes expectation of commensurate non-material rewards such as social standing and approval.

As Wedel (1969:45, in Wallman 1984: 219) indicated “the focus of economic activity at any point is not solely determined by what brings in the largest amount of income, but also by its interrelations or linkages to other activities, and by factors such as tradition, place of residence, or by what (one) would prefer to be doing”. It is all a matter of styles of resource management as drawn from one’s historical experiences as well as present dilemmas and opportunities. Therefore, different people handle resources in diverse ways even in similar circumstances and the resultant diverse styles lead to heterogeneous social forms and livelihood outcomes. In such cases then, livelihoods are evaluated in terms of being sensible rather than viable (cf. Wallman 1984:219). What then do the rural poor prefer to be doing and how sensible, in their own terms, are their livelihoods? More importantly, in pursuing what they consider to be sensible livelihoods, how do they manoeuvre in the face of intervening policy requirements?

Different livelihood styles rely on different elements of local cultural repertoires (cf. Ploeg, 1994:19) to flourish. In summoning the diverse cultural repertoires, actors mould and re-mould resources in diverse ways in order to service their lifestyles. Because lifestyles are hinged on values, it follows that what in one lifestyle may be considered a resource may not be in another lifestyle even in the same locality.

Hence, there is need as Long (2001a:54) points out "to explore the issue of lifestyles and the factors that shape them". Links between lifestyles and resources may perhaps be best explained by exploring life histories and inter-personal networks to locate the lifestyle typologies that relate to particular levels of both material and non-material resources. This is because villagers for example are not just gliding on and eking out a living whichever way, they have value orientations that 'style' their responses to 'opportunities' and whether in fact they define a situation as an opportunity is not economically or culturally pre-ordained; it is rather a negotiated issue.

These negotiations are not always overt; they are often covert and draw on resources in very subtle ways. While material resources may be crucial in these processes, other elements such as time, information and identity may be critical also (cf. Long 2001:55; Wallman 1984). To understand these crucial processes and their implications for livelihoods requires an analysis of the bases of the various lifestyles with regard to support networks as they shift over time. It is also necessary to analyse how success or failure is defined, evaluated and confronted as an outcome of a lifestyle.

Unit of analysis and observation: The elusive household

In this study the unit of analysis will for a start be the household. A household is traditionally defined as constituting a consumption group, that is a group of relations essentially organized around a family and eating from the same kitchen. In line with this Guyer (1981:89) has argued that 'household implies a domestic unit with decision-making autonomy about (re-production), production and consumption'. Guyer, however further argues that recent scholarship has shown that the concept

disguises variability in the ways things get done within, but that distancing from the concept has been reluctant because of the theoretical need for a simple unit of analysis. According to Guyer (*ibid*, p.98) in Africa the concept household is fluid and almost every survey that takes it as a unit of analysis has indicated a problem with defining its membership and in maintaining continuous records on people with such high mobility⁹. This issue of mobility implies that household as a unitary decision-making unit is equally fluid and members can exercise rights and be subject to obligations beyond the household where they live (*cf. ibid*, p.98).

Membership is particularly complex because a household may include a group of brothers, their families and parents living in a common compound, with varying levels of economic and social integration (*cf. Poate and Daplyn 1993*). This is common in the study areas and the compound constitutes a homestead (Omosa 1998). This should not imply a membership whose internal relationships can be taken as given (Guyer 1981:98) but rather negotiated and contested upon on a continuous basis. Harris (1981:6, in Guyer 1981:100) best captures this line of thought in pointing out that segments of households operate semi-autonomously at some levels but coalesce at others. Even within households, 'heads' do not fully control labour nor do they control all the resources and assumptions to the contrary only conveniently simplify a complex situation (*cf. Guyer 1981:100*). A related attribute is the varying levels of economic independency/integration of unmarried sons and daughters of different generations who also reside in the homestead making it difficult to accurately define a household or at any rate a unit of action in livelihood construction.

The household model assumes that families have resources, and most of the decisions are about allocating them. However, in practice resources are not just commodities and people have to invest in the mechanisms that assure them continuing access because they need social and political resources to get material resources (cf. Guyer 1981:102). This means that inter-household coalitions of diverse strengths develop for short-term as well as for strategic reasons. Therefore, household as a unit of analysis should be flexible and take cognisance of issues about resources that transcend allocation, to consider what resources are, how people get and keep them, before, during and after allocation (cf. *ibid*, p.102). This calls for a creative understanding of interpersonal, intra- and inter-household networks and resource flows. Information and visitation or friendship webs are important indicators of directions resources are likely to be flowing between and within households.

