

END OF PROJECT REPORT

LESOTHO NUTRITION PLANNING II

OPG - 632 - 0220

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INTRODUCTION

I served as the Advisor to the Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office (FNCO) from June 1981 through March 1984 under a grant to Planning Assistance, Inc. (PAI) funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The project was entitled Nutrition Planning Phase II, OPG-632-0220 and was let for the period 13 February 1981 to 12 February 1984. It was later extended on a no additional cost basis to 31 March 1984.

This grant to PIA was its second three-year grant with the FNCO; the first grant ended in March 1980. There was an interval of nearly one year between Phase I and Phase II of this assistance, and a gap of over a year between my arrival and the departure of my predecessor, Robert Learmonth. Planning Assistance began its assistance to Lesotho in nutrition planning in 1975.

Throughout my assignment I participated as an equal member of the FNCO team and served as an advisor to the Director and staff. I also advised individual projects and other ministries, particularly Health and Agriculture. I served as principle liaison with USAID/Lesotho, and, with my colleagues, provided liaison to other international organizations, such as the World Bank, FAO, UNDP, and UNFPA. As a team, we also worked with other countries in the region to improve our nutrition program.

Considerable time was spent with the FNCO staff and others in better defining precisely where the FNCO should be headed and how it should proceed given changing circumstances and limited resources. This assistance resulted in the restructuring of the LFNC, the narrowing of priorities and the adoption of National Food and Nutrition Security as a central theme. The need for a stronger mandate, clear operational procedures and allocation of added resources remain pressing problems for the FNCO.

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Staff training also occupied a good portion of my time. At the outset I had planned staff training and development to take place through formal training sessions. However, owing to the great number of diverse activities staff members were involved in, it proved impossible to find intervals when all or even most of the staff were free to participate. As a result, much of the training took place on the job and during staff planning meetings. A number of guidelines were prepared for staff to use in their daily work.

I was always amazed at the diversity and intensity of activities in which the FNCO was involved. While their greatest successes came with individual projects, they were also instrumental in getting some critical policy issues and legislation approved. Of particular note were a breastmilk substitutes code and the adoption of international food standards. These should come into force in 1984.

In its terms of reference, the FNCO was charged with conducting periodic interagency meetings and annual national nutrition conferences. The annual conference was intended to provide a forum for looking at nutrition issues collaboratively with all ministries during their yearly planning. This was a good strategy but changing circumstances dictated otherwise. When the Central Planning and Development Office grew in status, they assumed the responsibility for planning national development strategies with line ministries. The key unit within the CPDO became the Projects Review Committee. The FNCO has been trying unsuccessfully to secure a seat on this committee. But without a clear mandate for multi-sectoral nutrition planning, this has proven difficult. Only recently has the FNCO been invited to participate on the Projects Review Committee.

In lieu of annual nutrition planning conferences, the FNCO opted for more frequent interagency meetings and workshops. This proved more in keeping with

their limited manpower; this became a successful vehicle for coordinating and planning nutrition-related activities. This method was also successful in formulating the Food and Nutrition Supplement to the Third Five-Year Development Plan and the design of a national food and nutrition surveillance system. Such meetings and workshops also produced results in project planning and assistance to ongoing programs: the most notable of these are the Food Fortification Symposium in August 1981, the Women in Development Planning Workshop in October 1981, the Program for Better Family Living Workshop in August 1982 and the series of national and district workshops on Improving the Management of School Feeding Programs in 1982 and 1983.

The FNCO has been aware for some time that one of its highest priorities must be to assure that ongoing projects reach the village-level. This conviction formed the basis for their decentralization plans and assistance to village-oriented projects, including village health workers training, village-level nutrition education, and nutrition rehabilitation, among others. Central to this village-level orientation was the development through interagency meetings of a basic health, food and nutrition education kit under its UNICEF-funded project, Project Support Communications. This "kits" project formed the basis for the village skills project component of the FNCO's new strategy discussed in this report. These kits will be turned over to the line ministries for implementation through a series of national, district and area workshops. The FNCO will assist the line ministries in these workshops and will call periodic workshops in the future to discuss progress and problems encountered. The FNCO will direct the development of more in-depth educational kits to support and augment the basic kit.

In late 1982 and throughout '83, the FNCO became deeply involved in analyzing the extent of the drought and assisting in the development of emergency food

relief plans. This analysis re-enforced our opinion that a more comprehensive food and nutrition information system was needed. This need became a topic of discussion for a series of interagency workshops. From these came the design of a food and nutrition surveillance system that would draw upon existing data from multiple ministries, which, when analyzed collectively would provide a better assessment of the food and nutrition situation of the nation. This became the second component in the FNCO's new strategies.

