

## The Impact of Improved Road Infrastructure on the Livelihoods of Rural Residents in Lesotho: The Case of Phamong

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**ABSTRACT** The aim of the present study was to examine the impact of improved road infrastructure on the livelihoods of the rural people in Phamong, Lesotho. Using a semi-structured questionnaire and an interview guide to collect data from 300 respondents and six key informants, the findings show that Phamong was suffering from a lack of basic social services and inhabitants had to access them from Maseru, one of the district capitals of the country, 135 km away. In addition, before road infrastructure improvement, inhabitants were affected detrimentally, but after the improvement they were able to access social services from other places. The findings also show a total neglect of these improved roads by the government, hence, the lack of public transport to enhance transportation where social services could be accessed. This is the consequence of poor maintenance by the appropriate government department responsible for roads. Agricultural activities have also been affected negatively. The lives of the inhabitants have improved markedly through acquisition of household assets and access to social services some distance away. However, there is a need for more government and people-centered efforts in the improvement and provision of social services to the community.

### INTRODUCTION

Most of the rural areas in Lesotho suffer from poor road and transport facilities. The Lesotho government has attempted to address this problem and, therefore, the Department of Rural Roads (DRR) is responsible for contributing towards poverty reduction and the construction of road infrastructure in these rural areas (Sechaba Consultants 2002). The government of Lesotho has adopted a number of strategies that have to do with infrastructural development in rural communities as well as those urban areas where there are insufficient social services (Ministry of Public Works and Transport 2002). The DRR targets rural communities in providing functional rural roads in order to improve the socio-economic conditions of rural people. The Ministry of Public Works and Transport (MoPWT) has established a Transport Sector Program (TSP) listing all development and maintenance

initiatives in the Transport Sector that are planned for the next six years. The prime objective of the TSP is to contribute to economic growth and to the government's poverty-reduction strategy through improving road infrastructure and maintenance, institutional reforms, and reinforcing transport sector management in general.

Swanepoel and De Beer (2011) believed that most of the Third World poor live in rural areas. They are the people in the deprivation trap: poor, weak, isolated, powerless and vulnerable. They survive mainly by subsistence farming, and national hazards such as drought affect these farmers. They are, thus, faced with great challenges, and they are the backbone of the economies of most African countries. The continued rapid population growth of developing nations accentuates existing social and economic problems (Willis 2013). When a country has too many people for its resources, most people live in poverty, the resources needed for capital development are used up, and unemployment is high. In these poor nations, unemployment and underemployment trap large segments of the population in poverty. Most of the people in Third World countries live on less than US\$ 1 per day, they do not have access to proper infrastructure and they have a low level of literacy among adults (Web-

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ster 1990). The impact of roads on the lives of the rural poor in the Third World has been significant, but not always sustained. In part, this is due to the absence of maintenance. The roads simply do not last long enough to change people's lives substantively. Further, the problem is that some of the roads simply do not make more accessible the places people want to go. People do not necessarily become more mobile, as they perhaps cannot afford the transport, or perhaps the transport services themselves do not improve markedly (Tighes 2008).

The majority of the poor people in the rural areas of Lesotho sustain their livelihoods from subsistence agriculture, either as small farmers or as low-paid farm employees. Some poor people are found in the urban centers, where they engage in petty services, or in various forms of self-employment such as street-vending, street hawking, trading, and other small-scale commercial enterprises (Sechaba Consultants 2002). Road improvements in the rural areas of Lesotho may lead to higher land values and more intensive land use. In addition, the same road infrastructure may also lead to agricultural production, increased and expanded use of modern agricultural tools, machines, inputs, and modes of transportation as well. A rural road infrastructure in Lesotho can increase the access of the rural population to health and education services. A road network is also likely to increase marketing activities, as the new marketing patterns arise with road improvements (Government of Lesotho 2005). All of these activities are intended to create jobs for the rural poor, and thus tackle the problem of poverty.

Most early research into the subject linked transport infrastructure to poverty reduction, but defined poverty in terms of a region or rural economy, without disaggregating to the village or household level. It has also been emphasized that the rural areas are typically car- and truck-dependent, and characterized by a higher need for mobility and longer trip lengths. Public transport is not used as much in rural areas as it is in urban areas and about 30 per cent of rural people do not have access to cars, and, therefore, find it difficult to reach some services (Anderson 2006). To overcome the problem of social exclusion, governments should provide and maintain transportation infrastructure for rural communities, and this should include roads and

bridges, as they are of prime importance to rural people (Glaister and Anderson 2005).