This study will use the group organized around a common kitchen as an entry point and construct the actual composition of households or 'confederations' (cf. Alderson-Smith 1984) of them, over time in terms of the flow of information, resources and time allocation to common tasks observed. In tracing these confederations, the significance of engagements and connections within and between households will be sought (cf. Murray 1998:22) in order to estimate resource sharing or co-production. These confederations of households may turn out as 'clusters of households' related to one another in a variety of ways (kinship, working contracts, and mutual help) often across village, location, district or even national boundaries (cf. Murray 1998:24). This requires that social networks take precedence over discrete geographical or political areas. Therefore, the livelihood activities that will be analysed take place within and between households via social networks. The units of observation that is the actors to be studied directly are the individual adults

in the households. It is expected that adults related to the selected households will be living miles away in other countries or in cities, but have influence in decision-making and provision of information and/or resources. These adults will be pursued for observation or interview to the extent possible within the resources and time available. Children and youth may also initiate connections and ultimately resource flows within and between households and such processes will require closer observation in this study. Even as units of observation overflow from the local setting, that will remain the research level.

Study proposition

This study proceeds on the premise that rural livelihoods are functions of complex and multiple resource moulding and use processes that are hinged at the micro, meso and macro levels, and shaped by varied intra- and extra – household forces and orientations. In these processes resources evolve and unfold in different directions that satisfy specific but dynamic actor identifications and lifestyles.

The study focuses on the sorts of meanings that actors attach to resources and the uses they put them to. The primary concern in the study is to locate and explain the shifts and tensions in these meanings and uses, and ultimate livelihood success or failure on the bases of relationships at micro, meso and macro levels as well as actor identifications and lifestyles.

Figure 1 Resource moulding & use processes

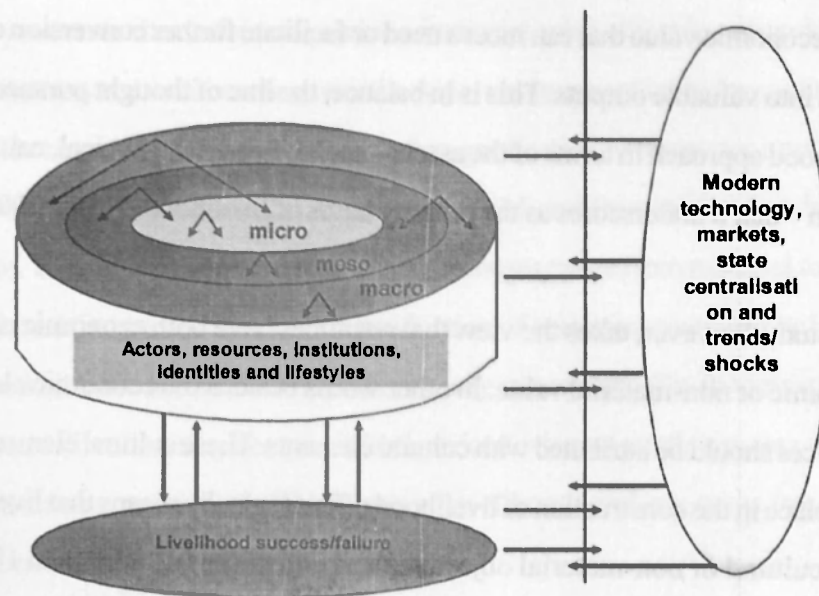


Figure 1 shows out a summary of the crucial actor interactions and orientations in the course of resource production, co-production and use. The resources are moulded and exchanged differently through interactions within the micro, meso and macro levels, as well as between the various levels. These interactions and exchanges are equally influenced by actor identifications and lifestyles, as well as the interpenetrations of modern technology, markets, the state and trends/shocks into their life-worlds. The interactions and exchanges and hence, resource creation and use processes will be analyzed in terms of operative networks and institutions that span the various levels of reality.

