

Preface

The authors of this book have much experience working in rural development in Africa. One of us—Nora McNamara—began an organisation called the Diocesan Development Services based in Idah at the conclusion of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970. Idah had been a frontline town in that war and DDS had a mandate for helping the rural poor, of which there were many, and it was inevitable that this would revolve around agriculture. Idah and its surrounds lacked any industry which could provide employment and what had existed was destroyed by the war. The vast majority of households in the area depended upon agriculture for their survival. The other author—Stephen Morse—first came out to Nigeria in 1980 and worked with Nora in DDS for much of that decade. In those days the fashion was very much ‘Integrated Rural Development’ (IRD); the bringing together of agriculture as a source of income alongside other services such as education and health care as well as infrastructure such as roads and water provision. Women featured heavily in IRD, not least because they were a significant source of income to support household livelihood. Major development donors such as the World Bank were heavily promoting and ‘doing’ IRD, and at the time was difficult to think of any other way or working.

IRD has long since evolved in many directions, not least because of the growth in urbanisation and a lessening of the focus on agriculture by many aid agencies during the 1980s and 1990s. Fashions changed and new themes such as good governance, accountability and stakeholder participation became dominant in aid agencies. These are certainly not incompatible with IRD, of course, but it is odd how fashions surge and wane and how lessons and experiences are forgotten. IRD had always been associated with ‘projects’; a more micro-scale intervention planned for a discrete period of time and resource. Projects also began to wane as the focus shifted to programmes; longer term interventions. However, the central idea of IRD—bringing together many aspects of importance to the poor rather than focussing on but one—has shown resilience and does make a lot of sense. A sole focus on agricultural production without any consideration of how the produce would fare in markets where prices are unpredictable or the education of children or the supply of good quality water to help maintain the health of the household makes little sense. Even getting produce to markets requires roads. In the late 1990s a new form of integration came into being known as Sustainable

Livelihoods. It was an amalgam of many influences, and IRD was just one of a number of influences in this new wave, but sustainable livelihoods rapidly gained in popularity amongst development practitioners, researchers and policy makers. Sustainable livelihood has a strong focus on people and it is context neutral in the sense that it could apply to both rural and urban households, and the inclusion of the term 'sustainable' taps into a strong theme of making sure that what we do now does not damage future generations or restrict their livelihood choices. Sustainability was very much the theme of the 1990s and its popularity persists to this day, largely because like integration it makes a lot of sense.

This book is about sustainable livelihoods in practice, or more accurately the framework that was developed to operationalise it—the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA). The authors have tapped into their long experience in working in development, but more importantly the long-lasting relationship they have had with the people in DDS. Nora has long since left the organisation she initiated but it does mean that she is well known to them and is trusted with their stories and secrets. Steve also worked for DDS for a time in the 1980s and 1990s, and the bonds are strong. This long-lasting relationship has allowed the authors to have access to the workings of DDS and in particular its attempt to make SLA work in the context of a series of interventions it was planning. The authors were somewhat on the periphery of all of that but were intrigued nonetheless by the ways in which SLA was put into action and, more importantly of all, the reasons why DDS did it and what they sought to gain. The process took two years and provided lots of opportunity for discussion and reflection between the authors and the DDS staff, the participants and the village communities as a whole. New ideas emerged and the authors became more and more determined to write them down and present them to a wider audience. The lessons of practice generated new knowledge and enhanced the wisdom that comes with years of experience and reflection. Indeed the experience and the outcomes were, at least to the authors, unique and not to be found in the SLA literature of which they were aware. This book is the authors' attempt to share those insights and they hope that the reader will find them useful. The SLA described in some detail may be rooted in one place and time but in the views of the authors they can transcend such borders and help to inform SLAs for other places and times. Unfortunately it can be all too easy to reject 'case studies' as being of little wider relevance but the authors feel that there are insights from the DDS experience that can 'travel'.

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