Tracing Development Frameworks Down the Aid Chain

CARE USA's Household Livelihoods Strategy from NGO Headquarters to its use in
South Africa, Lesotho, and
Partner Organizations

By

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The research within this article and the research report is original and has been carried out solely by the author. Research was undertaken under the supervision of Professor Lisa Bornstein at the University of Natal, Durban during 2001-2002 period. The author has not submitted this work to any other university, research institute or publication. The work of others is duly acknowledged and referenced within a bibliography and throughout the text.

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Intent:

This article is intended for the Journal of International Development published by John Wiley & Sons in association with the Development Studies Association. This article conforms to the guidelines set forth by the Journal of International Development's Instructions to Authors. These guidelines are included in the following pages and can be found at http://www.interscience.wiles/ipages/0954-1748/authors.html. The journal's focus area includes international NGO issues that effect development practice and therefore this article would be of interest to the publication's editors. The author will submit Copyright Transfer Agreement & the Copyright Permission Request Forms directly to the journal. The author is also sending a copy of the article to Michael Drinkwater at CARE's Southern &West Africa Regional Management Unit so that a CARE representative is informed prior to publication. There are several exceptions to the article requirements noted below. Page numbers have been included in citing direct quotes of other authors. Also, the length of the article is 6,645 words, rather than less than 5,000 words. The supervisor of the dissertation, Lisa Bornstein, and the programme director of the Master's in Development Studies degree, Imraan Valodia, have approved this length. Additionally, Figure 1 has been included in the text rather than as a separate document. Finally, the title page does not include proof author contact information and grant number. All of these changes will be made upon submission for actual publication.

Abstract:

This article analyses the aid chain and north-south power relations with regard to INGO programming strategies. CARE USA's Household and Livelihood Security (HLS) programming framework is examined, as case study, from the headquarter level to country offices in South Africa and Lesotho as well as partner organizations. HLS is discussed in relation to participatory methodology, management tools, the project cycle, donors and direct versus partner implementation. The paper argues that using HLS to combine people centred development ideas with northern-based management techniques has led to inadequate success in the field. Furthermore, the unequal power relations between the north and the south ultimately sabotage development success. HLS is a promising programming framework for development practioners. However, many of the past programming failures continue to impede HLS. Additionally, new programming failures are being created through the dissemination and implementation of HLS programming as it currently exists.

1. Introduction

NGO's are increasingly the main actors in development initiatives. Due to a variety of reasons in the 1980s, including the broad neo-liberal agenda, the power of the Bretton Woods Institutions, and the failure of third world governments to adequately address poverty within their countries, NGO's found themselves in a significantly influential position in poorer countries. While the power of the Bretton Woods Institutions and Western governments has been maintained throughout the 1990's, there has been a gradual acknowledgment of the need for partnerships with states. Within this framework, NGO's are still viewed as one of several conduits for aid. Therefore, NGO's have adopted different programmatic structures to show increased results and prove their capability as a channel for aid. Hence, programming frameworks used in NGO's are part of a larger debate regarding state and private involvement in international development. Ultimately, any new programming framework employed in international development should be scrutinized for its level of success in the field.

This article explores CARE USA's Household and Livelihood Security (HLS) programming framework from the headquarter level to country offices in South Africa, country offices in Lesotho and partner organizations in order to examine how these new programmatic frameworks are being used in international development agencies. The empirical research for this article was supported by IDRC and the University of Natal, Durban, South Africa. The conclusions found in this paper are based on 16 interviews and 24 surveys with field and program staff, along with on-site observation, that were conducted in Southern Africa and the United States in 2001. Further analysis of this research can be found in the forthcoming paper of the School of Development Studies and the Centre for Civil Society at the University of Natal. The results of the research point to insufficient success with CARE's HLS framework because of the contradictory aims of programmatic reform. HLS has been used to combine people centred development ideas with northern-based management techniques in order to address areas of development failure while maintaining management control. HLS is discussed in relation to participatory methodology, management tools and the project cycle -- the three distinct ways HLS is understood and used. Although these three areas show contradictions within HLS, INGO's and donors are still promoting the HLS framework to country offices and partners. Therefore, the next section of the article discusses how HLS is utilized in relation to donors and direct versus partner implementation of HLS. The article also questions the

legitimacy of large INGO's and donors imposing a programming framework on southern NGO's that has inherent contradictions and questionable success in the field. This article concludes that if the fundamental goal of development is helping communities around the world to thrive, then, less emphasis needs to be placed on the `owners' and `managers' of the aid chain and more on the `receivers' and `beneficiaries' of the aid chain. Ultimately, the promise of HLS is inspiring. However, many of its development achievements remain minimal because past development failures are not successfully addressed in the framework. Increased analysis of HLS operation and diffusion in the field could rectify these problems.

