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PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

LESOTHO'S EXPERIENCE

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P R E F A T O R Y   N O T E

This paper is one of a series of reports resulting from a research project carried out under the auspices of the National University of Lesotho, and the Free University of Amsterdam, between 1978 and 1982.

The main findings are reported in: Roeland van de Geer and Malcolm Wallis, Government and Development in Rural Lesotho (Roma, Lesotho: National University of Lesotho, 1982).

## 1. ABSTRACT

This paper reviews Lesotho's experience with the community development approach, a strategy which attempts to promote rural development by maximizing popular participation at the village-level, while minimizing government inputs. The paper begins with a general description of the conventional view of 'community development'. This is followed by a discussion of the more recent 'rural development participation' approach, which attempts to bring government closer to the people by re-structuring it, and developing local organizations that can work on behalf of local people, and act as links with government.

Lesotho's experience with the community development approach is discussed, and special attention is given to the reflection of this approach in Lesotho's three five-year development plans. It is indicated that rural development has received increasing priority in the successive plans.

The current practice of public administration for community development in Lesotho is then considered, with a particular focus on the organization and activities as well as the constraints affecting the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development (MCRD). It is pointed out that much of the work of the MCRD overlaps with that of other, more technical ministries, and that this has given rise to a debate about the role of the MCRD within the context of rural development activities in Lesotho.

The potential role of local organizations in facilitating the popular involvement which is key to the 'rural development participation approach' is also discussed. Such local organizations include pitsos, the chieftainship, and Village Development Committees. Cooperatives and Farmers' Associations are also considered as intermediary organizations with a potential for facilitating popular participation in the rural development process.

The paper concludes with a consideration of possible solutions to the complex task of providing an appropriately coordinated delivery of services to Lesotho's rural population.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Lesotho, like many other African countries, is faced with problems of low food production, declining export prices and a growing army of unemployed. The present world recession and the effects of the severe drought in Southern Africa have contributed to a decrease of food production and have substantially reduced government funds available for development purposes.

In order to prevent Lesotho's rural communities from experiencing a very rapid loss of living standards, it has become vital to see that the resources available are utilized as fully as possible. Against this background, the community development approach, which aims to substantially promote rural development with a minimum of government inputs and a maximum effort by the communities most concerned, and which has a record of a somewhat mixed nature, deserves fresh and critical attention. It is in this light that the current paper reviews Lesotho's experience with the community development approach.

### Lesotho: The Environment

Lesotho was ruled by the British until 1966. For much of the colonial period, it was assumed that the territory would eventually be absorbed into South Africa; thus little effort was made to shape the economy for independence, and when the Kingdom of Lesotho became an independent state, it was one of the world's least-developed countries and economically greatly dependent on the Republic of South Africa (1).

Lesotho, with a de jure population of around 1.4 million people and completely surrounded by the territory of the Republic of South Africa, is small (30,335 sq. km, slightly smaller than the Netherlands), and predominantly mountainous with elevations in the eastern half frequently exceeding 3000 m (2).

The extreme western part of the country, a strip averaging 40 km in width, forms Lesotho's 'lowlands', although it is mostly situated over 1500 m (3).

Most urban areas are located in the western part of the country, where some 70% of the population is concentrated. Maseru, the capital, is by far the largest--'greater Maseru' approaches 100,000 inhabitants. Of the total work force of more than 700,000, around 25% is at any given time employed in South Africa. Migrants' remittances account for 40% of Lesotho's Gross National Product (4).

Another indication of Lesotho's dependence on South Africa is its membership in the Southern African Customs Union, from which it

receives a percentage of total revenue collected which provides the government with around 30% of its income.

More than 80% of the resident labour force is engaged in agricultural activities. Cropping is predominant in the lowlands and in the mountain river valleys, while cattle rearing is more important in the mountainous areas.

Overstocking and unsuitable farming techniques, in combination with a high population density which in the lowlands exceeds 200 people per sq. km, have caused rapid soil erosion, which is now a major threat to the meagre 13% of the country which is reasonably cultivable, as well as to the range land in the mountains.

It is highly unlikely that Lesotho will in the foreseeable future be able to create sufficient employment opportunities for its population; during the Third Five Year Development Plan, 11,000 new jobs are set as the target, while more than 90,000 persons are expected to enter the labour market. Since these developments are taking place against a general decline in South African recruitment of foreign labour, Lesotho's economic prospects are grim.

The ruling party since independence has been the Basotho National Party (BNP), led by Prime Minister Dr. Lebua Jonathan. There is a substantial opposition, the main party of which--the Basutoland Congress Party--is divided into several competing factions, with its leader, Mr. Ntsu Mokhehle, in exile. In 1970 the constitution was suspended, following elections in which Mr. Mokhehle's party appeared likely to emerge victorious. An 'Interim' National Assembly was established in 1973. All of its members are either nominated or ex officio. The BNP holds 36 seats, the combined opposition parties 26, and the Principal Chiefs 22 (these are ex officio). There are also eleven members nominated in recognition of their service to the country (5).

### 3. FROM COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT PARTICIPATION

The conventional view of 'community development' is very adequately characterised by T.R. Batten in his book Communities and their Development, which describes it as a process during which people first thoroughly discuss and define their wants and then plan and act together to satisfy them' (6).

