



Perspectives and impacts of land reclamation projects on the rural poor in Lesotho

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ABSTRACT

Land degradation is a serious problem in Lesotho. This research was undertaken in three villages in the community council of Rapo-le-eboea in Maseru district to assess the perspectives and impacts of land reclamation projects on the rural poor in Lesotho using mixed methods. However the beneficiaries of land reclamation projects are the poor and vulnerable as intended; characterised by being women, married in customary laws, low educational attainment, and had marginal access to means of livelihoods. The study reveals that they do benefit from such projects although these can negatively impact access to fuelwood. The reclaimed areas did increase wool quality, grazing and the availability of medicinal plants. Beneficiaries value the contribution of such projects to their livelihoods and they also consider them to be effective at reclaiming degraded areas although there are some challenges facing the projects, including sabotage from neighbours not in the project. A major finding is that communities are generally not familiar with the Land Act 2010 which informs the projects. The study provides recommendations on how land reclamation projects and harmonisation of legal frameworks in Lesotho could enhance rural livelihoods.

Key words: Land Act 2010, Lesotho, land degradation, National Range Resources Management Policy 2014

RÉSUMÉ

La dégradation des terres est un grave problème au Lesotho. Cette recherche a été entreprise dans trois villages du conseil communautaire de Rapo-le-eboea dans le district de Maseru pour évaluer les perspectives et les impacts des projets de remise en état des terres sur les pauvres ruraux du Lesotho en utilisant des méthodes mixtes. Cependant, les bénéficiaires des projets de bonification des terres sont les pauvres et les vulnérables comme prévu ; caractérisées par le fait d'être des femmes, mariées selon les lois coutumières, ayant un faible niveau d'instruction et un accès marginal aux moyens de subsistance. L'étude révèle qu'ils bénéficient de tels projets bien que ceux-ci puissent avoir un impact négatif sur l'accès au bois de feu. Les zones récupérées ont augmenté la qualité de la laine, le pâturage et la disponibilité des plantes médicinales. Les bénéficiaires apprécient la contribution de ces projets à leurs moyens de subsistance et ils les considèrent également efficaces pour récupérer les zones dégradées, bien que les projets soient confrontés à certains défis, notamment le sabotage par des voisins qui ne font pas partie du projet. Une constatation majeure est que les communautés ne sont généralement pas familiarisées avec la loi foncière de 2010 qui informe les projets. L'étude fournit des recommandations sur la manière dont les projets de mise en valeur des terres et l'harmonisation des cadres juridiques au Lesotho pourraient améliorer les moyens de subsistance ruraux.

Mots clés : Loi Foncière de 2010, Lesotho, dégradation des terres, Politique Nationale de Gestion des Ressources de l'aire de Répartition de 2014

INTRODUCTION

Land degradation refers to a gradual deterioration of landscape functions as a result of both human activities and natural factors and it has become a global concern associated with desertification in some area (Gisladottir and Stocking, 2005; Marake *et al.*, 2019). Lesotho is well-known for severe land degradation which has prompted academics' interest in its types, causes, impacts and strategies to address it (Swallow *et al.*, 1987; MFLR, 2014; Rampai, 2017). Marake *et al.* (2019) have argued that there are different types of land degradation which Lesotho has been experiencing over a long period of time. They include soil, vegetation and water resource degradation. Each of these types manifests itself differently as soil degradation can show itself by loss of biological, physical, chemical, hydrological properties as well as soil erosion and soil pollution. Vegetation degradation could manifest itself by loss of plant diversity and vegetation quantity and quality. Studies further show that indicators of land degradation among other are water and wind erosion, loss of vegetation, landscape dominated by invasive plants, low botanic diversity and loss of wetlands (ORASECOM, 2014; Marake *et al.*, 2019).

The high-altitude grasslands and wetlands of the eastern part of Lesotho have been transformed by livestock, burning of grass and fuel collection. This has resulted in the ongoing grassland degradation and accelerated soil erosion (Nusser and Grab, 2002). Rampai, (2017) assessed the the impact of different grazing regimes in Lesotho and Iceland and just like Zunckel (2003) concludes that the rangelands were experiencing severe degradation mainly due to overstocking and poor grazing management, the spread of alien plants and poor infrastructure development. Marake *et al.* (2019) share the same sentiments that land degradation in the rural and mountain part of the country is the result of overstocking and poor grazing practices among other causes. It has been important to deal with the problem