Allport and Anderson (2011) explored that the transport investment will have the greatest impact on poor populations when other sector interventions are also in place. Such interventions tackle both infrastructure and services in transport policy, establish public accountability for poverty outcomes, and promote broad public participation in planning and action to meet transport needs. Vandana and Potter (2008) found out that the most valid generalizations about the poor are that they are disproportionately located in rural areas, are primarily engaged in agricultural and associated activities, are more likely to be women and children than adult males, and are often concentrated among minority ethnic groups and indigenous peoples.

### **Problem Statement**

The road network in Lesotho is estimated at 7 438 kilometers, 1 217 kilometers of which are paved, while 3 758 kilometers consist of gravel roads connecting the rural areas to small towns (Central Bank of Lesotho Economic Review 2006). Lesotho is a developing country that experiences severe poverty, especially in rural areas like Phamong community, where there are no tarred roads and the majority of people are not employed. Poverty in Lesotho is characterized by lack of access to social services such as education, health and many more, due to an inadequate rural infrastructure in the form of a road infrastructure and public transport, which contribute to communication-related problems (Ministry of Public Works and Transport 2002).

Many rural areas in the country are becoming increasingly excluded from most services that are likely to be of great importance. The lack of both public transport and road infrastructure in the rural areas limits the access of the rural poor to most services, including health services and markets. A large part of the country is rural and inaccessible, because the roads are in a poor condition. Besides, the inadequate provision of resources and capacity in rural roads management is one of the serious problems facing Lesotho (Government of Lesotho 2005). The present study, therefore, seeks to examine the impact of improved road infrastructure and public transport on the livelihood of local residents in Phamong, one of Lesotho's rural areas.

### Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to assess the impact of road infrastructure and public transport on livelihoods in the rural areas of Lesotho. The specific objectives of the study were to assess the extent to which improvements in rural road infrastructure and public transports have been accompanied by improvements in:

- 1) access to social services, including education and health,
- 2) acquisition of household assets, including land, livestock and household furniture, and,
- 3) acquisition of agricultural equipment and, consequently, better agricultural productivity and food security.

### Overview of Literature

Poverty alleviation requires improved mobility so that both women and men can access their daily needs, services, markets and income. Besides, lack of adequate, accessible and affordable public transport creates a real barrier to older women and men in the rural areas to access basic social services (Starkey and Njoemga 2010). Infrastructure can deliver major benefits in the form of economic growth, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability – but only when it provides services that respond to effective demand and does so efficiently.

Having economic, cultural and societal factors, women's access to transport is limited in most regions of the world. This applies to individual means of transport as well as to public transport services (Anderson et al. 2010). In developing nations, women and girls suffer most from the lack of transport infrastructure in rural areas, and walking remains a predominant mode among rural and poor urban populations, with women typically accounting for a disproportionate share. Women are almost entirely responsible for all domestic travel, which is by far the most energy- and time-consuming category in rural areas. Often women spend up to 65 per cent of household time on transport (Anderson 2006). The poor condition of the feeder roads especially affects rural women in an environment where tradition generally disadvantages women in many respects.

Road infrastructure plays a crucial role in the lives of rural people. It increases transport ser-

vices and travel is faster and more convenient in the sense that women and girls can travel safely further from home. Thus, the quality of rural health, education and other services become more accessible to rural women. Girls have more chances to attend high schools and colleges. Employment opportunities are generated for local labor including women, especially in respect of rural roads with labor-intensive construction, and on occasion national highways provide much-needed cash income for women and the poor (Government of Lesotho 2005). All the levels of education are important in every human society, and they are likely to be fully exploited if there is a reliable transport infrastructure, and if there is transport to convey people to schools and businesses (Sechaba Consultants 2002).

