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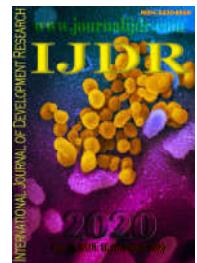
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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RURAL NON-FARM EMPLOYMENT AND SUSTAINABLE RURAL LIVELIHOOD APPROACHES: REVISING THE TOOLKITS

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ABSTRACT

The lessening of rural poverty continues to be a paramount goal of the developing countries as the majority of their poor population still resides in the countryside. The World Bank, for example, estimates that more than 70 percent of the world's poor reside in rural areas. So far, various strategies have been applied to address this concern, and among the major ones is rural employment creation. The agriculture sector has played a central role in providing rural employment opportunities in different countries. The sector, however, has been contending with a number of factors that have limited its further potential for generating new jobs in rural areas. Those factors include, for example, the small size of landholdings, insufficient capital and investment incentives, the inadequate farm infrastructure, limited markets, and stagnant prices of agricultural products. All of these have contributed to restricting the capacity for job creation in the agriculture sector. It is therefore necessary to focus on a broader spectrum of the rural economy, not just on agriculture. The aim of this paper is to make a systematic analysis of the role rural non-farm employment in creating conducive ground for sustainable livelihoods for the rural people. Various approaches and emerging issues on rural non-farm employment and sustainable livelihoods are systematically examined. The data was collected using secondary source of data, development and sociological literatures. The systematic and logical analysis of that has revealed that the rural non-farm employment is getting the attention of various international agencies, development scholars and policy makers as the increasing number of people are being engaged in the sector.

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INTRODUCTION

The rural non-farm economy may be defined as comprising all those non-agricultural activities which generate income to rural households (including income in-kind and remittances), either through waged work or in self-employment. In some contexts, rural non-farm activities are also important sources of local economic growth (e.g. tourism, mining, timber processing, etc.) (Davis, 2003). Carpentry, pottery, tea selling, water peddling, food selling, shoe making, blacksmithing, and construction also involve non-farm economic activity in rural areas. The rural non-farm employment is of great importance to the rural economy because of its production linkages and employment effects, while the income it provides to rural households represents a substantial and sometimes growing share of rural incomes. Often this share is particularly high for the rural poor.

There is evidence that these contributions are becoming increasingly significant for food security, poverty alleviation and farm sector competitiveness and productivity. As to Kuiper (2006), farm households do not live from farming alone. Non-farm activities play an important role in rural households' income and livelihoods, even in areas commonly perceived to be subsistence-oriented, such as Sub-Saharan Africa. In a rare worldwide comparison of the importance of non-farm income in developing countries, Africa ranks first with 42 percent of total rural income, followed by Latin America (40 percent) and Asia (32 percent). It is now well recognized that rural economies are not purely agricultural and that farm households across the developing world earn an increasing share of their income from non-farm activities. Evidence shows that rural non-farm income (RNFY) constitutes roughly 35 percent of rural household income in Africa and about 50 percent in Asia and Latin America (Kaur,

Kulkarni, Gaiha& K. Pandey). The issue of rural non-farm employment is attracting the issue of many development scholars and rural experts. This is due to the fact that non-farm employment plays key role in creating gainful employment and ensuring sustainable livelihood for the rural people. Despite this, there are controversies over its role in creating income inequality. Different actors and organizations employ different approaches to sustainable livelihood and thus for rural non-farm employment.

Statement of the Problem: The rural non-farm economy accounts for roughly 25 percent of full-time rural employment and 35-40 percent of rural incomes across the developing world. This diverse collection of seasonal trading, household-based and large-scale agro processing, manufacturing and service activities plays a crucial role in sustaining rural populations, in servicing a growing and modern agriculture, and in supplying local consumer goods and services. In areas where landlessness prevails, rural nonfarm activity offers important economic alternatives for the rural poor (Hagblade, Hazell and Reardon, 2006: 2).

Despite the crucial role that rural non-farm employment plays in the national economy in general and rural economy in particular, it has not given much attention by scholars and policy makers. Data regarding the scope and nature of rural non-farm employment, factors that determine it, that significance it has in ensuring sustainable livelihood is very limited and calls for further investigation. The same is true in the context of Ethiopia. As Fikru (2008) argues, in Ethiopia, policy makers, by tradition, were favoring agriculture as means of rural economic development for a long time. This excluded rural non-farm activities from much attention, thereby ignoring an important source of livelihood. This could be partly due to lack of empirical data that could influence policy makers and experts who assume key position in rural development approaches. This study is carried out in the light of the very limited attention for rural non-farm employment in literatures and among policy makers, which is indeed very vital as far as poverty reduction and sustainable livelihood is concerned. A rigorous and empirical investigation of the phenomenon is very vital to bring the issue forefront. Accordingly, the nature of rural non-farm employment, its significance and determinants, and its contribution to sustainable livelihoods is thoroughly analysed in this study.