of land degradation (Nachtergaele *et al.*, 2010; ORASECOM, 2014; Nkonya, *et al.*, 2015). The rural communities especially the poor depend on land for their livelihoods, especially in mountainous countries with limited arable land. In Lesotho and many other countries in Africa, rural communities depend on land for their subsistence farming where livestock and crop production substantially contribute to their livelihood strategies. For instance, Basotho raise livestock especially sheep and goats for production of high quality wool (Matebisi-Ranthimo, 2018). Although the revenue from wool and mohair has declined recently, rural communities have been enjoying huge benefits from this sector (Mokhethi, 2016;) which can be threatened by land degradation. During the 2014/2015 haverst season, revenue from wool and mohair was M195 and M52 million respectively (Mokhethi, 2016). Some rural communities regard livestock as a form of social status and they are kept for prestige (Swallow, Motsamai, Sopeng, Brokken, and Storey, 1987; Ferguson, 1990). Therefore, land degradation, if unattended could continue to impoverish local communities and impose environmental costs on Lesotho and her neighbours (Chakela, 2014). Though figures differ, it has been argued that land degradation should be addressed because some of its types are rife as it is estimated that up to about 70% all of drylands are turning into deserts (Gisladottir and Stocking, 2005).

It has further become imperative to deal with land degradation especially in the highlands of Lesotho in order to maintain water catcment integrity (Zunckel, 2003). Lesotho and South Africa committed themselves to a multi-billion Maluti hydro-electricity project in the mountains. It has therefore, became important to address land degradation for fear of the potential silting of the dam (Quinlan, 1995) which can negatively affect the economic benefits of the dam for both countries. Land degradation, as ORASECOM, (2014) argues increases level of soil erosion, reduces infiltration of water and loss of wetlands'

water-storage capacity which in turn disrupts the flow and quality of water downstream that leads to devastating impact on livelihoods and economies of the two countries.

Various intervention measures have been taken to address land degradation and improve the rangelands. They included the projects that have been initiated by the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA), Millennium Challenge Account-Lesotho (MCA-L), the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier and institutional re-alignments that have been implemented following the previous range management measures vested in chiefs under the Laws of Lerotoli of 1939 (MFLR, 2014) as well as enactment of various laws since independence in 1966. The Land Act 2010 is one of the initiatives sponsored by the U.S. government's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), an international agency dedicated to 'poverty reduction through economic growth' (MCC, 2012). The act is the latest piece of legislation that addresses issues of land and land degradation. The MCC contributed \$20 million to the government of Lesotho towards land reform process and the fund depended on the passage and execution of Land Act 2010 by Lesotho's parliament. According to MCC the law was part of many other pieces of legislation to modernise Lesotho's Land tenure system which prior to these laws gave a lot of power to chiefs to allocated land and created tension between customary chiefs and the colonial as well as post colonial states in Lesotho (Leduka, 2007). Other pieces of legislation sponsored by the MCC were the 1997 Local Government Act aimed at moving power to allocate land from chiefs to elected committees and the 2006 Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act that gave full citizenship and full property ownership to women (Fogelman, 2016).

The 2010 Land Act mandates that all landholders in the urban and rural areas should obtain leasehold titles rather than the 'Form Cs' which were customarily given to land-owners. It has changed the land ownership in Lesotho. As

Fogelman, (2016) shows before the enactment of the law, a large majority (73%) of leased land was held by men alone while less than a quarter (23%) was female-held. But immediately after the passing of the law, only 14% of the new leases were given to men, 34% to women and 52% was jointly held by married persons. The Act, though mainly focusing on women, was meant to reduced poverty and improve the economic conditions of the poor as Sekatle (2009) states that " the proposed Act will be a critical tool and help us turn all land in Lesotho into an economic asset with the ultimate aim of changing the lives of Basotho for the better." As a result, the land reclamation projects undertaken under this Act are supposed to improve the livelihoods of the local community and support a more sustainable and inclusive development. Part IX of the 2010 Land Act outlines the provisions for appropriation of land for public purposes or public interest used. Public purpose uses, land may be appropriated with payment of appropriate compensation as provided in Section 51 of the 2010 Act. Some of these provisions relate to rehabilitation of degraded land as it states that land may be appropriated for water conservation by means of watersheds, watercatchment areas, reservoirs; land conservation through afforestation, and erosion prevention; and alleviation or eradication of consequences of natural disaster. Some of the objectives outlined in the National Range Resources Managemnt Policy (NRRMP) 2014 that implement the Act succinctly summarise what the projects undertaken under this Act are supposed to achieve as stated in this manner:

- To improve and maintain the productivity of rangeland resources at optimum level so as to promote ecosystem balance,
- To rehabilitate and improve the quality of rangelands so as to enhance productivity of livestock and wildlife habitat,
- To improve income opportunities and quality of life of the rural communities and
- To promote gender equity as well as HIV and AIDS mainstreaming in the resource management(sic).

