

Programming Through a Livelihoods Lens: A Livelihoods Approach for the IFRC

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1. Purpose and Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to propose a position for the IFRC and associated way forward to strengthen a Livelihoods Approach within and across the organisation.

Currently, within the Federation, livelihoods is very much seen a sector and/ or an issue closely linked to Food Security, income generating activities and other sectoral responses such as shelter, and mechanisms such as cash. Recognition of the importance of people's livelihoods is growing across programme sectors within the organisation, and there are moves to mainstream it into Food Security, Shelter and Health initiatives.

This Paper puts forward the achievement of secure and sustainable livelihoods as an overarching framework rather than an issue to be mainstreamed or integrated – conversely the Livelihoods concept and approach itself can be an integration model. This concept and model is multi sectoral, can encompass all sectors of the work of the IFRC, and can offer considerable benefits in terms of the organisation's work towards vulnerability reduction and resilience building. Furthermore, it offers considerable benefits in terms of quality programme assessment, design and monitoring and evaluation. Thus, it can become the lens through which the organisation understands a context and assists with prioritisation of needs.

The proposals put forward by this paper are not intended to replace or compete with other initiatives or frameworks, rather to complement, expand upon, or draw together where appropriate. For example, it can help to integrate sectors, and support the organisation's approach to issues such as resilience.

Structure of document

This paper is structured in 3 parts. Firstly, it proposes a new framework which could be tested by the IFRC and discusses its use and benefits. Secondly, how a Livelihoods Approach fits into and benefits all of the strategic aims of the organisation is discussed. Thirdly, the paper suggests strategic objectives and a proposed way forward for development of a Livelihoods Approach for the IFRC.

2. Proposed Framework for Sustainable Household Livelihood Security

The model presented below represents an amalgamation of the concepts presented by commonly used models and tools known as the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and Household Livelihood Security. The diagram below illustrates an adaption of these into a format suggested to be pertinent to the type of programming by the IFRC and its membership. It is suggested that this model can:

- Provide a framework through which certain contributions towards resilience can be measured;
- Improve the quality of programming by providing an integration model;
- Use households and household livelihood security as a common (denominator) tool to link other models of operation and concepts within the organisation.
- Increase accountability and quality by providing a comprehensive and integrated tool for assessment, design, monitoring and evaluation;
- Enhance partnerships and support evidence based advocacy through the use of the information derived from the comprehensive and multi sectoral assessment process;

