

## Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment in Mafeteng and Quthing

**Location:** Mafeteng and Quthing, Lesotho

**Date:** March-April, 2006

**Sector focus:** Multi-hazard risk reduction, food security,  
drought and HIV/ AIDS

**Spatial focus:** mountain, foothills and lowland terrain with  
rural and peri-urban communities.

### **Bibliographical reference**

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International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Vulnerability Capacity Assessment Communities: Mafeteng and Quthing*, IFRC, Geneva, Switzerland (2006).

### **Abstract**

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Lesotho is a small mountainous community of 2.35 million people entirely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. The Lesotho Red Cross Society (LRCS) is in the process of strengthening its disaster management capacities from a reactive approach to prevention and preparedness through community participation. Disasters common to Lesotho include droughts, flooding, snowstorms, hailstorms, hurricane storms, veldt fires and HIV/AIDS. Due to the country's hazards and vulnerabilities, there is need to empower communities to reduce risks through community-based initiatives.

The publication *Vulnerability Capacity Assessment Communities: Mafeteng and Quthing* reports the findings from conducting a vulnerability capacity assessment (VCA). A representative sample was selected based on the geography of the districts and circumstances such as the presence of LRCS projects. Ten villages were selected from six administrative constituencies of Mafeteng and ten villages from the 5 administrative constituencies of Quthing district. The twenty villages were selected representing the geographical zones of mountains, foothills and lowlands as well as whether they were rural or 'peri-urban' villages. This community investigation process was funded through DFID under the LRCS Disaster Management program.

The methodology was within a triangulation framework. This included literature review of relevant documents; semi-structured interviews with key informants from local government departments, NGOs and other stakeholders. Community focus groups were facilitated and involved the contribution of 1,656 people representing rural and peri-urban areas. Research tools such as timelines, seasonal calendars and community mapping enabled the communities to identify and rank their hazards and capacities. Transect walks were also conducted for verification of information.

No particular end users are specified, however it would be useful for **branch and volunteers of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (RC/RC), community development workers, local government**

and **NGOs**. This project will be of interest to those working with rural and peri-urban, mountainous, foothills and lowland communities.

## Technical description

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**Hazard/risk type:** food security, drought, HIV/ AIDS, flash floods, pests, early frost, snowstorms, inadequate sanitation, diarrhoeal diseases.

**Type of assessment:** Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA)

## CRA process

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**Methods used:** Through the VCA process members of local government, NGOs, stakeholders, and community members were consulted. Twenty-two staff and volunteers from LRCS and other stakeholders were selected from the two districts and trained to facilitate the VCA process in a culturally and linguistically sound manner. Tips for how best to prepare for fieldwork are included in an annex.

Tools included: literature review, semi-structured and key informant interview, focus groups with more than 1,500 people, timeline, seasonal calendar, community mapping, historical timeline and transect walk. Based on the assessed capacities and vulnerabilities of the communities, soft actions plans were developed to transform change at the community level.

**Was livelihood analysis used?** Yes, a livelihoods analysis was used. This report particularly examines the underlying causes of poverty and vulnerabilities that exist within the communities. 'Livelihoods' in this report encompasses the human, economic, physical, natural and environmental resources owned by community members. The "triple threat" of food insecurity, HIV/AIDS (which stands at nearly 30%) and chronic poverty poses a great challenge for the country. These have negatively impacted on the livelihoods of many households, grossly reducing their coping strategies.

**Was external specialist knowledge introduced?** Yes, technical support was provided from the Federation Regional Delegation. The Regional Disaster Technical Manager was sent to assist in the process including training of data collectors. There was also close consultation with health delegates through this assessment. In Matefeng, the District Conservation Officer from the Ministry of Forestry and Land Resources participated as part of the VCA practitioners' team.

## Vulnerability analysis

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The main vulnerabilities in Lesotho were identified as weather extremes affecting crop yields (prolonged dry season, heavy rains, early frost or hailstorm, or heavy snow). The impact and consequences of people living with HIV/AIDS and associated health and social consequences were also identified as a main hazard in Lesotho. Participating communities defined vulnerable groups of people as: "People who have no capacity to help themselves when any disaster occurs and depend on others to help them: - e.g. children, terminally ill people, the elderly, people with disabilities, women, people living with HIV/AIDS and destitute people.