Recent thinking on the community development approach and the newer idea of community participation in the framework of an integrated rural development approach is excellently outlined in an interesting Cornell University study which attempts to formulate

the 'state-of-the-art' relating to these concepts (7).

Basic to the community development approach in poor countries is their governments' lack of finance and manpower to place qualified specialised staff in large numbers at grass-roots level.

Attempts are made to overcome this handicap by placing at the village level multi-purpose workers, trained to assist grass-roots communities to identify their 'basic' or 'felt' needs and organize themselves to meet them. These village-level workers need a 'right' attitude and personality. They often originate from outside the community in which they work in order to reduce the risk of local bias. They should, however, live in the village, gain villagers' confidence, and assist in social action to mobilize resources and involve the local people in project planning and implementation. Eventually, local initiative should become self-sustaining, thus resulting in a 'bottom-up' type of national development.

In practice however, the identification of basic needs has proved to be a difficult exercise, well beyond the capacity of most community workers. Normally operating outside the technical ministries, community workers have been expected to run their 'own' projects, for which they usually lacked the required technical expertise. As a result, programmes and targets have tended to come from 'above', from central government, and have often not related to local needs and capabilities. This has created an authoritarian situation in which villagers are told what to do rather than assisted in the identification of their needs.

Community workers have thus become agents of government rather than prime movers in the communities, and community development has acquired a bureaucratized image, as opposed to that of a bottom-up movement assisted and strengthened by governmental resources (8).

While the above points of criticism mainly concern the execution of community development, the approach itself has also given rise to a number of critical observations, some of which have been made in the earlier-mentioned Cornell University study (9).

In the first place, it is suggested that community development should not be seen as a separate programme, but rather as an approach which should be integrated with the activities of other government ministries and departments conducting relevant development activities. Secondly, the importance of local organization has not always been emphasized sufficiently in the community development approach. In order for community development to be successful, intermediary organizations, in which villagers are united to facilitate their cooperation with government, are an essential requirement.

In the third place, the community development approach tends to neglect the wealth of conflicting interests and attitudes toward

development and the government which exist within rural communities. Thus, a major factor preventing the establishment of the level of consensus required for a community to carry out development activities has not been sufficiently recognized.

Finally, the emphasis in the community development approach is very much on the local communities, while the linkage between the central and local levels is hardly considered. In combination with the placing of community development staff outside the technical ministries, the reliance on grass-roots initiatives without the simultaneous provision of access to the technical and capital resources of central government seems wholly unrealistic.

Partly on the basis of these critical observations, the idea of community development is increasingly under attack. In recent years, the approach seems to be in the process of being replaced by a 'rural development participation' approach, in which requirements relating to the organization of the local communities, the government machinery, and the links needed between the two, are all combined.

The elements of this more recent approach include a measure of decentralization, bringing government closer to the rural people and reorientating the structure of government and the frame of mind of civil servants towards the needs of rural people.

In this approach, the importance of local organization, capable of acting on behalf of the local people and involving them in the development of their communities, is stressed. This includes the placing of local leaders in stronger positions, enabling them to bridge the distance between their communities, and government. The approach, very roughly outlined above, is intended to create more balanced relationships between government and the rural people, by avoiding the 'top-down' emphasis of the community development approach which has predominated in practice. It is hoped that this new approach will further the integration of government-induced activities into the daily life of communities, as the institutions of participation will form part of the communities themselves.

#### 4. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT POLICY IN LESOTHO

Unlike the situation in most African countries, community development in Lesotho was practiced very little during the colonial period. The approach adopted in the mid-60s, however, did not differ significantly from what had been tried elsewhere in the continent.



The contribution of the community development approach to the development of Lesotho was recognised by the Lesotho Government in the Second Five Year Development Plan, which covered the period 1975-1980. In this plan, community or self-help projects executed during the First Five Year Development Plan period were evaluated positively as having 'created amenities and infrastructure in rural areas that have notably increased the well-being of the people (11). Examples of such self-help projects mentioned in the Second Plan included the construction of feeder roads, tracks, foot bridges, water supplies, conservation works, communal gardens, fish ponds, sanitary facilities and community centres (12).

As a result of the positive view taken by the Government towards community development-type initiatives during the First Five Year Development Plan, further projects were planned for the second five year period:

The level of assistance for self-help community development projects will increase in the next five years. Work will be concentrated in selected areas that have growth potential. The overall objective will continue to be the motivation of village communities to initiate and participate in development activities to improve their standard of living. The communities will be encouraged to engage in self-help projects and in integrating their efforts with ministries and voluntary organizations (13).

It was partly in recognition of the importance which the Government attached to community development that a separate Ministry of Rural Development was established in 1976. The new ministry was established

to advise the Government on rural development legislation, social policies, organization and administration of rural programmes, with special reference to the designing and administration of community development extension and nation building, human development resources, leadership, recruitment and training family and group organizations, project programmes, supervision and evaluation (14).

A main activity of the Ministry therefore was 'the promotion of community and self-help projects' (15).

