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Review

Having Faith in the Sustainable Livelihood Approach: A Review

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Abstract: This review paper focuses on the development and application of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA), especially regarding its limitations, both in terms of its formulation and link to theory as well as practice. The SLA has proved to be a popular approach, not least because it is holistic and 'people-centered', and forces a requirement that livelihoods, along with their vulnerability and institutional contexts, are well understood before interventions are designed and implemented to help the community. However, its theoretical underpinning has been questioned, and some have pointed to the weak representation of important dimensions such as power, including its link to globalization, and culture, with the latter including faith. This paper explores the various ways that these issues have been addressed by using faith as a lens, and makes a case for a 'Sustainable Living Approach' (SLivA) to provide a stronger dovetailing with the capabilities/functionings approach of Amartya Sen. However, there is a trade-off between the complexity of frameworks and their practicability, and more work is needed in this area, especially in terms of the potential contribution of technologies such as very-high-resolution Earth Observation, machine learning, and artificial intelligence.

Keywords: sustainable livelihood approach; capabilities; culture; faith

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1. Introduction

The Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA), also referred to as the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), which was developed primarily in the late 1990s [1–5], remains a popular approach employed by development practitioners to help maximize the effectiveness of interventions designed to support disadvantaged communities [6,7]. The following definition of the term 'sustainable livelihoods' has been provided by Chambers and Conway [8] (page 7): "*A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long-term.*" The SLA can be thought of as an analytical and diagnostic framework for the analysis of livelihoods as a starting point to help derive concrete suggestions for intervention to enhance and make them more sustainable, along with the monitoring of whether the intervention has achieved its goal [9–13]. As Nee and Mansur [14] (page 2) have noted, "*SLA offers the prospects of a holistic and integrated approach in combating poverty in this century.*" However, while the SLA has been derived primarily as a framework to help guide development interventions, it has also been used to help guide research.

The SLA and its influence within the thinking of development agencies has evolved somewhat since its inception, but it remains a popular framework in both development and research contexts [15–18]. As an illustration of this popularity, Figure 1 presents the number

of published articles (using the Google Scholar search engine) that mention 'Sustainable Livelihood Approach' at least once over the period 1990 to 2023. The number of articles increased rapidly from the year 2000 and, at the time of this writing, is between 600 and 700 publications per year. Not all of these would necessarily be scientific journal papers, and, indeed, Google Scholar was selected primarily because it spans a broader range of publication types, such as conference/workshop material and even reports that may be authored by those working in development. Given the avowed 'people-centric' nature of sustainable livelihoods and, therefore, the SLA [13,19,20], it is unsurprising that culture and, indeed, religion have often been included as important dimensions to the SLA, but these are typically considered in terms of how they support livelihood. This is a utilitarian perspective, but it is an understandable one given that many religions have structures and systems in place to help support their members, especially at times of shock and stress [13]. Indeed, there can be sophisticated international partnerships of faith-based institutions in place to help support people, be they members of the faith or not [21–23]. A shared culture within a community can also provide support mechanisms for livelihood and help them respond to stresses and shocks, and culture can even provide a source of income. Hence, it is perhaps unsurprising that published studies based on the application of the SLA often refer to culture and religion, and this is illustrated in Figure 1, with the two lines showing the percentage of publications that also mention 'culture' (solid line) and 'religion' (dashed line) at least once. While the percentages have declined somewhat since 2010, for 'culture', they have been between 70% and 90% of all publications. For 'religion', the percentages are smaller but have still been between 30% and 50% of all publications.

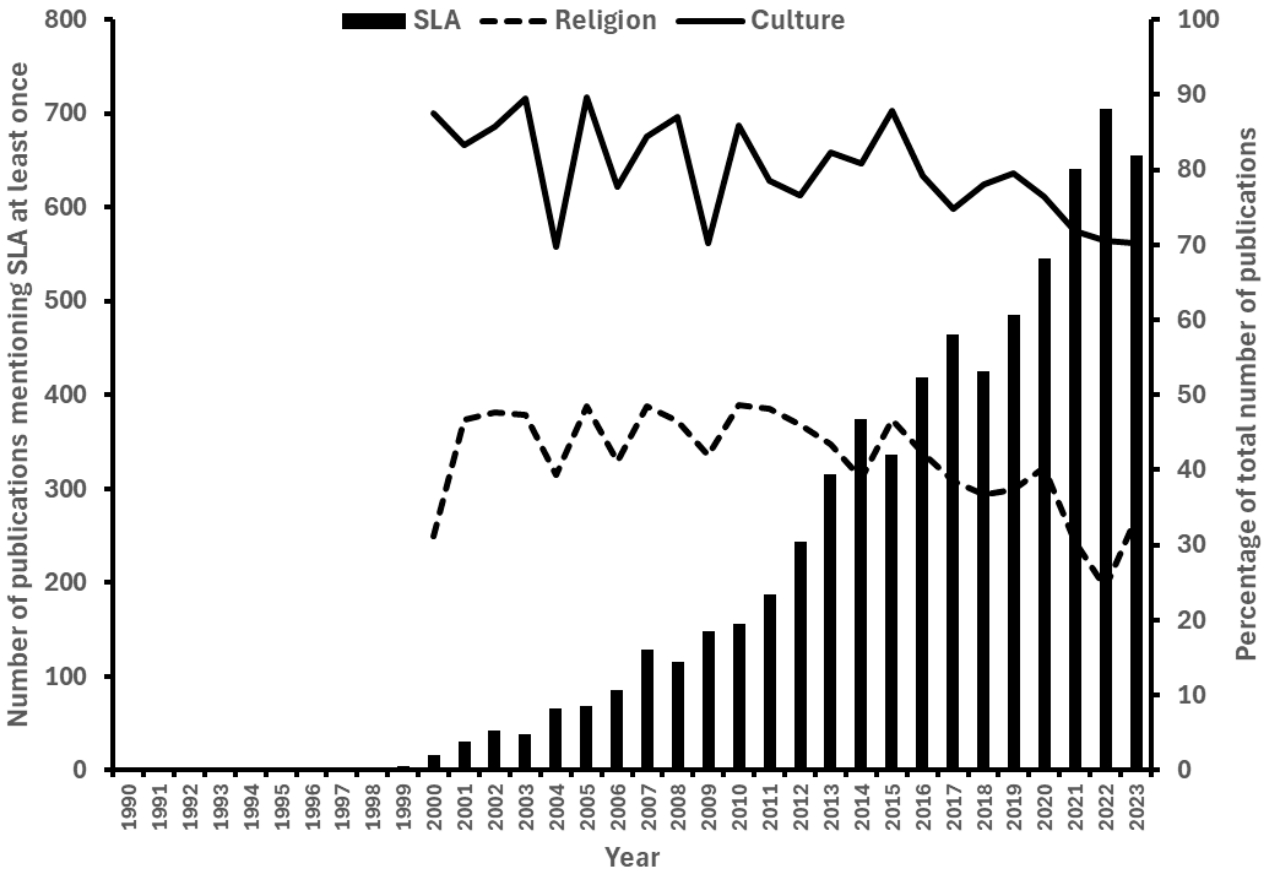


Figure 1. The number of publications found via Google Scholar that mention 'Sustainable Livelihood Approach' at least once. The two lines show the percentages of these counts that also mention 'culture' (solid line) and 'religion' (dashed line).

The published material that forms the basis for Figure 1 is highly diverse in terms of focus. To illustrate the diversity of topics and issues covered in the literature using the SLA, Table 1 lists just a few examples spanning the years 2004 to 2022. Many of the published examples span natural resource management (agriculture, forests, and fisheries) and are focused on rural contexts, but the application of the SLA is much wider than that, and includes tourism, water supply, entrepreneurship, energy provision, ergonomics, salt farming, and recycling, to name but a few. In many of these examples, the focus was on a specific community and/or group, and many of them are geographically located in the developing world; although, as noted by the inclusion here of the one example from Canada, this is not always the case.

Table 1. Examples of studies published between 2004 and 2022 that have used the Sustainable Livelihood Approach as a framework to help guide the research.

