



Sustainable Livelihoods: An Asset-Based Approach for Social Change

Founded in 2019, Sustainable Livelihoods Canada (SLC) is a national, not-for-profit social enterprise. Applying the holistic strengths-based Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) framework, we support individuals and communities to build their resilience and capacity to achieve social and economic security. In solidarity with diverse changemakers, we are building a movement for systemic change to create the conditions that support sustainable livelihoods for all.

The Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) approach emerged from research at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in the United Kingdom with a focus on international development. IDS research identified and explored changes in a range of areas, to capture a whole picture of livelihood building strategies and activities.

SLC adapted the approach to the Canadian context grounded in the recognition that external forces beyond people's control can significantly impact their ability to move forward. Through this lens, SLC has been able to clearly document the systemic abandonment of vulnerable populations by Canadian institutions and policies. A "sustainable livelihood" means more than simply having a job. It encompasses people's inclusion and full participation in society and the economy. It also means that people recognize and enhance their inherent resilience to weather life's challenges.

Building the "Capacity" and "Conditions" for Sustainable Livelihoods

Sustainable Livelihoods require building both the "capacity" and "conditions" that can support people and communities to thrive. The more systemic barriers that hold people back, the more vulnerable they become to setbacks and the more challenging it becomes to achieve sustainable livelihoods. Using a strengths-based approach, SLC partners with individuals, organizations and communities to focus on two interrelated aspects of sustainable livelihoods development:

- Build capacity to participate by identifying and growing existing skills, knowledge, ability and resilience to navigate systemic challenges and achieve self-determined goals.
- Build conditions for equitable social and economic participation through advocacy and systemic change efforts grounded in solidarity and social justice principles.

SLC offers both the tools and language to highlight existing systemic barriers as well as the transformative impact of SL-informed interventions and initiatives to diverse stakeholders, including communities, public and private sector partner organizations, and various levels of government.

Asset Mapping for Change

Assets are the building blocks for making positive change and managing challenges in our lives. Rather than start with “What don’t I have?”, an asset-based approach asks, “What assets do I already have, and how can I strengthen them?”

SLC’s asset-based approaches and mapping tools help individuals, programs and organizations, and communities to identify and grow their assets. The asset mapping process is grounded in the recognition that external “conditions” and vulnerability context can impede people’s progress on their self-determined goals. The asset mapping process can thus also help identify specific systemic barriers that need to be addressed to build assets and achieve sustainable livelihoods.

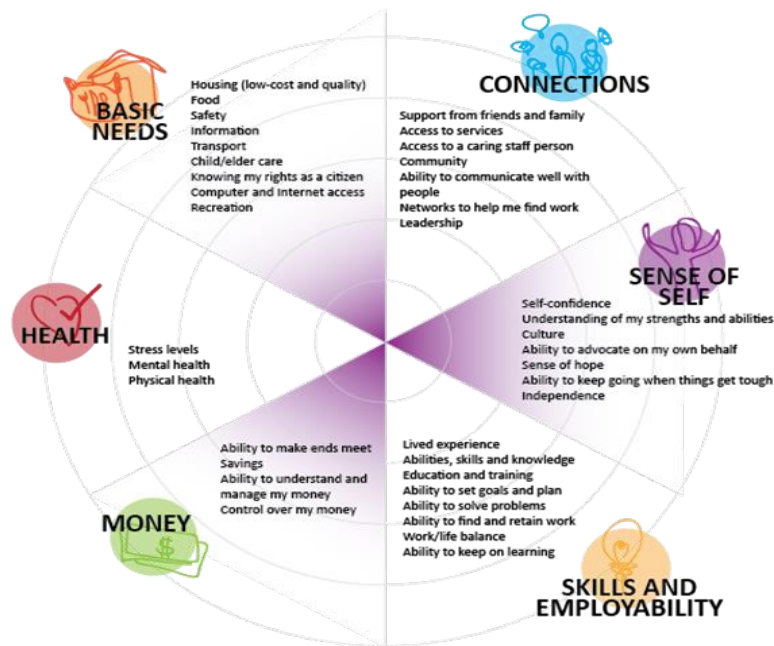
SLC has documented the success of asset mapping tools as an effective and impactful way of conducting community-led research and evaluations of programs and organizations as well as for building practical strategies for sustainability.

The six broad asset areas explored in SLC’s individual asset mapping tools include Basic Needs, Connections, Sense of Self, Health, Skills and Employability, and Money (see illustration below). Our asset mapping tools can be customized to align with specific organizational or community changemaking goals and priorities.

Asset Map Guide

What is an Asset?
Assets are building blocks for your future. We take a positive, well rounded approach to look at all your strengths.

