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# Towards an integrated framework for analysing the links between migration and livelihoods

AUGUSTINE TANLE



Tanle, A. 2015. Towards an integrated framework for analysing the links between migration and livelihoods. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift—Norwegian Journal of Geography* Vol. 00, 00–00. ISSN 0029–1951.

Although migration is often perceived as a livelihood strategy for both poor and non-poor households in developing countries such as Ghana, most livelihood frameworks overlook the links between migration and livelihoods. The author therefore reviews literature on livelihood approaches and compares the differences between some livelihood frameworks. The findings show that although all of the studied livelihood frameworks focus on sustainable development they differ in terms of their core mandates, which range from integrated rural development through the environment to sustainable human development. The contexts in which livelihoods are practised are influenced by institutional structures, processes and elements of vulnerability, which could be both internal and external. In conclusion, the author proposes an integrated framework for analysing the links between migration (both internal and international) and livelihood which have been glossed over in the literature.

Keywords: *Ghana, integrated framework, livelihood framework, migration*

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## Introduction

In the late 1990s, livelihood studies were promoted by the Department for International Development (DFID) as a new development paradigm for studies of poverty alleviation and sustainable development (De Haan 2012). This led to the development of various sustainable livelihood frameworks with varied objectives. The literature on sustainable livelihoods indicates that migration is one of the livelihood strategies for both poor and non-poor households but the link between migration and livelihoods has not been clearly established (MacDowell & de Haan 1997; Waddington 2003). Whereas some livelihood frameworks treat the context within which migration occurs superficially, others completely ignore it. Also, the spatial dimension involved in migration has not been analysed in most of the livelihood frameworks, thereby leaving the links between migration and livelihoods blurred (de Haan 2000; Waddington 2003). Moreover, the outcome of migration as a livelihood strategy needs to be analysed meticulously as some outcomes might not benefit primary migrants, but rather second-generation migrants, due to the temporal dimensions of some livelihood outcomes (Waddington 2003). The objectives of this article are therefore to establish a link between migration and livelihood, compare the differences between the various livelihood frameworks, and propose a conceptual framework for studying migration and livelihood.

## Conceptual issues relating to migration and livelihoods

Migration, which is a spatial mobility involving a change of a person's usual residence between clearly defined geographical units and for various reasons, is an important component of population change (International Organization for Migration 2003). Migration may be classified in three broad dimensions: (1) the decision to migrate, either voluntary or involuntary;

(2) the spatial dimension, which is the geographical space in which migration takes place, and (3) the time (temporal) dimension (i.e. whether the movement is temporary or permanent).

Chambers & Conway (1992) define the concept of livelihood as the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living. Further, they describe how some needs can be attained through a combination of human capital and material resources. Some migrants possess some human capital, which can influence the activities they engage in at their destination. Consequently, the two concepts (i.e. migration and livelihood) have common features, such as the capabilities of an individual, the availability of material resources and the activities that an individual engages in living. Thus, particularly since the year 2000, migration has been widely documented as a strategy aimed at improving people's livelihood status (Ellis, 2000; Kothari 2002; Nwajuba, 2005; Yaro 2006; Tanle 2010).

## Comparison of livelihood frameworks

The concept 'sustainable livelihood' has been defined broadly as a means of living that is resilient to shocks and stresses and does not adversely affect the environment (Meikle et al. 2001). Since its introduction in 1986 (Cahn n.d.), concurrent discourses on poverty, sustainability, livelihood systems, and diversity have led to the formalization and development of various competing livelihood approaches, and include the following:

- the sustainable livelihood framework, first developed for the Department for International Development's (DFID) in the UK by Chambers & Conway (1992) and later extended by Carney (1998)
- the household livelihood security approach, developed in 1994 in the USA by the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief (CARE), to address rural food security
- the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) sustainable livelihood approach, which adapted and

modified the DFID sustainable livelihood framework in 1995 as part of its broad mandate for sustainable human development

- the assets vulnerability framework developed by Moser (1998)
- the sustainable livelihoods framework for the Pacific Islands, published by Cahn (n.d.).

The DFID sustainable livelihood framework focuses on integrated rural development, particularly the relationship between rural poverty and the environment (Tacoli 1999). It has five main components: vulnerability context, livelihood assets, transforming structures and processes, livelihood strategies, and livelihood outcomes (Fig. 1).

