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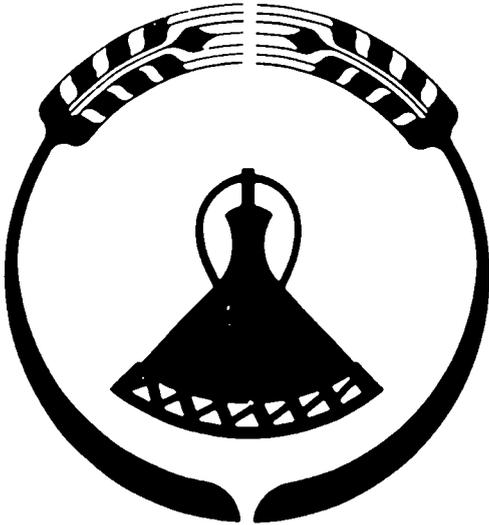
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# LESOTHO AGRICULTURAL SECTOR ANALYSIS PROJECT

Ministry of Agriculture  
Kingdom of Lesotho  
Department of Economics  
Colorado State University

PROFILES OF BASOTHO FARMERS

Gene C. Wilken

- Part I : Images of Basotho Farmers
- Part II : Are the Basotho Subsistence Farmers
- Part III: Progressive Farmers in Lesotho  
(with Martin H. Fowler)

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by

Gene C. Wilken

LASA Discussion Paper No. 8

Lesotho Agricultural Sector Analysis Project

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June 1979

## PREFACE

In any food system the most fundamental production units are the individual farmers or farm families. In agrarian societies these same units also control most of the consumption decisions. In subsistence or semi-subsistence systems\* the two functions, production and consumption, are so entangled that separating them not only is extraordinarily difficult, it may be pointless. Not only consumption and production considerations but also measurable factors such as input costs and environmental hazards are mixed with perceived opportunities and constraints to create a complex decision-making environment. Fully understanding the small farmers' perspective may be impossible, perhaps even for the farmers themselves.

Nevertheless, efforts to understand are worthwhile even if they fall far short of complete success. This statement essentially describes and justifies the following set of essays on characteristics of the farmers of Lesotho. The studies grew out of a strong desire to understand the particular case of Basotho farmers, and an equally strong dissatisfaction with previous descriptions that seemed lacking in geographical and historical perspective.

The first essay attempts to sort out existing images from the literature, beginning with the earliest accounts of the 1830's. The review reveals that the various evaluations of Basotho farmers are inconsistent, varying from one writer or period to another, and that they almost invariably employ unidentified but easily inferred models completely external to Basotho, culture, environment, or history.

Older qualitative judgements of whether the Basotho are "good" or "poor" farmers are replaced in the present era with such questions as "are the Basotho farmers rational decision-makers within their socio-economic context?" Unfortunately, the socio-economic context of the agricultural sector of Lesotho never has enjoyed a comprehensive exposition. Certainly the second essay is only an incomplete treatment. But comparison with a conceptual model suggests that Lesotho constitutes a special case, and that its farmers may well escape conventional definitions of subsistence producers.

The small size of holdings and traditional methods of operation, coupled with a paucity of extension resources, both financial and human, have for decades tempted planners and policy-makers to embrace so-called "progressive farmer" schemes in one form or another. This approach concentrates development activities on a select group of farmers, usually no more than five or ten percent of the population, that meets certain "progressive" criteria and that it is

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\* Definitions of these terms appear on page 9.

expected will act as agent for diffusing new information and technology. In Lesotho progressive farmer programs have ranged from local project to the national levels. Technical and social aspects of this approach are examined in the third essay where it is argued that select farmers are not necessarily effective diffusers of change, and that the approach may fly in the face of Basotho egalitarian traditions.

Although each of the three studies deals with a separate aspect of Basotho farmers, all bear on the relationship between assumptions and policy. The first essay, for example, reveals a strong element of cultural bias in evaluations, either positive or negative, of farmers' motivation, and capabilities. The second study outlines the distinctive socio-economic characteristics that set the Lesotho agricultural sector apart. And the third essay cautions against reactive solutions to the sometimes seemingly intractable problems of the agricultural production and development.

But critical studies can only clear away past debris: they do not themselves constitute a foundation for new models or new directions. If past images are wrong, what is right? How should we look at Basotho farmers and what should we expect of them? And what should be their roles in the Lesotho of the future?

Some features are evident. The Mosotho farmer is resilient: he has managed to survive for more than one hundred years in the face of difficult environmental, economic, and political circumstances. His survival has been a triumph of social organization rather than technology. Basotho farmers are not particularly outstanding with respect to adoption or invention of crops, tools, or techniques. For example, local management of agricultural resources, such as soil and water, is at a relatively low level that cannot be explained merely on the basis of population pressure.

On the other hand, local institutions associated with resource management are well developed (Wilken 1979). For example, allocations of resources such as land and building materials are controlled at the village level and are based primarily upon need and ability to use, rather than upon social position. Several institutions for shared work and joint land and animal management compensate for lack of power and equalize access to resources. Finally, decades of coping with difficult soils and climates have produced farming strategies that maximize the possibilities of survival if not of production.

These, then, are the factors that should be considered in planning for the development of Lesotho's agricultural sector. Rather than dwelling upon apparent weaknesses of the Basotho farmers, especially in comparison with farmers elsewhere, they should be considered within their own unique physical and socio-economic context and their strengths identified not only as clues to past survival, but also as potential building blocks for future development.

## I. IMAGES OF BASOTHO FARMERS

Of the many puzzling aspects of agriculture in Lesotho the most enigmatic is without doubt the farmers themselves. From earliest times Basotho farmers have perplexed observers, frustrated administrators, and exasperated advisors. The situation would be amusing were it not that interpretations of the nature of Basotho farmers have become part of the bases for policy making and planning. For this reason a review of past and present views of Basotho farmers will put the matter in perspective. It will also show that the impressions themselves are as contradictory and puzzling as the farmers they claim to describe.

Lesotho is overwhelmingly agrarian. More than 90 percent of the population lives in rural areas. Agriculture provides an important source of income for about 85 percent of the population and is the largest contributor to Gross Domestic Product (Lesotho n.d. v. 1, pp xi, 2; World Bank 1975, p. 37). Apart from migrant labor in South Africa and limited work in administration and commerce in the few urban centers, there are few employment opportunities other than agriculture.

Despite these characteristics of a predominantly agrarian economy, there is considerable question as to whether the Basotho are agriculturists and if so, whether animal or crop husbandmen. Doubts were expressed early on, in some of the first reports to reach the world outside southern Africa. Eugene Casalis, pioneer French missionary, *confidant* to Moshoeshe I (the founder of the Basotho nation), and friend and admirer of the Basotho, was ambivalent. Arguing first that the Basotho, like other southern African tribes, were essentially pastoralists rather than farmers, he then remarks that "among the Basutos . . . agriculture is looked upon in the most honourable light, and more generally pursued, both sexes devoting themselves to it with equal ardour." Casalis never resolved this conflict of impression, but settled for compromise: "They are much more attached to their flocks than to their fields, but . . . depend more upon their fields than their flocks for support" (Casalis 1861, Chap. 10).

The confusion was not to be clarified. In a series of reports reaching from the early 19th to the late 20th century the Basotho have been alternately extolled as farmers, condemned as non-agriculturists, or relegated to the limbo of reluctant (and presumably mediocre) cultivators who farmed only out of necessity. Two sets of examples, one from 19th century reports (Germond) and the other from the 20th (Ashton) contrast the opposing views:

"Every part of the country is once more under cultivation. . . export of grain is taking place by the thousand bags. . . the Basuto are becoming more and more industrious. . ."

Germond 1967, pp 320-321

"The Basuto are not agriculturists by tradition and rather grudge the amount of time they have to spend on their lands."

Ashton 1967, p. 120

"The agricultural genius of the Basuto. . ."

Germond 1967, p. 444

"For the Basotho are not good agriculturists and do not make the best of their natural resources"

Ashton 1939, p. 153

The confusion is not limited to farming but extends also to livestock. The position could be taken, as Casalis and others have done, that the Basotho are more pastoralists than farmers, and that cattle are more social than economic elements of their culture. But Wilson and Thompson (1969, pp. 142-153) maintain that in traditional Sotho economy herding always was of secondary importance. Sheddick (1953, p. 21) denies that the Basotho are part of the African "cattle complex" and argues instead that their attitude "may appear to be irrational and uneconomic by European ways of thinking, but their evaluation of cattle is for the most part based on practical considerations." Ashton (1967, pp. 138-140) differentiates between the social as well as economic value of cattle and compares this to the predominately economic value of sheep and goats. But he makes a most telling accusation: "The people are not particularly keen pastoralists and do not give their stock much more than the minimum attention required to keep them alive." The Basotho attitude toward livestock, it would seem, is as perplexing both culturally and economically as their attitude toward farming.

The conflict of interpretation is more than a difference of time or observers. Remarks similar to Ashton's can be found in all periods, including the present. It is less easy to find contemporary spokesmen as complimentary as those quoted in Germond. Yet never before in the history of this small country has there been so much emphasis upon developing agriculture and agriculturists as there is now. Apparently knowledgeable local administrators and foreign advisors alike are convinced that the Mosotho, if not a good farmer now, could soon become one with proper encouragement.

How are we to reconcile these confused images of Lesotho as an agrarian society composed of non-farmers and indifferent pastoralists, who produced great surpluses in the past\* but now are incapable of feeding themselves, yet who have a great potential for development? Two general explanations seem plausible: one based on the argument of the optimizing peasant\*\*, the other on the argument of the biased observer. Both shall be reviewed.

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\* In 1893 some 128,000 bags of wheat were exported (Ashton 1939, p. 158).

\*\* The term "peasant" does not apply generally in Africa, which is predominantly tribal. But since most studies of economic behavior in traditional societies have been carried out in groups identified as peasants the terms seem appropriate to the theory if not to the farmers of Lesotho (e.g., Lipton, 1968).

Possibly Sheddick's (1953, p. 21) observation that "their evaluations of cattle are based upon practical considerations" applies to agriculture in general. In this context Basotho farmers are viewed as optimizers with- in constraints that may or may not be apparent to outsiders. In Schultz' (1964, p. 37) words:

"There are comparatively few significant inefficiencies in the allocation of the factors of production in tra- ditional agriculture."

From this perspective, the emphasis should fall upon real and perceived opportunities and limitations.

For example, perhaps the environment dominates, and soils and climate in earlier times were more favorable to agricultural production than at present. This view is favored by conservationists who maintain that popu- lation expansion onto marginal and hilly lands and bad farming practices have so depleted and eroded Lesotho's soils that production has been af- fected. Alternatively, the climate may have changed. Agriculturally, the climate of Lesotho is marginal (Jayamaha n.d., Wilken 1978a), with clusters of acceptable years being followed by sub-marginal conditions (Dyer and Tyson 1977). Only slight long term trends would be sufficient to seriously affect yields. An agricultural countryside and its people must adjust rapidly in the face of environmental change and Basotho farmers may simply be responding to environmental conditions that have altered for the worse. Their apathetic attitudes may reflect a realistic appraisal of production potentials within perceived environmental constraints.

