CAUSES OF POVERTY IN LESOTHO

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is a multi-faced phenomenon and it shows itself in different ways in different situations. It is therefore important to understand poverty in order to address it and reduce its impact on society. If the governments are to succeed in poverty reduction they need to adopt a comprehensive view of poverty.

It has been clear that most of poor people reside in the rural areas of African countries so it is vital to understand poverty from their perspective. They live on farming, agricultural inputs availability, environment, national hazards such as drought affect these farmers and they are faced with a great challenge, especially because they are the backbone of most of African countries’ economy.

Inadequate health care and lack of information are causative factors of ill health and disease. The statistics show that people who are poor are highly affected by diseases. The imbalance gender leads to women being more vulnerable to poverty and disease than men.
The rural structures need to involve people in decision making as well as utilizing their knowledge in the delivery of services needed. The government of Lesotho is working very hard to improve this situation and reduce poverty.

INTRODUCTION

As a multidimensional phenomenon, poverty is defined and measured in a number of ways. But since material wealth does not form the total sum of being rich, lack of income does not form a total sum of poverty. Poverty is the greatest challenge facing African continent, it means different things to different people because it is multifaceted. Other factors that reflect the extent to which individuals are deprived of access to basic human need such as food, shelter, education and health services constitute an integral part of any description of well being and poverty. Most of African people live on less than US$ 1 per day, they do not have access to safe drinking water, access to proper infrastructure and they have low level of literacy among adults, they lack information on issues that could change their situation.

Most African Governments are embarking on strategies to fight against poverty but unfortunately the gap between the rich and the poor is large and growing not just in incomes but in education and health outcomes as well (World Bank 2000:33)
People who are more affected than others are residing in rural areas, these are people who also face extreme vulnerability to ill health, economic dislocation and natural hazards/disasters and they are often exposed to ill treatment by institutions of the state they are powerless to influence any decisions affecting their lives. Intensification of rural poverty has resulted in increased urban migration by landless households and has also undermined the ability of patriarchal family system to maintain women dependents some women leave their household's children and household farm and go to town (Berstein 1990:133).

It is clear that poverty undermines Africa’s prospects for future and needs to be tackled seriously. The state must play a central role in poverty reduction. It is important for the state to establish effective and efficient Public Administration system that addresses poverty reduction UNDP poverty report 1998 maintains that poverty and inequality are a threat to social stability and political rights.

The paper attempts to bring about Basotho’s perspectives on poverty this will cover issues of lack of general capabilities of individuals to lead long and healthy lives in a manner they have reason to value, the environmental and natural hazards
that affect agricultural products, gender inequality that will show that women are more vulnerable than men to poverty even though they are educated than men in Lesotho. Also decentralization process which plays an important role in bringing government closer to the grassroots so that their views can be heard and utilized properly. It concludes by recognizing initiatives taken by government to try and eradicate poverty and a bit of the role to be played by civil society and international donors.

WHAT IS POVERTY

It is hunger or homelessness, it is being sick and not being able to see a doctor, it is fear for the future, living one day at a time and it is not having power, representation or freedom. (World Bank 2001 VI).

UNDP report 1998 elaborates on describing poverty in six categories:

- Human Poverty – the lack of essential human capabilities such as being literate or adequately nourished
- Income poverty - _lack of minimally adequate income
- Extreme poverty – destitutions specified as inability to satisfy even minimum food needs.
• Overall poverty – a less severe level of poverty defined as inability to satisfy essential non-food as well as food needs.

• Relative poverty – poverty line set at one-half of mean per capita income implying that the line can rise along with income often this term is used loosely to mean overall poverty.

• Absolute poverty – defined by fixed standard an example is international US$ 1 per day poverty line which is designed to compare the extent of poverty across different countries often this term is used loosely to denote extreme poverty.

Actually the concept of human poverty focuses on the denial of opportunities and choices of human development to lead a long healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity and self esteem and respect of others (World Bank 1998:14).

