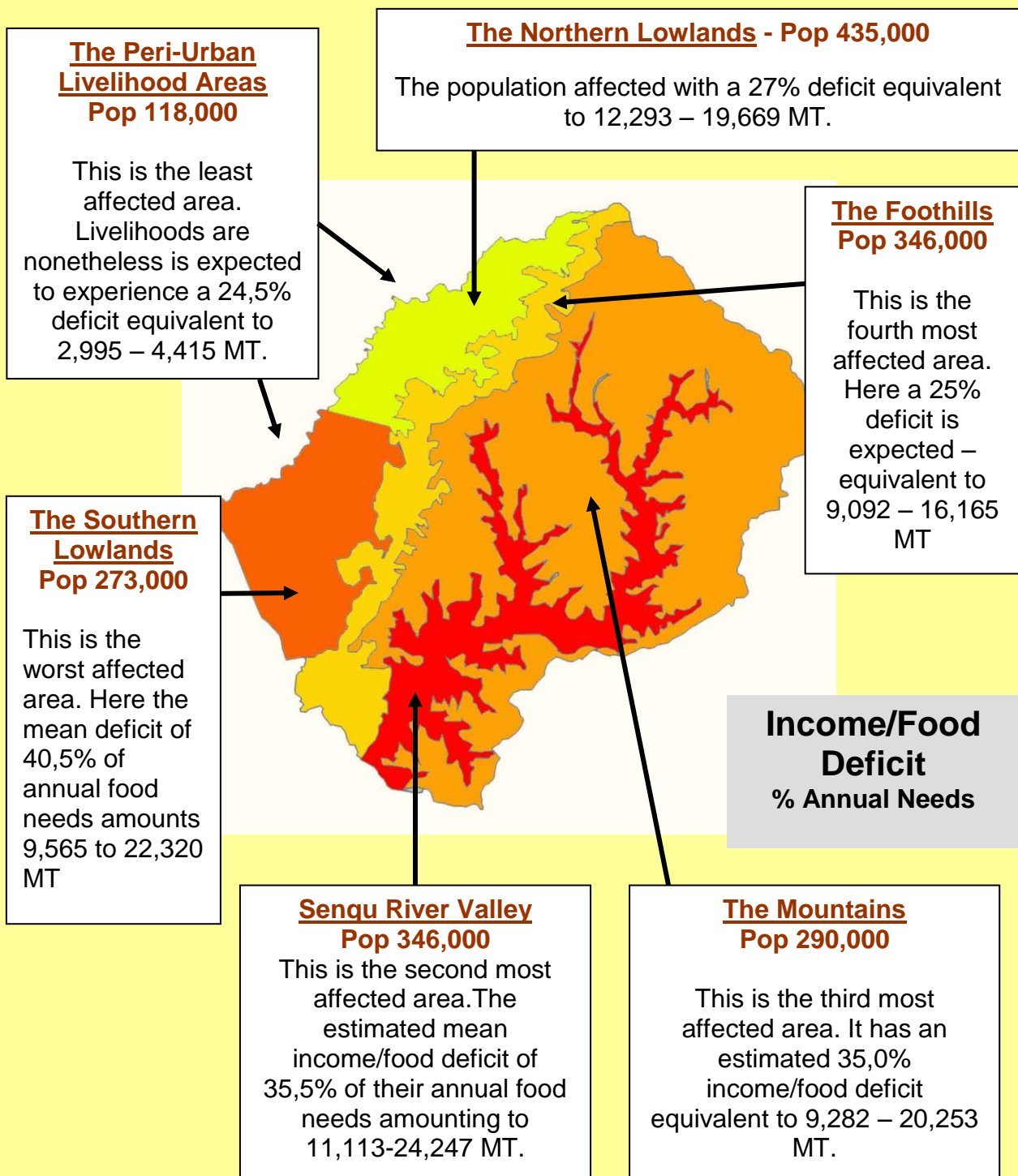


Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (VAC) Livelihood Vulnerability Monitoring Report March 2004

Highlights



NB: Food/Income deficit is calculated on 400gms cereals/person/day.