Or perhaps market conditions are paramount. No doubt heavy demands for food for the burgeoning South African mine districts acted as a power- ful stimulus to farming in Lesotho (néé Basutoland) in the 19th century. In contrast, the demand from these districts now is for labor. The change from export of grain to export of labor may represent an entirely reason- able response to changing export opportunities. Certainly the earnings and remittances presently generated by the 150,000 to 200,000 Basotho mi- grant laborers in South Africa far exceed the possible returns from exploit- ing any other resource at this particular time.

But massive export of labor tends to strip the source region of its human capital: not only are the numbers, but also the most able are lost to the local economy. In Lesotho, where more than 50 percent of the working- age males are away in South Africa the loss is enough to account in large part for declines in agricultural production.\*

An analogous but more amorphous argument involves possible basic cul- tural changes among the Basotho. Perhaps general and continued deterioration of the economic or physical environment coupled with socio-political constraints

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\* The loss of male labor and its effects upon agriculture have been noted repeatedly, (e.g., Ashton 1939; Morse *et al.* 1960; Pim 1935; World Bank 1975; Wykstra 1978).

have transformed the Basotho from once-industrious, surplus-producing agriculturalists to indifferent crop- and animal-husbandmen. That is, continued negative feedback over the years may have resulted in altered cultural values and left the Basotho apathetic toward agriculture.

This position actually is a pervasive variation on the theme of the optimizing peasant, and differs only in that the constraints that affect the society may be historical as well as contemporary. But in addition, it shifts emphasis away from constraints themselves and toward cultural values. To effect change not only would contemporary constraints have to be relaxed, but also cultural values would require modification.

There are many other possibilities. But these few examples are enough to support the view that Basotho farmers are neither irrational\* nor enigmatic but realistic, perceiving opportunities and making logical choices within environmental, social, and economic constraints.

The second and quite different explanation focuses upon the perceptions of outside observers. There are two interrelated levels: creation of basic images of Basotho personality and culture, and interpretation and evaluation of Basotho performance as agriculturists. The hypothesis is that not only are biases present in the interpretation of Basotho actions but also that the basic image of Basotho farmers is in part a creation of the literature and thus is biased.

The written history of the Basotho began with the first European missionaries, travelers, traders, military officers, colonizers, and administrators. Of these, probably the missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Mission Society were the most influential in transliterating the previously unwritten Sesotho language and recording oral history, cultural characteristics, and current events (e.g., Casalis 1861; Germond 1967; Ellenberger 1912). Thus, the events and characteristics of Basotho life were recorded and, more importantly, interpreted by men with strong convictions and cultural orientations of their own.\*\* Subsequent writers have been heavily influenced by these early accounts.

Having once established an image of the Mosotho, in part out of contrasts with European models, interpretations and evaluations come easily. The Mosotho farmer is "industrious", "grudging", "an agricultural genius", "a non-farmer". These evaluations are inferentially comparative; the question is, compared to what?

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\* Qualitative terms are not used generally, but rather only within the narrow definitions of economics. Thus "rational" means economically rational; i.e., making choices defined as rational by conventional economic criteria.

\*\* There are few accounts of Basotho culture by Basotho. Thus, as is true with so many African cultures, much of what is known about the people has been written by outsiders.

Beside almost all descriptions of Basotho farmers, positive or negative, loom the outlines of other farmers, perhaps better farmers, perhaps poorer, but not otherwise identified. In some cases we suspect they may be African from a different tribe or region. But in most cases the outline is unmistakably European. The outline is not clear and we wonder how close to reality it too might be, because behind these images looms an even more obscure figure, that of the missionary-traveler-administrator, often with little farm background of his own, who likely knew even less about the attitudes of European farmers than he did about African.

All is not image. The facts of grain surpluses in one period and deficits in another cannot be disputed. But the characteristics of the Basotho farmers who do or do not cause the land to produce is a less tangible element. Some observers have been relatively even-handed, and simply recorded Basotho agricultural techniques and customs with minimum evaluation (e.g., Sheddick 1953). But many more, particularly those involved with the technical side of agriculture, despair at Basotho farming practices and attitudes based on a preconception of "proper" standards.

So far, the discussion has been mainly of historic or ethnographic interest. But as we move into the modern period of planned change or development we find that impressions and interpretations of the Basotho are surfacing as prefaces to policy statements. Again, a few extracts will illustrate some common attitudes of expatriates toward Basotho farmers, and the relationship of image to policy.

The highly influential Pim Report (1935) launched the most extensive program of soil conservation and agricultural development of the period of British administration. The basic assumptions about Basotho farmers and their lands set forth in the Report were probably widespread at the time:

Taking the country as a whole Basutoland has many natural advantages and if the Basotho were a genuinely agricultural people it provides all the essentials for a substantial degree of prosperity.

(Pim 1935, p. 5)

and later:

". . . like all other South African tribes they have never been a genuinely agricultural people."

(Pim 1935, p. 29)

We see here the shadowy figure of comparison: the country was potentially prosperous if only the people were genuine farmers. But what is "genuine", and who are the "genuinely agricultural people" with whom the Basotho compare so poorly? We are not advised, but the strong suspicion is that most

African agriculturists would have failed the test.\* In this case, however, the implications for Lesotho went far beyond mere ethnocentrism. Non-genuine farmers cannot be expected to know what is necessary or proper for farm or resource management, and subsequent British conservation efforts did little to incorporate native contributions, except as labor under expatriate supervision.

But even non-genuine farmers have genuine attitudes about imposed technology which they can express either positively or negatively. Extensive terracing of Lowland and Foothill lands was one of the proudest achievements of the programs that resulted from the Pim Report. By 1959 almost 500,000 acres (200,000 ha.), or about half the arable land in Lesotho, had been terraced. No other program has since had such an impact upon the landscape of Lesotho. The terraces were constructed largely with powered equipment supplemented by native labor. But Basotho farmers never identified with these works and were prevented from abandoning them only by strict regulations. As it was, the terraces were largely ignored by those whose lands were occupied. Certainly there never was a significant movement at the individual or village level to adopt the practices or extend the works.\*\*

A contemporary account will bring the narrative up to date. In a recent report\*\*\* on a major area-based project the rural sociologist is at pains to explain the nature of farming and farmers in Lesotho. The area is in the south, the year is 1977, more than 40 years after the Pim report and after decades of discussion and experience in the field of development:

Serious farming, as we have seen, is prevented by the poor distribution of fields around the village, by the lack of tools and ploughing power, by the lack of labour, by the lack of such modern inputs as good seeds and fertilizers, and by the erratic climate. It is no wonder that the rural resident is not a serious farmer, when we consider all the obstacles to effective farming that he faces. It may well be simply the necessity to plough the fields in order to maintain rights over them in all that leads the rural resident to do crop farming at all. (Gay 1977, p. 18)

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\* It would be several decades before appreciations of African agricultural achievements appeared, together with differentiations of various technology and skill levels (e.g., Allan, 1965).

\*\* There are a few reports of Basotho actually adopting and extending British-introduced conservation measures such as contour plowing and terracing (e.g., Turner 1975, p. 19). But by and large the Basotho attitude toward maintenance of conservation works is perhaps best described as apathetic (e.g., Basutoland 1951, pp. 20-21).

\*\*\* The Gay (1977) study has been singled out not so much for its uniqueness as for its clear statement of a position held by an increasing number of people in Lesotho. In this sense the critical review is an unjust reward for an informative report.

At first glance the passage seems but another graphic description of optimizing traditional farmers whose actions are rational within the context of real and perceived constraints. In this case the obstacles are overwhelming: almost all inputs except the land itself are lacking and that is poorly distributed. Even the climate militates against "serious" farming. The rational reaction to such adverse conditions is almost complete indifference to farming. Thus although Gay's causal elements (constraints) differ from Ashton's (tradition) the net result is approximately the same: the Basotho are not agriculturalists.

What sets the passage apart is the repeated reference to "serious" farming or farmers. Just as Pim did not tell us what he meant by a "genuine farmer", neither does Gay explicitly define a "serious farmer." We grope by inference: must a serious farmer be a commercial (i.e., not a subsistence) farmer? Must he use modern inputs such as improved seeds and fertilizers? Are different arrangements of fields and a benign climate requisites for seriousness? And does it not seem that again another image lurks behind the sentences, another farmer to which a Mosotho of the Senqu Valley compares poorly?

The suspicion of another image is confirmed in a later section: (Gay 1977, p. 39).

If farmers have what they need to help themselves, if competent and enthusiastic farmers are located, if problems are identified that these farmers think are important, and if village residents are trained in basic crafts and skills, then a village is in a position to turn over the actual work of crop farming and livestock care to those competent and enthusiastic farmers, who will use the aid provided and the skills they have learned to help solve village problems. These farmers must be respected local leaders who would be accepted as managers of village fields and livestock.

The image stands revealed: The "serious" farmer is not simply a Basotho farmer without constraints. Rather, he is a competent and energetic individual, respected by local leaders, and furthermore, he is enthusiastic. There can be little question that such an individual would inspire confidence in the minds of development advisors, and hope in the hearts of donors. But these are strict standards with which to judge any farmer, serious or otherwise, and of necessity would severely limit the number who could qualify. The standards also are qualitative, for the most part, and suggest that the various parties involved in identifying "serious" farmers might not agree on specific individuals. \*

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\* Critics of development projects are themselves not immune to the lure of the ideal, the extraordinary individual who will solve the previously unsolvable problems. For example, Wallman (1969) has described the manager of a project in the 1960's as experienced in farming, knowledgeable about local conditions and modern techniques, mechanically adept (the project involved tractors), personally acquainted with South

It is not the intention of this review to criticize past or present perceptions of Basotho farmers. Comparisons of characteristics based upon stylized and simplified perceptions are common wherever cultures are in contact. At best, they offer refreshing insights into the range of human possibilities and experience. At worst, they reinforce preexisting prejudice. But it is useful to understand the nature of perceptions and expressed or implied comparisons to avoid undeserved judgements and unrealistic goals. The images discussed here become significant as they influence current action, policy formulation, or development objectives.

The issue is not whether the Basotho compare well or poorly with farmers elsewhere. Rather, we need to know the nature of agriculture in Lesotho, not only in its economic but also its social context. And we need to know what sorts of farming and farmers constitute legitimate and reasonable goals for the future. If only a few select individuals seem to possess the characteristics of "genuine" farmers, or of what Basotho farmers *should* be, then perhaps the country should pursue an elitist policy and place more and more of its productive resources in the hands of those few who qualify.\* But if traditional Basotho values of equality and egalitarianism are paramount, then perhaps Lesotho should accept something other than the "genuine" agriculturalists as defined by others and plan instead on different sorts of farmers who will combine the several factors of production, including off-farm labor as well as on-farm crop and animal husbandry into an agricultural mixture uniquely Basotho.

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African suppliers and markets, a native of Lesotho familiar with Basotho mores and customs and with a faultless command of Sesotho, politically inoffensive, a member of one of Lesotho's oldest white families, and "probably the best polo player in eastern South Africa." This combination of talents apparently endeared the manager to Basotho farmers and government administrators alike.