2. NGO's and the AID Chain

The metaphor of the aid chain is used here to illustrate a system comprised of a series of institutions and organizations in the north that devise ideas and frameworks for the south and then attempt to transfer and apply them. The aid chain is part of how current development takes place from northern funders and development specialists to southern partners and implementers. As Wallace (2000: 2) writes, "Down the funnels through which money is channelled come a range of procedures, understandings, and the latest `development thinking', all of which have a major influence on NGO policy and practice..." Simply put, the aid chain is a model to understand power relations in the international aid arrangement. In the past, programming frameworks passed down aid chains have been limited by preset sector emphasis (Ashley and Carney 1999, Frankenburger *et* al 2000), the inability to target the poor (Howes 1992, Frankenburger *et* al 2000, Fowler 2001), a focus on things rather than people (Cerena 1985, Chambers 1988, Edwards 1994, Ashley and Carney 1999, Frankenburger *et* al2000), a failure to monitor and evaluate programs (Simbi and Thom 1981, Frankenburger *et* al 2000), replication and competition of work amongst NGO's (Frankenburger *et* al 2000) and lack of community involvement (Howes 1992, Frankenburger *et* al 2000).

Because of the failure of these development models (Bornstein and Smith 2001), new development thinking has emerged with a renewed focus on poverty reduction (Fowler, 2001). The new thinking has been heavily influenced by the work of Sen (1981), Chambers (1988) and Chambers and Conway (1992). It has focused on people as actors of development, incorporating a move towards information transfer, training, and in country capacity building. Part of this revised development thinking has also attempted to sharpen

organizational efforts in strategic targeting (Uphoff 1992, Carney *et al* 1999, Alexander 2000). Some of these newer models have explored how to develop suitable programs for particular communities and avoid repetition within those communities (Wallace *et al* 1997, Wallace 2000, Fowler 2001, Alexander 2001). These models claim to be holistic rather than narrow in focus, flexible rather than set (Uphoff 1992, Wallace *et al* 1997, Carney *et al* 1999, Ashley and Carney 1999, Drinkwater and Rusinow 1999, Frankenburger *et al* 2000, Wallace 2000). These improved versions are what some international NGO's are transferring down their aid chains. Fundamentally, this new ideology challenges the aid chain as it currently exists and argues for increased power in the hands of southern implementers.

At the same time, NGO's are also being infused with rational management techniques designed to achieve improved development results. Rational management tools, such as the logical framework analysis (LFA), identify the necessary inputs into a project in order to delineate the desired outputs. They also monitor the impact of the outputs on the household and community (Mosley-Williams 1994, Simbi and Thom 2000, Alexander 2000). Rational management tools are modelled after successful practices in the American business sector. This is because staff from business professions have joined development agencies staff and blended their methodology into development practice. This new development approach focuses on the importance of information. Information is to be used within NGO's for management and planning, learning and discovery, advocacy and accountability (Edwards, 1994). Rational management tools are the answer to past development failures because they provide managers with the data they need to determine if a project was successful or not and why. Each tool provides increased control, management, and leadership of projects for northern NGO's. This management ideology does not challenge the aid chain; rather it reinforces its structure. Some development analysts claim that fusing these two ideologies enables northern donors to practice development responsibly while simultaneously influencing local people and organizations to make development decisions (Carney *et al* 1999). These ideas include projects in process, stakeholder language and the flexible use of rational management techniques (Wallace *et al* 1997). Wallace (2000: 20) writes, "There is an argument which says these very different approaches are not in opposition but can sit together and work in synergy: so there is talk of bottom up and top down strategic planning,

of participatory log frames, of participatory impact assessment sitting along side milestones, indicators and targets set by NGO's."

Critics, however, disagree. They argue that these techniques cannot be combined with flexible, learning based approaches since they utilize two distinct development ideologies (Hirschman 1967, Korten and Klauss 1984, Chambers 1986, Lecompte 1987, Long and Long 1992, Long and Villareal 1992, Scoones 1993, Howes 1996, Wallace *et al* 1997 and 1998, Harrison 1997, Fowler 1997 and 2001, Des Gaspar 1998, 1999 and 2001, Hubbard 2000, Pettit 2000, Bornstein and Smith 2001, Cornwall 2001). These critics argue that development based on local community decision making cannot be combined with northern management. That, in fact, there is no such thing as a middle ground for bottom up and top down processes because the engineers of the aid chain ultimately have the definitive power.

