

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE LESOTHO GOVERNMENT
HAS ECONOMICALLY EMPOWERED UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE**

Josphine Hapazari

Former Student, Department of Social Anthropology, Sociology and Social Work, National University of Lesotho and the University of South Africa

ABSTRACT

Economic empowerment is fundamental for combating the overarching challenge of unemployment. In Lesotho, unemployment is particularly endemic in the rural areas. The main objective of the study was the assessment of the extent to which the Lesotho Government has economically empowered unemployed people in Manonyane rural community between 2010 and 2015. This paper offers insights on the outcome of the Lesotho Government's attempts to alleviate poverty in rural areas. The study employed a quantitative approach. Quantitative data were collected from a sample of 120 unemployed adults aged between 21 and 64 years with the use of a questionnaire and were analysed using Microsoft Excel 2007. Economic empowerment framework was utilized to underpin this investigation. The study unearthed that the coverage of economic empowerment by the Government was very low since an overwhelming majority (80%) reported that they had received very little assistance and for some, no assistance at all. Government's efforts were found to be minimal. It concludes that the unemployed people should use local resources and be more proactive by approaching the Government for assistance to tackle unemployment. The study recommends that Government needs to institute more stringent measures to monitor the implementation of the economic empowerment programmes in place and to add more such programmes.

Key words: economic empowerment, extent, Lesotho, unemployment

INTRODUCTION

Lesotho is a country completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa and is located in the south eastern part of South Africa. According to the 2006 census, its population is 1, 876,633 (Government of Lesotho, 2009). Most of Lesotho's 30,355 square kilometres are mountainous and only 9% of the total area is suitable for arable cultivation.(International Monetary Fund, 2012). It therefore implies that on the one hand, the mountainous scenery attracts tourists and on the other, it also contributes to perennial food shortages in the country. The IMF (2012: 11) highlights that by ecological zone, "56.7% of Basotho live in the Lowlands, 12.8% in the Foothills and 30.5% in the Mountains and Senqu river valley." The major agricultural outputs are grain and cereals but they are mostly produced for household consumption. Additionally, Lesotho exports mohair which is cut from goats and is used to make woollen products. Due to its small economy and insufficient arable land, there are high levels of poverty and unemployment in Lesotho.

After 45 years of independence, Lesotho has made much progress towards development but she has not yet fully escaped poverty hence the GOL (2012: 1) states that "she is still a Least Developed Country (LDC) with per capita income of approximately \$1000." Lesotho is now classified as a lower-middle income country, poverty and unemployment are still high and the major challenges "that need to be addressed include sustained and shared economic growth that results in poverty reduction," (GOL, 2012: 3). Omile (2003) highlights that Lesotho is classified among the 42 least developed countries (LDCs) and macro-economic indicators show that Lesotho is ranked as one of the 40 lowest-income economies in the world. Furthermore, Omile states that the population is currently estimated to be growing at about 2.6% per annum, with population density highest in the Lowlands and Foothills. All this, undoubtedly, has a remarkable impact on the welfare of the unemployed people. The GOL (2014) points out that Lesotho is off track on these indicators since the incidence of poverty has increased by 0.5% from 56.6% in 2002–03 to 57.1% in 2010–11. The increase in severe poverty affects most Basotho in numerous ways. Malnutrition levels among children under five are unacceptably high everywhere and poverty is greater in rural areas where over 80 per cent of the population reside (Omile, 2003). It can be seen here that malnutrition was used as yet another poverty measure.

The GOL (2014) attributes poverty to poor soils, degraded range lands and volatile climate which combine to hold back progress on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger (MDG 1), for which Lesotho is off-track. As mentioned earlier, in Lesotho, poverty is measured primarily through the periodic Lesotho Household Budget Survey (HBS). The most recent HBS was conducted between 2010 and 2011. The poverty line was constructed based on the value of a minimal level of consumption, which was M246.6/person/month in 2011 and the food poverty line is the value of the minimal level of food consumption needed to meet standard nutritional requirements and it stood at M137/month in 2011 (GOL 2014). Therefore, a household will be deemed very poor if its income falls below this line.

Research on the extent of empowerment by Government

The UN (2013) states that, the UN Women reach out to women most in need, often engaging with grass-roots and civil society organizations. In addition, the UN points out that a UN Women partnership with the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women trains Soulalyates women, traditionally excluded from land rights on leadership and community mobilization. The project helped raise unprecedented attention to their plight in the media and the broader public and in 2012, the Moroccan Government ruled that Soulalyates women should enjoy equal rights in land transfers (UN2013). It can be observed here that in all its economic empowerment programmes, the UN's ultimate goal will be inclusiveness and independency. This study views the empowerment of women only as anomalous.

Ndlovu (2013) carried a study whose major aim was to examine the extent of the Zanyokwe irrigation scheme in enhancing food security, not only for the farmers but also for the surrounding communities. In that study, a qualitative methodology shaped the research design. The study also focused on the challenges facing the rural communities of the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. Ndlovu's study found that even though Zanyokwe irrigation scheme has played an indispensable role in enhancing food security for the smallholder farmers and the community at large, challenges such as market challenges, road infrastructural issues, land tenure issues, lack of proper coordination amongst the farmers as well as farmer empowerment are a

major limitation to the growth of the irrigation scheme and the farmers. It can be safely concluded that the impact of the Zanyokwe irrigation scheme was fairly high.