There is no question that the personality of key figures has much to do with project success. But such a paragon so dominates the analysis that, like the ideal farmer, it renders virtually inconsequential all other factors. The message is clear: without participants of unusual competence and qualifications projects will fail. But is it realistic? Unfortunately, it is exactly this requirement that is most difficult to fulfill: projects must be able to succeed with less than ideal personnel if development is to proceed in general, rather than exceptional circumstances.

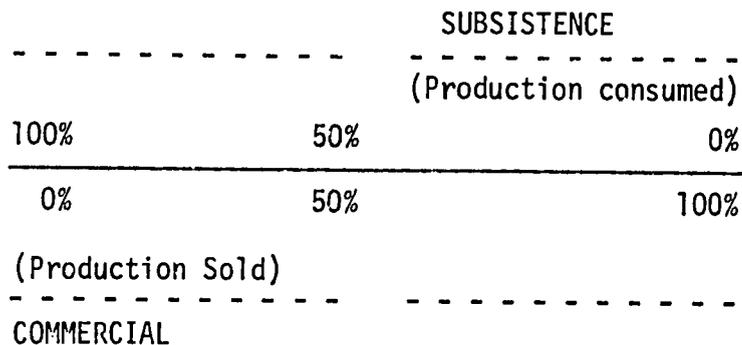
\*Past and present elitist or "progressive" farmer programs are examined in Part 3 of this report.

## II. ARE THE BASOTHO SUBSISTENCE FARMERS?

Before the specific case of Basotho farmers can be discussed it is necessary to examine general meanings and concepts. Like the conditions of peasantry, the nature of subsistence has been the subject of several searching reviews (e.g., Bodouin 1975; Clark and Haswell 1967; Miracle 1968; Wharton 1963; 1969).<sup>\*</sup> In the purest sense a subsistence farm family produces only what it consumes, and consumes only what it produces. At the opp site extreme a purely commercial farmer would sell all of his output and buy all of his inputs, including food and other domestic consumption goods. Since it is unlikely that there are many farmers that would qualify as either purely subsistence or purely commercial, the terms are best considered theoretical poles of a continuum.

Wharton (1963; 1969) presents the continuum diagrammatically (Fig. 1) and proposes that for ease of exposition the terms "subsistence and semisubsistence" be used to describe situations falling to the left of the 50 percent midpoint, and situations falling to the right be classified as "semicommercial and commercial". In this paper the terms also will be used to identify tendencies toward one end or the other of this continuum, not only in disposition of actual production but also in attitudes of farmers.

Figure 1.



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Source: Wharton, 1963, p. 48

In addition to the notion of degrees Wharton (1963) also describes the two facets of subsistence: consumption and production:

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<sup>\*</sup>Whether subsistence agriculture in particular or nonindustrial systems in general can be analyzed within the context of neo-classical economic theory or whether they need a different theoretical framework is not addressed in this essay. Those interested in this subject should refer to such works as Dalton 1969; Firth 1970; and Shanin 1973-75.

Thus, subsistence is often used both as a measure of orientation to the market and as an index of poverty. A farmer who is characterized as subsistence in the production sense is automatically considered to be subsistence or "poor" in the level of living sense. Although it is true that in most cases found in the real world a condition of subsistence production is accompanied by very low levels of living, we must remember that this is not invariably, even though usually, the case. Similarly subsistence levels of living may occur with fully commercialized farmers.

These distinctions will become clearer when we examine the particular case of Basotho "subsistence" farmers.

Subsistence living generally is associated with low levels of consumption. However, no analyst would propose using absolute physiological minima as criterium nor are most cultures so destitute that they operate at such a low "subsistence" level. Usually a "subsistence minimum" living standard is a combination of physiological requirements augmented by economic and socio-cultural variables.

But it is precisely these cultural variables that erode the usefulness of the concept of "subsistence" living. In some cultures bare minimum housing and clothing, and simple food production and preparation tools are the only augmentations to physiological needs. In others, a much more varied range of cultural baggage is necessary for "subsistence". Eventually, it is hard to see how any family that consumes all that it produces or earns (i.e., has no savings) can be excluded from the definition. \* But though the concept of "subsistence" level of living is weak, it is absolutely necessary since it is one of the few clues we have to the farmers' perception of their condition, and thus of the production strategies they might employ to maintain or change their situation.

What appears to be simpler concept is embodied in "subsistence production" by which is meant production for consumption, usually by the producing family unit or its village. The antonym "commercial" means production for sale, usually through established channels such as markets or middlemen. In most cases it also means sale for currency, a process which delights economists since it assigns prices to goods and brings farm production into the realm of statistical measurement, accounting, and analysis.

But determining the proportions and significance of production sold and consumed is not a simple matter. In addition to the difficulties of measuring anything accurately in traditional and generally non-statistical societies there are differences in the nature of off-farm sales that complicate the concept. For example, a farmer who routinely sells a small

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\* An analogous concept is "poverty" which in a country like India refers to people at or near physiological subsistence levels whereas in the United States it includes persons who own automobiles and television sets.

proportion of his products differs from one who only sporadically enters the market even though over a long period of time the average amount each sells is the same (Miracle 1968).

With this brief review of the concept of subsistence farming we can proceed to an examination of the specific case. Lesotho is something of an anomaly among less-developed countries. The World Bank's (1975, pp. 1, 37) characterization suggests a near-classic example of a subsistence economy:

Most of the [agricultural] production is for direct home consumption, only about one-third of farm output (mostly animal products) is sold. Farming is generally primitive and yields are low.

At the time of Independence (October 1966) the country was

virtually untouched by modern economic development. It was and still is basically, a traditional subsistence peasant [sic] society.

Others differ sharply with this image: For example, Cobbe (1978, p. 136) argues that . . . Lesotho is probably one of the most thoroughly monetized economies in Africa, with no part of the country, however remote, untouched by the modern market economy.

The apparent dichotomy is not hard to resolve. Production in the agricultural sector of Lesotho is primarily subsistence in nature whereas consumption is based upon relatively high levels of income from off-farm employment mostly in South Africa. Income from agriculture is significant only for the lowest income level families (Table 1). But for all except the lowest, remittances from migrant labor are more important. On the average more than 70 percent of farm household income is from migrant earnings whereas less than 20 percent is from farming. Thus, although farm production is primarily for home (subsistence) consumption, labor is a commercial product.

Table 1. Household Characteristics and Sources of Income (R1.00 = US\$1.15)

	Household Income Levels (Rands)				Average					
	0-199	200-599	600-999	1,000+						
Percent households	27	20	27	26						
Average household size	3.1	4.9	5.1	7.7	5.2					
Per capita income	21	83	168	226	151					
Average household income	66	408	859	1,739	783					
Sources of Income										
	<u>R</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>%</u>
Crops	26	39	66	16	30	3	75	4	47	6
Livestock	<u>20</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>85</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>51</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>204</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>90</u>	<u>11</u>
Total Agriculture	<u>46</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>151</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>279</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>137</u>	<u>17</u>
Lesotho off-farm	15	23	42	10	80	9	222	13	92	12
Migrant Labor (RSA)	<u>5</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>215</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>698</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>1,238</u>	<u>71</u>	<u>554</u>	<u>74</u>
Total off-farm	<u>20</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>257</u>	<u>63</u>	<u>778</u>	<u>91</u>	<u>1,460</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>646</u>	<u>83</u>

After van der Wiel 1977, pp. 84 & 88

Indeed, selling labor, particularly to the mines in South Africa, is an attractive alternative to farming. Mine wages have been rising rapidly in the last few years, from an average of R.0.77 per shift in 1972 to R.3.38 in 1976, a more than four-fold increase in five years (Table 2). These are extraordinarily high earnings for un- and semi-skilled labor in the less-developed world and not surprisingly, they evoke a substantial response from the pool of working-age males in Lesotho. They also are the largest single factor that differentiates Basotho from subsistence farmers elsewhere. For in what may seem a contradiction of terms, the farm sector of Lesotho is essentially subsistence in nature but enjoys a high per-capita cash flow. All development planning must take this unusual situation into account on pain of completely misreading the risk perception and incentive environments that prevail on Basotho farms.

Table 2. Minimum and Average Miners Earnings (1972-1976) in Rands  
(R.1.00 = US \$ 1.15)

Year	Minimum earnings per shift	Average Earnings	
		Per Shift	Annual
1972	0.42, 0.50 (a)	0.77	R 239
1973	0.50, 0.65, 0.72 (b)	1.01	315
1974	0.72, 1.20, 1.60 (c)	2.12	660
1975	1.60, 2.20 (d)	3.10	967
1976	2.50 (e)	3.38	1,056

Notes: (a) increased to R0.50 on 1 May 1972  
 (b) increased to R0.65 on 1 May 1973 and to R0.72 on 1 Dec 1973  
 (c) increased to R1.20 on 1 Jun 1974 and to R1.50 on 1 Dec 1974  
 (d) increased to R2.20 on 1 Jun 1975  
 (e) increased to R2.50 on 1 Jun 1976

Source: van der Wiel 1977, p. 69

Although opinion varies with respect to detail, there is general concurrence that the physical environment of Lesotho offers limited opportunities for agriculture (e.g., Rose 1977, pp. IV-9-10; World Bank 1975, p. 5). A marginal climate fraught with drought, frost, and hail, plus poor and eroded soils make meagre additions to the balance sheet of agricultural resources (Jayamaha n.d.; Wilken 1978a). Crops are hard won and on the generally small farms (average size about 2 ha.) and total production is too low to produce much income even under the best of circumstances and management. Except for a few specialty crop possibilities, it appears unlikely that earnings from the tiny plots could ever equal those derived from migrant labor.

There are other major constraints to agricultural development besides alternative employment opportunities and unfavorable environment, such as lack of product markets, mechanical and chemical inputs, technical information, and credit. But these are common to subsistence agriculture everywhere and do not merit separate review. Instead, the following discussion will focus upon a few topics that seem to best illustrate the uniqueness of Lesotho's "subsistence" agricultural sector. The situation in Lesotho could have been contrasted with any one of several models of subsistence farming in general (e.g., Badouin 1975; Clark and Haswell 1967; Miracle 1968; Ortiz 1973; Schultz 1964). Miracle's (1968) paper has been discussed and amplified (e.g., McLoughlin 1969) and criticized (e.g., Wharton 1968) and will serve as a general framework for examining some of the characteristics peculiar to subsistence farming in Lesotho. The following topics will be considered: risk and decision-making, isolation

and market access, weak commitment to agriculture, insecurity of land tenure, and labor and capital dependency.

### Risk and Decision-Making in a Subsistence Context

Miracle (1968) correctly links production-associated decision-making with living levels. He postulates a minimum desired level of consumption (MDL), or the minimum level of living a farmer expects to attain, and a minimum physiological level of living (MPL), or the minimum level of consumption necessary to maintain life. Unlike the MPL, which is more or less fixed for a given group in a particular environment, the MDL is elastic and largely an expression of culture. The MDL is always above the MPL.\*

Not only are true subsistence farmers largely dependent upon their own production to achieve their MPL, they also are dependent upon the production of a surplus to sell or trade for those other goods necessary to reach their MDL. Contributions to family subsistence are direct: what is needed and wanted is planted and in most years harvested and consumed to satisfy relatively fixed and known food requirements. Risks are primarily those of the environment, long familiar to subsistence farmers everywhere.