Several key decisions remain to be made before this system can become operational. Perhaps the most important is where the central data collection point will be located organizationally. At present, the FNCO does not have the manpower nor the facilities to carry out the analysis required. It can, however, serve as an advisor to a more technical agency such as the Bureau of Statistics. In an advisory capacity it could facilitate the final design of the data system, specify types and frequency of data required, assist in the design of the formats of data collected and assist in training the data collectors. It could also conduct or participate in periodic nutrition surveys to fill the gaps in existing data and assume responsibility for compiling and disseminating the multi-sector food and nutrition reports. In this way a more comprehensive food and nutrition information system could be implemented so that more complete data would be available to planners and project implementors.

The FNCO enjoys a central vantage point because they are under Cabinet organizationally. However, care must be taken not to infringe or seem to infringe upon the territory of line ministries. The FNCO must show that it can assist the line ministries in carrying out their programs more effectively through coordination with others. Perhaps this can be accomplished most readily by continued assistance to individual projects and working closely with relevant units within the line

ministries on selected issues. The new strategy described in this report should afford the framework within which this assistance can be provided most easily under a more directed focus.

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to the staff of the FNCO and the members of the LFNC for allowing me the privilege of working with them over the past three years.

SUMMARY

Planning Assistance's (PAI) history of food and nutrition planning began in Lesotho in 1975. However, the history of food and nutrition planning predates PAI's involvement by some twenty years. From 1955 to 1960 the World Health Organization (WHO) conducted the first nutrition survey in what was then called Basotholand. This survey found that nearly 75 percent of the households were afflicted with moderate to severe malnutrition at some time during the year, and that nearly 40 percent of the population suffered from goitre.

As a result of this survey and growing concern within the Government, the Permanent Bureau of Nutrition (PBN) was created to direct and control all food and nutrition activities, regardless of the ministry implementing the activity. The PBN was supported by funds from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and UNICEF. An operational unit was created for the PBN, called the Applied Nutrition Program (ANP) and was placed under the Ministry of Agriculture. The PBN was to remain an independent advisory body separate of any one ministry. It had no permanent staff; all of its members were seconded from individual ministries.

With the incorporation of the ANP under the Ministry of Agriculture, the PBN came to be associated with the Ministry of Agriculture, and it soon became evident that the ministries, perceiving few incentives, were reluctant to cooperate with the PBN in their food and nutrition-related activities. As a result, by the early 1970's the PBN had become inactive, while the ANP had become a full Nutrition Unit within the Ministry of Agriculture.

In 1975, the Government of Lesotho organized a national food and nutrition conference, assisted by PAI. The purpose of this conference was to reassess the history of the PBN and try to reestablish a coordinating mechanism for a national

food and nutrition program. One lesson learned was that such a body would have to be located outside of all participating ministries if it was to achieve its goal of coordination. To this lesson, PAI applied the concept of "collaborative planning," whereby all interested parties jointly identified the problems causing malnutrition, decided upon the best solutions to these problems and planned projects to address them.

Out of the 1975 conference came the establishment of the Lesotho Food and Nutrition Council (LNFC) and the Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office (FNCO) as its Secretariat. The LNFC is composed of a Cabinet Subcommittee on Nutrition, an Advisory Group, an ad hoc Resource Group and the FNCO. The FNCO is a statutory body created by the Government of Lesotho and located in the Cabinet. With this structure and from this more neutral vantage point, it was planned that the difficulties encountered by the PBN would be overcome.

The concept was sound, but owing to changes in government and other unforeseen factors, the LNFC and FNCO eventually faced the same barriers that had hindered the PBN. During the past two years, 1982-1984, measures were taken to avert the same outcome suffered by the PBN. The LNFC was reorganized into working groups and the tasks and priorities of the FNCO were more narrowly focused. Emphasis was placed on how the FNCO could become a true service agency to the members of the LNFC and their ministries and agencies. Following a multi-sectoral approach to nutrition planning, national food and nutrition security became the new framework within which priorities were set and resource allocations made for the FNCO. Highest priority was given to 1) security of food supplies, including domestic production and food aid; 2) a set of core skills projects, consisting of critical extension programs which if coordinated could supply the skills necessary to

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overcome the underlying causes of malnutrition; and 3) food and nutrition surveillance and information systems.

Planning Assistance's involvement with nutrition planning in Lesotho through the FNCO ended 31 March 1984 with the conclusion of the grant funding its assistance. At that time the FNCO had begun to plan and implement new strategies and more focused priorities. They will require some outside assistance to carry out these new strategies and to continue operations already established. It remains to be seen how successful these changes, initiated under PAI's assistance, will be.

## COUNTRY BACKGROUND

The kingdom of Lesotho is a recognized country completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa (RSA). Formerly the British protectorate of Basotholand, Lesotho became independent in 1966. Its present government has been in power since 1970 and is based upon the British parliamentary system.