Objective of the Study

General Objective: The general objective of this study is to analyse the various approaches and emerging issues towards rural non-farm employment and sustainable livelihoods.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To investigate the complex and dynamic nature of rural non-farm employment
- To understand the various approaches towards rural livelihood analysis and rural non-farm employment.
- To examine emerging issues on rural non-farm employment and sustainable livelihoods

METHODOLOGY

The study employed documentary research approach so as to explore the approaches and emerging issues towards non-farm rural employment and sustainable livelihoods. Documentary research method refers to the analysis of documents that contains information about the phenomenon we wish to study (Bailey 1994). The documentary research method is used in investigating and categorizing physical sources, most commonly written documents, whether in the private or public domain (Payne and Payne 2004, cited in Ahmed, 2010). This research method is just as good as and sometimes even more cost effective than the social surveys, in-depth interview or participant observation. Doing documentary research is much more than “recording facts”. It is a reflexive process in which we confront what researcher calls the “moral underpinnings of social inquiry” (Coles, 1997: 6). The paper, being documentary research, utilizes secondary sources from development and sociological literatures so as to come-up with relevant and empirical findings regarding different approaches towards rural non-farm employment in relation to sustainable livelihood.

DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

Rural Non-farm Employment: The rural non-farm employment may be comprising all those non-agricultural activities which generate income to rural households (including income in-kind and remittances), either through waged work or in self-employment. Non-farm activities play an important role in rural households' income and livelihoods, even in areas commonly perceived to be subsistence-oriented, such as Sub-Saharan Africa (Kuiper, Meijerink, and Eaton, 2006:1).

There are number of socio-economic and environmental factors that determine rural people's access to non-farm employment. Davis (2003) identifies determinants of rural non-farm employment at two levels: at the household level and wider factors determining access to rural non-farm employment. The determinants of access to rural non-employment at household level include education, social capital, ethnicity, gender dynamics, credits, and physical infrastructure and information. In Davis's view, education provides with greater opportunity for engaging in non-farm employment by providing with skills from formal schooling and increased social network. Social capital, as Davis argues, can translate into access to relevant market information and buyers, wage employment and business opportunities, formal and informal loans, cash advances, inputs on credit, skills, shared resources for production and marketing, and migration opportunities. Ethnicity is an important determinant of participation in the rural non-farm employment, and can play both and enabling and constraining role. Caste system has also to do with power relations thereby access to productive assets. Davis (2003) also identifies wider factors determining rural non-farm employment opportunities. Agricultural development, natural resource endowments, economic infrastructure, levels of public service, rural town development and business environment are wider factors that determine access to and effectiveness of rural non-farm employment. Agricultural development increase opportunities to engage in non-farm employment by providing with surplus food and increased income and saving to invest in rural non-farm

Table 1. Composition of rural nonfarm employment, by region (percent)

	Nonfarm share of rural workforce	Women's share of rural non-farm employment	Manufacturing	Trade& Transport Services	Financial& Personnel Utilities, mining& others	Construction	Total
Africa	9	39	19	31	35	15	100
Asia	24	24	27	29	31	14	100
Latin America	31	36	22	23	34	21	100
West Asia and North Africa	21	11.23	22.36	20	100		

Source: The Rural Nonfarm Economy: Prospects for Growth and Poverty Reduction by Haggblade, Hazell and Reardon, 2010

economic activity. Apart from agriculture-linked activities, the non-farm sector comprises wood processing and trading, alcohol production, fish processing and trading, mining and quarrying, construction and tourism necessitating natural endowments (Davis, 2003:15). Economic infrastructure shapes the development of the RNFE by influencing the scope for developing certain economic activities, the operational costs faced by enterprises, and the conditions for accessing outside markets. Islam (1997) argues that the expansion of roads, transport and communication infrastructure leads to specialization and division of labor by the rural people. Levels of public service, rural town development and business environment also pose significant impact on access to rural non-farm employment. As to Jonasson and Helfand(cited in Islam, 199), the extent to which rural non-agricultural employment is able to reduce poverty ultimately depends on rural households' access to non-farm employment and the income prospects in these activities. Rural non-farm employment plays significant role in enhancing household's capacity to stand with shocks and stress particularly when farm based activity fail to yield what was expected.