The sustainable livelihoods framework for the Pacific Islands is a modification of the DFID framework, and has six main components: access, resources and capabilities; livelihood strategies, influencing structure and processes; vulnerability context; livelihood outcomes; and well-being (Fig. 2).

Livelihood outcomes are closely associated with well-being. Consequently, positive outcomes can lead to improvements in well-being while negative outcomes can mean a reduction in well-being. If livelihood outcomes do not change, the level of well-being will remain unchanged (Tanle 2010). In contrast to the DFID framework, in which vulnerability has three components (shocks, trends, and seasonality), the sustainable livelihoods framework for the Pacific Islands identified five components of vulnerability: shocks, seasonality, trends, and cultural and household elements (Fig. 2). These differ from those outlined by Moser (1998) in her assets vulnerability framework (see Table 1), which is discussed below in this section.

The household livelihood security approach, developed in 1994 by CARE was similarly derived from the DFID framework. In 1994, CARE shifted its focus from regional and national food security to household and individual food security, leading to the development of a household livelihood security framework (Fig. 3). At the household level, the concern shifted from ‘food first’ or

food production to a wider focus on the ability of households to secure the food they require.

The salient features of the household livelihood framework include general background characteristics of the communities to which households belong and the shocks and stresses that exist in such places, livelihood assets in the form of various capitals, livelihood activities and livelihood outcomes. CARE’s household livelihood framework has three capitals: human, social and economic. It ignores natural and physical capitals, which are necessary for attaining household food security. Livelihood outcomes have three main components: security in terms of the basic necessities of life (food, shelter, water, health, nutrition, and education), community participation, and personal safety (the latter two components are not shown in Fig. 3). These serve as indicators for assessing improvements in household livelihood outcomes (Frankenberger et al. n.d.). CARE’s framework also ignores issues relating to migration, despite the fact that some household dynamics can influence migration decisions.

In 1995 the UNDP developed the sustainable livelihoods approach as part of its broad mandate for sustainable human development (Fig. 4). Its main focus includes poverty reduction, employment and sustainable livelihoods, gender empowerment, regeneration of the environment, and good governance. The framework comprises three main components: drivers, entry point, and outcome. The drivers are grouped into two categories: one assesses how technology and investment could facilitate or constrain people’s livelihood strategies and ultimately impact on their livelihood outcomes; the other focuses on community-level development (Carney et al. 1999) and how policies at the macro-level and micro-level influence livelihood strategies. The entry point is the point in time when a community starts to make use of or adapts to innovations, technologies or strategies for sustainable livelihoods. The outcome may be positive, neutral, or negative.

Moser’s (1998) Asset Vulnerability Framework is one of the few livelihood frameworks that address indicators of vulnerability directly. It identifies five categories of assets: labour,

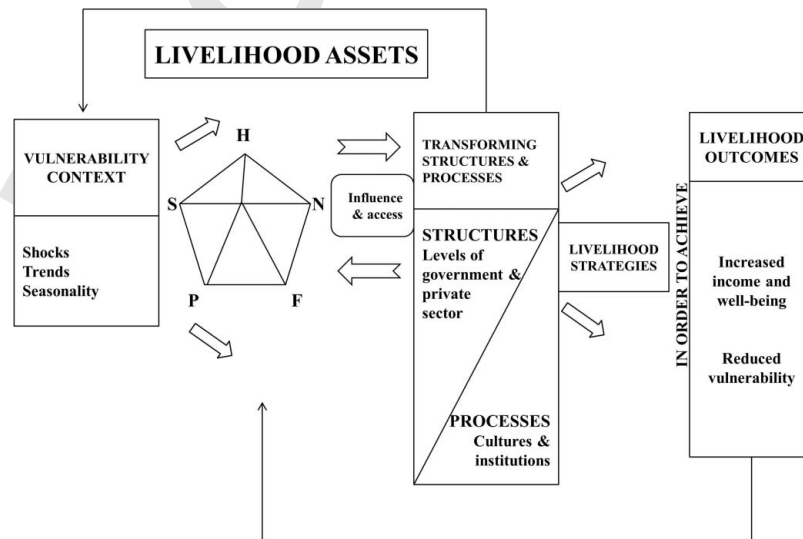


Fig. 1. DFID’s sustainable livelihood framework (modified slightly from Carney 1998)

