

SUSTAINABLE, ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH (SALA) - A PRAGMATIC, EVIDENCE-BASED, PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS AND CONSERVATION

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Context / Summary

Effective, participatory and inclusive community engagement is critical element for the sustainable conservation of habitat and wildlife. This is particularly relevant in areas where there are high instances of Human Wildlife Conflict (HWC), poaching and/or illegal wildlife trafficking. The aim of such engagement is twofold, firstly targeting community interactions towards fostering an attitudinal change to how wildlife and its conservation are perceived. Secondly, working with communities to identify, and realise, tangible opportunities for people to actively contribute to wildlife protection / conservation.

Historically local rural communities have often been at the frontline of human wildlife conflict; having to deal with the negative impact of wildlife (e.g. crop destruction from elephants) without much support or compensation. These are often the poorest of people who are dependent on subsistence agriculture for survival. This situation affords an opportunity to position the community as a potentially effective partner offering ongoing, on the ground support for wildlife conservation.

The livelihoods approach proposed here is to re-establish that partnership in addressing the needs of communities by helping to identify, create and realise opportunities for sustainable alternative livelihoods through an evidence-based approach and encouraging local community members to participate directly in wildlife protection activities, essentially making people part of the solution rather than the problem.

Through these activities it is hoped that communities will make a positive correlation between increased opportunity and the need to preserve and protect natural resources, which directly and indirectly provide these opportunities. These may include strengthening information networks; community scouts to assist rangers; and developing channels for the public to report crimes. This also allows communities to be engaged in options which suits their requirements and provide both food security, increased resilience and economic uplift, reducing dependency on unsustainable use of natural resources.

Our approach is summarised in our concept / definition of '**Sustainable Alternative Livelihoods Approach**' (SALA), which we describe as:

*"Interventions that are specifically targeted towards engaging communities to identify, create and realise opportunities for **alternative livelihoods** (i.e. activities that directly support wildlife conservation efforts). This is part of a **sustainable livelihoods** strategy aimed at enhancing the community's capabilities and assets, to increase resilience, while not undermining the natural resource base."*

In terms of how these strategies are implanted we strongly recommend that they are part of an adaptive management, iterative approach of assessment, planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (APMEL).

Defining Livelihoods

The term ‘*alternative livelihoods*’ is used in many contexts, but a widely accepted definition is for interventions that aim:

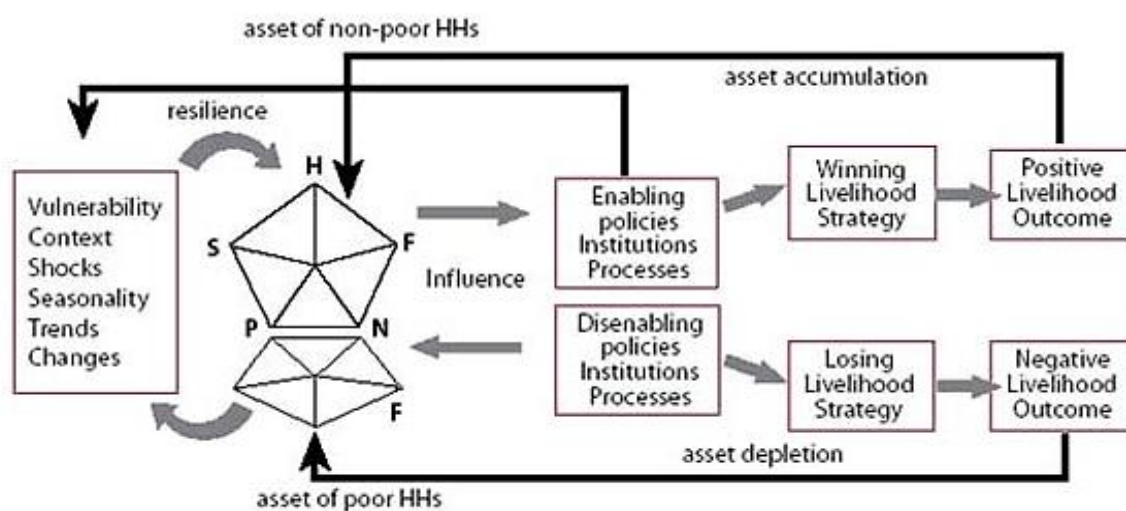
“...to reduce the prevalence of activities deemed to be environmentally damaging by substituting them with lower impact livelihood activities that provide at least equivalent benefits.” (Wright et al., 2015).