Operational definitions

Resources

Resources are traditionally defined with reference to economic value, so that a resource is anything that has or could have, that is has the potential for economic

value. In this sense resources are inputs that have potential of being converted into some economic value that can meet a need or facilitate further conversion of other inputs into valuable outputs. This is in balance, the line of thought pursued by the livelihood approach in terms of the assets – social, financial, physical, natural and human – that it underscores as the primary bases of livelihoods (Ellis, 2000).

This study, however, takes the view that resources have both economic and non-economic or non-material value. In other words besides the economic elements, resources should be attributed with cultural elements. These cultural elements have their place in the construction of livelihoods. This logically means that livelihoods have cultural or non-material objectives and outcomes (cf. Wallman 1984). In addition to Wallman's thinking about livelihood besides land, labour and capital that the economic model traditionally regards as resources, there are three additional resources; time, identity and information. These however, are "forms of resource each of which cover a whole range of cognate items". The important thing to add, according to Wallman, is that time; information and identity have more to do with organisation. These organising resources account for differential performance in livelihood construction within the constraints of a single environment (cf. Wallman 1984:29-30). These organising resources also help define contests and struggles over resources and the management of unfolding conflicts.

Therefore, this study holds that material resources have meaning for livelihoods only upon being combined with non-material resources. In doing this, which is in giving meaning to phenomena as resources, interactions with actors begin and in the process that ensues, resources evolve and unfold in meaning, value and usage. In that interaction with phenomena actors mould and re-direct resources to their

economic and to in Bourdieu's (1980:113) words, 'non-economic interests'. It is in these processes that actors co-produce resources with others in networks and in contestations and collaboration with the wider environment including polity and nature. These processes of production and co-production of resources imply that livelihood opportunities are seized as they unfold, and thus lead us to a further postulate. That, livelihood objectives and outcomes range from material to non-material, and that production and co-production of resources may well be both a livelihood aim and an outcome simultaneously or sequentially. In view of this, evaluation of livelihood outcomes is both an intricate and subtle process whose form and content require careful analysis of livelihoods and resources over time and space.

Livelihood

In view of Wallman (1984:22-23) and Long (2001a:241), this study holds that:

Livelihood is never just a matter of finding or making shelter, transacting money, preparing food to put on the table or exchange in the market place. It is equally a matter of ownership and circulation of information, the management of relationships, the affirmation of personal significance and the creation and re-creation of resources through naming and re-naming phenomena, the struggles to extend resource meanings while defending existing ones and embracing new opportunities thus getting involved in more complex relationships, identifications and lifestyles, and the interrelation of all those tasks to the other. The tasks of meeting obligations, of security, identity and status, and organising time are as crucial to livelihood as bread and shelter.

Markets

In conformity with Long (2001a), this study treats markets as processes by which actors such as individuals, households or coalitions of households increasingly delegate most of their reproduction and production processes to external institutions. This means that individuals and collectives are integrated to varied degrees into sites of exchange and allied economic transactions or commoditisation. More importantly, the study does not reify markets and therefore it considers them arenas of contests rather than determinants of rural life. Actors then resist or embrace markets to varied degrees and for a variety of reasons and benefits.

Institutions

This study adopts Watson's (2003) definition of institutions as 'encompassing sets of enduring ideas, rules (formal and informal) and practices (*de jure* and *de facto*), as well as organisations and decision-making groups'. With this broad definition the study looks at institutions both as arenas and as protagonists in struggles to construct livelihoods. Therefore, institutions do not continually order rural life; actors often change or at least re-orient them in ways that allow the creation and use of resources in preferred ways.

Rural Households and Livelihoods:**A Research Methodology****The Research area and population**

Data for this study will be collected in Nyamira District, Nyanza Province in South Western Kenya. Nyamira District is purposely selected for the study because of the researcher's ability to speak the local language. Besides, the district is the poorest among three where the Ekegusii language dominates and is appropriate for the study question. The district is home to the Abagusii people, a Bantu-speaking group that occupies two other neighbouring districts of Kisii and Gucha. Local oral history asserts that the Abagusii people originated from a place known as Misri to the North of Africa and migrated South to the Western Kenya areas of Maragoli and Kano Plains before occupying their present settlements at the turn of the 18th Century.

Traditional Abagusii life (Levine 1963, in Garst 1972:93) centred on the herding of cattle while cultivation was relegated to a secondary position. The social worth of men (and women) was determined by how many heads of cattle they accumulated through breeding, rustling and marrying out their daughters to get bride price. The major product of cattle, milk, was however given for free to those within extended families who had none. Hence, while a few members within the extended family may have owned more cattle than other members, milk was shared among all.

