

The Four Contexts

The use of six capitals produces livelihoods outcomes – 4 arrows – depending on the context of the six capitals. Two households could use identical capitals in a similar manner, and yet could have different livelihoods outcomes. The explanation for the differences exists in the context in which the households and the capitals exist. In other words, context is the conditional variable in the livelihoods framework. The contexts, in turn, contribute to the presence, and quality, of capitals and their use. The contextual variables offer scope, as well as limit, the possible livelihoods options and livelihoods outcomes.

The context is analysed into four parts:

- Environmental and ecological
- Techno-economic
- Distribution patterns
- Investment and consumption patterns

However, it must be remembered that the context is a whole and the division is for analysis only. Being different facets of the same phenomenon, the parts interact with each other in a dynamic fashion. A very clear distinction between these may not always be possible.

Environmental and Ecological Context

The environmental and ecological context denotes the larger natural and social environment within which a society (and the household) exists. The seasons, with all their sunlight and variations in climate, the moisture present in the air, the presence of vectors and pests that carry diseases and destroy crops over large tracts, and sea water intrusion are all examples of the larger natural environment.

Despite all capitals being same, the impact of this context can be seen from the following examples.

- One place has swarms of mosquitoes (and malaria) while at another, the mosquitoes are absent. This simple factor might explain a lot of variation in the livelihoods outcomes for the people in these areas. The repeated onslaught of malaria in the place with mosquitoes delays the interaction of the area with outside world. The productivity of people here could be lower due to the bad effects of malaria. Combined with TB, the situation could worsen. The expenditure of the persons on health could be high. The high death rate among the young ones in the community has its own psychological effects on the people. The concern being limited to survival in the near future, the investments made by these people in their other assets become lower. The place with mosquitoes has a different trajectory of growth compared to the other.
- At two places, the sea cuts into the land. At one place, it is just a bay; and all the rough tides of the sea are seen. But at the other, a natural formation separates the water and hence, it is quite. Despite their depth being equal, the place with calm waters grows to become a natural

harbour and a port town. The other may not be so fortunate. Sea shells may be available in the place where the sea is quite.

- People of a few villages on the coast of Bay of Bengal, in Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh, fish a lot. These villages have no direct connectivity with the mainland. A launch, owned by a family in one of the villages, needs to bring the fish to the main land. The launch serves the native village on time, but does not reach other villages on time. As it is difficult to manage these timings, the fishermen do not make a good living despite all the natural capital. It is very difficult for one to lay road for places like this. Thus, the context constrains the development of physical infrastructure.

Examples of the larger social environment are the war-torn communities and societies that face repeated onslaughts from outsiders, as in the case of guerrilla wars. Stable law and order, with a sense of justness and openness, ushers in a different kind of livelihoods outcome, than is otherwise possible. In the words of Amartya Sen, "Democracy leads to less hunger."

Techno-Economic Context

This context tells us the state of progress on the technical and economic front, and how these forces act on the locale under discussion. Techno-economic context offers scope as well as limits the possibilities for effective and efficient use of the resource base in the production of goods and services to exchange in the market to create wealth. It denotes methods adopted to add value (form, place and time value) to various products, and is a continuum between primitive to the modern. This includes the policy climate and the interaction/exposure to outside markets. Some of the other aspects in the techno-economic context that influence our lives deeply are the distance from major markets, presence of industries in the vicinity, major roads nearby, economic policies, structure of the markets, quality of electric power and other services like drinking water, etc. The state of research institutions and how the community affects the research agenda dictates the direction of evolution and use of techno-economic context.

The following examples illustrate the impact of this context on the livelihoods options and outcomes.

- Development workers identified that the interior Parlakhemundi and Ganjam districts are highly suitable for growing pine apple. But the tribal communities in these places had to move with head loads of pine apple to the nearby shandys to sell their produce, which was considered uneconomical by these people. The communities ate whatever they could and the rest were allowed to rot. Thus, the lack of connectivity with markets.
- Can you expect people from interior places where candle provides brighter light than the electric bulbs to be able to use any electrical motor?

The exposure to technology and resultant behaviours could be a factor that offers scope, as well as limits, the livelihoods options. In a highly agrarian economy of the delta areas of Andhra Pradesh, the agricultural labour were not exposed to the shift system. Entrepreneurs recount that even rice mills could be run only from 8 am to 5 pm. Similar was the case with coconut fibre (coir) extraction units that came up later in the vicinity. Unable to break-even under conditions of low capacity utilization, some of the early plants had to close down. Similar constraints were reported for organizing fruit growers in the Himalayas to serve Delhi market directly - getting their agreement to a change in the time of plucking the fruits and getting them ready for pick-up was a major social mobilization exercise.

