Evaluating communicative and environmental sustainability - an approach to collaborative self-evaluation

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Introduction

The announcement for this conference suggests that there is full agreement on the necessity to evaluate the success - or otherwise - of our efforts to achieve sustainable forms of human activity. The impossibility of continuing to expand both production and consumption for a still growing human population on a limited resource basis is becoming everyday knowledge - in some parts of the world at least. Particularly with a view to the peak of oil production[1] around the corner, "we" do not seem to have much time left to become sustainable[2]. And therefore we *must* know how much we have achieved - and therefore we need reliable information. Not only on the global level, where the United Nation's Millenium Ecosystem Assessment has delivered a massive volume of data[3], but also at local levels: there also seems to be little disagreement that sustainable development requires participation at all levels - from local communities to global corporations[4].

This paper presents a methodology for evaluation at the local level which has grown out of a research project comparing the role of local languages for development communication in countries as different as Uganda, Ivory coast, Namibia, and Indonesia[5]. Qualitative interviews, ethnographic conversation analysis and more conventional questionnaire research were used to observe and trigger local (self-)reflection on development processes and livelihood sustainability.

Following the introduction of the key terms of communicative sustainability and livelihoods sustainability, a method for participatory stakeholder evaluation is presented which integrates research approaches into a framework for the evaluation of sustainable development efforts which we deem suited to situations where cross-cultural communication gaps complicate the evaluation process. To the extent that it relies on the collaborative self-reflection of local

[1] In einem TV-Gespräch hat Bushs bis 2005 amtierender Wirtschaftsminister Don Evans kurze Zeit später die Peak-Oil-Befürchtungen der Bush-Regierung mit Blick auf die „SOTU"-Rede noch einmal bestätigt. Evans: „Es gibt weltweit kein ausreichendes Ölangebot (mehr) für ein vollumfängliches Wachstum unserer Wirtschaft oder der Weltwirtschaft." („There is not enough supply of oil in the world to grow our economy or the global economy at its full potential...")
Found at: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peak-Oil#_ref-SOTU_0 (July 4, 2006)

[2] Some people have already given up on sustainability. See http://www.beyondpeak.com/index.html

[3] All of these reports (in several languages) are available online at: http://www.maweb.org/en/products.aspx

[4] http://www.bp.com/productlanding.do?categoryId=4520&contentId=7014704:
BP and sustainability
Reporting about sustainability online we aim to reflect users' concerns and BP's business priorities. For 2005, we are giving greater emphasis to the business case for activities that benefit society and promote environmental sustainability.

[5] We - ie. the author and his colleagues Dr. Rose Marie Beck, Prof. Dr. Thomas Bearth, Dr. Frank Wickl, and Diomande Fan - gratefully acknowledge the funding of this project provided by the Volkswagen Foundation

actors and outside change agents concerning sustainability issues, it can be considered one of the methods for self-evaluation[6].

What is communicative sustainability?

Credit for coining the term Communicative Sustainability goes to the linguist Prof. Thomas Bearth of the University of Zurich. Communicative sustainability means that something becomes and remains a topic of discourse. It means that people talk about it and in talking relate it to other things or topics they talk about. The topic does not remain an isolated solitary object of talk but gets a place in the network of related topics which characterizes human communication.

People may intensively talk about something today - and forget it tomorrow: a fashion, or a memorable event like winning the soccer world cup. Frequency and intensity of talk alone are not reliable measures for communicative sustainability: the talk needs to be part of a repeated practice. And the repetition of this practice itself needs to be secured.

In other words: securing communicative sustainability for an idea or a topic, requires that this idea or topic is anchored in an institution. The term institution usually evokes the image of a more or less solid "body" such as a court of law, or a government. Most would also agree to see "marriage" as an institution. While the details may differ from one culture to another, an important aspect of all institutions is that they comprise a set of practices which have an accepted and valued function in the lives of the people belonging to a society or community, and are governed by regulations or rules - whether these are written down or not. Because they are part of an institution, these practices require talking and are talked about. Once something becomes part of institutionalized talk, it becomes difficult to simply forget it or abandon it, because the weight of obligation is added to the drive of personal interest in maintaining the talk about it. In some societies, this also applies to established practices such as dances on certain occasions or regular story telling - which can therefore also be regarded as an institution.

For evaluative purposes, we therefore have three basic elements of communicative sustainability:
1) Repeated occurrence of the topic under review in everyday conversation
2) Linkages between this topic and other topics which are referred to in everyday conversation; this may include integration of into everyday work practices - which is often a goal of development interventions
3) Anchorage of the topic in institutional practices

Communicative Sustainability and Local Language Hermeneutics

It is not difficult to derive indicators from these three elements, which can be used for different kinds of measurement - at least not in one's mother tongue. In the context of development cooperation / development assistance, however, it is not clear whether the meaning of the topic or subject for which communicative sustainability is assessed, is the same for the change agent and for the local population: even if the change agent is not a foreigner, s/he may come from a region with a different mother tongue. In addition, the same topic or idea may mean different things to different people, depending not only on their

[6] For a guideline see Osner (2001), which also describes the case of self-evaluation of the replication of the Grameen-Bank model.

knowledge, but also on their interests. This has been recognized as a key problem to change incentives long ago: no idea will be taken up - or "adopted" - unless it makes sense in a *local* context, irrespective of the sense it makes in the rationality of hte intervening agency (Dudley 1993).