For these purposes, the Ministry's policy was to 'motivate and educate the rural people in raising their own living standards and improving their own rural amenities, through self-help programmes and integrating their efforts with those of governmental and non-governmental agencies towards the achievement of national goals' (16). While the developments in academic thinking as outlined earlier are evident in these formulations, they can be traced even more

clearly in the Third Five Year Development Plan, which covers the period 1980-1985.

In this plan, community development is presented more explicitly than in the Second Plan, as part of a wider integrated rural development strategy. This strategy, aims at 'the overall enhancement of the lives of all rural people' in Lesotho, involving the improved coordination of all government operations in the rural areas (17).

It is abundantly clear, according to the Third Plan, that there is a need for effective rural development, and that programmes which ensure that social and economic benefits reach the poor and that government action assists the poor to help themselves should have priority (18).

The Third Plan recognizes that a wide range of sectoral programmes already incorporate various aspects of rural development. Examples mentioned include crop and livestock programmes, rural public works, formal and informal education, and health facilities. At the same time, it is observed that the people whom these sectoral activities are intended to help have frequently not been reached due to the lack of a fully developed policy and institutional framework for rural development (19).

Lesotho's bureaucracy is identified in the Third Plan as a major factor contributing to the present situation, due to its organization along vertical and largely technical lines, which in practice provide insufficient coordination of the inputs to rural development emanating from different ministries (20).

The Plan goes on to state that it is now recognized that development activities carried out by government ministries in the rural areas must be coordinated because the lives of the rural people and the determinants of their behaviour are not divided along bureaucratic sectoral lines. By way of illustration, reference is made to efforts to raise the nutritional status of children under five. This task requires an integrated programme that encourages village gardens, emphasizes the value of breast feeding, teaches nutritional values, constructs a clean water supply, introduces pit latrines and employs village health workers to teach basic health practices (21). The required coordination for this type of approach should, it is maintained in the Third Plan, take place at three levels. At central level, project planning should consider the role of all ministries concerned and the improvement of centralized support for action in the field. At district level, the day-to-day activities of supervisory and field executive staff require improved coordination. At the community level, either in the village or in a larger local area, coordination could be improved through greater cooperation among field workers with support from the district and central levels (22).

Basic to the new approach which the Lesotho Government intends to apply during the Third Plan period, is 'fuller involvement of local people in development activities' (23).

To achieve this situation, it is envisaged by government that 'we shall also be involving local people in the full process of planning and implementing the solutions to our problems. A 'bottom-up' approach to development is essential' (24). In order for this approach to be successful, it is recognized that the relation between governmental and local community inputs should be clearly understood by all parties concerned: 'There has to be a mutual awareness between Government and the beneficiaries of a project as to what is required of each party' (25).

Finally, it is also acknowledged that the government machinery should be prepared for this new approach and that local institutions should play a major role:

a larger measure of discretion and responsibility must be accorded to the lower levels of administration for both planning and implementation of development programmes. ... a considerable upgrading of lower level staff will be required. The District Development Committees must be given the capacity for more effective action (26).

## 5. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

In this section, the present practice of public administration concerning community development in Lesotho is outlined against the background of developments in academic thinking and in policy formulation by the Lesotho Government, as described in the previous two sections.

Public administration in Lesotho is highly centralized. Local government, in the form of district councils, was abolished in 1968, having existed for only nine years, and today all public functions are performed by the central government. The ten districts into which Lesotho is divided are therefore field service areas of central government, staffed by personnel responsible directly to ministerial headquarters in Maseru. The head of government at the district level is the District Coordinator, who is responsible to the Permanent Secretary for District Coordination within the Prime Ministers' Office.

While all civil servants in a particular district are in principle responsible to the District Coordinator in administrative matters, the headquarters of the respective ministries in Maseru remain in authority on all technical issues. Obviously, the border-line

between administrative issues and technical matters is often blurred, a situation giving rise to frequent tension and misunderstanding, with the outcome of conflicts often depending more on the personalities involved than on typically vague governmental regulations.

Almost all ministries are represented at the district level and have appointed a senior officer as district head. The joint heads of ministries at the district level meet regularly, usually once or twice a month, under the chairmanship of the District Coordinator. In addition, local representatives of the chieftainship, which remains a social and political force in Lesotho, as well as traders, teachers, missionaries and local politicians regularly meet with senior district government officers in the District Development Committee (DDC). The DDC, which should meet at least once on a month, is an advisory committee to the central government. Since the DDC lacks both a statutory basis and financial resources, it has failed to become an effective link between the central government and district levels. As a result, its developmental role is generally considered limited, and attendance tends to be disappointing (27).

The responsibility for community development activities in practice is usually dispersed over a wide range of governmental agencies. This paper concentrates mainly on activities carried out under the auspices of the Ministry of cooperatives and Rural Development (MCRD), since part of the focus of these projects is explicitly on community development, whereas 'community development' objectives in comparable projects executed by the technical ministries are usually more implicit. The MCRD's activities in Lesotho take three main forms: food-aid projects; supportive activities for projects of the 'technical' ministries; and the provision of education and training to rural people by civil servants (28).