Stan Burkey 1993 observed that, measuring poverty can be done in three different ways, first of all, through the gross national product (GNP) of the countries, secondly, through life indices such as literacy rate, high life expectancy and low child mortality to give an indication of the standard of living for average person and thirdly, through the basic need approach
which touches on essential provision of services that covers sanitation, public transport, health and educational facilities. He maintains that, “there are numerous problems involved in attempts to identify and qualify poverty no one set of measurements will give a complete picture (1985).

Rampele and Wilson viewed poverty as hunger and sickness, problems of environment, fear of uncertainty but all these are exacerbated by alcohol the effects of which are wreaking havoc in both urban and more recently rural areas of the country. The problems associated with liquor are not peculiar to the poor but their effects are often considerable more devastating for those involved because of their greater vulnerability completed with limited access to rehabilitated facilities. In areas where the poor lives there is a clear impression of the seriousness of the problem “children not at school also found pleasure in it” (Wilson/Rampele: 159) They have observed that poverty shows itself in different ways in different situations and it has diverse causes, it is not easy to make a clear distinction between the facts or symptoms of poverty and its origins.

**Urban Poverty**
In many developing countries urban dwellers often work in the informal sector with its low wages and long hours for example as street vendors, petty traders, taxi drivers, car parking attendants, beggars and commercial sex (population reports:8).

Most urban poor live in slums and squatter settlements without adequate access to clean water, sanitations and health care. They are exposed to pollution of the water and air endangers, that causes chronic illness and water related diseases. These diverse activities share the common threat, low status and insecure conditions. This situation prevails in Lesotho also because Maseru is crowded with migrants from rural areas looking for jobs, they form most of public sector along the streets of Maseru.

**Basotho Perspectives on Poverty**

Lesotho is a small country surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. She covers an area of about 30,335 square kilometers, roughly the size of Belgium and has a population of approximately 2.1 million. The country has 75% mountainous, with only 25% considered lowland. The lowest point is 1388 meters above the sea level. The country is divided into ten administrative districts and four regions (lowlands, foothills,
Senqu valley and mountain areas). Lesotho is a constitutional monarchy, the Head of state is the King and the Head of government is the Prime Minister.

In 1995 poverty assessment study was undertaken which showed that poverty in Lesotho is predominately a rural phenomenon. This was not only because most people live in rural areas but also because incidences of poverty are much higher in rural areas than in urban areas (Mapetla: 1994.16)

During the assessment period people viewed poverty to be the following:

- Lack of food and clothing
- Lack of employment (money)
- Lack of livestock
- Lack of agricultural assets
- Poor mental or physical health
- Insecure shelter
- Lack of adequate water and education (Lesotho Poverty assessment August 18 1995).

People that were interviewed thought that poverty is caused by
- Unemployment
- Environmental disaster (including drought, floods, hailstorms as well as soil fertility)
- The lack of adequate agricultural land and inputs
- Ill health and disability

By the year 2003 during the process for the development of the Lesotho National Vision 2020, consultations workshops were conducted throughout the country that revealed the way Basotho perceive poverty, on top of the list mentioned above they added the following:

- Lack of information to change one’s situation
- Lack of access to goods and services

The following list was what appeared to be causes of poverty:

- Alarming rate of stock-theft
- Lack of basic needs (food, shelter and clothing)
- Lack of health and sanitary facilities
- Vulnerability to sexual diseases including HIV/AIDS
- Retrenchments from South African Mines
- Natural hazards (drought, soil erosion, degradation etc.)
- Reduction of workers from the highlands water project due to its completion and this increases unemployment
• Population growth due to not using birth control measures but HIV/AIDS is taking its toll in the country and many children are orphans.

At the moment, Lesotho is among South African countries that are faced with a challenge of lack of food. The state of emergency has been declared on famine and war against HIV/AIDS has also been declared.

The country is also working on its poverty reduction strategy paper with the hope to combat the problem. The strategy is addressing road construction in rural areas where rural people are trained as constructors and will reduce rural-urban migration. The government is committed to providing basic education through its recent policy free primary education. In health the government has introduced the nurse clinician cadre and voluntary community health workers, to support the strategy of primary health care that delivers health care facilities down to community levels. The Government also has created privatization unit so as to develop an enabling environment for increased private sector participation in the development process by limiting direct government intervention in the economic sectors.
The government has also introduced a number of soil conservation projects and environmental rehabilitation projects in order to preserve arableland, soil conservation programme and the range management programme. There is also a programme formulated out of the Lesotho Highlands Revenue Fund – the Lesotho Fund for Community Development (LFCD) that has to finance projects that have been identified and prioritized by communities.