Since there are two distinct philosophical frameworks being included onto NGO's agenda's and their merging is a subject of debate, there is merit in studying how effectively or ineffectively these current models are being transferred from northern headquarters to southern implementers. With new rational management and logical framework strategies on the one hand, and a people centred development and learning focus, on the other; how have attempts to marry the approaches faired? Does the aid chain structure, with the pressure to substantiate results stronger and competition between NGO's greater than ever, allow international NGO's to use a programmatic structure without a management-based approach?

3. Case Study: CARE USA's HLS Approach

CARE USA is an excellent organization in which to study these issues due to its attempt to institutionalise a new model that is championed as being both people centred and includes rational management techniques. Initially, within CARE there was disagreement regarding how the HLS framework would develop. However, over the last eight years CARE has developed, refined and institutionalised its HLS approach within the organization. In 1994, CARE officially adopted HLS as its programming framework (Frankenburger *et* al., 2000). The implementation of HLS brought about a re-vamping of CARE Headquarters in the north and a heavy push on country offices in the south to incorporate or even superimpose HLS on their programs

CARE defines HLS by stating, "in its simplest form, livelihood security is the ability of a household to meet its basic needs (or basic rights)" (Frankenburger *et* al., 2000: 4). This includes a household being able to acquire adequate food, health, shelter, minimal levels of income, basic education and community participation. Under CARE's definition, if these criteria are not being met, then, a household is said to be living in absolute poverty. Figure 1, depicts CARE's HLS model and is adapted from Swift (1989) of Sen's original entitlement model (Drinkwater and Rusinow 1999). The objectives of CARE's HLS model are numerous. The HLS framework is CARE's attempt to address past development failure and avoid many of the pitfalls of past projects. The aim of the approach is to have a holistic, integrated and flexible framework without maintaining a preset sector focus. This allows NGO's to avoid focusing on sectors where they have the most expertise. The first goal is to improve the ability to target the poorest and most vulnerable households in a community. HLS is based on a people centred development approach, which attempts to involve the community and its stakeholders, the idea being the community's needs and desires are discerned before a project is designed and that the community takes an active role in the design process. By examining a community and a household's overall livelihood, a program can be more comprehensive in scope. Additionally, with the use of HLS and partners, CARE can attempt to coordinate projects in similar geographic areas and avoid repetition. Finally, using HLS throughout the project cycle would lead to increased levels of monitoring and evaluation, which would in turn allow CARE to successfully demonstrate its results in the field and increase the efficiency level of its programs.