Issue/Topic	Country	Reference
Joint Forest Management projects	India	[24]
Promotion of ergonomics in industrially developing countries	Many	[25]
Extent and causes of food insecurity	Ghana	[26]
Effects of the tsunami on fisheries and coastal livelihoods	Sri Lanka	[27]
Effects of HIV/AIDS on the livelihood of banana farmers	Kenya	[28]
Recycling of garbage	Canada	[29]
Impact of income on calorie intake	Mexico	[30]
Adoption and utility of solar water heaters in low-income areas	South Africa	[31]
Impact of Small Entrepreneurship on Sustainable Livelihood Assets of Rural Poor Women	Bangladesh	[32]
Development of community indicators for mangrove forests	Thailand	[33]
Information and communication technology and sustainable livelihood of the youth	Malaysia	[34]
Merging capabilities and livelihoods	Case study in Nepal	[35]
Urban greening in informal settlements	South Africa	[36]
Sustainable groundwater resources management	Indonesia	[37]
Sustainability of tourism-related livelihoods	Thailand	[38]
Sustainable irrigation management and farmers' knowledge	Iran	[39]
Livelihood of salt farmers	India	[40]
Assessment of Poverty Alleviation Measures	China	[41]
Analysis of female-headed households' livelihood strategies	Ethiopia	[42]

While a utilitarian perspective on culture and faith within the SLA is understandable, it does raise some intriguing and important questions that stem from the theoretical underpinning provided by sustainable livelihood—the foundation stone of the SLA as an analytical framework. The irony here is that a key theoretical basis for sustainable livelihood is the capability approach of Amartya Sen [43–45], yet that approach also regards culture and faith not solely in a utilitarian sense but also as important dimensions of people's lives that they would wish to sustain alongside livelihood. Put another way, one of the key theoretical foundations upon which the SLA as an analytical framework has been built regards culture and faith not just as 'inputs' but as 'outputs' to be considered alongside a sustainable livelihood. Yet, this quite different perspective has received little attention in the SLA literature, where the sole focus is upon the use of the framework to provide an 'evidence base' for improving livelihood [13]. But widening the consideration of the SLA to include such an analysis could potentially have repercussions in terms of its practicality, especially within a development context. Hence, there is a need to explore efforts taken to date to formally include faith, or, indeed, a wider consideration of culture, in the SLA, and to explore the ramifications that emerge from this. How has faith been included within the modifications to the SLA framework since its emergence in the late 1990s? What lessons can be gleaned from the literature about how faith can be included as a valued functioning rather than just a support (an 'input') to livelihood, and what would be the trade-offs in terms of practical feasibility? In effect, faith is used here as a lens to

explore the theoretical basis and assumptions that sit at the heart of the SLA, along with its practicality. While published reviews of the SLA abound, there are none to date which seek to explore the inclusion of faith in the SLA, and, in particular, how this has ramifications for the theoretical basis of the framework and the trade-offs with practical feasibility. That is the important gap in knowledge being addressed in this paper.

The paper begins with an outline of the theoretical foundation of sustainable livelihood. This is somewhat complex, as the development of sustainable livelihood as an approach to development arguably has many influences, but, in the literature, one of the most significant of these is the capability approach of Sen [43–45]. This section is followed by a brief summarization of how the concept of sustainable livelihood has been operationalized via the SLA and the assumptions that have been made to help achieve this. The section will cover the outline of the SLA and the centrality of the 'capitals', vulnerability, and institutions within the framework. It is important to note here that the intention is not to set these out in detail, as that can be found in many other publications, such as [13]. Instead, the aim is to provide the reader with a brief overview of the SLA and its key elements, and how these have been explored and contested within the literature. The result of the latter has been an evolution in the thinking behind the SLA, especially in terms of how aspects such as culture and faith have been addressed. The final sections of this paper will pull all of this together and re-view it through the lens of the theoretical foundation for the SLA, and discuss the ramifications for its practicality.

This review was based on the literature published on the SLA and faith, and the engine employed for the search was Google Scholar. The search terms were 'Sustainable Livelihood Approach' and 'Religion'. As noted above, the reason for this is that Google Scholar includes a wide range of publication types, including academic journal papers but also reports and conference/workshop papers. This breadth of type of publication is an important consideration here, given that the SLA has its origins in the planning of development projects rather than research.

2. Theoretical Foundation of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach

2.1. Sustainable Livelihood and Human Development

The SLA was always intended to be the basis for a holistic approach to the analysis of the sustainability of livelihoods [13], but it is by no means the only or even the first attempt to do this. For example, the 1970s witnessed the implementation of many so-called 'integrated' rural development (IRD) projects supported by the World Bank, among many other funders [46–49]. IRD as a concept sought to integrate many important components of community development, including education, health care, water supply, infrastructure (e.g., roads), and agriculture, although the extent to which such interventions, and many others like it, genuinely provided a joined-up approach has been questioned [49–52].

The notion of a 'sustainable livelihood' is often said to have arisen out of the United Nations-sponsored Brundtland Commission on the Environment and Development, and its report entitled 'Our Common Future' [53,54]. Further momentum to the concept and operationalization of sustainable livelihoods was provided by the 1992 Earth Summit [55], but the ideas at the heart of sustainable livelihoods are arguably much older. Other influence can be traced to 'Agro-Ecosystem Analysis' from the 1960s [56], 'farming systems research' [57], 'political ecology' [58], and 'new household economics' [59], all of which emerged in the 1980s. However, an especially strong influence on the concept of sustainable livelihood was the rise of the notion of 'human development', promoted most notably by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from 1990 onwards as an alternative to a dominant emphasis at the time on economic development [60]. Human development, as espoused by the UNDP, was influenced by the 'capability approach' developed by

Sen [43–45], as well as other authors who explored the importance of 'vulnerability' [61–64] and access to resources [65,66]. As the UNDP stated in their first 'Human Development Report' published in 1990 [67] (page 10): "*Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices. In principle, these choices can be infinite and change over time. But at all levels of development, the three essential ones are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. If these essential choices are not available, many other opportunities remain inaccessible*." "*Enlarging people's choices*" [67] (page 10) can be achieved by widening the access to education and training, as well as ensuring that people have access to good health care and an income that will support them. Indeed, human development has often been claimed to have resonance with so-called 'basic needs' approaches, where human beings are assumed to need a basic set of resources (food, water, clothing, shelter, etc.), to assessing and tackling poverty [68,69].

2.2. Capabilities, Functionings, and Basic Needs

While human development was based on the work of Sen, he did make the point that there is a distinction between 'basic needs' and what he regarded as 'capabilities' [43], even if he seemed to have some misgivings over the choice of words: "*Capability is not an awfully attractive word. It has a technocratic sound, and to some it might even suggest the image of nuclear war strategists rubbing their hands in pleasure over some contingent plan of heroic barbarity*" [44] (page 31). Instead, "*the capability approach to a person's advantage is concerned with evaluating it in terms of his or her actual ability to achieve various valuable functionings as a part of living*" [44] (page 31), where "*Functionings are what a person achieves or is able to be or do*" while "*Capabilities are a person's opportunity to achieve functionings*" [45]. For an individual, these 'functionings' correspond to states and activities that they would regard as constituting their living, and, given the implied breadth of what 'living' can mean, there may then be many 'functionings'. They span having a good livelihood, being healthy and safe, but can also include being happy, calm, content, and having the freedom to immerse one's life in a culture, follow a faith (i.e., religion), or to be spiritual, where the latter two will be treated in this paper as being distinct [70]. This matters, as many people in the world identify with a faith, and the freedom to follow a particular faith is an important consideration within the capabilities approach [45]. Hence, functionings are not solely a matter of having enough of the 'basic need' type of capability (food, water, accommodation, clothing, etc.) to live, although these are clearly important, but also for people to have capabilities which allow them to achieve what they want to get from life—what they want to be and do [44]. Many of these functionings will also be intertwined; the freedom to follow a faith may help to provide happiness as well as a sense of contentment.