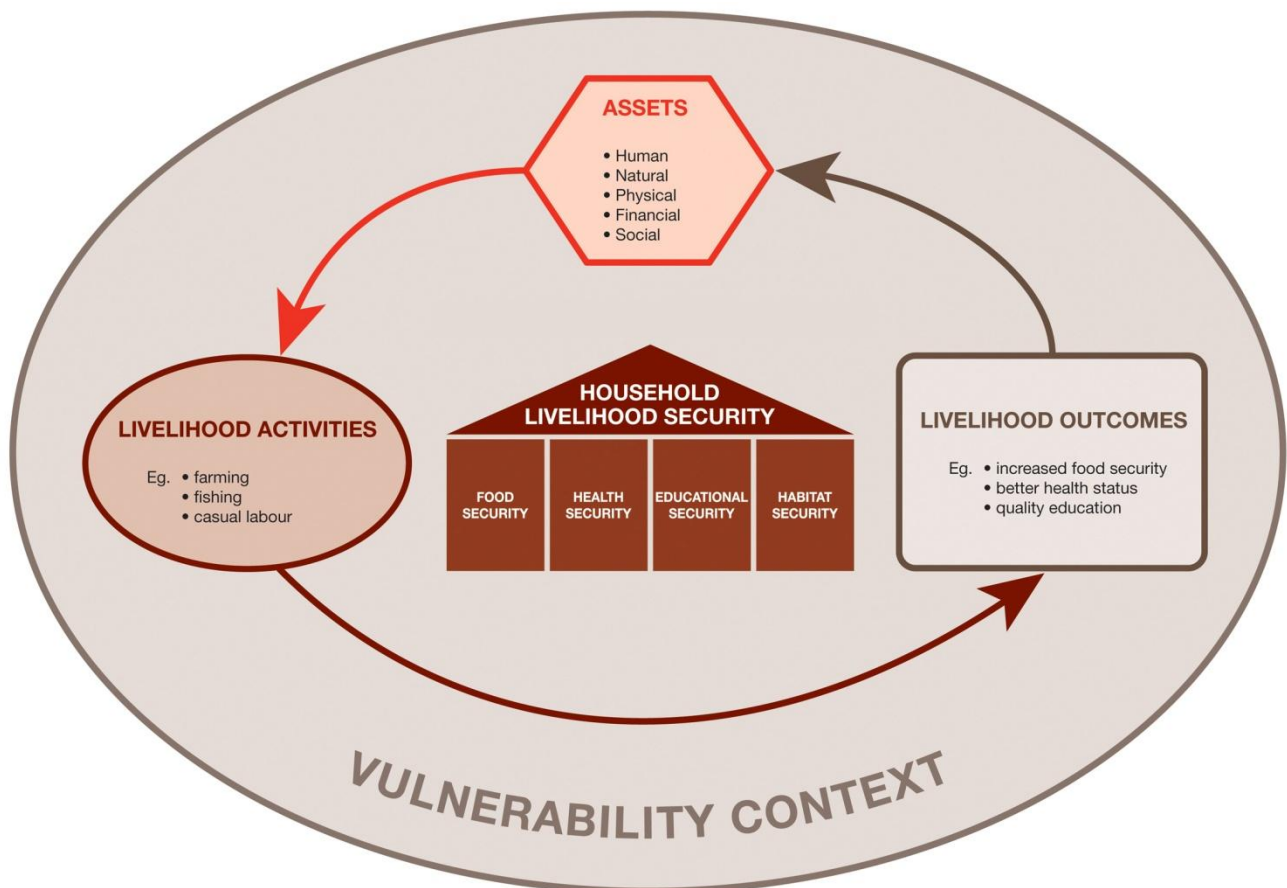


Figure 1: Proposed Household Livelihood Security Framework

Central to this diagram is the household and what is termed ‘ **household livelihood security**’, which can be defined as adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic needs (including access to food, potable water, health facilities, educational opportunities, housing and time for community participation and social integration). Thus, livelihoods are secure when households have secure ownership of, or access to, resources and income generating activities, including reserves and assets, to offset risks, ease shocks and meet contingencies.

Livelihood Outcomes are the expressed goals of people, and include priority areas for the household or communities such as increased food security, better health status, increased income, increased access to quality education, and greater community participation. Such outcomes contribute towards increased wellbeing and reduced vulnerability.

Livelihood Activities are the activities that people do in order to meet their basic needs and other livelihoods outcomes. Examples of activities are farming, fishing, casual labour and employment, trading etc. These activities are also influenced by the policies, institutions and processes that surround and govern them.

Livelihood Assets

Assets are the building blocks of a sustainable livelihood. People require a range of assets to achieve their livelihood goals, and no single asset on its own is sufficient to yield the varied livelihood outcomes that people seek. These five asset groups (also known as capitals) are described below, and can be seen as ‘softer’ and ‘harder’ assets all of which are very much interrelated.

Physical Capital: is the term used for the basic infrastructure and materials and goods (producer goods) needed to support livelihoods. Examples of infrastructure are shelter and buildings, water and sanitation devices, energy supply systems, communications. Examples of materials and goods are tools and equipment.

Financial Capital: is the financial resource that people use to achieve their livelihood objectives. Thus, it links to the availability of cash or equivalent - examples of non cash resources are livestock and jewellery. This type of asset is least available to the poor, and explains why other types of assets are so important to them.

Natural Capital: is the term used for the natural resource stocks used and useful for livelihoods. For example, trees, land, water sources, biodiversity, vegetation.