However, while the promise of HLS is clear, research in Southern Africa suggests that many of the past pitfalls still plague current project operations. Moreover, there are new problems emerging that an HLS approach, at least as currently employed, is unlikely to resolve. Some of these difficulties could be remedied, or at least moderated, if greater attention was paid to the dynamics of HLS diffusion and implementation. Other problems, as the evidence below suggests, will require a more fundamental reassessment of the existing aid system and the unequal `partnerships' fostered therein.
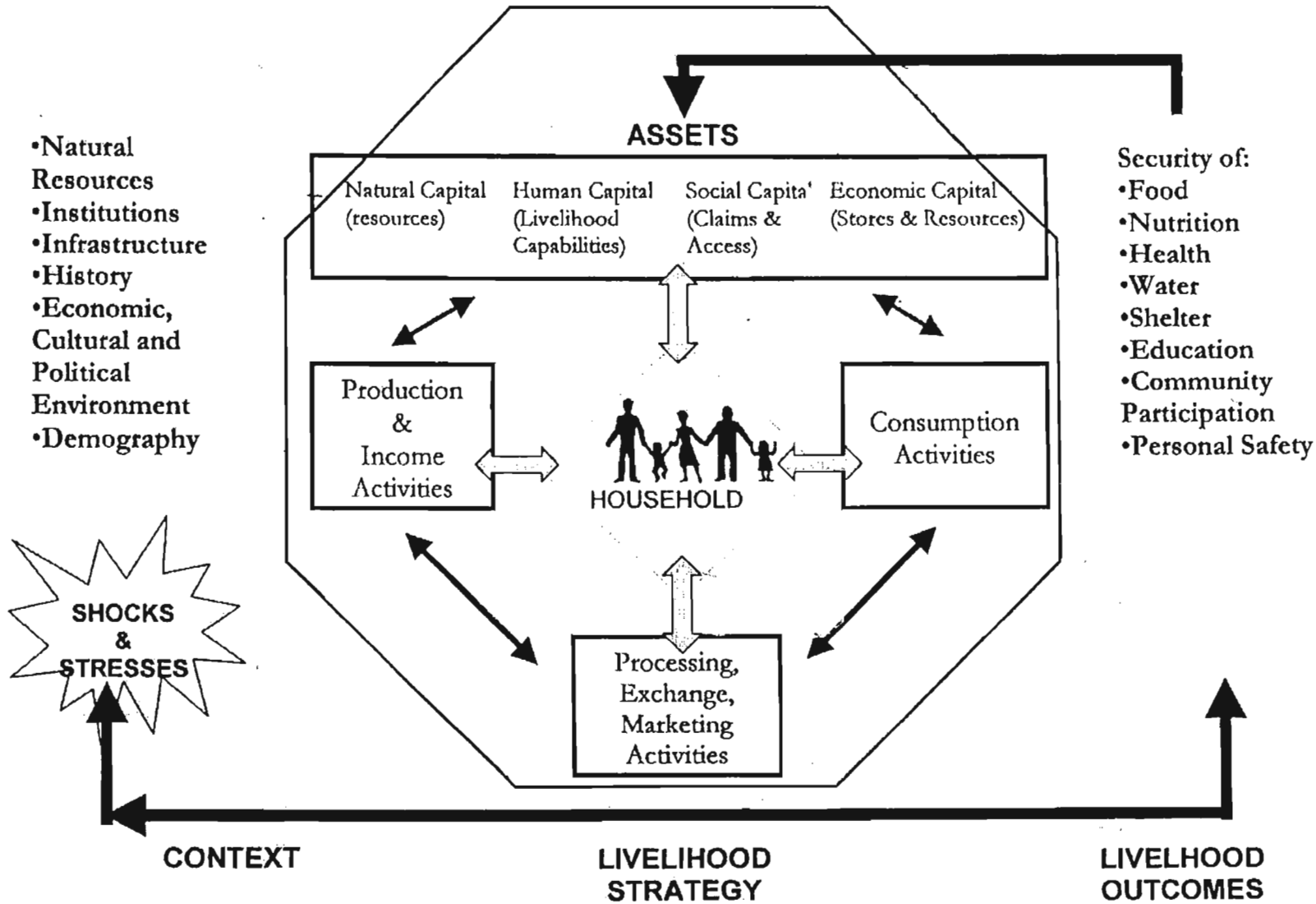
CARE'S LIVELHOOD SECURITY MODEL

ASSETS

Natural Capital (resources)	Human Capital (Livelihood Capabilities)	Social Capital' (Claims & Access)	Economic Capital (Stores & Resources)

- Natural Resources
- Institutions
- Infrastructure
- History
- Economic, Cultural and Political Environment
- Demography

Security of:
- Food
- Nutrition
- Health
- Water
- Shelter
- Education
- Community Participation
- Personal Safety

Production & Income Activities

HOUSEHOLD

Consumption Activities

Processing, Exchange, Marketing Activities

SHOCKS & STRESSES

CONTEXT

LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY

LIVELIHOOD OUTCOMES

Figure 1: CARE's HLS Model Taken from Operationalizing HLS: CARE 2000.

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4.   Theoretical Approach To Analysing HLS

In order to analyse the HLS framework, it became helpful to separate HLS into three distinct modes the framework is used and understood. The three diverse ways of understanding and using HLS are: a participatory methodology, a management strategy and as a project cycle tool. Analysing HLS in several different usages exposes the myth that HLS is simply a `programmatic framework'. Additionally, it helps to address one of the major questions in this article -- whether rational management techniques and people centred approaches can successfully be married to one another in practice. Basically, HLS is used by NGO's as an apparatus created to combine flexible learning approaches with management based tools. Understanding HLS as a participatory methodology links the framework to a people centred approach: whereas viewing HLS as a management strategy or a project cycle tool aligns the framework with a management based philosophy. Therefore, it is necessary to probe the ways HLS is utilized and how each way is received and understood in the field. By doing this systematically, both the success' of CARE's HLS programming and the tension inherent in merging people centred development approaches with management-based strategies can be observed. Additionally, examining HLS in relation to donors and direct versus indirect partner implementation of HLS depicts how the framework is transferred from organization to organization, the rationale behind the transfer and whether or not the transfer of programming ideology is successful. Ultimately, the different ways HLS is understood, used and transferred is bound within the dynamics of the aid chain. Therefore, the overarching goal is to examine the aid chain system using CARE's HLS programming framework from a headquarter level in the United States to its use in South Africa and Lesotho.