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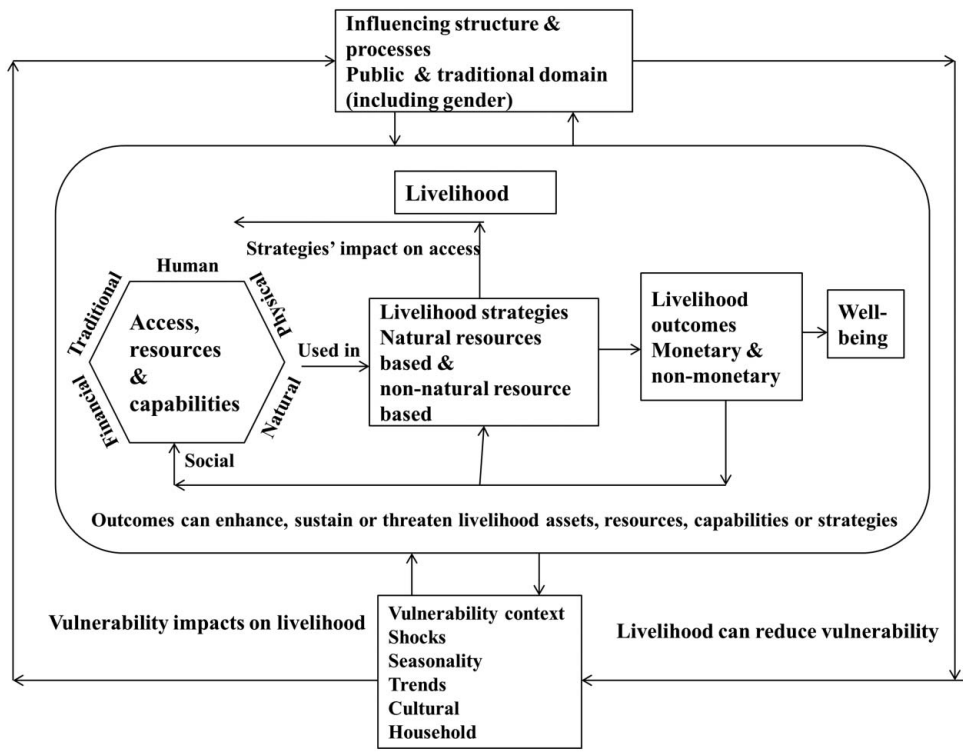


Fig. 2. Sustainable livelihoods framework for the Pacific Islands (modified slightly from Cahn n.d.)

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Table 1. Assets vulnerability framework (adapted from Moser 1998)

Type of asset	Household response
Labour	Increase the number of women in work, mainly in the informal sector Allocate a disproportionate share of women's time to meet increasing responsibilities Allocate more time to obtaining services in response to declining quality of infrastructure Increase reliance on child labour
Housing	Diversify income through home-based enterprises and letting property Adopt intergenerational plot identification strategies to accommodate their children's households
Social and economic infrastructure	Substitute private goods and services for public ones
Household relations	Increase reliance on extended family support network
Social capital	Increase labour migration and receipt of remittances Increase reliance on informal credit arrangements Increase informal support networks among households Increase community-level activities

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housing, social and economic infrastructure, household relations and social capital (Table 1). Labour is treated as a productive asset of an urban poor household. When a household's economic situation deteriorates its members are likely either to mobilize additional members to engage in labour, including the women and even the children, or to increase their working hours.

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As a productive asset, housing could yield income in various ways such as through letting property, serving as collateral for a loan, and saving on the cost of providing accommodation for other household members in the future, especially children (Moser 1998). In addition, households' relatives are expected to

provide a supportive network that will be critical in times of economic difficulties, and crucial for adjusting to life-cycle events such as marriage, birth, illness, or death. Social capital comprises informal credit arrangements, informal support networks among households and other community-level activities. It serves as a safety net during crises such as ill health or bereavement or in the event of human and natural disasters such as domestic fires, floods and bush fires. The assets vulnerability framework provides information on the possible reactions of households when their livelihoods become vulnerable, but unlike both the DFID framework and the sustainable livelihoods framework for the Pacific