2.3. Religion, Spirituality, and Sustainability

It needs to be acknowledged at this point that faith and, indeed, spirituality have long been explored in terms of their relationship to sustainability. An example is provided by eco-dimensionality, which has been reviewed in this journal and is defined as "*the integrative expression of environmental values, caretaking norms and sustainable practices in all aspects of religion, including symbolism, myth, art, ritual, and ethics, that recognizes and specifically adapts to keystone environmental processes and ecosystemic or geo-physical diversity*" [71] (page 4). A further example is provided by eco-theology, which is the "*interrelationship that can be established, based on Christian faith, between the revelated God, the Creator of all things, and the earth with all living creatures, as 'the whole household' of God*" [72] (page 2); while this definition is expressed in terms of Christianity, it applies equally to all faiths. For spirituality, an example is provided by the theory of eco-spirituality and the perspective it takes on the relationship between people and the planet [73–76]. Some have even made a case

for eco-spirituality beginning to replace eco-theology [72]. Even taking a non-religious and non-spiritual perspective, such as 'eco-humanism' [77], to the relationship between the richness of human engagement in the sciences and the arts, including literature, and sustainability can introduce a plethora of 'functionings' as broadly defined in terms of what people want to be and do. These are deep waters that do not need to be dived into here, but such analyses often bring in other key dimensions to sustainability, such as culture, ethics, social justice, and indigenous (or traditional) knowledge systems, and all of these should have a place within the SLA.

However, the capabilities at the heart of human development are very much focused on the supporting of livelihood almost as a subset, albeit important, of a rich landscape of 'functionings' that comprise 'living', and the SLA has been regarded by many as an 'operational vehicle' for the implementation of human development [78–80]. While the focus is on livelihoods and their sustainability as a narrow subset of all of the 'functionings' that an individual may regard as important for their living, there is nonetheless a lot to unpack here to provide the basis for a practical framework. Indeed, it is perhaps unsurprising that some have criticized the definitions of 'sustainable livelihood' as being "*unclear, inconsistent and relatively narrow*", and, as a result, this could result in "*conceptual muddle*" [81] (page 10). As a result, some have pointed to a disconnect between the capabilities approach as articulated by Sen and the SLA as a practical framework for implementing the concept of 'sustainable livelihood', influence from the former [35]. For example, Lienert and Burger [35] explored a number of these, and point to the vagueness of the capability approach as set out by Sen and others when it comes to putting it into practice. These authors put forward what they refer to as a livelihood-based capabilities framework, which includes an analysis of the causes of deprivation and, hence, how livelihoods can be enhanced and made more sustainable [35]. They make the following key point: "*The according assets, e.g., the forest or family, are regarded not only as the means to achieve ends but also as valuable ends in themselves. . .. Capitals can be perceived both as instrumental and as intrinsically valuable*" [35]. This is a point that surely should apply equally to culture and faith, as well as forests and family.

Nonetheless, these shortcomings of the SLA have not prevented its widespread adoption by development agencies, and, arguably, one of those at the forefront of developing and, indeed, applying the SLA was the UK Department for International Development (DFID) [82–85], following a 1997 UK government 'white paper' on international development, which stated that there is a need to "*refocus our international development efforts on the elimination of poverty and encouragement of economic growth which benefits the poor. We will do this through support for international sustainable development targets and policies that create sustainable livelihoods for poor people, promote human development and conserve the environment" [86]* (page 6). This push for the adoption of 'sustainable livelihood' thinking and the SLA as its operational framework in the late 1990s by the DFID in particular helps to explain the starting point of the surge in interest that is shown in Figure 1.

3. Outline of the SLA Framework

3.1. Capitals

The SLA framework is typically set out as shown in Figure 2 [13,80,87]. At the heart of the framework is an assessment of 'capitals', or what some refer to as 'assets', that underpin livelihood at the level of the social unit being analyzed, be it an individual, household, village, or community. These capitals are referred to as human, social, physical, natural, and financial.

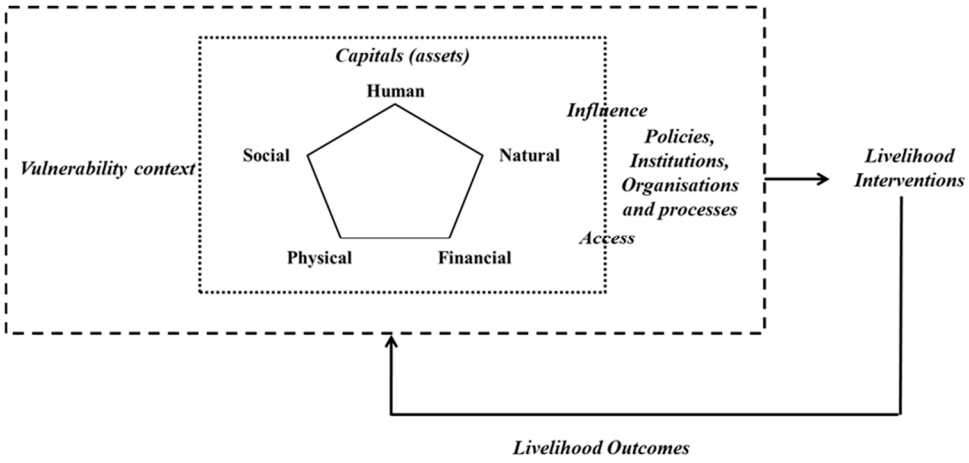


Figure 2. Outline of the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (adapted from [80]).

The use of the term 'capital' in the context of sustainable livelihood has its roots in the analysis of production. It derives from the Latin word 'caput', meaning 'stock', and Adam Smith (1723 to 1790) used the term to describe a factor of production comprising inputs from nature (soil, water, minerals, plant products, etc., all of which are natural capital), labor (human capital), and constructed capital such as machinery and buildings (physical capital). Money (financial capital) is used to pay for the inputs and revenue is derived from the sale of the outputs [88]. The SLA framework makes use of this notion of capitals underpinning production (in essence, an economic approach) and extends it into the capitals (or capabilities) underpinning livelihood; it is, in effect, a 'resource-based' view of livelihood [89]. One assumption here may be that having access to a diverse set of capital can provide greater opportunity (i.e., greater capability), as people can switch between them, as different capitals may become more important at some times than others [90]. The relative contribution, and, hence, the importance of the capitals to people's livelihoods may change over time [91], and, indeed, the livelihood outcomes are not static [7]. For example, rural communities reliant on agriculture for their livelihood are likely to face short-term seasonal patterns at play as well as longer-term trends due to climate change [92]. There is also a spatial dimension to consider, and while capitals can be quite local in nature, this can also change, and some elements may be relatively distant [91]. People may live far apart in quite different geographical contexts, yet they can still exchange capital, although this may be easier for some types of capital, such as financial and human (e.g., sharing information and knowledge), than for others [93].

3.2. Vulnerability and the Institutional Context

The sustainability of livelihood, shown in Figure 2, is assessed in terms of the vulnerability, or the opposite term resilience, of the capitals that underpin livelihood [94–96]. The vulnerability context is explored in terms of the trends, shocks, and stresses that the capitals may be subject to. Vulnerability can be assessed using available data sets, especially time series data and models of the impacts of historical shocks (e.g., drought, flooding, and conflict) and stresses on the capitals [97]. It is important to note that, within the SLA, the focus is on livelihood resilience and not just ecological resilience, although the two are intertwined [98]. Participatory methods can be employed to ask the communities about what they regard as being the trends, shocks, and stresses that are the most relevant and the impacts that they have had on their livelihood, and this should include the wider concerns of tradition and culture especially, as they can also provide support for livelihood [98]. Some capitals may not change much over time (e.g., land and buildings), while others, such as financial and social capitals, can be far more volatile. The vulnerability of capitals

to stresses and shocks, as well as their impacts, may also vary. A flood or drought, for example, can impact upon natural and physical capital, but can also impact on human capital as people migrate [99–103]. The vulnerability of capitals to stresses and shocks can also vary over relatively small spatial scales [31,104].