In a qualitative study conducted by Naidoo (2010) in the Vulindlela area found in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, one of the objectives was to review the livelihood outcomes of Zibambele beneficiaries in response to the structural conditions that the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Transport faces. Zibambele is a poverty alleviation programme implemented by South Africa's Department of Transport. Naidoo expounds that the main objectives of the Zibambele programme are achieved through securing employment for the beneficiaries and the main criterion for employment is destitute female-headed households, who are selected by the community's traditional authority structures. The Zibambele programme claims that the focus on selecting women for participation in the programme is to address the inequality women face in economic and social spheres (Naidoo, 2010). The study established that the Zibambele participants were requesting more money from the implementers and they also requested to be taught practical skills which they could use in income generating projects. All this implies that the extent of coverage of the Zibambele programme was low.

The empowerment of the poor is usually done by the Government and the Non-Government Organizations. These two actors are involved in all the components of empowerment depending on the needs of those to be empowered. Majara (2013) highlights that Lesotho has not only achieved tremendous progress in the implementation of the compact, in the areas of water, health and private sector development, but also gender and economic empowerment. The compact is a treaty signed between the Government of Lesotho and the United States Government through the Millennium Challenge Corporation's, which is an independent U.S. foreign aid agency that is helping lead the fight against global poverty. In partnership with the Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation and Lesotho's Gender Equality in Economic Rights programme, the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) jointly established the Federation of Lesotho Women Entrepreneurs (FLWE) in February 2013 (Majara, 2013). In explaining the primary aim of the FLWE, Majara asserts that it is to ensure that gender considerations extend beyond women's

traditional roles thereby allowing women to contribute to poverty reduction and economic growth initiatives.

Usually the economic empowerment of poor people ensures poverty reduction. Additionally, it guarantees gender equality and a better control of life if both men and women are incorporated in the intervention measures. There will no longer be that powerlessness and lack of self-esteem that will have been created by poverty and gender inequality. It should however be pointed out that most of the previous research covered the economic empowerment of women. Zoellick in the UN (2013) points out that improved economic opportunities for women lead to better outcomes for families, societies and outcomes. This is spot on given that the majority of women are involved in the daily running of households hence most if not all the income passing through their hands will not only benefit them but all members of their households. In this study economic empowerment is conceptualized to mean assistance with payment of education, assistance with capital, accessing loans, inputs and being enrolled in economic empowerment programmes.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative approach. This approach enabled the evaluation of the economic empowerment extent through the use of questionnaires that elicited quantitative data from the unemployed adults. The study site was the Manonyane rural community. It is located in the central part of Maseru district. The sample was made up of 120 unemployed adults residing in Manonyane community who were between 21 and 64 years old. The size of the sample had to be large for the evaluation of the extent to be authentic since a small sample size cannot yield a reliable evaluation. The 12 villages were selected using simple random sampling. All the 56 villages were first assigned numbers and then only 12 villages were picked, randomly. As for the unemployed adults, the research employed two non-probability sampling methods which are quota sampling and snowball sampling.

Furthermore, Burchinal (2008) elucidates that quota sampling is when a certain number of persons is selected to represent subgroups that make up the population. With the quota sampling, the researcher identifies various strata of the population (Rakotsoane 2012). In this instance, the

strata for the quota sampling were villages and gender. The researcher tried to ensure that all the villages and both genders are proportionately represented within the sample. This was of paramount importance so as to avoid any bias. Survey questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data from the unemployed people. All questions were close-ended ones. Quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft Excel 2007 program. Ethical clearance was sought and was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Sciences committee on 22 January 2016.

RESULTS

This section presents findings entailing the extent of Government economic empowerment programmes to the unemployed people. Biographic details of the respondents will be presented first. This will be followed by whether the unemployed people were assisted with education bursaries and projects by the Government. Thereafter, results will be presented on the enrolment in empowerment programmes as well as whether respondents were assisted with capital, loans and inputs. Lastly the respondents' rating of Government efforts to assist the unemployed will be presented. The analysis of the data collected from unemployed people was largely descriptive.

Biographic details

This section covers the profile of the respondents. It is composed of one table which illustrates the biographic details of the 120 unemployed adults. This section entails the univariate analysis of the biographic details of the respondents.

Table 1: Biographic details of the respondents

Variable	Attributes	Frequency	%	Age in years
Gender	Male	68	57	-
	Female	52	43	-
Age	Mean	-	-	33
Marital status	Single	57	47.50	-
	Married	44	36.67	-
	Widowed	12	10	-
	Divorced	7	5.83	-
	Other	0	0	-
Educational status	Primary	29	24.17	-
	Some high school	39	32.50	-
	Secondary complete	26	21.67	-
	Tertiary	25	20.83	-
	Never attended	1	0.83	-

From Table 1 above, it can be observed that out of a total of 120 respondents, 68 (57%) of them were males and 52 (43%) were females. The mean age was found to be 33 years. The majority of them 57 (47.50%) were single, 44 (36.67%) were married, 12 (10%) were widowed and only 7 (5.83%) were divorced. The majority, 39 (32.50%) had gone up to high school level, while 29 (24.17%) had only primary level, with 29 (24.17%) having completed secondary level and 25 (20.83%) went as far as tertiary level. Only 1 (0.83%) had never attended school.