In the framework the relationship between natural capital and the Vulnerability Context is very close (eg floods and soil erosion that destroy agricultural land, fires that destroy forests, and mines which prevent access to land).

Human Capital: links to skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health. It is essential to make use of the other assets. At the household level, human capital is a factor of the amount and quality of labour available.

Social Capital: is the term used for social resources which people can draw upon in pursuit of their livelihood objectives. Examples are informal networks and safety net structures such as extended families, and more formal structures such as women's project groups and other groups and organisations.

Increasingly, it is being recognized that in addition to these five categories, it is important to include analysis of *political capital*. This goes beyond social capital, in that, an individual's stock of political capital will determine his/her ability to influence policy and the processes of government. An understanding of political capital is important in determining the ability of households and individuals to claim rights to assistance after a disaster.

In the contexts where the IFRC works, the goal of Household Livelihood Security is closely linked to the goals related to basic needs expressed by households and communities in livelihood outcomes.

Vulnerability Context

The vulnerability context links to stresses and shocks such as floods, droughts, earthquakes and conflicts. It is also influenced by critical trends, such as economic and population trends, and seasonality of factors such as commodity prices. Such issues are largely out of the control of the communities which the IFRC targets, and their response to shocks are commonly referred to as '**coping strategies**'. Coping strategies can also be defined as responses to threats to livelihoods. Such strategies are employed to stave off destitution with the hopes of reversing the situation again. Coping can be characterised into stages which range from strategies which are reversible such as reducing household food consumption, to selling off productive assets, to destitution which often results in migration. Coping strategies will be context dependent and vary across countries, communities and from rural to urban settings. It should also be noted that it is widely recognised that households are prone to prioritise asset protection for the future at the expense of other immediate needs.

2.1 Potential Use of this Framework

It is recognised that households are made up of, or are part of, the broader community. However, households are the target group for most projects and thus can be a common unit of analysis and measurement across programmes and phases. Thus household livelihood security can be a building block towards overarching outcomes and broader agendas in the organisations such as resilience and development. This ability of a household to meet their basic needs can become a lens through which the

IFRC can view its approach at the household level for all programming objectives. This can also be measured as component which contributes towards resilience.

Furthermore, the model provides a comprehensive framework where community assets and strategies are examined, understood and utilised. It has also been stated above that it may be useful to examine the adaptation of the framework to incorporate further '*Characteristics of Safe and Resilient Communities*', and to ensure essential DRR components are included. The VCA already exists as a tool through which livelihoods assessment analyses can be conducted and supported.

Resilience and Vulnerability Reduction: Strengthening livelihood assets, and the achievement of livelihood outcomes and household livelihood security contribute significantly to resilience building and broader vulnerability reduction. Household Livelihood Security can be measured as a unit and/or indicator towards IFRC's contribution towards vulnerability reduction.

Programme Quality

Programming benefits detailed below centre around increasing quality and accountability through furthering integration, comprehensive assessment, analysis and design, as well as monitoring & evaluation.

▪ *Integrated Programming*

An objective of the IFRC is to foster integrated programming to increase positive impacts for target beneficiaries as well as greater efficiency for the organisation. As Household Livelihood Security is the overall ability of a household to meet their basic needs, it can provide a framework for multi sectoral programme integration. For example, an objective of Household Livelihood Security can provide tangible overarching common objective with concrete sub objectives, such as food, health and shelter security.

The use of household security with the defined livelihoods outcomes and associated indicators for both allows different programmes to be measured together towards a common outcome. It also means that the impact of one sector on others at the household level can be identified and acknowledged. For example, the provision of aid post disaster (such as food, water and shelter) allows assets to be saved and or utilised for categories such as continued education. Such impacts can also be recorded. A further example with regard to livelihoods is that emphasis is often placed on protection of 'productive' assets. However, protection of one set of assets may offset others (particularly human). For example, protection of productive assets such as livestock, may result in negative impacts in one of the other categories such as withdrawing children from school, forfeiting transport costs to a clinic, and 'risky' behaviour such as theft and prostitution, which negatively impact on household members and their security.

