

# Sustainable livelihood in the era of globalisation: Does it make sense?

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THE concept and framework for Sustainable Livelihood (SL) has emerged as a trajectory of thinking about poverty from income generation to multi-dimensional perspective. As a multi-dimensional approach or framework, SL is considered to have poverty reducing potentials and therefore, it has gained a prominent ground in the praxis and practice of current development efforts around the world. However, the actual potentials of SL approach can be hardly realised unless the approach is looked into from a historical perspective. Within the spectrum of history, there are also the undercurrents of political economy, which operates along the North-South divide. Indeed, the practice of SL approach has come into being in such a historical context where one of the most important path-breaking historical phenomena like globalisation has got hardly any attention. This has resulted in inconsistency between the norms encapsulated in the SL approach and the principles articulated in the globalisation process. In other words, the implications of globalisation and precisely the global forces have not been fitted in while applying SL approach in poverty eradication efforts. As a result of this missing link, the SL approach, which emerged out of a normative deal in the development arena, has not been able to address the poverty in a sustained way. I will explain hereunder in what historical context and in whose normative expectations the SL has failed to tackle poverty in the light of North-South relations.

## The historical juncture: The movers and shakers

The historical profile indicates that the concept of SL first came into being as an official agenda in 1987 with the publication of a report of an advisory panel of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) entitled Food 2000, which was supported by the Brundtland Commission. Subsequently, this concept was brought to the wider audience and thus popularised by the work of various development institutes based in the north. Besides, the concept of SL was linked to various aspects of development in various contemporary global meets such as Social Summit, Rio Conference, Beijing Conference and so on so forth.

This historical account indicates that the movers of the concept of SL are the international development agencies, which are located in the north. One of the prime movers and shakers of SL is the Department for International Development (DFID) in the sense that its poverty reduction framework is widely accepted and practiced by the leading development agencies around the world. Another important aspect to note here is that the concept and practice of SL has evolved out of a global socio-political process. To be more specific, the growth and development of SL has taken place in the era of globalisation. My interest is not to identify the historical juncture from the perspective of the place of origin or the movers and shakers of SL only, but I also attach value to globalisation phenomenon as the most important historical juncture here. Because, both SL and globalisation emerged as a normative value. In case of SL it carries normative value in the sense that the concern raised with SL under the caveat of sustainable development is meant for both northern and southern countries for the greater interest of both

present generation as well as the generations to come. Similarly, globalisation is a norm because, a particular norm or ideology of what is called 'globalism' is very much inherent in it.

## Whose norm counted? Endogenous versus exogenous question

The historical profile of SL approach/framework as discussed above supports the fact that the norm originated exogenously. This could be further substantiated with the value attached to SL by the 'definers'. I have already mentioned that the idea of SL has originated in the northern countries. Therefore, the northern people, while bringing the issue on board, defined it from the value of their own perspective -- the value that developing nations having faster growth of population have resulted in poverty and eventually threatened the sustainability of development efforts. This value judgment has led them to ascribe the norm that the developing nations should be concerned and accordingly be taught to practice the SL framework in order to eradicate their poverty in particular and to contribute to the overarching norm of sustainable development. This is how the SL as norm was exogenously given in the context of developing countries.

It is noteworthy that this exogenous norm did not come out from the northern

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countries because of lack of knowledge of the southern or developing countries about the sustainable livelihood. Rather, there had always been a concern for SL among the people in each society of developing or southern countries. In these countries, the people have been traditionally adopting various ways and means of their own living considering their own geo-social landscape. Given the resource base, the people used to mostly apply indigenous technical knowledge to sustain their living. Therefore, despite having endogenous concern for SL, the norm that the developing countries have been following is exogenously given. My question here is that if the exogenous paradigm of SL is considered to be excellent or viable in tackling poverty and sustaining livelihood of the common people, to what extent it has taken care of SL? Before dealing with this question, I would like to mention once again that the exogenous paradigm of SL norm should not be seen as an isolated historical juncture. Rather, the whole spectrum of globalisation process should be brought into the discussion. Because, the term globalisation contains a particular kind of norm which is exogenous to the developing countries. Besides, it is important to understand to what extent the norms of globalisation as exogenous one has taken care of SL norm.