Many projects in Lesotho take the form of food-aid. These projects characteristically contain a major labour input by the local community, whereby the participants receive government-issued food parcels as compensation for the provision of their labour. Originally, participants received food parcels only, but in 1980 a cash remuneration of M7.50 per two weeks was introduced in addition to the food parcel (29).

The Food Aid Management Unit, a central government agency, is responsible for the allocation and administration of the vast quantities of food used in the execution of the food-aid programme. For these purposes, the Unit runs a central store in Maseru and local stores in the districts through which food and tools are distributed to the projects. Large quantities of high quality food are donated to Lesotho by bilateral and multilateral donors, notably the World Food Programme and the Catholic Relief Services (30).

As the food-aid programme is extensive--a typical allocation for a district is well over a thousand food-aid workers at any given

time--and is subject to numerous conflicts over allocation policy, the Food Aid Management Unit has become part of the Prime Minister's Office, in an attempt to associate it with the highest form of governmental authority. There are widespread feelings that politics rather than technical development considerations play a major role in the allocation policies of both the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development and the Food Aid Management Unit. Allegations about excessive political influence on food-aid allocation seem to be substantiated where local committees, dominated by members of the ruling party, attempt to control food-aid projects. Politicians are often closely associated with these projects and frequently perform official-symbolic functions, such as the opening or closing of food-aid supported activities. Obviously, the Lesotho Government, like any government, is keen to enlarge its grass-roots support, and it is unlikely that a potent means such as food-aid would remain unused in this respect (31).

A food-aid project is intended to be originated by a Village Development Committee. Such a committee should approach community development staff with a request to assist the villagers with the formulation of a project proposal. Most food-aid projects, however, seem to be initiated by civil servants. In such cases, 'the Government' starts a project and people are attracted to work for food and cash. In all cases, projects must be presented to the District Development Committee and are only passed on to central government following approval by the district committee.

Once a project has been approved at central level, food, cash and tools are allocated to it by the Food Aid Management Unit, through the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development. Participants are entitled to their share of food and cash on the basis of a completed food ticket. A ticket runs for fifteen work days, on each of which the bearer should work for five hours. The foreman of the food-aid gang, usually consisting of fifty people, punches the tickets for each work day, and upon completion of the required fifteen days, participants receive their allotment of food and cash. Every fifteen days the gang should be composed differently to distribute the food widely among the people in the area in which the project is carried out.

Apart from involvement in food-aid projects, community development staff are also involved in projects of the other more technical ministries as 'trouble shooters' and motivators. Typically, community development staff accompany government officials of other ministries to rural communities to introduce and explain such widely differing activities as range management, the construction of a post office, or the introduction of a fish pond.

Finally, education and training of villagers is an important part of the activities of community development staff. Courses may be held in the local community, in the district headquarters or at a Farmer Training Centre, depending on the subject and the skills

of the available staff. The content of courses varies greatly, and ranges from leadership skills to administration to the maintenance of village water supplies. The frequency and content of courses is largely dependent on the availability of teachers and technical instructors, who may be civil servants of other ministries, staff of the National University of Lesotho, etc.

The Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development, originally created in 1976 as the Ministry of Rural Development, is one of the newer ministries; before 1976, community development was carried out by a department of the Ministry of the Interior. The department of cooperatives was added to the Ministry of Rural Development, in 1979, when it was transferred from the Ministry of Agriculture and Marketing. At the time of its formation, the new ministry was intended to perform a general coordinating role, covering all aspects of rural development. But the position of the Ministry of Rural Development vis-a-vis other ministries involved in rural development, such as Health, Education, Works and Agriculture, was never clarified, and it is now a minor rural works ministry, with a particular role to play in fostering community participation.

Most of the minor works carried out by the ministry potentially overlap with the work of the other technical ministries. However, all the works executed by Rural Development are characterized by an emphasis on involving the local communities actively in the exercise, from the very beginning to the end.

The Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development may thus be said to represent a somewhat awkward marriage of technical and community development considerations, and its problems are compounded by the limited capacity of communities to contribute in the technical field. This creates demands on the government which--even with considerable improvements-- it is unlikely to be able to meet. This is particularly true in the very important field of village water supplies.

Until 1980, community development staff were posted at three levels: regional, consisting of several districts; district; and sub-district. Each region was headed by a Senior Community Development Officer (SCDO), whose responsibilities included regional policy formulation, coordination of regional programmes, and communication between field staff and ministerial headquarters. In practice, the SCDO was an advisor and personnel manager with limited powers, (e.g. to grant leave), and an administrator of petty cash used for local transport and minor office equipment. It was subsequently concluded that this regional arrangement was not effective and a decision was taken to dispense with it. The existing District Community Development Officer (DCDO), became head of the ministry's field services at the district level.

In 1981, further changes occurred at the district level, when a new district post was introduced. Known at first as the 'Officer-in-Charge', this position was later designated District Rural Development Officer (DRDO), assisted by two Rural Development Officers, one responsible for cooperatives, the other for the remainder of the Ministry's operations. Thus, the DRDOs had overall responsibility for a wide range of matters, including cooperatives, village water supplies, food aid, conservation, civil works, and all other activities undertaken by the MCRD. At a lower level in the hierarchy were posted Rural Development Assistants; most districts now have a number of such workers. However, generally these people have had little training; an urgent priority is for the DRDOs to compensate for this by guidance and supervision on the job.