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Context

Lesotho's emergency response 2000-01 to 2003-04 has generated debate. The interpretation of recent events solely in terms of 'drought' is both narrow and misplaced. Much of the evident household food insecurity needs to be understood as a consequence of a much deeper 'humanitarian crisis' and 'livelihood failure', fuelled by poverty, inequality, the erosion of natural resources¹ and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.²

"We don't call it an emergency, we call it a humanitarian crisis, because what is happening is a convergence of factors. The food shortage is the most visible aspect, but AIDS - a major factor - is invisible. Poverty is less visible."

Bertrand Desmoulin, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) Lesotho country representative. Source IRIN. 11 Feb 2004

As important as it is to better understand the complexity of the causes of the 'current crisis',³ adverse weather conditions in 2003-04 have again affected country.³ This year's agricultural season can only aggravate the current situation for 1.8 million rural inhabitants. Two years of 'poor' production and 'crop failure' are likely to be followed by a 'very poor' agricultural season this year.

"Last year was better. People were able to plant, and harvest. The crops lasted them six months. This year, the crops will last them three months - maybe. The situation looks dangerous this year,"

Chief Simon Mokoroane of Hachabeli in the Mohale's Hoek district in the southwest of the country. Source IRIN 12 Feb 2004.

"There is no chance for agriculture to recover this year. There were no summer rains until January, and by then it was too late. There are a few pockets of production, but they are negligible. Most fields are stunted crops, good for animal fodder but nothing more."

A Western diplomat. Source – IRIN 12 Feb 2004.

¹ According to the WFP, in the mid-1970s the average maize and sorghum yields were about 1,400 kg/hectare, but they now average 450-550 kg/ha.

² Lesotho could well be a prime example of the so-called 'New Variant Famine' in the making. The scale of the crisis and its pattern **does** appear to be novel. See Alex de Waal and Alan Whiteside (11 Oct 2003) 'New Variant Famine': AIDS and Food Crisis in Southern Africa. The Lancet; 362:1234-37.

³ Clearly better and more appropriate interventions can be put in place to deal with new forms of both acute and chronic vulnerability - emerging from a new complex set of causes in both rural and urban contexts.

³ See: SADC Special Agromet Updates - Analysis (& further analysis) of a Developing Drought Situation in Southern Africa 2003/2004 January & February Reports.

Rainfall for 2003/4 has been well below average in many areas especially in during what would normally be the first half of the summer rains. This has led to reductions in planted areas, late plantings and major reductions in yield forecasts. Following two poor seasons in succession, many farmers may not have had the resources to finance plantings. The Recent Inter-Agency and Multi-Stakeholder (IAMS) report estimates production for maize, wheat⁴ and sorghum at 40,620 MT for 2003-04. This is 46% (less than half) of the 'poor' production realised in 2002-03 and only 21% of the longer-term mean. **This cereal production forecast is a 'disaster'** and represents a massive collapse in domestic cereal availability.

The poor rainfall has also resulted in poor grazing conditions. Insufficient forage for livestock has resulted in significant numbers of livestock losses – especially through birthing difficulties. Marketing surveys suggest that the **role of livestock and livestock products in livelihoods appears to have been in a significant decline since 2000-01.**

Price inflation in 2003-04 has eroded purchasing power of households that access some or all of their maize meal via purchases. While evidence is patchy, **consumers in rural areas may have faced 20-50% increases in maize meal prices 2002-03.** Drought conditions have affected Lesotho's neighbours – Swaziland, South Africa, Mozambique and Southern Zimbabwe. The failure of production in countries neighbouring Lesotho could have significant implications for the future price of maize. Lesotho has high reliance on cereal imports. This year there will be very high reliance on commercial imports (plus possible food aid) to satisfy the needs of the consumption year July 2004 to June 2005.