## Who takes care of sustainable livelihood? Localism versus globalism

As I indicated before, there had always been a concern for the livelihood at the local in particular and the southern or developing countries in general. This concern has developed 'localism' in that it is driven by the ideological orientation towards nurturing of knowledge which is very much suited to their own geo-socio-political context. Alongside 'localism' there is also the existence of 'globalism' which is the carrier of exogenous norm. Now the point to ponder here is, to what extent 'globalism' as the carrier of exogenous norm has taken care of sustainable livelihood concerns within its purview of activities. Before that, it is important to understand the characteristics of 'globalism'. In functional term, 'globalism' is an ideology or 'ism' of 'globalisation', whereby the latter one is defined as the process of movement of capital, goods, people, ideas and images across national boundaries. At first instance, 'moving across national boundaries', being the defining character of globalisation encapsulates neo-liberal ideology and as part of this ideology the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) provide the following prescriptions: (i) opening of financial and capital accounts; (ii) removal of foreign exchange restrictions; (iii) cuts in public expenditures; (iv) balance budgets, lower corporate taxes; (v) deregulation of busi-

nesses; (vi) encouragement of foreign investment; and (vii) sell off public enterprises and secure private property monopolies under law.

Importantly enough, the ideology or norm of 'globalism' expressed in these prescriptions is promoted by broadly two actors, which are usually located in the north and oriented towards capital accumulation. These two actors or forces include the Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and inter-governmental organisations. Given this ideological or normative configuration of 'globalism', and the institutional support towards this end, it is difficult for local efforts to sustain with 'localism'. Because, 'globalism' carrying neo-liberal norm incapacitates the ethos of 'localism' by situating the state in such a position, which makes it less oriented towards internal demands. Besides, the state being linked into neo-liberal principles through agreements with various international institutions has to free the flow of capital and enshrine the transnational corporate rights as 'national treatment'. This context of 'globalism', therefore, leaves with hardly any doubt that it does not take care of SL norm. Instead, it imposes the norm, which is exogenously imposed on the one hand and dismantles the initiative and the ideas generated by the community on the other. The following part will deal with how different carriers or actors of 'globalisation' dismantled the sustainable livelihoods of the people, precisely the poor.

## Globalisation and its consequences on the poor: Does it make sense at all?

The globalisation process dismantles the SL strategies that the poor people adopt which has negative consequences on the poor. How this process adversely affects poor people of the developing countries could be understood better from three domains from which the SL emerged: (i) agriculture-centred perspectives; (ii) environment and natural resources perspectives and; (iii) the coping strategies perspectives.

In case of agriculture-centred perspectives, deregulation of business as one of the major threads of economic globalisation has resulted in negative consequences on the livelihood options of the poor. Within the broader spectrum of agriculture if we consider the aspect of food production, then the emergence and penetration of agriculture industries into developing countries under the aegis of globalisation becomes a great issue of concern. Because it does not only undermine the indigenous knowledge and practice of agriculture in these countries, the most crucial point is that the poor farmers lose their control over the production process. The promotion of the marketing of Genetically Modified (GM) seeds and the expansion of GM cultivation by the Transnational Corporations (TNCs) under the aegis of globalisation in general and the prescription of 'globalism' in particular is a case in point. Although the production of GM food in Bangladesh is still under doubt, there is, however, a benefit of doubt. The important

The coping strategy as another domain of SL is also being affected by globalisation process. The aspect of coping strategy is more prominent in the urban area than rural area. The joining of women in the garment sector is a classical example of coping strategy of the households in the sense that given acute economic crisis, these women had to get involved in outside work in most cases to cope with this crisis in such a context where the household head is either absent or inactive. It is to be noted here that these women are exposed to a precarious employment condition because of the 'cheap labour' criteria set primarily by the employers and finally by the buyers. Now, the point to consider here is how the globalisation process adversely affects this coping strategy. It is well known to all that the Ready-made Garment Sector (RMG) is now on the brink of phasing out of what is called Multi-fibre Arrangement (MFA) which will remove all the quotas under MFA and open market for all countries. This apparently indicates that the quota-free regime for the country like Bangladesh will not affect the sector and hence will not cause vulnerability to women workers, because it may have the capacity to survive with its own competitive edge. But the problem is more with the non-tariff barriers than the quota restrictions, which will limit the access of LDCs, like Bangladesh, to global market.