Institutions, including government, the private sector, and, indeed, the non-governmental sector, can play an important role in helping communities to develop prevention and mitigation strategies for shocks and stresses. Indeed, institutions of all kinds may be important players in the livelihood of communities, as they can be employers as well as providers of valuable goods and services, such as health care and education. Also included here is the legal context and the 'rights' that people may have in terms of access to capitals, as well as making use of them to support livelihoods [105]. Indeed, institutions may have influence over both the access and utility of capitals by helping to govern factors such as social relations, power structures, and market access [106,107]. As a result, this component of the SLA is often referred to more broadly as comprising 'Policies, Institutions, Organizations, and Processes' (captured by the acronym PIPs) or, more concisely, and arguably more clearly, as 'Transforming Structures and Processes' (TSPs), and "*offer(s) a way of assessing how organizations, policies, institutions, and cultural norms shape livelihoods both by determining who gains access to which type of asset, and defining the range of livelihood strategies that are open and attractive to people*" [108] (page 158). Both of the acronyms—PIP and TSP—are widely used in the literature and have their usefulness; hence, they will be used here interchangeably. The key point is that PIPs (TSPs) can provide an 'enabling environment' for supporting livelihoods, as well as limitations, brakes, and hinderances in terms of, for example, norms, rules, and regulations. However, much depends on the access of the community to PIPs (TSPs), as well as their ability to make use of the 'enabling environment' for supporting livelihoods. These may not necessarily be assured, and there can be a wide variation in terms of the power that people may have to make the most of any opportunities. Similarly, the community may also have an influence on the 'enabling environment', and the extent of this influence can also vary between members. For example, some faith-based institutions may have limitations placed on the access to the services they provide that favor the followers of their faith over non-followers [13].

3.3. Livelihood Interventions and Outcomes

Once all of the above is understood, and the points of weakness and opportunities for improvement are identified, then interventions can be planned and implemented to enhance the sustainability of livelihoods. In its original manifestation, the SLA was intended to provide the basis for the design and implementation of suitable interventions which can help make livelihoods better [11,109–112]. For example, an SLA may provide the evidence base for policy development [113–117], the creation of new indicators and indices [118–121], and to help inform other frameworks, such as multidimensional poverty classification, to help guide policy [122]. It has also been used to help design a program for the 'Development of Awareness of Religious Harmony Villages' (PDSKUB) in Indonesia [123]. As well as providing an evidence base for designing interventions, the SLA has been used as a tool for evaluating the impacts of interventions after they had been put into practice [124]. In addition to the use of the SLA to help plan and evaluate interventions designed to improve the sustainable livelihood of communities, it has also been employed in research to provide a theoretical foundation, or perhaps as a practical framework, to help plan data collection and analysis [125]. Indeed, the generic and holistic nature of the SLA framework means that it is not limited to any particular geographic or sectoral context, and while in its initial application the focus was more on livelihoods of rural communities, it has also been applied to help support communities in urban contexts [101,108], which includes such contexts in

the Global North via charities such as Oxfam in the UK [126]. Some have also promoted a 'Sustainable Urban Livelihoods Approach' (SULA) as a specialized form of the SLA [31].

The eventual goal of any sustainable livelihood intervention is the achievement of outcomes such as reduced vulnerability to stresses and shocks, maybe via a diversification of livelihood, and improved food security [7,117]. The outcomes themselves are often interrelated, and their sustainability is a central concern. Aiming for an enhanced agricultural productivity, expressed as the output relative to an input (land area, labor, etc.), using fertilizers and pesticides may help in the sense of a short-term increase in income for the household, but it may not be sustainable. Similarly, the provision of better health care can support human capital, and thereby lead to better food security and, indeed, vice versa. Nonetheless, in Figure 2, the interventions and outcomes are framed very much in terms of sustainable livelihood rather than other outcomes that people may regard as important, such as leisure, which can help with happiness and contentment [13]. Indeed, livelihood outcomes, as expressed in Figure 2, do seem to be relatively focused when considering the capabilities approach and the notion of "*various valuable functionings as a part of living*" [44] that surely go beyond a sole emphasis on livelihood.

As noted earlier, the SLA has repeatedly been claimed to be a 'people-centered' approach [13,19,20] and, as such, it should require the involvement of those intended to be helped [7,114,117,127–129]. Participation is not just a fundamental human right, given that people must have a say in any process designed to help them [60], but, on a more practical level, the community has the local knowledge needed to undertake the SLA and to provide the basis for planned interventions and livelihood outcomes [130]. A participatory approach to the SLA also means that there are opportunities for community-based learning and empowerment, which themselves can lead to benefits [131,132]. The latter can be especially useful, given that the SLA is a holistic analysis [12,49,133] built on a recognition that people may have multiple contributions which help support their livelihood [12], and that trade-offs are common, if not inevitable [134]. This complex interplay of actors, components, and trade-offs over time and space may not always be readily apparent even to the communities.

3.4. Critique

The SLA has had its critics, and its supporters often acknowledge that it should not be regarded as a panacea [110,135–138], especially as livelihoods, even within a single community, may be highly diverse [139]. The framework outlined in Figure 2 may be relatively simple in terms of content, but people's lives are complex, and the danger is that the analysis could lack depth, and miss important actors and interactions, such that the planned interventions do not have the desired impact or may even be detrimental. For example, some have pointed out that, despite the recognition in the SLA framework of the need to consider power relations, it nonetheless "*ignores the power relations and transformations to the lives of poor through globalization and other macroeconomic forces*" [140] (page 356). These larger-scale forces can, of course, be facilitators of livelihood, but they can also add to vulnerability. Indeed, it has been suggested that the SLA "*belongs to the group of holistic approach that seeks to capture the enormous complexity of development problems, but do so at the cost of focus, depth and analytical clarity*" [135] (page 251). For all its good intentions, people may be oddly under-represented in an SLA framework that has been explicitly designed to focus on them [13].

Its holistic nature does mean that an SLA can be a complex and time-consuming undertaking. Almost inevitably, it generates compromises in terms of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Morse and McNamara [13], for example, took two years, and with a limited focus on a small number of households from two villages in Nigeria, to

grapple with the key elements of livelihoods as a basis for exploring the desirability of an intervention, in this case, a microfinance scheme being planned by a Catholic Church-based development organization. A variety of different methods have been employed in published studies that have adopted the SLA as the framework, including surveys, interviews, and participatory methods such as focus groups [141]. Given the complexity involved in an SLA, it is perhaps understandable that many of the published studies have tended to focus on a specific community, sub-group, and/or issue/topic. Data collection for the SLA has mostly been via questionnaire-based surveys, sometimes in combination with in-depth interviews. Relatively small sample sizes have been used by some researchers to facilitate the more in-depth analysis of livelihoods [13,20,142]. Nonetheless, although, as shown in Figure 1, the application of the SLA has increased since its derivation in the late 1990s, it is, of course, possible that the methodological challenges have helped to limit the use of the SLA for planning livelihood interventions in the developing world. For example, Chitongo [139] (page 134) noted that the SLA "*has not been given the prominence that it deserves. It has been applied more on experimental basis than as a major development strategy aimed at alleviating the conditions of the poor*". This comment may have been made in 2013—and, since that year, the number of published studies using the SLA has more than doubled (Figure 1)—but it arguably remains a valid concern given the early promise of such a holistic framework for the analysis and achievement of sustainable livelihoods.

4. Faith and Sustainable Livelihoods

4.1. Knowledge, Psychology, and Culture as Capitals

What comprises capital within the SLA, and how it should be presented, has been the subject of significant debate in the SLA literature, and various approaches have been undertaken. Some authors have suggested that information, and the technology that facilitates its spread and use, should be seen as another capital distinct from physical and human capital [143,144]. From a different perspective, knowledge, including indigenous/traditional knowledge, can be conceptualized as being far more than just another capital to add to those in the center of Figure 2, and should rather be infused with all of the elements—capitals and resilience/institutional contexts. Hence, "*Knowledges, how they are constructed, understood and utilized, are vital to peoples' livelihoods. The foundations of a people's welfare (socially, mentally and physical health) are in the production and use of their knowledges. . . It is a process of knowledge construction and co-construction that makes the connection between people and the overall enabling environment that influences the outcomes of livelihood strategies thus improving community livelihoods. It brings attention to bear on the potentials people have in terms of their skills, social networks, cultural knowledges, and the ability to influence their socio-cultural, physical and health development*" [145] (pages 469–470).