Community development staff are still thin on the ground relative to the tasks of the ministry. The changes made have improved this situation and thus increased the accessibility of the community development organization to the public at the district level and below. Most districts have a substantial mountain population, with some districts completely mountainous. The resulting transport constraints make it impossible to regularly visit all villages. Once staff have decided to tour the mountainous areas, trips should be planned to last several weeks, as regular returns to the office greatly increase travelling time.

At present, staff often practice lowland-bias and concentrate on areas where transport is available. The increase in the numbers of Rural Development Assistants and their posting permanently outside district headquarters is likely to improve the situation, if only slightly.

#### Local Organizations As Links Between Government and the People

Within the context of this discussion of community development, the role and potential of existing local organizations as intermediaries between government and the people is an important consideration. An intermediary organization should facilitate the transfer of information from government to the people, should be instrumental in the formulation of claims for governmental services on behalf of its members, is intended to promote mutual assistance among members, and should enable the members to participate in the conduct of public affairs. The nature of participation may vary greatly; it may be limited to advice or may include decision-making by casting of votes; it may be limited to the preparatory stages of a project or it may involve extended activities of the people in the implementation of a project (32).

In Lesotho, public participation through local organizations tends to be advisory. Usually, this comes in the form of villagers requesting projects to be carried out in their area, although more often extension staff take the initiative in discussing projects

with the villagers. The most widespread type of public participation in Lesotho, however, takes place in the implementation phases of projects. For example, the food-aid scheme is an important instrument for public participation in implementation.

At the local level, the institution within the traditional political structure which has enabled participation has been the 'pitso', a gathering of people under their chief. Pitsos have traditionally taken place at different levels within the traditional political structure, and the popular feeling expressed at them has filtered to the top of the system through the hierarchy of chiefs.

The importance of participation within the traditional political structure has decreased considerably. As a result of British colonial policy, which supported the Paramount Chief in the frequent internal dispute in Lesotho, the traditional political structure took on a predominantly 'top-down' nature and chiefs, increasingly deriving their authority from the colonial power, felt less obliged to consult their people (33).

The powers and duties of chieftainship have diminished greatly as a result of legal reforms since 1938. As a consequence of these reforms, a chief's authority was no longer embedded exclusively in the traditional political structure, but became statutory in a system which gave chieftainship executive rather than policy-making functions. A chief became a chief by the government rather than by the people (34).

These changes have taken place against the background of a 'modernizing' Lesotho, which saw the emergence of competitive authority at village level. Educated villagers--civil servants, teachers, migrant labourers--are less willing to accept a chief's authority and leadership, especially on development-related issues. Moreover, the political parties have, with varying success, penetrated the village level and strained relations between party committees and chiefs are regularly encountered (35).

As the number of public functions performed within the traditional political structure has dwindled, the need of participation within that structure has diminished. While legal authority has largely been taken away from the chiefs and traditional authority is declining, a chief with a strong personality or with close links to central government may still heavily influence the course of events. If a chief possesses a certain degree of charismatic authority, people still readily accept him as a leader, and he will emerge as an extremely influential opinion leader. A chief may stimulate and guide his people to actively plan, request, and execute development projects. In this way, a chief uses his authority to assist his people in participating in the process of resource allocation which is controlled by the government in Maseru. However, participation within the traditional political structure itself no



longer serves much purpose, and its control over Lesotho's resources has diminished considerably.

Although village committees were first established in the early 1960s under auspices of the District Councils, and were later to develop grass-roots support for the political parties for the first general elections in Lesotho in 1965, most of these early committees no longer exist (36).

During the late 1960s, the then Department of Community Development stimulated villagers to organize themselves into committees to initiate projects in close cooperation with government. As village water supplies were a major activity of the Department, many of the early committees were water committees, a large number of which exist up to the present day.

As a result of the emergency following the general election in 1970, an intense awareness of politics emerged. The establishment of Village Development Committees, (VDCs), usually consisting of supporters of the ruling party, was a direct consequence of the politicization of many spheres of life in Lesotho in the early 1970s. The then Department of Community Development played a major role in establishing the VDCs, and in 1971 issued a circular to all community development staff to stress that VDCs should be composed of democratically-selected members who should represent the Government 'in every respect'. During the 1970s the VDC became the dominant type of village committee (37).

In practice, however, the structure and functioning of VDCs varies widely. This is partly due to the absence of strict regulations and guidelines concerning village committees. Other important factors are the differing political relations in villages and the varying degree to which chieftainship is active at village level. As a result, VDCs are very different in size and scope of activities, and in a significant number of villages, committees are not active at all.

There is not much evidence to suggest that the political colour of a village affects its chances of getting resources allocated if a request is made to government through official channels. A partial explanation seems to be that District Development Committees tend to approve any project presented to them, and that decisions on resource allocation are taken in Maseru, frequently by technocrats far removed from village and district politics. Our impression, however, is that villages with a sizeable opposition element tend to approach government agents for developmental purposes less frequently, in an attempt to steer clear of government involvement in their day-to-day life. Boycotts of development projects by opposition groups are a frequent occurrence.