Translation alone may not be the solution to the possible gap between the intended meaning and the meaning perceived and acted on by the target group: even if a clear translation is possible, the images and practices associated with that translated term may evoke meanings and attitudes which dispose people against even trying this new idea, practice, or gadget. For linguists and translators, this lack of "control of inferences" is a common problem.[7]

This constitutes a case for *Local Language Hermeneutics.* In the social sciences hermeneutics is understood as an interpretative approach to meaning - the meaning of written texts, as well as of spoken sentences and even of observable practices, and therefore has an established place in sociology, psychology, and anthropology. As the sociologist Anthony Giddens (1996: 75-75) has stated: "Unlike natural science ..., the social sciences involve a double hermeneutic, since the concepts and theories developed therein apply to a world of the activities of conceptualizing and theorizing individuals. the social scientist does not have to interpret the meanings of the social world to actors within it. On the contrary, the technical concept of social sciences are, and must be, parasitical upon lay concepts."

Whether assisted by a social science component or not, *any* development intervention - and all development assistance or aid is intervention - has to come to terms with this "double hermeneutics." All development actors seek to change behaviours according to assumptions about causal connections. Some of the assumed causes of behaviour and behaviour change are themselves interpretations of facts, events, relationships. Any change agent is therefore in the position of a sociologist: trying to interpret an already interpreted world - with the added difficulty of being confronted with a world interpreted in, communicated in, and acted upon in a different language. The communication for which this other language is the medium constitutes a *living* hermeneutics, which makes that local world understandable and manageable in its natural and social aspects in this language.

How can a development agent ever hope to become an actor in this game of *Local Language Hermeneutics* - of simultaneous action in the physical world and the world of interpretation -, even though this may be seen as a precondition for success? Because success in this case means changing both kinds of action, and in a predetermined direction?

Fortunately, and unlike sociologists or anthropologists, change agents do not have to bother with constructing general or culturally specific theories about the relationship between worldviews and actions. They can be satisfied with understanding how local people understand the gadgets, practices, and concepts or ideas brought along by the intervener. For them, the problem boils down to the more manageable attempt to compile a list of words and concepts related to their offer, and to understand the relationships between the items on this list *in local terms*. These are the first two steps of an *applied local language hermeneutics*: seeing "my"/"our" offer or intervention through "their" - i.e. the recipients or traget group's - eyes.

Just compiling a list of related words and discussing their meaning seems easy enough once reaosonably bilingual resource persons have been identified. For reasons to do with local

[7] Thomas Bearth emphasized this point in discussions within LAGUS

relationships of power *including* those to the interveners themselves, this is not as straightforward as presented here and therefore more difficult in practice. These difficulties will be taken up later. The first practical step - both for proper planning and for evaluation - remains to compile lists of words. Based field research experiences in three countries - one together with a colleague whose main task is to introduce agricultural innovations in the Lake Kyoga region of Uganda - the following list of questions provides a useful entry point for an evaluation of communicative sustainability *and* environmental sustainability (see also Appendix I):

- What are *resources*?
- How are resources used?
- Did you notice any changes in the availability of these resources?
- How does the change - if any - in the availability of resources depend on your actions?
- On what else did the change - or the unchanged availability - depend?
- What, for you, is "development"?
- What do you imagine the future to be like for you?
- What do you imagine the future to be like for your children?
- According to the direction offered by the answers to the previous questions, the following one will be either in the direction of sustainability or in the direction of change:
- What can you - or others - do to ensure that you can continue your present activities? And your way of life in general?
- What can you - or others - do to make sure that the changes you wish for will come about?
- What is "good leadership"?
- Where do you see good leadership at present?
- What is trust?
- Where do you see trust or a lack of it at present?

To some extent, focusing on a list of words for things and activities, their meanings, and the relationships between the *concepts* expressed in the words and the relationships circumvents some of the problems brought in by the unavoidable power relationship between a project (team) and local inhabitants. The list is a concrete item demonstrating interest into everyday life, knowledge and thinking on *their* terms and thus fulfils a fundamental *need* of local people all over the world: to feel respected. Feeling respected makes it easier to trust. And trust is an essential ingredient for both the relationship between a project and local people, but also for the quality of information for any evaluation.

We now turn to the social and environmental context, in which these words, concepts, and activities are carried out and make sense.

Communicative, Environmental, and Livelihood Sustainability

The concern with the sustainability of the effects of development projects is old[8] but, according to a Swedish study, still an "enigma" (Catterson and Lindahl, 1999). As early as 1993 (see, for example Dudley, 1993) it was recognized that the issue is complicated by the concern not just for project sustainability, but also for the overall sustainability of the global

[8] See, for example, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (1991), and Stockmann (1992)

system: the sustainability of modern industrial society came under review. This review led to the realization that simply expanding modern industrial ways to the rest of the world would accelerate the exhaustion of non-renewable resources. Therefore, the goal of development aid cannot remain to be only: to assist all nations and people to reach the industrial age. The goal has to be broadened to include the development of sustainable forms of resource use.