At the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress in 2012, a resolution was passed calling for a critical review of alternative livelihoods projects (ALPs) and the development of best practice guidelines to ensure sustainable benefits to species, ecosystems, and people (IUCN 2012). This review found that ALP interventions were often based on “*flawed assumptions about people’s needs, aspirations, and the factors that influence livelihood choice*” and as such they are unlikely to achieve their conservation or human development objectives. Instead a more holistic, sustainable livelihoods approach is recommended. (Wright et al., 2015).

‘*Sustainable Livelihoods*’ is itself a somewhat contested and evolving term, but it can be defined as:

“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, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base.” (Schoones, 1998)

This asset (or capital) based definition can also be expressed in a Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (see below), which can be used to inform how different livelihood strategies can either lead to positive (i.e. assets accumulation) or negative (i.e. assets depletion) livelihood outcomes.



Key

H = Human Capital **N** = Natural Capital **F** = Financial Capital **S** = Social Capital **P** = Physical Capital

- **Human capital:** skills, knowledge, the ability to work and good health. Good health is not simply a means to earning a livelihood; it is of course an end in itself.
- **Social capital:** the social resources that people draw on to make a living, such as relationships with either more powerful people (vertical connections) or with others like themselves (horizontal connections), or membership of groups or organisations. Generally, relationships of trust, reciprocity and exchange that the poor can draw on in

times of need, and that lower the costs of working productively together. Like human capital, social capital has an intrinsic value; good social relationships are not simply a means, they are an end in themselves.

- **Natural capital:** the natural resource stocks that people can draw on for their livelihoods, including land, forests, water, air, animals and so on.
- **Physical capital:** the basic infrastructure that people need to make a living, as well as the tools and equipment that they use. For example, transport and communication systems, shelter, water and sanitation systems, and energy.
- **Financial capital:** savings, in whichever form, access to financial services, and regular inflows of money.

Figure 1: Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (DFID, 1999)

By combining these ‘alternative livelihoods’ and ‘sustainable livelihoods’ concepts we can get a pragmatic approach which promotes the development or targeted alternative livelihood strategies that are based on solid assumptions and which are designed to be sustainable from both a human development and wildlife conservation perspective. This leads to our definition of the ‘**Sustainable Alternative Livelihoods Approach**’ (SALA) as:

*“Interventions that are specifically targeted towards engaging communities to identify, create and realise opportunities for **alternative livelihoods** (i.e. activities that directly support wildlife conservation efforts). This is part of a **sustainable livelihoods** strategy aimed at enhancing the community’s capabilities and assets, to increase resilience, while not undermining the natural resource base.”*

It is important to consider that in addition to specific livelihoods interventions there may be a need for other **targeted community initiatives** which are aimed at building trust with the community. These initiatives usually have a short-term focus and may not be directly linked to the conservation aims of the project, but never-the-less are important to facilitate the desired attitudinal change. For example, this could be looking to address a basic need of community, e.g. access to safe water, which is required before the livelihoods intervention can begin. Ideally these initiatives would be enablers for the main livelihoods work (so there is some link) and can also afford a chance to develop trust, or a **social licence to operate** (SLO), with the community. In the context of the SALA approach we consider these community initiatives as important facilitators but distinct separate to the main livelihoods strategies, which should be directly linked to the conservation goals.

Approach / Methodology

Based on extensive experience working on community engagement / livelihoods in the region, Imani believes that the most sustainable way to achieve effective and lasting community engagement and impact is to work in partnership with communities and stakeholders in a participatory and iterative way to:

- Understand the issues from all the different perspectives
- Work together to identify potential win-win solutions
- Engage the community to effectively implement solutions that can both...
 - Reduce the risk of human / wildlife conflict; and
 - Provide the community members with opportunities for alternative sustainable livelihoods.

With this in mind, Imani proposes a phased approach to community engagement / livelihoods, as outlined below.

Phase 1: Initial Scoping and Engagement

The first phase initially focuses on identifying suitable communities to work with and then visiting them to better understand the local landscape in terms of existing social, economic and political factors.

Phase 2: Community Consultations and Surveys

Building on the data from phase 1 more detailed data is obtained from consultations with the target communities via surveys, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The analysis of this data will inform the identification of a number of (1) **targeted community initiatives** (see definition above) and (2) **alternative livelihood interventions**, with the potential to engage communities directly in conservation (e.g. wildlife crime prevention).

Phase 3: Design and Planning

Each potential livelihood strategy /intervention will be assessed for suitability in terms of specific criteria including: local demand, social impact, market access, access to finance, sustainability planning, and environmental impact. The project will directly engage with the community (usually via a committee) working with them in a participatory manner to scope and design an intervention as part of appropriate community engagement strategies.