An important strategy in overcoming political tension in villages, while at the same time following government advice on the composition of VDCs, is the appointment or election of members of the opposition in its subcommittees. Such an arrangement may be a first step to readmit an important part of the population to formalized participation. This now appears to be the approach, but it would be premature to comment on how successful it has been in view of the intensity of political conflict in the country.

Where there is no VDC in a community other committees may be found. Communal garden committees, school committees, water committees and various agricultural committees may exist, often based upon the 'show of hands' method of election.

By submitting proposals to the District Development Committee, village committees express grass-roots demands, (albeit in a politically biased way), and provide the information upon which resource allocation in Lesotho is based. However, neither the DDCs nor the village committees have real power, and their suggestions are usually ignored by the centre. This has led to a sense of frustration and apathy at village level.

#### Cooperatives and Farmers' Associations

Cooperatives and Farmers's Associations may also be regarded as intermediary organizations with a potential for facilitating participation. However, the establishment of cooperatives in developing countries is often more a result of government action than of spontaneous popular initiative. This situation causes a number of problems, including the establishment of cooperatives even if the people involved are not really interested, the use of cooperatives to pursue government policies or to impose political control, and finally, extended governmental involvement in cooperatives. In the latter case, it has been said, cooperatives become 'gov-operatives' (38).

Although the cooperatives movement in Lesotho has been in existence for over thirty years, government found in 1975 that only two types were successful: credit unions and wool and mohair associations. It was estimated that around eight percent of farm families belonged to a credit union, and two to three percent to thrift and credit and marketing societies. The main reasons for the failure of Lesotho's cooperatives movement identified in the 1975 report were political divisions and lack of a business orientation among members (39).

In spite of a variety of government enquiries and attempts at reorganization, the cooperative movement in Lesotho remains hampered by lack of trained members, lack of support services and the occurrence of political divisions at village level. While enthusiasm for cooperatives is widespread, they remain heavily dependent on government

support. In view of the staffing and other constraints under which the Department of Cooperatives is operating, progress is slow and emphasis should be placed on increasing the cooperatives' capacity to operate more independently from government inputs. Such an approach might also reverse the relative concentration of cooperatives in the lowland districts around Maseru.

Farmers' Associations in Lesotho have mostly been established with the active assistance of the Ministry of Agriculture. The three main groups are wool and mohair marketing associations, livestock production associations, (e.g. egg circles and range management associations) and finally, crop producers' associations (40).

The associations are of potential importance for stepping up agricultural production. Most associations assist in disseminating information from extension agent to farmer, (e.g. by organizing meetings between participating farmers and the agent). Certainly, associations influence the way in which individual agents operate, but in the districts researched, it was not found that the results of discussions between farmers and agents were used by government in a systematic way to review policy and procedures.

The associations do not formulate requests or claims on governmental services and cannot be said to facilitate the meaningful participation of their members in the conduct of public affairs. Rather than acting as the departing point for a 'bottom-up' flow of information and demands, associations are heavily dependent for their survival on regular contacts with extension staff.

As in the case of cooperatives, priority efforts should be made to turn Farmers' Associations into viable intermediary organizations. In this respect, preparations for the establishment of District Agricultural Committees should be noted. These committees are intended to advise government on agricultural policy in the districts. The idea is to include representatives of all farming activities in the committee, which ought to meet frequently. By forcing farmers to formulate advice, a pool of original thought on Lesotho's current agricultural problems may become available, while at the same time, farmers may be stimulated to more actively pursue innovative farming systems and to claim governmental support to introduce such systems (14).

## 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Lesotho is one of the world's poorest countries; in view of its increasingly scarce resources and its geographical position, its prospects for a better future are limited. Therefore, the country

should focus on a survival strategy based on its existing resources, rather than on continuing to search for grand developmental schemes which are unlikely to be affordable for the country in the near future. In view of this situation, a major contribution to national development should be made by the rural communities themselves.

Government has demonstrated in its Third Five Year Development Plan that it perceives the limitations of the community development approach, and is aware of the need for a strategy which emphasises a combination of stimulating the development of the rural communities and improving governmental operations, while simultaneously strengthening the links between communities and the government machinery. In our outline of governmental organizations most involved in community development and of the main intermediary organizations, it has been indicated that the actual situation 'in the field' is far removed from what government hopes to eventually achieve in this respect.

In recognition of the need for change, government has appointed District Coordinators, but their lack of clear administrative and financial authority and formal coordinating powers has prevented them from dramatically improving the situation. In addition, very serious quantitative and qualitative gaps in the availability of staff have created a situation in which both civil servants and the public feel that the few efforts to improve the situation in the rural areas are futile in relation to the existing needs.

Of great importance for the coordinated delivery of services to the rural population is the place of the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development in the government machinery as a whole. On this point there are two positions, one favouring the creation of a 'super-ministry' with wide-ranging powers in planning and implementing of rural development programmes, the other encouraging the abolition of the ministry all together. Advocates of the first position argue that with well over 80% of Lesotho's population living outside urban areas, rural development should be stimulated as a matter of top priority. Most ministries are in some way involved in rural development, and it is felt that the delivery of governmental services presently takes place in an uncoordinated fashion. In this view, a powerful coordinating rural developmental ministry is the solution. Community development staff, it is argued, work closest to the people and know their basic needs. A strengthened Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development should therefore take the lead and be given powers to effectively coordinate governmental activities geared to rural development.