Lesotho is a mountainous country, rising from a plateau of lowlands at 5,000-6,000 feet on the West to the Maluti Mountains, running North to South in the center (9,000-11,000 feet) to the Drakensburg Escarpment which forms the Eastern boundary with the RSA province of Natal and the Transkei homeland. It is one of the smallest countries in Africa, 11,720 square miles, approximately the size of Belgium or the state of Maryland in the U.S. Lesotho is drained by the Senqu (Orange) River system. Cultivable land is estimated at thirteen percent of its land area. This land is largely concentrated in the lowlands.

Lesotho a semi-arid country receiving on the average from 700 to 900 mm (18-23 inches) of rainfall per year. There are distinct dry and rainy seasons, though rainfall does occur throughout the year. Historically, Lesotho has been plagued by periodic severe droughts. Research has shown that every other nine years tends to be less than average rainfall. In 1981-1982 the country entered one of these identifiable nine-year periods. Local research has shown that there are areas within the country that can have a one-in-three year or one-in-five year severe drought even during normal rainfall periods. Rainfalls are generally heavy, associated with violent thunderstorms and hail, and short in duration. Consequently, much of the rainfall runs off to overflow the rivers and disappear into the RSA. The runoff is accompanied by serious soil erosion, with precious topsoil lost at a rate of about two percent per year. The hail is often destructive to

crops and property.

The landscape is largely treeless, mostly grasslands and rock outcroppings. Excessive numbers of livestock have resulted in overgrazed and deteriorating rangelands. Though a woodlots project has been active for over forty years, only recently with improved legislation has some progress been realized. Lesotho still imports nearly 90 percent of its fuel needs (wood, coal and paraffin) from the RSA. Rural villagers usually rely upon indigenous brush and cow dung for fuel.

Nearly sixty percent (approximately 140,000) of Lesotho's male labor force is employed as migrant laborers in South Africa, mostly in the mines. Although their cash wages are an important part of Lesotho's gross national income (over 40 percent), their long absences are detrimental to the family structure and to the development of agriculture in the country. Approximately eight out of ten households in Lesotho have at least one member working in South Africa from whom they derive the majority of their income. Agriculture and livestock contribute only about 17 percent of a household's income. Moreover, households with miners earn an estimated Maloti 1,500 (\$U.S. 1,250) per year, while those without a source of mine income earn approximately Maloti 400 (\$U.S. 330). The average household has between five and six members.

There are few opportunities for cash wage employment in Lesotho; the result is this large migrant labor force. Even though nearly sixty percent of the males work in South Africa, about 20,000 jobs per year need to be created in Lesotho to absorb the underemployed, unemployed and those entering the labor force. Yet each year only about 2,000 jobs are being created.

Lesotho's major crops, both commercial and subsistence, are maize, sorghum, wheat, and beans and peas, in this order. Yields, even with modern farm inputs are low, ranging from 1.5 metric tonnes per acre to less than 200 kilograms per

acre on the more marginal subsistence lands. Maize is grown commercially in the Northern districts along the Western lowlands and, on a subsistence basis throughout the country. Sorghum is more suited to the dryer South, but is also grown throughout the country's lowlands. Winter wheat is grown mainly in the Central and Southern lowlands, and summer wheat is grown in the mountains. Beans and peas are grown throughout the country. In a good year Lesotho is only 41 percent self-sufficient in food production; in a bad year, perhaps 20-25 percent.

The Basotho diet consists largely of maize meal made into a stiff porridge and flavored with a relish of green vegetables, either domestically grown or wild. Wheat products are the next largest contributor to the diet, followed by sorghum. Milk, eggs and meat play a relatively minor role in the diet, even though the Basotho are known traditionally as herders and large amounts of meat are consumed during local festivities, such as marriages and funerals.

The nation's average diet consists of approximately 1,845 calories and 45 grams of protein. Caloric intake comes almost entirely from starches. Owing to income disparities between households and consumption patterns within households, the normal daily diet departs greatly from the average. As a result, we tend to see higher rates of malnutrition among lower income households, particularly in the South and the Mountain areas, and in children under five years of age and the aged. It is estimated that there are over 40,000 (approximately 22 percent) chronically malnourished children under five years of age.

There is a distinct "hungry season," occurring during the months of December through March of each year when the previous year's harvest has been consumed and before the current year's harvest is in. Over the past few years malnutrition in children under five, as measured by less than 80 percent of normal weight for age, has averaged 20-24 percent throughout the year with peaks during the hungry season

as high as 40-50 percent in some areas, particularly during drought years. Preliminary analysis has shown that malnutrition and nutrition-related diseases account for approximately 10 percent of all patients seen at clinics throughout the country. During the hungry season, this percentage rises to approximately 20 percent.

