

Understanding and Addressing Underlying Causes of Food Insecurity in Lesotho

Workshop Report

WORKSHOP RATIONALE

Since 2002 CARE International Lesotho has been implementing the Livelihoods Recovery Through Agriculture Programme (LRAP). LRAP is a developmental relief response to the food security crisis experienced in Lesotho since 2002. The programme was designed and has been implemented in partnership with the Lesotho Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and local non-governmental organisations and with the support of the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

The overall goal of the programme has been to improve the livelihood security of vulnerable rural households by increasing awareness of the prevailing vulnerability in Lesotho, influencing policy through practical interventions and building productive agricultural assets that have a short term impact on food security while addressing some of the chronic, underlying causes.

The regional meeting was designed to share LRAP practice, research and policy lessons with a wide regional audience. Displays before and during the workshop showcased LRAP's work on the ground, and a series of presentations from CARE, NGOs and government addressed topics such as:

- Understanding livelihood change and evolving vulnerability in Lesotho;
- Homestead gardening -what's new and what difference does it make;
- Beyond the homestead gardening - mainstreaming HIV and AIDS through positive living and nutrition;
- Understanding food security - policy and partnerships;
- Lessons for the region from LRAP.

Participants were drawn from several countries from around the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. The workshop was designed to enable participants to deliberate directly with LRAP project partners including CARE, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, NGOs, research institutions and community members.

AN INTRODUCTION TO LRAP

Improving food production and nutrition is one of the best ways to help vulnerable households cope with HIV/AIDS and its impacts. There is a strong two-way relationship between food insecurity and the epidemic:

households affected by HIV/AIDS have less time and energy for food production, while reduced access to food increases people's general vulnerability and accelerates the disease in those already infected. Homestead gardening can help to break this connection. It offers a wide range of potential crops than field-based agriculture, requires less time and labour and can provide a source of extra income. Meanwhile, mainstreaming HIV/AIDS concerns into agricultural programmes also helps to reduce the stigma associated with HIV and build partnerships with other organizations.

PANEL 1: BACKGROUND OVERVIEW

WHY LRAP? Tom Kelly, DFID:

Tom Kelly detailed a number of reasons why DFID supported LRAP. Essentially the programme recognised that hunger was a long-term problem, which required a long-term planning horizon with diversified responses for an effective response. Donors required reliable mechanisms to respond to hunger beyond food aid, which, although important in some scenarios, was not a solution to long-term vulnerability to food insecurity. A diversity of responses was required, as alternatives to traditional food aid programming, including building of self-reliance and encouragement of a wider range of partnership.

DFID recognised that LRAP was not just a single NGO response, but a programme based on partnerships with a wide range of players. The partnerships involved worked well and provided useful lessons for elsewhere, which raised the importance of need to carefully assess the impact and outcomes of programmes. LRAP was commended because of the innovation demonstrated in working across sectors, from the extension services to the private sector. It was concluded that LRAP offers excellent opportunities to influence the programme choices of the Government of Lesotho, including the emerging food security policy, as well as other policies in other countries.

WHAT IS LRAP? PJ Lerotholi, CARE:

The Livelihoods Recovery through Agriculture Programme is often popularly referred to in Lesotho as *Lirapa* - the Sesotho word meaning "homestead gardening". LRAP was developed as a response to the food and livelihoods crisis that emerged in 2002, partly as a result of the Southern Africa drought and a series of episodic shocks such as floods and rainfall variation. With support from DFID and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS) designed and began implementation of a programme to provide a rapid response to the food security crisis in Lesotho.

The goal of LRAP is to improve the capacity of vulnerable rural households in Lesotho to cope with shocks and stresses. LRAP does this by addressing the underlying causes of household vulnerability and by supporting and strengthening the development and implementation of enabling policies that assist vulnerable people to secure their livelihoods. LRAP focuses on homestead gardens, the promotion of crops that meet the nutritional requirements of people living with HIV/AIDS, building households capabilities for food production and working with local NGOs to scale up their work and get direct support to vulnerable rural households. The

partnership with MoAFS ensures that government extension services are strengthened through the initiative.

LRAP is presently in its final six months and is emphasising lesson learning and analysis, which will be shared across the region. LRAP is being integrated into the Lesotho Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan and the emerging Priority Support Programme, which is being developed by PMTC, CARE and the British Council. Lessons around impact and outcomes will be carefully built into this process.

Homestead gardening - what's new and different in LRAP? Mampho Thulo, Rural Self Help Development Association (RSDA):

Although homestead gardening has been present in Lesotho for a long time, LRAP has facilitated its improvement by bringing together knowledge, experience and good practice to derive practical lessons. It also helped to raise awareness about the links between homestead gardening, HIV/AIDS and micronutrients. By emphasising the importance of living positively, LRAP has reintroduced hope to those living with HIV through practical means. LRAP has therefore brought a new meaning to food gardens.