This state of affairs is reflected in the various declarations following the Rio Summit and the Johannesburg Summit, most notably Agenda 21 and the Millenium Development Goals. In this context, the new approach of livelihood sustainability became widely promoted by DFID (see Solesbury, 2003) and the FAO, which organized a global forum electronically as well as live in 2000.[9] This approach recognizes that the strategies used to "make a living" - the livelihood strategies - both depend on available resources *and* influence their availability. It also acknowledges that local livelihood strategies take place in a context which influences the availability and quality of *assets*, wich is the term used for different kinds of "capital", or resources in this approach, as the following definition from the widely available *guidance sheets* produced by DFID shows:

> *'A livelihood comprises 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.* '[10]

The relationships between *assets*, *context*, *structures*, *strategies*, and *outcomes* are captured in Figure one (taken from the same *guidance sheet*):

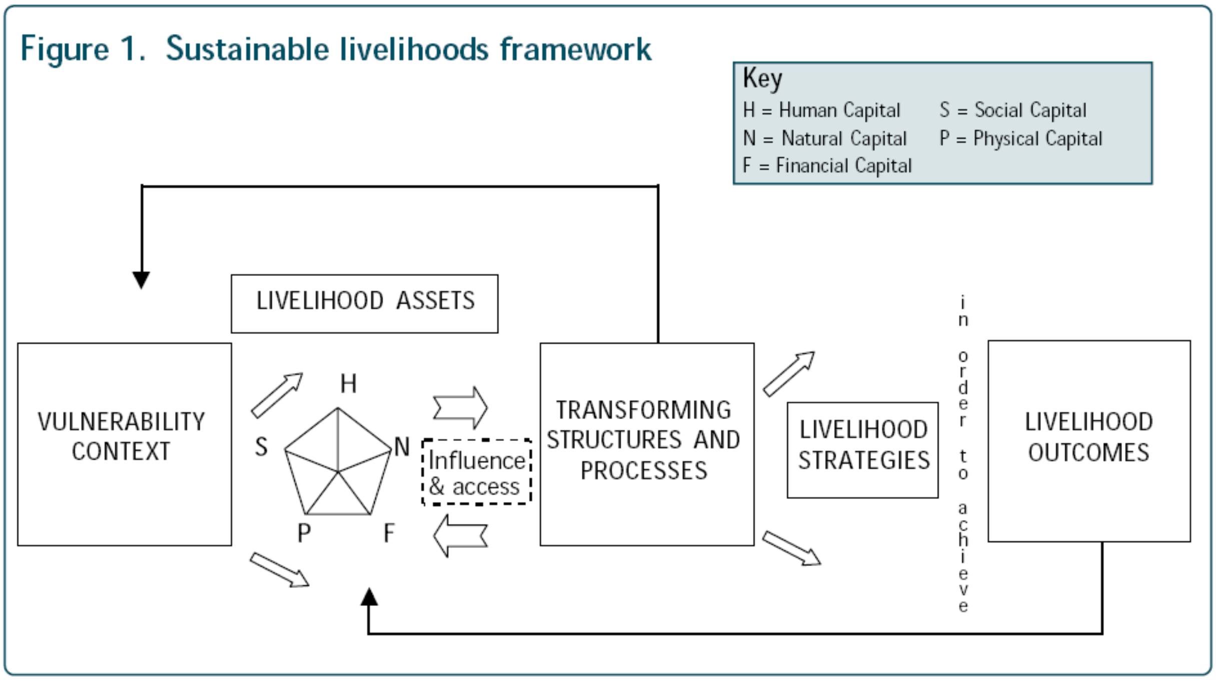

Figure 1. Sustainable livelihoods framework

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[9] The complete set of papers, including evaluation and follow-up information, can be accessed at http://www.fao.org/docrep/003/X9371e/x9371e00.HTM

[10] DFID Livelihoods Guidance Sheets - "Overview" (1999a), downloadable from http://www.livelihoods.org/info/info_guidanceSheets.html.
According to the *Guidance Sheet*, the quote has been "adapted from Chambers, R. and G. Conway (1992) *Sustainable rural livelihoods: Practical concepts for the 21st century.* IDS Discussion Paper 296. Brighton: IDS"

Source: DFID Livelihoods Guidance Sheets - Introduction (1999), downloadable from http://www.livelihoods.org/info/guidance_sheets_pdfs/section1.pdf

The SLA framework is presented here as a widely used comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between people's actions (the livelihood strategies), the political and societal context (called vulnerability context because of the explicit focus on poverty alleviation), and the natural and other resources (assets, here called different forms of "capital"). Not explicitly represented in this framework are the local *actors*, while their own institutions and the institutions they have to deal with to implement their livelihood strategies are subsumed under the "transforming structures and processs."