Following colonization in 1907, the Zebu type of cattle, which were owned by the Abagusii, was declared an ecological hazard and a barrier to food security. Hence, according to Hall (1963) livestock culling became mandatory. Besides, the

delimitation of settler areas for whites only and 'native reserves' (Okoth-Ogendo 1976:55) severely reduced the amount of land at the disposal of Africans including the Abagusii. This reduced grazing land greatly and pushed some people out of herding. Moreover, Africans were required to plant new crops particularly corn whose surplus was required by Europeans especially during the two world wars (Zezeza 1989 a, b), hence herding was slowly abandoned by some households. Garst (1972) and Uchendu and Anthony (1969) indicate that by the 1950's such new crops as maize, tea, coffee and pyrethrum, among others, had been widely adopted in Gusiiland. The transition from herding to cultivation among the Abagusii was compounded by, as Levine and Levine (1966:10) have indicated, the pressure of a rapidly increasing population; the introduction of new crops and the possibility of obtaining cash through agriculture turned the primary economic attention of the Abagusii away from cattle and to their extremely fertile soil.

The rise of agriculture as the main basis of livelihood among the Abagusii alluded to above, tremendously increased the number and scope of economic activities at household level. This process definitely had far reaching implications to production organization at household level, particularly in terms of acquisition and application of resources. These changes came with new labour arrangements such cooperative work groups and exchange of labour for beer (cf. Levine and Levine 1966:15). These were perhaps the starting blocks of the incorporation of wage labour into agriculture, which currently abound in Gusiiland.

The Abagusii society is organized around clans on the basis of which marriage is exogamous and the family patriarchal and patrilocal. Marriage is consummated after the bridegroom's family 'pays' a price in cows (increasingly money nowadays)

to the bride's family. Traditionally, only sons inherit land from generation to generation, and women get access to and use of it through their spouses or by purchasing it in the market.

Nyamira District, which is the fieldwork site that is part of Gusiiland¹⁰ Gusii or Gusiiland is the geographical space in Western Kenya traditionally occupied by the Abagusii people. Their language is called Exegesis and Kisii is a major urban centre in the land. All these related and often confusing names are derived from the name of the man to whom the entire Abagusii ancestry is traced, Mogusii.

, is an agro-ecologically medium to high potential area with fertile soils and reliable rainfall. The rural economy is largely agricultural with farm sizes averaging about 1.5 hectares¹¹. Dairy and crop farming are prominent in the district. The main crops grown in the area are coffee, tea and pyrethrum. Other crops are bananas and maize (both local and hybrid), finger millet, sorghum, beans and an assortment of horticultural crops. Maize and beans form the staple food in the area. The people's traditional food crops include finger millet as the staple, and spider weed, pigweed and nightshade as the main vegetables. By and large, therefore, livelihoods are organized around land and agriculture, but known to spread to trade and other activities. This is therefore, mainly a small-scale farming area.

Other economic activities include some trading mainly small grocery shops, motor vehicle repairs, selling of second-hand clothes, carpentry and metal fabrication. The local labour market is very small mainly in the tea and coffee factories as well as a tiny local bureaucracy. Migration of labour is mainly to the urban areas, and to the tea and sugar cane plantation areas of Kenya. Health facilities in the district are

insufficient, poorly distributed and undersupplied with basic drugs. The most challenging diseases in the area are malaria, anaemia, pneumonia, meningitis, tuberculosis, measles, gastroenteritis and HIV/AIDS.

In terms of politics and the flow of development services from the centre, the district has been on the periphery since the colonial times. The first tarmac road was completed in 2004 while most other roads are impassable during rainy seasons. Electricity has been supplied to only a few urban centres. Pipe-borne water is limited to the district headquarters and a few other areas; Kenya (2002:10) shows that only 4880 households had access to piped water as at 2002. More than 90 per cent of the population relies on natural water springs for drinking water. Wood fuel is the main source of energy.

