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Visit to Lesotho, March 2009



Visit to women's group in the village Ha Notsei in Lesotho. The women have worked with Rural Self Help Development Association (RSDA) and Denmark Lesotho Network.

Report from visit to Lesotho

The intention with this report is to facilitate knowledge, impressions and information that were collected during my visit to Lesotho to the Project Advice and Training Center (PATC) and to pass on observations to the organisations with whom I had the pleasure to talk and meet.

The conclusions are based upon my visit to Lesotho on the 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th of March 2009. Before the finalization of this report the involved parties have had an opportunity to comment on the report.

Purpose and background of visit

The original purpose of the visit to Lesotho was to gather general information about the country, and to talk to and visit some of the partner organisations of PATC members there. The only PATC member working in Lesotho is Denmark Lesotho Network (DLN) and therefore they did play a crucial role in the planning of the visit.

DLN have participated in the whole process with enthusiasm.

My role as observer changed a bit shortly before leaving Denmark, as we were made aware that the granting committee of PATC had refused the latest application from DLN and Rural Self-Help Development (RSDA).

I did have the time to talk to Karen Steffensen and Bodil Mathiasen from DLN before leaving Denmark, and we decided to try and use my visit to Lesotho to look forward and to be constructive rather than to be caught up in discussions about why the application had not been granted.

Besides my visit to and meetings with RSDA with whom DLN have had a Project funded through the Mini-projectfund, I met with other relevant stakeholders and potential partners for DLN, such as Development for Peace and Education (DPE).

Overall conclusions

Lesotho is still in need of external inputs and aid. In parts of the country the main issue for farmers is still food security. That said, the organisations with whom I talked, seem to have ideas to develop strategies for incorporating capacity building and advocacy within programmes that could also include inputs to secure food. Both DPE and RSDA would in my opinion be valuable partners in dealing with long time development in Lesotho, building on their different capabilities and experiences.

Program

Tuesday 10th:

- Visit to Lesotho Council of NGOs (LCN)
- Meeting with Development for Peace and Education (DPE)

Wednesday 11th:

- Moshoeshoe day – national holiday
- Informal meeting with Seabate Motsamai from Action Aid Lesotho

Thursday 12th:

- Meeting with RSDA (Me Thulo)
- Visits to area where RSDA and DLN have worked
- Visit to present RSDA project activities

Friday 13th:

- Preparation for final meeting
- Final meeting with RSDA (Me Thulo)

Meeting with Lesotho Council of NGOs

The meeting was set in the offices of LCN in Maseru. Motseoa Mohapi (Finance and administration officer) and Liapeng Thupeng (Finance and administration manager) participated.

Organisation

A total of 11 people work for the Council. There are around 200 member organisations. The members have been divided into 6 sectoral commissions: Human Rights and Democracy, Health and Social Development, Agriculture and Environment, Disaster and Humanitarian Relief, Women, Children and Gender, Economic Justice which then define the six different focus areas. Among others the focus areas are capacity building, financial management and advocacy. Annual meeting in November for one week. Annual meeting selects Board of Directors selects the Executive committee (volunteers) whom guide and define the work of the Secretariat.

Finance

LCN is 100% donor funded. It is difficult for them to find funding, especially core funding as donors do not like to finance such activities. LCN receives no national government funding, but do coordinate sitting funds for example from the national aids fund. Annual membership is 250 Rand for the member organisations.

Context Civil Society and LCN

2008 was the first time that there was a workshop that focused on holding the government accountable. At the moment CS can not influence the national budgets, but work is being done to give CS a stronger position to influence these. It is also a good sign that it is the first time that Civil Society is the major recipient of Global Funds. In general there are some limitations on Civil Society through legislation.

CIVICUS

CIVICUS is an international network of Civil Society Organisations with whom the Project Advice and Training Centre has started implementing a new program focusing on civil society's rights and responsibilities. As part of the preparation of the following work with CIVICUS I asked about the knowledge, perception and opinions towards CIVICUS.

It was not totally clear whether or not LCN were members of CIVICUS.

Generally it was my impression that there is an opinion that CIVICUS lack grounding and contact with member organisations. LCN thinks that there is a big potential in CIVICUS if they start to work with capacity building activities for members, help mobilize resources for members, and help promote the status of CSOs. They recognize the power that CIVICUS has.

After the visit I have facilitated contact between CIVICUS and LCN, which hopefully will benefit both organisations.

Comments about RSDA and Development for Peace and Education

LCN was positive towards both organisations. RSDA is recognised for their large effort within agriculture and advocacy. Development for Peace and Education is recognised for their large effort to reach into areas where no one else is present, and a steady voluntary involvement.

