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# Government Relief for Development or Government Development for Relief? Critical Lessons From the Famine Relief Programme (FRP) as an Input-Subsidy Policy in Lesotho, 2002-2003

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## ABSTRACT

This study, within the context of funding disaster recovery, purports to examine some socio-economic impacts of Famine Relief Programme (FRP) as a country-wide input policy of the agricultural year, 2002/2003, by the Lesotho Government (LG). Obtainable critical lessons in the implementation of this programme range from issues of management, efficiency, effectiveness and equity. A representative area of Roma valley has been used as the main primary information provider through observation and formal interviews for 'generalization' and conclusive evidence to country entirety. The assessment includes whether food security or yield increment was attained through FRP as an input-subsidy policy.

FRP has been a food security strategy implemented in vain without considering some lessons of success from other former food security strategies like 'The Mantśa-Tlala (famine-eradicating) Scheme as other small-scale farmers put it. They deem failure to copy such lessons of success to emanate from political antipathy of just not preferring to follow one's preceding political rival's line of success. Food security as thus stands out to be an issue of 'political will' not applied rather than stifling lending conditionalities of IMF and World Bank, as well, fostering 'liberalization' on agricultural sector, even where the private sector is not fully developed and the government being the only one with enough capital to sharecrop with the famine-stricken asset-poor or has adequate potential to create/strengthen one if not attract foreign one. Only that there is almost no developed food self-sufficient country in the world, always providing food aid, that does not practise input subsidy to any degree if not throughout all cropping and marketing levels. Progressive taxes and other redistributive welfare measures are adopted by developed food self-sufficient countries to tackle among others subsidy cost-recoupment in agriculture, including practising unfair terms of global agricultural trade.

## INTRODUCTION

This research study assesses, on farmers, the socio-economic impacts of the input policy adopted by Lesotho government (LG) through the Famine Relief Programme (FRP) of agricultural year 2002-2003. The study confines itself to Roma valley as a representative sample to the country. Rural villages in the foot-hills and lowlands were observed and their farmers interviewed together with the officials of the Ministry of Agriculture. The study determines whether FRP enabled the farmers to achieve higher output levels contrary to previous years and as such establish attainment of food security by the end of 2002-2003 agricultural year. The appraisal also includes effectiveness, efficiency and equity of distribution of the inputs as the main focus.

The research assumes that asset-poor farmers in the least-developed Lesotho depend on government for their inputs and that not all farmers could be included into the policy framework (FRP), especially the landless. Furthermore, policy-makers and decision-makers took not into account local variations in soil and climate when implementing the country-wide FRP.

### Food-deficit Problem in Sub-Saharan Africa

A cycle of drier years started in mid-1960s in most of the Sub-Saharan Africa and the negative impact of these droughts has increased and become visible through the widespread of famine making recovery from such droughts to become more difficult for people.[1] Southern African food crisis continue to be a worsening threat for many countries in this part of the African continent. According to the World Food Programme (WFP) (2003), as an arm of the United Nations that oversees food aid, better harvests in Malawi and Zambia have declined by half, from 13 million tonnes to 6.5 million tonnes, increasing the number of people with severe food shortages in Southern Africa. Many people are at the risk of famine in Swaziland and Lesotho. Families continue to experience food shortages, escalating food prices, unemployment and political instability. This is more visible in Zimbabwe whose dwindled annual contribution and distribution of more than 280,000 tonnes of grains in this region has created more deficit and inflationary effect on food.

According to Mason and Talbot (2002:2) "As world leaders attended the United Nations General Assembly…new figures were released showing the deepening famine facing Southern Africa. An estimated 14.4 million people [are] were threatened by famine by then, compared to 12.8 million reported in the previous survey of May". This confirms worsening famine in Southern Africa. Drought has severely affected maize production, causing it to fall

sharply in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique. Some reports estimate 10 million people in Southern Africa to be experiencing famine, mostly in above mentioned countries, inclusive of Zambia as already indicated.[2] Famine is also greatly exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic across the region as it causes resources diversion, depletion and productive manpower loss.

The immediate causes of the current famine crisis are drought, flooding and low levels of crop planting. What has made these countries so vulnerable to famine, however, is chronic poverty and inadequate policies. While severe climate contributed to Southern Africa's most recent problem of famine, it is not the sole cause. Other factors ranging from political instability and poor governance to the spread of infectious disease also contribute to famine and food insecurity.

The problems of food insecurity in all SADCC countries, particularly at the household level, are experienced in some rural areas and among the urban poor and unemployed[3]. This shows that food insecurity is not just the problem of the rural families but is also the great problem for a large number of urban households. The problem of food insecurity is relative in the region; it also exists in countries with net surplus and is experienced at the household level among certain vulnerable groups.