Rural non-farm Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods:
Approaches: As to Chambers and Conway (1991) asserted that sustainability connotes self-sufficiency and an implicit ideology of long-term self-restraint and self-reliance. It is used to refer to lifestyles which touch the earth lightly; to organic agriculture with low external input; to institutions which can raise their own revenue; to processes which are self-supporting without subsidy. Socially, it means the ability to maintain and improve livelihoods while maintaining or enhancing local and global assets and capabilities on which livelihood depends. The sustainable livelihoods idea was first introduced by the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development as a way of linking socioeconomic and ecological considerations in a cohesive, policy-relevant structure. The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) expanded the concept, especially in the context of Agenda 21, and advocated for the achievement of sustainable livelihoods as a broad goal for poverty eradication. It stated that sustainable livelihoods could serve as 'an integrating factor that allows policies to address 'development, sustainable resource management, and poverty eradication simultaneously' (Krantz, 2001:6).

Different scholars and development agents approach sustainable rural livelihood from different angles. While some mainly focus on economic aspects like on production, employment and household income, others tend to develop a more holistic view which unites concepts of economic development, reduced vulnerability, environmental sustainability while building on the strengths of the rural poor. In the following section, I tried to figure out various

approaches so sustainable livelihoods in relation to rural non-farm employment.

DFID's Approach: The objective of DFID's SL approach is to increase the agency's effectiveness in poverty reduction by seeking to mainstream a set of core principles and a holistic perspective in the programming of support activities to ensure that these correspond to issues or areas of direct relevance for improving poor people's livelihoods (Krantz, 2001:22). The DFID's framework for sustainable livelihood is built around five principal categories of livelihood assets or pentagons to underline their interconnections and the fact that livelihoods depend on a combination of assets of various kinds and not just from one category. An important part of the analysis is thus to find out people's access to different types of assets (physical, human, financial, natural, and social) and their ability to put these to productive use (Krantz, 2001:22). The DFID framework offers a way of assessing how organizations, policies, institutions, cultural norms shape livelihoods, both by determining who gains access to which type of asset, and defining what range of livelihood strategies are open and attractive to people. (Carney 1998). This is particularly true for rural non-farm economic sector whose viability and effectiveness is highly influenced by those factors mentioned by Carney. The asset pentagons' in DFID's framework should be given a due consideration as far as rural non-farm employment is concerned. As Davis (2003) argues, access to productive asset is vital in rural people's propensity to engage in non-farm activities. While people who have more access to these assets tend to engage in non-farm activity, people with limited access to the productive assets are less likely to engage in non-farm economic sector.

UNDP's Approach: UNDP employs an asset-based approach, emphasizing the promotion of people's access to and sustainable use of the assets upon which they rely as central to poverty reduction. To that end it stresses the need to understand the coping and adaptive strategies pursued by men and women (Krantz, 2001:12). This is crucial in promoting opportunities for rural poor to engage in non-farm employment. As people's capacity to effectively utilize the assets improves, so does their ability to diversify their livelihood by engaging in non-farm employment. Since UNDP specifically focuses on the importance of technological improvements as a means to help people rise out of poverty, this positively contributes to development of rural non-farm employment in areas of agro-processing, enterprise development, and marketing. As modern technology pertain to rural areas and their adjacent towns or cities, this provides with greater opportunity for rural non-farm employment by increasing productivity as well as wide spread non-farm jobs. UNDP also emphasize that policy (macro-micro links) and governance issues as they impinge on people's livelihoods

should be taken into consideration and addressed through specific actions. This could be alternative approach for the conventional approach to sustainable development which remained to be solely farm focused. Policies need to take in to account the diverse nature of rural livelihood strategy people employ in addition to farming. Finally, Krantz (2001), argues that for UNDP the sustainable livelihood approach serves primarily as a programming framework to devise a set of integrated support activities to improve the sustainability of livelihoods among poor and vulnerable groups by strengthening the resilience of their coping and adaptive strategies. Here the role of rural non-farm employment is undeniable if the program has to ensure sustainable livelihood, particularly for vulnerable groups. Barretta, Reardon and Webb (2001) argued that, Poverty policy generally aims to improve the asset holdings of the poor, either by endowing them with additional financial, fixed, human, natural, or social assets, by increasing the productivity of assets they already hold, or both. In order to augment the vulnerable poor's income, providing non-farm employment is a determining option.