The government is working on the issue of introducing mechanism to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services to the grassroots. There is the Public Sector Improvement and Reform Program whose main thrust is to improve the public service management and service delivery within the government ministries and departments. The government is preparing the local government Act that would lead to local governments to be elected soon that will bring government closer to the people.

Health

The commonest and most important feature of poverty is susceptibility to ill health. Poverty is both generated by ill health an example; hunger due to poverty is the cause of death. In most cases ill health among the poor arises from lack of access
to food and clean water, health care facilities, education, employment, housing sanitary facilities and arable-land. These are compounded emphasized by lack of control over resources, extreme vulnerability and insecurity in the face of changing circumstances e.g. globalization. Also polluted air cause problems for poor people and they suffer from water related diseases such as diarrhea, cholera that kills millions in developing countries especially in Africa.

Lesotho is one of the countries experiencing extreme incidences of poverty and deteriorating health status due to poorly functioning health and social welfare system, high cost of medical care, long distances to medical facilities, insufficient numbers of health personnel especially rural areas and only one referral hospital which doubles also as a Maseru district hospital. This makes this facility congested and difficult for people to access services from it. There is evidence that the health system has not been able to optimally address the health problems.

The government of Lesotho is working on the health policy that will address the issue of cost of medical care, through a community based assessment of the poor so that they can be excluded from paying medical fees. Health centers and village health posts will be constructed as well as mobile health care services. Through Primary Health Care (PMC) the
government will ensure that every citizen attains a state of physical, mental and social well-being. Working conditions will be developed in order to retain qualified personnel in remote areas.

**HIV/AIDS**

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is taking its toll on the progress of governments throughout Africa for instance life expectancy for a new born mosotho was estimated to 55 years in 2000 (UN Population Division 1999) however due to HIV/AIDS pandemic life expectancy in Lesotho is said to drop to 45 years by 2010. This virus, thus threatens to reverse one of the most remarkable human development achievements in Lesotho modern history. HIV/AIDS has nullified any further improvements in infant mortality rates over the coming ten years.

HIV/AIDS remains a serious problem in Lesotho with an estimated of people dying per day at 70 and orphans at 70,000. This presents daunting risks and threatens macroeconomic and social fabric of the Basotho nation (Minister of Finance: 2004.13). HIV epidemic in Lesotho is still in an explosive phase though there is not proper surveillance of the incidence of AIDS related mortality but there is evidence
that HIV epidemic has reached a mature stage (Heywood, Mark: 2003.5).

The government has established Lesotho AIDS Prevention and Coordinating Authority (LAPCA) with a purpose of coordinating all efforts from different sectors of government, private business, community organizations and non-governmental organizations that are fighting HIV/AIDS. After the declaration of HIV/AIDS as an emergency by the Prime Minister it was noticed that this was no longer the problem of the ministry of health alone but the economic and social development are also threatened. The government formulated the national strategic Plan that directed every ministry to set aside 2% of its budget to look into HIV/AIDS related issues.

For purposes of improving Public Service capacity on HIV/AIDS institutions such as Lesotho Institute of Public Administration and Management (LIPAM), Institute of Development Management (IDM) and the National University of Lesotho (NUL) have developed specialized HIV/AIDS courses as a way to reinforce and broadening knowledge and skills in all organizations that are their clients. In 2003 NUL hosted a course on “Impact of HIV/AIDS on food security and Rural Development in the SADC Region” its purpose was to enable participants to understand implications of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on development
policies and in particular, the linkage between food security nutrition, agriculture, rural development and HIV/AIDS” (SADC Training News: 2003).

The national policy on HIV/AIDS provides that there should be policies for HIV/AIDS in workplaces that will allow employees to understand workers rights and also to take advantage of workplace to improve awareness and knowledge of HIV and thus assist prevention efforts. At the moment many ministries have drawn their workplace policies others are still in draft form. These policies are hoped to be a means to and end not and end in itself.