5.   Research Methodology

The research employed for this project is a mixture of personal work experience, key informant interviews, four different surveys and on-site observation. At each site, core and field staff were interviewed or surveyed. Following a three-month internship at CARE USA's Headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia with the Partnership & Household Livelihood Security Unit; specific field research was conducted in Johannesburg at CARE's Southern and West Africa Regional Management Unit, CARE'S country offices in South Africa and Lesotho, and various partner organizations throughout South Africa. In total, 16 personal interviews and 24 surveys were carried out during the year of 2001. The importance of choosing the two

country offices of South Africa and Lesotho cannot be underestimated. While they are near one another and under the same regional umbrella, they have two different approaches towards programming and the use of HLS. Further discussion of the research methodology and findings is available in the forthcoming School of Development Studies report (Dill, forthcoming).

6.   HLS as Participatory Methodology

HLS is not a methodology. It is a programming framework. HLS utilizes different methodologies to gather information in order to design a project. However, my research shows that in Southern Africa some program and field staff understand HLS in terms of participatory methodology only. One field worker stated, "HLS training taught me how to collect information from the people in our programs." Overall, there is little distinction between HLS as a framework for understanding households and their livelihoods, and participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) as a means of collecting information from the community. These misunderstandings of HLS mean that what the staff actually understand and engage in is PRA methodology under the guise of HLS. The TEAM project in Lesotho, which is highlighted as a successful HLS program, is one such example whose core and field staff have significant difficulty explaining the difference between HLS and participatory methodology.

One reason for this confusion is that while most staff have received some type of training on HLS, they describe this training as making HLS perplexing. This is because competent HLS training takes a commitment of time that many core staff find difficult to provide. The deepest understanding of HLS seems to come from the regional office and one or two top members of the country offices. These top members of the country offices, at least in the case of Lesotho, are international staff rather than local people. This is significant because it means that national staff lack a clear understanding of CARE'S overall HLS initiative. Additionally, staff are often trained in HLS and then do not use the framework. Often, if they do use the framework, it is only for an initial HLS assessment, which is then equated with PRA. Core and field staff can only be expected to become competent in a framework they consistently use. Fundamentally, the blurring between methodology and framework is problematic for four main reasons: lack of methodological variety within the framework, lack of successful examples of the HLS framework, lack of ability to filter

information gathered, and lack of staff capacity. If HLS is only understood in terms of participatory methodology, then, this can hardly be considered a successful programming strategy that addresses all the development failures HLS claims.

7.   HLS as a Management Strategy

HLS can also be understood as a management strategy. One of the purposes of strategic management in development has been to demonstrate an organization's success. As such, different types of information and management strategies have been transferred down the aid chain as part of a `negotiated' process. However, as Goldsmith (1996: 1431) writes, "The methods of strategic management are supposed to encourage creative problem-solving, but the methods can also become ends in themselves, to the disregard of what they are supposed to accomplish". By advocating for HLS, headquarters can encourage inclusion of key elements within programs and maintain control over their country office activities. In this sense, HLS seems to be another method for Northern development experts to transmit their own vision of development to the south. Moseley-Williams (1994: 78) makes reference to this phenomenon when he writes, "It is as if the South is seen as a passive recipient of micro-projects, while policy debates and lobbying efforts are concentrated in the North". Acceptance for the HLS approach may have been mixed for this reason. My research found that, in general, staff feel that the HLS framework has been a top down process. Original purveyors of HLS argue that HLS was developed in the field, even in Southern Africa, and was then negotiated to the top. However, regardless of the actual origin of HLS within CARE, the sentiment of country office staff affects the way HLS is implemented. Only a small number of staff say they personally feel ownership over HLS. While there are those within CARE that truly believe in the approach, there are others that do not support the HLS framework. Of those that are critical of HLS, many believe the framework is inflexible, ineffective and fails to reach the poorest. Some staff members commented that HLS appears to be operational in theory; but in the field it is often unable to deliver upon its claims of improvement. This is due to a lack of finances, time, community commitment, and staff capacity issues at different sites. To some HLS is a programming framework that HQ can put on paper to discuss how it has improved its programming. However, in reality, the success in the field is less than clear.

8. HLS as a Project Cycle Tool

Finally, HLS can be viewed as a project cycle tool. Breaking HLS down into elements, as in the life of the program cycle, is common in CARE rhetoric. Thus, staff understand HLS as something that you can and should use throughout the project. However, my research found that in many programs, HLS is often used in the field for an initial assessment and then is neglected throughout the rest of the project. Even CARE SA, in training other partner organizations, found this to be a problem, a challenge that CARE acknowledges in several of its documents and training materials. One such document acknowledges that while some attempts to superimpose a livelihoods approach over existing programs were successful "in many other cases this resulted in extensive information gathering and analytical exercises which overwhelmed staff with data, but resulted in little real change in actual project implementation" (Drinkwater and Rusinow, 1999: 18). Some difficulties derive from the debate about whether HLS can be introduced midstream into a project. While many core and field staff advocate that it is possible, my research found that introducing HLS in midstream of a project is rarely done.