LVAC recognizes that some of the production declines measured in previous and the current rapid assessment must be attributable to the effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. **The scale of HIV/AIDS epidemic is a major factor undermining agricultural prosperity in Lesotho. Almost one-third of the adult population is living with HIV.** From case study evidence and emerging regional survey findings, it is clear that increasing rates of morbidity and mortality are exacting a huge toll on the ability of households to produce food and earn income⁵

⁴ Low levels of precipitation (including poor snow falls in the mountains) in 2003 depressed Winter/Spring wheat production.

⁵ Households with a chronically ill member have average reductions in annual income of 30-35% - See D. Webb, and G. Mutangadura, 'The socio-economic Impact of Adult Morbidity March 2004

while at the same time increase household expenditure on health and related costs. Children are particularly affected by HIV/AIDS with an increasing number of orphans. Given over extended kinship networks, the emergence of 'very vulnerable' child-headed households is a disturbing trend. The exact extent to which HIV/AIDS is increasingly contributing to domestic food production 'failure' on a yearly basis is much more difficult to assess. **It is assumed that increasing HIV/AIDS related morbidity, deaths, loss of assets and knowledge, is lowering productivity in agriculture.**

The effects of the epidemic and both the recent and current droughts are overlaid on a long history of poverty. The high level of poverty in Lesotho is characterised by an alarming level of destitution. It is likely that the levels of vulnerability in these groups have considerably worsened given three years of depressed food production and failing livelihoods.

Another dimension to the HIV/AIDS epidemic is the likely erosion of Government and private service capacity to respond to the problems of HIV/AIDS - given the impact of the epidemic within the sector.

In the light of the severe and long dry period in the first half of the summer 2003-04, the Government of Lesotho declared a state of national disaster in February 2004.

LVAC and Partnerships

The Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee is currently chaired by the (Insert details plus all the members and any relevant points of information).

The VAC process is coordinated at regional level by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) Food, Agriculture, and Natural Resources (FANR) Directorate's Regional Vulnerability Assessment Committee (RVAC), in collaboration with international partners (WFP, FEWS NET, SC (UK) and FAO).

Broadly, the aim of the Lesotho VAC is to incorporate a deeper understanding of livelihoods in emergency and development programming and broaden early warning systems. VAC analytical outputs are aimed at informing policy decision making at the highest levels of Government, United Nations and NGOs. In the short term, the focus has been on carrying out emergency assessments focusing predominantly on identifying food aid needs. There has been an increasing demand for broader assessments

and Mortality in Households in Kafue District Zambia,' SAFAIDS, 1999.

Lesotho VAC Vulnerability Monitoring Report

focusing on the complex set of economic, social and cultural factors (including HIV/ AIDS) that embody and affect people's livelihoods in Lesotho providing strong indications of relative vulnerability, the reasons underlying the vulnerability and what types of interventions may be appropriate as a response mechanism.

Following establishment of the Lesotho VAC in May 2002, three emergency food security/ livelihood assessments were carried out in July/August 2002, November/December 2002 and May/June 2003. These formed the basis of the Lesotho VAC work guiding emergency interventions of UN agencies, NGOs, and the Government of Lesotho. The Lesotho VAC represents one of the few fora that channels national technical guidance for UN agencies, NGOs and Government Ministries to ensure that necessary humanitarian and livelihood support is directed to the most vulnerable people at the correct time.

Methodology

The current report uses livelihood baseline data¹ collected in the April-May 2003 assessment, in combination with recent monitoring information². It presents assessments of the severity/magnitude of various hazards on livelihoods and makes projections of food access for six food economy / livelihood zones in the country - taking into account likely local coping strategies.

The basic principle underlying the household economy / livelihoods based approach is that an analysis of local livelihoods is essential for a proper understanding of the impact of hazards at household level. Serious crop failure may, for example, leave one group of households destitute because the failed crop is their only source of staple food. Another group (in a nearby location) may be able to cope with these crop production problems because they have alternative food and income sources that can make up the current production shortfall. For example, they may have livestock to sell or have the ability to gain local paid employment. Food economy / livelihood baseline information captures essential facts on local livelihoods and coping strategies.³ Used in combination with current hazard information it is

¹ These baselines are presented in the Lesotho Livelihoods-Based Vulnerability Assessment (LVBA) April May 2003.