Conclusion

The Lesotho Council of NGOs has functions very much alike those of PATC. They have a problem finding sufficient funding, but get by so far. They are a strong and worthwhile network partner for the rest of the organisations in Lesotho.

Meeting with Development for Peace Education

Informal meeting with Sofonea Shale.

Organisation

DPE is an organisation based on engaged individuals and they work to give people living in the mountains of Lesotho the same possibilities to make decisions and judgements regarding a number of issues as the population living in Maseru.

The organisation is based upon the philosophy of Sister Veronica¹. The main focus is the education of people in their communities. The methods are based upon a reflection → action → reflection understanding. The idea is to give people the opportunity to talk, analyse different aspects from their own perspective, allow people to define own reality and to act on the basis of that.

They run two main programmes

- (i) Community Organisation & Empowerment

DPE works through and with existing organisations in the villages, for example women's groups, young peoples groups, income generating organisations or others. They inject "life" motivate and animate.

- (ii) Economic Justice & Policy Dialogue

- Simplify policies and legislation to facilitate community input
- Start their advocacy in the communities
- Take the points to the ministries and politicians
- Publicise the answers which are also returned to the villagers-in a newsletter called Dialogue
- Work through animators stationed in villages
- People's tribunal. Trained lawyers start out, and then the issues are discussed with villagers. Interesting method
- Facilitate peaceful resolution of conflict between chiefs and councillors in local government

HIV and AIDS is core stream and the interest is dealing with it as a policy and human rights issue

Finance:

- Finish embassy (potential increase in funding)
- GED – German Development Organisation
- Canada through embassy
- Partners with Center for Conflict resolution in Cape Town

Conclusions:

The conclusions are barely based upon a conversation with Sofonea Shale and I have not had the time to visit activities in the country side.

The work that DPE makes in the mountain regions of Lesotho is very relevant and builds on existing structures in the villages, which are capacitated and encouraged through new and inspiring methods of working with citizen participation (through animation) such as the "peoples tribunal".

It is my impression that the organisation uses a large level of voluntary engagement within its activities, which is impressive.

The advocacy work that the DPE makes is based upon participatory strategies which ensure that the people voices are heard, and which seem to have a profound and valuable impact.

Meeting with RSDA

Organisation:

¹ Sister Veronica was a nun whom thought that the basic service delivery efforts made by the church were not having the impact that she would like to see. She studied development for awhile, and upon returning to Lesotho she founded DPE focusing on providing information and knowledge as a basis for action among farmers in desolate areas.

RSDA is a well working, enthusiastic organisation which works with different farmers groups. They work with different aspects of rural development and focuses on capacity building and advocacy.

The organisation was established in 1991. In 1995-1996 they started focusing on Self-help as the primary means of development. The organisation has a board which is functional, but they need a new director as the old one passed away. The next board meeting is in April. The board appoints auditors, approves budgets, discuss and decide on the strategic plans.

There is an understanding that the organisation needs to think and act strategically but for a while the available donors have been keen on quantitative outputs rather than strengthening the organisation and its capacity to use advocacy and capacity building strategically. There is a need to discuss strategy and implement it!

Programme areas:

- Sustainable agriculture. Various projects in different project areas. Works with income generation through chickens, eggs and cows. If the demonstration farm becomes self-sustainable it is an impressive input that it delivers to the farmers.
- HIV/Aids. Work with money from USAID. Work with A and B (Abstinence and Be Faithful) but are allowed to include C (Condoms) if they themselves can provide funding for the condoms. Build capacity of self-help groups. Reach 14 villages and 10.000 people. 2 peer educators in each village and animators in field offices. Work with behavioural change.
- Capacity building in self-help groups. Implemented in rural areas.

Recommendations regarding programme areas:

- From the visit to the demonstration farm it became clear that there is a need to monitor the potential sustainable activities closer, and to make economic calculations on whether activities will become self-sustainable or will continue to need smaller economic inputs.
- It might be possible to plan some investments better, to ensure that equipment is not bought before the "frames" (buildings, cooperatives, farmer organisations etc.) in which it is to be used are in place.
- The service oriented projects that RSDA primarily work with at the moment will probably benefit a lot from a more capacity and eventually advocacy oriented approach, which RSDA also wish to include in their line of work.

Financing:

- USAID
- REPFAR
- FAO
- GART (steady collaboration which has brought in other donors, among others SIDA and Common Fund for Commodities)

Generally the financing of present activities and planned activities are in place until 2011 which allows for long time planning and discussion with DLN in order to plan for a project that will benefit RSDA and its members and beneficiaries as much as possible.