Food insecurity is believed to be caused by a number of various aspects, both regionally and nationally. Among all these, this problem is believed to result from fluctuations and instabilities in production and supply. The fluctuations are also seen as being caused largely by droughts. At household level, food insecurity is the result of poverty whose level is determined by factors such as lack of access to agricultural resources, employment opportunities, reasonable income, agricultural inputs and ability to market the produce.

With regard to food security, the Zambezi Basin countries are generally not self-sufficient in food production as the statistics indicate a general increase in food imports between 1976-1995. These imports help to feed mainly the rural poor who are unable to fend for themselves due to the poor harvests caused by drought, floods and lack of agricultural inputs.[4]

**Lesotho's Chronic Problematic Food-deficit Situation and Background**

The total area under cultivation in Lesotho fluctuates between 300,000 and 350,000 hectares. This land at its best utilization and under most favourable conditions produces only between 50% and 60% of needed country's cereal

production. There is hardly any intensification of arable land use. Since crop production is a gamble against natural climatic conditions, the 50% to 60% cereal production is almost a seldom case. The cultivated area is very small when compared to the population of over 2 million people growing at 2.6% rate per annum. Cropped area by crop is most frequently as follows; 61% for maize, 19% for sorghum, 11% for wheat, 6% for beans, peas 2% and 1% sunflower. Over populated little fragmented land, inequitably distributed as well, disables large intensive scale farming and hence the prevalence of subsistence production that rarely meets food requirements at individual family level, especially in the rural sector where there is 80% of the asset-poor population.[5]

Participatory rural appraisal techniques (PRA) used in data collection produced a myriad of following agricultural problems: There is severe soil erosion and low soil fertility. Soil erosion has created large gullies reducing what was arable land for many families. Most part of the land is sloping and in heavy rains much soil is lost due to lack of vegetation cover. Low soil fertility is therefore worsened by rife erosion. This greatly reduces fields and increases food insecurity, compounded by loss of manpower from several deaths due to HIV/AIDS pandemic, as well.

Furthermore, land is communally owned and this tenure system is not commercially oriented. Land cannot serve as collateral and therefore commercial farming is not widely practiced due to severe poverty. Only around 14% of the small-scale irregular farmers are said to be commercial. Credit facilities are not in place. A bank that was meant for this purpose known as Lesotho Agric Bank collapsed in 1990s due to management problems. Therefore appropriate technology for better yields remains inaccessible in this country.

PRA elicited that improper farming practices include inadequate use of organic fertilizers due to poverty, untimely planting due to late rains and inputs of seeds not being sufficiently available across the country, poor land preparation, inadequate weeding and delayed harvesting resulting in plants being destroyed by hailstorms, frosting, pests and insects invasions and plants' diseases compounded by lack of chemicals and/or biological means and effective extension services to control them. Retarded growth of plants for food is a 'normal' sight in Lesotho, whether north or south. Many Basotho believe that rainfall is the most significant determinant of agricultural productivity but one argues here that rain fed crops need moisture and not necessarily rain. Poverty is a major setback here because there is enough running and ground water which though drought may affect, better production with water reserves can be maintained, as well as food reserves against severe famines.

PRA findings also indicate that education and training on home gardens is not widespread and intensive. This is confirmed by the fact that Lesotho's commercial imports to a large extent include cabbage, potatoes, beetroot,

tomatoes, carrots, onions, spinach, pumpkin and lettuce. Rural dwellers also confirm that malnutrition ranks unmarked in the statistics of patients among children admitted in government hospitals. Lack of community gardens also promotes food insecurity.

Terribly declining migrant remittances due to mine workers retrenchments in Republic of South Africa (RSA) have greatly reduced food accessibility to many Basotho families. This incidence with now escalating unemployment rate of more than 45%, due to lay-offs, compulsory early retirements and jobs cuts and reduced fringe benefits within Structural Adjustment Lending Programme by IMF and World Bank as lending conditionality on LG have increased numbers in groups such as ('street-children/kids') vulnerable children in the street, abandoned children in the villages, deserted women/families, needy women and men, 'school drop outs' due to lack of parental and insufficient LG's support, starving and needy aged ones with meager old age pension, large dependency ratio and other unnoticeable vulnerable groups such as prostitutes ('commercial sex workers'), delinquents and the abused (including child labour, boys herding in remote hazardous mountainous areas, girls being domestic workers, all exploited).