The lack of transport services has been identified as a major constraint to the rural development of Lesotho. The Government of Lesotho Transport Sector Policy and the six-year (2004–2010) Transport Sector Program will contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction through the provision of a sustainable transport infrastructure for its citizens, and affordable transportation services and opportunities (Sechaba Consultants 2002). Those who benefit most from rural roads are the larger commercial growers, as better roads help in getting their crops to the cities and ports more efficiently. An intermediary who buys from the poor and is fortunate enough to own transport of some kind can also make his operation more lucrative with the help of better roads (Vandana and Potter 2008). Transport policies and regulations of transport services need to consider users and be poverty-focused to ensure that the access of the poor to the markets and social services is improved. The trends associated with mobility suggest an increasing demand for new or altered markets in transport infrastructure, with a need to define strategies in terms of accessibility and safety (Asian Development Bank 2008). The literature shows that little exists on this topic in Africa, especially Lesotho, and this study intends to contribute towards filling this gap.

## METHODOLOGY

### Study Site

The study was limited to Phamong community in the Mohale's Hoek district. The Phamong

community consists of 60 villages. It was selected for this study because among all the communities in the south region, Phamong is considered to best exemplify a community with a poor road infrastructure and inadequate public transport in a rural area of Lesotho. Farming is the chief sustainable livelihood strategy in this community, as there are no other employment activities. Phamong has several primary schools, few health centers and one high school. Besides, the study seeks to assess the impact of road infrastructure and public transport on the livelihoods of the rural people in Lesotho, with Phamong as a case study.

### Population, Sample and Selection Procedures

According to the Lesotho Preliminary Census Results (2006), the population of Phamong is 8 402, with 4 113 males and 4 289 females. The study population is made up of household heads in the Phamong community. There are 60 villages and 3 014 household heads in Phamong community, and these made up the population of this study. The sample of the study was 300 household heads and six key informants. Out of the total 60 villages, 14 villages were selected through a simple random sampling method. A systematic random sampling technique was used to select households within selected villages in Phamong. A purposive sampling technique was used to select key informants for the study, and they included the Principal Chief of Phamong, chairperson of the Council, Principal Transport Inspector, Principal Roads Engineer, Agriculture Officer and public transport operator.

### Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The primary source of data was a semi-structured questionnaire and an interview schedule. The questionnaire comprised demographics, the extent of rural roads in improving access to social services, the extent of improved transport and roads as a determinant of educational level of the poor people in the rural areas, the relationship between improved feeder roads, food security and poverty reduction, and the extent of improvement of asset acquisition resulting from improved public transport and road infrastructure. An interview guide was also used as a qualitative data collection instrument. Data was analysed quantitatively using the Statistical

Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Quantitative analysis was performed through frequency distribution tables, and made use of percentages. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically with the use of direct quotations from the participants which helped in the enrichment and complementarity of the quantitative data.

## RESULTS

### Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

The sample was made up of 142 males and 158 females, representing 47 and 52 percent respectively. As Table 1 indicates, 53.7% of respondents were married, 9.6% separated, 28.7% widowed and 8.0% were not married. Table 1 shows that of the 300 respondents, 1.0% were aged 20 to 29 years, 10.6% 30 and 39 years, 37.3%

**Table 1: Respondents' characteristics**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	161	53.7
Separated	29	9.6
Widowed	86	28.7
Not married	24	8.0
Total	300	100.0
<i>Age</i>		
20 – 29	3	1.0
30 – 39	32	10.6
40 – 49	112	37.3
50 – 59	59	19.6
60 – 69	60	20.0
70 – 79	32	10.6
80 +	2	0.6
Total	300	100
<i>Education</i>		
Primary	16	54.7
Secondary	46	21.3
Tertiary	46	2.0
No education	66	22.0
Total	300	100.0
<i>Employment</i>		
Employed	43	14.3
Self-employed	58	19.3
Unemployed	199	66.4
Total	300	100
<i>Source of Income</i>		
Casual labour	49	16.3
Sale of homebrew	87	29.0
Sale of animals	3	1.0
Hawking	57	19.0
Sale of crops	35	11.7
Pension	23	7.7
None	43	14.3
Other	3	1.0
Total	300	100.0

40 to 49 years, 19.6% 50 and 59 years, and 20.0% 60 and 69 years, while 10.6% were aged 70 and 79 years, and 0.6% of respondents were aged 80 years and over. Regarding the educational level of respondents, Table 1 indicates that 164 of them (54.7%) had been to primary school, while those who had obtained the secondary (Junior) Certificate constituted 21.3%. Sixty-six respondents (22%) had never been to formal school, while only 2% had had tertiary education. Concerning the employment status of respondents, the majority (66.4%) were unemployed, 19.3% were self-employed, and only 14.3 had one form of employment or the other.

