

Interdisciplinary knowledge integration and the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

Case studies on rural livelihoods in Kenya and China

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Abstract

To understand the complex and multifaceted problems of rural development in Africa and Asia, perspectives that have the capacity to consider, combine and integrate contributions from different disciplines and different stakeholders are needed. Through five papers based on case-studies in rural Kenya and China, this dissertation contributes towards reaching such a perspective. The first paper attempts to answer whether sustainable development based on agriculture is attainable in Kenya through a combination of bio-physical, economic, and socio-cultural perspectives on land management in Kenya's central highlands. The second paper looks at how farmers in Shaanxi Province, China, perceive and adapt to climate variability, with a focus on land use. The third paper attempts to use the *Sustainable Livelihoods Approach* through an exploration of the relationships between different livelihood resources in the Chinese rural context of changing climate and land use. The fourth paper applies a resource-based perspective, based on the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, to the analysis of livelihood strategies among 22 households Shaanxi Province. The fifth and final paper asks how, why, where, and to which degree the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach integrates knowledge in relation to rural development. The results from the five papers show that even though the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach is not the solution to world poverty and not the ultimate guide to sustainable rural development, it is an attempt to capture the enormous complexity of rural development problems that goes beyond disciplinary boundaries.

Brought together, the five papers constitute an interaction between three different contexts of knowledge production: the *interdisciplinary* context of human ecology, the *multi-disciplinary* context of research cooperation, and the *transdisciplinary* context of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach. This interaction puts the limits of disciplinary knowledge production and the problems of inter- and transdisciplinarity into focus and suggests that disciplines involved in rural development research have to consider knowledge that is produced outside the disciplinary organization of the university.

Key words: sustainable livelihoods approach, rural development, climate change, land use, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, China, Kenya