PRA findings confirm and conclude that generally, Lesotho as a country suffers a long-term inadequate food productivity forcing her to import food for never less than 40% requirements to offset her national food deficit. Poor nutritional status, rapid population growth causing encroachment on arable land and skewed distribution of such land, chronic poverty, frequent drought, soil erosion and low soil fertility (environmental degradation), scarcity of arable land, joblessness, lack of widespread irrigation, poor agricultural farming practices, expensive inaccessible inputs, lack of feeder roads and education and training on food security are continuing to aggravate Lesotho's food insecurity and economic dependency. All these together with occasional severe hail-storms and heavy snows creating disastrous state, stifle any Lesotho's disaster preparedness and mitigation. Capacity in disaster preparedness and mitigation is still greatly limited.[6]

The agricultural low production in Lesotho consequently makes the mean annual cereal production per household to be 27kg only, which is far below the FAO standard of 180kg per person. Only 2% of households are self-sufficient in cereal crops.[7] This implies that even with years of exceptionally good harvests, the country cannot produce enough to feed its people. There is always a cereals deficit requirement of at least 40% estimated at 217,870 metric tonnes (mostly maize, wheat and sorghum respectively), to be met with aid and at times dumped imports. There is also a declining trend of agricultural production from 1996 to the present, which is due to series of drought occurrences since 1994/95.

The prime minister of Lesotho declared the state of famine on the 19th April 2002. The famine occurred as a result of a serious crop failure precipitated by unfavourable weather conditions. The food shortage problem is further compounded by a high rate of unemployment and retrenchment of mine workers from South Africa as already indicated.

Hunger, which is the result of low production, seems to be the problem in Lesotho as much as it is in many developing countries. In most cases hunger is the cause and effect of poverty. This is because Lesotho, like any Southern African country, suffers cyclical drought and other natural catastrophes and has experienced years of good and bad harvests.

Lesotho is not only a small food-deficit landlocked country surrounded by its economic giant, RSA, but also has a small Gross National Product (GNP) per capita of US $540. Her economy is generally based on limited agricultural and pastoral production as well as minor percentages of industrial product export.[8]

The country has ten districts, of which Maseru is one. Within this district is a place named Roma. This place is situated in the south-east of the capital city Maseru, 35km away. This place is also a scenic valley; characterized by plains of fields, which are located in different types of soil, yielding different levels of output. As well, the overall agricultural productivity of Roma valley, as is widely the case, is currently low. The planting season of 2001-2002 country-wide, was characterized by abnormally severe drought that adversely affected production of cereal crops. This resulted in great famine, which forced the government to assist the farmers by providing them with the input subsidies in the form of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides for 2002-2003. The programme was declared as Food Relief Programme (FRP).

**FRP's Objectives, Strategy Limitations and its Terms-Conceptualization**

LG adopted FRP as an input policy basically to reduce famine by attaining food security locally comprehended and as pursued, to be food self-sufficiency strategies, though food security may not necessarily be food self-sufficiency. That is, enough food quantities around is not spontaneous adequate access, especially where unequal purchasing power or the market which responds to cash-backed needs and not hunger are involved. The expectation was also that farmers' widespread poverty would be alleviated. It was generally meant to mitigate the impact of food deficit by assisting Basotho community in improved agriculture and sustainable production.

Input policy refers to measures designed to determine price levels in the market and delivery systems of bought variable inputs in farm production.[9] FRP was used by LG to provide farmers with 50% subsidized inputs like fertilizer, lime, pesticides and seeds. This state action lowered inputs' prices

as centre-stores from which these inputs were available were made known to the farmers through media and extension agents. Provision and distribution of the subsidized inputs was also done in collaboration with Disaster Management Authority (DMA), LG department dealing with country's disasters. Furthermore LG provided 43 tractors to the farmers at lowered subsidized costs for cultivation.[10] In return, after harvest, the concerned farmers had to pay in kind to the government, depending on how much each farmer had reaped. However, the government supplied all these without ensuring simultaneous increase of all types of variable inputs proportionately, that is delivery of inputs, appropriate quantities in relation to individual field and information concerning the quantity, type and combination of inputs for various fields. This approach lacked complementary inputs like sufficient credit and irrigation water and was as thus ill-equipped concerning Lesotho's often drought which actually stroke. It is important to note that increased productivity may not be attained only through subsidies but even through diseases' control like HIV/AIDS and soaring above climatic constraining factors.[11] Package approaches like this usually require no ingredient/element missing; otherwise failure and loss are certain as has been the case with FRP-input policy. FRP was also meant to overcome farmers' risk averse behaviour, thus increase their yield and income, prevent errors in use of improved inputs and use of wrong dangerous ones and make inputs widely accessible even in remote areas.