As Table 1 shows, the majority of respondents (66%) were unemployed, though they had several ways of generating cash income for the daily survival of households. Out of 300 respondents, 29.0% were selling traditional homebrew, while 19.0% of them depended on hawking. Further, 16.3% of respondents were engaged in casual labour, while 11.7% depended on the sale of crops. There were 23 respondents (7.7%) of the elderly people who depended directly on the old age pension fund provided by the Lesotho government. Some respondents (14.3%) held that they had no specific source of income. Out of those who indicated that they had 'other' form of income, 1.0% of them mentioned a combination of sources of cash income, such as the sale of animals and tobacco (dagga).

### Access to Social Services

Many respondents indicated that road infrastructure in their community was improved compared to 10 years back, when there was no road and public transport. There were only two main types of social services in the Phamong area: schools and clinics. Table 2 indicated so-

cial services that were very important to the people of Phamong and it also shows their opinions about road infrastructure. Out of 173 respondents, 31.2% held that the improved road infrastructure enabled them to access educational services, while 23.7% of them mentioned that they were able to access health services after the improvement of road infrastructure. Twenty-two percent of respondents stated that the improved road infrastructure made it easier for them to access markets, while 12.7% of them held that they could use bank facilities because of the improved roads. Further, 10.4% of those respondents who used postal services stated that they were able to access postal services frequently after road improvement.

The key informants all maintained that there was no road maintenance and that this contributed to the poor condition of the road. This in turn contributed to public transport inadequacy. They said that this condemned villagers to poverty, as they could not move out of their community in search of jobs, and other activities that could alleviate poverty. However, some key informants blamed the community for doing nothing to help themselves. The Principal Roads Engineer pointed out that:

*It is true that the condition of roads in the rural areas is very bad. This is only because people do not consider maintenance of their own roads a necessity any more, especially if the project does not pay them. Communities must do self-reliance projects to develop their own communities both agriculturally and economically.*

The key informants also revealed that social services were too far from the community. Most services were found only in Mohale's Hoek, which is 135 km away. Some respondents, especially those who use it, occasionally regarded

**Table 2: Access to social services**

Access to social services	Status of road infrastructure					
	Improved		Not improved		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Market	38	22.0	16	12.6	54	18.0
Health	41	23.7	38	30.0	79	26.3
Education	54	31.2	45	35.4	99	33.0
Banking	22	12.7	13	10.2	35	11.7
Postal	18	10.4	15	11.8	33	11.0
Total	173	100.0	127	100.0	300	100.0

public transport as an important asset in their community. Besides, there were a few respondents who indicated that public transport was not a necessity, because in their community people use horses as a means of transport to access social services in the nearest town, Mount-Moorosi. On the common types of transport used in their community to access social services, the majority (66.7%) of respondents indicated that they regularly used public transport to go to different places where they could get social services. The remainder (30.7%) were of the opinion that, though they use transport, they still maintained that feeder roads should be thoroughly improved in order to attract public transport businesses in their community. The Road Transport Inspector mentioned that:

*Phamong is one of the rural villages that has a very serious problem when it comes to public transport as many taxi/bus owners refuse to register their vehicles to convey passengers to Phamong because of the bad road.*

Nevertheless, according to the findings it was not possible for the Traffic Police and Transport Inspectors to prohibit vans ('pirate taxis') from transporting people from towns to their villages because the vehicles that were legally authorised to carry passengers were reported to have mechanical problems because of the bad conditions of the rural feeder roads. This situation, and other factors, forced even those who commonly used authorised vehicles to make use of vans, which are a reliable and common type of transport in the Phamong community. The Road Principal Transport Inspector (PTI) pointed out that:

*There are approximately five taxis and two buses registered to convey passengers from Mohale's Hoek bus stop to Phamong community, but only one bus is operating while the oth-*

*er one is parked for mechanical problems. This gives many unauthorised pick-up vans the advantage to carry passengers and charge them expensive fares which are also illegal.*

A similar situation was conveyed by a taxi operator from the Phamong Taxi Association. According to him, the bad condition of rural feeder roads has caused serious mechanical breakdown and taxi owners are left without little choice but to withdraw from operation, as changing brake pads and other vehicle parts after every trip becomes prohibitively costly.

