

The rural world and agrarian transformations in the global South: key debates and challenges

Dr Simon Batterbury
School of Social and Environmental Enquiry
University of Melbourne
Carlton 3010 VIC Australia
simonpjb@unimelb.edu.au
www.simonbatterbury.net

Key themes

- Livelihood diversification, or “productive bricolage” on the part of the most important actors on the stage – farmers (Batterbury 2001, Netting 1993). Mixing and combining lucrative activities, is an almost universal response to livelihood pressures, to hazards, and to falling income.
- The "centrifugal forces associated with occupational experimentation" (Bryceson 2000) are driven by the need for cash as well as food in a globalised world, leading to vulnerability as well as occasional opportunity.

Population/environment

- Boserup's oppositional account of population growth, showing how households innovate (*pression créatrice*)
- "Machakos thesis not universal - " Rwanda (Andre and Platteau, 1998, Murton 1999) and are disputed in the immediate area around Machakos. Lele & Stone (1989) distinguish between "autonomous intensification" of the type described by Boserup, and "policy-led intensification"

- Land is the heart of all farming systems. Providing security is vital if "autonomous" intensification is to occur to meet wealth and investment expectations. Without security of land tenure and land access, individuals have to seek other options
- Life post-IPPC/Stern report?

Political-economic 'framing' of livelihood systems

- Commodity markets – very widespread eg Nigeria, Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Debbie Bryceson shows diversification resulting from commodity production in colonial and postcolonial era. “unfree” labour.
- 55-80% of household incomes in surveyed regions in several counties of Africa was non-agricultural in the late 1990s.
- Henry Bernstein “*Commoditization, it is suggested, is central to how 'people' - and which people – interact with their environments, including intensified uses of soil and water resources independently of, or combines with, intensification attributable to demographic growth*”

3 systems – or more?

- Subsistence/little outside engagement
- Strong engagement through markets or migration (eg around cities)
- Labour reserves with \$ transfers (eg S Africa)

- Plus – coerced systems and collectivised agriculture, transmigration (E Timor rice prodn)
- Involution (Chinese Tibet)?

livelihoods

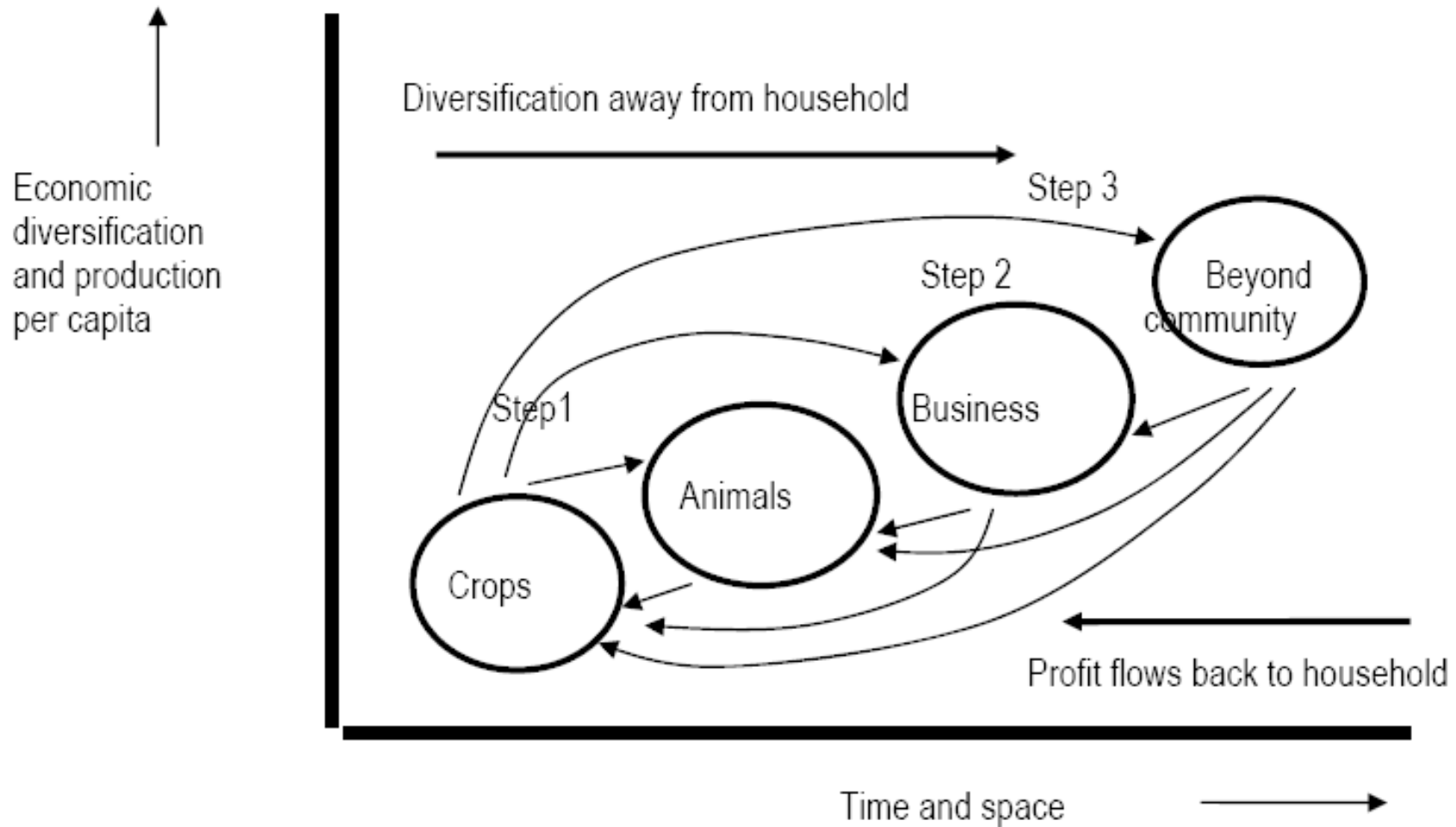
- Livelihood strategies are the things people do to make a living. livelihood priorities change over a life course in "styles and pathways" (de Haan & Zoomers 2005)