▪ *Comprehensive Assessment, Analysis, Design, Monitoring and Evaluation*

The model can provide a comprehensive framework for assessment and analysis – for both planning new activities and also assessing the contributions and impacts of current activities. It also allows for greater contextual analysis.

Its use allows an entire situation to be analysed (including the overall impact of a situation on a household). Assets, outcomes and strategies are key components of an assessment as well as very pertinent for evaluations. Indicators for household livelihood security can be monitored on an ongoing basis in the context of the wider picture as defined by this model.

Furthermore, contributions towards household livelihood security (HLS) can offer a concrete set of indicators to measure impact across sectors and phases. A composite set of indicators can also be designed at the household level to measure combined impacts. Changes in assets may also be measured in quantifiable terms, whereas outcomes can be linked and measured at the household level. HLS can also be a unit of

measurement common to different frameworks such as resilience and DRR. It can also be used as a baseline and to benchmark towards vulnerability reduction and resilience building.

▪ *Evidence Based Advocacy and Partnership*

It is unlikely that any programme will be able to contribute towards the entire set of Livelihood Outcomes as specified by the community. The use of these Livelihood Outcomes and their link to Household Livelihood Security then facilitates boundaries to be set for a programme intervention. Furthermore, the results of this assessment and analysis process can be used to facilitate partnerships and conduct evidence based advocacy to enable other needs to be highlighted to be broader community. It can also strengthen the IFRC and National Societies as members of national Cluster fora.

2. IFRC and a Livelihoods Approach – Applications and Benefits

The IFRC's Strategy 2020 details the strategic aims of the organisation as follows:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods and strengthen recovery from disasters and crises;
2. Enable healthy and safe living; and
3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.

This section outlines how a livelihoods approach supports each of these aims, and what further benefits it can bring to the organisation.

Strategic Aim 1: Save lives, protect livelihoods and strengthen recovery from disasters and crises.

A livelihoods approach in a humanitarian context is commonly used in a basic sense to mean that whilst the organisation works to protect the lives of people, it also looks to ways in which the livelihoods of the household or community can be protected and supported. Thus, this type of approach is fully consistent with SA1, and as mentioned in Section 1 above, is being increasingly promoted by IFRC for example in food security, shelter and health programming. For example, whilst providing essential food assistance, the IFRC also it also aims to protect and support recovery and longer term needs.

Relief & Recovery Programming

In relief operations applying a Livelihoods Approach would work to protect assets, and reinforce positive coping strategies – thereby enabling a better transition from relief to recovery, and reducing any potential dependencies on aid. Protection of assets can be a direct effect of assistance, such as food or cash, which allows people to save resources which otherwise may have been used to fulfil basic needs. Thus, such activities also assist people not to resort to negative or risky coping strategies.

The approach aims to provide an understanding of livelihood strategies prior to, during and after shocks (as well as the overall context within which these strategies operate), thereby further enabling and supporting people's own efforts to cope, recover and rebuild after a crisis and return to or improve upon their pre-disaster living conditions.

Strategic Aim 2: Enable healthy and safe living

The reduction of vulnerability and strengthening resilience are fundamental objectives of IFRC across programme thematic areas - such as health and food security, and programming approaches such as relief and recovery.

Vulnerability and resilience are highly influenced by the asset base that people have prior to a crisis and their ability to engage in various coping strategies. Indeed, it has been stated that *'the risk of livelihood failure determines the level of vulnerability of a household to income, food, health and nutritional insecurity'*¹. Thus,

¹ Chambers & Conway (1991), Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: practical concepts for the 21st Century

resilience, as the *ability to withstand shocks without compromising longer term objectives*, also correlates to assets and coping strategies. Gender and age are also critical factors here.

The main target group of the IFRC are those most vulnerable to such shocks, as well as those made vulnerable and destitute as a direct result of a natural disaster or other shock. Such vulnerable households have few assets and resources available to them on which they could base livelihood strategies. They have little to fall back on should a shock occur and often have inadequate access to skills and resources to help them make the most of the assets that they do have. They also tend to have little access and influence over the institutions and policies that govern their entitlements to resources.