The budget speech 2004-2005 has shown that the government has scaled up its efforts by restructuring all institutions involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The other effort that the government to Lesotho is encouraging lately is Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VTC), many departments have under gone this test in order to put records and statistics straight. The government is willing to assist those who are affected and infected by support groups and medication

**Gender and Poverty**

The social group that suffers a high poverty risk is women in African continent. Women comprise more than half of world's population (Consumers - International: 20) They are over half of the population of this continent (Africa) (The Economist 2002: 52) Women in Africa remained culturalised subjects controlled by men, chiefs, husbands and even minor sons (2002:53). Most of these women reside in rural areas where they live below poverty line. They lack facilities even to produce food for their families, they depend on traditional methods and they have to travel greater distances in order to collect fuel fodder and water, this also imposes physical burden on them and exposes them to personal risk. Women are more prone to pollution from cooking done; they are diagnosed with acute respiratory infection (Courier 2000 P45).

The cultural subordination of women increases women’s vulnerability. They believe that they cannot question their
husbands on his sexual life, they believe that they cannot refuse sex as their bodies are for their husbands, they cannot ask their husbands to practice safe sex as he is the dominant partners. Thus, many women suffer very seriously from STDS and HIV/AIDS. Most of the women who are infected are innocent housewives especially from poor communities (world consumer rights Day 1998:46).

Gender situation in Lesotho is unique in many respects. Many women have had more opportunities for education than men in contrast to what is found in many African countries. The literacy rate in 1986 was 54% for women compared to 34% for men. There is a predominance of women at all levels of education. (Mapetla: 1994).

Despite this very high visibility of women they are still treated as minors by the dual legal system, Roman Dutch law and customary laws and the culture. They are still scarce in policy-making, decision-making and other executive councils. Even though women constitute a bulk of the electorate there are still very few in parliament. Although women are educated they still need their husbands consent to access loans. Their status is still continues to be linked to that of men no matter their achievement.
The poverty assessment issues paper noted that, “the incidences of poverty in Lesotho has increased in recent years... the worsening poverty has primarily been borne by females or female headed household” (Mapetla, 1994:15)

Most female are in manufacturing or hotels, shops and retail employment but this employment is exploitative and workers are vulnerable because of the ease worker substitution, they are paid meagerly because there is surplus labor. Female employees are also subject to demeaning practices such as body searchers by men and other sexual harassment.

Female in the public sector are the majority but they mostly in the lower grades and minority in higher grades. There has been a tendency for female to specialize in gender-stereotyped vocations (Secretary, nurses clerical and other services jobs).

Poverty in Lesotho is predominantly, a rural phenomenon. About 80% of the population resides in rural areas. But issues of poverty are not only because most people live in rural areas but also because incidences of poverty is much higher in rural areas than in urban area (Mapetla 1994:16). There is a problem of small land base and the country is also prone to adverse weather conditions, which have led to land degradation, and agricultural products suffered decline at a rate of 1.7% per year.
while increase rate of population of 2.6% per annum. Female-headed households face constraints in attempting to make a viable living in rural areas.

**Environment and Poverty**

Soil and water degradation is a major threat to improving the agricultural productivity that underpins the livelihoods of most poor people in rural areas and is a corner stone of poverty reductions strategies in many countries.

Drought is responsible for many cases of famine and food insecurity in many countries. Drought is therefore, those hazards potentially having the greatest economic impact because they affect the greatest number of people. Borton and Nichols, 1994 emphasise the economic impacts of agricultural and hydrology droughts as follows:

- Reduced income for farmers and agricultural labourers
- Increased price of staple foods
- Difficult and scarce availability of water results in a general increase of water borne diseases (typhoid, cholera etc)
- Deterioration of nutritional status and high vulnerability to infection
• Women an children walk long distances to collect water from perennial sources (time is money concept is lost)
• Reduced literacy because of children’s lack of energy to walk to schools and insufficient funds to pay school fees.

The welfare of rural households varies significantly with the size of plots of agricultural land available to them. The incidence of poverty is greatest among those with smallest plots. The land tenure has always been a problem, in some countries, land redistribution and resettlement has been government focus but “the clear lesson of the past 20 years or so, of support for land reform is that it has been too sectoralised and centralized. Land the tenure reforms by themselves do not reduce poverty or enable development; they must be linked to wider efforts including production and marketing support and the development of basic services and markets” (The Courier ACP-EU 2002:46).