² Maize, wheat and sorghum production figures come from a combination of the BOS area planted forecasts, and the Inter-Agency & Multi-Stakeholder Rapid assessment yield and production figures.

³ The way in which households normally cope when faced with adverse conditions that do not deplete the socio-economic basis of the households e.g. sale of productive livestock (termed survival strategies).

possible to analyse relative vulnerability broken down by area and by socio-economic status within livelihood zones.

Livelihood patterns clearly vary from one area to another, according to local factors such as climate, soil, access to markets etc. The first step in a household economy / livelihoods based analysis is therefore to prepare a **livelihood zone map**, i.e. a map delineating geographical areas within which people share similar patterns of access to food (i.e. they grow the same crops, keep the same types of livestock, etc.), income and have the same access to markets.

Where a household lives, is one factor determining its options for obtaining food and generating income. Another is wealth, since wealth determines access to the means of production and/or additional income generation. Wealth groups are typically distinguished from one another by differences in land holding, extent of cultivation, livestock holding, financial and physical capital, education, skills, labour availability and/or social capital. Defining the different wealth groups in each zone is the second step in a food economy / livelihoods analysis, the output from which is a **socio-economic breakdown**.

The Lesotho VAC food economy / livelihood zone map and livelihood profiles define 6 areas and 18 livelihood profiles ('poor', 'middle' and 'better off' wealth groups in the: Northern Lowlands, Southern Lowlands, Foothills, Senqu River Valley, Mountains and Peri-Urban areas).

Having grouped households according to where they live and their socio-economic group (wealth), the next step is to generate **food economy / livelihood baseline** information for typical households in each group, for a defined reference or baseline year. Food access is determined by investigating the sum of ways households obtain food — what food they grow, gather or receive as gifts, how much food they buy, how much cash income is earned in a year, and what other essential needs must be met with income earned. Once this baseline is established, then an analysis can be made of the likely impact of a shock or hazard in a bad year. Assessments examine how food access will be affected by the shock, what other food sources can be added or expanded to make up initial shortages, and what final deficits emerge.

The objective is to investigate the effects of a hazard/shock (e.g. drought or price increase in staples) on **future** access to food and income, so that decisions can be taken about the most appropriate types of interventions. The rationale behind the approach is that a good understanding of how people have survived in the past provides

a sound basis for projecting into the future. Three types of information are combined; information on normal or baseline access to food and income, information on hazards (i.e. factors affecting access to food/income, such as crop production or market prices) and information on response strategies (i.e. the sources of food and income that people turn to when exposed to a hazard). The approach can be summarised as follows:

Baseline + Hazard + Response = Outcome

NB. This is a rapid assessment based on secondary sources. The estimation of the parameters that make up 'normal' patterns of food access, the estimates that go into crop production and the other forecasts on other livelihoods outcomes are subject to margins of error. Understanding of livelihoods and coping strategies is limited. It is important to realise therefore that **the figures presented below are to give some broad dimensions to the magnitudes of shocks and possible outcomes.** This information is early warning. It cannot be used to define numbers of beneficiaries.