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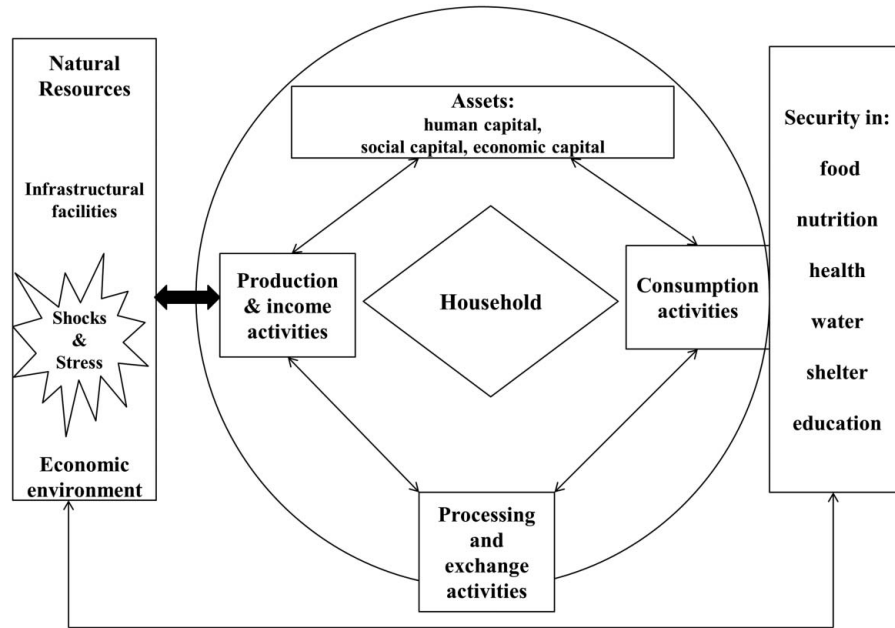


Fig. 3. CARE's household livelihood security framework (modified from Carney et al. 1999)

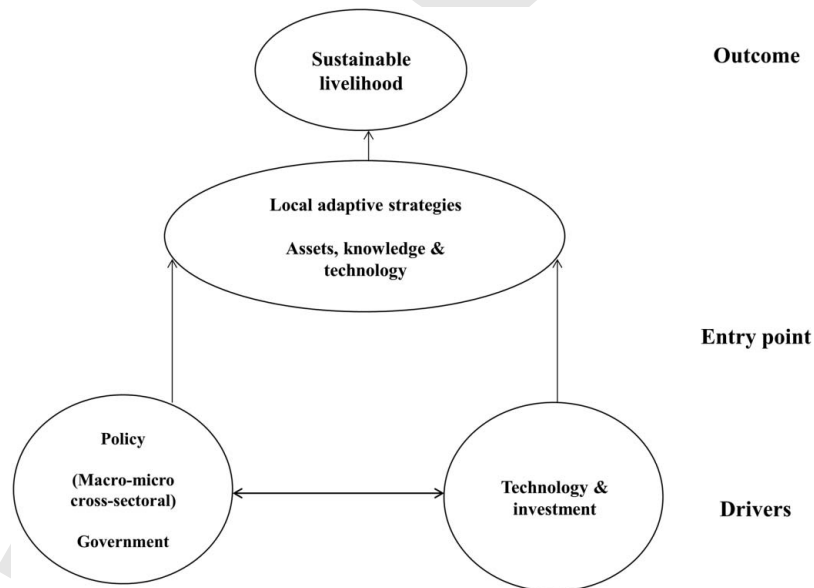


Fig. 4. The UNDP's sustainable livelihoods approach (modified from Carney et al. 1999)

Islands it is devoid of any institutional structures and processes that contribute to household vulnerability.

### Some weaknesses of livelihood approaches

Although the literature shows that livelihood frameworks have been widely employed in many development studies, these frameworks have some weaknesses. First, the policies, institutions

and processes have been widely criticized for their 'black box' nature. The individual components (i.e. policies, institutions and processes) are too broad and therefore might not be useful for micro-level analysis (Farrington et al. 2002). Second, livelihood approaches glossed over power relations and inequalities within or between households or communities. As an example of such power relations and inequalities, gender differences can lead to differences in power relations to the extent that some household members, particularly females, are not likely