### The State of Food Security

Many households in this community had access to arable land, and relied on agriculture to feed their families, as the majority of people (66%) were not employed. Ninety-one percent of respondents owned arable land and used it for crop farming. People who did not own arable land made up 9%, and were employed in Phamong. Many household heads in Phamong maintained that improved roads in their community had not increased agricultural activities because their fields were far away both from their villages and from the road. Nevertheless, the improvement of roads had helped them to improve their agricultural yields, as they were now able to travel and buy new improved seeds and fertilizers.

Table 3 indicated various types of agricultural products sold by households between 2007 and 2008. Two to four bags of maize were sold by 70.0% of households, while 30.0% of them sold the same quantity of sorghum. Some households were able to sell 5–8 bags, 44.0% sold maize, and sorghum was sold by 36.0%, while 20.0% of households managed to sell 5–8 bags of wheat. In addition, 9–12 bags of maize were sold by 72.7% of households and 9.1% sold this

**Table 3: Quantity of agricultural products sold per household (2008-2009)**

Product	Quantity sold											
	2-4 bags		5-8 bags		9-12 bags		13-16 bags		17+ bags		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Maize	14	70.0	11	44.0	8	72.7	1	33.3	-	-	34	55.7
Sorghum	6	30.0	9	36.0	1	9.1	-	-	-	-	16	26.2
Wheat	-	-	5	20.0	1	9.1	2	66.7	-	-	8	13.2
Vegetable	-	-	-	-	1	9.1	-	-	2	100	3	4.9
Total	20	100	25	100	11	100	3	100	2	100	61	100

quantity of sorghum, while 9.1% sold the same number of bags of wheat. About 33.3% of households sold between 13 and 16 bags of maize, and 66.7% sold the same number of bags of wheat. Vegetables were sold by 4.9% of households, where more than 17 bags were sold.

Although, the conditions of agriculture were not so good in Phamong, according to the respondents, many households managed to have good harvests, especially of maize and sorghum, the staple food of Basotho. Respondents mentioned that sometimes they had to walk through the villages selling their agricultural products. Donkeys and scotch carts were the most common types of transport used to carry farm products to the market. However, some products were sold on the farms to the people in the neighbourhood.

### Livestock Ownership

Concerning livestock ownership, 25.0% of respondents did not respond to the question as they had no animals. Among the assets owned by respondents, livestock was of interest because it was considered by most of respondents as the backbone of their community since animals generate income for most households. About 76% of respondents had livestock, such as cattle, sheep, horses and goats, ranging from one to 40 in number. Respondents pointed out that they sold their animals most of the time to make ends meet. Whereas 48.2% of households indicated that they were forced to sell their cattle, 38.9% revealed that they had to sell their sheep for various reasons, such as payment of children's school fees and feeding their families. Respondents reported that there were factors that affected the number of animals they owned before road and public transport improvements, such as theft, the barter system and reproduc-

tion of animals, especially sheep and goats. However, they all were of the opinion that after the improvement of road infrastructure, the police office in Phamong could use police vehicles to patrol, and stock theft accordingly decreased. The Chairperson of the Local Government Council added that:

*The presence of Police Station Office in our community has brought changes and decreased the rate of stock theft which affected many households before due to the fact that, most of the poor depend on their animals to feed their families. Therefore, the larger the number of livestock the easier it becomes for the rural households to reduce household poverty.*

The respondents maintained that services provided by the Lesotho Mounted Police Services (LMPS) were essential for their community, as they had decreased the level of stock theft.

### Household assets owned before and after the improvement of road infrastructure and public transport

Besides, animal ownership, respondents owned other household assets, such as cupboards, wardrobes, radios and double beds before the improvement of public transport and road infrastructure. As Table 4 indicated, the household assets most frequently owned before the improvement were radios, followed by cupboards. The table shows that improved road infrastructure has increased rural people's livelihoods in terms of household asset acquisition. Before improved road infrastructure and public transport, respondents had cupboards, wardrobes, radios and double beds, representing 30.2%, 5.4%, 41.9% and 22.5% respectively. After improved road infrastructure and public transport improvement, all showed an incremental increase, except radio ownership and double beds, which dropped to 39.8% and 20.5% respectively.