Besides, the already existing weak backward and forward linkage of RMG sector in Bangladesh will not capacitate the sector to compete with even the regional competitors. Apart from that, the changing scenario of trade rules under the aegis of globalisation and its active forces like WTO offers bleak future for the future growth of RMG sector which will have implications on the livelihoods of women who have been coping with their household crisis at the moment. It should be specifically mentioned here that the global recession following 9/11 has already caused retrenchment of 3,50,000 garment workers who are experiencing livelihood crisis. Further shock, which is apprehensible from the existing and the new trade rules to come, will increase this number and consequently intensify vulnerability of the workers involved in the RMG sector. Not only that, livelihood crisis of these workers will have spiral effects on the livelihoods of other groups of people who have been involved with some sub-sectors which were developed for catering to the needs of these workers, particularly the women workers.

In conclusion, I would like to point to the fact that the poverty reducing potentials could be realised through application of SL if the principles or norms of globalisation expressed by what I have indicated as 'globalism' could be reconciled in such a way so that it becomes supportive of SL norm. But in real life situation, this has not happened and consequently the efforts towards poverty eradication made through SL approach have not carried any meaning to it.

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## In memoriam

# Salma Sobhan

## A human being extraordinaire

HABIBUL HAQUE KHONDKER

I often wondered what kept many of my compatriots from knowing some of the true heroes in their own midst. Is it because we are less enthusiastic about knowing the achievements of a fellow citizen than finding about their scandals? Upon reflection, I realised that this could also say something about the personality in question. Some people are reluctant to bask in the glory of success or media attention, they carry on with the jobs they have committed themselves to. Salma Sobhan, who passed away shortly after the midnight between December 29 and 30, 2003 was such a person. I often wished to see her as an ambassador of Bangladesh for the simple reason that apart from her enormous talents and brain, she was a rare person whose both parents were ambassadors. I cannot think of another such example. Salma Sobhan's father was Mr. Ikrumullah who was the first foreign secretary of the newly independent Pakistan and subsequently represented Pakistan as an ambassador. Salma Sobhan's mother Begum Shaista Ikrumullah too was Pakistan's ambassador to Morocco. Her father-in-law too was once Pakistan's ambassador. It would be an understatement to say that Salma Sobhan was unobtrusive. She never told me that she was the recipient of the famous Human Rights award from the Lawyers' Committee in USA in 2001. It was Ms. Sigourney Weaver who presented the award to her in person. I had to find it out the hard way -- a search through Internet -- as I was preparing a brief resume on her. Salma Sobhan's maternal uncle was Hussain Shahid Suhrawardy and her paternal uncle was Justice Hedayetullah who later became the Vice President of the Republic of India. Her younger sister is married to Hasan Bin Talal, the uncle of Jordan's Monarch.

Such illustrious family background fades in comparison with her personality, which is full of wit and wisdom. A social activist driven by a conscience and a commitment to the causes of the disadvantaged, she was one of the founders (along with Dr Hameeda Hossain) of Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK). She left her teaching career in law at the University of Dhaka to commit herself fully to this organisation of legal aid to the poor women and became a champion of human rights, especially of women and children and other disenfranchised communities in Bangladesh.