In Lesotho land reclamation projects are

carried out within local institution and several legal frameworks. They are organised and administered mainly by the the Ministry of Forestry and Land Reclamation in collaboration with different stakeholders that include the international organisations working in Lesotho, local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the different government ministries (Showers, 2006). The activities relating to land reclamation have been administered within various legal frameworks that include the Land Husbandry Act 1969, Land Husbandry (Amendment) Act 1972, Range Management and Grazing Control Regulations 1980, Local Government Act 1997 and Land Act 2010 (Marake *et al.*, 2019). Range Management and Grazing Control Regulations, for instance provide for setting aside of areas for the propagation of grass, reedbed, tree planting, rotational grazing ‘leboella’, regulation of total number of stock in the country. Land Act 2010, in the same manner, provides for the appropriation of land for public use which includes setting aside land for land rehabilitation projects.

Although land reclamation projects are organised and implemented by different stakeholders, they generally follow a bottom up approach which involve intensive consultation with the local communities at all levels of decision making which encourages their voluntary participation in the implementation of the projects (ORASECOM, 2014). The different stakeholders that include the community, the traditional leaders and elected community representatives in consultation with the relevant ministry identify the location of the project. Chiefs in consultation with elected community councillors select members of the community eligible to work in the projects on rotational basis. One member from the community oversees that animals do not graze in the project area while the Ministry of Forestry and Land Reclamation provides financial support for the projects and experts who monitor the day to day running of the projects. Similarly, those that are managed by

NGOs and other stakeholders follow the same pattern and the difference is that financial support is provided by the relevant NGO or a particular stakeholder (ORASECOM, 2014).

The land reclamation project at ‘Mampho is part of Lesotho’s sustainable range management and wetland protection in the whole country. The project is located within the Rapo-le-Boea Local Community Council within the jurisdiction of the Principal Chief of Matsieng, some 70 kilometre from the capital Maseru. The area like many others in Lesotho where similar projects have been implemented, is faced with deteriorating range resources and destruction of wetlands which form the major sources of water. This situation is attributed to overgrazing resulting from livestock population that far exceed the rangelands-carrying capacity and fights over rangelands (Thabane and Pule 2006; Rampai, 2017). The adaptation strategies adopted by the Community Council among others to address land degradation were donga rehabilitation, uprooting extra-terrestrial plants, grass reseedling and planting of trees, which were in line with initiatives of the Ministry of Forestry and Land Reclamation (Lewis *et al.*, 2013). The Ministry budgeted some M3, 635, 152 for this project and all others intended to increase vegetation cover, improve land and water retention capacity (GOL, 2019).

As Tekka *et al.* (2020) observed, studies have documented types, causes and effects of land degradation on the natural environment and strategies that have been implemented to deal with its effects but perceptions and impacts of land reclamation projects on the livelihood of the beneficiary rural households has been less documented in other parts of the developing countries including Lesotho. Therefore, the aims this study are to i) assess how Land Act 2010 is an enabling instrument for the implementation of the policy objectives of the National Range Resources Management Policy 2014 ii) assess the perceptions and impacts of the land reclamation projects in enhancing rural

livelihoods and iii) explore the extent to which the views of the key participants about Land Act 2010 and the land reclamation projects are widespread in the community where the project is located.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Sampling sites. The study used one community council selected from five community councils in the Maseru district that participated in 2013 in a capacity building training project to protect livelihoods through adapting to and mitigating the effects arising from climate change in Lesotho. Rapo-le-Boea Community Council was selected purposely for its participation in the training project, easily accessible to the researchers and for being one of the community council in Maseru district located deep in the mountains of Lesotho frequently experiencing severe climatic conditions. Rapo-le-Boea was the second Community Council in the Maseru district which participated in the 2013 training but it was not selected for this study because of inaccessibility. Other community councils that participated in training project in 2013 were not included in this study because they are located in urban areas and the lowlands of the country.

Type of data collected. A cross sectional study was conducted and a sample was taken from one of the two land reclamation projects underway during the study. Firstly, a desk review was conducted which included journal on watershed management, recent legal frameworks related to land and land restoration. This was meant to generate qualitative data to assess congruence between the Land Act 2010 and the National Range Resources Management Policy (NRRMP) 2014 in order to establish the extent to which the act would be an enabling instrument in the implementation of the policy objectives. Four policy objectives were identified from the National Range Resources Management Policy and relevant sections of the Land Act 2010 were matched against the objectives to assess the extent they enable or impede the implementation and achievement of the policy objectives. The assessment was supported with evidence from other land-related legal frameworks such as the

Local Government Act 1997.