But where does culture fit into Figure 2? The term 'culture' has many definitions [146], but, from the perspective of the SLA, Daskon and McGregor [147] (page 550) have noted that cultural capital is "*the systems of knowledge, beliefs, customs, and norms (embodied) that contribute to a wide range of performances and artistic products (objectified) [that] play a significant role in the everyday lives of the people*." This definition would include faith, and 'cultural capital' is both distinctive from social and human capitals yet spans them, although it arguably has not received the same attention within development. Critically, Daskon and McGregor [147] (page 559) have also noted the following: "*Currently culture sits outside the asset pentagons mapped by development agencies employing SLA (which currently focus on financial, physical, social, personal and human assets), it therefore falls outside conventional livelihoods analysis and practice. This omission is lamentable as we believe SLA provides the most appropriate and immediate vehicle for exploring and enhancing cultural capital and bridging conceptual disconnections between past, present and future. It also provides means to reconceptualize*

livelihoods as more than income and resilience, and instead something that also incorporates pride, tradition and connectivity to place. . .. For planning and policy purposes this would involve, at the very least, the expansion of the asset pentagon to a hexagon to reflect and recognize the importance of embodied and material forms of culture to sustainable livelihoods." However, while it has been noted that the SLA, as set out in Figure 2, ostensibly says little about culture, this is perhaps unsurprising given the focus on livelihoods and the predominantly Western origin of the SLA [19,148]. But, as noted earlier in Figure 1, the term 'culture' has often appeared in the SLA literature, and there have been efforts to formally include 'cultural capital' alongside the others in the SLA. An example of the latter is provided by Hidayat et al. [149] with their study of fisherfolk livelihoods in Indonesia. Similarly, Kunjuraman [20], in an SLA study of community-based ecotourism in Malaysia, included what they referred to as 'socio-cultural' capital.

A third addition to the list of capitals worth mentioning is that of 'psychological' capital, which has been suggested within the field of entrepreneurship. Psychological capital has been defined as "*the ability of entrepreneurs to overcome difficult situations such as economic crises*" [89] (page 3); this is a sort of 'resilience mindset' that can be framed by aspects such as the values, beliefs, and norms of entrepreneurs [89]. It is, thus, about "*the individual mindset that enhances or hinders willingness and ability to take advantage of opportunities (like irrigation schemes) despite prevailing constraints. If individuals are endowed with positive psychological capital, their entrepreneurial drive is enhanced, and they will most likely develop the tenacity necessary to undertake the entrepreneurial process*" [150] (page 601). Whether 'psychological capital' defined in this way is solely a prerogative of entrepreneurs is debatable, and one could argue that it may apply equally to anyone having to face challenges in their lives. Indeed, one could perhaps make a case that 'spirituality' comes within the remit of psychological capital, given that it is not the same as faith [70] and arguably has a better fit there than as a part of cultural capital.

Including all three of the proposed new capitals—culture, knowledge, and psychological capitals—into the SLA generates something akin to what is presented in Figure 3. Here, these are treated as more capitals, and so the center of the diagram changes from a pentagon to an octagon, and no doubt it could go further. Even so, the capitals shown in Figure 3 already look like adding significant orders of complexity to the SLA.

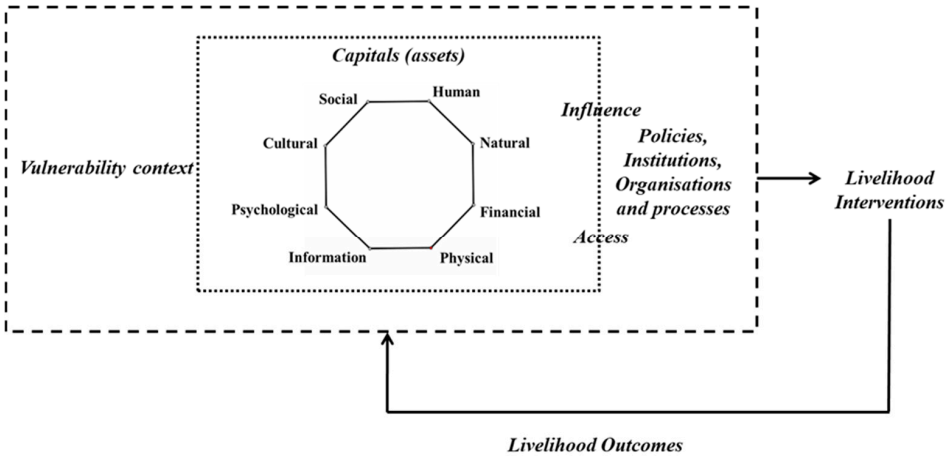


Figure 3. Modified version of the SLA shown in Figure 2 with more capitals (cultural, psychological, and information) included.

However, this is not to say that communication, knowledge, culture, and entrepreneurship have been entirely absent from the original five capitals of the SLA, even if their presence is more implied than explicit. For example, while natural capital in the SLA is

traditionally thought of as comprising goods and their associated services, such as the soil and water needed for crop and tree production, water for drinking, washing and cooking, uncultivated plants for food and medicine, and wild animals for food [151,152], it also has much in common with the ecosystem goods and services (EG&S) framework [153–159]. Natural capital within an SLA can be readily mapped onto the notion of 'ecosystem goods', and some (e.g., [160]) have argued that natural capital in the SLA should be expressed in monetary terms, which also has resonance with many of the formulations of the EG&S framework. But the key point in the EG&S framework is that these capitals/goods can be the basis for 'services', and that includes the support for recreation, aesthetic, culture, and, indeed, faith and "*spiritual benefits*" [156] (page V). An extension in the EG&S framework from just having access to goods (capitals) to the services that these goods provide is clearly an important one, but, rather oddly, it is missing from the more static representations of capitals in the SLA that are often found in the literature [35]. This is especially so since Sen and others in the 'capability approach' do include what they refer to as 'conversion factors', which are intended to cover a multitude of influences at play in the ability of people to convert capabilities to functionings [43–45]. What seems to be missing with the diagrammatic representation of capitals in the SLA is a more explicit and dynamic sense of the services they are providing to help support sustainable livelihoods. They can be accommodated into the SLA diagram by putting 'services' at the heart of the capital pentagon, as shown in Figure 4, which also provides an acknowledgement that the capitals interact to provide these services. For example, machinery (physical capital) requires expertise (human capital) for it to deliver the services needed to support livelihoods, and there is clearly space here for entrepreneurship to play a role. There is much complexity in the conversion of capitals to services, and this includes cultural facilitators and constraints, as well as more individual factors such as knowledge and a willingness to take advantage of opportunities. Indeed, the addition of services in Figure 4 is admittedly a rather clumsy diagrammatical device, and a better option will be discussed later in the paper. On the other hand, it does need to be acknowledged that some have regarded cultural values and norms, including religious ones, as potential constraints to an understanding of opportunities as a basis for planning interventions—they are seen, at least by some, as potentially imposing limits to what can be done [148].

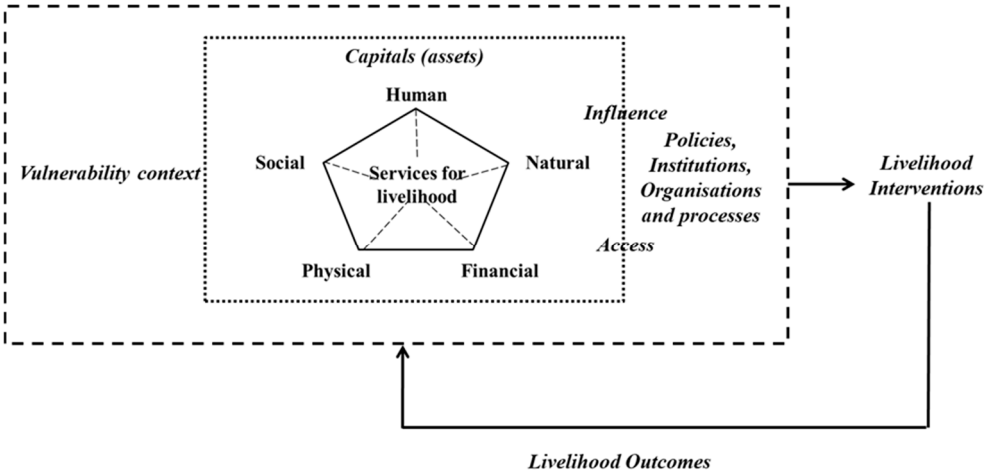


Figure 4. Version of the original SLA diagram shown in Figure 2 but with the services provided by the capitals to support livelihoods made more explicit at the heart of the diagram.