The evaluation approach presented here fits into this framework because the underlying sociological conceptual model of the LAGSUS research project (see Figure 2 in the following section) is congruent with the SLA framework, focusing precisely on communicating *local actors* and mediating *institutions*[11]. Local people make choices and act together with some people and in competition or adversity to other people, in order to keep going and to possibly improve their lives, dealing with adverse conditions and using resources in the process. All local actors - including individuals and institutions of non-localorigin - constitute a livelihood *system* which "provide[s] people with 'layers of resilience' that can help them to deal with the 'waves of adversity' that occur periodically in their lives" (Glavovic *et al.*, 2002). The overall goal of Sustainable Livelihood Approaches is to strengthen these livelihood systems: to make them more robust so that people can " transform adversity into opportunity" (Glavovic *et al.*, 2002).

People's concern ist first with their own lives and the lives of those close to them, and they will employ whatever resources - natural and otherwise - to maintain and improve those lives. Seen from this angle, the core question becomes: does the present pattern of resource use - particularly of locally available natural resources - stand a chance to be continued in the future? And do people actually want this? Chances are - as I heard to my own amazement in all the three countries where research took place - that what has been recognized as an unsustainable pattern of resource use in industrial countries, remains the goal to strive for in the name of "improving the livelihoods" in countries of the "South." However, such statements are conspicuously absent from the development literature - including evaluations from donor agencies which I have seen - such as the case studies of the effects of 10 SLA-oriented projects (Neely *et al.*, 2004)

It is clear that people's own understanding of the nexus between their actions and the resources used, and hence the sustainability of their livelihoods depends on the degree to which this nexus can be and is discussed in the language which with they are most familiar: their own everyday language, which is the medium for their everyday interactions, everyday thinking, and everyday action. Hence, the sustainability of their livelihoods has to go through this medium, and the sustainability of talking about it affects the sustainability of the livelihoods themselves. In that sense, SLA's goal of strengthening the "layers of resilience" (Glavovic *et al.*, 2002) against adversity - shocks, threats and changing circumstances - requires communicative sustainability as *one* of its preconditions: a precondition for informed local decision-making in general and sustainable natural resources management in particular[12].

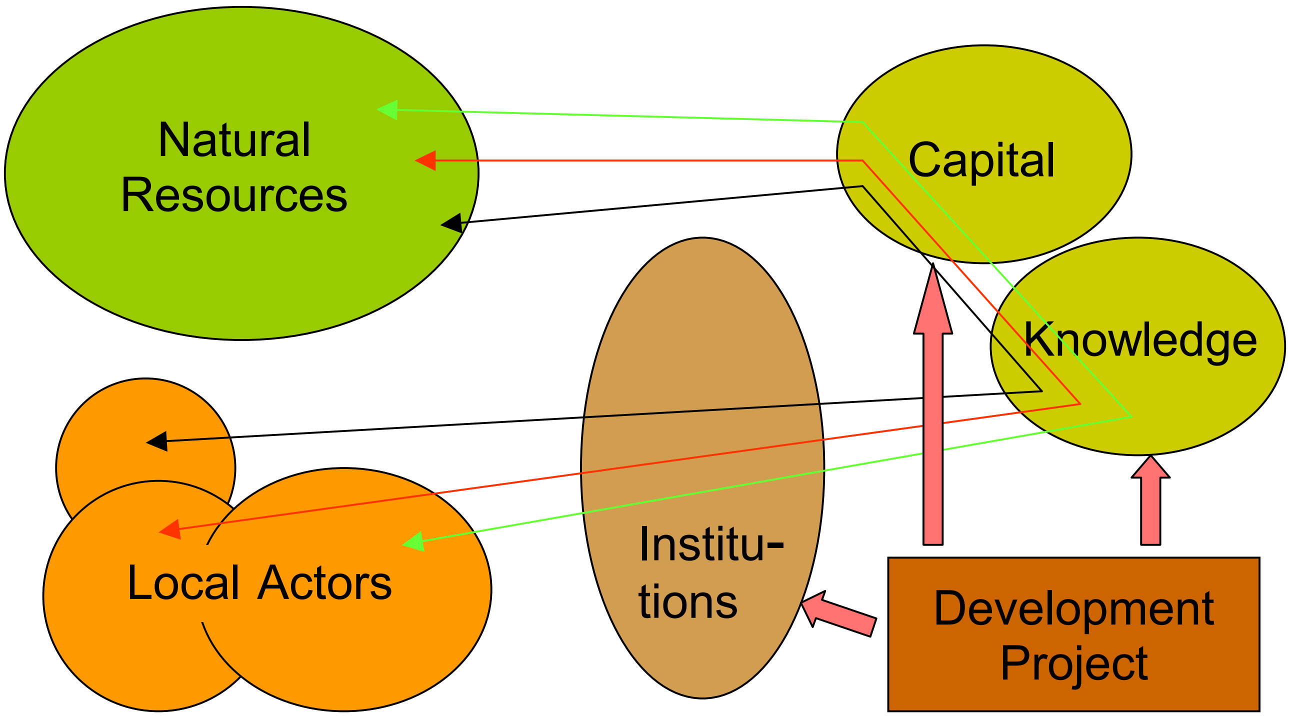
[11] This point is treated in the following section
[12] Communicative Sustainability can be seen as one of the elements of the "assets" of both cultural and social capital in the SLA framework. In that sense, the proposed evaluation method takes into account the concern that

Local decision-making, however, has only a very limited influence on the overall political, economic, and even environmental situation - the "vulnerability context" in the SLA framework. While this is outside the scope of the suggested evaluation framework, the participatory nature of the evaluation approach requires to be informed about this context: without this, neither can local actors' reasoning about decisions and activities be understood, nor will they even accept the evaluator(s) as competent counterparts for the collaborative self-reflection suggested as a key principle.