Secondly, seven key participants were selected from the villages adjacent to the selected land reclamation project. They were two chiefs, two community councillors and three team leaders of the project. The interviews generated qualitative data on how the project was organised and managed, the extent to which those working in the project were sensitized about the laws and policies governing the land reclamation project and the selection process for those who should work in the projects as well as whether they consider the project accomplishing the intended objectives. The interviews were all recorded, described and analysed.

Thirdly, since the total population of those employed in the land reclamation project was far too small to take a sample, we planned to administer a five-point Likert scale questionnaire to all the 75 participants in the project. However, only 48 (64%) of them were willing and responded to the questionnaire, comprising of 25 (52%) males and 23 (48%) females. The purpose was to generate quantitative data in order to understand their opinion on the benefits of the project to their livelihoods, their understanding of the Land Act 2010 and the extent to which views expressed during in-depth interviews with the key participants and generated during desk-top review were widespread among those working in the project.

Data analysis. Content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data in which manual coding was employed to generate themes and quotes were used to support the themes. Key themes/hypotheses generated during content analysis of both the 2010 land Act and interview transcripts were used to generate Likert scale items for phase 2 of the study. Five major themes that emerged from the analysis of the Land Act 2010, NRRMP 2014 and transcripts from the key informants based on the study objectives were 1) Land Act had limitations in supporting the policy instrument 2) projects address the needs of the poor and vulnerable 3) limited

knowledge and understanding of the Land Act 2010 4) importance of land reclamation projects to livelihoods 5) effectiveness of land reclamation projects. Analysis of quantitative data using descriptive statistics supported the views expressed in the qualitative data that the project addressed the needs of the poor as intended, there was limited knowledge and understanding of the legal frameworks related to land reclamation, land reclamation projects were important and address the needs of the poor and they were effective in restoring degraded land.

FINDINGS

A) Desk review. This section presents the findings from the desk review on the relationships between the Land Act 2010 and the National Range Resources Management Policy (NRRMP) 2014. From the desk review two issues emerged which were related to the policy objectives outline in National Range Resources Management Policy (NRRMP) 2014. One, that Land Act 2010 hardly facilitated the improvement of rangelands hence improved rangeland, productivity of livestock and enhanced the livelihoods of rural communities through improve income opportunities were likely to fail. Two, the Land Act had the potential to address gender issues but with some limitations hence promoting gender equity in land management would be advanced but not fully achieved.

There are several sections within the Land Act 2010 which need scrutiny as they relate to land degradation and rural livelihoods. Section 50(1) outlines circumstances under which land may be expropriated for public purposes. Though some of these circumstances are important and sound reasonable, they have implication for enhancing livelihoods using livestock and consequent land degradation in Lesotho. Where land is expropriated for water conservation through construction of watersheds, water catchment areas and reservoirs sounds to be good for long term raising of livestock and prevention of soil

erosion. However, practice dictates that land in Lesotho is being expropriated for various reasons which leave less and less land for livestock production hence consequent soil degradation in the communal grazing areas. Therefore, this section will make it hard to achieve the selected objectives from the National Range Resources Management Policy 2014.

Secondly, the Act just like the constitution does not do away with customary land tenure. It says that all land in Lesotho belongs to all the Basotho. This section is problematic in regard to land degradation and livestock. It will be difficult to implement measures to reduce livestock stocking and consequent land degradation for two reasons such as lack of finances and lack of political will. In order to deal with soil erosion in Lesotho livestock population should be controlled and one way to do so is to introduce grazing fees. However, as Chapeyama (2004) maintains such a fee was introduced in Lesotho but was abandoned in the run up to elections in 1993 because political opponents of the government used the fee as a weapon against the incumbent government for implementing unpopular policies that would tax Basotho on a resource which is their inalienable birth-right. Therefore, the failure to control stocking level on the rangelands has led to land degradation manifested in soil erosion and invasion of the pastures by alien plant and grass species. The local government Act and Local government policy which have to facilitate the process of land restoration are struggling to achieve the envisioned policy objectives of Land reclamation. Community councils themselves have limited capacity to generate revenue as they hardly collect any revenue. Grazing fees would help to finance them. Those who raise some revenue collect no more than M5 000 per year (less than US\$400 in a year) (Musi, 2016). As a result, promoting ecosystem balance, productivity of livestock and improving income opportunities envisaged in the policy document will be hard to achieve.