The extent of economic empowerment

The extent of economic empowerment was measured by whether or not their education was paid for, enrolment in projects, the extent to which they benefitted from the projects and whether the projects are still running. The results are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Whether they were assisted with education bursaries and projects

Variables	Attributes	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Whether Government paid for education	Yes	13	11
	No	95	79
	Only part of it	11	9
	Not applicable	1	1
Whether enrolled in a Government project	Yes	24	20
	No	96	80
The extent of benefitting from projects	Not at all	3	12.5
	A little bit	16	66.6
	A lot	5	20.8
Whether the project is still running	Yes	15	11.67
	No	9	6.67
	Not applicable	98	81.67

Table 2 above shows that 95 (79%) respondents did not have their education paid for by the Government 13 (11%) who got paid for. Others, 11 (9%) had only part of their education paid for. For 1 (1%), it was not applicable since the respondent had not attended school. As for whether respondents were enrolled in a Government project since 2010, 24 (20%) were enrolled and 96 (80%) were not enrolled. With regard to the extent of benefitting from the project, 3 respondents (12.5% of the beneficiaries) stated that they did not realize any benefit at all, while 16 respondents (66.6% of the beneficiaries) pointed out that they benefited a little bit and only 5 respondents (20.8 % of the beneficiaries) alluded that they benefited a lot. As for 97 (81% of the

respondents) it was not applicable since they had never been enrolled in any project. On whether the project is still running, 15 (11.67%) respondents reported that the project is still running and for 9 (6.67%) the project is no longer running. As for 98 (81.67%) it was not applicable since they had never been enrolled in a project before. Table 3 below demonstrates the number of men and women in respondents’ households who were enrolled in economic empowerment programmes in Manonyane rural community since 2010.

Table 3: Enrolment in empowerment programmes

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Men	56	55
Women	46	45

From Table 3 above it can be seen that more men 56 (55%) than women 46 (45%) in respondents’ households were enrolled in economic empowerment programmes between 2010 and 2015. The unemployed were also asked whether or not they were ever assisted with capital by the Government and their responses are graphically shown below in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Whether respondents were assisted with capital

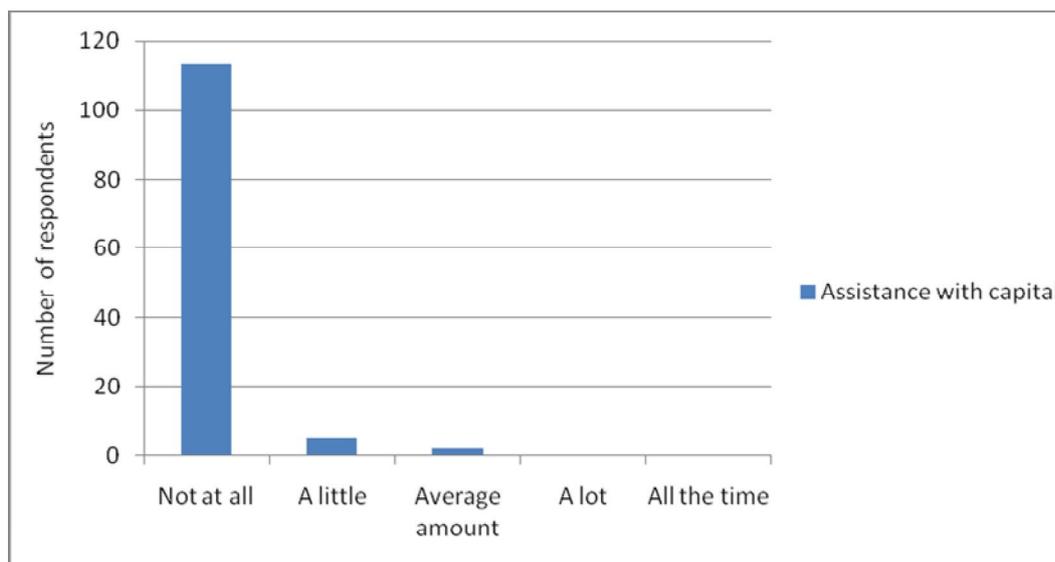
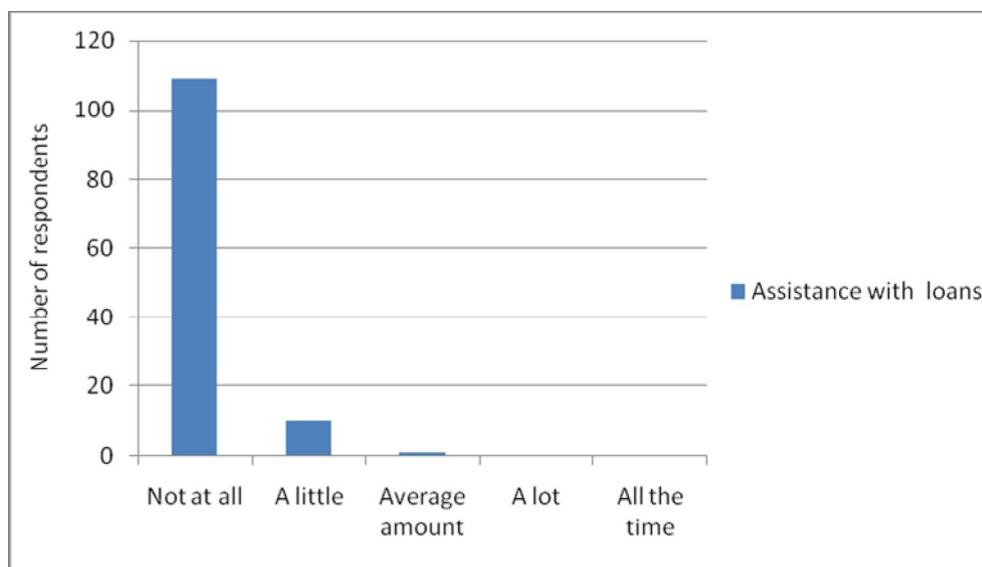