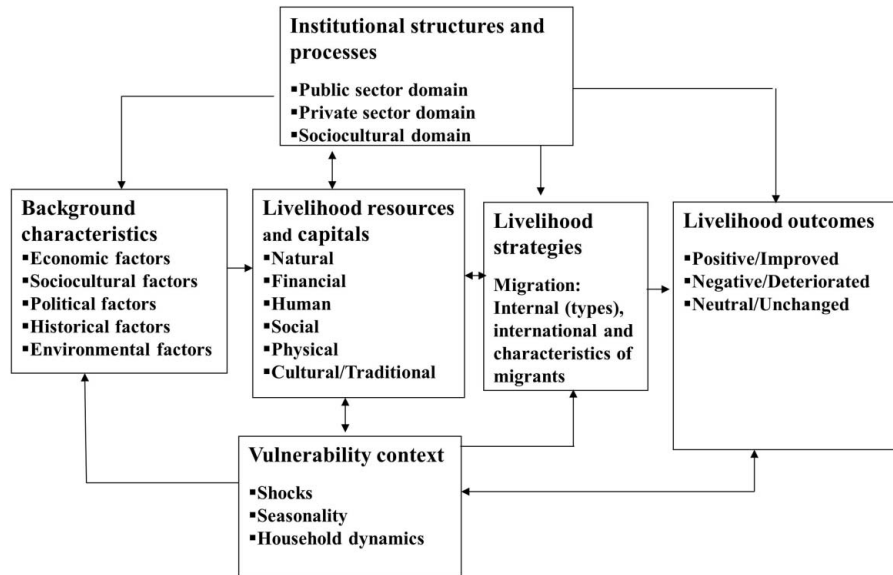


Fig. 5. A framework for migration and livelihood studies (adapted from Cahn n.d.)

to benefit from migration as a livelihood strategy (Harrison & Mcvey 1997). Moreover, De Haan (2012) reviewed extensive literature on power relations and concluded that livelihood approaches cannot be neutral towards power relations, as they determine access to resources and determining inclusion or exclusion in livelihood activities and hence livelihood outcomes.

### Understanding the links between migration and livelihoods

I propose a conceptual framework for migration and livelihood studies (Fig. 5). This framework is adapted from Cahn (n.d.), and its main advantage over other frameworks is that recognizes migration as a livelihood strategy. The proposed framework comprises six main components: background characteristics, livelihood resources and capitals, vulnerability context, institutional structures and processes, livelihood strategies, and livelihood outcomes or well-being. The background characteristics – economic, social, cultural, political and environmental – provide the context within which migration (either internal or international) can occur.

The differences in background characteristics between places of origin and destination account for outmigration from one area to another within a country in cases of internal migration or emigration from one country to another. For example, in Ghana north–south migration, which is the main internal migration pattern, can be attributed to the activities of British colonial administration, differing socio-economic opportunities and infra-structural facilities initiated by the colonial government and sustained by post-colonial governments, and the differences in the physical characteristics (i.e. climatic elements and soils) between the northern and southern parts of the country (Anarfi et al. 2003; Songsore 2003; Tsegia 2005; Tanle 2010).

By contrast, international migration is generally from less-developed or less-endowed countries in the Global South to

the more developed countries in the Global North and is mainly influenced by the immigration policies of both the country of origin and the country of destination, which are subject to modification at any time by the ruling government. Furthermore, social and cultural factors, particularly entrenched gender differences in patriarchal societies, could make women more vulnerable than men if they have limited or no opportunities to migrate. Moreover, social and familial structures may determine whether the migration is permanent or seasonal. In the proposed framework, I identify and discuss the differences in spatial contexts, political agendas and power relations that other livelihood approaches ignore.

### Livelihood resources and capitals

In my proposed framework, livelihood resources comprise natural, financial, human, social, cultural and traditional, and physical resources. Natural resources are mainly common environmental resources such as land, water, trees, and wildlife. These resources can influence migration decisions at the place of origin and the type of livelihood activity that a person engages in at their destination. Thus, migrants may engage in livelihood activities at their destination according to the availability of natural resources and their access to them, which in turn will largely depend on the prevailing power relations.

Financial capital comprises money, access to loans, and savings. The availability and accessibility of affordable credit to migrants are important for promoting their livelihood activities and for their livelihood outcomes (Meikle et al. 2001).

Human capital includes skills, education, experiences, and good health. Internal and international migrants may be able to obtain income directly through employment, particularly in urban settings, due to the commoditized nature of urban areas, which increases dependency on cash incomes (Moser 1998). Health care is vital for determining the quality of labour,



whereas access to formal education and skills training is a means for people to increase the value of their human capital (Meikle et al. 2001). Whether a migrant is able to obtain a well-paid job in a competitive labour market at their place of destination will depend on the quality of their human capital (Sabates-Wheeler et al. 2005; International Organization for Migration 2008). In addition, the quality of human capital could have a greater influence on a migrant's decision to migrate as well as on their choice of destination.