Technologies such as plot construction, improvement of soil fertility, as well as cropping practice has been promoted by the LRAP. Technologies such as inputs (better quality seeds), water harvesting and conservation (homestead dams), small livestock and marketing (eggs and poultry) and food preservation (canning, drying) have also been promoted. NGOs have been involved in giving training, providing inputs, facilitating on-going mentoring and technical advice, and supplying advisory services on marketing. The documentation of lessons learned and the exchanges between farmers and NGOs have promoted *Lirapa* as an example of good practice throughout Lesotho.

The homestead gardening programme is clearly sustainable since the technologies being promoted are based on natural resources, which are widely available. The investment cost is also very small. LRAP has created new knowledge through peer-to-peer learning, which also underpins sustainability. There are, however, a number of challenges facing the programme. For example, people should be helped in decision-making around market disposal for surplus and bulk buying of seeds and seedlings. The weather conditions also remain to be a challenge.

Beyond the homestead garden - Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS through Positive Living and Nutrition, Ntsie Tlale, CARE:

One of the core principles of LRAP is the concept and promotion of positive living in a holistic manner. LRAP started with homestead gardening as an initial intervention on mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into food security programming. Over time, partners on LRAP realised that food gardens were an important entry point for dealing with the impacts of HIV and AIDS at community and household level, which led to a growing interest in positive living. This approach encourages individuals to take control of their lives and can slow the progression from HIV to symptomatic HIV. The approach works on the belief that it is important to understand HIV as a chronic illness and to use home gardens, and home remedies, to ensure good nutrition. Focusing the mind, body and soul in a positive way is critical for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Good nutrition through a diet containing all the primary and secondary nutrients is crucial to

provide the necessary antioxidants to protect the body against viral infections. This also increases the immunity of the individual, which is of great importance for a person living with HIV/AIDS. The primary as well as secondary nutrients can be found in a variety of fruits and vegetables which can be easily cultivated in the homestead gardens. Some of the plants such as *Amaranthus* and African potato can also be used as home remedies. That implies that by using the positive living approach people will be able to use a sustainable approach for addressing HIV/AIDS.

PANEL 2: LESSONS LEARNT

Understanding livelihood change and evolving vulnerability in Lesotho, with ideas for appropriate programming responses, Stephen Turner and Palesa Ndabe, CARE:

The objective of the LRAP research component is to gain a better understanding of evolving livelihood strategies of vulnerable households. Research formed a key component of the programme development by drawing out the implications of the findings for relevant interventions. The LRAP research component has aimed to reach its target audience and influence relevance policy through a number of consultative linkages with decision makers and policy structures. This includes workshops with communities and with local NGO implementing partners, and through widespread dissemination of research briefs and reports.

LRAP and its partners have needed to understand how Basotho design their livelihood strategies within these changing conditions in order to target their support to those strategies effectively. Much has changed in Basotho livelihoods over the last two decades with evolving vulnerability arising from a number of factors including unemployment, environment, HIV/AIDS and institutional change. It is clear from the research that rural Lesotho is not an agrarian economy or society, as South African mine labour has more than halved in 15 years. New opportunities have arisen with Lesotho factory work although these are coupled with new vulnerabilities.

Environmental factors have also increased vulnerability, as an unreliable climate has become a constant, there is some evidence of continuing land degradation continues, water remains a key constraint and there is increasing dependence on the biosphere for energy. HIV/AIDS has been recognised as the nation's worst crisis, leading to deeper vulnerability for women and girls, new vulnerability for children and older people, which has led to increasing vulnerability for livelihoods and ultimately the state. Deteriorating governance hurts the poor most and many formal institutions are threatened by the epidemic. Many indigenous institutions continue to be resilient.

In terms of building on the research, a number of programme responses have emerged. The analysis has emphasised the importance of linking livelihoods and HIV/AIDS initiatives, as well as rural and urban initiatives. Other issues that LRAP research has highlighted as key for programming include helping society to tackle gender inequity, promoting effective interventions in governance and social support, supporting ways for the vulnerable to produce food, helping people overcome water constraints, and helping extension services adjust to new vulnerabilities.

Lessons from LRAP for the region, Scott Drimie, Independent Consultant:

The prevailing situation of increasing vulnerability to hunger in Lesotho and the region demonstrates how risk is driven upwards by often silent but intensifying conditions of political, socio-economic and environmental vulnerability. As a developmental relief response, LRAP clearly is an example of "good practice" that provides useful lessons for interventions engaged with vulnerability in the region. In particular, the focus on influencing policy beyond the programme through practical interventions is important.

The LRAP definition of "mainstreaming HIV/AIDS" is useful for other regional programmes grappling with the reality of the epidemic. Mainstreaming is understood not as a series of activities but rather a process of changing attitudes and deepening understanding about complex issues, which requires continual learning and reflection. Thus LRAP's engagement

with HIV/AIDS is practical and about how interventions can help prevent infections, ensures care and support for those already infected and to lessen the impact of the epidemic.

LRAP is a long-term process that involves education, skills development and new ways of thinking and working. Some of the key lessons that can be learnt from LRAP for the region are that it embraces complexity and engages with multiple stressors, it comprehends and responds to the bi-directional relationship between HIV/AIDS and food security, in terms of targeting LRAP is careful to include the most vulnerable and marginalised, it pushes to work with many partners and in turn tries to influence these in practical ways.