But for the amenities, some of which are equally "necessary", farmers are dependent upon some form of market or exchange system where the needs and wishes of many buyers are variable with respect to a single producer. Striving for MDL forces the "subsistence" producer into a commercial role: he must make decisions with imperfect knowledge about an uncertain market.

But in Lesotho differences between MPL and MDL are made up primarily from off-farm earnings, not from the sale of farm products (Table 1). In fact, growing food imports in recent years (Table 3) suggest that a substantial and increasing proportion of MPL also is being supplied not by subsistence farming but by purchased foods.

Table 3. Imports of Maize and Maize Products (metric tons)

<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>
12,498	19,928	52,627

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Adapted from: Lesotho 1978, p. 78

\* Although foods are a primary component of the MPL, status or prestige foods, which may contribute no more, or even less energy and nutrients to a diet than the traditional foods they replace, occupy a prominent position in the MDL.

The farmers' perspective is crucial here. To achieve a 20 percent increase in total income, whether to raise MDL or to meet inflation, an average family would need to increase off-farm income by 25 percent. But to realize the same total increase from agriculture would require boosting farm-generated income by more than 100 percent! Perhaps more to the point: to realize the additional 20 percent in total income from crops alone would require increasing crop-generated income by more than 300 percent. With-in prevailing constraints of mediocre soils, risky climate, poorly developed marketing structure, and low level of technology, the prospects for such dramatic increases in farm-generated income must appear bleak indeed to the average Basotho family.

What are the perceptions of Basotho farm families with respect to off-farm employment opportunities? There are no answers specific to this question. But available studies of work preferences suggest that although Basotho farmers may not prefer off-farm to on-farm work, they think of it as available (e.g., Guma, Gay, and Kumar 1978, p. 35). Given the discrepancies between on-farm and off-farm income generation, it seems likely that they increasingly look to off-farm incomes for their MDL needs.

On the other hand, if proportionate gains from farming are low, so are the proportionate risks, a fact that should have important implications in the Basotho small-farm situation. One of the ways subsistence farmers customarily are differentiated from commercial farmers is that the former employ strategies to minimize risk whereas the latter attempt to maximize production or profits. Presumably if subsistence (i.e., MPL) depends upon farm production, and if crop failure means either privation or reduction of scarce capital (e.g., sale of livestock), attitudes toward risks are of a different nature than if losses mean only a reduction of income (MDL). In the case of Basotho "subsistence" farmers if only 17 percent of average farm household income comes from agriculture then even total loss would not mean disaster.\* For the lowest income group farm losses are significant. But for the remaining 73 percent that depend primarily upon non-farm income, the possibilities of physiological, economic, or even social, deprivation from crop failure or livestock losses should be less threatening than for other, more exemplary subsistence farmers.

Yet the Basotho have not responded well to programs designed to introduce new crops and techniques. Although there is some evidence that risk elements continue to be important factors in farmer perception of farming opportunities (Gay 1977, pp. 148-166), on the whole it would seem that farmer reluctance to innovate must be a result of factors other than perceived risk. With so much of their income coming from sale of labor, Basotho farmers apparently suffer from lack of incentive to innovate, rather than fear of failure. As van der Wiel (1977, p. 57) says: "Rejection of farming is the rejection of a lower standard of living than perceived to be available elsewhere."

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\*The focus here is on reduction of income. Reductions of capital and the socio-psychological costs of livestock losses are ignored.

### Isolation and Market Access

Physical and socio-economic isolation are common characteristics of subsistence farmers everywhere. Isolation can be physical, as when farmers live in remote villages with no easy access to market centers, or socio-economic as when farmers are blocked from access to markets and modern influences by social or economic barriers. The latter is best exemplified in societies with two or more distinct language groups or cultures where one controls the economic processes to the exclusion of others.

Lesotho is such a tiny country (30,350 km<sup>2</sup>) and the people so mobile by tradition\* that even remote mountain villages do not suffer the near complete physical isolation found elsewhere in Africa. Instead, Lesotho is plagued with another pattern common to less-developed countries: that of peripheral development and external orientation (Morrill 1974, pp. 139 ff; Taafe, Morrill, and Gould 1963).\*\* The pattern becomes clear on a map of roads of Lesotho (Map)\*\*\*. Except for the "Mountain Road" now being improved to Thaba Tseka, all paved roads and most all weather roads are around the edges of the country, with spurs leading off to connect with South African market centers (Moody 1975; 1976; Wagner 1978).

Linkages from the east to Maseru are particularly weak. For example, it is difficult to travel by road from Mokhotlong or Qacha's Nek to the capital and stay within Lesotho. All-wheel drive vehicles can manage over rutted tracks but except for air linkages, there is no commercial transportation from eastern districts to Maseru.\*\*\*\* Feeder roads from the hinterlands to district centers also are in poor shape or nonexistent.

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\* Basotho mobility is exemplified by such continuing practices as trans-humant cattle movement from lowlands to highlands, migratory labor movements from all parts of the country, and commerce in animals and animal products between mountain regions and South Africa, all of which have a long history in the country.

\*\* For a review of the theoretical literature and studies specific to Lesotho see Wagner 1978. Village spatial patterns are discussed in Stevens and Lee 1979.

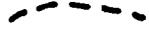
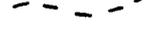
\*\*\* The only railroad in Lesotho is a one kilometer stretch that links Maseru with the South African rail system.

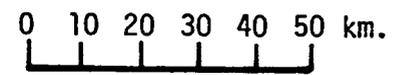
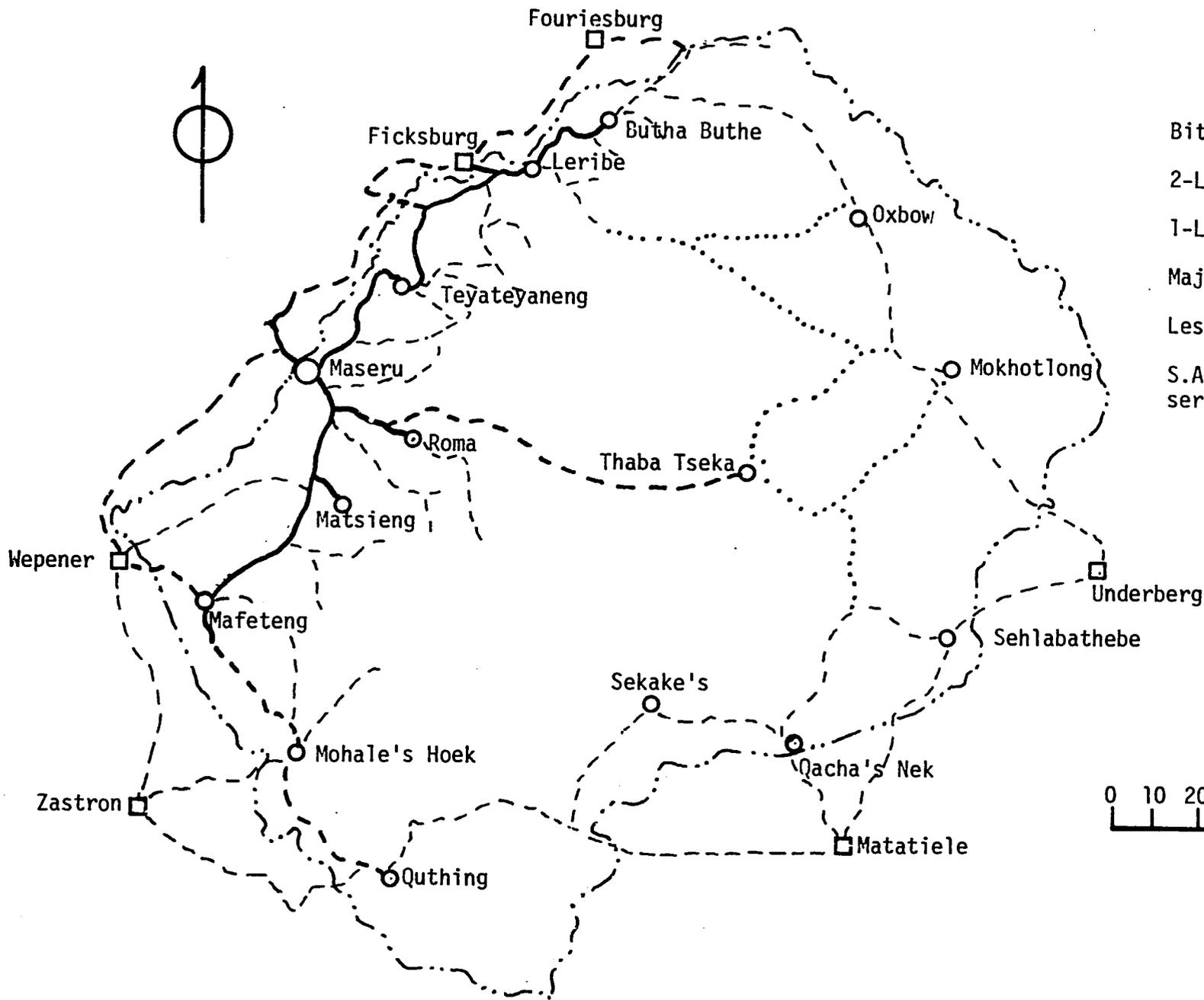
\*\*\*\* The proposed Southern Road would "remove the threat of isolation of the Quthing - Qacha's Nek area from the nearby South African towns upon which it now is almost wholly economically dependent and will open up access to Maseru and the Lesotho economy" (Berger 1978 I-1).

# Lesotho Road System



## LEGEND

- Bitumen Roads 
- 2-Lane gravel 
- 1-Lane gravel 
- Major tracks 
- Lesotho towns 
- S.A. Railheads serving Lesotho 



Thus, many Basotho agriculturists are faced with extraordinarily difficult access to potential markets within the country. Nor have they had much success in supplying farm products to markets in South Africa. With a much greater range of environments and a much larger domestic market South African farmers can specialize and commercialize to a degree impossible for the Basotho. Little wonder that, except for animal products such as wool and mohair, the flow of agricultural goods is from South Africa to Lesotho.

Isolation of Lesotho's agricultural districts, however, may not be as grim as maps seem to indicate. In fact, most of the population and most of the farmland is located in the so-called Lowlands (actually high plains) and Foothills (eroded mountain outliers) that lie in narrow, parallel strips along the western edge of the country, some 200 km. in length but with a combined width of only 30 to 60 km. Thus, most farming areas are within a few kilometers of the main paved roads that link the lowland district headquarters with Maseru and the South African road and rail systems.\* Communication is more difficult with mountain livestock centers and with farmers in the Senqu (Orange) River Valley and its tributaries.

There are no major socio-economic barriers to Basotho participation in market operations. Culturally the country is relatively homogenous: with few exceptions Sesotho is spoken in all parts and identification with the Basotho as a people and Lesotho as a country is strong. Although sub-tribal and political loyalties provide grist for charges of favoritism and exclusivism, in fact the degree of access to public or private enterprise is high for an African nation.