There is no question that from a development standpoint, nutrition must still be considered a high priority in Lesotho, despite the improvements since the WHO survey during 1955-1960. Lesotho's population growth rate is estimated at 2.3 percent per annum and some unofficial estimates place it as high as 2.7 to 3.0 percent. Therefore, while the percentages of malnutrition may be declining, the absolute numbers remain roughly constant or may be actually increasing. Malnutrition becomes an increasing burden for the country and its people to bear.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LESOTHO  
FOOD AND NUTRITION COUNCIL

As a result of the 1975 National Nutrition Planning Conference, the Government of Lesotho, by a Cabinet Memorandum in March 1977, created the LFNC and established the FNCO as its Secretariat under Cabinet. The staff, consisting of a Director and Deputy Director with administrative support staff, was announced in August of 1978. By 1979, the FNCO was at its present established staff of five professionals and seven support staff. The mandate and terms of reference, still in effect today, provided for the LFNC to be made up of a Cabinet Subcommittee on Nutrition, composed of the Ministers of Health, Agriculture, Education, and Rural Development.\* The Minister to the Prime Minister was appointed Chairman of the Subcommittee and President of the Council. An Advisory Group was also established, members were from the above ministries and other related ministries and non-governmental agencies--total membership came to twenty-five.

As stated in the memorandum issued 11 March 1977, the mandate of the LFNC was to encompass Recommendation Three of the 1975 Conference, i.e., "The inter-agency coordination of activities in the four program areas of food production, distribution, consumption/utilization and nutrition education." The memorandum further stated that "the responsibility for the formulation of nutrition policy, the development and formulation of nutrition related regulations be vested in a Cabinet Sub-committee..."

The FNCO was given the following terms of reference:

"The office would perform the day to day work required for support of the Cabinet Committee's responsibilities as well as:

- (a) development of an integrated national food and nutrition program;

\* In 1981, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry was added to the Cabinet Subcommittee.

- (b) monitoring and evaluation of ongoing food and nutrition programs effectiveness;
- (c) development and maintenance of a coordinated food and nutrition related data collection analysis system;
- (d) performance of an operational needs assessment and subsequent development of a reasonable staffing plan and budget for the continuation of the office;
- (e) planning, coordination and conduct of periodic interagency meetings and annual national nutrition conference."

The mandate set out the reporting requirements: "The FNCO Director would report to the Minister to the Prime Minister in his capacity as Chairman of the LFNC and Cabinet Committee." Reports were to be circulated to all Advisory Group members for review and comment before submission to Cabinet.

### Organizational Problems

In practice the reporting channels evolved differently. Shortly after the office was staffed the Director was to report to the Minister to the Prime Minister through the Deputy Permanent Secretary and the Senior Permanent Secretary. This procedure was changed in early 1980 when the post of Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Administration, was created and the FNCO was delegated as one of his responsibilities. Lack of direct access to the highest policy levels eroded the effectiveness of the FNCO and reverberated throughout the LFNC. It seemed to many that nutrition was being given a lower and lower priority as the number and variety of other development projects increased. In September of 1983, the FNCO was delegated to the portfolio of the Senior Private Secretary of the Prime Minister. This change promised more direct contact to the Prime Minister, but in effect may have increased the distance between the FNCO and the line ministries with which it worked(s).

For over two years the FNCO pressed government to strengthen its mandate and to establish formal operational procedures and guidelines. There appeared to be several schools of thought on this question within the FNCO, the government and the international donor community. Some believed that by virtue of being under the Prime Minister's Offices the mandate was sufficient, and that requests from the FNCO for information and assistance must be complied with because these were issued on behalf of the Cabinet Subcommittee and the Council (LFNC) as a whole. However, this proved insufficient incentive for many at the higher levels in the ministries who saw little direct effect of the FNCO's coordinating efforts.

This confusion over the mandate and the lack of operational guidelines and procedures spilled over to the LFNC. Many of those involved began to question what precisely the FNCO was set up to do. Some felt the FNCO was a threat to their programs, others that it was set up to be a watch dog and tell tales on them, and others that all the FNCO did was hold meetings.

The result was that many ministries became guarded in their cooperation and, at times, withheld routine information. Advisory Group meetings began to be poorly attended, and most coordination occurred at mid-management levels. Nevertheless, project managers and project staff with whom the FNCO worked closely believed that the FNCO's coordination efforts and technical assistance were a tremendous asset.

Moreover, the Cabinet Subcommittee had ceased to function almost as soon as it was created. It met only twice after the establishment of the FNCO in 1978. The last meeting was in 1980. This was not due to any negligence on the part of the FNCO. On the contrary, the FNCO requested Subcommittee meetings on many occasions and these meetings were included as a regular activity in all of the FNCO's annual plans for the LFNC.

### Illustration of Lack of Support

The inactivity of the Cabinet Subcommittee and lack of clear operational procedures and guidelines had far reaching impact on the FNCO's ability to carry out its mandate. I will cite an example. As a result of the central role that the FNCO had played in emergency relief planning during the drought in 1980, the FNCO participated, along with several other ministries, in a series of discussions to develop an early warning system for drought in late 1980 and early 1981. A position paper was developed and submitted in March 1981 by the FNCO to the National Disaster Relief Committee composed of Permanent Secretaries of various ministries. There was no response from this Committee.