Institutional Practices and Sustainability

The evaluation approach described here is suited for use within SLA-oriented approaches, because the underlying sociological conceptual model of the LAGSUS research project (see Figure 2) is congruent with the SLA framework, focusing on communicating *local actors* and mediating *institution*. The model emphasizes that individual action is mediated through institutions and employs capital and knowledge. It also draws attention to the fact that most projects work at intervening in or through institutions and concerning different forms of capital and knowledge. The evaluation approach also satisfies the requirements for monitoring and evaluation formulated by Bingen (2000):

> "SL programmes and projects should give as much attention to who gets what, when and how, as to who is setting what rules, when and how. In doing so, it should be possible to identify the ways in which the SL approach might be able to improve the effective functioning of different structures and processes that influence the access to assets and the livelihood strategies that are open to the poor."



"inappropriate development strategies" may harm existing social and cultural capital in the form of customary and communal cultural systems (Glavovic *et al.*, 2002)

Figure 2: Access to and Use of Resources for Local Actors: Mediated through institutions (Graphics: Reinald Döbel and Rose Marie Beck)

Bingen's formulation suggests a way to address what some see as the SLA's lack of attention to distributional issues (Carney, 1999). In focusing on "who gets what, when and how" and on "who is setting the rules, when and how", these "distributional issues" can be approached in terms understandable in everyday language. The advantage of focusing on local terms for resources and activities first - as suggested in the previous section - is that the potentially controversial topic of distribution and access to decision-making can be approached indirectly, allowing for the possibility that the actual case is an exception to the experientially validated rule that the "local actors" are not a homogeneous "community," but an hierarchically ordered set of differentiated groups with differential access to institutions and - through the mediation of institutions - to knowledge, capital, and natural resources. We suggest that these three categories are closer to everyday understanding and hence better suited for practical evaluation purposes than the five kinds of capital which constitute the "assets" in the original SLA framework: as the approach proposes to discuss findings directly with stakeholders, it is imortant that they already have an understanding of the key terms - even if their understanding may have a particular local flavour - or group-specific flavours, which the evaluation will bring to the surface. The reasoning of the evaluator(s) and the local and institutional stakeholders needs to "connect" as a precondition for using collaborative self-reflection as a tool to establish the validity of evaluative findings concerning the prospects for comunicative and environmental sustainability.

In practical terms, this means connecting the terms already collected in the first step to occasions of and frequency of use: the more occasions for use that can be elicited - whether in everyday conversations, as connected to work practices, or connected with institutional practices - the greater the communicative sustainability of the term or topic. Using the conceptual model presented in Fig. 2 can assist in establishing whether and how specific terms and/or meanings are linked to particular groups of actors, and to what extent this linkage is supported through inclusion into or exclusion from institutional practices. Institutional practices could be specific relationships of exchange, allocation of use rights, or formal regulations for ownership and/or use rights[13].

Connecting important terms to use of natural resources and institutional regulations requires to understand both the physical and the institutional landscape. Data collection for both can rely on fairly well established methods used in rural appraisals.

The quantity, quality, and availability of natural resources is at the core of both environmental and livelihoods sustainability. Transsect walks are a good way to assess the condition of natural resources together with local actors: being able to see and touch the items in discussion eases some of the translation problems mentioned earlier. To the extent that the previous step of compiling a list of relevant terms and activities gave indications for the existence differentiated social groups each having a different approach to natural resources - possibly linked to differentiated rights of access - it may be advisable to capture this diversity more fully by conducting more than one transsect walk, using the opportunity to also discuss the history and future prospects of the present state (fully functioning ecosystem versus

[13] It would be an interesting experiment to provide local people with the "elements" used in this concept and allow them to develop their own conceptual model simply by asking them for ways to connect all these elements (local actors, institutions, capital, knowledge, development project, natural resources) into one "whole."

degradation) and the options for use. This forms the basis for developing hypothesis about the sustainability of usage patterns as parts of livelihood strategies.

Usage patterns also depend on institutional mediation, as most forms of natural resource use requires either coordination with other actors, or following certain established rules, or acquiring formal permits. Hence, the use of the physical landscape is mediated through the institutional landscape, which can be determined with the use of such methods as Venn Diagrams or the Institutional Landscape model described in Schiefer and Döbel (2001, Appendix 14, p.98f.). Based on the knowledge about existing institutions and their relationships - the "institutional landscape" - the role of decisions within these institutions concerning the use of natural resources, and the possible not equitably distributed access to these instition can be assessed together with the participants of this group exercise.