Rather it appears that the lack of Basotho orientation toward, and participation in market activities is of cultural derivation, reinforced by a long-standing pattern of economic domination by strong South African trading organizations. Early on some missionaries noted that the Basotho were not disposed toward commerce:

In this respect, Basutoland differs totally from other colonial possessions, such as Madagascar, where the native has a passion for trade, is always ready to open a little shop, or spends his life frequenting market places.

(Germond 1967, p. 480)

Sheddick (1953, p. 24) later confirmed these tendencies, but noted that small shopkeeping had entered the list of acceptable occupations:

A hundred years ago there seems to have been very little specialization of crafts and professions. Then as now, pots were made by women. Basket-work was undertaken by both sexes.

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\* One goal of the massive (\$30 million) multi-donor Basic Agricultural Services Program (BASP) is to improve access in the Lowlands and Foothills (World Bank 1977).

The practice of metal-work seems to have been restricted to the Tlokoa and among them to one or two individuals only. Today there is a tendency for individuals to set themselves up as self-employed whole-time craftsmen; as brick-makers, house-builders, smiths, and stone-masons. A similar movement is to be found in the field of commerce where individuals are established as beer-sellers, butchers, bakers, store-keepers, and café proprietors.

Although small shopkeeping is established, a strong tradition of market production and sale has not yet developed in Lesotho. Just as the massive grain exports to South African mine districts in the 19th century were handled by expatriate traders, so the commerce of modern Lesotho is dominated by non-Basotho. Several large South African trading stores located in Maseru with branches throughout the country account for the bulk of soft- and hard-goods sales. Most of the food sold in Maseru markets and cafés is produced on South African farms, collected in South African wholesale centers such as Bloemfontein, and brought to Lesotho by South African traders. There is no comparable organization to collect and distribute foods produced by Basotho farmers, and this may be one of the greatest inhibitors to the development of commercial production on Basotho farms.\*

#### Weak Commitment to Agriculture

The preceding discussion suggests that Basotho farmers, for one reason or another, are not strongly committed to agriculture. The situation is not unique to Lesotho or to the present time. Whenever and wherever producers can rely upon nonagricultural pursuits there is less pressure to initiate output- or productivity-increasing measures (Miracle 1968). Although risks of innovation diminish with reduced dependence upon agriculture, so do rewards in relation to alternative sources of income. The net result is a weak commitment to agriculture as a commercial activity.

What is unusual about Lesotho is the magnitude of off-farm employment. According to van der Wiel (1977, p. 16) there were some 200,000 labor migrants in 1976 of which 180,000 were male and 20,000 were female. Since at any one time an average of about 40,000 migrant workers were in Lesotho on leave, there were absent on the average some 140,000 male workers.\*\*

The nature of non-farm employment is important. For example, farmers who hire out as laborers on other farms with slightly higher levels of production or different crop mixes have an opportunity to learn techniques

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\* The extensive wool and mohair trade provides an exception to the pattern of foreign market domination. Local grower associations have largely displaced foreign traders and now ship directly to brokers in Port Elizabeth.

\*\* It is assumed here that there is a much smaller proportion of female workers home on leave.

applicable to their own plots.\* Working for a trader or participating in commerce is one of the most useful types of off-farm employment since it serves as an introduction to the commercial processes that make production of farm surpluses profitable. In addition, traders can be a powerful influence for encouraging farmers to try new cash crops, produce to market standards, and increase yields.

Home or small-factory production of craft goods offers another popular form of non-farm income. The problems here resemble those of farm production itself: if the producer-craftsmen do not control the marketing they are essentially wage workers for those who do. Furthermore, farm productivity has little to gain from the acquisition of craft skills.

But most of the off-farm work available to Basotho is in the mines of South Africa and unfortunately, mine-learned skills have little value in agriculture. As Fortes (1938, p. 87) puts it: "skills . . . cannot function independently of the proper material apparatus, the relevant social context, and the recurrent situations in which they are appropriate." Mining itself and related manufacturing in Lesotho are at such low levels that there is little direct application for mine-acquired technical skills. Mine work produces substantial income and a potential for investment in agriculture. But with little understanding of how such funds could be profitably invested in farm production, little experience in the commercial aspects of agricultural marketing, and some question as to the security of land tenure, the Basotho farmers' lack of propensity to invest is understandable. In fact, the most marked changes induced by exposure to modern methods have been imitative not of production but of consumption patterns. A high proportion of hard-earned mine wages is spent on clothing, furniture, radios, and other items available to those with cash (Table 4; van der Wiel 1977, p. 94).

Table 4. Expenditure Pattern of Cash Return Flows per Average Contract

<u>Item</u>	<u>Value</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Percentage of Miners</u>
Food and clothing	R250	55%	100%
Building	32	7	36
Furniture	27	6	34
Agriculture	23	5	59
Livestock	50	11	35
<i>Bohali</i> (brideprice)	36	8	27
Savings	23	5	20
Others	13	3	30
Total	R454	100%	

Source: van der Wiel 1977, p. 80

\* Even this type of diffusion has had only limited success. Too often employing farms are so advanced that their techniques cannot readily be adopted by hired worker-farmers.

The commerce of agriculture continues to offer unexploited opportunities for stimulating greater interest in farming. As was mentioned, the Basotho lack a tradition in the arts of buying, distributing, and selling agricultural products, particularly crops. But the development of a system of indigenous markets and traders could create a powerful stimulus to farm production and diversification, in addition to creating employment in the market system itself. The wool and mohair growers have enjoyed some success in this area and it is quite possible that with government encouragement, perhaps in the form of associations and credit unions, farmers also could create a marketing system that would provide incentives for improved agriculture.\*

### Insecurity and Land Tenure

The basic concept of tenure in Lesotho is that land is a national and social asset for the Basotho nation as a whole. The King holds the land in trust for the people and controls distribution and exploitation. He delegates much of his authority to chiefs, subchiefs, and headmen who allocate land use rights to individuals, generally male heads of households (Lesotho n.d., I:3). Land must be cultivated in a fairly regular fashion or use rights can be withdrawn and the land reallocated.

A succession of economic missions have stated categorically that the traditional system of land tenure is unsuited to economic development and that its removal is a precondition for economic growth (World Bank 1975, p. 8). This position is countered by some foreign advisors (e.g., Jenness n.d.) and by the Basotho themselves (Lesotho n.d. v. 1, p. 3; Phororo 1979b) who point out that the tenure system has prevented concentration of land in the hands of either foreigners or Basotho, a condition that would itself stifle development.

Land tenure in Lesotho differs in detail but not in essence from that found over much of Africa (Mifsud 1967). What distinguishes the Lesotho case is not tenure *per se*, but tenure in the context of the total agricultural situation, the main characteristic of which is the high incidence of off-farm employment. As has been noted, most Basotho farm families are dependent upon farm earnings for only a small part of total income. Yet it is rare for heads of households to relinquish rights to land. Instead they continue to cultivate in a fashion adequate to retain their rights even if inadequate to produce acceptable yields. Expected reasons apply: rights to land represent an important, perhaps the most important link to the village which is a basic social unit in Basotho society. In an unsure world land represents a form of security; insurance against the possibility of loss of off-farm work and a place and occupation for the later years when vigorous effort, such as mine work, is impossible.

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\* It is far from certain that government marketing institutions, such as the Produce Marketing Corporation (PMC) will encourage the formation of small, private, indigenous trading ventures.

Table 5.

## HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS BY SEX AND RESIDENTIAL STATUS BY SIZE OF HOLDING

Percentages

Holding size (acre)	Total number of heads of households reporting			Present on holding			Absent but still in Lesotho			Absent outside Lesotho		
	Total	Male	Female	Sub/T	Male	Female	Sub/T	Male	Female	Sub/T	Male	Female
Without land . . . . .	100·01	86·66	13·9	88·19	78·85	9·34	6·87	2·86	4·01	4·95	4·95	0·00
Under 2·00 . . . . .	100·00	74·80	24·63	65·94	41·51	24·43	5·83	5·62	0·20	28·23	27·67	0·57
2·00 – 3·99 . . . . .	100·00	67·71	32·29	74·06	43·30	30·76	6·47	4·94	1·53	19·47	19·47	0·00
4·00 – 5·99 . . . . .	99·99	73·57	26·44	76·11	50·62	25·50	3·74	3·39	0·35	20·14	19·56	0·59
6·00 – 7·99 . . . . .	100·00	70·46	29·54	84·47	55·19	29·29	3·41	3·41	0·00	12·12	11·86	0·26
8·00 – 9·99 . . . . .	100·01	69·11	30·89	82·35	52·10	30·25	2·26	2·26	0·00	15·40	14·75	0·64
10·00 – 14·99 . . . . .	100·00	75·18	24·82	85·19	61·90	23·28	5·34	4·58	0·77	9·47	8·70	0·77
15·00 & over . . . . .	100·00	79·52	20·49	89·46	68·98	20·49	6·06	6·06	0·00	4·48	4·48	0·00
<b>Total</b> . . . . .	<b>100·00</b>	<b>71·80</b>	<b>28·21</b>	<b>75·98</b>	<b>48·81</b>	<b>27·18</b>	<b>5·01</b>	<b>4·34</b>	<b>0·67</b>	<b>19·01</b>	<b>18·65</b>	<b>0·36</b>

So far, land tenure and commitment to farming have been discussed from the point of view of a male head of household who also may be a migrant. But since a high proportion of working-age males are absent, the actual operation of many Lesotho farms is in the hands of women, the wives of migrant laborers, widows, and other women without men.\* (Table 5) As van der Wiel (1977, pp. 37-38) notes:

The high proportion of absent male household heads has an important impact on the authority relations within the household. Whereas 34 percent of the heads of household are female, 68 percent of the households are managed by women. The discrepancy between the latter two figures is explained by the fact that husbands who are absent migrants continue to be recognized as household heads but effective responsibility for domestic affairs is vested in their wives. Only 32 percent of the households are headed and managed by a male.

Substituting female for male farmers by itself should not change the situation since basic opportunities and constraints remain the same. But in fact the risk and decision-making environments are markedly different in two ways. Some Basotho males are reluctant to surrender their traditional roles as heads of households and decision-makers, and may attempt to continue as managers of farm operations, making such decisions as when and what to plant, whether and how much fertilizer to use, and so on, by mail or message from the mines of South Africa (Table 6). This means that farming operations are disrupted since the resident women operators cannot decide on major farming operations. It also means that women may not be able to act on suggestions from government extension agents or development project experts, even in those rare cases where such advice is directed to women farm operators.\*\*

Table 6. Decision-Making on Absentee Fieldholder's Fields

	Fieldholders (percent of total)			Total
	Make no decisions	Make some decisions	Make all decisions	
Lowlands	58%	35%	7%	100%
Foothills	63	23	14	100
Thaba Bosiu Project Area	60	29	11	100

Source: Lesotho 1977

\* It is not known to what extent women may continue to claim absent males as heads of households in order to retain rights to land use, even when it is clear that the male in question will never return.

\*\* Male chauvinism is trans-cultural. From project plans and reports it is clear that most foreign-financed development projects will target on male farmers even though the majority of actual farm managers in the project area are women.