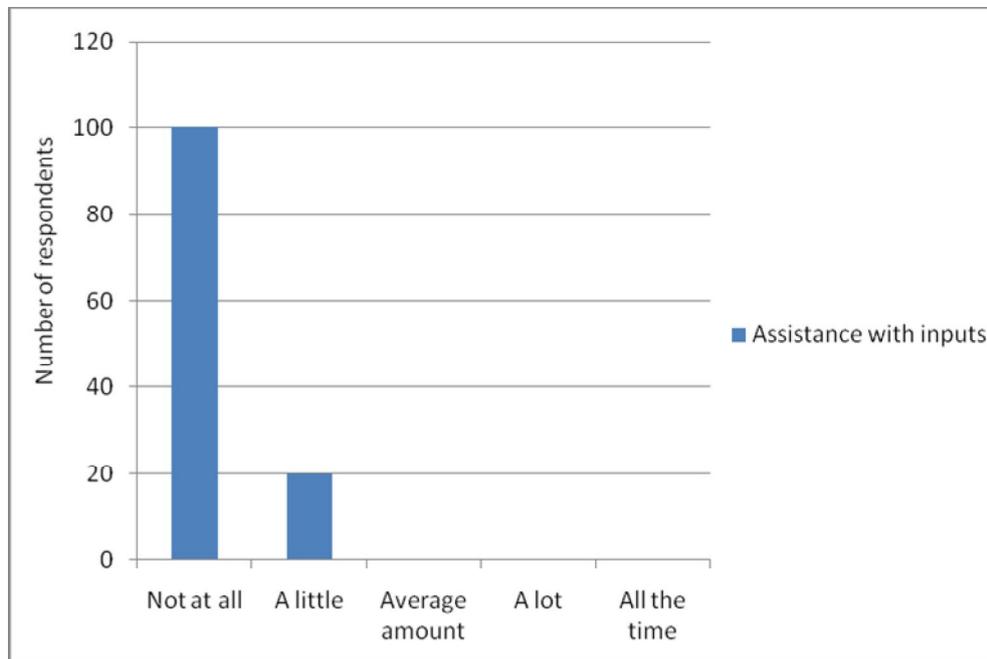
Figure 1 above depicts whether or not respondents were assisted with capital by the Government. Overwhelming numbers indicated that they never received any capital from Government 113 (94%). Only 5 (4%) received a little capital from the Government. Those who received an average amount were 2 (2%) from Government. None of the respondents received capital all the time from the Government. Respondents were also asked whether or not the Government ever assisted them to access loans. Their responses are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Whether respondents were assisted to access loans



From Figure 2 above, it can be observed that, again, the majority of the respondents 109 (91%) did not receive any assistance at all to access loans from the Government. Those who received a little assistance were 10 (8%). Only 1 (0.8%) received an average amount. None of them received a lot of assistance or received assistance all the time. Again, in an attempt to check how economic empowerment was implemented in Manonyane rural community, respondents were asked whether or not they were given inputs by the Government. Figure 3 below shows their responses.

Figure 3: Whether respondents were given inputs



From Figure 3 above, it can be observed that 100 (83%) were not given any inputs at all by the Government. The others, 20 (17%) received little inputs. None of the respondents received a lot of inputs or received inputs all the time from the Government. The respondents were asked to rate Government efforts to economically empower unemployed people in Manonyane rural community. Below is Figure 4 which shows the outcome of the rating of efforts made.