Hazards/Shocks Affecting Livelihoods

1. Production and Supply Changes - Food Crops

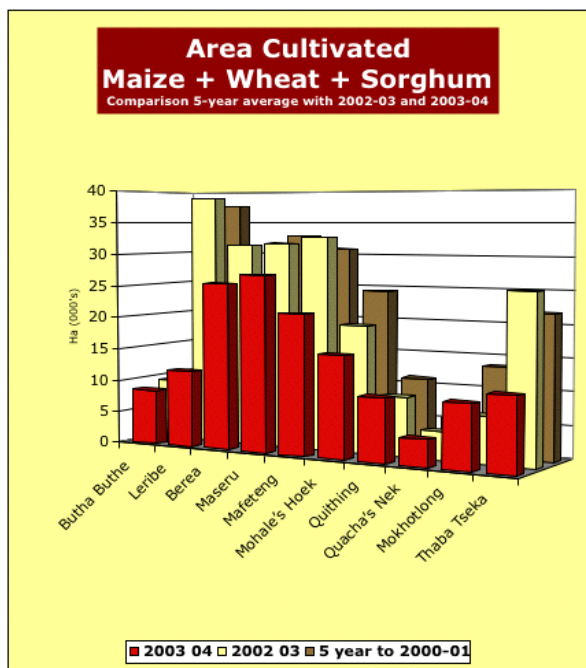
Figures on total cereal production have recently witnessed major variations in estimates between FAO/WFP, MoAFS, NEWU and the BOS. One set of benchmark figures (for maize) comes from the Lesotho Agricultural Situation Report 1996/97 – 1998/99. Another is FAO/WFP 5-year average for all cereals (Maize, Wheat and Sorghum) to 2001/02. The emergence of variations in recent estimates, has raised questions about the reliability and accuracy of historical records. National food balance statements have also been highly problematic. This raises a number of problems for comparative analyses over time and for a definition of some theoretical 'normal' situation.

The IAMS February 2004 assessment indicates that total cereal production 2003-2004 is likely to be 40.62 (000) MT. That represents 21% of the 5-year average to 2001/2 and 45.6% of the 'poor' production in 2002-2003. While areas under cultivation have declined somewhat compared to last year (and badly in some important cereal producing districts), a number of negative factors have been considered in estimating very poor

average yields and hence very poor production prospects this year.¹

Figure 1 presents the BOS preliminary estimates of **area cultivated** 2003-04 (Maize, Wheat and Sorghum) compared to last year 2002-03 and the a five-year average to 2001-02. It shows that there is a noticeable reduction of area cultivated for the current year. Leribe, the most important cereal producing district in the country, has experienced the most dramatic fall in area cultivated. Both Thaba Tseka and Mafeteng districts also show up significant comparative declines in area cultivated.

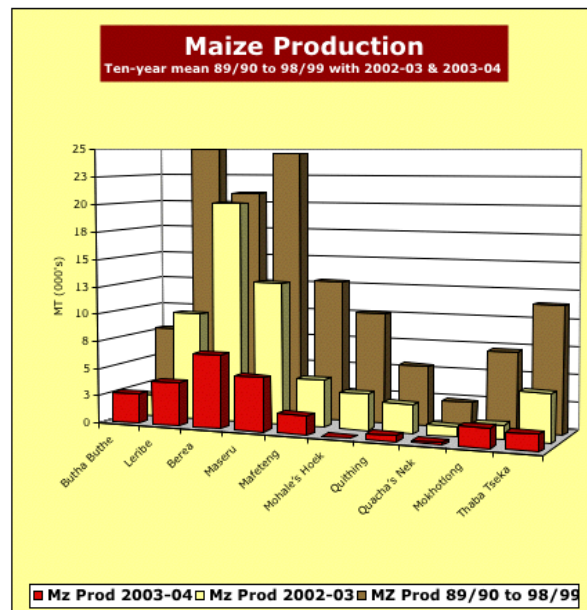
Figure 1



The District Maize production forecasts for 2003-2004 are presented in Figure 2 and Appendix 1. Both compare 2003-2004 production estimates in relation to the 10-year average 1989-90 to 1998-99 and to the estimate for 2002-2003. Comparing Figure 2 with the picture from Figure 1, it can be seen that the forecast for maize production is very low indeed. **Reduced area under cultivation** in combination with **very poor expected yields** gives rise to a total estimated maize production of only 25.03 (000) MT (See Appendix 1).