Section 14(1) of the Land Act 2010 just like other acts that came before it maintains that land allocation and administration will be exercised by the local authorities and chiefs. This is a result of political developments that have introduced competing sources of authority in which the influence of traditional leaders gradually diminishes resulting in uncoordinated management of land resources including grazing lands (Chapeyama, 2004; Musi, 2016). The customary land holding left intact by the Land Act 2010 and previous laws dictates that while lowlands farmers could send their animals to the highland (meraka) for summer grazing, mountain farmers could not at same time send their animals to the lowlands for winter grazing. This results in unbalanced pressure on land resulting in severe land degradation in the highlands. This situation in turn negatively affects rural livelihoods which are based on livestock keeping and does not lead to the achievement of the policy objectives.

b) Promoting gender equity in natural resource management. The desk review showed that Land Act 2010 had limited capacity to address gender issues as dictated in the Act other legal frameworks and the policy objectives for land reclamation. Section 3 of the Act maintains that upon enactment the act will supersede all the laws in the country except the Constitution. However, the Constitution has clauses that are potentially discriminatory against women. Section 18 (4) (c) of the Constitution discriminates against women in term of access and use of land (Makoa, 1997; Land Review Commission, 2000). According to this section, discrimination is sanctioned when it is based on customary law. Though the customary laws cannot be necessarily discriminatory, they can be potentially used against women. Senate Masupha's case testifies that customary laws can be potentially discriminatory. She was denied chieftainess position on the ground that the laws that govern chieftaincy fall within customary laws (Goitom, 2013). Similarly, though the land reclamation policy aims at achieving gender

equity, the policy itself is lopsided. The rural women in Lesotho depend on some of the alien plants for firewood. While uprooting such plants has a potential to improve the rangelands, it increases the burden on women who have to travel longer distances to collect fire wood. The uprooting of the alien plants which form a source of energy for rural communities worsens the situation of women because rural electrification programme is struggling to reach most parts of the highlands.

It is clear that the policy objectives, as good as they may sound, may not fully achieve what they are intended. There laws and other legal frameworks are not very clear to make such policy objectives outlined earlier in this study implementable.

b) In-depth Interviews

Limited knowledge and understanding Land Act 2010. The study revealed that there was limited knowledge and understanding of the 2010 Land Act among the participants. The chief who had been acting for three years at the time of the study categorically denied knowing anything about the Land Act. But the Community councillor for the Rapo-le-Boea Community Council where the project is located stated that he had knowledge and understanding about the Land Act *"I know about the Act because I am a councillor... I could have not known about it if I were not a councillor. It was only that when I started my work as a councillor I was taken to training where I was taught about how the council works."*

To find out whether the councillor understands the content of the Act in addition to having knowledge of its existence, he stated that according to the Act *"I have to work with the chief and the community to protect the rangelands, we close them so that they can improve. When the rangeland is improved we decide with the chiefs which area to open for grazing and which area is closed for grazing. We also see to it that there is no soil erosion as we keep on changing grazing areas in time."*

The responses from the Community Councillor and the village chief suggest that there was limited knowledge or understanding among rural communities about the legal frameworks that govern the development projects. The Community Councillor was conversant with the act only because he attended training which other members of the community did not. This suggested that those who attended the training did not disseminate the knowledge to the rest of the rural community.

Improve income. The key informants for the study maintained that the land reclamation project in their area was important as they would improve the rangelands, livestock and rural livelihoods. ‘When there is no soil erosion and grass is available farmers will get a lot of money from the sale of wool and mohair.’ The chief stated. In addition, the chief explained that the project underway in the catchment area was valuable to the community because it generated income for the poor and vulnerable members of the community. This was evidence by what she said *“Most people in these villages are poor. You see this year the drought was bad and we did not harvest anything from the fields and every household here lost many animals ... but the money that they get for working in project help them to survive and some use it to buy second hand clothes to sell.”*

The key informants stressed that the projects were important in enhancing livelihoods of the rural poor by creating temporary employment hence income for the local communities. As a result they felt that such projects should be rolled out to other catchment areas within the community council. This view was exemplified by the narrative given by the community councillor that: *“the project of this nature are so important in this community council because they address the needs of the local community... they create short term employment which gives the poor some income. If they are rolled out to other catchment area within the community council more people would benefit.”*