Figure 4: Rating Government efforts

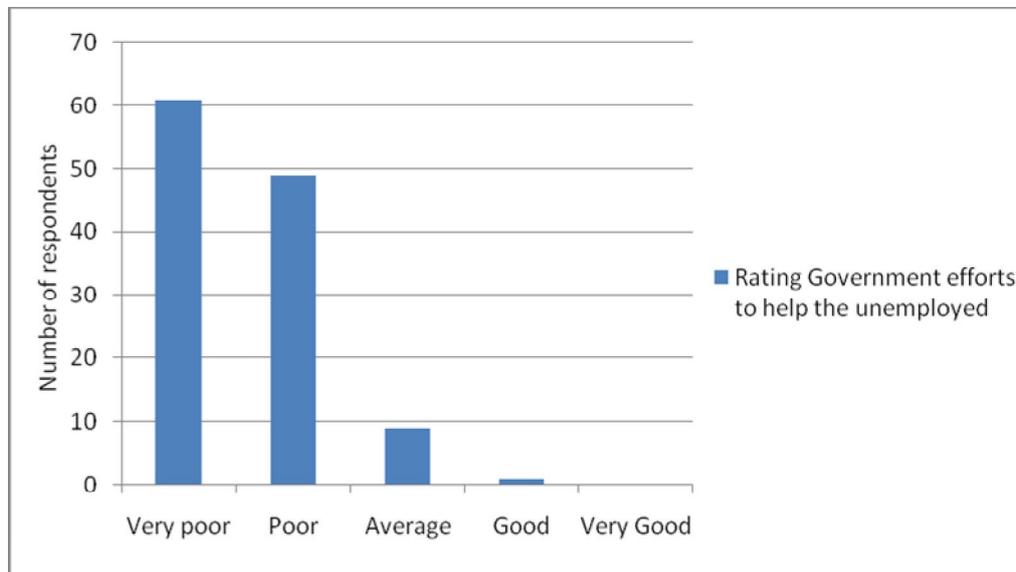


Figure 4 illustrates the outcome of the respondents' rating of Government efforts using the variables very poor, poor, average, good and very good. The majority of them 61 (50.8%) indicated that the Government performed very poorly in its effort to economically empower unemployed people. More respondents 49 (40.8%) rated Government efforts as poor. Average 9 Only 1 (0.8%) respondent rated Government efforts as good. None of the respondents rated the Government as very good.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The extent of economic empowerment on the unemployed people

In this section the discussion will be centred on what the participants viewed as the extent of economic empowerment programmes. The extent will be measured in terms of various forms and levels of assistance received from Government within the period covered by this study - 2010 to 2015. This includes education and training sponsorship received, whether or not they were ever enrolled in economic empowerment projects, and the extent to which they benefited from the economic empowerment programmes. The extent of economic empowerment will also be discussed in terms of whether or not they were ever assisted with capital, accessing loans, and inputs from the Government. In addition, the discussion will also focus research participants' rating of Government efforts in assisting the unemployed in Manonyane rural community over

the period 2010 to 2015. In discussing all this, the aim will be to answer the major research objective on the extent of economic empowerment in Manonyane since 2010. Suffice to say, earlier on, in the literature review chapter; economic empowerment was conceptualized to mean assistance with payment of education assistance with capital, accessing loans, inputs and being enrolled in economic empowerment programmes.

Assistance with sponsorship towards education and training

The extent of economic empowerment was minimal when one looks at the assistance given by the Government towards the educational needs of the unemployed adults. With regard to assistance with education sponsorship, the study revealed that 95 out of 120 respondents (79%) did not receive any assistance towards the cost of their education from Government. On the other hand, only 13 respondents (11%) acknowledged that their education was paid for by the Government, and as such, the respondents are mostly those who also reported their highest level of education as primary school level. In 1999, the GOL introduced a Free Primary Education Policy (FPE). But it was to be implemented in a phased fashion so that fees were abolished one standard every year starting from 2000, (African Development Bank 2005; Morojele 2012). Thus, it generally explains the 11% of respondents who acknowledged Government sponsorship.

On the other hand, the majority who did not benefit from the programme can only be accounted for by the fact that they had already finished primary education when the programme came into being, which generally tallies the age group of such respondents. On the contrary, Lesotho does not sponsor secondary and high school education. The other 11 respondents (9%) reported that only a part of their education was paid for by the Government. This group is mainly comprised of those who went as far as the tertiary level; and indeed, Lesotho even to date offers a loan-grant package sponsorship towards tertiary education to its citizens who will have qualified and enrolled at state owned institutions. Generally, that happens to be a very small number compared to those who fail to reach such higher levels. Effectively, this adds weight to the assertion that most unemployed adults did not benefit from education and training sponsorship programmes.

Furthermore, it can be argued that since all this investment towards primary and tertiary education is ideally geared at ensuring national human capital, then the viability and sustainability of such programmes is questionable. Cognizant of the fact that the beneficiaries end up without jobs and consequently failing to contribute towards the tax base or national economy, and even failing to repay the loans. Notably, 1 respondent (0.8%) reported never being economically empowered by the Government and also never attended school. Admittedly, this form of economic empowerment is inapplicable for such a respondent. The form of economic empowerment relevant to such people is skills training on practical things they are passionate about for instance poultry, farming and crocheting. Then, later, they can be assisted with capital or other inputs to start their own income generating projects along the areas they would have shown some grasp. The researcher strongly believes that, with appropriate economic empowerment programmes in place, even the uneducated people can still live honest and decent lives despite their lack of education.