The poor are most often exposed to environmental hazards and are least capable of coping with them. Poor live in areas of high ecological vulnerability and relatively low levels of productivity. When drought hit they are affected heavily because they already lack income since they depend on agricultural products.
Rural women produce 60-80% of food in developing countries and if aid is to fight hunger effectively it must reach them. (Courier ACP/EU 2002:5) It has been observed that, though women are farmers, they lack adequate and for farming but “as more land is taken into production and it becomes scarce, so women have difficulty in protecting their land rights on the basis of either local or state codified procedures and laws” (Bernstein 1990:61) The resource base for their independent farming is undermined and also they lack capital to purchase agricultural inputs.

In Southern African countries recently, rainfall has recently been low and varies so crop failures are more common because of drought. In some countries e.g. Lesotho, soils are of low fertility and soils are shallow and highly erodible Overgrazing of rangelands is the most serious contributor to soil erosions both in croplands and rangelands (World Bank 1993).

The government has expanded the ministry of agriculture so that there is another ministry that deals directly with land reclamation and tree planting to redress the situation and reduce soil erosion, as well as providing overall capacity for an environmental and economically viable agricultural production.
In its strategy paper for poverty reduction the government of Lesotho has observed the need to enforce the Environmental Act 2001, which has established the National Environment Secretariat (NES) that is an executive arm of Lesotho Environment Authority. Also there is need to review the Land Act of 1979 and enforce it so that land degradation could be controlled. The recommendation of Land Policy Review Commission of September 2000 should be adopted and over-harvesting of trees and grass should be minimized.

There is also a new Ministry of Forestry that has a mandate to plant more trees in the country and preserve other natural resources. This Ministry has to provide overall capacity for an environmentally safe and economically viable agricultural production that ensures food security.

**Decentralization**

Decentralization is a transfer of powers and functions to lower levels so that they can be able to have a say in matters affecting them. When governments are centralised they retain a major share of decision-making, resources allocation, planning authority, information, power and experience. This situation contributes little to developing local leadership and initiatives.
Through decentralization, the local government structures may assist planning process, policy making and decision making on allocation of resources. Planning may focus on issues that are relevant to poor people and they may come up with their priority least. Decentralisation goal is to ensure equitable distribution of governments human, institutional and infrastructural resources and capacity building.

It emphasizes sustainable development under the control and management of people directly affected, thus, ensuring full participation of communities in poverty reduction efforts.

The local councils would plan with people in policies on resources access that would be integrated into local planning for facilities such as safe drinking water, sanitation management, roads, new methods of agriculture, schools and clinics, all these have obvious and very positive effects on health. The World Bank partnerships for development maintain, “In many developing countries and particularly in Sub Saharan Africa, villages located more than 5 kilometers from the main transport routes are likely to have significantly lower standards of living than closer villages”.

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Hence the Lesotho government envisaged local government, which will be based on political devolution and decentralization of functions. Local governments will have the responsibility for social development and provision of public services within their jurisdiction. Citizens will be participating actively in planning and managing their own development through districts councils, community councils and rural councils. In their plan they would be driving the fight against the following problems, HIV/AIDS, poverty and gender bias through concerned efforts of the national government and the local governments. Citizens will have greater democratic control over the development planning process.

**Lack of Information**

It has been clear that poor people residing in rural areas lack access to goods and services and information to change their situation. The governments may have good strategies or put much effort to poverty reduction but such information does not reach people who need it most. There are a lot of summits and conferences held on poverty reduction and sustainable development. Most governments do not disseminate any information about the agreements made in these conferences and how they would affect rural poor.
In most cases the poor have not participated in sharing the benefits from the massive development efforts, because of lack of information. The governments are working on poverty reduction papers with a view of reducing poverty but rural poor do not know much about those strategies and how they will benefit them. The orphans, disabled and women do not know even the offices that can be of assistance for their needs, sometimes farmers do not know about new farm inputs offered by Ministry of Agriculture. It is important to empower farmers to adapt/adopt new technologies and support them in testing suitability of these new practices as well as applying advises and training services to their day-to-day life.

