

*Food
Insecurity in
Lesotho*

*Lessons
Learnt from
the
Livelihoods
Recovery
Through
Agriculture
Programme
(LRAP) 2002-
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Livelihoods Recovery through Agriculture Programme: Lessons for the SADC Region

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INTRODUCTION

In 2001-2002, Southern Africa experienced its worst food crisis since 1992. Most assessments have understood this crisis to be as much a crisis of livelihoods, or of development in general, as a simple food shock. In the decade leading up to the crisis, increasing vulnerability to the changing political and socio-economic environment was not adequately understood or addressed. This meant that a modest external threat, such as erratic rainfall, was all that was required to trigger widespread suffering. Numerous studies have since revealed the complexity of the crisis, which is now recognised as having both acute and chronic dimensions. In addition, the emphasis of investigation has shifted from a focus on food availability to a broader understanding of risk and vulnerability, including the role of access and entitlements in food insecurity.

As a developmental response to the situation, CARE International Lesotho has been implementing the Livelihoods Recovery Through Agriculture Programme (LRAP). LRAP is a developmental relief response to the crisis, which 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). LRAP has been hailed as an example of “good practice” that provides useful lessons for interventions engaged with vulnerability in the region.

AN INTRODUCTION TO LRAP

The LRAP programme is popularly known as *Lirapa* in Sesotho, a word meaning, “homestead gardening”. The tenet guiding this programme, centres on addressing the underlying causes of household vulnerability, achieving this through the creation of a conducive policy environment that supports secure livelihoods. 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.

LRAP's main focus has been on homestead gardens, the promotion of crops that meet the nutritional requirements of people living with HIV and AIDS, building household capabilities for food production and working with local NGOs to scale up their work and get support to vulnerable households.

In this regard, the programme is not only run by one NGO but through partnerships that have been created with a diverse number of players. The critical aspect of the LRAP programme has been the positive relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture that has ensured that government extension services are strengthened. Within this framework, LARP hinges on the following key themes: a solid research base and analysis of long-term trends and dynamics in Lesotho, importance of mainstreaming HIV/AIDS concerns into agricultural programmes, the need to build interventions within existing institutions as well as embracing "new" concepts such as social protection.

BUILDING ON RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

The importance of information and analysis for decision -making has been emphasised within LRAP as a way of gaining better insights into livelihood mechanisms of vulnerable households. This analysis focuses on livelihoods and not just "food gaps", assets and activities. Furthermore, the approach enables an analysis of a suite of "multiple stressors" that include employment, the environment, HIV/AIDS and institutions. In so doing, it engages vulnerability in a more holistic way and not, for example, over-stating the impact of one stressor such as with "HIV exceptionalism". Apart from informing and influencing policy direction, the research component of the LRAP has in addition provided clear direction for interventions.

MAINSTREAMING HIV AND AIDS

Challenges facing many organisations have converged around understanding the meaning of HIV/AIDS mainstreaming. There are important lessons that can be learnt from the LRAP definition of "mainstreaming HIV/AIDS" for other regional programmes grappling with the reality of the epidemic. Mainstreaming in this case is not understood as a series of activities but rather a process of changing attitudes and deepening understanding about complex issues, which requires continual learning and reflection. Furthermore, LRAP's engagements with HIV/AIDS are practical and about how interventions can help prevent infections, ensure care and support for those already infected and to lessen the impacts of the epidemic.

LRAP provides a key lesson around mainstreaming: those embarking on such a process need to be clear from the start that this is a long-term process, not a single event that can be planned, conducted, completed, and left behind. The Lesotho experience provides one example of a process that is long term, involving education, skills development, and new ways of thinking and working, so that staff and partners automatically seek to understand and address risks and vulnerabilities associated with HIV and AIDS. The process has involved a number of diverse events and initiatives, and on-going efforts to ensure that all involved actually learn from these opportunities.

However, having a number of initiatives is only part of the process: if the lessons learned are not properly synthesized and used to modify existing work and guide new work, the collection of initiatives no more ensures 'mainstreaming' than a collection of raw foodstuffs ensures good, nutritious meals, or than one good meal ensures food security. Those embarking on a journey of mainstreaming should be prepared to invest some time, energy, and thought into the process.

BUILDING ON EXISTING INSTITUTIONS

LRAP has been a success because of its clear links to existing institutions at community and government levels. This innovation of building and nurturing partnerships across sectors, from the extension services to the private sector creates an environment for sharing goals and hence greater funding opportunities. Other resultant benefits include symbiotic relations for transferring skills and experiences among partners. LRAP in this context provides excellent opportunities for scaling up activities and influencing the programme choices of the Government of Lesotho as well as policies in other countries.

TOWARDS SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection describes:

- All public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor,
- The protection of the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and
- Enhancement of the social status and rights of the marginalised.

Against this background, social protection is best understood as reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups of people.

LRAP can be defined as having a social protection outcome in that it is seen as providing relief and helping avert deprivation. As already inferred, the programme addresses underlying causes of household vulnerability by providing a development response to a humanitarian challenge. Increasingly eminent within the programme is its potential to enhance household incomes and capabilities through support mechanisms that are provided by government and non-governmental agencies in the short and long term. Moreover, LRAP addresses issues of social equity by supporting and strengthening enabling policies. In addition, the process also enables vulnerable people to realize their rights to livelihood security.

CONCLUSIONS: KEY LESSONS FOR THE REGION

Important lessons that can be learnt from LRAP originate from its appreciation and understanding of the complexity of multiple stressors in the region. There is a growing realisation that these stressors are often complex and emanate from both human and environmental origins. In addition, the societies exposed to these stressors also respond at different scales and levels. This general understanding allows actors to view food in a broader context and aims at not only analyzing vulnerability but also finding opportunities of building community resilience. Hence, vulnerability analysis is further widened to give much attention to health and nutrition issues.

Lying at the core of this programme is the high level of comprehension and response to the bi-directional relationship between AIDS and food security. For example, the recognition that deaths caused by AIDS were exacerbated by hunger and poor nutrition led to the promotion of homestead gardening targeted specifically to communities with high levels of food insecurity. Another critical issue already discussed, is the fact that mainstreaming HIV/AIDS concerns into agricultural programmes has helped to reduce stigma and eventually facilitated building of partnerships with other organisations. The engaging of partners has influenced external assistance through training partners on food security and HIV. Moreover, in terms of targeting, LRAP has been careful to include the most vulnerable and 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