Social capital consists of networks and associations. Social networks facilitate access to information about economic opportunities and serve as a safety net on which migrants can rely during crises or when they have shocks such as illness or death. Social networks in the form of migrants' associations are common among both internal and international migrants at some destinations. With advancement in communications technology, social networks as sources of information tend to facilitate migration processes and reduce the types of fears and uncertainties that had characterized earlier migration.

Both cultural and traditional capital comprise beliefs, norms, values, language, and the aspirations of individuals or social groups. These can influence people's perceptions and attitudes towards migration, and influence how migrants perceive their livelihood status or outcome.

The types of physical capital needed to facilitate livelihood activities include infrastructure such as housing, education, health, roads and electricity. In particular, housing is one of the most important assets or capital that migrants need for both productive and reproductive purposes (Moser 1998). Initially, when migrants arrive at their destination, those with low socio-economic status are likely to live with friends or close relations, or they may live in squatter settlements because they may be unable to afford to rent accommodation (Goldscheider 1992). Thus, the quality of housing at their destination could be a measure of the migrants' livelihood status.

## Livelihood strategies

Livelihood strategies are activities in which people engage in order to earn a living. Migration, whether internal or international, is one such strategy that migrants adopt in their pursuit of a living. Generally, they tend to choose livelihood strategies that they anticipate will provide them with the best or optimum livelihood outcomes. However, this will depend on a number of factors, such as the migrants' assets, the institutional structures and processes that impact on them, the vulnerability context within which they operate, their personal characteristics, the type of migration, and their perception of what constitutes a livelihood outcome (McDowell & de Haan 1997).

## Institutional structures and processes

Institutional structures and processes such as laws, policies, norms, beliefs, and incentives can have either positive or adverse effects on livelihood strategies and their outcomes. Thus, for example, government policies may induce migration. In the case of Ghana, the

colonial government policy of forced recruitment of labour from the then northern territory to the mines induced north-south migration in the country, which has since become an established culture among people in the three northern regions (Northern Region, Upper East Region, and Upper West Region).

Under the influence of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, some African governments were compelled to implement trade liberalization and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1990s. The effects of the SAPs on people's livelihoods have been extensively documented (Chambers & Conway 1992; Farrington et al. 2002; Scoones et al. 2005; Tsikata 2009). For example, Farrington et al. (2002) have noted that through the SAPs agriculture became less attractive as a livelihood activity and the situation compelled some people to migrate to urban areas for employment.

Although migrants may be endowed with capital, their ability to utilize it optimally in any activity will depend on institutional policies such as entry requirements in the case of formal sector employment, the migrants' willingness to abide by certain contractual agreements as a precondition to access land or to be included in any business activity, and the general power relations at their place of destination. Furthermore, institutional structures and processes could influence international migration in terms of the need for relevant documents as a pre-requisite for departure from the country of origin and for entry into the destination country. An understanding of policies, institutional structures and processes will provide the link between micro-level power relations (e.g. individual, household, and community) and macro-level power relations (e.g. private enterprises, government, and regional and international organizations (Chambers & Conway 1992; Ellis 2000; Tanle 2010; Cahn n.d.). In addition, such an understanding will help to identify areas where restrictions, barriers or constraints occur and will explain social processes that can impact positively or negatively on migrants' livelihood activities (Tanle 2010).

## Vulnerability context

Although vulnerability forms part of the DFID sustainable livelihood framework, the assets vulnerability framework, and the sustainable livelihoods framework for the Pacific Islands, it is not related to migration. In the proposed framework, three main elements of vulnerability are identified: shocks, seasonality, and household dynamics. Some of the shocks that people have to grapple with in their search for better livelihood include events that happen suddenly and without prior notice or indications, such as ill-health, motor accidents, dismissal from jobs, earthquakes, floods, droughts, conflicts, and agricultural problems such as pests and diseases (Tanle 2010). For migrants involved in non-agricultural activities, shocks can take the form of job insecurity in either the formal sector or the informal sector.