Information about health facilities and ways of preventing diseases and in this era of HIV/AIDS more education and information dissemination is needed to prevent the impact of this disease. Policies on education must be taken right to the people at the lowest level. This is why there is a need to have right structures at regional and district levels which would be responsible for making people aware in their areas, about all efforts governments are making to combat poverty and sustain development.

INITIATIVES TO REVERSE THE SITUATION
African leaders have a pressing duty to eradicate poverty and to place their countries both individually and collectively on a path of sustainable growth and development so as to participate actively in the world economy. There are many different forums that leaders have committed themselves to reduce this situation, for example, the World Food Summit held in 1996 and also the millennium Summit of 2000 where they have committed themselves to half poverty by 2015, to balance investment between social sector and investment to support the productive capacities of the poor, but the priority came up to be investment in agriculture that would lead to economic growth among poor people in rural areas. These summits observed that better agricultural methods would lead also to better living standards of poor people. It was realized that there is a problem of markets for agricultural products from developing countries so that liberalization of markets and well monitoring could assist farmers from developing countries. It was also discussed to increase incomes of rural poor resulting in broad-based development.

Agriculture is one of the core priorities in the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) it maintains that “improvement in agricultural performance is a pre-requisite of economic development” (Courier:3) NEPAD calls for the reversal of the
African situation through mobilizations of resources, such as, capital, technology and human skills and their proper utilization. “Democratic regimes are committed to the protection of human rights” (Microsoft Internet Explorer) rural people should be involved so that they can air their views regarding their status.

The world summit on sustainable development held in August 2002 Johannesburg, South Africa, committed itself to poverty reduction by both donors and government. It was agreed that donors should provide funding while developing countries focuses more on raising resources domestically especially in rural areas where the bulk of the poor people live and to the agriculture sector that is central to their survival.

International food Agricultural Development (IFAD) has shown that rural people are capable, creative and committed actors in development. But they must be involved more and more in policy-making process. It is clear that poverty reduction is not something that international organizations or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can do for the poor. The poor people have to seize responsibility for their own development, but they have to be given the right type of support and opportunity to change their own situation.
The Smart Partnership movement also calls for limitless opportunities and wealth that is shared, that is sustainable and that allows the participants to function in the global knowledge economy (global 2003:2) Smart Partnership relates well with NEPAD content “therefore to implement NEPAD is a practical way to make smart partnership work” (S. Simao SAID 2003) That would lead to African having access to safe drinking water, basic food, basic health care and education. These are all services that the poor need.

Lesotho has a Smart Partnership Hub in the Prime Minister's office that is encouraging all its sectors to approach development in a smart way, that is, all about collaboration and cooperation and networking for mutual benefit among all players both in public and private sectors of the economy. The objective of the Hub in Lesotho is to attempt to create employment, enhance productivity and contribute in realization of the Lesotho National Vision 2020 as well as PRSP and other government initiatives.

The Ministry of The Public Service has an objective to increase the number of women in senior positions in fulfillment of the government goal of balancing gender within the civil service. The government has ratified a declaration by heads of state in SADC 1997 which include the establishment of a policy
framework for mainstreaming gender in all SADC activities and in strengthening the efforts by member countries to achieve gender equality.

**Conclusion:**
The paper has discussed causes and some solutions of poverty as perceived by Basotho within their context. It has been clear that poverty means different things to different people. It also is clear that governments should understand poverty within their context in order to be able to address it properly.

There are many strategies that the government are putting in place but it is important that is understood from all its faces and so that it can be addressed accordingly. All strategies should also involve poor people so as to integrate their views in decision-making process that affect them.

The governments that wish to eradicate poverty should strengthen the capabilities of the poor so that they can better cope with adversity such as disease, economic shock, natural disasters and lack of information. Issues of discrimination such as gender imbalance should also be addressed.

It is true that the Government of Lesotho is working hard to fight against poverty but it important to realize that it has to be
addressed within a comprehensive manner. Information about all initiatives has to flow to the beneficiaries in order to accomplish its purpose.

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