Food security in the context of Lesotho through FRP was food self-sufficiency as already indicated, that is the availability and accessibility of food supplies in sufficient amounts to meet the current and future basic requirements needed to insure against calamities and poor harvests. Food security includes attaining sufficient and nutritionally balanced quantities of food.[12] Poverty, through resources and techniques lacking constrains food security efforts. Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon; it is lack of money and anything that can make life comfortable, that is, lack of basic essentials: food, clothing and shelter etc. Poverty describes material and services lacking, spatial and social inequality and social relations involving social exclusion, dependency and lack of ability to lead 'normal' life. It can be absolute or relative lacking.[13] Poverty and drought are thus understood to have been causes of famine which is the absence of food in a country for a very long period of time threatening the livelihoods of many Basotho. It is the general state of prolonged food grain intake decline per capita, ultimately leading to excess deaths in the country or region. It threatens food security

and nutritional status of households as caused by poverty and recurring droughts.[14]

In this context, input policy was adopted by LG through FRP which had declared the state of famine in the country on the 19th April 2002. The famine occurred as a result of a serious crop failure precipitated by unfavourable weather conditions. Following the declaration, the government contributed US$2,300,000.00 towards Food Aid and Nutrition and US$1,500,000.00 towards agriculture (FRP).[15]

The cabinet established a sub-committee of Ministers assisted by Task Force of senior officials to formulate the FRP. The FRP outlined the Food Aid and Non –Food requirements. As a result, necessary structures were put in place to facilitate the implementation of the Programme. The survey undertaken was followed by the registration of the affected population. All the farmers were entitled to seeds, fertilizer, and machinery at subsidized rates, the quantities being based on the size of their field as calculated by the Extension Officers in the District Agricultural offices. The main activities in agriculture, within the FRP, were the provision of inputs for agricultural production, provision of mechanical operations and promotion of food security through poultry production especially for the landless and destitute farmers. With this incidence, the government assisted the farmers with fertilizers and seeds (maize, wheat, sorghum and beans). Farmers had to pay half of the expenses or in kind in the form of part of their harvest. Field machinery operation such as ploughing, planting and cultivating were also subsidized at 50%. Inaccessible fields to tractors would be tilled by draught power. However, the inputs arrived late, which led to late planting, thus affecting household yields negatively.

**Input Policies in the SADC region**

In this region governments, with the help of donors and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) always have ways to assist those that are vulnerable or attacked by famine or any other natural or human-based disasters. Too often, strategies to reduce food insecurity have been operationalized in emergency or relief. Many NGOs are also helping Africa to deal with the crisis, and Catholic Relief Services as well as Church World Services continue to supply food, seeds and cash to the poor, while also trying to combat HIV/AIDS and spread agricultural recovery.[16]

In the Communiqué of SADC Ministers of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources (2002) the ministers noted with concern that financial

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flows to agriculture from both public and private sources have declined over time; hence a considerable level of investment in the agricultural sector is required to achieve the objectives of food security and economic growth. The ministers also stressed that poverty reduction and food security strategies should, inter-alia, include measures to increase agricultural production, productivity and food availability. They also expressed commitment to promote equal access for women and men as well as child-headed households to land, credit, technology and other agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, agrochemicals, seeds and mechanization.

Given the situation of food insecurity and famine, Dhliwayo (1989) shows that there are various well-meaning programmes that are being undertaken by SADCC member states to address the issue of food insecurity and famine. The successful implementation of these programmes holds some promise of increasing agricultural production and reducing poverty throughout the SADCC region.

In SADC Food Security Network Ministerial Brief at http://www.sadc-fanr.org.zw, with the concern over the start of the 2002-2003-crop season, many SADC member states were reviewed. In Lesotho, it was found that planting has been constrained by shortages of tractors, draught power, improved seed and fertilizer and the government had introduced the policy of leaving no land fallow and was subsidizing inputs to capable farmers. In Mozambique, farmers were urged to plant early and to plant cassava, sorghum, millet and short-cycle maize.

Many countries including Botswana, the role of the government in agricultural development has been considered crucial and yet, in some cases, very sensitive and controversial depending on the interest involved, the role of the Ministry of Agriculture and indeed the government is to continue providing necessary services and infrastructure to encourage farmers to increase production and productivity. However, in some remote areas, the government may, in the interim, engage itself in agricultural marketing and provision of inputs through its offices.[17]

**Input Policy Socio-economic Impacts on Farmers: FRP's Critical Lessons**

In many countries, responses to drought [famine or any other disaster towards agricultural sector] should be seen in the context of economic and social conditions as agriculture is an important economic back-up and may play a greater role through the redistribution of resources.[18] In a way, governments and agencies need to be sensitive to the consequences of relief on the receiving societies. Relief effort even in the form of subsidized inputs,

like any other external intervention, can have an impact on the economic, social, political and cultural systems of the recipient societies, even though the social impacts may seem difficult to ascertain. Furthermore, within any given society, the impact of famine relief will depend on at least five factors, namely; the nature of the famine itself; the stage of the famine at which the agency intervenes; the type of relief offered; the structure of the society experiencing poverty; and the structure of the national and world systems of which the affected society is a part.[19]