## Capacity analysis

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**Resources available:** *Infrastructure capacity:* school, church, local court and health centre. *Economic resources:* The villagers have livestock, fields for farming and grazing land. Women work in clothing industries and men work in the fields and with livestock.

**Limitations to capacity:** Although the community members and government officials recognise that it is the role of the government to tackle more issues of vulnerability in the community, there is a lack of resources to provide necessary services to the community. The youth are not interested in the industries that the adults are employed in; there is high job insecurity; and low investment into diversifying the livelihoods.

## **Action planning and implementation**

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### **What actions were actually planned?**

The study provided a series of 25 recommendations for the LRCS to work closely with other partners such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Food security, the Ministry of Forestry and Land, the FAO, WFP and other relevant agencies to assist communities in strengthening sustainable livelihoods through food security interventions, HIV/AIDS home based care and community awareness raising programs, and reducing pollution in the environment. This includes improving the sanitary environment at home and in community areas to reduce the incidence of diseases.

Once the results of the study were compiled and analysed an action plan was to be developed with the community and local government.

### **What actions were actually carried out?**

An action plan was developed and funded through DFID, British Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross and American Red Cross Society.

The main focus of activities has been on livelihood support through food security projects. Concretely this has been projects such as household gardening (backyard gardens with drip irrigation systems, keyhole and trench gardens), fruit tree management, and a small-scale pig-raising income generation project. Water and sanitation issues have been addressed largely through the building of soak aways for household use (underground systems that allow rainfall to infiltrate into the ground). Issues on land reclamation have been addressed in close liaison with the relevant government department.

Integration of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Home Base Care (HBC) at the project level is ongoing, which is reflected in the number of agricultural fields run by the HIV/ AIDS home based care with technical support of the DRR/FS officers, with harvest primarily meant for orphans and vulnerable children.

### **Have these actions turned out to be sustainable?**

Yes, to a large extent these actions have turned out to be sustainable. This is mainly due to ensuring that the management of the project is with the community, which is reflected in the community initiating regular meetings relating to the interventions and end-of-year review meetings. Furthermore, the lead gardeners (who are community members) are mainstreaming gardening techniques within their own communities and neighbouring communities. The use of local materials (formally non-recognized) for the household gardening actions ensures easy replication by other community members thus strengthening the sustainability of the intervention.

Lastly, LRCS is well recognised by government ministries with established and effective cooperation that enhances sustainability of the interventions; the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare assisted in training of volunteers on soak away pits, the Ministry of Forestry and Land Reclamation assisted in identifying suitable land reclamation areas, and the Disaster Management Authority undertook a joint venture with LRCS on reviving village disaster management teams in both districts.

### **Were there any unanticipated additional benefits of the actions?**

- The project has provided a platform for integration of projects (DRR, food security and HBC). One example is a joint planting of a six-hectare field of wheat in Mafeteng which is technically supported by DRR officers and financed by Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC)- Norcross.
- The income generated by the project has allowed more children, particularly OVC, to go to the school.
- The volunteers, who were trained and have constructed the soak away pits, are now able to train other community members and simultaneously generating income for themselves.

- Recognizing their benefits in hygiene measures, community members have constructed additional soak away pits not supported under the programme.

**Were there any unanticipated negative consequences of the actions?** Unknown

**Limitations on action/sustainability of actions:**

Although actions were implemented in coordination with relevant partners such as the Disaster Management Authority, these partnerships should be more formalised by developing a partnership strategy.

With regards to the communal activities such as the pig-raising project, complications of non-coherence amongst individuals in a group/ community were experienced which could be damaging to the success of the activity if not well managed.

## Indicators

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A detailed log frame has been developed to monitor progress of the actions identified by the community.

## Contextual notes

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**Existence/role of prior or contemporaneous conflict?** There was poor attendance in two villages so no interviews took place at Sixondo and Ha Peete villages. In one of the villages participants spoke of the conflict of interest between the counsellor and the local chief who do not see eye to eye. Some community members spoke about trans-boundary fights between Basotho and Maqhotsa over stock theft.