The district covers an area of 896.4 square kilometres and is divided into seven administrative divisions. These are Borabu, Nyamira, Ekerenyo, Rigoma, Nyamaiya, Nyamusi and Manga. Borabu and Rigoma have four locations each, while Nyamira Division has five. Nyamaiya, Nyamusi and Ekerenyo have two locations each and Manga Division has three (Kenya 2002). The district has a total of 22 administrative locations, 71 administrative sub-locations and three parliamentary constituencies i.e. West Mugirango, North Mugirango-Borabu and Kitutu Masaba (Kenya 1994:6; 1997; 2002). The district is bordered by Kisii District to the South-west, Narok District to the South-East and part of Kericho to the north and Rachuonyo District to the North-west. To the East are Kericho and Bomet districts.

The district's climate is of the highland equatorial zone. Climatic variations are limited and result mainly from the varying altitudes in the area. Rainfall is bi-modal

with the long rains starting from March and April and continuing until June. Short rains begin in October and end in December. The district has an average annual rainfall of 2000 mm. Most of the rainfall is received in April when over 300 mm is recorded while least precipitation occurs in January and August (100 mm). The dry season is experienced in December – January (Kenya 1994: 2).

Kenya (1994:10) shows that in 1979, the district had 300,956 people and Kenya (1999) put it at 498,102. Inter-censal growth rate was put at 4.0% per annum between 1969-1979, 2.7% per annum between 1979-89 and 3.1% per annum during 1989 - 1999. The average district population density by 1979 was 349, and 556 in 1999. The least population density was found in Borabu division with 335 persons per square kilometre compared to Manga division with 682 persons per square kilometre in 1999 (Kenya 1994). Kenya (2002) has shown that as at 2002 the district had a total population of 535,288 and an average population density of 609 persons per square kilometre. It is further indicated that in 2002 Nyamira Division had the highest population density in the district at 815 persons per square kilometre, while Borabu Division had the lowest at 257 persons per square kilometre (Kenya 2002).

The study will concentrate on Rigoma Division. This is because the division constitutes a convergence of at least three important agro-ecological zones i.e. the lower highland Tea-Dairy zone, the lower highland Maize-wheat/pyrethrum zone and the upper-midland coffee-tea zone (Kenya 1994:17). This type of ecology provides ample opportunities to all farmers in the study area to possibly grow food crops, the three main cash crops – coffee, tea, and pyrethrum - as well as undertake dairy farming. This scenario provides opportunity to examine how livelihoods are

constructed without obvious reference to constraining ecological conditions and to analyse the emergence of heterogeneous forms in a relatively homogenous setting. People have many viable livelihood options to select from. The choices they make and how these relate to their identities and interpersonal networks is of interest to this study.

Methods

This study is basically exploratory. It will thus, methodologically unfold as it progresses over 24 months. The issues of resources and livelihoods will be approached with flexibility and open-mindedness (cf. Stebbins, 2001: 4-10). Methods will unfold according to emerging generalizations and patterns. The principal methodological aim is to capture as much data as possible to explain household resources and their use; as well as the ends sought in such processes. The study is largely qualitative, employing ethnographic approaches of data collection and analysis. Qualitative research (DFID 2000) does not seek to establish absolute values for the phenomena it investigates; its aim is to build up an accurate interpretation of what is being researched. This approach will be useful in locating the material and non-material things that are crucial in the lives of poor rural people and how they mobilize them to service their objectives in life.

The study will thus commence with detailed and extended in-depth interviews in one village randomly selected from a list of all the villages in Rigoma Division through a lottery. This will involve collecting life histories from male and female adults within the selected households and in others interconnected with them in the pursuit of livelihoods i.e. extended family and exchange networks wherever they are (cf. Alderson-Smith 1984; Hebinck and Bourdillon 2001; Andersson 2002). Snowball

sampling method will be employed in picking household for in-depth interviewing in the selected village.

The study will track individual livelihood trajectories as they relate to or derive from various types of social networks such as women's groups, kin groups, village groups, credit and savings groups, welfare groups, farmers' work groups and others as well as the creative resource moulding and co-production processes and the livelihood opportunities they present.

In the collection of life histories, the retrospective interviews will lead to reconstruction of key moments, critical events, decisions, changes in trajectory and springboards in the lives of individuals¹². The word individual is used here just as an entry point. In the research process analysis will move from the individual, their spouse and children to the other families and households that they are interconnected with in their livelihood pursuits – 'household confederations' (cf. Alderson-Smith 1984). The aim is to capture the broad processes of resource moulding, co-production and utilisation that transcend individuals and yet involve and benefit them. These processes may also transcend local and national boundaries, but are important resource constitution and flow avenues worth analysis and their pursuit of livelihoods within and in relation to social networks (cf. Murray 1998; 2001).