The relevant topics and questions for this stage have been summarized in a DFID *Guidance Sheet*:

> With natural resources it is also very important to investigate long-term trends in quality and use. This is familiar territory for those skilled in the practice of rural appraisal techniques (mapping, transect walks, etc.). Typical issues for analysis might include:
> • Which groups have access to which types of natural resources?
> • What is the nature of access rights (e.g. private ownership, rental, common ownership, highly contested access)? How secure are they? Can they be defended against encroachment?
> • Is there evidence of significant conflict over resources?
> • How productive is the resource (issues of soil fertility, structure, salinisation, value of different tree species, etc.)? How has this been changing over time (e.g. variation in yields)?
> • Is there existing knowledge that can help increase the productivity of resources?
> • Is there much spatial variability in the quality of the resource?
> • How is the resource affected by externalities? (For example: the productive potential of different parts of watersheds is affected by the activities of other users and the way in which resource systems operate; the value of fisheries depends upon the number of other users who have access and the choices they make about their catches; biodiversity is often damaged by intensive agriculture.)
> • How versatile is the resource? Can it be used for multiple purposes? (This can be important in cushioning users against particular shocks.)
> (DFID 1999b, Section 2.3.3)

Hence, the evaluation framework suggested here fits into existing larger international frames, while focusing on the actors themselves, and on the institutions which mediate their access to and use of resource. It focuses on the - group-specific - way local actors talk about resources, resource use, and decisions taken about these, feeding back the results into discussions with stakeholders. While it is true that participation has often been misused (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) and also often not led to better projects (Asian Development Bank, December 2004), a participatory approach is a must for the sustainability of livelihoods, as people's own thinking about it plays a major part in this sustainability: we are dealing with a case of applied "double hermeneutics."

Evaluating the relationship between decision-making and resource use through stakeholder participation

Participatory project evaluation has a long history[14], was introduced into mainstream evaluation as "Fourth Generation Evaluation" (Guba and Lincoln, 1989), and turned into an expanding methodology under the term "Empowerment Evaluation" (Fetterman 2001, Fetterman and Wandersman, 2005).

In our case, participation is needed not only to establish accurate representations of the physical and institutional landscape (see the previous section), but even more so in order to understand the pattern of decisions governing livelihood strategies and hence the use of natural resources. This, in turn requires establishing a reasonably trusting relationship with local stakeholders based on their assessment of the integrity of the intentions of the evaluation. It is therefore paramount to be open from the start about the final aim of the evaluation: to reach a collaborative assessment of the effect of local livelihood strategies on the sustainability of resource use through the use of dialogic communication between evaluators and stakeholders and between stakeholders themselves[15]. At the same time it should be taken into account, that this very aim may not be communicable at the beginning: while local notions of sustainability may exist for specific purposes, these may not be related to an overall assessment of either livelihood strategies or the natural resources base.

The sequence of steps is therefore designed to allow for an understanding to emerge over the course of the evaluation, while also building trust respecting local language use, custom, and everyday activites - by including them into the evaluative investigation and all the conversations linked to it. It should be noted that it will be the quality of these conversations which will convey - or fail to convey - the "spirit" a dialogical "thinking together" even across language barriers as a means to and as an expression of achieved trust.

Having compiled a list of local terms and established linkages between them, established linkages between local terms and everyday activities, assessed the state of the environment through transsect walks (which are considered to build trust and elicit spontaneous conversation), and built a representation of the institutional landscape, the evaluation can now proceed to assess local social differentiation and its consequences for livelihoods and environmental sustainability. To the extent that the previous stages have discovered differences of access to resources and resource use specific to particular groups, this stage will seek to understand how these differences are maintained by established mechanisms of decision-making in the existing institutions through an examination of access to institutions and the consequences of decisions with groups of stakeholders separately first, and with all stakeholders together in a second and final step (steps 4-6 in the *Summary* given in the appendix).

The one particular novely of this approach is the inquiry into differences between topics and issues considered relevant in the individual discussions of the very first compilation of list, the following discussions ensuing during transsect walks and institutional diagramming, and the topics established as relevant in the analysis of institutions and the decisions taken there. The tabulation of these differences or discrepancies - which is the one item about which the evaluation team cannot openly communicate if it does not want to jeopardize the accuracy and relevancy of this tool - is the sole responsibility of the evaluator(s). They simply compile and constantly cross-check which topics are considered relevant by actors with respect to the

[14] For a comparatively early general guideline see Feuerstein (1986)
[15] On the difference between "discussion" and "dialogue" see Isaacs (1999)

access to and use of resources (natural and otherwise) needed for their livelihood strategies. This particular tool aims at assessing the sustainability of local processes of decision-making: excluding certain issues from public discourse and formal decision-making has been termed the "fourth face of power" and is known to be one of the means by which a local power elite can reinforce its position. Some issues, however - such as systemic exclusion and environmental sustainability - have a pernicious obstinacy of their own. They may be excluded from discourse and decision-making, but they will not go away. Not only will they not go away, they will often grow in that seeming exclusion - "seeming" because they are infact rather obvious to almost everyone except that power elite. As the participatory framework suggested here emphasizes simply to follow up all detectable social and group differences, such issues are likely to surface - if they exist.