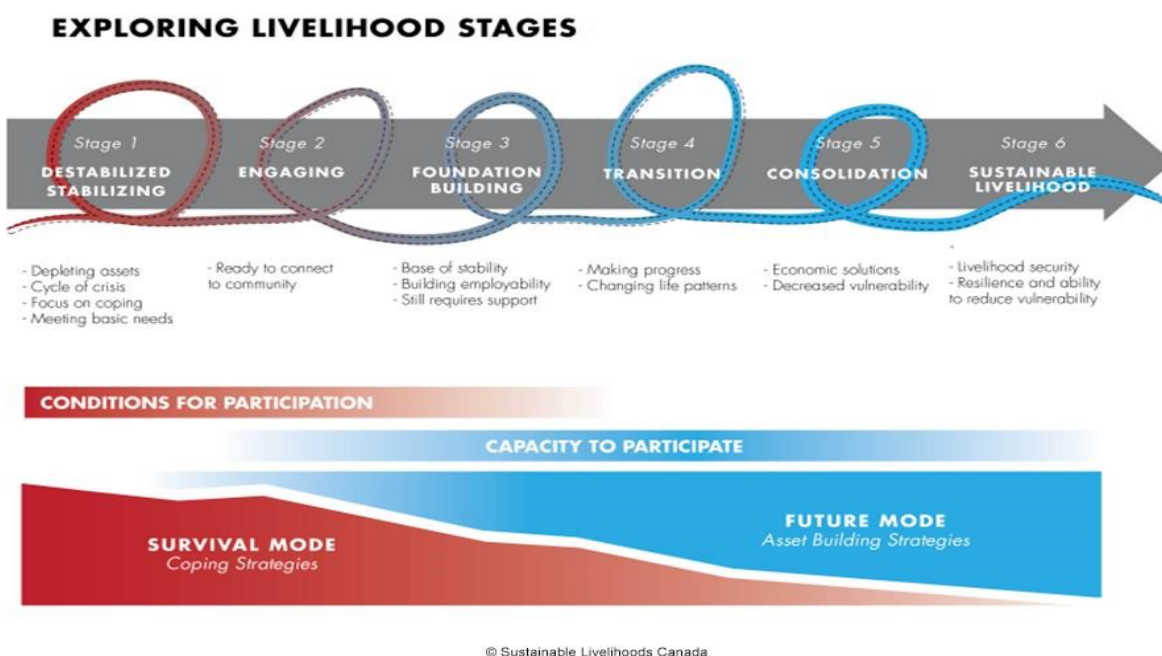
Assets can be:
- What you know
- Your “lived experience”
- Your skills and abilities
- Your learning and training



Sustainable Livelihoods Canada ©

Stages of Livelihoods

SLC also helps to identify stages of livelihood development or the patterns that influence asset building pathways to a sustainable future. Recognition of these livelihoods stages have been proven to help organizations better align their services and programs to meet their program participants “where they are at”. In doing so, organizations have been able to assess gaps in service areas while building conditions that help foster increased participant capacity and engagement. An illustration of the livelihoods stages is shared below.



A Sampling of SLC’s Work

- **Canadian Women’s Foundation (CWF) - Rebuilding Lives Grant Stream:** SLC led and conducted the evaluation of a three-year national funding initiative supporting 16 CWF grantees to collaborate in exploring effective practices in gender-based violence prevention programs. The resulting report, [Barely Keeping it Together: Final Evaluation for the Rebuilding Lives Grant Stream](#), described the challenges faced by women experiencing gender-based violence, and the those of the GBV sector as it continues to work within a policy framework that leads to systemic abandonment.
- **National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) - Building Employment Pathways for People with Disabilities:** A three-year national multi-stakeholder project funded by Employment and Social Development Canada, currently under way. As a



project partner, SLC is leading efforts to strengthen Sustainable Livelihoods coaching practice and build capacity within NEADS to develop employment pathways for people living with disabilities, through employer engagement resources and strategies. SLC is also working with NEADS and other project partners to develop an advocacy agenda centred on building the economic security of people living with disabilities.

- **Job Skills York and Peel Region – Motivational Interviewing Informed Sustainable Livelihoods Coach Training:** SLC trained all 56 staff at Job Skills in Motivational Interviewing-informed Sustainable Livelihoods coaching practice. We also helped Job Skills form practice groups to embed the practice in the organization, as a strategy for long-term sustainability.
- **Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants:** SLC Associates led a research and evaluation project in partnership with OCASI, COSTI Immigrant Services and WoodGreen Community Services to explore the current state of coordination between settlement and housing, and to identify effective practices. Our work culminated in the publication of [The Intersection of Settlement and Housing Services and Policies: Reducing the Risk of Homelessness for Immigrant and Refugee Women](#).
- **Canadian Women’s Foundation – Feminist Entrepreneurship Project:** This national entrepreneurship project is delivered by seven organizations across Canada. In collaboration, we identified values key to feminist entrepreneurship and designed a multi-faceted evaluation plan involving the voices of the participants and delivery partners. The plan is designed to support learning and improvement for our program partners while also telling the story of the project to attract future interest and funding.