By building livelihood assets, individuals and households develop their capacity to cope with the challenges they encounter and to meet their needs on a sustained basis. Rural examples are farmers who have savings to buy food when crops fail, and pastoralists who can afford to lose or sell a few animals and still have enough to build up their herds again after the emergency passes.

Examples of the many ways in which the IFRC supports livelihood assets are given below:

Human: Health; skills and knowledge.

Natural: agriculture based interventions; climate change adaptation.

Financial: Income generating activities; micro-credit

Physical: Shelter; water and sanitation; agriculture based inputs.

Social: RCRC Volunteers and local branches; community project management committees.

The following section further examines how supporting livelihoods is fundamental to building resilience.

Resilience

According to the IFRC's resilience concept paper², *'interventions to strengthen resilience aim to (a) address underlying causes of vulnerability in order to increase resilience and protect development, (b) reduce and mitigate radical drops in resilience caused by disasters and crises and (c) enhance bouncing back from adversity in order to continue strengthening resilience*. Furthermore, examples of Characteristics of Safe and Resilient communities from the IFRC Framework for Community Safety and Resilience are quoted as:

- *'They are able to do much for themselves and can sustain their basic community functions and structures despite the impact of disasters.*
- *They can build back after a disaster and work towards ensuring that vulnerabilities continue to be reduced for the future. More safety and resilience means less vulnerability.'*³

Thus, it can be seen that supporting people's livelihoods and protection and building assets are fundamental to supporting resilience.

According to a study commissioned by the IFRC, the main factors which contribute to a safe and resilient community can be identified under three categories: meeting basic needs, ownership of assets; and access to external resources⁴. Additionally, further factors relate to the capacities of communities and qualities of assets. (Community capacities here relate to the capability of the community to adapt to change, self organise and learn, thus differing from the social and human capacities already described in the asset pentagon.) There is a clear correlation between these factors and the proposed Framework particularly in terms of basic needs and ownership of assets.

³ ARUP & IFRC (2011), Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Study, Characteristics of a Safe and Resilient Community

⁴ IFRC & ARUP (2011), Characteristics of a Safe and Resilient Community.

Development

Common characteristics of poverty are a lack of control and sense of powerless over stresses and shocks. Multiple factors such as lack of resources, fragile livelihoods, exposure to hazards, and climate change compound these poverty factors for a large proportion of the world's poorest people.

Working to support the ability of households to strengthen their asset base, and meet their basic needs, as well as other broader resilience measures, are major contributions of the IFRC towards longer term development. Furthermore, the IFRC emphasises a focus on human development which relates to *'enabling everyone to achieve their full potential, and lead productive and creative lives with dignity according to their needs and choices, whilst fulfilling their obligations and realising their rights'*⁵. A livelihoods approach can work to support this objective.

Strategic Aim 3: Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace

According to Strategy 2020, the IFRC *'nurtures the development of livelihoods and good citizenship skills that enable disadvantaged groups to function better in society'*⁶. The document also stresses the importance of providing practical measures to improve people with disadvantage to interact effectively with mainstream society. Furthermore, it also stresses the importance of addressing the underlying causes of population displacement including economic migration, where stresses on livelihoods can be a casual factor.

A Livelihoods Approach provides further opportunities for people centred analysis and to support and bolster household positive survival and coping strategies. It also allows for the different needs of different members of the community to be involved in an overall assessment and planning process. Thus, through the above factors, as well as its contribution towards vulnerability reduction, the approach can assist contributions towards SA3.

Box 1: Key Guiding Principles of a Livelihoods Approach.

Livelihoods approaches are people centred and seek to understand and support peoples' assets and resources and their positive strategies to convert these into livelihood outcomes. Participatory approaches are used to establish a household or communities' priorities and needs.