In August/September of 1981, repeated inquiries were made to this committee for their views so that a plan could be developed, and further recommendations were submitted. Beginning in late 1981 and continuing into 1982 a series of FAO/SADCC consultant missions visited Lesotho to discuss participation in a regional early warning system. They were told that recommendations had been submitted, but were unable to obtain any information on these from the Committee. The FNCO supplied the FAO/SADCC representatives with copies of their previous submissions and jointly worked on Lesotho's potential participation in a regional SADCC early warning system. Ideas and advice were also sought from the FAO mission on developing a country-based early warning program. These actions and suggestions were forwarded to the National Disaster Relief Committee as required by established protocol. There was still no response from the Committee.

Late in 1982, the FNCO began to receive reports from the field that a more widespread drought than had occurred in 1980 was likely. Working with various ministries through the LFNC, it conducted field surveys and compiled and analyzed data

which showed that Lesotho was indeed facing a severe drought emergency. With the assistance of an advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture and data supplied by the Ministries of Agriculture, Water, Energy and Mining, and Health and Catholic Relief Services, maps were developed showing the areas which would be hit hardest and their likely shortfalls in harvests.

This information was communicated in late January 1983 to the Disaster Relief Committee, the Cabinet Subcommittee on Nutrition, all LFNC members and the Prime Minister, as well as to the Food Management Unit and the donor community. The FNCO requested that a national drought emergency be declared as soon as possible so that emergency planning could be initiated. A national emergency was declared by the Prime Minister in the first week of March 1983 based upon the information that the FNCO had provided him. In the meantime, the National Drought Relief Committee declared an emergency for a small area in the District of Berea hard hit by a cyclone, but they did not comment on the national drought emergency.

The FNCO continued to provide drought updates as conditions worsened and took the lead in developing an emergency food distribution plan. A second field survey was conducted in May and maps and plans revised accordingly. Throughout, mid-level management in all ministries were extremely helpful in supplying, analyzing and interpreting data once the problem was explained.

From the start, donor cooperation was superb, but they required more detailed information than the FNCO could readily supply. Had clear operational procedures been in effect this data would have been more timely in coming. In essence, the FNCO had to take time to create a mechanism for data reporting and analysis that it had proposed to policy makers nearly two years before.

Once the emergency relief plan became operational and the logistics unit for

emergency food distribution, recommended by the FNCO, was established in mid-1983, the National Disaster Relief Committee finally became involved. But as of March 1984, there was still no response on the early warning system that had been proposed in 1981, and 1983/84 was being projected as an even worse drought year.

This example illustrates the need for an active Cabinet Subcommittee on Nutrition, active support from the highest policy makers of line ministries, and a stronger mandate for the FNCO with clear operational guidelines and procedures. Had these been in place, the FNCO would have already been receiving critical data on a routine basis and prediction of the coming drought; the analysis of its severity would have been more timely. The Cabinet Subcommittee could have been advised to notify directly the Prime Minister and relevant ministries, so that a national emergency could have been declared earlier and a more effective relief plan developed sooner; government resources could have been allocated and donor assistance sought.

Many other examples could be cited. It is important to note that much of the ability of the FNCO to operate effectively relies upon support from the top--which its Cabinet position implies. The FNCO does well in its access to information from critical projects, but continues to have difficulties in getting access to the highest levels.

The reason for the inactivity of the Cabinet Subcommittee is a matter of conjecture. Many believe that it is directly related to the addition of the Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Administration into the reporting channel, the rise of the CPDO to full ministry status, and the turnover within government of senior officials who supported nutrition in 1975 and were instrumental in the creation of the LFNC and the FNCO. This also helps to explain the erosion of support at highest policy levels that the FNCO had enjoyed originally.

The question of a stronger mandate should have been addressed when the FNCO was created along with clear operational procedures. A stronger mandate and operational procedures are vital if operations are to continue smoothly when personnel at all levels change. As the FNCO communicated to the government in a November 1982 memorandum, it requires a stronger mandate clearly stating that multi-sectoral nutrition planning is in its terms of reference. The operational procedures for ensuring this must also be established. In addition, it would appear to be crucial to reactivate the Cabinet Subcommittee on Nutrition in order to strengthen the position of nutrition planning as a whole and to legitimize the FNCO as an office.

GOALS AND OPERATIONS  
OF THE FNCO

While policy-level support became questionable, the FNCO continued to work toward its terms of reference. The number and diversity of projects and activities with which they were(are) involved is truly astounding. Still, with a more directed focus it would seem they could have generated more support from the highest levels while allaying fears within the ministries that the FNCO was out to create its own empire. During 1983 and 1984 this process of focusing priorities was well underway.

By 1980, the FNCO had restated its mandated terms of reference into four goals each with operational objectives. These and the plans that accompanied them each year became the annual plans for the LFNC. Although the wording changed from 1980 to 1984 the essence remains the same. The precise wording reflects the evolution of the FNCO's rethinking its role and narrowing its scope of priorities.