How effective is HLS when it is only used in parts of the project cycle? Additionally, what is the point of conducting an HLS assessment when the assessment does not affect the rest of the project? If use of HLS is both time consuming and costly, then it is highly important to benefit from the process of assessment. This means that HLS usage should be negotiated throughout the program cycle. Some CARE staff believe that the initial connection in CARE with HLS and the linear service delivery of the project cycle discouraged staff members from adopting the framework. Howes (1992: 381) explains this automatic process, "The proper management of inputs then sets in motion a linear sequence of causes and effects, which leads automatically to the intended impacts". Understanding HLS in rigid project cycle terms sets the framework at odds with its claims of flexibility and a learning oriented approach. Also, HLS claims to have improved monitoring and evaluating within the project cycle. However, my research showed that the monitoring was not consistently comprehensive and that problems within the project were not always addressed in a timely manner.

By analysing different interpretations of HLS, a clear tension between each use of HLS becomes apparent. These varied ways of understanding HLS send mixed messages to staff. Individuals become unwilling to adopt HLS and confused about its purpose and meaning. For

instance, if a field or core staff member understands HLS in terms of a participatory methodology but they also observe HLS being used in terms of a project cycle, which they view as inflexible, they will be less likely to learn, accept and put the framework into practice. Fundamentally, HLS, as it is designed, fails to achieve all it claims to in development programming because the ideologies and tools within the framework counteract one another. Regarding the experimentation of using rational management tools in the context of participatory and learning approaches, CARE's experience with the HLS programmatic framework shows that this fused process has led to insufficient success in the field and cannot realistically be done.

9. CARE's Use of HLS and Donor Influence

While CARE is a northern based NGO that maintains its own fundraising and provides some funding for country offices, most of its funding base derives from international donors. Each country office applies directly to donors for funding of individual programs as does CARE headquarter programs. The pressure on CARE USA's headquarters from donors not only comes from funding but, also relationships, discussions and the desire to maintain footing. Understanding how and if donor issues are significant in CARE's use of HLS at both a HQ and country office level is important. Of particular interest and study in this project has been CARE's HLS approach in relation to DFID's livelihoods focus.

CARE decided to institutionalise HLS in 1994; DFID only introduced its livelihoods approach in 1998 (Carney et al., 1999). Instead of CARE following the development process of a major donor, as is often asserted by donor critics, this particular donor changed its programmatic framework after several large NGO's had done so. A glimpse at DFID material on livelihoods depicts this learning process. For instance, in DFID's Sustainable livelihoods: Lessons from early experience (1999) manual they quote several of CARE's livelihoods examples and work. But the CARE and DFID models are different in several significant ways. The most important difference in the two models is that CARE's HLS framework focuses more heavily on the household level and all of the members within the household (including intra household relations). The fact that these models have maintained their differences is again proof of CARE's leverage.

However, since CARE country offices apply to DFID and other donors separately for funding, it is important to question whether country offices are consistently supported by DFID

because of their livelihoods focus. With regards to HLS and donors, one CARE regional official stated, "We have too big a portfolio to say that we are going to have all of our projects of the same quality and standard and you have different donors interested in different things so that is part of the challenge." CARE's own study on HLS reported on CARE Mozambique and CARE Haiti (CARE South Africa and Lesotho were not a part of the study). It stated that following CARE's HLS mandate, pleasing some donors was challenging (Alexander, 2001). While the aid chain studied for this research project had a variety of donors, the bulk of project support in South Africa and Lesotho is from DFID. However, most CARE staff members in country offices felt they used a livelihoods approach because of CARE's focus rather than DFID's. One staff member said, "We use the approach because it was developed in CARE and it just so happens that DFID also uses a similar approach. This is helpful because it means we can work together on these issues." The fact that DFID had a similar mindset supported the relationship and the funding between the two organizations. Thus, in this case study, donor influence contributed to but took a back seat to headquarter pressure from the North.