To the extent that they exist, and depending on the communicative skills of the evaluator(s) such topics, together with an attempt to assist mutual understanding between the different viewpoints of different groups, will be brought into the final deliberation organized as a bigger group event. At this stage the ultimate goal of reaching a collaborative assessment of environmental sustainability should be generally understandable. At this stage it should also be possible to present those "neglected" issues deemed relevant by the evaluator(s) to all the stakeholders to engage in a collaborative self-reflection on the relevance of these issues as part of the overall assessment of the sustainability of the environment and the livleihood sustainability of *all* local groups. This description is an ideal however: it is not only possible but, unfortunately, likely, that the evaluation will encounter open or latent conflicts which require different methods - such as conflict resolution - in order to reach a state in which these relevant topics can be openly discussed without jeopardizing "public peace".

Acknowledging such complications, this evaluation approach nonetheless seeks to contribute directly to both communicative and environmental sustainability by proposing topics for discussion which had until then been considered unfit for public discussion. Fostering "openness" is an explicit goal for this evaluative approach, a goal which conforms with general concerns about accountability and transparency. Care needs to be taken to introduce a solution-oriented direction of the opening up of public discussion, in order to avoid exacerbating existing conflicts - both open and latent ones. Only discussable problems can be resolved. "Social exclusion" is often one of those problems, together with the related notion of distributional justice, but not necessarily so. Therefore, and because of their sensitive nature, these topics have not been made explicit points on the lists of questions: if they are a problem, they will emerge, and can then be introduced with the necessary tact by the evaluators and facilitators of the rounds of collaborative self-reflection. The effectiveness of increased openness for sustainability is suggested by the fact that it has been made the focus of a commercially marketed leadership training under the name of *Clear Leadership* (Bushe 2001), which grew out of the Appreciative Inquiry approach to organizational development. The need for more openness particularly when it comes to sustainable development has been clearly expressed as the conclusion to a whole book on how to make development assistance work as early as 1993 (Dudley, 1993: 169)

> "The greatest contribution which we, the interventing classes of both the advanced industrial countries and the cities of the Thirld World, can make is to minimize hypocrisy and, as far as is possible, live and be seen to live the way of life which we recommend to our poorer neighbours in the global village."

Conclusion

Why should we care about communicative sustainability if there is agreement that, overall, it is the mismatch between demand for resources and availability which is the core of the *global* sustainability problem? Why do we not just opt for an "ecocracy" where reasonable and sustainable resource use is dictated by those who know the facts and know how to manage? Because systemic management knowledge as much as experience - in my case the encroachments into the newly created Lore Lindu National Park in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia - shows that restraint in resource use through control requires too much energy to be sustainable: unless people at all levels participate *because* they understand what is at stake and that their contribution is needed, and *therefore* apply their personal mental resources - such as knowledge, intelligence, and creativity - to finding a cooperative solution, the Kassandras will see their dire predictions validated. In my view, an evaluative approach which asks for discrepancies between topics people feel a need to discuss and take decisions on, and the topics actually discussed and decided on, stimulates collective self-reflection and contributes to communicative sustainability - and as a consequence to environmental sustainability. The whole point of the participative methodology suggested here is to either initiate or contribute to an inclusive dialogue about the sustainability of livelihoods - a dialogue which does not continue existing trends to push some people over the edge. Because "pushing over the edge" is not a sustainable strategy.

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Appendix 1:

Tool I:

Entry Questions for evaluating communicative and environmental sustainability

- What are *resources*?
- How are resources used?
- Did you notice any changes in the availability of these resources?
- How does the change - if any - in the availability of resources depend on your actions?
- On what else did the change - or the unchanged availability - depend?
- What, for you, is "development"?
- What do you imagine the future to be like for you?
- What do you imagine the future to be like for your children?

According to the direction offered by the answers to the previous questions, the following one will be either in the direction of sustainability or in the direction of change, or both:

- What can you - or others - do to ensure that you can continue your present activities? And your way of life in general?
- What do you - or others - need in order to do what you have just mentioned?
- What can you - or others - do to make sure that the changes you wish for will come about?
- What do you - or others - need in order to do what you have just mentioned?

The last set of questions refers to relationships of power and decision-making

- What is "good leadership"?
- Where do you see good leadership at present?
- What is trust?
- Where do you see trust or a lack of it at present?

These questions can be used both in individual interviews as well as in group interviews. In my own experience, individual interviews offer a richer variety of answers. This, in turn, is a good stimulus for the group discussions of the next phase.

Appendix 2:

Summary: The Sequence of Steps for Evaluating Comunicative and Environmental Sustainability

Step 1: ***Compile a list of key terms, including activities***

- Resources
- Resource use
- Activities
- Concepts of futures

Done individually, compiling such a list also provides an opportunity to gather information on social groupings. On this basis, a more differentiated picture can be obtained in the following steps with a view to the topic of social inclusion / exclusion in the reflective discussions. If information on social differentiation is already available in the project, this can be used to ensure that the views of social groups which are excluded or threatened to become excluded are included in the evaluation.