Top-down policies tend to forsake the interests of the poor and deny them access to land, agricultural inputs and generally deprive them of access to productive assets necessary to produce sufficient food for them to live a healthy and productive life. On-station agricultural research, parastatals, cooperatives, subsidized agricultural equipment, centrally administered credit programmes and many other initiatives have favoured the less poor at the expense of the very poor. As a result, the policies have provided poor answers to the urgent needs of the affected societies in the allocation of the resources to achieve longer-term food security. Government policies also fail to attract long-term investment in food production.[20]

As to what has been the impacts of FRP in Lesotho, extensive discussions were held with the farmers, Extension Workers, District Agricultural Officials, the Ministry of Agriculture's headquarters and DMA. At these discussions, it was clearly established that very late planting of crops due to late arrival of the subsidized seeds and fertilizer and inadequate tractors and other machinery were the main constraints to production that year (2002/03).

It has also been important to investigate whether the inputs have increased the farmers' level of income through their produce, as it is believed that there should be changes in the level of income as brought by the programme. The increment of the income could enable the farmers to invest in any farm machinery that an individual farmer is in need of. However, findings of this study show that 98% of the farmers in Roma valley could not sell their produce, as it was poor and even not enough. As a result, they could not invest anyhow, even by buying the simple hand hoe. As such their living standards, income, health and education of their children were not improved in any manner. One other shocking fact is that subsidized poultry that was intended for the landless never took off; officials lack information as to why poultry was not done for the landless.

Many households continued to have inadequate means and resources to access or buy food, even after that FRP year. In the absence of functioning national safety nets or welfare system, targeted food aid was necessary to meet the nutrition requirements of households, which would otherwise have no access to food. In early 2003, the prices of cereals, particularly maize,

began to decline as the prospects of relatively better harvest had improved at the regional level. Severe drought still stroke in Lesotho in 2002/03, however, yield per hectare at the national level was higher than the previous year but remained highly variable between the districts. Southern lowland districts of Mafeteng, Mohale's Hoek and Quthing were worst affected and many areas were assumed not to produce any grain at all for the following two consecutive years. The Northern lowland districts of Berea, Leribe and Butha-Buthe were relatively less affected and the yields were slightly better. All foothill and mountain areas, although variable within districts, showed best potential.[21] It is, however, striking that in Roma valley, 10% of the farmers that used subsidized inputs reported their yields to have sharply decreased in that cropping season of 2002/03. As for others decline was not that remarkable (see table 2 page 22). Causes of low yields have already been blamed for late delivery of subsidized inputs, incomplete packages of inputs, lack of LG's support throughout levels of cropping, drought, frost and hail, inadequate tractors, poverty/asset-poor condition and so on. One of the best indicators that FRP did not generally increase yield is that at least the following cropping year if not two successive cropping years lacked any food reserves, 40% food deficit was still eminent. Subsistence farmers still remained non-commercial.

One other critical lesson is that FRP created dependency syndrome in most farmers as they expected the government to go further and weed or hoe their fields through its machinery, many of the crops were choked by weeds. Farmers continued to expect in vain that LG would subsidize them even in the following year, as a result many farmers' fields remained fallow. This increased food insecurity in the next years. Many farmers kept on hoping that more subsidies would come from the government to boost the effort and revitalize the agricultural sector in the country where food security had tremendously declined in the past.

Inequitable access to 50% subsidized inputs still resulted in many farmers left untouched by this policy as they totally lacked any purchasing power to access half-priced inputs. The delivery system lacked sufficient crediting system and only benefited the less poor neglecting the very poor. Social differentiation, exclusion and inequity had been aggravated on the very poor and vulnerable, really needing food. Hence their argument that 'Mantśa-Tlala Scheme (Famine-Eradicating Scheme) of the 1970s and early 1980s was better because the government sharecropped with every one of them and took half of the yield from which their remaining harvest was always more than any harvest they ever had because variable inputs and support were made available by the then LG throughout all the levels of cropping. Farmers are also complaining that people who have really benefited by foul means are government officials who were involved in the inputs delivery service points

as they took the inputs for themselves and started sharecropping all over the country with any landed person. They are said to have become rich and are still continuing to share crop even to date. The poor became poorer and the rich, richer.