Enrolment in empowerment programmes

Economic empowerment of the unemployed in Manonyane rural community was also measured according to enrolment or participation in projects implemented by the Government within the duration covered by this study, 2010 to 2015. It is worth noting that the term project is used cognizant of the fact that when it comes to implementation, most programmes are implemented in form of projects. It emerged that only 24 respondents (20%) were enrolled in some empowerment project (s) within the 6 year period, while 96 respondents (80%) were not enrolled (see Table 2). This shows that the Government economic empowered efforts can only reach as much as 20% of the legitimate beneficiaries in a period of 6 years excluding the large majority of 80%. This raises serious questions as to why such a small proportion (20%) of eligible people could have benefited from the economic empowerment programmes given the existence of a huge range of such programmes as cited by the Government. Needless to say, six (6) years is too long a time for such a huge number (80%) of eligible targets to have not been offered the opportunity to participate in any economic empowerment project(s) of whatever nature.

The study reveals that economic empowerment projects were virtually not running in any significant way, in Manonyane rural communities. At best they were running at a very low scale which could hardly impact much on the livelihoods of the unemployed community members. This may point to, among other possible reasons, lack of political will and paying lip-service on economic empowerment issues. Otherwise, one would expect a significant number of the Ministries that pronounced their involvement in a myriad of economic empowerment programmes to have worked with unemployed people in Manonyane in at least one of the years under review. In that case the proportion of beneficiaries could have been significantly bigger than the 20%. It is worth noting that the observed low extent of economic empowerment programmes is not confined to Lesotho, it is also a problem even in other countries which are even more endowed with resources to assist their unemployed people. A case in point and closer to home is South Africa, where a study by Sikrweqe (2013) also revealed that only about 22% of the respondents had participated in projects implemented in their neighbourhood whilst the majority 78% had not been accorded the opportunity to participate.

An even more worrying picture was unveiled when the few (24) who were enrolled in economic empowerment programmes were asked to rate the extent to which they benefited from the projects. In response to that question, 3 respondents (12.5% of the beneficiaries) said they did not realize any benefit at all, while 16 respondents (66.6% of beneficiaries) said they benefited a little bit and only 5 respondents (20.8 % of the beneficiaries) said they benefited a lot. It may be speculated, that those who said they did not benefit at all are most probably those who enrolled in very short-term project(s) possibly running for periods of one month or less, and at the same time earned very little for their efforts. While those ones who said they benefited a little bit could be those who enrolled in projects which had relatively longer time frames. Generally, if a project has a long timeframe, even if the returns are low, it may yield more benefits to the participants because that consistence will enable beneficiaries to have something to look forward to for a long period and at times even accumulate some savings. However, whether it will lift people from poverty or not will depend on the amount of benefits accrued from the projects, and individual attributes.

But, going by the beneficiaries expressed sentiments, in this regard, it can be argued that, the extent of economic empowerment programmes in Manonyane was not only low and constrained in terms of accessibility to the target group(s), but even more so in terms of uplifting the very few people who participated. Moreover, given that a very small proportion of the unemployed got the opportunity to participate then the expectation would be having the majority of that small group benefitting a lot since at least they had the opportunity to be enrolled in some project(s). Yet, to the contrary, the majority of that very small group did not even benefit much from those economic empowerment projects they participated in. This, taken together with the fact that majority of the unemployed (80%) had already been excluded from participation amply highlights that the extent of economic empowerment was overall very low. Generally, where there is low extent in economic empowerment of the people, there are high chances of the majority of the people, particularly the unemployed, sinking into abject poverty. Under normal circumstances, economic empowerment is supposed to lift people out of poverty or to contribute significantly to poverty reduction.

Again, another question which was relevant and directed to those (24 respondents) who asserted to have enrolled in economic empowerment projects was, whether the project they participated in is still running. In their responses, 15 respondents (62.5%) reported that the projects were still running while 9 (i.e. 37.5%) stated that the project is no longer running. The fact that more respondents indicated that the projects were still running could be viewed as positive and commendable as it shows that one way or another there are some members of Manonyane community who were still benefitting even though it might be at a low scale. However, the ideal situation could have been to have all projects still running so that people can continue to be productive in their lives, given that for most of the unemployed adults such projects are hopefully viewed as vital vehicles for combating poverty. On the contrary, Sikrweqe (2013) found out that the majority of respondents (66%) agreed that there were municipal projects that were undertaken in their neighbourhood in the past two years as part of the implementation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme in South Africa.

Enrolment in empowerment programmes

As has been mentioned earlier, the extent of economic empowerment programmes was measured by looking at the number of men and women from the respondents' household who were enrolled in economic empowerment programmes in Manonyane between 2010 and 2015. On this aspect, the respondents were asked to indicate number of all household members and their gender who participated in any economic empowerment programmes. It emerged that a total of 102 household members of the respondents participated of which 56 (~54.9 %) were male and 46 (~45.1%) were female (see Table 3). On face value, the gender balance may seem relatively fair though it is still skewed in favour of men. However, if this slight gender empowerment imbalance is considered together with Lesotho's gender ratio which is generally reported to be ~51% women to ~49% men, then the issue of gender equality clearly comes to the fore and effectively increases the disparity in the gender empowerment processes.