Scale matters (Ellis)

A	B	C	D	E	F
Livelihood platform	Access modified by	In context of	Resulting in	Composed of	With effects on
<i>Assets</i> natural capital physical capital human capital financial capital social capital	<i>Social relations</i> gender class ethnicity <i>Institutions</i> rules and customs land tenure markets in practice <i>Organisations</i> associations NGOs local admin state agencies	<i>Trends</i> population migration tech change relative prices macro policy national econ trends world econ trends <i>Shocks</i> droughts floods pests diseases civil war	livelihood strategies	<i>NR-based activities</i> collection cultivation (food) cultivation (non-food) livestock non-farm nr <i>Non-NR-based</i> rural trade other services rural manufacture remittance other transfers	<i>Livelihood security</i> income level income stability seasonality degrees of risk <i>Environmental sustainability</i> soils and land quality water rangelands forests biodiversity

Fig 6 Simple model of diversification in the household economy, based on farming communities in Northern Nigeria



Adaptation is diverse and mediated by institutions

- **Transition**
 - **Land use intensification**
 - **Economic diversification**
 - **Institutional change**
 - **Demographic transition**
-
- **" There are four major tendencies evident in the current social restructuring, namely: resort to 'incomplete' family units, i.e. locational separation of the reproductive couple for the sake of income-earning; reduction in the size of large extended families in the direction of nuclearisation; weakening of dependency ties on gender and age lines within family units; and, women's efforts to use matrilineal ties to further their material security "**
Bryceson (2000)

Lessons from studies

- Rootedness vs movement – remittance landscapes
- The fragility of commodification (PNG)
- New technical advances (GM)
- Median density population densities – special challenges with mix of in situ intensification and incomes

Figure 2. Participation in the construction of diguettes in the village of Ibi Palaga, Bam Province, Burkina Faso, 1992. Photo: author.



Key variables to examine for rural livelihoods

- a) the nature of the society in question
- b) its population-environment relationship and pressures on resources, and
- c) its history of engaging in commodity markets, levels of technology, and other aspects of political and economic history.

- Previous aid to small farmers, like 'one size fits all' agricultural extension strategies and technology packages, never recognized diverse livelihoods or sometimes even peoples' histories, and were bound to fail.
- Instead, support to livelihoods needs a rather different set of policy measures - continue to allow human capacities to find their own solutions, while stepping in to minimize the worst excesses of disadvantage, greed, and grievance

- Harold Brookfield argues - We cannot resist the urge to tinker, to design new crop mixes or land uses on farmers behalf, or to point to emerging crises that may affect them in the future.
- Meanwhile.... Local land users have already proven they can fight back against particular forms of environmental degradation as well as marginalization in a growing world economy, and the latter is unlikely to loosen its grip on them.
- They are now fighting back against the social and economic factors that impel them to seek a *bricolage* of activities other than agriculture.

- Of course "people do make their own livelihoods, but not necessarily under conditions of their own choosing" (De Haan & Zoomers 2005:43), but human adaptations to risk and productive bricolage are endless, and they have to be assessed in terms of their place within livelihood systems that may not be based on local resources and capital alone
- If anything it is by building local institutional capacity – and developing an enabling policy environment that permits the accumulation of a range of capital assets – that people will forge their own paths, occasionally with outside assistance.