The inefficient delivery system of inputs was seen as very deceiving to many farmers as it gave many of them incomplete inputs packages. Some received only lime, while others accessed only seeds without fertilizers and so on and so forth of incomplete packages. Some of the inputs (mostly lime) are still unused and left by sides of, for a long time fallow fields. Explanations on this unused lime are also different, some are saying they are donations which they are in anyway unable to use for lack of complete accessible inputs. Weathered-torn lime bags and wind have already rendered this lime unusable by scattering it on off field side-locations. The government-subsidized fertilizers and seeds that were available for the 2002/03 agricultural season were not available and/or accessible to most farmers. The government was not in a position to provide a sustainable efficient and effective input delivery system to farmers, not even considering the neglected landless except on paper.

**Efficiency, Effectiveness and Equity in the Distribution of the FRP's Inputs**

Such distribution problems invariably involved transport obstacles, delayed delivery of seeds, fertilizer or pesticides (and other inputs) preventing timely sowing; inadequate collection of harvest and sufficient delivery of consumer goods to rural shops. Part of the problem is the poor state of transportation infrastructure with poor roads and lack of enough transporting vehicles and manpower and tedious paper work/red tape. Much of the problem stems from the government inefficiency and/or overt corruption. Depots for collecting inputs are widely scattered and are often too far from the farmers' fields and as thus seeds are not delivered on time for planting.[22]

Farmers who were skipped or could not access these or some of these inputs feel that there has been biases in the rationing of the inputs that were in short or excess supply, typically favouring ruling political party affiliates and the wealthier clients who were in a position to pay the 'under-the-table' costs of acquiring the input supplies. They report that information concerning availability and accessing of these inputs was unevenly disseminated. These hurdles in combination created failure in timeliness to access the inputs for evenly improved food security at household level. There was lack of even practical and relevant information for accessing inputs. The Roma valley farmers alone, constituting 14% never accessed such subsidized inputs. Registration and distribution activities bypassed them.

Diversion of the LG subsidized inputs from the target group to government agricultural officers, probably for lack of adequate motivation, has continued in a way to marginalize the real poor farmers and supplied such officers with more of staple food crops for their survival and self-enrichment as they sell in towns and everywhere. This is ultimately a betrayed food security effort in terms of the missed target group, resulting in inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Some officers are reported to have indulged in illegal marketing of such inputs at unofficial prices. FRP has thus indeed reflected supply failures at village or national level. It has therefore become regressive in its effects on income distribution or food security because it benefited most of those farmers who had better purchasing power and neglected the penniless and landless. Roma valley farmers alone, constituting 60% could still not afford the subsidized inputs due to their financial lacking, where there is 45% unemployment country-wide but 80% in the rural sector. With the input policy of Malawi, for instance, farm inputs were reportedly available across most of the country, with the prices stable but too high for poor households with three million families targeted to receive free "starter packs", which could make Malawi self-sufficient in maize if the rains were to be good. In Swaziland, production was hampered by shortages of fertilizer and draught power and high tractor rentals not affordable to poor small farmers who had to shift to sugar cane production for little income earning but which affected staple food production, food supply and threatens food security in the long-run. Furthermore, in Zambia, inputs were reportedly available, but high prices limited their use and limited government assistance reached only 50% of overall plans. In Zimbabwe, government reported shortages of maize seed in anticipation of a 25% increase in the area planted, and access to seeds by poor farmers was severely constrained due to high prices and the slow pace of assistance programmes.[23]

Equity in food security, especially in the rural sector in Lesotho may be perceived as determined by arable land accessibility and its even distribution. That is the number of fields per household influences household food security to some extent. It is widely known that the rural sector in Lesotho has 30% of the households as landless. This further puts many households at a greater threat and experience of famine. Observably and obviously, this partly emanates from the skewed distribution of arable land and not only overpopulation and fragmented land. The table below confirms such concentration of arable land in few hands, treating Roma valley as a country's sample, then, 50% of the farmers have more than one field. Community resources shared inequitably usually result in various forms of insecurity including food one, as that embraces both social and economic exclusion.

**Table 1:** The number of fields per household/Hh.

| Number of owned fields per Hh | Frequency | Percentages |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 25 | 50 |
| 2 | 15 | 30 |
| 3 | 6 | 12 |
| 4 | 2 | 4 |
| 5 | 2 | 4 |
| Total | 50 | 100 |

(Critical lessons in LG input-subsidy Policy Study: 2005).

It is important to also note that even if the more than one field landed 50% in the table above could supposedly release a piece of land to the landless 30% (country-wide), food insecurity would not be so significantly reduced without arable land use intensification (and irrigation). Almost every field owned by a household is commonly more than an acre. It is also interesting to note that 50% of households that claim to have enough grain throughout the year, for subsistence, are the ones that have at least more than one field for cultivating. This is not necessarily food security for them as it also involves balanced diet, gender-equity issues and age/seniority, dependency ratios/household sizes as some factors that may determine accessing (nutritious) food at household level. It still remains sound though, to infer therefore that at least 50% of the rural population on the other hand is famine-stricken or lacks adequate grain throughout the year (excluding the landless).