**Role of displacement/relocation.** A major part of the Lesotho economy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been remittances from overseas miners, mainly in South Africa. The movement of people is also seen to tie into the movement of disease in the community such as HIV/AIDS.

**Role of prior disaster & prior recovery attempts?** The people of Lesotho have faced food insecurity, disease, early frost and flash floods before and have developed a variety of coping mechanism. In cases of droughts and resultant food insecurity, people gather wild vegetables and preserve them for consumption. They sell their livestock and other assets to buy food, reduce number and quantities of meals, do piecework for money/food or seek assistance from the government and other agencies.

**Significant historical, geographic, economic, political, or cultural issues that influenced this instance of CRA and its consequences?** The Kingdom of Lesotho gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1966. There has been political unrest since 1990 when the king was exiled, followed by military mutiny. In 2002, peaceful parliamentary elections were held and the country's constitution is being implemented.

The economy depends on petty trade in firewood and cigarettes, domestic work, casual labour (stone collection and field work), livestock and their by-products like wool and mohair. Crops include maize, sorghum, beans and vegetables. There is a gap between the wealthy citizens who have regular skilled activities and opportunities for employment, and the 'poor' and 'very poor' who are limited in access to casual labour opportunities such as weeding, house smearing, home brewing and washing. Two major sectors of the economy are industry and remittances from overseas miners mainly in South Africa.

## Strategic notes

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**How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at the national level?**

This CRA and the success of its resulting actions have contributed to a better understanding of the importance of such practices and led to recognition and appreciation by the government of the national society and its work.

**How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at local level?** At district and local level, local government and other stakeholders have been involved in the actual CRA practice and, to some extent, in the planning and implementation of identified actions. This has strengthened the understanding of these partners on the actual practice, as well as strengthened effective working relationships.

**How has this practice of CRA influenced the level of organization and solidarity in the locality where it was carried out?** The practice of the CRA facilitated the ownership and management of actions resulting from the process, which is reflected in the community calling for regular meetings to discuss the progress of the actions or possible constraints experienced.

The process has strengthened the solidarity in the community, which is evidenced by the majority of initially planned actions being implemented in a largely successful manner. One community was heard to say “Rona re Ma-Red Cross”, (We are the Red Cross People), when asked on the actions implemented in the community.

**Less divided along class, gender, age, ethnic lines?** The results of this study provide a unique opportunity for stakeholders to work in partnership on programmes that reduce people’s vulnerability to disasters. The idea is that the programmes would be developed with a more integrated and participatory approach enabling actions in areas of prevention, mitigation, and community health and community development.

**More divided along these lines?** Unknown

**Are the people living in this area more able to speak out on issues that concern them?** Around the time of this study, new local authority structures were developed. Villages have local councillors who work closely with the chiefs and headmen and may have increased ability to speak out on issues that concern them.

**Have new civil society organizations been created directly or indirectly because of this practice of CRA?** The village disaster management team (VDMT) is responsible for identification of local disasters or hazards and report to the Disaster Management Authority.

In many of the villages, communities had taken initiatives establish crime prevention committees to safe guard their animals from theft. Crime prevention committees are responsible for the safe upkeep village property and animal stock in the village. During the night, some men are responsible for kraal watching and the committee is also responsible for strangers that may enter the village. Animals are kept in one community kraal where they are watched overnight.

## **Lessons learned**

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- Vulnerability is dynamic and varies amongst different people and over time
- Time allocated to the process was too short and this put great pressure on the team
- Preparations for similar study should be done well in advance and involve all stakeholders
- Stakeholder involvement from the onset is vital
- Community participants appreciated being given an opportunity to contribute to their own empowerment
- Community ownership of the process with the involvement of local leadership is important to get the community support and participation.
- LRCS needs to work closely with other partners such as Ministry of Agriculture and Food security, Ministry of Forestry and Land Reclamation, UN Food and Agriculture Organization and UN World Food Programme and other relevant agencies to assist communities in sustainable livelihoods

## **Keywords**

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Food security, drought, HIV/ AIDS, flash floods, pests, early frost, heavy snowstorms, hailstorms, inadequate sanitation, diarrhoeal diseases and integrated assessment.

## **Resource persons**

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