Key informants explained that when the projects were completed they achieved so many things such as availability of medicinal plants and the beauty of the landscape that potentially would attract tourists which will improve income. The other Community councillor who participated in the study explained. *“Tourists pass through our area when they go to famous places like the waterfall in Semonkong. The beauty of the land will make them spend money in our community”*

Effectiveness of the project in land restoration. All the key participants were unanimous that the projects were effective at land reclamation. They maintained that the removal of the alien plants had contributed to the regeneration of grass and the contours made with the uprooted alien plants were effective in preventing soil erosion till such times when the grass had covered the ground. Some pointed out that the projects were good in land restoration because one component of the project was to restore indigenous plants and grass. The foreman testified that *“The objective of this project is to restore land by removing exotic plants, reseeding and planting some plants and herbs that are valuable for medicinal purposes... you can see the difference between this side of valley where the project has been implemented and the other side where there are dongas and shrubs that have killed the grass.”*

The other side of the valley where the project had not been implemented was covered with useless shrubs, there was not grass cover and signs of soil erosion were prominent.

Pressure on highland rangelands. The land reclamation project at Ha ‘Mampho was challenged by the number of livestock in the area and the grazing system experienced in most rural and mountain areas. The key participants in the study maintained that there were so many animals in the surrounding villages which did not allow the land in the project area to restore itself to full capacity.

Some blamed the grazing system in which animals were always in the same area. The chief explained that “unlike smallholder farmers in the lowlands who bring their animals here for summer grazing, we do not take our animals to the lowlands for winter grazing. Therefore, our rangelands including the project area are under constant pressure from livestock grazing which leads to loss of grass hence soil erosion.”

Some stakeholders sabotage the project.

The project was facing another challenge that some of the key stakeholders in the projects were sabotaging it. The herd boys and some traditional leaders (chiefs) were singled out as some of the worst culprits in sabotaging the project. The lady who was working in the project whose work was to ensure that animals do not go into the project area was disappointed about the behaviour of the herd boys and some chiefs. *“You saw those animals in the project area? I cannot report them because the herd boys and the chief of that village in particular sabotage this project. If I report their animals they threaten to hit me with stones... at night they let livestock into the project area...”*

The chief of the village reported that her neighbouring chief posed a big problem to the project. *“He lets his animals and those of his subjects to go into the project area. When we stop them, they make sure that they burn the grass at night.”*

All the key informants were very much worried about the behaviour of other stakeholders and they feared that the land reclamation project was likely to be closed and moved to other areas which would have devastating effects on their livelihoods. They alluded to lack of knowledge and understanding of the benefits of the project. One of the councillors testified that *“for the herd boys the problem is that they do not understand. They think burning grass will make it green sooner as summer sets in, not noticing that they are doing more harm. When you burn grass you destroy seeds and after time the grass will never*

regenerate.”

Gender equity. The key informants of the study expressed different views in relation to whether the land reclamation project in their community council addressed gender issues. Some felt that such issues were addressed because the project improved rangelands hence livestock which was considered the main source of income and they provide for other livelihood needs. Others felt that the projects though good for women in terms of employment and income, they were creating a burden for them. The chief explained that *“The land has improved. There is a lot of grass for animal. But the project clears out the wood and our women here go far to collect firewood which exposes them to risks such as rape, walking long distances and dog bites in the cattle posts.”*

In the village of Ha ‘Mampho where the project was underway, women had to travel over three kilometres to collect wood because near the village exotic plants that form the main source of energy were all cleared.

c) Survey of employees in land reclamation project.

Findings from the survey revealed two important issues that the beneficiaries of the land reclamation projects were the poor and that the views expressed in the interviews with the key informants were widespread within the rural communities as represented by those who were working in the land reclamation project. These two issues are presented in this section.

Beneficiary of the project were the poor and vulnerable. A survey questionnaire was administered to forty-eight (48) participants in two reclamation projects of the Maseru district whose communities received training in 2013 on capacity building to protect livelihoods. The sample represented some 64% of the total estimated participants involved in land reclamation project at Ha Mampho and 32% of two projects selected and underway in the district at the time of the study. The descriptive statistics revealed that the beneficiary of the

project were the poor and vulnerable as per their age, gender, marital status, educational level and access to means of livelihoods.

The study revealed that the majority of the participants in the land reclamation project were youth and the young adults comprising 58% and 35% respectively. There were very few participants over 60 years of age. The age of the participants ranged between 17 and 67. This study shows that in term of gender out of 48 respondents 25 (52%) were males while 23 (48%) were females.

The employees of the project fell in different categories of marital status. Table one presents the marital status of the participants working at land reclamation project at Ha ‘Mampho.