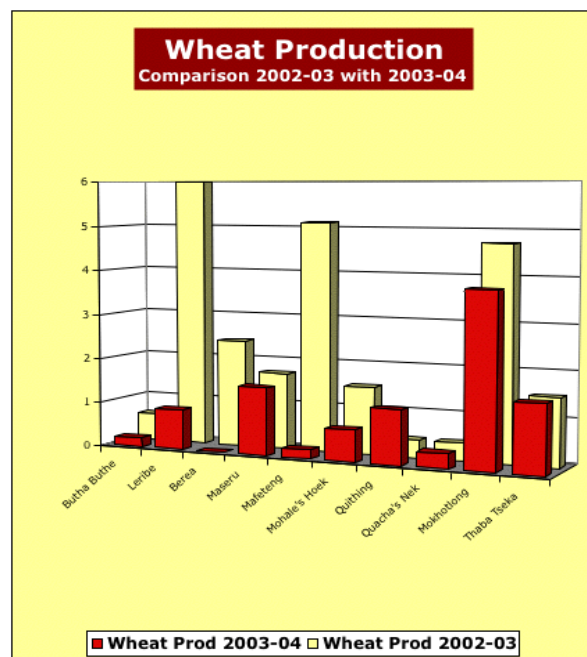
¹ They include: Drought or very bad distribution of summer rain, widespread late plantings, cash constraints, poor quality seeds, lack of other supporting inputs, labour constraints and poor crop husbandry, plus a multitude of HIV/AIDS impacts, as well as failing share-cropping arrangements.

Figure 2



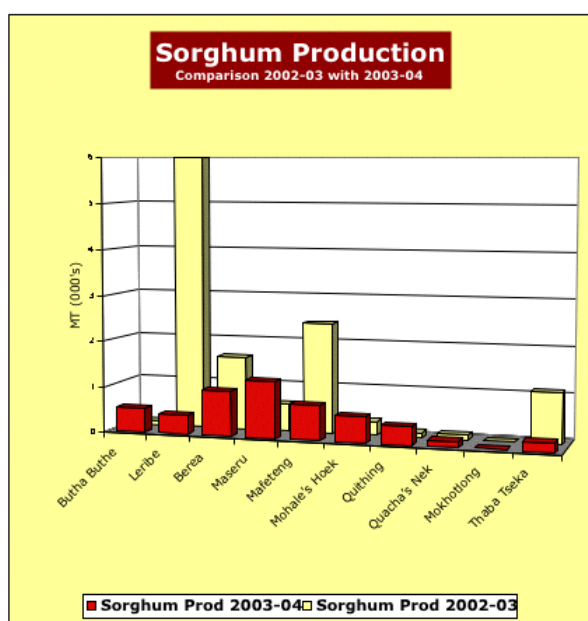
Figures 3 and 4 show the contributions of Wheat and Sorghum to the forecast tonnage for 2003-04 in comparison to 2002-03.

Figure 3.



The IAMS analysis forecasts that total wheat production 2003-04 will be 10,33 (000) MT – that is 13,97 (000) MT below the production achieved last year. Major failures in wheat production occurred in Leribe, Berea and Mafeteng districts. Total sorghum production 2003-04 is estimated to be 5,26 (000) MT – which is 7,04 (000) MT below production in 2002-03. There are major sorghum production failures forecast for Leribe and Mafeteng Districts.

Figure 4.



2. Production and Supply Changes – Grazing Conditions.

Poor rainfall resulted in insufficient forage for livestock in 2003-04. There were significant numbers of livestock losses at the end of the dry season especially where veld fires destroyed grazing reserves. Added to these losses, stock theft is widespread and therefore many farmers have also lost animals to thieves in 2003-04. In addition livestock production is in decline because of disease – including Black Quarter and internal and external parasites. In many areas, dipping facilities are in poor condition. Hard times have also meant that people have been slaughtering animals for food and for social obligations (such as funerals). In some locations, livestock numbers are therefore declining fast. The rainfall in February and March 2004 has brought very welcome relief to the rangelands and has improved the stock water supply situation.

Evidence from records on Cattle Auctions, 2000 to 2003, provide a partial¹ but strong indication that incomes from livestock and livestock products have gone down dramatically between 2000 and 2003. Figures indicate that while the average price/Kg has increased from R2,69 in 2000 to 3,51 in 2003 (an increase of 30% over four years), the number of sales have declined to 45% of that in 2000. Moreover, the numbers of animals sold in 2003 was 25% of that in 2000 and gross revenue fell from R2,527,918 in 2000, to R860,450 in 2003 – i.e. only 32% of the revenue earned in 2000.