However, there appears to be a disparity between the experiences of CARE's country offices and other organizations that use livelihoods approaches. All staff seemed aware that donors, especially DFID, like and encourage the use of HLS. Some smaller organizations even said that donors offered them funding if they incorporated livelihoods into their program. In one example, an organization claimed they were told by DFID that they would only be funded if they incorporated a livelihoods approach into their program. They were sent livelihoods trainers, rewrote their proposal to include a livelihoods framework and then their proposal was accepted. Thus, some partner organizations admitted to throwing in the word 'livelihoods' into program proposals because it was something that donors like to see. One director of an NGO in South Africa stated, "The joke now is that if you want funding, make sure you include sustainable livelihoods" (Bornstein and Smith, 2001: 4). Another director said, "A lot of people feel in order to get funding from DFID they have to put the word [livelihoods] in whether they understand it or not" and "You can tell which programs are DFID funded because they all say livelihoods in it." This donor led-thinking can be identified within DFID documents on livelihoods that refer to DFID's `operationalising' of livelihoods. One document states, "Currently, DFID is in the process of extending discussion of sustainable livelihood ideas and

assessing how they fit with other existing procedures (i.e. country programming systems) and approaches... (Carney *et al.,* 1999: 6)."

These organizations, in many cases, have been forced to accept a donor programming strategy that has inherent ideological contradictions and provides minimal bargaining power for southern NGO's to affect local programming. It is clear that even if DFID and CARE's process has co-evolved, specific donors like DFID are encouraging livelihoods usage as a condition of their lending. This has negative ramifications for smaller and locally based organizations whom have limited funding and time and are being forced to focus on a programming framework with questionable legitimacy.

10. CARE's Direct or Partner Implementation of HLS

Given the difficult terrain of NGO's and partnership, it is important to understand how CARE's HLS process is implemented by partnerships and the actual nature of these relationships. In 1994, the word partnership first appeared in CARE's strategic plan. While a current CARE document states that, "Resistance to the idea of partnering is no longer a major issue in CARE" (Stuckey, 2001: 2), staff members admit to a wide range of partnerships.

However, CARE USA has worked hard at a HQ level to develop its philosophy about partnerships. A recent partnership document from CARE states, "This [new] insight means that the rationale for partnering cannot be framed in terms of what our partners contribute to CARE's work, but rather how can CARE complement the ongoing work of many organizations in society, the sum of whose activities must contribute to achieving our mission" (Stuckey *et al.,* 2000: 1).

Though CARE is a large organization and does provide some funding to country offices through matching grants, CARE does not provide funding to partners. In that sense, CARE has the ability to promote the idea of partnership without the inequality that donors foster. However, although CARE does not provide funding, its country offices are still a part of a northern NGO with significantly larger resources, skills and staff than the local organizations with which they tend to partner. This means that the risks for partner organizations and CARE in attempting to engage in partnerships at a country office level are significant. Thus, understanding CARE's HLS usage in relation to its local partners is important.

In order for CARE to maintain and expand its use of HLS, it must have significant control over partner program design or partners who are familiar with and support the use of

HLS. Crucial to partnership success is choosing partners with high staff capacity and proficient information flows. Official CARE documents heavily promote partnerships in relation to HLS as a means to "replicate, scale-up and spread programs, in order to achieve a more widespread impact" (Frankenburger *et al.*, 2000: 10). As such, CARE HQ claims partnership is an essential part of HLS and attempts to encourage use of HLS through partner implementation. A good example of a CARE program that is conscious of potential partnership complexities is the SCAPE program in South Africa.

In South Africa the entire scope of CARE's SCAPE project is providing HLS training to partners, including both civil society and government. In this sense, CARE is propagating its framework by providing training and support to local organizations. However, observation of the project shows that this transfer is done in a sincere and balanced manner. One staff member who had recently been engaged in training in another South African province said, "Our goal is to work with the NGO to develop an HLS system for the organization to use practically, not to control specifically how the other organization works in a community." A significant difference in the SCAPE program appears to be the way top-level staff understand partnership. While partners have hesitations regarding HLS, especially since funding is not involved to most, they join out of their desire to increase their own capacity and programming skills. It is important to note that CARE SA's partnership with two key smaller organizations in the SCAPE project allowed the three organizations to apply for joint funding from DFID. If CARE had not engaged in a partnership with these two organizations, then, they would have been too small to apply for this funding themselves. Hence, with these two key organizations CARE must be even more cautious in respect to partnership boundaries. In contrast, in Lesotho partners do not appear to have a sense of the livelihoods approach nor is partnership heavily emphasized in the various programs, although, there seem to be plans to change this. In sum, there does not seem to be a balance within country offices regarding HLS and local partnership. Each country office appears to have a different experience with partnership and this affects how HLS is used and imposed on partners.