CARE Approach to sustainable Livelihood: CARE stresses empowerment as a fundamental dimension of its approach, therefore identified two levels of empowerment: personal empowerment and social empowerment. Personal empowerment, which refers to enhancing people's confidence and skills (i.e. their human capital) to overcome constraints, principally in the economic sphere. This may include the formation of mutual support and interest groups to commence savings activities, to improve existing income-generating activities, or to identify and start-up more profitable new activities (Krantz, 2001:16). The second alternative to ensure personal empowerment, that is to identify and start-up more profitable new activities, stresses the importance of creating rural non-farm employment so as to ensure sustainable livelihood. Even improving the existing income generating activities may call attention for rural non-farm employment if the source includes non-farm activity.

SIDA's Approach: The SIDA also approaches sustainable livelihood as same to other approaches. It aims at empowering the rural poor by bringing policy changes and participatory actions. The programme document states that raising quality of life is not a matter simply of improving the incomes of the poor. Most of all, it means increasing people's capacity to provide for themselves and lift themselves out of poverty. As people gain more capacity, they are more likely to engage in non-farm economic activities and earn sustainable livelihoods.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Approaches

Strengths of the Approaches: The sustainable livelihood approach are important in that they facilitate an understanding of the underlying causes of poverty by focusing on the variety of factors, at different levels, that directly or indirectly determine or constrain poor people's access to resources/assets of different kinds, and thus their livelihoods. People's access to these affect their effectiveness in on-farm and non-farm economic activity, thereby ensuring sustainable livelihood. It also gives special consideration to vulnerable sections of the community particularly women, who face problem in accessing the asset pentagons, and owing to that less likely to engage in non-farm economic activities. The approaches also closely analyse the power relations that

influence people's access to and utilization of productive assets that affect rural non-farm employment.

Weaknesses of the Approaches: The very rationale of the SL approach is poverty alleviation. Since poverty in the first place is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, the question of 'who is poor' leaves the approaches with methodological and theoretical problems. This is also true to the poor who are believed to lack opportunity to engage in non-farm economic sector, thereby may have sustainable livelihoods. In addition to this, there is gender issue which has to do with the fact that men and women not necessarily have equal access to engage in non-farm employment which the approaches failed to take in to consideration. The issue of power relations is also missed.

Rural Non-farm Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods: Emerging Issues

In rural areas, given the constraints on farm expansion and continuing growth of the rural population, greater attention is being given to non-farm activities in view of their potential for economic development and poverty reduction (Kaur, Kulkarni, Gaiha and Pandey, 2010:1). In addition to these pushing factors that trigger developing rural non-farm employment opportunities, there are also pulling factors such as globalization process, trade liberalization and rise of multi-national corporations. Kaur, Kulkarni, Gaiha and Pandey (2010), identified number of factors that account for the emerging interests in the rural non-farm economy. First, employment growth in the farm sector has not been in consonance with the employment growth in general, implying that agriculture alone cannot sustain growing rural communities. This in turn demands providing non-farm employment opportunities so supplement their subsistence. Secondly, even if productivity and incomes in some non-farm activities are not higher than those in farming, the former as an option makes a difference, as it facilitates income diversification. Diversifying into non-agricultural activities could be a response to insufficient farm income or a means to decrease the vulnerability associated with volatile agricultural incomes due to, for example, exogenous shocks such as rainfall. The rural employment is getting more and more attention as it is accommodating huge number of active labor force. Tacoli and Satterthwaite (2003) argue that rising urbanization and national economic growth, together with improved transport and communication networks, provide important economic linkages between urban and rural areas, opening up new opportunities for rural households (and 2003). This positively contributes for rural non-farm employment.

Thirdly, a planned strategy of rural nonfarm development may prevent many rural people from migrating to urban industrial and commercial centers. Although migration to urban areas may be the most appropriate route out of poverty for some groups, rural non-farm economy could also have the potential to slow down rural-to-urban migration and the process of rural poor merely becoming urban poor. But a growing rural nonfarm economy does not guarantee access by the poor. Haggblade, Hazell and Reardon (2010), argued that wealthy households, well-endowed with financial, human and political capital, often prove better equipped to take advantage of growth in the high-productivity segments of the rural

nonfarm economy, both as entrepreneurs and as wage employees. But the poor households, left to their own devices, risk remaining relegated to slow-moving backwaters of the rural nonfarm economy. This is another emerging issue attracting the interest of many scholars and development agents. In recent years, globalization, urbanization and improved infrastructure have opened up new opportunities in many rural areas, thereby reducing their dependence on agriculture. These developments seemingly offer new prospects for stimulating rural economic growth and, perhaps, new pathways out of poverty. But just how powerful these new opportunities are and to what extent have they substituted for agricultural growth as the main driver of the RNFE is still debatable.