Phase 4: Capacity Building and Implementation

An understanding of the relationship between a protected area and its surrounding human population in terms of these costs and benefits is crucial to the design and implementation of projects seeking to promote conservation with development. With this in mind and before the specific livelihoods implementation starts, a number of trainings will be carried out in the community, with a broader aim of raising the awareness of the importance of conservation. This is then followed up with specific capacity building required for the livelihoods interventions themselves. Once the community training has been completed, Imani will work with the local communities to launch the interventions.

Phase 5: Assessing, Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (APMEL)

Phase five will focus on monitoring the progress of the interventions as part of an **adaptive management** approach. In an effort to ensure the interventions are targeting development for local communities in a holistic (social and material) and sustainable sense, while at the same time not having a negative impact on the wildlife or the environment, a Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) framework will be used here to look at the impact on: human, social, financial, physical, and natural capital.

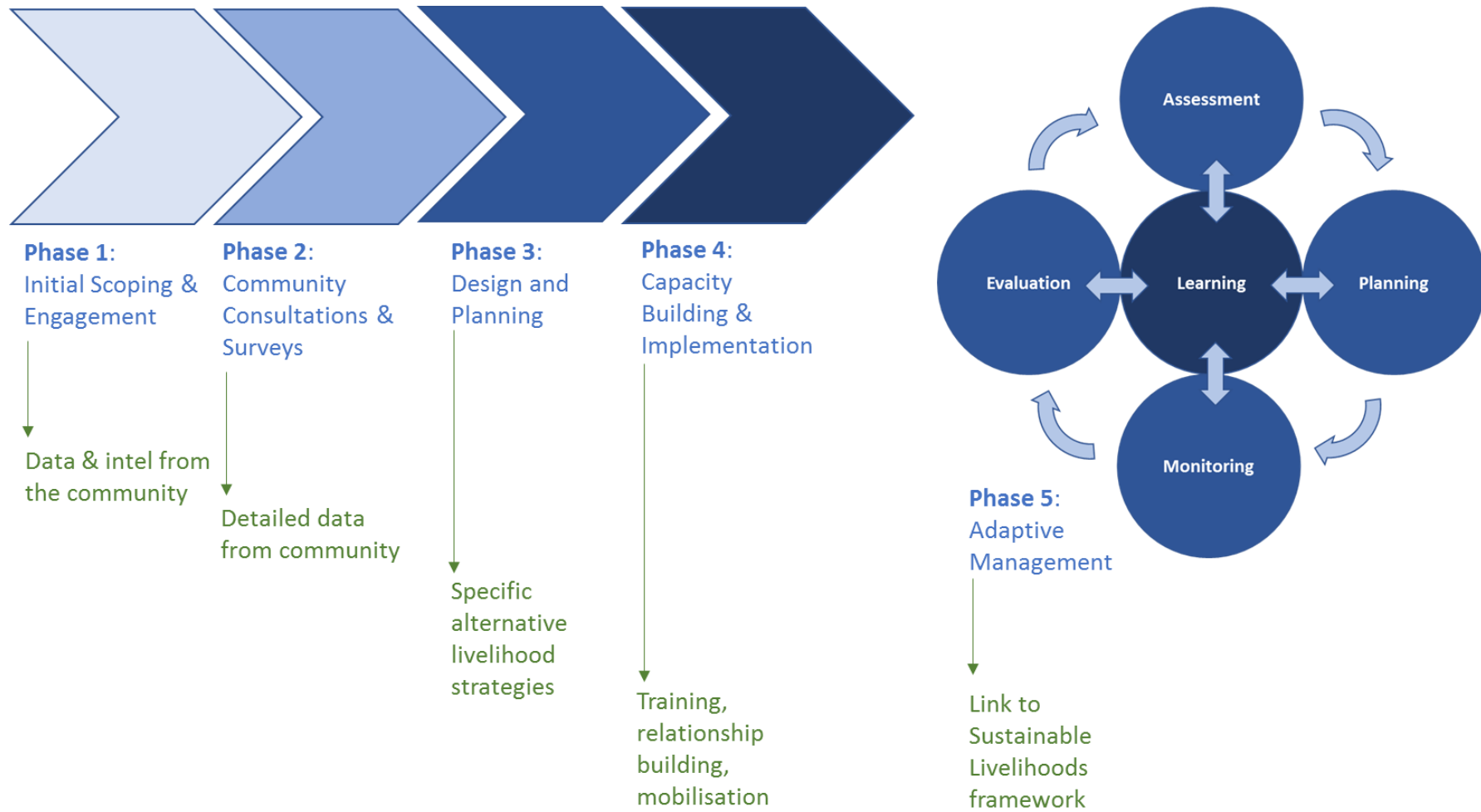


Figure 2: Sustainable Alternative Livelihoods Approach