**Table 4: Acquisition of household assets**

Asset acquisition	Improved roads					
	Before		After		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Cupboard	39	30.2	54	31.6	93	31.0
Wardrobe	7	14	14	8.1	21	7.0
Radio	54	68	68	39.8	122	40.7
Double bed	29	35	35	20.5	64	21.3
Total	129	100	171	100	300	100

Table 4 showed that people were able to acquire more furniture because it could be easily transported from furniture shops to their villages, which was not possible in the past. The respondents maintained that some of them still had some furniture which was mostly transported to their homes from Mount-Moorosi using scotch carts and donkeys, especially when the River Senqu was dry. Factors affecting the livelihoods of respondents were indicated by all except two respondents. Out of 298 respondents, 51.3% maintained that their livelihoods had negatively changed, as there were no shops in their community any longer, because villagers could not utilise them because of the lack of cash. However, 24.3% further added that the high rate of unemployment had increased the poverty that they were already encountering. Eleven percent of respondents indicated that transport was unreliable and 12.0% said that their livelihoods had changed due to the high level of poverty in their community. The majority (51.3%) of them associated the miserable condition of their community to the politics of the country. They blamed the government of Lesotho for not providing social services to their community. They, further, maintained that Phamong was the poorest community in the rural areas of Lesotho. The Chairperson of Local Government Community Council pointed out that:

*Many Chinese supermarkets that were in Phamong had to close down not only because of the bad conditions of the rural roads, but also because people could not buy in large quantities like before, and therefore, that affected the business economy and forced the investors to run away.*

Further, the respondents argued that if there other types of social services were to be provided, such as hospitals, post offices, banks, markets and technological services, electricity and means of communication, their livelihoods would change for the better. In addition, they pointed out that a community equipped with such facilities would be able to create jobs for its people, and, thus, more readily combat household poverty. They maintained that the absence of the above-mentioned services had affected people's livelihoods negatively, thus contributing to the lack of improvement in their lifestyle.

## DISCUSSION

The constitution of Lesotho clearly stipulates formal education as a right to every Mo-

sotho child, and, realising that enrolment rates among children were declining, the Lesotho government introduced the system of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 1999 and implemented it in all primary schools in the year 2000. Since the majority of respondents attended their primary schools prior to FPE, they reported not having attended school because educational institutions were few and far away from their homes. All of this has contributed to a high illiteracy rate, which was 22% in Phamong at the time of the study. The Basotho have strong values regarding livestock maintenance, especially in the rural areas where animal farming is the major source of income. It is a Sesotho tradition that all male children at the age of four start herding animals. This was regarded as a cultural way of socialising boys into becoming responsible future men, although the practice is declining rapidly in the rural areas nowadays as many children attend schools.

The road traffic fleet and the freight transported over the road network are generated and influenced by the condition of the road surface: the better the road condition the higher the traffic volume and freight transported. The exclusion of certain members of the community, or exclusion of the community as a whole from the provision of social services, can be felt both directly and indirectly. Politicians usually visit poor rural areas, seeking people's votes with fabulous promises of all the social services that will provide when they get into office. However, after the elections people still lack the promised social services, and hence languish in poverty due to roads that have not been attended to, for example. Also, the government could actually refuse to provide services in a certain community because it had voted for opposition parties. Phamong, like many other rural communities, has experienced an indirect exclusion from the provision and delivery of social services for the above reasons.

Poverty alleviation requires improved mobility so that both women and men can access their daily needs, services, markets and income. Besides, lack of adequate, attainable and reasonably priced public transport creates a real barrier to older women and men in the rural areas to access basic social services. The improvement of road infrastructure in the Phamong community enabled some villagers who were employed in the South African mines to buy vehicles, such



as vans and taxis. It also helped rural women, who in most cases had to walk long distances while carrying heavy loads on their backs and heads. According to the Government of Lesotho (2005), the Labor Construction Unit (LCU) is responsible for some of the main trunk roads with lower traffic volumes and some of the secondary and feeder roads. In addition, it is also responsible for upgrading earth roads and tracks to all-weather gravel standards, and subsequently for maintaining them. An improved road infrastructure connects the Phamong community to other communities in the south region of Lesotho, and has already enabled some residents to adopt new agricultural strategies to promote food security. People had managed to sell their products and this has proved that if social services were to be delivered to this community, many people, including small-scale farmers, would be able to produce more.