Rural non-farm Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods:

The context of Ethiopia: The importance of off- and non-farm activities to ensure sustainable livelihoods security in Ethiopia has been at the center of investigation during the past 20 years (Tegegne, 1995; Mulatu and Teferi, 1996; MOLSA, 1997; Mulatu; 2001; Tasew, 2002; Wondeye, 2005, cited in Kuneand Mberengwa, 2012). However, indications are that the debate is still far from being over. Different perspectives have imaged on whether these activities can lead to the attainment of sustainable livelihoods security. The study done by Tegegne (1995) on assessment of Ethiopia's agricultural land resources indicated that involvement in non-agricultural activities positively influenced farm productivity. It noted that farmers involved in non-farm income in Wolaita, Damot Gale and Kachabira Weredas were prompted to cultivate more land, utilize fertilizers and engage in cash crop production. The study emphasized the importance of production linkages between the farm and non-farm activities and recommended the expansion of education and the development of the livestock sector as a means to enhance rural growth linkages.

Despite the increasing share of the non-farm economic sector in accommodating the rural labor force, the sector is not well developed in the country. For example, An assessment made by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) (1997) on agricultural wage employment and rural non-farm employment in Ethiopia showed that rural non-farm activities were characterized by low capital requirements, low-quality products, and low-productivity jobs. Number of factors account for the underdeveloped non-farm economic sector. This made rural non-farm employment opportunity slim. They are identical with the problems from which the farming sector also suffers. As it was identified by Kebede, PhD (2000), four major dimensions of the employment problem in Ethiopia without a thorough analysis and understanding of which a meaningful work can hardly be done to alleviate the problem. These dimensions include the individual or household characteristics, the macro-level institutional framework; the environmental or physical setting influencing and influenced by individual as well as social actors; and enabling or service rendering capabilities of the larger society. Individual or household characteristics that affect rural age, gender, health and physical conditions, family size, family ties and social networks, material endowments such as livestock capital as well as ownership of farmland including access to farm inputs. These all factors play key role in determining rural non-farm employment. Formal institutional factors play significant roles in both enhancing and constraining peoples' participation in meaningful work including non-farm employment. Institutional factors that affect both farm and non-farm

employment include land tenure policies and practices, unequal trade relations and its impact on the rural sector, regional and spatial patterns of investment, foreign debt, and the costs of military expansion.

Summary

The rural non-farm employment is of great importance to the rural economy because of its production linkages and employment effects, while the income it provides to rural households represents a substantial and sometimes growing share of rural incomes (Davis, 2003:7). In light of the shrinking farm land size with the ever growing population, non-farm economic sector is a key in diversifying rural livelihood strategy. The rural non-farm employment is complex and dynamic in its very nature. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish it from farming economic sector. People from various socio-economic backgrounds engage in it as survival strategy. Despite the difference in terms of the activities and the level of development of the sector, rural non-farm economic sector contributes lion's share in accommodating the rural active labor force and enhancing the rural economy. There are number of factors that determine the viability and effectiveness of rural non-farm economic sector and thereby non-farm employment opportunities in the rural areas. Some of them are level of education, age, gender, ethnicity, access to productive assets and natural resource endowments. The wider context that determine it include, agricultural development, business environment, economic infrastructure and policy frameworks. Various development agents and rural experts approach the rural non-farm sector and sustainable issue differently. But most approaches mainly focus on farming activity with lesser attention to non-farm economic sector and employment opportunities. Though their holistic approach allows making the analysis of contribution by non-farm sector, they say little or nothing about its very nature and complexity. The rural non-farm sector is nowadays attracting the attention of various international agencies, NGOs, government organizations, development scholars, policy makers, rural experts, and politicians. This is mainly due to the ever growing world, particularly overwhelmingly rural country's population at the expense of the shrinking farm size and declining agricultural productivity. The problem of rural unemployment is another emerging issue as far as rural-farm employment and sustainable livelihoods is concerned. Though the rural non-farm economic sector play key role in our country Ethiopia as means of livelihood diversification and thereby ensuring sustainable livelihood, the sector is not yet well developed and lagging far behind as compared to its potential for rural non-farm employment number of factors own for this. The outstanding factor behind the limited growth of rural non-farm economic sector lies in the institutional and policy framework that deprived the sector a due consideration and hampered its growth. There are also micro-level factors including the characters of individuals and households. All in all, the rural non-farm employment plays key role in ensuring the sustainable livelihood for the rural people. It can significantly contribute to poverty reduction and rural development if the concerned bodies give a due attention. We cannot think of rural people's wellbeing unless we firstly ensure a gainful employment for them. In light of the shrinking farm land size and declining agricultural productivity, the rural non-farm employment by no doubt is key in providing gainful employment.

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