Changes in the seasons can affect prices, production levels, employment opportunities and health status, all of which can have an impact on livelihood outcomes. For example, seasonal climatic problems such as floods and droughts affect agricultural production and can influence outmigration to destinations where the climatic conditions are much more favourable for agricultural production. Another element of the vulnerability context is household

dynamics, which include changes in household size, characteristics, and life-cycle events. However, whether an increase or a decrease in household size, household characteristics, or changes in migrant's life cycle will render that person vulnerable will depend on their human and social capitals and the influences of institutional structures and processes (i.e. they will depend on whether the migrants themselves or the institutional structures have any means of reducing the migrants' degree of vulnerability).

It is also important to assess the opportunity cost of a household member's migration, to determine whether the cost is greater than the returns (remittances) from migration, which can make a household become vulnerable. In addition, all households are prone to personal shocks of chronic illnesses (Ellis 2003) and death of some members; in the case of adults who are the breadwinners, such shocks can leave some or all the other members vulnerable.

However, there is some degree of overlap between institutional structures and processes on the one hand and vulnerability on the other hand. For example, the lack of collateral security makes it impossible for some migrants to obtain loans from financial institutions to expand their farms or businesses. In addition, the loss of public sector employment, the removal of state subsidies for basic goods and services, and the effects of free-market policies on prices and employment can create vulnerability among some population subgroups, including migrants (Meikle et al. 2001).

## Livelihood outcomes

Livelihood outcomes are many, varied, and might be visible only to secondary migrants in some cases (Waddington 2003). According to the proposed framework, livelihood outcomes can be positive, negative, or neutral. Positive outcomes imply improved food security, income, housing quality, human capital, social capital, increased remittances, increased assets (including access to land or landownership), reduced vulnerability, and ultimately improvement in livelihood status, whereas negative outcomes imply deterioration or a decrease in all these factors, increased vulnerability, and deterioration in a person's livelihood status. Neutral outcomes denote neither positive nor negative changes in these outcomes or in livelihood status (Frankenberger et al. n.d.). However, it is important to note that all livelihood outcomes, whether positive, negative, or neutral, are subjective. What some migrants may perceive as improvements in their livelihood status, others may perceive differently. This will depend on the differences in their background characteristics, the type of migration involved, and their general expectations in life. It is also important to note that some livelihood outcomes take time to become visible and might not be immediately beneficial to a primary migrant.

## Contributions of the proposed integrated framework

The integrated framework for analysing the links between migration and livelihoods has more elaborate background

characteristics than other livelihood frameworks, and includes power relations, spatial contexts, and political dimensions, which are ignored in most livelihood frameworks. The background characteristics set out the context within which both internal and international migration can occur. Power relations at the household level could influence the migration decisions of males and females, whereas government policies and programmes could influence both internal and international migration in both developed and developing countries. Furthermore, the integrated framework explains the influences of institutional structures and processes on access to capital or resources with respect to differences in power relations and the background characteristics of a migrant. The proposed integrated framework specifically highlights migration as a livelihood strategy and considers the various types of internal migration as well as international migration (i.e. the spatial dimensions of migration can have different impacts on migrants' livelihood activities and hence the outcomes of those activities. Moreover, I have analysed all of the main components of the integrated framework with respect to migration. Lastly, the integrated framework categorizes livelihood outcomes as positive, negative, or neutral, and points out how outcomes that are quite subjective might not become visible to primary migrants, thus recognizing the next-generation effects of livelihood outcomes.

## Conclusions

Although migration has long been recognized as a strategy through which both poor and non-poor households can improve their livelihood status, the relationship between migration and livelihoods has not been adequately established. I have reviewed existing livelihood approaches, established the links between migration and livelihood, and proposed a conceptual framework for migration and livelihood studies adapted from Cahn (n.d.). The proposed integrated framework facilitates an understanding of the links between migration and livelihoods since it provides various contexts within which migration as a livelihood strategy can be explained. For example, whereas background characteristics provide the context within which internal or international migration decisions can be analysed, power relations and government policies are instrumental in the institutional structures and processes that influence access to capitals or resources as well as the livelihood activities that a migrant may engage in at their place of destination. Finally, in contrast to other frameworks, the proposed integrated framework for analysing the links between migration and livelihoods, recognizes the fact that livelihood outcomes are subjective, and can be positive, negative or neutral, and might be visible only to second-generation migrants.

(Manuscript submitted 25 September 2014; accepted 20 April 2015)

Editors: Ragnhild Lund, Catriona Turner, Kerstin Potthoff

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