Understanding food security - policy and partnerships

Senator and Hon. Minister Dr Phoororo, Lesotho Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security:

LRAP was described in terms of a “developmental marriage” between the MoAFS, DFID and CARE. Each of these organisations had a specific role to play in tackling food insecurity; DFID as a committed donor, CARE as an implementer of programmes and MoAFS as a facilitator and government partner. The relationship between the three institutions was regarded as unique in that they integrated poor landholders in development streams through LRAP with direct outcome of providing a mini “green revolution” at the household level by low cost irrigation systems, water and soil conservation agriculture.

Lessons Learned

A number of important lessons can be derived from LRAP that can inform development relief programming across southern Africa. Many of these lessons have been captured in the presentations, a few of which have been further elaborated below.

Promoting small scale agriculture

Farming households facing food insecurity are often exposed to drought, low soil fertility and a variety of other factors. Water harvesting for irrigation, conservation farming techniques as well as access to seed is an important in agricultural production amongst farming households in the rural areas. From these interlinked challenges and programming responses, it is evident that food security will depend on many stakeholders working together in new ways, coupled with agricultural policies that promote sustainable agriculture suited to Lesotho’s situation. This challenges organizations to work with many more and diverse partners. This approach should be coupled with awareness and understanding of different vulnerable groups, and how vulnerability is changing in the context of the multiple impacts of HIV and AIDS. The LRAP experience suggests that it is possible to promote small-scale agriculture on a large scale that answers the food insecurity and HIV/AIDS problems of the rural Basotho.

Evolving livelihood strategies

Central to the LRAP approach is an understanding of how local people have developed and designed livelihood strategies that engage with diverse opportunities and challenges in Lesotho. It is clearly important to understand how livelihood strategies are constructed, and the rationale behind these decisions, in order to target support effectively. LRAP has therefore been developed using effective research to underpin the programme.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on livelihoods

LRAP recognizes and responds to the fact that HIV/AIDS creates new vulnerability and weakens or destroys many households. It is clear that in order to support vulnerable households to improve their livelihoods, it is important to understand the impact of the pandemic. The incidence of HIV/AIDS was found to be high in the areas targeted by LRAP,

evident from the high frequency of funerals, a growing number of orphans and from the high level of chronic illness. LRAP recognized that the impact of HIV/AIDS on livelihoods varied depending on the specific livelihood strategy employed by the household before its member/members fell ill.

It was also recognised that deaths caused by HIV/AIDS were exacerbated by hunger and poor nutrition. LRAP responded in terms of promoting homestead gardening as a nationwide effort with a specific focus on people within communities who have high levels of food insecurity. Nutrition education should form part of the process in order to educate the communities which food to cultivate for their specific situation. Another clear lesson was to integrate different responses to the various impacts of HIV and AIDS and the temporal dimension to the pandemic. Thus access to counseling was improved through expanding current services and making them widely known. Employment of HIV-positive people who were living openly with the virus to work with communities and AIDS-patients was also promoted to engage with stigma. The participation of civil society actors in the various district AIDS task forces to promote the coordination of efforts was an important dimension to this approach.

Gender and generational changes in rights and decision-making

Lesotho is experiencing rapid change in social norms, standards, expectations and behaviour. It was found that these changes are affecting household's structures, and in turn, affect livelihood options and performance. It increases the proportions of economically vulnerable households. These findings have implications for targeting and providing appropriate support. It is therefore important to do careful targeting in order to include the marginalized.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For additional information on LRAP and other related programmes, please visit the CARE-Lesotho website at www.caresa-lesotho.org.za

For additional information on the workshop and the presentations, please visit the SARPN website at www.sarpn.org.za

Annexure One

Lessons Learnt from the Livelihoods Recovery Through Agriculture Programme (LRAP) 2002-2006

AGENDA - 17 February 2006

12:00 - 13:25	<i>Lunch and Displays</i>	
13:30 - 13:50	Introductions and Welcoming Remarks	Session Chair: Joanne Abbot, CARE
13:50 - 15:00	<p>Panel 1: Background Overview</p> <p>Why LRAP?</p> <p>What is LRAP?</p> <p>Homestead gardening - what's new and different in LRAP?</p> <p>Beyond the homestead garden - Mainstreaming HIV and AIDS through positive living and nutrition</p>	<p>Tom Kelly, DFID</p> <p>PJ Lerotholi, CARE</p> <p>Rural Self Help Development Association</p> <p>Ntsie Tlale, CARE</p>
15:00 - 15:15	<i>Tea</i>	
15:15 - 16:10	<p>Panel 2: Lessons Learnt</p> <p>Understanding livelihood change and evolving vulnerability in Lesotho, with ideas for appropriate programming responses</p> <p>Lessons from LRAP for the region</p> <p>Understanding food security - policy and partnerships</p>	<p>Stephen Turner and Palesa Ndabe, CARE</p> <p>Scott Drimie, Independent Consultant</p> <p>Senator and Hon. Minister Dr Phoororo, Lesotho Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security</p>
16:10	Closing remarks	Joanne Abbot, CARE