Table 1 shows that majority (51%) of the employees in the land reclamation project were married while minority were either separated (4%), divorced (4%) or widowed (15%). There was, in addition a big portion (28%) which represented those who were single.

As it is typical with rural communities in the developing world that they lack education and training, the study found out that 47 participants who provided data on educational background, any training received and training for the land reclamation project, 75% had attained primary education, 23% junior secondary while 2% had

no formal education. The data revealed that 85% of the participants had never received any form of training and were never trained for the project in which they working.

The results showed that the employees in the project had different means of livelihood. Table 2 presents the means of livelihoods as they were given by those who responded to the survey questions.

As Table 2 shows majority of the participants 49% derive their livelihood on-farm and these activities include livestock and crop production, about 34% derived their livelihood on off-farm activities that included selling firewood, traditional beer and working in other persons’ farms while nearly 16% reported to survive on non-farm activities.

In terms of access to livelihood assets, the study revealed that 67% of the participants in the project and the study had access to 0- 10 small livestock and 77% had 0 or no cattle at all.

Prevalence of the views about land reclamation project. Table 3 summarises the opinions of the participants on several statements which were meant to solicit their view about knowledge of Land Act 2010 and views expressed during desk top review as well as interviews with key informants.

Table 1. Marital status of the participants

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	13	28
Married	24	51
Widowed	7	15
Separated	1	2
Divorced	2	4
Total	47	100

Source: Field data, 2019

Table 2. Livelihood activities of the participants in land reclamation project

Economic activities	Frequency	Percentage
On-Farm	30	49.1
Off-farm	21	34.4
Non-farm	10	16.4
Total	61	100

Source: Field Data, 2019

Table 3. Views about and understanding of the Land Act of 2010

Question	Total	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Project relates to the Act	48	2 (4.1)	0(0)	46(95.8)	0(0.0)	2(4.2)
Project effective in land rehabilitation	48	35(72.9)	12(25)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(2.1)
Project improves rangelands	48	42(87.5)	5(10.4)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(2.1)
Project must roll out to other places	48	36(75.0)	5(10.4)	3(6.3)	1(2.1)	3(6.3)
Project is sabotaged	48	34(70.8)	11(22.9)	1(2.1)	0(0.0)	2(4.2)
project improves wool	48	42(87.5)	4(8.3)	1(2.1)	0(0.0)	1(2.1)
Project is a source of income	48	41(85.4)	6(12.5)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	1(2.1)
Project address gender issues	48	28(58.3)	0(0.0)	2(4.2)	0(0.0)	18(37.5)
Grazing regime impacts the project	48	11(22.9)	22(45.8)	8(16.7)	3(6.3)	4(8.3)

Source: Field data 2019

The respondents generally thought that the project was effective in land rehabilitation (72.9%) and the project may improve wool and mohair hence improves income. Majority (85.4%) felt that the project was a source of income for the rural poor. Similar to the views expressed during interviews with key informants, the respondents widely believed that the problems had challenges. For example, majority (70.8%) thought that some stakeholders sabotage the projects and that the grazing regime in Lesotho negatively impacted on the land reclamation projects. As it was the case during in-depth interviews, the views were divided on whether the project addressed gender issues. While 58% felt that it was addressing gender issues 37.5% strongly reported that it was not addressing gender issues.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings from the desk top review show that the 2010 Land Act in Lesotho, as implemented through projects, has limitations in ensuring that the National Range Resources Management Policy (NRRMP) of 2014 achieves the stated objectives of promoting ecosystem balance, enhance productivity of livestock and improve income opportunities for the rural poor. The Act has sections that contradict with the Constitution, the supreme law of the country. As a result, it will be hard to implement the policy objectives as intended. This is line with some scholars who argue that policies should be back up by legal framework actions that will be taken whenever a policy is violated (Ndimba *et al.*, 2014). In addition the expropriation clause which rightly could lead to rehabilitation of degraded land in the rural areas, could impede the achievement of the policy objectives as it has a potential to open land grabbing that would leave smallholder farmers with limited rangelands hence contribute further to land degradation. Academics have observed that rural livestock owners do not have capacity