Perhaps more important is the risk situation from the women's perspective. Basotho migrant workers probably are no better or no worse at accepting responsibility for distant families than any other group of absent males. In Lesotho, there is a relatively high incidence of husbands gone for good: they voluntarily remain in South Africa on a permanent basis or are killed in mine work. Others return injured and unable to generate off-farm earnings or do heavy farm work. Even those who periodically come home may not remit consistent amounts, or may demand that remitted earnings be returned to them.

The result is that while migrant worker earnings form an enormous share of the average household's income, for any particular household they may not be dependable and may even cease altogether. Thus, from the women's perspective off-farm earnings have a distinct element of risk.

For women it is quite conceivable that the farm represents a degree of security much more akin to that of true subsistence farmers. It is a fall-back enterprise, a hedge against risk that gives it significance far beyond its value as an income producing enterprise. Although meagre, the yields common to Lesotho farms would go far toward feeding a family should remitted mine earnings fail for whatever reason. Unfortunately, there are few data on women in agriculture in Lesotho and thus, much of the foregoing is speculative. In a country where more than half the working-age males are absent from the farms, it would seem of critical importance that women's roles in farming and women's attitudes be better understood.

#### Labor Dependency

Small-scale farmers who must rely upon non-family labor differ in their decisions on labor allocations and in their responses to innovations from those who use only family labor. From a subsistence farmer's perspective, family labor is more certain than hired labor. In addition, its costs are hidden since they are incurred whether or not the labor is utilized. Thus, family labor tends to be treated as though it has no cost, or as a fixed cost (Clayton 1978, Miracle 1968).

In contrast paid labor is a measurable cost that inevitably invites comparison with benefits. Thus, although production may still be primarily for subsistence, the introduction of paid labor changes the outlook and decision-making framework, and farmers are forced into a more commercial perspective (Wharton 1969).

A common alternative to paid labor in small-farm sectors the world over is cooperative or exchange labor systems (*letsema* or *thusano* in Sesotho) in which relatives, friends, or villagers combine to perform tasks that are more easily or efficiently accomplished with massed labor. Land clearing, plowing, planting, cultivating, and harvesting are common examples of such tasks. Most of these systems require repayment in the form of reciprocated labor drawn from the family labor pool. Thus, in concept exchange labor differs little from direct family labor in that it is not paid wages. Even if host farmers are required to provide food and drink for the work parties the system is not necessarily forced into the commercial sphere since these "payments" usually come from domestic production. The disadvantage of such

pooled labor is that because of common seasonal scheduling most farms in a region need labor at the same time. Since cooperative or exchange labor systems do not actually augment the labor force, other than as they perhaps increase efficiency, they do not relieve labor shortages at peak farm activity periods (Ashton 1967, p. 131; Sheddick 1953, p. 23).

Another Basotho custom reportedly is to schedule vacations from off-farm employment to coincide with peak labor demand periods. The extent of this practice has been questioned. For example, van der Wiel (1977, pp. 48-51) finds only a weak seasonal correlation with fluctuations in mine workers on leave and attributes part of this to the lure of Christmas and New Year's holidays (which coincides with the growing season) rather than to the attractions of farm work.

Miners who return to work on their farms could easily calculate the cost of farm labor in terms of foregone mine wages. And it is likely that at least part of the trade-off for wages is leisure. Using vacation time for leisure rather than work makes sense given the relationship between mine earnings and farm earnings. Comparing Tables 1 and 2 reveals that crops contribute only R47.00 to the average household's annual budget, the equivalent of about 14 mine shifts (at an average of R3.38/shift). Miners probably benefit more from the rest than they would from the results of vigorous farm work. Little wonder that miners at home feel that they are on vacation and do not engage in farm work full time or with total enthusiasm.

One method of bringing labor and also capital, seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs into a subsistence economy is through sharecropping (*seahlo* in Sesotho). Since payments are a percentage of production, rather than in cash, the whole transaction is incorporated into the subsistence concept. In addition, unless sharecroppers take a fixed amount of the harvest rather than a percentage, they share the risks of production. However, as Sheddick (1953, p. 23) points out:

While it [sharecropping] offers to the peasant the immediate advantage of getting his land cultivated with little or no expense, it reduces his effective holding by a half, while the effective seasonal holding of the contractor is correspondingly increased. The system is producing a class of agricultural capitalists possessing an effective use of land far in excess of their normal entitlement.

In Lesotho plowing for shares (*lemisana*) is popular. Tables 7 and 8 show the range of sharecropping arrangements by size of holding. In this system contractor-sharecroppers contribute labor-saving equipment (tractor or oxen and plow) plus labor at one of the peak activity periods for shares of the crop. Government programs have attempted to emulate this traditional practice with varying degrees of success (e.g., Cooperative Crop Production Program; see also Wallman 1969).

Table 7.

**NUMBER OF FARM HOUSEHOLDS REPORTING CONTRIBUTIONS  
MADE BY SHARE-CROPPING PARTNERS BY TYPES OF CONTRIBUTION  
BY SIZE OF HOLDING**

Numbers

Holding size (acres)	Total number of households reporting	Types of contribution made by partners			
		Oxen	Crop seeds	Labour	Farm tools and equipment
Under - 2.00 . . . .	3 062	2 537	2 114	2 664	2 705
2.00 - 3.99 . . . .	6 952	6 060	4 821	6 645	5 784
4.00 - 5.99 . . . .	5 404	4 117	4 124	4 817	4 216
6.00 - 7.99 . . . .	3 442	2 793	2 480	3 014	3 161
8.00 - 9.99 . . . .	3 028	2 269	1 819	2 637	2 527
10.00 - 14.99 . . . .	2 120	1 821	1 407	1 653	1 737
15.00 & Over . . . .	1 245	766	590	1 055	1 004
Total . . . . .	25 253	20 363	17 355	22 485	21 134

Source: Lesotho 1972, p. 53

Table 8.

**NUMBER OF FARM HOUSEHOLDS HAVING LAND SHARE-CROPPING AND OPERATING JOINTLY  
WITH PARTNERS BY TYPES OF WORK ENGAGED BY SIZE OF HOLDING**

Numbers & Percentages

Size of holding (acres)	Total number of households reporting		Types of work operated jointly with partners							
			Ploughing		Planting		Weeding		Harvesting	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Under 2.00 . . . .	2 574	7.00	1 455	3.95	1 064	2.89	1 559	4.24	2 258	6.14
2.00 - 3.99 . . . .	6 793	12.20	3 730	6.70	3 226	5.79	4 556	8.18	5 635	10.12
4.00 - 5.99 . . . .	5 354	13.11	3 670	8.98	3 217	7.88	3 824	9.36	4 707	11.52
6.00 - 7.99 . . . .	3 276	14.70	2 068	9.28	1 706	7.66	2 365	10.61	3 071	13.78
8.00 - 9.99 . . . .	2 988	22.51	2 299	17.32	2 001	15.07	2 462	18.54	2 594	19.54
10.00 - 14.00 . . . .	1 998	17.25	1 005	8.68	845	7.29	1 238	10.69	1 920	16.57
15.00 & over . . . .	1 245	27.05	1 092	23.72	1 092	23.72	640	10.00	1 073	23.31
Total . . . . .	24 228	12.93	15 319	8.17	13 151	7.02	16 644	8.88	21 258	11.34

Source: Lesotho 1972, p. 54

Theoretically at least, both parties to a sharecropping agreement should be interested in increasing yields: the contractor-sharecropper since he will gain a greater return for his efforts; the subsistence farmer since he will get only part of the production from his fields. But several factors work against completely successful contractor-sharecropping arrangements:

- a) plowing relieves only one of the periods when labor scarcity can affect yields. Other arrangements must be made for other peak periods, (e.g., weeding). Nor do the agreements necessarily include other inputs, such as improved seed or fertilizer. Thus, despite proper original field preparation yields may be low.
- b) Partly because of the small and fragmented nature of Lesotho farms, scheduling equipment is difficult. Contractors often plow all the fields in a given area at one time regardless of local soil and moisture conditions that should dictate different schedules.
- c) Contractors are not as reliable or as easily controlled as family labor, nor is there much penalty for a contractor who fails to perform.

The sharecropping situation is complicated by the substantial number of female farm managers. Women find that sharecropping provides a convenient method for circumventing physical and social obstacles that inhibit their performance of certain tasks. As Rose (1977, pp. IV:5-7) notes:

One outgrowth of the growing land pressure has been the growth of sharecropping as a unit of production. It is thought that 25 percent of the total cultivation is under some form of sharecropping arrangement. It is further estimated that 60 percent of the sharecroppers are women. Women are not allowed land rights under customary Basotho land tenure system.\* They must sharecrop if they are without a husband. The absence of men from the household in 51 percent of all rural farm households adds to the growth of sharecropping. In these cases women find it difficult under the existing system of production and value system to prepare land, purchase inputs and make production decisions. It is simpler from the standpoint of traditional values to negotiate a sharecropping arrangement with a male farmer, with the consent of the absent male head of household, than for the female to undertake all facets of production.

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\* This is an oversimplification. Widows, for example, retain certain rights to land and may continue to work the full allotment originally granted to their husbands.

The problem of finding non-wage labor to care for livestock is solved by the use of herd boys usually drawn from the family labor pool. Should this be inadequate or impractical, the Basotho have a system of semi-permanent livestock loans (*mafisa*) that in some ways resembles share-cropping. Cattle are loaned to those who can care for and herd them. Those who tend the cattle enjoy use rights. For example, they milk the cows and use oxen for draft. Calves belong to original owners who thus enjoy the capital growth if not the earnings from their investments (Casalis 1861, p. 155; Sheddick 1953, pp. 20-22).

### Capital Dependency

In most small-farm sectors lack of capital, and of savings to generate capital, is a major obstacle to farm investment. Credit is a logical response but farm size and tenure arrangements inhibit extension of loans. The small size of individual loans makes processing and record-keeping expensive to lenders. Without formal, transferable land titles farmers have no collateral to offer. Both conditions inhibit commercial lending institutions from extending credit to small-farmers. For this reason developing countries often establish banks or credit institutions specifically for small farmers or for those who do not have clear title to the lands they farm. However, the economics remain the same and even government sponsored lending institutions have trouble extending credit to semi-commercial farmers without incurring continuing losses.

In Lesotho mine earnings appear to be in excess of minimum living expenditures and therefore represent a source of funds available for investment in agriculture. In fact, the average Basotho household currently is spending or investing almost R100 per average mine labor contract (approximately one year, including leaves) in agriculture or savings (Table 4: i.e., Agriculture 23, Livestock 50, Savings 23), or more than 20 percent of the total contract of R454. This is a substantial amount and percentage for a "subsistence" economy and by itself could be a powerful force for improving resources and increasing productivity. But beyond the hire of plowing and purchase of fertilizers and seeds, Basotho farmers do not seem to perceive investment opportunities in farming. Cattle, which represent both wealth and social prestige and which can be used for payment of bride-price (*bohali*) apparently are much more attractive. As van der Wiel (1977, p. 80) sums it up:

The relatively large sum of cash invested in livestock, particularly cattle, is the result of the superior facilities for storing and investing wealth that cattle provide and the inadequate alternative investment opportunities. In the form of cattle, wealth may readily be put to a number of uses. A man may use it for cultivation of his own fields; he may hire it out to others; it produces itself, to a limited extent, by natural processes. Moreover one of the main factors determining a person's social status in the village is the number of stock he owns. A family which wishes to rise in the social scale will seek to increase the number of cattle it owns.