Observation will be built into the fieldwork exercise in order to capture data as it unfolds and to triangulate information from solicited interviews. It is expected that the various household covered in the in-depth interviews will capture our theoretical arguments and thus cover changes and importance of various lifestyles and resources,

interpersonal networks and springboards, and identity construction processes in everyday livelihood pursuits.

On the basis of a preliminary analysis of the qualitative data from in-depth interviews a survey will be conducted covering 80 households randomly sampled from Rigoma division of Nyamira district. The qualitative data will help show what resources are and thus indicate the variables to be measured through the survey. The survey will thus be used as a tool for measuring some of the variables emerging from the qualitative work and to provide a clearer view of livelihood patterns in the selected village. The survey data will provide an opportunity to identify and seek explanations to continuities, discontinuities and contradictions in the emerging livelihood patterns. If certain issues still be unclear, after the survey further explanations will be pursued through a second round of in-depth studies of selected households and others that interlock with them in their livelihood activities.

Secondary Data

Secondary data (DFID 2000) refers to information and statistics that are already there when the livelihoods investigation begins. For the present study, documents particularly materials from the National and District Archives, policy documents, government reports and oral literatures will be utilised especially in furtherance of the historical method. Existing research and civil society reports will also be reviewed to provide the background information for the field data collection and analysis. Newspapers and local magazines particularly '*Sauti ya Gusii*' will also be used to capture popular comments on issues related to this study.

Furthermore, a search of local music will be conducted to follow the twists and turns in resource creation and use. The focus on music is motivated by arguments that it is a powerful symbol of cultural identity and aspirations, and that it evokes a wealth of associations of an emotional and social kind (Long, 2001b:4). And one needs to explore the internal negotiations and struggles taking place within and between the various genres of music and how they depict struggles over resources and livelihoods (cf. Long 2001b:5).

Data collection techniques

Interviewing

Interviewing involves asking people for the facts of a matter and/or their opinions about an event or phenomenon. This technique helps bring out what respondents know about the matter being studied (cf. Southwold-Llewellyn 1999). In the present study interviewing will be carried out in Ekegusii language and the responses will be recorded in the same language to be translated later into English. For respondents who do not speak Ekegusii, Kiswahili language will be used. This study will employ the following interview techniques: ethnographic interviewing and survey interviews.

Ethnographic Interviewing

Ethnography involves the detailed recording of the statements, interaction and behaviour of the people who are the subjects of study (Mitchell 1983b). This can be achieved through a number of techniques amongst which interviewing is just one. Ethnographic interviewing entails two distinct but complementary processes: developing rapport and eliciting information (Spradley 1979). In eliciting information the interviewer gets the informants talking about particular cultural scenes or themes and describing/analysing them. This study will utilise ethnographic interviewing to

construct life stories and to understand how various resources unfold, actors' involvement in the process and how these processes relate to social networks in which they are embedded. It will be important to learn through this method how resource and opportunity improvisation evolve and on which networks this rely. Other themes for ethnographic interviewing will include perceptions of resources, how identity and lifestyles interact and shape livelihood pursuits and how market opportunities, modern technologies and other policy interventions have been encountered especially with regard to the livelihood choices made and pursued. Direct observation will be part of this interviewing process to capture behaviour that may unfold which, relates to the matters under study.

Survey

A survey will be conducted in all the villages in Rigoma Division after a preliminary analysis of qualitative data generated through in-depth and ethnographic interviews. The survey will make use of an interview schedule with open- and closed-ended questions. The questions will focus mainly on the demographic characteristics, resources owned or accessed, network activities, social group involvement, modern technologies encountered, market links, special skills, and sources of information, time budgets and religious involvement. These data will enable the profiling of the villages and an early view of the nature of reality in the villages. The survey respondents will be drawn from a random sample of Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) population listings for the various villages in the division under study.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a special mode of observation in which the observer may fully participate in or take a variety of roles in the events being studied on a

day-to-day basis and have the opportunity to learn from inside the group being studied (cf. Yin, 1994; Jorgensen, 1989). In carrying out participant observation the researcher and his assistant will take part in the everyday life activities in the villages under study. The researcher and research assistant will live in the villages, observing and taking part in household production and consumption activities. The researcher will participate in and observe village/community wide activities such as those in the churches, local markets, funeral ceremonies, community group and family meetings to record their links to the livelihoods of the actors. Time will be set aside every night to systematically write up each day's events and activities, for easy follow up as need arises in subsequent days.