Overall this finding shows that the number of men and women who were enrolled in the programmes is very low given the number of the respondents (120) and the household family size of 5 giving a total number of 600 household members. Effectively only 102 out of 600 people (17%) enrolled in economic empowerment programmes in the 6 year duration. This is a very small number or proportion considering the length of the duration. The period under review is very long hence the expectation was to get a much larger number than 102. For instance, one can imagine, if just 1 household member per respondent were enrolled each year, then the total number of beneficiaries was going to be 720 for the six years, which is a far cry from the reported 102 beneficiaries over the same period.

Assistance with capital

When conceptualising economic empowerment, this study included capital as another major form of economic empowerment. Against this background, the respondents were asked to state whether or not they were assisted with capital by the Government within the focus period - 2010 to 2015. The outcome was overwhelmingly on the negative, as 113 of the respondents (~94%) indicated that they never received capital from Government while only 7 (8.3%) attested to have received Government assistance in the form of capital. Furthermore, 5 of the 7 described the

capital assistance as a little and only 2 recipients (i.e.1.7%) described the assistance as average amounts. It is likely that majority who received capital assistance (i.e. 5 out of 7) could have received amounts that were hardly enough to start any income generating venture and all they could do was to use the supposed capital for consumption purposes. Hence, it did not translated into capital at all.

Effectively the efforts by the Government only benefited 7 respondents (i.e. ~5.83%) while the majority 113 (~94.17%) did not benefit. Then considering that most of those who benefited described the capital they got as a little, it could be argued that may be only those who depicted what they got as average or as a lot got amounts that could suffice as capital to venture into income generating projects and overall these were only 5 constituting ~4.2% of the respondents. Again, the fact that overall only 5.83%) of the unemployed in Manonyane received some form of capital assistance over the 6 year duration signifies that the people of Manonyane were, at least during that time, overlooked and left to struggle with poverty largely on their own without much external assistance from the Government. If it is further considered that only a meagre 4.2% could have received amounts that would qualify as capital to start some sort of sustainable income generating project(s) or ventures, the picture gets even shoddier. Just like with the other forms of economic empowerment, only very few individuals among the target group(s) benefited. This was a serious blow, even Rantšo (2015) also expounds that unemployed youth in Lesotho are faced with many challenges such as lack of start-up capital and market outlets.

It is also this researcher's view that whilst provision of any amount of capital to the unemployed can always be viewed as a positive contribution by the benefactors, it requires some thought as to whether the provided amounts really constitute viable capital for the beneficiaries to actually start-up income generating projects or ventures. Other factors such as capacity building also come in, which brings into question whether the recipients were given and/or assessed to have the requisite skills to venture into those areas for which the capital funding was provided for. Without taking care of these fundamentals, among others, all capital injections regardless of the quantities may not result in the desired empowerment effects. Admittedly and in general, the availability of capital is critical for enabling the unemployed to implement income generating

ventures or projects; especially those with their scope of skills. Indeed, on this particular aspect, it can be argued that, largely the lack of capital assistance and in the very few cases observed the availing of inadequate capital assistance from Government generally explains why most respondents passionately pleaded if the Government could provide them with capital to engage in ventures that would enable them live economically independent lives. Again, this aspect of the study, like other preceding aspects, still signifies a low extent of the economic empowerment endeavours by the key players – namely the Government, with specific reference to the Manonyane rural community.

Assistance to access loans

Another measure of economic empowerment employed in this study was whether the respondents received any assistance to access loans from the Government. Evidence from the study shows that just as with capital assistance, the majority of the respondents did not receive any assistance at all to access loans from either the Government (see Figure 2). In specific terms 109 of the respondents (~91%) indicated that they did not receive such assistance from the Government, and only 11 respondents (~9%) did. Again, majority of the few recipients (10 out of 11) depicted the amounts accessed as a little and only 1 recipient (i.e. ~0.8% of the respondents) got an average amount. It could be argued that, only 1 out of 120 respondents (~0.83%) were assisted by the Government to sizeable access loans that could possibly enable recipients to kick-start sustainable income generating ventures.

As elsewhere in the world, with very little assistance from Government and/or any other organizations, the lending institutions (i.e. the banks) are highly unlikely to risk the investors' money by issuing loans to unemployed people. Hence, this means majority of the unemployed (~91%) in Manonyane did not manage to secure any loans that they could have required especially to venture into income generating projects and become economically active. Notably, this empowerment aspect by Government only accommodated 11 respondents (~9%) over the 6 year period while the rest ~91% was left out. Effectively, the programme had very limited impact in terms of its accessibility, and overall the impact further shrinks as the majority recipients (10 out of the 11) only got a little while only 1 recipient (~0.83%) got average amounts and none got

a lot. Therefore, it can be argued that just like all the other preceding economic empowerment efforts this one also could hardly have had any impact on the unemployed people in Manonyane in terms of improving livelihood and poverty reduction in general.