The last sentence in the passage from van der Wiel is significant. Unfortunately quantity rather than quality of livestock is important in the Basotho value system, and the substantial investment goes primarily to maintain numbers, rather than to increase the economic attributes of cattle.\*

### Summary and Recommendations

The preceding review opened with the question of whether the Basotho are subsistence farmers. Clearly, they differ markedly from typical models of subsistence or even the more general small-scale farmers. The differences are less in size of land holding and methods of production, and more in attitude and orientation. But the differences are significant and it seems unlikely that predictive models of subsistence farmer behavior would work well, if at all in Lesotho.

The outstanding differentiating feature of Basotho farm and home economy is the pervasive alternative employment opportunities and the flow of earnings from off-farm labor. From this stem almost all distinctions of which the following list is only partial and somewhat speculative:

- Traditional and rising expectations (MDL) are more easily realized with additional mine earnings than with increased agricultural production.
- With a substantial labor and attitudinal orientation toward off-farm employment, commitment to agriculture is weak.
- Risk and uncertainty are more closely associated with loss of off-farm earnings than with loss of crops. This may be especially true for women farmers who have less control over off-farm income than do male wage earners.
- There already exists a source of savings and potential investment in agriculture. However, the land tenure situation, low productivity from agriculture, and social values inhibit investment in yield-increasing inputs.

In the following ways Basotho farmers more closely resemble their typical subsistence counterparts:

- The small farm sector is isolated from markets. In the mountains and eastern valleys the isolation is physical. In the lowlands lack of commercial orientation and indigenous market systems seem more important.

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\* Although most conservationists deplore the continued importation of cattle as an increased drain on the already overtaxed grazing resources, there is little evidence to indicate that the national herd is increasing. It appears that the sizable investments in livestock, mostly purchases from South Africa, replace natural losses and sales of live and slaughtered animals (LASA 1978, p. VII-5).

- There are well-developed traditions and institutions for cooperative or exchange labor and sharecropping, including methods of sharing animals.
- Agricultural labor is fairly specialized: animals and animal-related tasks (e.g., plowing) are a male domain whereas cultivating and gardening belong to women. Decision-making roles in the various task areas of agriculture have yet to be determined.

At some point differences in definitions become so great that comparisons no longer are valid. The Basotho are so distinct that not only is there disagreement on whether they are subsistence farmers, there is disagreement on whether they are farmers at all.\* At one extreme are those who argue that Basotho males are essentially wage earners, most likely miners, who retain rights to agricultural lands to preserve village social ties and as a hedge against loss of off-farm work and old age. Others maintain that they are farmers, or at least agriculturists by tradition, lured off the land by higher income possibilities elsewhere. A third and probably more realistic group hold that there is no one typical rural Mosotho; there are several: those who prefer off-farm labor, those who would farm diligently if they could make a decent living, and those in between with varying degrees of enthusiasm for village life (Guma, Gay, and Kumar 1978).

The definition of women's roles is incomplete. Only comparatively few women are migrants. The majority remain in Lesotho on family lands and undoubtedly occupy a critical place in farm operations and decision-making. But little is known of their capabilities, attitudes, responsibilities, or authorities. Accurate profiles of Basotho women as farm managers and workers deserve the highest research priority.\*\*

The matter is of more than academic interest. Millions of Rands are being invested by various donor agencies to "develop" Lesotho. The importance of political and economic relations with South Africa and with donor agencies cannot be ignored. But neither can the goals and aspirations of the nation and its people. The best of projects or programs is bound to fail if it ignores the environmental, social, and economic realities of this enigmatic country. The following seem necessary first steps:

- Complete an agro-ecological survey of farmlands, particularly of the Lowlands, to determine within reasonable limits what risk and production levels are possible and thus, what income expectations would be realistic.

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\* Contradictory views of Basotho farmers are reviewed in Part I, "Images of Basotho Farmers."

\*\* Although not specific to farming, recent studies of migrant workers shed some light on wives' attitudes and roles, e.g., Gordon 1978.

- Determine national policy with respect to agricultural production orientation (e.g., self-sufficiency vs export), balance or mix of products (e.g., crops, livestock) and nutritional levels.
- Survey Basotho farmers, their wives and families to determine with some precision their goals and income expectations and the types of incentives that would encourage greater commitment to agriculture.
- Conduct a program of special studies of the women's role in Lesotho agriculture. This should include examination of women as gate-keepers to the flow of disposable income, food, labor, and other inputs to the home and farm economy; women as input suppliers and as income or food producers; and women as participants in information exchange systems.

This sort of preliminary work would not create a viable agricultural sector in Lesotho. But it would clarify much of the mystery that now surrounds the Mosotho farmer. It might also clarify some of the mystery of previous project failures, and perhaps contribute to better use of development funds in the future.

### III. THE BASOTHO AS PROGRESSIVE FARMERS

with

Martin H. Fowler

In the preceding sections several explanations were advanced to explain the generally poor performance of Basotho as farmers. Among them were that:

- 1) traditionally, the Basotho are not farmers.
- 2) Basotho farmers are rational optimizers but must operate within strangling environmental, social, and economic constraints.
- 3) the Basotho essentially are wage laborers with only weak commitments to agriculture.
- 4) even if the Basotho did want to be "genuine" or "serious" farmers they lack sufficient land, labor or capital. In addition, farming offers poor investment opportunities since returns are low.

Individually the various explanations are not convincing; in combination they are somewhat contradictory. Within Lesotho there is no clear agreement on root causes of poor farm performance and therefore, no clear agreement on corrective action. Despite years of efforts and millions of rands of expenditures and investments, productivity remains low (Table 9). Little wonder that a sense of frustration has pervaded the farming and development communities alike for many years.

Table 9. Report Yields (kg/ha)

<u>Year</u>	<u>Maize</u>	<u>Sorghum</u>	<u>Wheat</u>
1950	1,180	900	1,010
1960	830	850	850
1970	520	700	550
1971/72	807	918	691
1973/74	944	1,008	745
1974/75	652	682	822
1975/76	579	553	798
1976/77	1,568	1,467	1,473

Sources: Collings, Donely, and Wickham 1977; Lesotho 1950; Lesotho 1972; Morojele 1963. The remarkably high yields of 1976-77 are difficult to explain. They may be in part due to enumeration inaccuracies.

Although there is no general agreement about what ails agriculture in Lesotho, the nagging feeling remains that the problems are largely managerial; that it is as much the farmers as the farms that need attention. Given the constraints and distracting opportunities already noted, it is not surprising that many planners despair of ever reaching the great number of farmers, quasi-farmers, and non-farmers who manage or mis-manage farm-lands in Lesotho. Nor is it surprising that proposals for elitist or "progressive" farmer policies surface from time to time. In these approaches agricultural development efforts would be focussed upon only a small proportion of the farmers. These *progressive* (also called *lead*, *master*, *better*, *advanced*, *model*, etc.) farmers have certain characteristics attractive to government bureaucrats and project administrators alike. They are few in number, usually comprising no more than 5 to 10 percent of the total farmer population, and thus offer a sharp and relatively inexpensive target for extension, credit, and general development activities. By definition they are "progressive", already using more advanced, usually more capital-intensive techniques, and are more receptive to new ideas than their non-progressive counterparts.\* And they are farmers who derive a substantial portion of their income from agricultural activities, which is unusual in Lesotho, and therefore, they are measurably more committed to farming than the migrant laborers, urban office workers, and other part-time farm managers who have little at stake in their farm operations other than maintaining usufruct rights and village relationships. If in addition these select farmers would serve as examples for ordinary farmers to emulate, then it would appear logical that they should be the primary targets of government extension and development efforts.

But before such elitist farmer programs are adopted they should be carefully studied. The record of failures in Lesotho and elsewhere and the adverse impact such programs could have on cultural traditions and development goals suggest that an attitude of extreme caution is appropriate. The purpose of this paper is to review the history of progressive farmers schemes in Lesotho, and to consider some of their cultural and economic implications.

The role projected by various planners for progressive farmers in Lesotho ranges from that of adopter-demonstrators who would amplify extension activities to the more extreme view that progressive farmers should manage an increasing share of the nations' agricultural resources. There may be a tendency to change from the former to the latter view during the course of a program, perhaps as anticipated adopter-demonstrator processes prove ineffective. The history of Lesotho's only formal progressive farmer program is illustrative.

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\* In many ways "progressive" farmers resemble the "innovators" and "early adopters" so long enshrined in the diffusionist literature of sociology and geography. For a review of the literature on adoption and diffusion of innovation see Rogers and Shoemaker 1971.

The program was implemented in the latter part of 1958 by the then-Department of Agriculture under British administration. Orders were issued to every assistant demonstrator\* to:

. . . find in his area a number of farmers up to ten who were willing to accept advice from the department and were at the same time genuinely interested in improving their farming system\*\* (Basutoland 1958, p. 15).

Each farmer thus identified should have following attributes and facilities (Basutoland 1959, p. 16):

- a) he should be dependent on his farm for a living and not be a migrant laborer.
- b) he should be willing to follow the advice of the Department on certain broad lines, such as adopting the use of fertilizer and kraal manure and following a crop rotation.
- c) he should have a minimum of six cultivatable acres (ca. 2.5 ha.) of land. This figure could vary in relation to intensivity of production.
- d) he should have sufficient draft animals, tools, and implements to work his holding.

These were general requirements, not to be rigidly enforced. For example, exceptional individuals who had gained success and/or reputations as horse breeders, poultry raisers, and specialty crop growers could qualify for the program as could farmers who did not own but who could borrow or rent necessary equipment.

The Department of Agriculture staff was instructed to give more and more of their time to the program. Demonstrators were to visit progressive farmers regularly, providing information and guidance, and help in acquiring tools, fertilizers, and credit.\*\*\* The demonstrators were the cream of the extension staff in the Department and it was proposed to use all of them to work with a maximum of 900 progressive farmers, or about eight per demonstrator. A change in land use was envisaged, with progressive farmers concentrating on cash and fodder crops and incorporating improved animal husbandry in their operations. Tree planting also was to be emphasized. All of this

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\* A junior official who had obtained a diploma from the Maseru Agricultural School, now Lesotho Agricultural College.

\*\* The use of the term "genuinely" is interesting. A.W. Pim (p. 5) would have been pleased.

\*\*\* The excellent Basutoland Farmer's Handbook was produced "for the use of the Agricultural & Veterinary Department Field Staff and for Progressive Farmers in Basutoland" (Brightmore 1963, p. 1).

was an effort to "raise these people above the level of surrounding farmers" (Basutoland 1958, p. 15; 1959, pp. 16-17). For satisfactory participation in the program progressive farmers were to receive Master Farmer certificates and badges to increase self-identity and visibility among their neighbors.