Funding is generally for Service Delivery and there is a strong need to supplement the SD oriented funding with funding for capacity building within RSDA and the farmers groups they work with.

Advocacy:

RSDA has begun to include advocacy work at national, regional and local levels. They are lobbying for a change within the dairy sector, which will help small scale milk producers. They are eager to build on experiences from Dairy sector and use the experiences in other programmes/areas of work.



Work with DLN:

As part of my visit to the country side I had the pleasure to visit one of the villages that DLN and RSDA have worked with during their last project. I met with a group of engaged women whom told me a lot of the benefits of the water-tanks that were constructed in the last project. There are no doubt that the water-tanks are very beneficiary to the women in this and other villages. It allows them to produce vegetables for longer periods, and also it is a source of water that is easily accessible from the houses.

At the same time it is important to look beyond service delivery in a future project – even though it could be with the same women. The women are very engaged in their local community and there may be a potential in combining capacity building elements, advocacy and with some kind of input to food security.

The women had a tendency to focus on the outside inputs as means of improving their own conditions, input which are necessary in some aspects. At the same time though it is important to bring the “self-help” aspect into focus, and to help the women define the strengths and potentials that they themselves posses. In the following discussion they surely proved to have ideas and willingness to work for sustainable solutions for themselves and the community, and they are very well aware that they themselves are the prime input to changes in their life conditions.

Conclusions:

From my visit to the country it was obvious for me that there was a very high level of Service Delivery in the projects currently being implemented by RSDA.

Service Delivery might very well be one form of working with development, but within the “Civil Society Strategy - Strategy for Danish Support to Civil Society in Developing Countries” service is primarily to be used in a strategic combination with capacity building and advocacy.

In my meeting with Me Thulo on Friday the 13th my primary concern was therefore if RSDA were keen to focus on Service Delivery. If this was the case I did not think that they should try to apply for money with DLN through PATC.

I was glad to hear that this was not the case, and that RSDA were very keen to work with capacity building and advocacy. That meant that they fit very good with the Danish strategy, and it would be a valued strengthening of the organisation to include capacity building and advocacy on all levels. I do believe that a future project focusing on capacity building of RSDA as organisation, capacity building of local farmers groups including some aspects of working with food security, where the service delivery is used strategically, and advocacy on local and regional/national levels will have the possibility to strengthen RSDA as organisation and strengthen the local farmers groups. Both aspects will benefit the farmers in a longer perspective.

Integrating these aspects in the present work of RSDA into a project with DLN would in my opinion lift the present and future work of RSDA, and help build long term sustainable solutions for farmers in Lesotho.

I was happy to know that RSDA had no hurry to secure funding right now, and that they would rather enter into a project formulation process that will be reflective and positive than to hurry something through.

Recommendations for DLN

Based on the findings in Lesotho I recommended that DLN considers the following:

- DLN evaluates its capacity and priorities regarding development projects in Lesotho with funding through PATC. It is important to notice that it possibly will have to include capacity building of DLN – for example through new human volunteer resources and/or through participation in some of PATCs general courses.
- DLN discusses whether to work with DPE or/and RSDA and do this according to own resources and capacity.
- If DLN decides to work with RSDA: that DLN together with RSDA applies for a final project formulation trip.
- That based on the final project formulation trip a project proposal is finalized.
- I encourage DLN and RSDA to start with a budget of no more than 1 million Danish Kroner.
- If DLN decides to work with DPE: To apply for a final project formulation trip.
- Based on this final project formulation trip that DPE and DLN formulates a project proposal of no more than 400.000 Danish Kroner.

In my opinion DLN posses a number of valid experiences and knowledge that make them capable of being a qualified partner for both DPE and/or RSDA. It is not to posses the qualifications though, it is necessary to put these experiences into use, and to realize that a development project funded through PATC even though implemented through the local south partner calls for involvement and engagement of the Danish organisation. If DLN prioritises this I think that they will be able to build on existing capacities and be qualified partners for NGOs in Lesotho.

In my point of view both the work of RSDA and DPE deserves support, but it is very important that the engagement with one or both organisations is only given on the basis of an estimation of the capacity in DLN.

I am very glad to have had the opportunity to visit Lesotho, and I am very thankful to all the people whom I met there and whom gave me a wonderful, informative and productive time.

Input to the report

Input to the draft versions of this report have been given by representatives from DLN, RSDA and DPE. I am grateful for the input as it has clarified certain points for me as well and resulted in the final report in its present form.