Data Analysis

The major task in data analysis will be to find and make meaning of the concepts that pattern the processes of resource evolution and moulding, livelihoods construction and the networks of social relationships upon which resource and livelihood opportunity anchor. As Gordon Allport once pointed out, "the only reasonable thing to do, if one wishes to study a phenomenon, is to put 'a specimen' before one's eye and look at it repeatedly until all essential features sink indelibly into one's mind (Young 1966:474). This study intends to read and re-read the data generated in order to evolve the emerging patterns of resource evolution, livelihoods transformation and the social networks that relate thereto. The quantitative data from the survey will be summarized using the SPSS computer software to locate the patterns that emerge following the study questions. These patterns will then be linked to the qualitative data partly using the computer software Hyper Research on the basis of some of the codes developed from the quantitative data to describe and explain them from the actors' perspectives.

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End Notes**(Endnotes)**

¹ This is an exploratory study on rural household resources and it is premised on the assumption that majority of the people in the rural areas of Nyamira District are poor. It is therefore, a study of the rural poor assumed to be involved mainly in agriculture.

² Belshaw, C. (1967) 'Theoretical Problems in Economic Anthropology' in M. Freedman (ed.) *Social Organisation: Essays Presented to Raymond Firth*. London: Frank Cass, cited in Wallman (1984). Belshaw's work represents a new but largely ignored dimension in the livelihoods debate due to his introduction of time and symbolic systems as resources. While other studies on livelihoods do not mention time as a resource, the inclusion of symbolic systems opens new avenues of data collection and analysis.

³ Well-being is one of those concepts that are most troublesome to comprehend and many critics of the livelihoods approach are of the view that it is applied to generally cover the less understood socio-cultural aspects of livelihood. According to Maxwell (1999:3) the term well-being has 'come to act as a metaphor for absence of poverty, with concomitant emphasis on how poor people themselves view their situation'.

⁴ This livelihood approach under discussion is as presented by DFID (2000) and extended or re-defined by associated organisations and researchers such as IDS - Sussex and Frank Ellis (2000).

⁵ This definition is cited in DFID (2000), and adopted in Farrington *et al.* (1999:2) and Hebinck, P. and Bourdillon, M. (2001:2). Scoones (1998:5) adapted the definition with minor changes while Swift, J. and Hamilton, K. (2001:82) in turn adopt Scoones' modified definition. In practice all livelihood work by DFID

and IDS Sussex adapt the definition by Chambers and Conway (1992). There are other competing definitions of livelihood by Long (2001 a) and Wallman (1984), which are discussed later.

⁶ The boundaries between institutions and individual actors are significantly blurred, because people appear to be born into institutions such as families or households with rules. But conceptualisations such as “unruly practices” (Gore 1993 cited in Leach 1999:238) and “passive resistance in everyday life” (Scott, 1985) provide a lot of scope for action beyond and in spite or because of institutions.

⁷ Ellis (2000:39) for example argues that land tenure institutions determine access to land. However in reality institutional positions are often contested and negotiated upon by individuals and households, and the outcomes of such struggles do not always echo institutional stances (cf. Leach *et al.* 1999).

⁸ Security is a major issue in the manner in which resources evolve and are used in constructing livelihoods, Ellis and Kutengule (2003:1502) for example found out that in some villages in Malawi, civil insecurity had deteriorated and livestock theft was so rife that villagers had opted not to keep them. In most African countries security in rural areas is ignored and priority given to urban areas especially those with foreign installations or those frequented by tourists.

⁹ See also Francis (2002) Rural Livelihoods, Institutions and Vulnerability in South Africa. Development Studies Institute, Working Paper Number 02-30, London School of Economics, London, pp. 7-8. This author brings out issues of labour migration and household dissolution due to resource constraints, arguing that households vary considerably in terms of both their composition and their stability over time.

¹¹ In Nyamira, Ekerenyo and Manga divisions, average farm sizes may be much lower than 1.5 hectares because of subdivisions for inheritance of land since the 1950s. In Borabu division which is a newly settled area having been a settlement scheme for Whites only during the colonial period, farm sizes are bigger than the district average.