Step 2: ***Determine Occasions and Frequency of use of the key terms***

- Ask people to list occasions for the use of the terms on the list
- Ask people to assess frequency of usage in everyday communication
- Assess linkages between terms (use a locally adapted form of mind map or a matrix)
- Assess Linkages to everyday practices (use a locally adapted form of mind map or a matrix)

Depending on the resources available for the evaluation and local expediency, the first two items can be covered individually or in groups. Constructing the matrixes is better done in groups. The formation of such groups should. however, take into account local differentiations which became appartent in Step 1. Depending on the local situation, this assessment can be done in conjunction with a transsect walk, which has the added advantage of having the conditions of the natural resources present for discussions.

Step 3: ***Assess institutional anchoring and state of natural resources***

- Determine state of natural resources through transsect walk or a similar method, if necessary separately with different groups.
- Determine local "Institutional Landscape" (use Venn-Diagram or a tool like in Schiefer&Döbel 2001): which institutions are relevant for the terms compiled and the associated activities? What are the relationships between these institutions?
- For each institution, ask relevant actors about occasions and frequency of use of terms.
- Assess mechanisms for decision-making: to what extent is negotiation (i.e. conmmunication) required for decisions? Who has access to the institutions and to decision-making (inclusion/exclusion)? What is the distance between the language and method of reasoning used for these mechanisms of decision-making and the language and reasoning used in everyday communication? (Language, specific terminology, use of concepts for reasoning)

Step 4: ***Assess linkage between institutional decision-making and the sustainability of livelihoods***

- Assess mechanisms for decision-making in institutions (who decides what?) This goes beyond simply asking about the use of particular terms and general communicative mechanisms. It aims at establishing to what extent access to decision-making in the different parts of the institutional landscape is open to everyone or restricted to certain groups. This can be done on the basis of the institutional landscape diagrams or Venn digrams drawn in the previous step.
- Assess linkage between institutional decisions and resource use (local versus intervening institutions). This is an extension of the previous one which goes into more detail concerning about the influence of institutional decisions on people's access to the use of natural resources. The focus is on determinining to what extent customs, rules, and regulations provide differentiated ease of access to different social groups - as an indication to possible and actual conflicts between these groups.

Step 5: ***Assess institutional sustainability of the mechanisms of decision-making and of the decisions themselves***

- Compile a list of issues discussed publicly
- Compile list of decisions concerning these issues
- Compile list of issues considered relevant, but not discussed openly
- Compile list of decisions considered necessary but not taken (or taken in the wrong way)
- Compile list of issues which emerge as relevant from the evaluation up to this stage
- Compare issues discussed / issues relevant (if necessary, according to different stakeholders, including the evaluators) and decisisons taken / necessary decisions (if necessary, according to different stakeholders, including the evaluators)

Step 6: Discuss Findings with Stakeholders - "collaborative self-reflection"about sustainability and social exclusion

- Discuss findings *and how your arrived at them* first with the groups used in previous steps. Some of the results will be based on information from other social groups which are not normally discussed in the present group. Introducing such views already widens the spectrum of discussion within this group, and also prepares for the larger meeting to follow.
- Organize a larger meeting where stakeholders of different groups and institutions are present. This meeting has three main parts:
  1) Carefully focus the discussion on the livelihood strategies of different groups - including employees of NGOs and state agencies - and the (different) roles these strategies have for the natural resource base. Take care to include your reasoning behind the descriptions the correctness is to be assessed collaboratively by all participants, including chance events which gave you access to particular facts or opinions which turned out to be particularly relevant. This may lead to a public discussion of different views on the same strategies by different groups - and thus earn the title of "collaborative self-reflection." This will only happen if the evaluator(s) manage to explain their reasoning in terms understandable on local terms - if his/her/their reasoning can "connect" to local reasoning. The preceding steps should have provided sufficient indication as to the possibility of connecting in this way, leaving

behind the expert role, to which most people will respond in
2) Then move to the role which rules, regulations, and local customs play for these interactions between strategies and resource base. The remarks made for the first part also apply here. In addition, this stage provides an opportunity to bring up the topic of social exclusion - if the previous analysis has pointed to its relevance. The relationship between exclusion and institutional regulations and/or (access to) institutional decision-making can then be discussed.
3) In the third part, the triangular relationship between regulation of livelihood strategies through institutions, the livelihood strategies themselves, and their effect on the natural resource base can be summed up in one overall sustainability assessment. This, however, is only possible in the absence of major conflicts: in the presence of conflicts (to take a drastic example: between a logging company and local comunities) the sustainability outcome will be radically different, depending on the outcome of the conflict.

- Therefore, if the previous stages have pointed to the presence of a major conflict *and* led to suggestions for a resolution for this conflict from the involved parties, this should be tackled either in a third part, or in a separate meeting. This meeting can then be a first assessment of the viability of the resolution strategies uncovered as part of the evaluation. It is obvious that no such meeting should be attempted in the absence of resolution strategies which make sense both to some locals and to the evaluators.