Once I received Salma Sobhan at Changi airport of Singapore shortly after the assassination of Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi and as we were heading to city she was discussing the



Late Salma Sobhan

tragedy and how shocking it was to her sister (at that time wife of the Crown Prince of Jordan) who knew both Rajeev and Sonia from her Cambridge days. As we were discussing the implication of this murder for Indian politics, our English-speaking taxi driver took part in our discussion. He said -- with a characteristic elitist bias -- why kill a Prime Minister, why not an ordinary peasant? Salma Sobhan interjected: "Why a peasant? His life is as precious as that of the former Indian Prime Minister", she argued. The exasperated driver then said: "Ok, if you have to kill someone, kill a dog". Salma Sobhan retorted, human beings have souls and according to many religions there is resurrection or transmigration of soul but the poor dog, many believe, has no soul; once it is dead, it is gone forever. Our friendly driver, at that point gave up. Little did he know that his passenger clad in a cotton sari with unkempt hair from a red-eye flight and an unassuming look was a barrister and a humanist. I asked her later whether she knew anyone in Singapore. Salma Sobhan told me casually that she once met the wife of Singapore's founding leader Lee Kuan Yew, Mrs. Lee. Before she was Mrs. Lee and a senior at Cambridge invited Salma Sobhan to a tea party organised for a handful of female Asian law students at Cambridge. Salma Sobhan quipped: you can imagine how small that group was. I did not press her for any statistics. Salma Sobhan was in Cambridge from 1955 to 1957 and in 1958 was called to the Bar at the tender age of 21.

In another occasion, Salma Sobhan was in Singapore along with Ms. Kamal (Lulu Apa). They gave a talk at a Singaporean NGO dominated by lawyers and other female professionals. The Singaporean feminist activists came to the talk but were milling around as they were not apparently impressed by the diminutive Salma

Sobhan with her ordinary looking sari and less ordinary-looking mannerism. However, once she started her speech, I saw a gradual change in the audience behaviour. Those who were milling around stilled, those who were standing began to sit. In a few minutes, some of the Singaporean lawyers were sitting on the floor with rapt attention to her deliberations. What an engaging speaker she was! The audience was spellbound. After the talk, the documentary film "Eclipse" was screened to the feminists in Singapore.

Salma Sobhan, a personality extraordinaire is no more. I had the great privilege of dining in the company of some extraordinary individuals who glowed in their own light some years back. It was a small gathering where Begum Shaista Ikrumullah (deceased), Mr. Obaiddullah Khan (deceased), Dr. Rahmatullah, his daughter, Dr. Mehraj Jahan and myself sat around a Japanese styled table for a simple but sumptuous dinner hosted by Salma Sobhan and her husband Rehman Sobhan, a legend in his own rights. In that dinner, I reminded Begum Shaista Ikrumullah of her essay published in the Reader's Digest on a promise that Mr. Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan made to her. The essay was a recollection of a conversation Begum Ikrumullah had with Mr. Jinnah prior to the birth of Pakistan. For a moment, I felt I was talking to history. Like her mother, who authored the famous book From Purdah to Parliament, Salma Sobhan was an intellectual of great calibre and an unparalleled moral integrity. Salma Sobhan wrote a letter defending the publicity of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the pages of The Daily Star -- only when Awami League was out of power.

Salma Sobhan is survived by her loving husband Professor Rehman Sobhan and two adorable sons Baber, an economist and Jafar, who spurned a cushy lawyer's career in New York to choose a career of journalism in Dhaka. Such a move does not surprise me for both her parents Salma Sobhan, a personality extraordinaire, and Rehman Sobhan stuck it out in Bangladesh amidst adversities. For Salma Sobhan, Bangladesh was her base. She lived here and now she will be in eternal peace here forever. She will remain a hero for all those who share her empathy for humanity, especially for those who are socially excluded and disadvantaged. She was a voice for those needed it most. As a human being she was a personification of humility and decency, qualities we can collectively emulate.

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## Following is a letter Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy wrote from jail to his niece Salma Sobhan reproduced from her mother Begum Ikrumullah's book Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy -- A

### Appendix XI

Central Jail  
According to the News papers  
today is 8 May 1962.

Hello my Junior-never-to-be  
Congratulations to start with,

And now as an ancient relic I am expected to offer you some sterling advice -- as you are about to be hitched or nitched. Having made a mess of my own life, and still in the further process of doing so, I am the most competent person to guide others, particularly in the province of Don'ts. What do these persons know of the shape of things who have lived a sheltered life, embossed in the service of a providing government -- other than they know everything, they know and know what they will know. So I, am an outcast, I am certified.