Supporters of the opposed view argue that food-aid and self-help projects need not be executed by Community Development staff, but should be handled by the Food Aid Management Unit and the technical ministries involved in a particular projects. The technical services of the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development, such

as village water supplies and conservation, should be transferred to the appropriate ministries. Furthermore, according to this line of reasoning, District Development Secretaries should replace DRDOs as the link with Village Development Committees. This would free Community Development staff to concentrate on assisting the people in identifying their needs, on conducting courses and on assisting other ministries in implementing projects. Local level coordination in this model is a matter of a committee of district level ministerial heads, chaired by the main representative of government in the district. In such set-up, it is argued, no need exists for a separate Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development. Community Development could be placed under the Prime Minister's Office which, through the District Coordinators, could assume an active coordinating role at district level.

Both views are fairly extreme and present problems. First, the establishment of a 'super-ministry' is bound to create widespread friction. The existing ministries all have a more-or-less clearly defined range of responsibilities, and superimposed coordination by one of the ministries will certainly be perceived as a threat to ministerial autonomy. Also, the status of the present Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development is fairly low; it is seen as a ministry without a hard technical core, a cluster of 'soft' and ill-defined responsibilities which creates more problems than it solves. Elevating such an organization to a 'super-ministry' status does not seem to be realistic. In addition, Government has now made a decision on district coordination by appointing the District Coordinator, within the Prime Ministers' Office, as the head of government at the district level. A District Coordinator and a super-ministry operating together seems too heavy a construction for a small country like Lesotho.

On the other hand, the abolition of the ministry is likely to add to management problems encountered by Central Government. All ministries active in rural development are hard pressed enough with their present load, and to distribute the departments of the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development among the other ministries is a measure which is certain to create resistance and result in a low priority for the thus distributed departmental activities. Further, the technical ministries do not have a strong orientation to participatory approach to development.

In our view, the solution of this set of problems may lie in administrative reform aimed at improving central government coordination, strengthening local level coordination, and removing existing overlaps between the Ministry of Cooperatives and Rural Development and other ministries. Thus, the existing ministry would provide expertise by focusing on projects of a clear community development type.

The introduction of 'modern' values and a governmental policy directed at decreasing chiefs' powers have resulted in a diminished

role for the traditional political structure at local level. With the decline of the legal and traditional basis of chieftainship, a chief's position is more and more dependent on his personal qualities, and often the chief's role is confined to that of an opinion leader, competing with other sources of authority in the village.

Another factor contributing to the decline of the traditional political structure is the diminished influence of chiefs on the process of resource allocation at national level. Decision-making is firmly in the hands of a government in which individual chiefs may play an important role, but where the traditional political structure is only one of the forces which shapes decision-making. Participation in the traditional political structure, therefore, is no longer a means of participation in the national political process. Further, the traditional political structure is not organized to promote rural development, and the measure of leadership in this respect provided by a chief is heavily dependent on his personal views.

It remains doubtful whether it is possible to create a more development-oriented cadre of chieftainship in Lesotho. The above-mentioned Cornell study on intermediary organizations, found that successful local organizations were generally not traditional ones but formal institutions established by government (42). Experience from elsewhere thus suggests that efforts to strengthen the traditional political structure may be counter-productive to rural development, and in this light other local institutions and government's commitment to support such institutions become of great importance to rural development. However, while the traditional political structure is in decline, no viable local organizations have emerged as alternative vehicles for participation.

The main alternative source of authority at village level is the Village Development Committee, which in many cases is ineffective as a result of political cleavages in the village. Where a VDC is well-established and in close contact with local politicians or the Member of Parliament of the area concerned, a village is connected to the district political process in the District Development Committee and the national political process centred in Maseru. However, neither the DDC nor Parliament plays an important role in the process of resource allocation, and as a result, villagers feel that their possibilities of successfully claiming governmental resources are limited. Experience from elsewhere suggests that an improvement in the performance of VDCs and DDCs will require extensive administrative reform. Esman, for example, found that

effective local institutions cannot function in isolation. They must be linked through a two-way flow of information, influence and resources, with centres of power at the district, regional and national level where policies are determined and resources are allocated (43).

The introduction of such links, however, requires the establishment of what is presently conspicuously absent in the Lesotho rural scene: local centres capable of influencing national policy-making and resource allocation. The creation of such links also implies a need for the centres to become more responsive to local level pressures--a situation far removed from today's reality.

The introduction of more powerful village and district level institutions, and improved measures of responsiveness from the centre to local level institutions, however, may not be enough to remedy the situation: a degree of accountability of local institutions is essential as well. This conclusion appears to be in line with the conclusions of both Esman and the Cornell study.

The earlier presented a picture of the links between VDCs, DDCs and central government, and of the functioning of the village and district committees, which indicated that the latter committees as they presently function are not suitable as intermediary organizations; they largely fail to facilitate communication between field services and the people; they are far removed from controlling local administration; they do not promote mutual assistance; and they are not very successful in claiming government services.

