

African Food Security Urban Network



AFSUN Policy Brief MASERU

Overview of the Study

Maseru is the capital of the Kingdom of Lesotho, with a population of approximately 230,000 (2006 Census). The Urban Food Security Baseline Survey sampled 800 households and 2,737 individuals drawn from the census urban constituencies numbers 33 and 34, which include the six peri-urban neighbourhoods of Lithoteng, Qoaling, Ha Seoli, Ha Shelile, Tsoapo-le-Bolila and Semphetenyane. These constituencies were purposively selected because it is known from previous poverty mapping studies that they contain pockets of extreme levels of poverty in Maseru. The average household size was found to be four persons who mostly lived in nuclear and female-headed households. Very few households (0.4%) were headed by females younger than 18 years. Seventy percent of households lived in owner-occupied housing, while the rest lived in rented accommodation. The household population that was in full-time wage work was 18%, which was less than the national urban average of 30%. There was an almost equal split between the proportions of people who were born in urban Maseru (46%) and those born outside, especially from rural areas (48%).

Key Findings

Poverty and Food Insecurity: For the sample population as whole, the average Lived Poverty Index (LPI) was 1.42, which, although better than the national average of 1.8, still demonstrates worrying levels of poverty. According to the computed Household Food Insecurity Access Prevalence Scale (HFIAPS), less than five percent of the surveyed population were food secure. Sixty five percent were severely food insecure; 25% were moderately food insecure and about 10% were mildly food insecure. The average Household Food Insecurity Access Scale Score (HFIASS) for the population was 12.83, which also demonstrated disconcerting levels of poverty. The computed average Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS) was 3.43, thereby showing low levels of dietary diversity and by implication high dependence on food categories with low nutritive value. The average Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning Indicator (MAHFP) for the survey population was 7.76 and 6.94 for the food insecure households. Although the scores are slightly above the mid-point on the incremental MAHFP scale, they still represent significant levels of food poverty in Maseru.

Livelihood Strategies and Food Security: Given the high levels of urban poverty in Maseru, it is not surprising that an overwhelming majority (92%) of households have devised other livelihood strategies besides their regular or main sources of income, which include growing of field and garden crops, keeping livestock, informal (especially street) work, casual labour, renting out rooms and home-based work. A significant proportion (44%) of households also depends to some degree on food transfers from relatives and friends living in rural or other urban areas.

Health and Food Insecurity: The food insecurity and poverty indicators discussed above are also strongly correlated with incidences of ill-health, with nearly half (47%) of households reporting loss of life in the past twelve months due to TB (29%), HIV/AIDS (10%), pneumonia (6%) and diarrhoea (2%). With the exception of HIV/AIDS itself, the other illnesses are also arguably most prevalent amongst HIV/AIDS compromised populations, most of whom are also equally poor.

Policy Issues

These extreme levels of poverty and alarming levels of food insecurity have far-reaching policy challenges for both national and local governments. At the national level, it is clear that most households require immediate food assistance coupled, ideally, with public works programme aimed at generating short-term employment in order to avert the most debilitating impacts of poverty and ill-health, especially HIV/AIDS. At the local level, poverty means reduced municipal revenue due to the inability of households to pay for service provision and consequently, reduced capacity of the municipality to extend services to the underserved areas of the city. Lack of services, especially water, has direct impacts on the ability of households to produce their own food. Currently restrictive municipal bylaws that prohibit micro-enterprises or informal sector work call for immediate revision.

Project Support

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