Now let us start with a non-controversial premise. You are preternaturally transcendently intelligent. It just oozes from you and you can't conceal it. The above adverbs you have inherited from your mother and the adjective from your parents. Now the young man is also intelligent, and sound and well-versed in his subject. Let there be no conflict of intelligences. You may scintillate in your arguments, but he is sounder in his deductions. So learn how to give in and try to conceal the spark under a bushel.

Item number two -- you will have to mix with other people, relatives, friends, wives of friends, take a place in society -- such as will enhance the young man's prestige. But now -- the other people. Normally they resent intelligence. They happen to be normal, and have an inferiority complex in the presence of better-equipped people and they resent it. You will not realise it. You will go in your own way -- a little introverted -- and they will call you arrogant and proud, although you really are a very humble little creature, anxious to please dreading to hurt people. Hence, what are we to do? We cannot make them more intelligent, we can't go on defending ourselves. I am afraid that it is a little cross we have to bear. Afraid of you, they suspect you before you open your lips. Now I cannot ask you to shut your mouth -- it will be impolite to do so and equally impossible for you to comply -- heredity stands in your way. But it is best to let the other chatter and their talks will be inane. The female, the modern one -- thank Heavens, when I look at sundry females of our family I find that they have a higher sense of dignity and social behaviour and harbour no ill-will -- thinks it clever to talk ill of other females -- slyly, by innuendoes. Do not fall into the trap, never speak ill of anyone, however much that anyone may deserve being spoken ill of -- this of course, I have not understood, why does one deserve to be libeled. If X is bad, well it is none of your business. In fact, speak well of everyone -- or not at all. Best is, to treat them as elder sisters, and give them a sense of superiority, at least in the social aspects.

Next item. Set your own house in order, before you start the social rounds or embark on social service. Most important you may even learn how to cook. Strange as it may sound it is a tradition of Midnapur and of your family, to cook well from the lowly pietha to the best gorma, gofta, pulao, biryani (kutchi and pucci), seekh kabab (I have never tasted anything equal to what my sainted mother used to cook), shami kabab (pharaira) murg-i-musallam paratha (with several parads, and at the same time khasta, on top, and narm inside), feerni (sounds easy, but can be very tasty), meetha tookra (rich and poor), and I nearly forgot the exquisite (I am tasting it in imagination, and drooling, but I have forgotten the name, sign of sure senility -- I wish people would realise I am senile and played out) something sweet and sour with

curd and onions and you can have meat, fish (very good) fowl, (very, very good) even shishah-rangea, nargisikabab, ananas, and kabule pulao: and chutnis of all kinds and bhartas (potatoes, brinjals, sutki, chingri, fish, etc. etc).

I know of a person who is doing so much social service that she is neglecting her home, allowing the expenses to outstrip a fairly comfortable income, and in her zeal, making enemies -- her sole satisfaction being that she is really doing good work and will go to heaven -- setting an example that others can't follow and hence they dislike her (inferiority complex I hope disillusionment doesn't await her to break her spirit). Begum tomatoes make excellent Chatnis. In fact, I think you should not think of social service now time is when you are a matron, and your sympathies need bestowal on a wider circle and here comes the crux (don't pronounce it as crooks) of life. I think firstly, it is absence of hate: and secondly, the positive feeling of love. I do not know why I have never been able to hate -- I almost think it is a weakness. Or it is perhaps a streak in me of always trying to see the other man's point of view and find justification for him. I think was born with it, and it has developed with legal training and a judicial sense. Even in my childhood days I always fought for anybody absent who was attacked. I find that there are a few, very few, I cannot think of but one or two who are just intrinsically spiteful and vindictive, but they can't help it, if God endowed them with a fiend's nature. Others -- and this is true of nearly all people -- seek to justify their actions by arguments, or by principles, which, however warped they may be, satisfy their conscience. Hence, even when I was in power, and I have been so for years together, with power to do harm to my enemies, I have never victimised them. Indeed, my party men, who understand more the ruthlessness of politics, have always blamed me for what they call my softness. Have I made friends by my leniency and consideration? I have yet to see. Unhappily it is those persons on whom you confer benefits who are apt to stab you in the back. Still, not to hate is morally satisfying, and then, to love I think I do, and would like to love everyone. Only some won't have it. However, this is not the proper occasion to deal with a subject so abstrusely psychological it may have something to do with senile decay. The reason why I have digressed is that, I think that when one steps into society one is apt to like and dislike and it is more satisfying to like, and not to dislike. And as an outer sign do not backbite, there is nothing which I dislike more, and never hit a person who is down. They must have your sympathy, whether they deserve it or not.