The techno-economic context came into clear relief from the behaviour of flower growers near Cuddalore. While there were no market and natural resource constraints, the flower growing was limited only to about 1/4th acre. Only the household labour was used to pluck the flowers and hand them over to the transporter, a public bus. These flower growers could not consider employing outside labour as they knew only of the whole day (full time) labour. They could not think of a half-day (part-time) labour, even during summer season when full time employment from other agricultural operations was not available.

Distribution Patterns

The distribution of wealth that gets produced in a society could assume various patterns. The distribution of existing resources, know-how, income, infrastructure, influence, patronage by outsiders, knowledge, education, exposure to outside world, skills, access to energy, technology, information and markets all influence the livelihoods options and outcomes.

The following examples indicate the impact of distribution patterns on livelihoods outcomes:

- In one village in western Andhra Pradesh, all the land belongs to one family. The lands are fed by a tank and provide employment for all the others in the village. Thus, all villagers are dependent on this one family for their survival, almost like serfs, and are called to work at will by the landlord. There is a very low scope for innovation - only the owner can innovate. Others cannot spend on diversifying their livelihoods as they live at the mercy of the landlord.
- In contrast, in a village in the southern part of Andhra Pradesh, all the villagers have small parcels of land. Lot of experiments were done at individual level. These results were shared among themselves, and this led to tremendous variation in crops and regular income.

The distribution of knowledge also matters. In a village, the SCs were not allowed near the choupal are cut-off from the discussion on the efficacy of

several measures to contain the pests. Thus their agricultural productivity depends more on the seller of the pesticides.

In a village in Eastern Karnataka, the students are encouraged to take up several streams of education. In contrast, students in Western Andhra Pradesh pursue a set pattern of graduation, followed by B. Ed. This contrast explained a lot about the presence of a larger percentage of employed youth in the former village. In addition, the diverse skills also translated into advice from diverse perspectives and thus strengthened overall entrepreneurial activity in the village.

Another dimension of distribution context that is often ignored in development interventions is the general reputation of workers of a particular area. Some areas are known to supply construction labour to all major dams across India. On the other hand, labourers from some areas are not preferred even by the local landlords or entrepreneurs. The landlords and entrepreneurs in such areas get the labour from outside, despite higher costs involved. Unless the intervention works to change these perceptions, the areas with low reputation may not be able to improve. Similar is the case with an inclination to cooperate with others. Success of cooperatives in Gujarat is often attributed also to such behaviour among the people.

Patterns of Investment and Expenditure

The patterns investing or making expenditure in securing food, clothing, health, housing, education, credit, insurance, production and employment offer scope as well as limit the possibilities of further progress. The differences in the pattern can be explained in terms of culture, opportunity, exposure to financial instruments, etc.

A large domestic savings base has always been recognised as a key to development. Similar is the case at the household level.

An important investment could be time and energy at one's disposal. Certain behaviours are associated with most successful people. One of these is their reading habit. Despite all pressures that success brings, the successful people dogmatically invest their time in reading more and updating themselves. On the other hand, many youth are not seen investing their time in such pursuits. The farmers in a drought prone village of Anantapur, who were motivated by a local NGO, demonstrated their resilience by investing their free time in picking up stones from their fields and making their fields more productive.

The following examples illustrate the impact of this context on livelihoods outcomes:

- Two persons have similar incomes. But one person stays on a platform, while the other stays in a house. Because the person on the platform

does not have an address recognised by the government, he would not be able to save what he has earned. On the other hand, the person in a house has some security and hence is able to save money. Because of the ability of save, and the difference in their expenditure pattern, the life style of these two persons and the livelihoods outcomes are entirely different.

- There are two farmers, both progressive and equal in all the endowments. But one farmer has a larger family, with the consequent higher expenditure. This difference between the two farmers results in totally different livelihoods outcomes.
- Some people plant trees with long life like mango or tamarind in their backyard, and with little investments in terms of money and time. Even after a generation, the tree comes to rescue in the event of risk to the family.

One important difference between the capitals and the contexts could be noted here: While one can assess and understand the capitals that can be accessed and used by a household by looking at the village itself, one may need to go beyond the village to understand the context.

The discussion shows that for sustainable impact, livelihoods interventions need to be based on a good understanding of the contexts. Efforts to improve the capitals with out taking into account the contextual factors that constrain the development and use of the capitals could lead to frustration. In such cases, interventions at the level of contexts would be need of the hour.