In its 1983/84 workplan the FNCO stated its purpose as:

"The purpose of the Lesotho Food and Nutrition Council and inherently that of its Secretariat the Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office is to ensure that good nutrition becomes a national development goal in its own right, so that malnutrition can be eradicated through coordinated efforts of relevant sectoral ministries of Agriculture, Health, Education, Commerce, Rural Development and others."

The goals of the FNCO toward fulfillment of this purpose were stated as:

1. Assist in formulation of nutrition policy and recommend Food and Nutrition Laws and regulations.
2. Ensure effective coordination of nutrition-related projects through strengthening multi-sectoral planning and implementation of primary nutrition projects.

3. Promote and assist coordinated research in support of selected priority food and nutrition projects.
4. Gather and disseminate multi-sectoral information in support of the National Food and Nutrition Program.
5. Ensure timely, efficient and effective management of the FNCO and LFNC.

Annually, objectives and activities are planned for each goal. Some are carryovers from the previous year when tasks are ongoing or incomplete from the previous plan period. Many objectives are new as circumstances require and the national program progresses. Staff are assigned to each of the objectives and activities are phased throughout the year.

Annual plans are developed at the end of March and beginning of April. (The government fiscal year runs from 1 April to 31 March.) The FNCO's annual plan is reviewed every two months and a more detailed bi-monthly plan is developed. At this time adjustments are made to the annual plan as required. Weekly plans are developed each Monday in staff meetings. During these meetings staff report on their progress and detailed strategies regarding how to proceed are discussed. Given the many activities the FNCO is involved in, these Monday meetings provide an opportunity for all staff to be briefed on the work of others and to see the overall direction of the office.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED WITH  
THE FNCO OPERATIONS

There was a period of nearly one year, from March 1980 to mid-February 1981, between Phase I and Phase II of the grant, and, over a year lapsed between the departure of my predecessor, Bob Learmonth, and my arrival in June 1981.

During this interval many of the organizational changes discussed above occurred. The Cabinet Subcommittee became inactive, the Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Administration was named our new direct supervisor, the Central Planning and Development Office was elevated to Ministry status under the Minister to the Prime Minister, and the FNCO's policy section on Nutrition for the Third Five-Year Development Plan was edited out of the final printing. In addition, several key staff members who had been trained under Phase I of the grant had left the office for better paying jobs.

After I had worked about three months with the FNCO, I realized that the staff were involved in many worthwhile activities, but they were so fragmented that they could not follow-through satisfactorily on actions initiated. The organization did not have the resources to accomplish its goals. And, there was confusion as to what it should be doing and how to proceed.

The FNCO had been left a legacy of collaborative planning. This is a powerful tool in program design and planning, but has its limitations in direct implementation. Diverse meetings seemed to consume much of the staff's time, so much so that there were often not enough staff to attend all the meetings yet attendance was felt to be necessary--there was seldom time to do the desk work necessary to properly prepare for the meetings or follow-up.

Mushrooming Projects

At the 1978/79 Second National Nutrition Conference, nineteen projects were planned or replanned and became the basis for the national nutrition program. This project load increased rapidly. From the nineteen priority projects planned at the 1978/79 Conference, the FNCO annual work plans showed:

YEARS	NUTRITION-RELATED	--OF WHICH PRIORITY FOR THE FNCO
1981/82	110	38
1982/83	130	45
1983/84	133	42

Although most staff time was spent on priority projects, the FNCO tried to monitor all of the nutrition-related projects.

Still, without a clear policy mandate, as exhibited by the omission of the nutrition section from the Third Five-Year Development Plan, FNCO felt compelled to secure policy support. Because of decreased access to highest policy levels, seeking support became a time-consuming quest, which ended in favor of the FNCO in mid-1982. Finally, the FNCO received permission from the Permanent Secretary Central Planning and Development Office (CPDO), to develop and submit an updated Food and Nutrition Supplement. This permission came about only as the result of a World Bank mission that came to Lesotho to assess the possibility of assistance in Health and Nutrition. The Supplement was developed by the FNCO through a series of interagency discussions and workshops with LFNC members. The 125-page document was reviewed by the Advisory Group and submitted to Cabinet and the CPDO in April 1983. As of March 1984, neither body had approved it.

Relations with the  
Central Planning and Development Office

*when?* Relations became strained with the CPDO in its new role as the Ministry to coordinate, monitor and evaluate all development programs in the country in addition to planning national development strategies. Perhaps there was a feeling within the CPDO that its mandate superceded the FNCO's and so the FNCO was redundant. Despite the FNCO's repeated efforts to discuss roles with senior officials in the CPDO, little progress was made.

The World Bank mission, mentioned previously, stated to the CPDO that before it could support nutrition in Lesotho, the FNCO would have to be given a stronger mandate and clear operational procedures. They also recommended that established posts be raised two pay grades to bring them in line with other government agencies.