Food security is essential for all Basotho. The Lesotho government has drawn up a national food security policy, and in recent years Lesotho has moved beyond its earlier focus on agriculture and food self-sufficiency to emphasizing the need for food security (Government of Lesotho 2005). Many communities in the rural areas of Lesotho improved agricultural activities and yields after donations made by the government and the provision of agricultural equipment such as tractors. Besides, the improved feeder roads had helped many rural communities, including the Phamong community, to improve food security at both household and community levels. After the improvement of the roads, some people began to use improved seeds and fertilizers.

As regards livestock, the majority of Phamong residents owned cattle, sheep, goats and horses. However, because of high levels of poverty caused by unemployment, many people had to sell their animals, mostly cattle, sheep and goats. Livestock, therefore, was regarded as financial capital assets, which generated cash income in most households. The majority of respondents who owned livestock had to sell them in order to make ends meet. Livestock had been the backbone of the Phamong community for a long time in the past. However, a decline in the number of livestock after the improvement of public transport and road infrastructure was caused by various factors like exchanging them for services, such as burial ceremonies. Every

traditional ceremony in Sesotho culture is performed with the slaughtering of an animal, mostly cattle or sheep and goats. Road infrastructure and public transport connected people of the Phamong community to their relatives outside their own community. A household is a social as well as economic unit. Besides, household assets, such as cupboards, wardrobes, radios and so on, are good indicators of changing social, economic and living standards of the household. They are important measures of household welfare, and the availability of these assets is a good indicator of household socio-economic status. Further, having access to the radio exposed household members to innovative ideas from other parts of the world.

## CONCLUSION

The Phamong community is one of the rural communities in the highlands of Lesotho that lack social services, with their absence contributing to high levels of household poverty. Many conclusions can be drawn from the above findings, including the following: the improved road infrastructure and public transport have improved people's access to social services, such as health, education and markets, which are not available in the Phamong community. These services are accessible only in Mohale's Hoek, which is approximately 135 kilometers from Phamong. The improved road infrastructure makes it easier for the people to acquire certain household assets, such as furniture.

As in many rural areas in Lesotho, the community relies on agriculture. Many people have experienced low yields because of the on-going drought, which contributes to poor land preparation, late ploughing. Poor weeding and low use of fertilizers also characterize the cropping practices of this community. Lack of income-generating activities and degradation of natural resources is among the principal causes of poverty in Phamong. Nevertheless, the income and nutritional status of poor rural households can be improved by developing improved varieties of, or better production techniques for, traditional food crops. Traditional crops such as maize, sorghum and wheat are the core of the farming systems of the Phamong community. The availability of public transport improves people's livelihoods by improving the network with relatives and friends who live in other communi-

ties. People of Phamong are now able to attend funerals and other important ceremonies that bind them, which was not possible before the improvement of road infrastructure and public transport.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are some of the salient recommendations:

- 1) Major services such as markets, banks, post offices and hospitals need to be in place if Phamong council is to be effective in its regulatory rule. There is also the need to undertake market reforms as well as to create dedicated markets for the benefit of the poor.
- 2) The government and the council need to mobilize and make accessible formal capital and other means of acquiring capital such as the institution of small and medium-size enterprise schemes with favorable conditions for the poor and the promotion of decent employment as a way of fighting poverty in Phamong.
- 3) The Lesotho government together with the Department of Rural Roads (DRR) should apply a program of regular feeder-road maintenance in order to keep the standard of public transport in the rural areas of Lesotho on the right level.
- 4) There is the need for rural people to organize themselves into one formidable force that can mobilize, organize, negotiate and represent their interests in agricultural activities in order to increase household food security. This will force the government to assist them with programs such as block farming, which will help them to fight against hunger and poverty.
- 5) There is the need to organize training for rural farmers by the Agricultural Department to equip them with the latest skills and knowledge of improved agricultural methods.

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