Now, I think that is enough of sterling advice; I hope it is not dress. But it is quite heavy. It could be gold or lead. If lead, transmute it into gold. I hear you can now spout French. Let me see how far you have progressed when we meet. I took it up after my detention; I have eased off considerably: I find it easier to pass time being lazy than being-industrious for nothing. I have started Monte Cristo in French -- to discuss common experiences when I meet him in the next world.

I have received your mother's letter. She is always worrying and explaining that she has always replied to my letters etc, etc. Just ask her not to worry. I do receive her letters and they are as balm in Gilead or nectar to a thirsty soul I would love to hear from her if she will stop worrying about -- having written, or not having written etc....

Now Salma, behave yourself, be a good girl and accept my cordial felicitations.  
Lots of love.

Shaheed Mama



## All health information to keep you up to date

# Ten commandments for your health this year

On the eve of New Year we all make New Year resolutions. To help you make yours -- the following tips are for you.

Have regular eating times for breakfast (between 7-8am), lunch (1.30-2pm), afternoon special, and dinner (8-9pm) doesn't matter -- wherever you are!

1. Have regular times for going to sleep and getting up. Try to avoid daytime big naps. Avoid tea, coffee and tobacco at least four hours before sleep.
2. Avoid tobacco (including Zarda), too much tea /coffee and spicy, oily food and 'mishri' (sweets) as much as possible. Eat plenty of vegetables with fibres and try to avoid red meat as much as possible especially after 35. Age-reversing foods include all fruits and vegetables. Particularly spinach, cabbage, broccoli, sprouts, green leafy vegetables including lettuce, peas and beans, root vegetables.
3. Being overweight is very bad. It is desirable to lose weight (avoid fatty food, sugary and refined carbohydrates; eat nutritious food with vitamins and minerals supplements, eat less but regularly and exercise). Eat less for both cosmetic and weight related many medical illnesses. Avoid table salt specially those who are hypertensive.
4. Avoid all sorts of fizzy drinks. Milk could be your 'the drink' as well as 'the food' in everyday diet. Don't eat for at least one-and-half-hour before going to bed. To avoid indigestion, sip water slowly to dilute stomach acids.
5. Check your Blood Pressure, Blood Sugar and Lipid profile (cholesterol) and Vision if you are over 40 (if needed-electrolyte and ECG). Ask your family physician or a friend for a reliable diagnostic centre. All women, from 18 onwards, should be careful of their breasts once a month for changes. Breast ailment affects the lives of thousands of women and their families every year.
6. Cherish good friends; 'good friends are like medicine'. Scientists are discovering more ways that friendships boost our lives.
7. Practice your faith; 'prayer is a good medicine too'. Evidence is showing that being more sincere in your prayer is an effective prescription for healing illness.
8. Teach your child to behave well -- you are their model; first few years of life have always an effect for whole life. Your sons/daughters learn by watching what you say and do all the time. Anyone can be a mother/father, but it takes someone special to be a 'mum' / 'dad'.
9. Exercise regularly; its duration, not intensity, which counts in fitness and weight loss is important. Walking is one of the best among all exercises.
10. Relax. Don't always expect everything to go right. Accept that things can go wrong. Stress management through exercise and relaxation is helpful for hormone balance. Stress may increase the production of adrenaline, which can interfere with your balance.

## Quotation for this year:

'Let food be your medicine, medicine be your food' -- Hippocrates