¹ In the absence of comprehensive information national livestock sales, is quite possible that official sales records may show up a downward trend while unmonitored and unofficial sales may be moving in the opposite direction. Caution is there required in interpreting these results.

Given these recent trends and the current conditions in the livestock sector in 2003-04 it is likely that we should anticipate depressed incomes from the livestock components of livelihoods in 2003-04.

3. Production and Supply Changes – Cash Crops.

Depending upon food economy zone, cash crops are made up of a combination of crops, who's rank order (in terms of significance), vary from location to location. They include: Vegetables, Beans, Peas, Potatoes, Sunflowers, Paprika, Maize, Sorghum, Wheat, Dagga and Pumpkin.

All the main summer cash crops (grown under rain-fed conditions), are likely to have experienced depressed production along similar lines to the production estimates as set out for Maize and Sorghum above. Low levels of precipitation depressed winter production of cash crops. There are some notable exceptions to this general picture of cash crops. Potatoes can be planted out in February and March. In some locations, it seems that farmers may be taking up the opportunity of recently improved rainfall to plant out larger (compensatory) areas of potatoes – given the very poor summer crop production. This option is, however, limited and not open to all households.

Overall incomes from cash cropping 2003-04, is expected to be depressed and in the range consistent with the production forecasts for the main crops of Maize, Sorghum and Wheat.

4. Changes in 'Normal' market access.

Changes in normal market access have been factored into the problem specification for March 2004. Access to employment is judged to be 75-100% of normal across the country. Quite some share of local employment comes from the agricultural sector. Area cultivated is down, yields are down plus disposable incomes are down making people less likely to take on casual wage employees.

5. Food Price Changes.

The LVAC Food Security assessment Report December 2002 presented the findings of a survey of maize meal prices in late 2002. Depending upon packaging and location, prices were in the range of R2,45 to R3,30/Kg. Remote areas and smaller packaging were positively correlated with higher unit prices. More recent information from the FNCO & UNICEF (Food and Nutrition Bulletin. Vol. 1, No.3 2003) indicates that prices in number of 'sentinel sites', range between R2,95 and R5,00/ks and reconfirm that remote areas tend to incur higher unit prices. This

difference translates into a 20-50% increase in price in the past year. Regional maize prices took a considerable hike around May/June 2002. The comparison of average maize meal prices in the period July 1999 to June 2002, with average prices since July 2002, would probably show up a higher level of price change. It is estimated from import figures, that Maize meal prices could have been around R1,00 to R1,50/Kg between 1999 and 2000. The LVAC recognises the need to generate much more solid information of food price changes over time.

A likely food price change (20-50%) has been factored into the current assessment of hazards affecting livelihoods, in different parts of the country (See Appendix 2 for details).

Response Strategies

Sotho rural households have a number of strategies to respond to common food security threats. However, the resilience of 'poor' households to shocks is constrained by the following factors: a quite high dependence upon purchased staple foods – subject to price inflation and a quite high dependence upon casual labour but face the very limited ability of local agricultural labour markets and other labour markets to meet the demand for expanded employment in bad years.

In addition to the above constraints, 30-35% of households are facing the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This generates a number of additional problems: household-level labour shortages, a higher dependency ratio, the loss of assets and skills through protracted illness and adult mortality, the burden of care for the sick adults and orphaned children and a vicious HIV/AIDS-related malnutrition interaction.

Vulnerability is no longer a feature for many of these HIV/AIDS affected households. Many have moved from being 'vulnerable', into a state of destitution. These households require considerable external support to provide care for the ill and to enable the surviving members to develop sustainable livelihoods.

The findings of the current exercise have been broken down systematically to look at (1) the '**crude (income/food) deficit**' (the sum total of all the contributing shocks on livelihoods without taking into account likely coping strategies) and then secondly, to take into account likely response strategies that people may use to reduce their food income deficit. These estimates are then factored into – (2) a '**final result**' (See Appendix 2).

Given three years of shocks and depressed livelihood options, the simulation has chosen to eliminate the possibility of access to 'normal' food stocks.