The above observations notwithstanding, it remains of utmost importance for Governments to render assistance to the unemployed if these people are to be liberated from the vicious cycle of poverty in which majority of them are entangled. With adequate loans and capacitation, the unemployed adults will be in a position to explore new channels of earning a living. The availability of loans has the potential to even elevate these people from their main-stream economic inactivity to employers, hence benefiting the wide society and not only themselves. When this plausible scenario is visible, then the extent of economic empowerment effort can be viewed as high. Furthermore, assistance with accessing loans by Government or any other economic empowerment institutions is vital because accessing of loans alone by individuals who are unemployed and poor is generally impossible; and may be in very rare instances possible but rather difficult and tedious. The Lesotho Government effectively summed this up over a decade ago by stating that small-scale entrepreneurs failed to secure finance from commercial banks because of a lack of collateral (Ministry of Trade and Industry, Cooperatives and Marketing, 2002). The statement applies even now, and foreseeably, will continue to apply way into the future of Lesotho as a country, if not everywhere elsewhere across the continent or the world for that matter.

Assistance with inputs

Apart from education, enrolment in projects capital and loans, economic empowerment can also be measured in terms of assistance with inputs (such as seeds, irrigation pipes, fertilizers sewing machines and cooking stoves). The results (see Figure 3) indicate that only 20 respondents (~17%) received inputs from the Government and 100 (~83%) did not. Effectively, and assuming there were no repetitive beneficiaries, only 20 out of 120 unemployed respondents (~17%) in Manonyane rural accessed this form of economic empowerment assistance over the 6 year period. This again is low in terms of its reach given the 6 year time-frame under consideration. If this rather constrained outreach level is considered together with the fact that all the recipients

indicated that they only received little inputs, then the impact rating of this empowerment effort sinks to very low levels, and presumably amounts to insignificance.

In this case, the majority of the unemployed in Manonyane did not get any inputs which they can use to eke a living. Furthermore, none of the few recipients attested to have had received a lot of inputs or to receiving inputs all the time from the Government. This explains why a sizable number 14 (11.7%) passionately pleaded for inputs in their final comments, which is a very positive and progressive mentality as opposed to situations where poor people expect some kind of ready-to-eat handouts from Government. It can therefore be argued that for the unemployed in Manonyane rural area, inputs are generally the kind of stepping stones they need towards poverty reduction and gender equality. In terms of rating this particular aspect of economic empowerment, one can argue that the highly limited and inadequate assistance rendered to the unemployed in Manonyane rural community simply means the extent of this economic empowerment effort was so low that it could even be inconsequential.

Rating Government efforts

In order to evaluate the extent of economic empowerment in Manonyane, the study asked the respondents to rate the overall Government efforts to help the unemployed. As shown in Figure 4, the majority of the respondents, that is 61 out of 120 (~50.8%) rated Government performance as very poor, while 49 (~40.8%) rated it as poor and only 1 respondent (~0.8%) rated the Government performance as good.

While the negative picture painted could be worrying, it is very much in line with the majority of the respondents' pronouncements on all other issues such as a huge majority never received any assistance in form of education, never enrolled in projects, never got capital, never accessed loans and never received inputs from the Government. The rating by the respondents themselves just over-emphasizes what all the other aspects of the study have already indicated, which is that the extent of economic empowerment in Manonyane is rather low. Apart from that, it also suggests that poverty reduction was not achieved. In another study in King Sabata Dalindyebo municipality, Eastern Cape Province in South Africa, Sikrweqe (2013) unearthed a very similar

trend as majority of respondents (88%) indicated that there were no projects taking place in their neighbourhood. It may be argued that this highlights the need for Governments to be more effective or result oriented when it comes to implementing economic empowerment and poverty reduction measures. Putting policies and other sound official pronouncements in place alone, with very little or nothing to show on implementation, will not change the livelihoods of the poor.

CONCLUSION

The study's succinct overall goal was to evaluate the extent of economic empowerment programmes by Government on the livelihoods of unemployed adults in Lesotho's Manonyane rural community, with specific reference to poverty reduction and gender equality. To that end, the study was guided by the following three specific objectives, namely: to evaluate the extent of Government efforts in economically empowering unemployed adults in Manonyane rural community to ensure poverty reduction between 2010 and 2015. With regard to the main objective which was to evaluate the extent of economic empowerment to the unemployed people, the findings revealed that the extent of Government efforts in economically empowering the unemployed adults in Manonyane between 2010 and 2015 was very low or non-existent. In fact, the majority of the unemployed attested that they never received any economic empowerment. In the same vein, the Government generally has national programmes in general, but again very little specific for Manonyane rural community came out.

On a positive note, it can be concluded that the findings reflected a good gender balance in the implementation of economic empowerment programmes targeting the households of the unemployed in Manonyane rural community. The balance was clearly authenticated by the fact that the ratio of unemployed beneficiaries, which was 56% males to 46% females, was almost equal to the ratio of unemployed males (57%) to unemployed females (43%) in this community as established in this study. This is commendable. However, the Government needs to design its economic empowerment programmes in consultation with the target groups if such programmes are to result in high impact effects. To that end, Government ought to rely on well researched information when formulating any interventions to effectively ensure sound economic empowerment of the unemployed people in rural areas. It remains of utmost importance for

Governments to render assistance to the unemployed if these people are to be liberated from the vicious cycle of poverty in which majority of them are entangled.

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