Guiding Principles of a Livelihoods Approach:

- Participatory
- Integrated
- Quality assessments
- Build on strengths
- Form good partnerships
- Respect the local context
- Understand and respect gender dimensions
- Take cross cutting issues into account

In times of crisis, a livelihoods approach supports the household and community priority to protect their asset base and also aims to bolster positive coping strategies. It also seeks to understand the differences between groups of people and to work with them in a congruent way, and to build on the strengths and capacities of people, as well as reinforcing their positive coping strategies after a shock. As not one organisation can support all of the needs of a community to develop sustainable livelihoods, productive

⁶ IFRC (2010) Strategy 2020: Saving Lives, Changing Minds

partnerships are needed to build asset ranges and also enhance the legal and political environments in which people live.

The Approach incorporates the needs of different members of the community including those who are marginalised, and those with special needs such as People Living with Hiv and Aids and People With Disability. It also differentiates between the skills, needs, assets, vulnerabilities, responsibilities and potential of women and men. Further pertinent cross cutting issues are DRR and environmental concerns including climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Box 2: A Livelihoods Approach and Food Security

This box aims to illustrate the links to thematic programming areas in practice. Food Security is chosen as the two are often seen as closely related, and indeed the livelihood related theories and concepts in use today are derived from food security related research conducted in the 1980's and 1990's. This research illustrated that in order to address food insecurity, the approaches in use needed to be broadened. People may choose to go hungry in order to protect their assets and future livelihoods, and the research highlighted that food should not be seen independent of wider livelihood considerations⁷. The fact that food security is a subset of objectives of poor households, and food is only one of range of factors which determines how the poor make decisions and spread risk, makes overall Household Livelihood Security an appropriate objective.

Traditionally assessments analyse four 'pillars' related to food security as follows:

1. Availability of food (which is related to quantity and quality of food supply)
2. Access to available food ('exchange entitlements' which is obtaining food through purchases, exchange and claims)
3. Utilisation (use of this food to meet dietary needs of people)
4. Stability (of the above 3 pillars)

Livelihood assets and strategies are highly influential in all areas of food security. Examples are:

- Quality land and water resources facilitate produce production;
- Health status of individuals, and productive adults who have the ability to work;
- Cash income and flows or stocks of capital, access to loans or credit, and social networks all influence access to food;
- Appropriate water and sanitation services contribute towards effective utilisation of food.

These above are but examples which show the interrelation and interdependence amongst various programme areas.

Analysing livelihood assets defines the context which influences, and can define options available to and constraints, on households in pursuit of their desired outcomes. Thus, when doing assessments and baselines, it is important to look through the lens of the Livelihoods Framework. Furthermore, for monitoring the changes in these assets, strategies and outcomes. Whilst some of these are assessed and changes measured at the community level, the influence is measured at the household level through the Livelihood Security objective. Whilst food security indicators are a subset of this, the overarching HLS objectives can be a benchmark towards resilience.

3. Conclusion and Proposed Way Forward

The conclusion of this Paper and its consultative process is that there can be considerable benefit in examining further how these concepts can be used and adapted for the IFRC context. Particularly in terms of the potential benefits surrounding programme integration, and overall increased quality and accountability.

⁷ Frankenberger, Drinkwater, Maxwell (January 2000), *Operationalising Household Livelihood Security*,

As a way forward, it is suggested that a multi year plan be developed with the objective of testing this model in different contexts and Zones. This would allow for the proposed model to be best adapted to fit the needs of the IFRC and its membership.

Important contexts include:

- Urban and rural situations.
- Complex emergencies and disasters.
- Medium and longer term interventions.
- Countries where other members of the Movement working with similar models are operational (examples of other Movement actors being ICRC, BRCS, SRCS).

Further issues for consideration would include:

- To examine consistency across movement (eg in countries where there are other movement actors such as ICRC, BRCS and SRCS). Specific links to HEA.
- Roll out of the Livelihoods Guidelines for capacity building.
- Potential roles for the Livelihoods Resource centre.
- Integrate the characteristics of safe and resilience communities.
- Role and importance of age and gender.
- How this can link to the resilience concept in practice.
- Links to the Better Programming Initiative
- External guidance and initiatives.

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