The results indicate that the residual coping strategies can reduce the crude deficit in some food economy areas, while elsewhere, more vulnerable livelihoods seem unable to mobilise much to offset food and income losses. The main mechanisms are the increased use of paid employment and the increased use of livestock sales. For the whole country, these coping strategies may offset between 20-24,000 MT or only 16% of the crude deficit. This however leaves 84% of the total estimated crude deficit in place.

Summary & Outcomes

Appendix 2 presents a summary analysis of the core figures and assumptions used in this assessment. Utilising the RiskMap Version 1.2 computer programme, the problem specification (current hazards – expected changes in production and supply conditions, changes in normal market access and the consideration of a food price index for 2003-2004) have been applied to baseline livelihood data profiles assembled in April-May 2003. The final result (after factoring in the effects of likely coping strategies) is presented in the outcomes section of Appendix 2 and summarised below:

- The entire rural population of Lesotho is likely to be affected with income/food deficits in the range 24,5 - 40,5% of annual food needs. . This is equivalent to 54,340 to 107,069 MT of cereals. (NB. This deficit has been calculated assuming non-availability of normal levels of household food stocks - given several years of poor production).
- The worst affected area is the Southern Lowlands, where the population is estimated to have a mean deficit of 40,5% of their annual food needs amounting to 9,565 – 22,320 MT.
- The second most affected area is the Sequ River Valley. The mean deficit of 35,5% of annual food needs amounts to 11,113 – 24,247 MT.
- The third most affected area is the Mountains. It has an estimated 35% income/food deficit equivalent to 9,282 – 20,253 MT.
- The fourth most affected area is the Northern Lowlands Here a 27% deficit is expected – equivalent to 12,293 – 19,669 MT

- The fifth most affected area is the Foothills with a 25% deficit equivalent to 9,092 – 16,165 MT.
- The sixth, and least affected livelihoods are located in the Peri-Urban areas. They are nonetheless expected to have a 24,5% deficit equivalent to 2,995 – 4,415 MT.

This scenario analysis has been based on a nine-day secondary analysis of hazard information, preliminary production forecasts and a computer-based modelling exercise. It provides early warning of a major domestic production failure/disaster in 2003-04. It is rare to come across a situation where the entire rural population is anticipated to experience such high level of deficit. Emphasis should now be placed on a phase of research and analysis to authenticate and modify these initial findings where necessary.

The findings of this report sets out some alarming orders of magnitude for initial contingency planning among Government and humanitarian agencies. Clearly food aid should not be the automatic and only answer for populations affected. Coherent livelihood promotion programmes need to be put into place. Programmes should focus on measures that increase appropriate agricultural, livestock and non-food production. The generation of employment opportunities in the most vulnerable areas of the country should be a high priority.

Livelihood recovery programmes that can reduce the vulnerability should be identified and facilitated through, development projects and resource transfer mechanisms – cash-for-work, food-for-work and vouchers programmes. Reversing livelihood decline along with the reduction of the number of people in poverty will mitigate the effects of future shocks on livelihoods.

The Lesotho VAC has made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this report and that the judgments on food availability and food access are realistic. Vulnerability assessments are rapid studies to provide early warning of livelihood vulnerability. They forecast likely possible outcomes and provide judgments on the broad orders of magnitude of potential vulnerability in the country. They are not the basis for uncorroborated action. This study has been based on secondary data and it is strongly emphasised that agencies and ministries go out to the field to carry out more detailed assessments.

The livelihoods based approach adopted by the Lesotho VAC aims to provide relevant information

and analysis on food access and livelihoods to various Government Ministries, as well as to international organisations and civil society to inform early warning, rural development strategies, poverty reduction and safety nets programming, and food security policy formulation.

As part of a regional VAC initiative, the Lesotho VAC is planning to carry out a more extensive vulnerability assessment in late April and early May, using updated hazard information and supported by up to two weeks of nationwide field assessments. This work will verify and modify (where necessary) some of the assumptions underlying this preliminary scenario and will provide stronger analysis of vulnerability and recommendations for future interventions in the more vulnerable areas of the country.

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