Within the regions studied there appears to be tension around partner relations. For instance, one of CARE SA's main partners said they have to be forceful in communicating that they are only partners with CARE SA and not CARE Lesotho or CARE regional and HQ offices. Most of CARE's partners in the field do not view CARE as a donor but their weight is

felt through uneven capacity issues and their identity as a northern NGO. From CARE's partner organizations, regarding HLS, there is a perception that organizational capacity is an issue in relation to expertise, cost and time. Partners claim that they do not have the necessary staff skills to engage in this type of programming. They also have mixed feelings regarding HLS because they have yet to see concrete results due to the lengthy process of the HLS framework and the lack of examples of success within the region. In this regard, one partner said, "CARE assumed people would hook into HLS sooner and they have not."

Additionally, local NGO partner respondents stated that with regards to HLS usage stakeholders within the community are considered a potential problem because of traditional leaders acting as gatekeepers between the community and the NGO. There are also fears that the HLS process is too extractive from communities without guarantee that the community will benefit or that the NGO will be able to address the needs. Additionally, partners feel threatened by HLS because it has the potential to expose that they do not have a deep understanding of the communities they are working in. For example, during an HLS assessment, that CARE SA helped a local CBO (community based organization) in the Eastern Province facilitate, a disagreement within the community over the work that the CBO had been involved in became apparent. As the assessment was in process, the local CBO and CARE SA staff was asked to leave by the chief because they were viewed as the cause of the community divide. Finally, CARE SA's partners believe that while CARE has helped them implement a HLS assessment there has been little follow up. This can be seen through the staff of CARE SA as well since they are unable to gauge the success of their partner's assessments. However, CARE SA says they are addressing this issue. It is important to note that success or failure to address this gap will be a defining measure of the extent of partnership between CARE and its affiliate CBO's. For these reasons identified above there is serious resistance among some NGO's to adopting the HLS framework.

In contrast, some organizations have embraced the use of HLS and even adapted it to fit their own needs. These organizations claim using the HLS framework helps them plan projects that are effective, promotes better targeting and provides accurate information about the needs of the community. One of CARE SA's major program partners claims to have modified the HLS model that CARE SA now uses. To their credit, these organizations appear committed to learning about the communities in which they work. They also appear to have enough funding

and staff capacity to engage in this type of programming. While this positive capacity building relationship is exciting and means that CARE's aid chain has upward linkages, on the whole they are minimal. Therefore, referring to the NGO-donor relationship as a partnership can only be determined on a case-by-case basis. However, with large international NGO's like CARE that are not as dependent on a single donor and have fruitful partnerships, the term can be used cautiously. CARE must tread lightly, however, in attempting to have partners implement a framework that has mixed success within its own organization. Considering the negative consequences of contradictory programming strategies for local organizations is of utmost importance for northern NGO's and donors.

11. Conclusion

Local NGO's suffer from unequal power relationships with northern NGO's and donors in relation to programming strategies. While NGO's have increased in size, scope and competition in the north, their southern counterparts have remained less significant as controllers of the development process. CARE and other organizations have altered their programming structure and introduced best practice strategies to be used in the field; however, they have also left their southern partners and implementers out of the process. As Alan Fowler (2001: 13) writes, "Learning is often transferred as packages of best practices that others have to apply".

This paper is based on a case study of CARE and its HLS programming framework from a HQ level to implementation in South Africa and Lesotho. HLS is examined in relation to three different ways it is used and understood -- participatory methodology, management strategy and project cycle. HLS is then examined in ways it is transferred to organizations -- through donors or direct versus indirect partner implementation. This case study showed that through HLS CARE has attempted to move towards a people-centred development process; however success has been inadequate because of the contradictory management tools integrated into HLS programming. Despite these programming contradictions, HLS continues to be passed down the INGO and donor aid chain and this transfer calls into question the legitimacy of the aid system. Ultimately, HLS has potential as a programmatic framework, provided attention is given to its inherent contradictions in implementation and diffusion.

Accountability within the aid chain must not only run upwards. There needs to be an adoption of accountability procedures regarding programming frameworks with both forward

and backward linkages. Ultimately, the imbalance of the aid chain must be addressed more profoundly than it has been by international NGO's. INGO's must embrace a willingness to confront the power issues inherent within the aid chain; including whether programming frameworks can successfully be amalgamated with people centred development thinking, how programming strategies are used in relation to donors and partner organizations and whether the lack of power among NGO's continues to encumber their actions in local development. The findings of this study of the aid chain in Southern Africa conclude that the inherent contradictions in programming ideologies that are being forced onto southern NGO's agendas have serious negative implications for development practice.

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