With reference to the last two mentioned functions of intermediary organizations, Farmers' Associations appear to be more successful. Government agents tend to play a significant role in their establishment, and once in operation, Farmers' Associations generally receive further support, if only in the form of advice by extension agents. In several cases, associations and government staff share responsibilities, (e.g. in the field of marketing). The establishment of District Agricultural Committees is intended to enable farmers to more effectively influence governmental policy. As shown earlier, there is much room for improvement in the running of these associations, but potential for meaningful participation is there, and should be developed as a matter of priority. At the same time, Government should be aware of the danger of turning these associations into mere extensions of governmental departments; Farmers' Associations should remain autonomous organizations.

Obviously, participation in Farmers' Associations is of crucial importance for rural development, but the scope of such associations is naturally limited to agriculture-related activities. A possible means of organizing the rural people in institutions with broader aims is cooperative development. In spite of Government's commitment to the establishment of multi-purpose cooperatives, the idea has not yet been implemented successfully to any great extent. Few cooperatives are flourishing, and successful cooperatives are usually thrift and credit societies or marketing cooperatives. While it is governmental policy to establish multi-purpose movements, the

actual contributions of these activities to participation are limited. The effects of the proposed reorganization of the cooperative movement--if implemented--are impossible to calculate at this point. In view of the importance for rural development of the creation of viable local organizations, efforts to strengthen cooperatives and to possibly promote their amalgamation with successful Farmers' Associations should be given detailed attention.

As matters stand, there are limited opportunities for participation at the district level and below in Lesotho. Government policy can best be described as lukewarm. The political environment is not conducive to change. However, without local level participation, it seems likely that much development activity will founder. As the situation now stands, the move from community development to rural development participation has taken place at the level of central government planning, but it has yet to become a reality in Lesotho's villages.



7. FOOTNOTES

1. For an overview of the first years following the independence of the Kingdom of Lesotho, see Lesotho Government, Lesotho First Five Year Development Plan, 1970/71-1974/75.
2. A. MacGregor Hutcheson, 'Lesotho: Physical and Social Geography', in Africa South of the Sahara (London: Europe Publications, 1983), p. 480.
3. Ibid., p. 480.
4. Ibid.
5. See Roeland van de Geer and Malcolm Wallis, Government and Development in Rural Lesotho (Roma, Lesotho: National University of Lesotho, 1982), p. 20.
6. T.R. Batten, Communities and Their Development (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 1.
7. N.T. Uphoff, J.M. Cohen, A.A. Goldsmith, Feasibility and Application of Rural Development Design (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1979). Part 1.
8. For a critique of community development, See B.B. Schaffer, 'The Deadlock in Development Administration', in Colin Leys, ed., Politics and Change in Developing Countries (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 203-206.
9. Uphoff et. al., op. cit., p. 28-31.
10. Ibid., p. 27.
11. Lesotho Government, Kingdom of Lesotho: Second Five Year Development Plan 1975/76-1979/80, p. 123.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 124.
14. Lesotho Government, Ministry of Rural Development, Annual Report of the Permanent Secretary for the Year 1977, p. IV.
15. Ministry of Rural Development, Reorganisation of the Ministry of Rural Development (Maseru, 1977), p. 1.
16. Ibid., p. 1.
17. Lesotho Government, Kingdom of Lesotho: Third Five Year Development Plan (Maseru: Government Printer, 1980), p. 123.
18. Ibid., p. 128.
19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid, p. 129.
23. Ibid, p. 130.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Van de Geer and Wallis, op. cit., p. 41-43.
28. Ibid., p. 104.
29. Ibid., p. 105.
30. Further information on food aid in Lesotho is provided in: World Food Programme, Brief on World Food Programme Activities in Lesotho, (Maseru, 1978);  
World Food Programme, Discussion Paper on a Strategy for Food Aid in Lesotho, (Maseru, 1979);  
World Food Programme, Impact of Food Aid on Domestic Production and Trade in Lesotho, Note by the Executive Director, (Maseru, undated): and  
World Food Programme, The Uses of Food Aid in Lesotho (Maseru undated).
31. Van de Geer and Wallis, op. cit., p. 106.
32. For a discussion of intermediary organizations, see M.J. Esman, 'Development Administration and Constituency Organization', in Public Administration Review (1978, No.2), p. 166-172.
33. Van de Geer and Wallis, op. cit. p. 45.
34. J. Perry and C. Perry, A Chief is a Chief by the People (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).
35. R. Feacham et. al., Water, Health and Development (London: Trimed, 1978), p. 67-68.
36. Van de Geer and Wallis, op. cit., p. 47.
37. See circular savingram of 4-02-1971 on Village Development Committees, originated by the Department of Community Development.

38. G. Hyden, 'Cooperatives and their Socio-Political Environment', in G.G. Widstrand, Cooperatives and Rural Development in East Africa (Uppsala: Scandanavian Institute of African Studies, 1970), Chapter 5.
39. COPAC Mission, Report on Rural Cooperative Development in Lesotho, (Rome, 1975), p. 2.
40. Van de Geer and Wallis, op. cit., p. 54.
41. Ibid., p. 56.
42. Uphoff et. al., op. cit.
43. Esman, op. cit., p. 168.



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