4.2. Social Capital

As noted above, rather than list culture as a separate form of capital, as shown in Figure 3, an alternative would be to consider it as being a part of the other capitals, such as

social capital [161]. As faith, spirituality, and religion are often included within definitions of culture, social capital would also seem like a natural home for them [146]. Social capital is the most recently conceptualized of all of the capitals shown in Figure 2. While it appeared in the economic literature of the 19th century [162], it had a variety of meanings, and the current conceptualization of the term dates, in essence, to the early 20th century [163,164] before re-emerging and gaining traction in the 1950s [164–170]. Social capital has been defined as "*resources that individuals can access thanks to their membership in a network, and includes both the resources accessible through direct, individual connections as well as the ones that are available to all the members of a given network thanks to the relationships within the network itself*" [171] (page 58), or, put another way, "*social capital deals with cooperation in groups and networks within groups of people*" [172] (page 631). It would seem reasonable to assume that such cooperation may take time to be developed, given the need for shared values and norms, as well as trust [173,174], and, by extension, "*social capital is frequently a by-product of religion, tradition, shared historical experience, and other factors that lie outside the control of any government*" [175] (page 17). Hence, social capital can be thought of as a resource derived from being a member of social groups and networks [165,176,177] that are themselves typically built on shared norms, values, and trust, which helps the members to cooperate for their mutual benefit [178,179]. Thus, it is easy to see a deep relationship between social capital, culture, and faith, given how these can provide the basis for such shared norms and values. However, it is important to note that many other secular groups and networks exist based on politics, occupation, leisure, and so on [92], and that people can at the same time be members of many groups, both faith-based and secular [180].

Nonetheless, social groups and networks need to 'work' for livelihoods to be considered as a part of social capital, with a key assumption being that people who are better connected will have better support and access to opportunity, and, hence, will do better in terms of their livelihoods [181]. For example, Mahato and Jha [182] explored the impact of social capital on the entrepreneurship of women in India, and noted that "*the strong network and community interactions of women entrepreneurs with their business stakeholders contribute significantly to their ability to recognize innovative ideas, emerging opportunities, new approaches and possibilities for expanding their entrepreneurial venture*" [182] (pages 457–458), which, in turn, had positive benefits for their sustainable livelihoods. Thus, "*social capital is the contextual complement to human capital*" [183] (page 202); to use a vernacular expression, 'It's not what you know, it's who you know', where the 'what you know' is a part of human capital, while the 'who you know' is part of social capital [164].

But having social capital is just the starting point and using it to positively support sustainable livelihoods is another matter [169,175,184]. There are many studies which have pointed to the positive contribution that social capital can make to livelihood, including technology adoption [185,186], enhancing indigenous knowledge [187] and knowledge transfer [188], enhancing the resilience to disasters [178], addressing environmental problems [189,190], helping with employment opportunities [191], and ecosystem management [192]. But the members of groups may also cause friction, which can have detrimental consequences. For example, Aliane et al. [193] noted a negative relationship between insecure employment in the hospitality and tourism industry and work within teams, which can result in "*organizational conflicts, destructive behavior, and practices that weaken team performance as a result of engaging in team-detrimental activities*" [193] (page 15). The same has been noted within faith-based social groups, and an example is provided by Morse and McNamara [194], who noted how individuals in Nigeria, especially community leaders, who engaged in theft while being members of a microfinance group, can generate much distrust and ill feeling, such that the entire group can collapse. Levien [195] (page 79) noted that social capital can have a 'dark side', leading to "*an exclusion, exploitation, or*

monopolization of resources" by those who are members of groups and networks, but have negative impacts on others in the wider community who are not. Criminal gangs and terrorists, including those using terror to espouse a particular faith [123], may have an abundance of social capital, and this may indeed benefit the livelihoods of its members, but it would be detrimental for wider society.

Finally, it does have to be acknowledged that the framing of social capital as set out above is not without its critics [166,167,196]. One author has argued that social capital has become a label which covers too much and hides as much as it reveals, and even that "*some authors employ the term [social capital] not for its conceptual cogency but rather in the hope that it might give their work more visibility*" [197] (page 1). Another author noted the following: "*it* [social capital] *is a totally chaotic concept, drawing its meanings from the more or less abstract studies or tidal wave of case studies on which it depends. This, in turn, has led to a critical literature along a number of lines which essentially reflect the imprecision with which the dual notions of 'social' and 'capital' have been used and combined. . .. it can never be clear where the capital ends and the social begins*" [166] (page 8). Others, however, have pointed to this diversity in the meaning of social capital as a strength [171].

4.3. Is Faith a Capital?

One can argue that the production-focused origin of the capitals conceived to be at the heart of the SLA is limiting and does not match the breadth of what Sen originally had in mind with his capabilities approach [35]. As Bebbington [90] (page 2022) has noted: "*People's assets are not merely means through which they make a living: they also give meaning to the person's world*." Capitals are not only 'things' that support livelihood but should also be viewed in this much broader light of supporting what people want to be and do, and that includes their wishes to see a wider change in society. After all, the 'functionings' in the capabilities approach are far more than people just wanting to have a good livelihood, and extend to achieving what they want to achieve from life—their dreams and ambitions, not just for themselves, but for wider society. This includes facets such as wishing to have pleasure and to engage within their culture, as well as a desire to follow a faith and be spiritual [13]. People's 'lives' are clearly far bigger than their 'livelihoods', and this point is captured by the criticisms noted above, that human development and, by extension, the SLA resemble 'basic needs' approaches to poverty assessment [68,69]. This is not to say that culture is unimportant for livelihood, but that culture is not only about livelihood; there is a significant difference here.

4.4. Putting the People Back into SLA

The danger of a sole focus on livelihood is, ironically, that the SLA does not achieve its necessity of being 'people-centered' in approach [13], and there have been efforts to re-frame the SLA to address this concern. An example of such an effort is provided by Nef and colleagues [198] with their inclusion of 'Personal Realization Capability' (PRC) as a way of making people more central to the analysis. A modified form of the SLA incorporating the PRC is shown in Figure 5, a diagram that has been based on [198], and this is arguably more in tune with the capability approach developed by Sen. After all, "*The Capability Approach focuses on the achieved quality of life (achieved functionings) and the freedom to live a good life (capabilities). . .While some people can do the things necessary for what they consider desirable for a good life, others may not be able to do so due to of a lack of empowerment*" [198] (page 7). Figure 5 has similar elements to Figure 2, in the sense that the capitals, of which there are five, as well as the PIPs (TSPs), sit within a vulnerability context, and the analysis leads to a set of planned interventions and livelihood outcomes. To the right of the capitals is a new addition called the 'opportunity space'. While the capitals may be available in

principle, people may have restrictions, including cultural restrictions, to accessing them. Hence, the capitals can be thought of as providing an opportunity space for supporting livelihoods, but the actualization of that opportunity is subject to the 'Personal Realization Capability' (PRC), which covers the ability of people to access the opportunity provided by the capitals and to make use of them to support their livelihoods. There are strong echoes here with the 'conversion factors' employed in the capability approach of Sen to describe the conversion from capabilities to functionings, and Figure 5 provides a far more nuanced conceptualization than the inclusion of 'services' in the capital pentagon of Figure 4. The PRC is formed by the following two attributes: social living conditions and personal identity [198]. Social living conditions include "*structures and processes that shape a person's behavior through explicit and implicit processes and rules (e.g., norms and beliefs in faith communities or subcultures)*" [198] (page 11). There are clearly interrelationships here with the PIP (TSP) context shown in Figure 5. Personal identity is the concept of who a person feels themselves to be, which "shapes the image of what is considered desirable in life", and this "*can have a significant impact on a person's agency, potential discrimination, and the privileges they face*" [198] (page 9). However, while the SLA framework shown in Figure 5 has much to commend it, it would present a significant challenge when it comes to implementation, and this point has been noted by the authors as follows: "*the difficulty of delineating systems, as well as spatial and temporal boundaries, poses a significant challenge to the application of the framework*" [198] (page 14). Much the same could be said of the more basic version of the SLA framework set out in Figure 2, but the addition of the PRC does add a greater complexity that would need to be captured, and this would no doubt present a significant challenge when implemented for a community, given the anticipated variation over both space and time in social living conditions and personal identity.