While sharecropping may be argued to reduce vulnerability of the landless, this insignificantly and limitedly happens at the will of the landed, quite often to their vantage point in accessing resources inputs they at the moment lack. The fact is the landless are often destitute if not only constrained by landlessness. The landless and destitute usually provide their labour to the landed that in turn meagrely reward in kind, normally with part of the harvest and/or food where monetary reward is not used, for seasonal subsistence. This is incidental within the usual 40% food deficit requirement worsened by a lacking rural economy whereby the rural sector is dependent upon shopping imported foods. Erratic sharecropping is practised at most by 14% of the landed households.

Subsidized input policy is usually rather more effective and efficient in import substitute approach seeking to promote and protect local input production/manufacturing and marketing to boost local economy. Unfortunately, for LG, this was not the case, almost all of the inputs, as accessed by farmers, varying from a combination of maize seeds and fertilizer, maize seeds, beans seeds and fertilizer, maize seeds and sorghum seeds, wheat seeds and fertilizer and only fertilizer, respectively, were imports, thereby also disabling easy cost control at government level and market level. Technological efficiency also lacked in that only 2% of the farmers could readily use their owned tractors, others had to wait for weeks for subsidized tractor ploughing which resulted in late planting and losses in harvests as 64% of Roma valley farmers reported. Others never accessed subsidized tractor ploughing as it never came and had to resort to draught power, which is again an incomplete subsidized-input package supply and improper farming practice.

Entitlement to access the inputs is also important to note as it is always the case that every programme or policy has the beneficiaries or a target group. However, this programme did not have specific beneficiaries as all the farmers who were willing to reap the benefits were allowed to register for the inputs, given the condition that they would pay half the government expenses after the harvest time or during the purchase of inputs. The authority ensuring food security also showed that there has been no discrimination against any farmer, as they had been told to register on time and any other information regarding the programme was disseminated through public gatherings, radio programmes and extension officers. By the officer's words, this had been a blanket subsidy programme for all farmers with fields. Findings on the ground are contrary to this, provisions never came to other waiting farmers while the landless remained neglected.

Effectiveness of FRP may also be assessed by comparing yield before its intervention and its effect on the yield. The following table below confirms that the programme was not effective considering Roma valley farmers' yield as a sample. There was a general decline in yields of grain.

**Table 2:** Yield before and after FRP.

| Yield before FRP | Frequency/ farmer | Percentage | Yield after FRP | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0-300kg | 24 | 48 | 0-300kg | 29 | 58 |
| 301-600kg | 9 | 18 | 301-600kg | 8 | 16 |
| 601-900kg | 7 | 14 | 601-900kg | 6 | 12 |
| 901-1200kg | 5 | 10 | 901-1200kg | 3 | 6 |
| 1201-1800kg | 3 | 6 | 1201-1800kg | 2 | 4 |
| 1801-2400kg | 2 | 4 | 1801-2400kg | 2 | 4 |
| Total | 50 | 100 | | 50 | 100 |

(Critical lessons in LG input-subsidy Policy Study: 2005)

There is a difference of farmers (10%) who got a striking decline in yield at a very low range of 0-300kg while 16% of them lowered from 18% at range between 301-600kg. General decline in yield is then observable from this range on until 1201-1800Kgs. The last range remained unchanged mainly due to the fact that these are the farmers who had own tractors and technological implements for relatively improved farming and therefore complete input packages. What is interesting is that the lowest range increased, confirming a sharp decline for most of the farmers in year 200/03 due to late arrival of the inputs and the drought that persisted even in that year. Farmers who have not used received inputs which they mention to have come too late have been included in the first range as well as their yield counted as zero. This has been almost the same for the whole country when previous yields are compared with FRP yields. Generally, 2002/2003 agricultural year has been regarded as a bad one as far as production of maize, in particular, is concerned compared to the previous agricultural year. Some of the reasons for the failure of the crops are frost, hail, flood and drought, as already mentioned. The Bureau of Statistics also shows that the 2002/2003

harvests were 60% below normal. As a result, farmers had to buy additional maize meal, corn or even flour, that is food import mostly in urban shops. By the end of that year, as production was low and poor, farmers did not have enough food.

Gender-wise this study has proved that most farmers are women (52%) (married, widowed or separated). They have been participants in this programme and this may be traced back to their poverty, as most of them are not in any permanent activity that earns them income, besides agriculture. On the other hand, some women farmers still have some survival strategies that earn them some income, which helped them out of the FRP failure/crisis. This programme is found to have impacted negatively on the farmers, either socially or economically, as they did not get high yield in that year and struggled a lot for survival.