to halt any form of land expropriation against the state (Shale, 2010) and the Act itself open land expropriation not only by the state but by other agents. Peters, (2013:548) confirms that since the 1990s new land reform policies and acts have been implemented which purport 'to give greater security of rights for the millions using customary lands' but evidence suggest that customary land holding is being appropriated by governments and other agents. In Lesotho, though figures differ, statistics shows that large tracks of rangelands have been expropriated from the rural communities for dam construction and related development projects such as mining, national parks, and nature reserves (Keketso, 2003; Devitt and Hitchcock, 2010; MFLR, 2014). The construction of phase 1 of the Lesotho Highland Water Project forced over 400 households to be resettled resulting in the loss of arable and grazing lands. Hitchcock, (2015) shows that at completion Katse Dam had displaced 71 households while 2,700 hectares of grazing land and 925 hectares of arable land were lost. The construction of the dam had affected 20,000 people in all. The completion of the Mohale Dam displaced 325 households in stages 1 and 2 while other households lost 50% of their land. These communities and households further lost about 1,125 hectares of grazing land, 875 hectares of arable land and 7,400 people were affected.

The desk review further showed that the 2010 Land Act just like other national legal frameworks sponsored by MCC has good intentions to improve the livelihoods of rural communities but the Act has sections which will potentially hinder the policy to promote gender equity as studies show that the Constitution of Lesotho still has sections that discriminate against women (Makoa, 1997; Goitom, 2013). One daughter of Chief Masupha failed to become a chief and lost a case because it was argued that the law that governs chieftainship fell within the customary

lawas (Goitom, 2013).

Analysis of data from in-depth interviews with key informations and the survey questionnaire revealed that the beneficiaries of land reclamation projects were the poor and vulnerable as intended characterised by being women, married according to the customary laws, low educational attainment, and had marginal access to means of livelihoods. This piece of finding is consistent with the objectives expressed in the National Range Resources Management Policy 2014 that the projects were aimed at gender equity in resource management. It indicates that though participation patterns in rural development projects are changing, women still constitute a sizable proportion, an observation made by Marake *et al.* (2019) that gender relations should be considered in all aspects of watershed management. Studies in Lesotho have shown that for a long time women have been the main participants in rural development projects. The reasons included among other the migration patterns since the discovery of gold in the Republic of South Africa. However, trends have changed as a result of massive retrenchment from the South African mines. Similarly, marriage is an important cultural and religious institution which determines the rights and access to resources in many societies. This has been important in the context of changing land tenure system and other laws that had been enacted to improve the status of women in Lesotho (Fogelman, 2016).

The study showed that the project was addressing the needs of the poor and vulnerable as was the objective of the projects. Access to the means of livelihood indicates that it was addressing the needs of the poor. Studies have shown that the poor in Lesotho do not have access to assets such as land and livestock. Turner (2001) found out that Basotho differentiate between the poor and the better off in which anyone in the mountain areas who owns small stock in the range of 0 – 10, 11-49 and 50 and above are regarded as poor,

moderate and wealthy respectively. Therefore, the participants in the land reclamation project were poor and vulnerable.

It has been clear that the employees of the land reclamation projects do reap benefits from such projects. They value the contribution of such projects to their livelihoods and they also consider them to be effective at reclaiming degraded areas though there are some challenges facing the projects. This has been consistent with literature that watershed projects are helpful to rural communities (Teka *et al.*, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Three main conclusions were made from the study. Firstly, the 2010 Land Act in Lesotho has limitations in facilitating the achievement of policy objectives that operationalise it. This is due to the fact that some sections of the Act hinder the achievement of the stated policy objectives as there are contradictions among different legal frameworks that govern the implementation and management of land reclamation. Therefore, it is recommended that the government of Lesotho should harmonise all legal frameworks related to land rehabilitation. In particular, the Constitution should be amended to accommodate new development that have come with laws that deal with land issues such as the Local Government Act 1997 and Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 2006. It further recommended that rural electrification should be fasttracked because the finding showed that there were competing needs in relation to gender issues. While land reclamation was thought to improve livelihoods, it was at the same time contributing to increasing women burden in collecting firewood.

Secondly, it was concluded that the beneficiaries of land reclamation projects are the poor and vulnerable as intended. The study revealed that a sizeable proportion of employees in the project were women, who were married according to the customary laws, had low

educational attainment and had marginal access to means of livelihoods such as fields and livestock. However, the employees in the projects considered the project valuable to their livelihoods and effective in land rehabilitation. As result, it is recommended that such projects should be expanded to other rural areas in order to address issues of poverty, vulnerability and land degradation which are acute in rural areas.

Thirdly, the study revealed that there were challenges as some stakeholders especially chiefs and herd boys sabotaged the projects. It is recommended that more training should be provided to all stakeholders so that they understand the implications of sabotaging land reclamation projects. Those who attended training on land administration and rehabilitation should disseminate the information to other members of the rural communities.

STATEMENT OF NO-CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this paper.

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