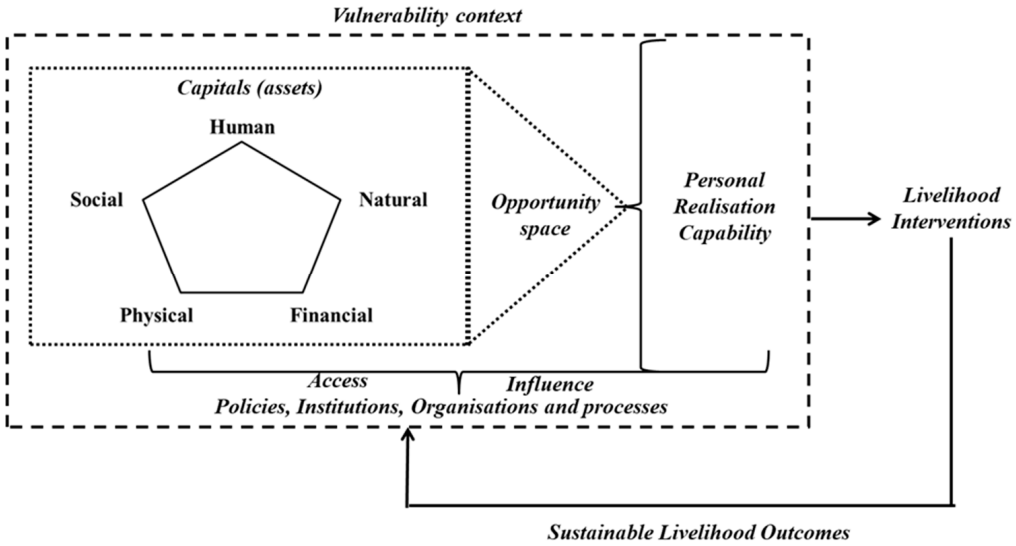


Figure 5. Modification of the SLA shown in Figure 2 to include the 'Personal Realization Capability'. The figure is based on a model created by Nef et al. [198].

The version of the SLA presented by Nef et al. [198] embraces the points made earlier about the importance of, for example, culture and psychology, and does get closer to making the SLA more 'people-centered' by including the notion of capabilities supporting 'functionings', as outlined by Sen, but it is still framed with the stated outcome of achieving sustainable livelihoods. It leaves the point that has already been made about livelihoods not being the only concern of 'living', and culture, including faith, provides an illustration of this. At a more practical level, it is possible to consider the potential contribution of faith for supporting sustainable livelihoods. For example, many faiths have organizational

structures, and these often include agencies dedicated to providing support for their members and, in many cases, the wider society [139]. This support can take many forms, including the support of infrastructure and services (e.g., clinics, schools, microfinance, agricultural training, and extension), and the donations of food and cash to help the poorest; in some cases, the support provided by faith-based organizations (FBOs) may be far greater than that provided by governments [199]. Another example is the provision of financial services (microcredit, micro-savings, and insurance) by FBOs to help support disadvantaged groups [200]. Hence, FBOs may be engaged in trying to enhance both the opportunity space and the PRC, as shown in Figure 5, and, in many of these interventions, the FBOs may help to enhance social capital. Faith can also have an important influence on public administration [201]. This institutional context provided by faiths can also help to support people faced with shocks. Indeed, even the places of worship—the 'physical capital' of churches, temples, and mosques—can provide sanctuary for people to go and to feel secure and supported.

4.5. Sustainable Livelihood to Sustainable Living: Faith as a Functioning

Beyond an instrumental focus on supporting sustainable livelihoods, faith also needs to be considered as important for framing personal identity; this is important for providing a sense of self and place in the world, including a sense of community with nearby and distant others, and the responsibility for their wellbeing. These can matter a great deal to an individual and aid in their wellbeing. Yet, faith and, indeed, the practice of faith can also be subject to stresses and shocks, perhaps through persecution by governments and others in the community, or perhaps by scandals within the faith. Therefore, as well as faith being conceptualized in instrumental terms for supporting or, indeed, as some would claim, inhibiting, livelihood it can also be a 'functioning' in itself, and people may also wish to see how the framework can be used to help support the sustainability of their faith and, indeed, culture in general. With this in mind, the final version of the framework, presented here as Figure 6, is an adaptation of Figure 5, but which replaces sustainable livelihood as an outcome with 'sustainable living'. The result can be called the 'Sustainable Living Approach' (SLivA), where capitals are still important, as indeed are the vulnerability and PIP (TSP) contexts, for supporting sustainable living, and Figure 6 keeps the useful conceptualization of an opportunity space and the PRC, introduced by Nef et al. [173], although, as noted above, these are in many ways resonant with the 'conversion factors' in the capability approach.

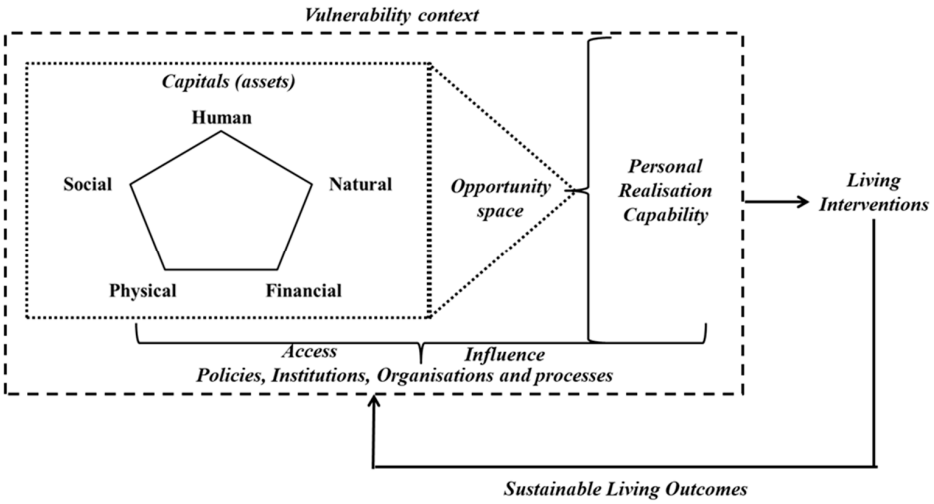


Figure 6. Adaptation of Figure 5 but expanded to become a 'Sustainable Living Approach' (SLivA) rather than being focused on sustainable livelihoods as the only outcome.

The advantage of the SLivA framework, shown in Figure 6, is that it more fully embraces the capability approach of Sen, which includes livelihoods as well as other aspects of 'living' that people feel are important to them as 'functionings', including faith and spirituality. It maintains the capitals at the heart of the SLA, as these categories do cover many of the capabilities that people may have, at least in theory, but which are subject to the PRC, to support 'living', but it goes beyond seeing faith and spirituality as instrumental 'inputs' for sustainable livelihoods, treating them instead as valued outcomes (functionings) in themselves. However, the challenge with the SLivA framework is its operational complexity; a point that will be returned to in the following section of this paper.

5. Discussion and the Future

5.1. Having Faith in the SLA

The aim of the literature analysis was to explore the approaches taken to incorporate faith (i.e., religion) within the SLA. While there are, indeed, many published articles and reports that do discuss faith within the context of the SLA, the emphasis is typically on how faith-based organizations, networks, and groups provide social capital and help with mitigating the stresses and shocks to livelihoods. Earlier forms of the SLA were criticized for missing some important aspects of humanity, such as culture and power, and the review has explored how the SLA framework has evolved from the original version, summarized as Figure 2, up to a more recent version, presented in Figure 5, that arguably does far more to put people at its heart. Such an evolution is to be expected, given the complexity of livelihoods and the origin of the framework in the late 1990s, roughly a quarter of a century ago, and various suggestions have been made as to how to include missing facets such as culture, which is typically conceived as including faith, and power in the framework. The progression of the SLA framework from Figures 2–5 represents a rich story of reflection and change, and it is interesting to see how facets such as culture, which includes faith, have been addressed, with some seeing it as a capital, while others have regarded it as an important dimension of other capitals, such as social capital. But, throughout this evolution, the emphasis is still very much upon how faith and, indeed, culture in general can support livelihood and its sustainability.