The FNCO submitted its request for assistance from the World Bank to the CPDO on 25 November 1982. In January 1984, a World Bank mission came to Lesotho to finalize assistance for the Ministry of Health. While the CPDO had forwarded the Ministry of Health's request, it did not forward the FNCO's request even after repeated inquiries. As a result nearly two years of planning for future assistance from the World Bank went for naught. Nutrition was dropped from their consideration for the foreseeable future--due to a lack of government interest.

Clearly, this noncooperation at the highest levels became a continuing frustration to the FNCO's operations and aspirations for a national food and nutrition program. Staff morale suffered. Compounding the silence of policy support, the FNCO suffered yearly budget cuts, down from Maloti 90,000 in 1980 to Maloti 69,000 in 1983/84. The Planning Assistance field budget was able to soften these cuts to some degree, but now that the project has ended, the FNCO will have to cut its scope of work considerably.

Still, the FNCO continues to provide valuable assistance to many key nutrition interventions. With its revised scope of priorities taking effect in 1984/85 it should be able to continue to do so in the future.

RESPONSE TO PROBLEMS  
ENCOUNTERED

Three main strategies were followed to overcome the problems encountered outlined above. These were: 1) a reorganization of the LFNC to inject new life into it so it could become more responsive to the nutrition needs of the country; 2) a more focused definition of priorities for the FNCO and allocation of staff time and resources according to these priorities; and 3) interagency meetings and workshops to improve linkages with ministries and build a constituency for the FNCO while at the same time demonstrating the value of coordination. At the same time staff training became a priority and attempts were continued to reestablish support from key decision-makers.

It took time for these strategies to be implemented and they tended to evolve as circumstances dictated. However, at the conclusion of the second phase of the grant all were well underway and benefits were being derived from them.

Reorganization of the LFNC

Beginning in 1981 the LFNC and FNCO staff were surveyed to gather views and opinions on how the LFNC and FNCO could be improved. This survey was conducted with questionnaires and interviews. From these it was clear that most LFNC members were concerned that nutrition was losing its high priority as a national development issue. Their suggestions formed the basis of the LFNC reorganization and the FNCO's refocusing its priorities. A special meeting of the Advisory Group was convened to discuss the findings of the survey and the options available.

At this meeting it was decided to reorganize the LFNC by: 1) trying to revive the Cabinet Subcommittee on Nutrition; 2) clarifying reporting and communication channels in the Cabinet and at the Permanent Secretary and Ministerial levels;

3) continuing efforts to get the CPDO to give official approval for the food and nutrition supplement to the Third Five-Year Development Plan; 4) revising terms of reference for members of the Advisory Group, having ministries designate a primary and secondary member, and having members brief their Permanent Secretaries on a regular basis on activities of the LFNC; and 5) establishing four standing working groups to assist the FNCO.

The working groups would meet monthly on topics they would define jointly with the FNCO and the Advisory Group according to a workplan to be completed within three months. The working groups would report to the Advisory Group at their quarterly meetings. Members of the working groups would be invited from compatible units of ministries and would not necessarily have to be members of the Advisory Group.

The four working groups established were: Policy, Planning and Coordination, Research and Information. It took several months for these to be established and because their members had heavy workloads it became impossible to get full participation at the monthly meetings. What evolved was a group of task forces which worked with the FNCO on specific issues. This procedure proved to be more than adequate, and the working groups should continue in this fashion.

Two completed tasks of particular note were the review and revision of the Food and Nutrition Supplement to the Third Five-Year Development Plan and the development of the food and nutrition surveillance system. The working groups on Policy and Planning and Coordination reviewed and revised the Supplement in a series of working sessions in late 1982 and early 1983. This revised document was submitted to the Cabinet in April 1983. The Research working group, in a series of workshops from August to November 1983, designed the food and nutrition surveillance system

presented at the Third National Nutrition Planning Conference in January/February 1984. This surveillance system will form a cornerstone of the FNCO's new strategy in 1984/85.

### New Strategies for the FNCO

Outlined in the Supplement was a modified approach to multi-sectoral nutrition planning. Multi-sectoral nutrition planning recognizes that the causes of malnutrition are the result of complex interactions of social and economic factors and that no one sector is sufficient to cause chronic malnutrition. In Lesotho these have been grouped into eight broad sectors: 1) food production; 2) policy and programming; 3) health and environment; 4) food technology; 5) economics and food distribution; 6) nutrition education; 7) training and community development; and 8) research.

Individual causes of malnutrition in Lesotho span all of these sectors. While there is a need to intensify efforts at the national level, particularly in planning and programming, the greatest need is to increase the application of existing projects and programs to the village level. There is also a vital need for better data with which to plan projects and target resources so that geographic areas most at-risk are served adequately. Finally, there is need for government to place national food security as one of its highest development priorities.