## CONCLUSIONS

The asset-poor farmers in the least-developed country, Lesotho, are heavily dependent on government actions for their inputs. Some farmers reported that it was probably their first time ever to either use improved seeds and/or chemical fertilizers on some of their fields after so many years, others never use such improved inputs for lack of sufficient cash. Farmers constituting 14% in Roma valley never accessed subsidized inputs as thus not all farmers could be included into the policy framework (FRP), especially the landless. Asymmetric information and factors to inputs delivery system failure resulted in seclusion of other really needy farmers. Furthermore, policy-makers and decision-makers took not into account local variations in soil and climate when implementing the country-wide FRP, hence variable yields per district and poorer yields than ever, since there are dry land farming techniques that ought to have been adopted on variable soil and climate basis.

The agricultural sector in Lesotho is dominated by women, as in most cases are the ones left behind by their husbands who sometimes work as migrant labourers. Men do not constitute a great part as they normally work away from their homes, and those who are farmers, are in most cases retrenched especially from the mines in RSA. Married people seemed to be the ones who are heavily absorbed in this sector as they have the responsibility of supporting their families.

It has also been found that many of the interviewed farmers have one field and most of these fields are found on bad and sandy soil, or that type of soil that needs fertilizer to enhance its productivity. The typical crops that have been found to be preferred by farmers are maize and beans. It has also been found that most of the farmers are not always able to buy themselves the inputs every year and could only depend on government support/subsidy. That is why they have been willing to register for the inputs that the government was intervening with. It should also be noted that most of these farmers who registered are women and that they do not have their income but

are dependent on their husbands who work in other sectors of the economy, for those who are married. FRP developed dependency syndrome on most farmers as they felt that the government should intervene again in the following year. One's global studious observation and analysis is that there is almost no food self-sufficient developed country without strategic subsidy element in agriculture, however theoretical views are justified.

The FRP has also been found to have negative economic impacts on many farmers as production had declined due to late cropping, as a result of late delivery of inputs. The yield of many farmers was thus low and poor. Those who sometimes manage to sell some produce lost that opportunity. As such, the programme did not help the farmers economically as they did not sell anything in order to get income through their produce so that they could invest in any farm machinery or even be able to send their children to schools. FRP did not improve health and living standards of the farmers.

Landless farmers were not helped anyhow during the implementation of the FRP yet the government document on this programme had an aspect on poultry production for ensuring food security. This type of landless households seems to be the most vulnerable as the government excludes them in many improvement services.

On food security issues, many farmers were left insecure as a result of the programme's inputs delivery delay and incomplete inputs packages, non-distribution, unaffordable inputs' costs and state impropriety through its inputs smuggling (sharecropping) officials. This is because many farmers have large family sizes yet they did not get enough food while others did not get anything at all. After the harvest time of 2002-2003, many farmers who were the beneficiaries of FRP were even more famine stricken than before.

In terms of effectiveness, efficiency and equity in the distribution of the inputs, there has been some problems. The inputs reached the farmers' destinations late in relation to the normal time of planting for most farmers. As a result their planting time was delayed and this caused a negative economic impact. Some of the problems that farmers encountered within this sector include the smuggling of the inputs and poor information dissemination about the FRP.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As it has been observed that agricultural sector is characterized by decline in the production of staple grains and overall reduction in agricultural output, all the agencies involved in ensuring food security should cooperate in order to enhance investment in agriculture so that the efforts aimed at boosting this sector can benefit the farmers. There should also be increased domestic and international support for agriculture, as this will avoid the dumping of subsidized food imports into the developing countries, which has a damaging impact on local farmers. This is because some farmers seem to solely depend on agricultural produce for survival. Almost every food self-sufficient

country or otherwise food secured has heavy subsidies involved, causing unfair terms of trade (imperfect competition) in world market, contrary to World Trade Organization mandate of regulating and maintaining fair practces in global/international trade. Surity in food security circumstantially requires input subsidies and market determinism since the 'free' market (without human obligations) is not for the poor famine stricken ones.

Any initiative aimed at enhancing development in this sector should be in line with farmers' calendar of activities, especially planting time. Local variations in climate between the highlands and the lowlands should be considered. The extension officers should also go out and observe the farmers' fields in order to advise them on the inputs appropriate for each farmer's field, to avoid the errors in inputs combination before they can happen. Appropriate and enabling farm technology should also be introduced to enhance the productivity of this sector. It is highly essential for the agricultural sector to be transformed into agribusiness addressing local food consumption needs also connected to local industries ('forward and backward interlinkages') for primary products/industrial inputs and value added products before targeting the exploiting unfair and unreliable export trade.

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