The concept of sustainable livelihood and, indeed, its practical manifestation as the SLA had many influences, and one of them is often claimed to have been human development, as championed by the UNDP [60,79]. All of these share a need to go beyond simple financial representations of poverty by taking a multi-faceted approach that embraces a range of capitals, including social capital, and analyzing these within the context of their vulnerability and their PIPs (TSPs) [13]. Human development and sustainable livelihoods had strong influences from the capabilities approach of Sen and his concept of 'functionings' [43–45], even if the emphasis in the SLA is more narrowly upon livelihood as the 'functioning'. There have been critiques of such an approach, including, for some, the 'feel' that human development and, arguably, by extension, the SLA, is more in line with a 'basic needs' vision of development than anything else [68,69]. Maybe this stems from what can be considered the fundamentality of livelihoods as, after all, people need to have some "*means of living*" [8] (page 7) before they can survive. Livelihood is a means of supporting one's existence, and without existence, nothing else, neither culture, art, nor faith, is possible. Livelihood can thus be regarded as a 'basic need' for existence, and the SLA provides a means of capturing the sustainability of that 'basic need'.

However, while livelihood may be a requirement for 'living', defined as survival, people wish to do far more with their lives than just exist; they have dreams and ambitions [90]. Faith is a part of this. While faith can be considered in a narrow sense within an SLA by exploring its role within social capital and FBOs to help support livelihood and its

sustainability, it is far more than just being an instrument. For many, faith is what helps give meaning to their lives, and brings a sense of happiness and contentment; it is the very essence of what they wish to be and do. It is here that the limits of the SLA begin to become apparent. Many have pointed to the omissions in the original form of the SLA framework, such as a lack of inclusion of culture and power relationships, but these were typically addressed by including more types of capital rather than anything more fundamental. A more radical approach to placing people more at the heart of the SLA is provided by the work of Nef et al. [198] and their suggestion for viewing the capitals in terms of all of the factors (including cultural norms, rules, beliefs, and agency) that influence people's ability to make use of them for supporting sustainable livelihoods. But, even so, all of these have been viewed exclusively through the lens of livelihood.

5.2. The Cost of Including Faith as a Functioning

However, it does need to be acknowledged that progressing the SLA framework from Figures 2–5, and, indeed, going beyond livelihood altogether to 'sustainable living', as shown with the SLivA framework in Figure 6, would be expected to come at a significant cost in terms of practical implementation. The SLA, even as represented by Figure 2, can be a complex and lengthy undertaking [13] given how diverse communities can be in terms of their capitals, as well as the vulnerability and PIP (TSP) contexts, and these can all change over time. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the published examples of the application of the SLA, as represented by Figure 2, have tended to focus on specific sectors or issues, and some examples were provided in Table 1. Adding other capitals to include cultural [147], psychological [150], and information/knowledge [145] capitals, as shown in Figure 3, greatly expands this complexity, as, indeed, does the inclusion of 'opportunity space' and 'Personal Realization Capability'—as important as they are in Figure 5 [198]. Proceeding to the next level of the SLivA framework as a means of assessing 'sustainable living' (Figure 6) would potentially present an enormous challenge given how variable this may be within a community and, indeed, for the same person over time.

A participatory process would have to be central to all of the forms of the SLA represented from Figures 2–5 given the need to understand livelihood, and this would also be so, perhaps even more so, when it comes to the SLivA framework shown in Figure 6. This is not only a fundamental human right—people must be engaged in any analysis and set of interventions that are designed to help them—but is also required from a practical perspective. But participatory approaches are time-consuming to implement and to analyze the results [13], and they also tend to lean towards the achievement of agreement, which could mean that the loudest and more forceful voices tend to dominate. Hence, there is always the danger that what emerges from participatory approaches, the voices of elites with the most power, rather than a reflection of the wider community, and especially the poorer members of that community [202]. More recent developments have used the growing field of Earth Observation (EO) using very-high-resolution satellite imagery to populate indicators, some of them proxy indicators, for capitals and other facets, such as vulnerability, within the SLA framework [203]. Maybe there is also scope here for the use of machine learning (ML) and artificial intelligence (AI) to help translate these images into information on sustainable livelihoods, which could be collected at a relatively low cost and far quicker than more traditional ground-based approaches, even if the latter may still be required for ground-truthing. These latest developments could also potentially help with the application of more complex versions of the SLA, such as that represented by Figure 5, and maybe even the SLivA framework, although there can also be dangers to relying on proxy indicators that can be populated using EO allied with ML/AI to assess social capital, as well as culture and faith.

5.3. Compromising SLA: Revisiting Basic Needs

There is still much to consider and learn about concerning the application of the SLA, especially more complex forms, let alone the SLivA framework. Maybe it is inevitable that methodological compromises have to be made with the SLA, and the old adage of having at least some information is better than having none can apply here. But there are also dangers involved if interventions based on incomplete knowledge end up creating more harm than benefit [204]. Indeed, while there is clearly much scope to explore the utility of these more complex forms of the SLA, it is perhaps understandable that research to date has kept to a framework that is, at least, practical, even if some have acknowledged a lower level of use to help guide interventions and outcomes than is warranted [139]. Adding greater complexity, as seen in Figure 5, and eventually the 'Sustainable Living Approach', shown in Figure 6, may allow the framework to be more in tune with its aspiration of being 'people-centered', but it may also greatly hamper its utility as a practical framework in development, as even the authors of these suggestions often acknowledge. It thus seems likely, and maybe even desirable, that the more fundamental form of the SLA, as shown in Figure 2, will be the one that continues to be applied. While it does have its limitations, it does at least provide a workable framework that can be applied, although still challenging, in practice. What is needed, perhaps, is a stronger acknowledgement of the detachment of the SLA from its often-cited theoretical foundation. Figure 2 does indeed have far more in common with the 'basic needs' approach to development than it does to the capabilities of Sen, but is that necessarily a bad thing? After all, people do have many needs in their lives, but survival is certainly one of them. What is needed are new ways of helping to make the approach shown in Figure 2 work in practice rather than making it more complex, and it is here that the new technologies of high-resolution EO imagery allied with ML and AI potentially have much to offer. While these new technologies cannot replace the need for data collection on the ground, including the use of participatory techniques, they may be able to provide much supplementary material.

5.4. Limitations of the Review

A study based on a review of the literature, especially with a literature as broad as that devoted to the SLA and its various derivatives, does have its limitations. Firstly, the focus was very much upon faith and religion, with these two seen as being synonymous. They are often considered to be a part of 'culture', but spirituality can also be regarded as being a part of culture, yet has been defined here as being distinct from faith. While the inclusion of spirituality in the analysis is unlikely to have altered the conclusions drawn in this paper, it does nonetheless remain a limitation that has to be acknowledged. Perhaps more important is the second limitation—the scope of the review. The SLA literature is a vast one, and its adoption by development practitioners means that many important insights may not necessarily find their way into the academic literature or to be picked up via the Google Scholar engine, even if the latter takes a broader perspective than do many other academic search engines. While report writing is an important task in development projects, not least in terms of reporting back to funders on the progress and impact, it is not unreasonable that development practitioners will have other priorities than academic publishing, and, as a result, there may be many valuable insights that are simply inaccessible. Hence, the use of Google Scholar has its limitations, and much may have been missed, especially when it comes to the use of the SLA for guiding development rather than research.

6. Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this review. Firstly, while the SLA in its widely applied form has its limitations, it has proved to be a popular approach in

guiding both development and research. Second, efforts to improve the SLA by addressing facets such as culture, including faith, have been numerous, and have, for the most part, revolved around the inclusion of more capitals or even reframing it more in line with the capability/functioning approach of Sen and colleagues. But these changes, such as the move towards a 'Sustainable Living Approach' (SLivA), do add more complexity that arguably makes the framework more challenging to apply in practice; inevitably, there is a trade-off between the complexity of a practical framework and its application. This perhaps helps to explain why more complex forms of the SLA that have a greater resonance with its theoretical underpinning have failed to gain much traction, and why faith and, indeed, culture have remained to be seen more in terms of how they can support livelihood rather than as valuable 'outcomes' in themselves. Finally, when considering the above, the emphasis needs to be on how the SLA can be supported in practice rather than making it more complex, and recent advances in Earth Observation, machine learning, and artificial intelligence may help with the assessment of capitals as well as vulnerability.

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