For these reasons the FNCO and LFNC adopted national food security as its new focus. This new strategy became the theme of the Third National Nutrition Planning Conference, conducted from 30 January to 3 February 1984, and it will form the basis for a more focused national food and nutrition program beginning in 1984.

National food and nutrition security is seen as increasing food production, stabilizing food supplies, making food economically accessible to all, and promoting food and nutrition skills. The FNCO's new strategy encompasses three foci: 1) security of food supplies; 2) surveillance and early warning; and 3) skill promotion at the village level. Within each of these foci there are two or more core projects; the whole program totals fifteen core projects. Naturally, many other nutrition-related projects continue to play vital roles, but these fifteen core projects will receive the greatest attention of the LFNC and FNCO. It is envisioned that these will become high priorities for all ministries.

Under the focus of security of food supplies come programs for increased grain and vegetable production and better utilization and management of livestock. This focus also includes the expansion of strategic food reserves, managed by the Food Management Unit (FMU), and expansion of trade relations to broaden sources of food imports.

Increased food production will largely be the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture and will include both improved subsistence and expanded commercial farming. The FNCO will advise on the nutrition implications of agricultural projects and help identify areas in the country that require additional agricultural resources.

The FNCO will assist the FMU in determining the size of strategic food reserves required and will help in identifying where and how these should be stored. The FNCO will also continue to advise the FMU on the best uses of food aid, including better targeting of rations and placement of storage facilities.

### Skill Promotion at the Village Level

The promotion of nutrition security at the village level comes with the improvement of practical skills that make households more self-reliant. A core set of extension programs has been identified which, if coordinated, can supply the necessary skills to overcome the causes of malnutrition.

Skill projects selected are:

- Program Support Communications Project (kits) (FNCO)
- Nutrition Rehabilitation Program (MOH)
- Under-Fives Supplementary Feeding Program (MOH, CRS)
- Village Health Worker Program (MOH)
- Village Water Supply and Sanitation Program (MINRUDEV, MOH)
- Horticulture Extension Program (MOA)
- Village Level Nutrition Education Program (MOA)
- Breastfeeding Promotion Program (MOH)
- Improved Nutrition Education in Primary Schools Program (MOE)
- School Feeding and Gardens Program (MOE)
- Women in Development and Income Generation Program (BOWYA, MOA)

It is with these projects that the FNCO will work most closely in the coming years. Many of the skills taught in these projects are contained in the basic health, food and nutrition education kit developed by the FNCO through a multi-agency Project Support Communications Committee under the kits project. This education kit is being distributed to all extension workers in the country as well as to all primary schools through a series of national, district and area workshop. Coordination and supervision plans will be part of these workshops. The FNCO will continue to take the lead in developing more indepth educational kits for future distribution.

### Food and Nutrition Surveillance

The 1982/83 drought made it very clear to everyone that better data is required if Lesotho is going to be able to predict future droughts and develop

sound emergency relief plans. The FNCO had been trying to develop an early warning system for drought for several years. Moreover, it is widely accepted that Lesotho requires better food and nutrition data in a timely manner to use in planning, monitoring and evaluating development projects.

Using the multi-agency working group methodology, the FNCO developed a food and nutrition surveillance system that should meet the needs of all users. The system will serve four main functions:

1. Scanning: identification and referral of malnourished children at the clinic level.
2. Warning: forecasting of crop production and early warning of drought so that government can identify potential food shortages and take appropriate actions in time.
3. Planning: using data from several sectors to identify the underlying causes of malnutrition so that interventions can be planned and targeted.
4. Monitoring and Evaluation: to track project implementation at all levels and assess the impact of projects in reducing malnutrition.

Using existing data, the system will develop a grid of most at-risk geographic areas within the country based upon historical data of crop yields, crop production, rainfall data and reported cases of malnutrition. This will be presented as a series of maps overlaid on population distribution and ecological zones. Later off-farm wages will be added as these data become available, and when the national household capability survey begins these maps can be further refined to include much more socioeconomic data.

Against this grid of geographic areas most at-risk to malnutrition, current data, consisting of clinical reports of malnutrition, rainfall, temperature and

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agricultural data, will be plotted. The aim will be to create a functional classification of areas and households most at-risk, so that skills projects and other projects can be targeted more effectively.

This surveillance system is still in the process of final design. A number of critical aspects remain to be fully developed, but these should be resolved in the coming months.

Monthly reports will be provided to all ministries and Cabinet. Food and nutrition security updates will be published quarterly in the FNCO newsletter. The FNCO could also assist the ministries in the training of their field workers who collect data and assist in the design of surveys and questionnaires so that nutrition-related information is collected on a consistent basis.

With these changes, it is hoped that the FNCO and LFNC can play a more dynamic role in the development of Lesotho. Through the focus on food and nutrition security it will have a concrete product to offer all ministries at the national, district and area levels. This product will also mesh well with the current decentralization strategy being pursued by the Government.