Initial reports were enthusiastic. About 350 farmers originally enrolled in the program which was described as "extremely popular" (Basutoland 1959, p. 16). In 1960 the Morse Commission reported that the Progressive Farmer Scheme was making an important contribution to raising potential return from both crop and livestock husbandry. Halpern (1964) visited the country in the early sixties and stated "at present, the most promising developments in Basutoland are the progressive farmers scheme and the growth of the cooperative movement." Tables published with the 1961 and 1962 Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture showed continued growth in numbers of participant farmers and total acreage (Table 10).

Yet despite these generally enthusiastic statements, farmer response as interpreted from figures in successive Annual Reports showed some disturbing trends. For example, although enrollments in the movement continued to grow, the rate of increase fell sharply throughout its short history. Similarly, total acreage in the program, failed to maintain the dramatic rate of increase that it had shown in the first years.

With an original enrollment of 352 and a target enrollment of only 900 it would be expected that initial high rates of increase might not be maintained. Nevertheless, the fact that the 1962 season saw only 5 percent additional farmers and 2½ percent more land added to the program suggests that something was stifling farmers' enthusiasm. Certainly there are no indications that a demonstrator effect was operating, i.e., that progressive farmer methods were being adopted by a wider group.

There is further evidence that even in this early period something was amiss. In 1961, after reporting that the Progressive Farmer movement was "developing satisfactorily", the Department of Agriculture Annual Report noted that:

In some areas there has been a tendency for the better farmers to realize the need for planning and in particular there has been a definite realization on the part of the more successful of the benefits of consolidation of lands. A stage has been reached by the majority of the farmers, where further improvement in farming methods is being hampered by lack of security of tenure, and fragmentation which the existing land tenure system perpetuates.

The report goes on:

Finally it is becoming increasingly obvious to both farmers and the Department that if the Progressive farming movement is to bring lasting benefit to Basutoland, custom and tradition concerning land will have to be changed. Land

Table 10. Progressive Farmer Movement 1959-1963

District	Number of Farmers Enrolled				Total Crop Acreage under Cultivation				Average Acreage under Cultivation-Per Farmer*			
	59/60	60/61	61/62	62/63	59/60	60/61	61/62	62/63	59/60	60/61	61/62	62/63
Butha Buthe	10	60	78	84	115	556	609	642	11.5	9.3	7.8	7.6
Leribe	73	79	93	83	464	562	818	846	6.4	7.1	8.8	10.2
Berea	47	82	90	97	557	1039	1144	1429	11.9	12.7	12.7	14.7
Maseru	106	132	190	201	744	1372	2049	1642	7.0	(10.4)	10.8	8.2
Mafeteng	16	28	32	35	157	409	304	274	9.8	14.6	9.5	7.8
Mohale's Hoek	8	27	38	61	50	234	194	430	6.2	8.7	5.1	7.0
Quthing	51	31	42	39	263	345	430	398	(5.2)	11.1	10.2	10.2
Qacha's Nek	21	21	26	21	-	171	183	175	-	8.1	7.0	8.3
Mokhotlong	<u>21</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>202</u>	<u>164</u>	<u>164</u>	<u>207</u>	<u>9.6</u>	<u>6.1</u>	<u>6.8</u>	<u>8.6</u>
TOTALS	353	487	613	645	2552	4852	5895	6043	7.2	(10.0)	9.6	9.4
Percent Increase		38	26	5		90	21	2.5				

\*Calculated from Basutoland 1961; 1962. Figures in parenthesis are larger by 1.0 or more from those reported.

which is well farmed has an "improved" value, a subsistence economy is replaced with a cash economy, and the question of security of tenure and inheritance become matters of overriding importance to the progressive farmer if the effort is to be maintained.

(Basutoland 1961, p. 15)

The next Annual Report of agriculture (Basutoland 1962, p. 26) noted that the Progressive Farmer movement ". . . continued to grow in strength and range of activities." But the Report again stressed the need for consolidation of holdings, noting that the farmers themselves recognized the need and that this augured well for the future of agriculture:

. . . which is at present adversely affected by an outmoded and wasteful system of land tenure. One of the main objectives of the Progressive Farmer movement is to create this awareness and appreciation among those who intend to make farming their means of livelihood. It is from these enlightened individuals that the real farmers of Basutoland should emerge.

The shift in emphasis is striking. Within three years, the program, originally established to improve farming practices, had adopted as a main objective the creation of awareness of the need to change the land tenure system.

The program already was experiencing difficulties: neither farmer participation nor acreage was expanding significantly, and there was no evidence that progressive farmers were having any positive influence on the bulk of the farming population. Linking progressive farming to changes in traditional land tenure may have been the final blow. Progressive farmers were last mentioned in the Department of Agriculture Annual Report of 1964, only five years after the program had begun, and thereafter appeared no more in government publications.

In retrospect it seems likely that a program based upon the concepts of (a) raising a select few above the level of surrounding farmers, (b) giving these few a disproportionate share of government services and facilities, and (c) encouraging active dissatisfaction with traditional tenurial systems would run into heavy opposition in Lesotho under any circumstances. Certainly it had poor prospects for survival in a period when the country was preparing to move from British to independent administration (achieved in October 1966).\* With all the problems of economic and political stability yet to be faced, the early 1960's were no time to threaten the nation's traditional egalitarianism and rights to land.\*\*

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\* This was by no means the first time that land tenure changes had been recommended during the period of British administration (e.g., Pim 1935).

\*\* Equal distribution of wealth in general and of the role of land tenure in particular is emphasized in the Second Five Year Development Plan (Lesotho n.d. v. 1, pp. 2-3).

Were this the end of progressive farming the foregoing review would be primarily of historical interest, a brief chapter in the evolution of attitudes toward farmers and farming in Lesotho. But like the persistent *teele* weed\* which when chopped off, sprouts again, progressive farming seems ever-ready to rise anew. Despite past discouraging results in Lesotho and elsewhere\*\* a progressive farmer inclination in one form or another can be found in most present and planned development projects and programs. For example, in the Khomokhoana Rural Development Project progressive farmers are "those who are prepared to accept new technology."\*\*\* In the Senqu River Agricultural Extension Project it is recommended that "key people be identified, those who are progressive farmers, innovators, and productive persons" (Gay 1977, p. 37). Preliminary documents of the Basic Agricultural Services Programme (BASP) advise extension workers that persuasion and motivation must follow channels characteristic of the society "through chiefs, influential villagers, early adopters, and then the general community" (Lesotho 1977a, p. 1 (of 15)). In the now-greatly expanded Thaba Tseka Rural Development Program "lead farmers" chosen by extension agents are brought to Project headquarters for special training (Thaba Tseka 1978, p. 9). Initial targets for the Farming Systems Research Project are to be those individuals or groups who indicated ". . . a desire and willingness to try improved farming techniques." By project's end some US\$8 million and five years later, "appropriate farming systems and related rural enterprises are [to be] in use by 5% of farm households in areas of project implementation" (Farming Systems, n.d.).

Other projects have focussed upon agricultural contractors as lead elements. For example, the Leribe Pilot Project, forerunner to the Khomokhoana Rural Development Project, considered contractors as representing ". . . one dynamic element in a system that is otherwise rather lacking in channels for improvement" and recommended that "individuals owning tractors or animals who cultivate fields for others carry out a high proportion of all field operations in the project area." In the project's view the contractors "constitute an important extension medium", have a "greater interest in farming, . . . are prepared to innovate and to invest, . . . and their technical expertise is at a higher level than most landholders" (Helman *et al.* 1975, pp. 42, 65).

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\*The *teele* weed (*Homeria pallida*) is poisonous to stock. The leaves, however, are used for tying bundles and for weaving skipping ropes for children (Jacot Guillarmod 1971).

\*\*Progressive farmer schemes have been tried and for the most part have failed in many African countries, including Botswana, Kenya, Rhodesia, and Tanzania. For general discussion see Kirkwood, Brams, and Brams 1974; Rogers n.d.).

\*\*\*Personal communications, Khomokhoana Rural Development Project.

The Government of Lesotho does not have a policy for promoting progressive farmers.\* Although Cobbe (1978, p. 152) charges that there is a policy "actually designed to produce only small changes in the incomes of the mass of the rural population, while slowly encouraging the emergence of a relatively small group of comparatively wealthy, full-time, modern farmers and rural contractors", no such position is taken in any official publication. Nevertheless, it appears that progressive farmer concepts are deeply entrenched in developers' thinking. Thus, whether or not progressive farmerism has been adopted as explicit policy, it has become effective policy in most project areas.

The reasons for the pervasiveness of progressive farmer schemes are apparent. Attempting to reach thousands of small, isolated, frequently unresponsive farmers is difficult at best, often unsuccessful, and frustrating. It would seem an easier task to introduce modern methods and realize increased production from a few "progressive" farmers than to mount a massive extension effort to reach the whole of the farming community. But what is apparent is not always real, and one purpose of this paper is to question the efficacy and wisdom of concentrating agricultural development efforts on an elitist group. It seems timely to call for a complete review of progressive farming as a development mechanism. The experience of Lesotho and other countries should be examined for whatever lessons they can offer. But in addition, several major issues need clarification before further scarce resources are committed to progressive farmer programs. The list below is by no means complete, but only suggests some of the topics that should be considered:

#### Who are the progressive farmers?

Many methods have been used to identify progressive farmers, from the *ad hoc* approach of some development projects ("Progressive farmers are those who take our advice!"\*\*) to the identification by fellow villagers on which the Senqu River surveys were based. But none of these approaches answer the basic question of whether progressive farmers have some inherent qualities that set them apart or if they are progressive because they already are economically distinct. For example, during the ill-fated scheme of the Basutoland Department of Agriculture the average holding of progressives was

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\* The draft outline of a "master farmer" program aimed at production of specific crops was dropped from the final version of the Second Five Year Development Plan (Lesotho n.d.).

\*\* Expatriate technical expert, Leribe-Khomokhoana Project.

almost 10 acres compared to the national average at that time of 5.4 acres.\* In addition, farmers in the program were required to own or have access to quantities of animals and tools that also were well above national averages. The recently published Guma and Gay (1978) study of attitudes towards farming in the Senqu River area found additional differences:

These better farming families differ in many ways from the ordinary families. They have more members, in particular more males at home. Only 1/6 of them have no men at all at home. Thus, their male labor force is better than for the ordinary farmers, and their production figures for all crops are much higher as well. . .

The Guma and Gay report documents these differences in considerable detail. Table 11 reveals that the "better" farm families not only had more and better educated male labor, they also had more fields, more equipment, more draft animals, and even more income from mine remittances! That is, "better" farmers had more land, labor and capital, both human and physical, than did average or ordinary farmers. The question bears repeating: do progressive farmers have more resources because of some inherent quality of "progressiveness", or are they identified as "progressive" by project managers and fellow villagers alike because for reasons yet unidentified they already control more of the factors of production?

Table 11. Comparison of Ordinary and Better Farmers

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Ordinary</u>	<u>Better</u>
Number of family members	5.59	6.65
Males in Family	2.57	3.46
Males aged 16-65	1.68	2.17
Males ever in mining	1.27	1.25
Males never in mining	1.30	2.21
Mean male schooling 16-65	3.57 yrs.	6.30 yrs.
Mean female schooling 16-65	4.50 yrs.	6.40 yrs.
Number of fields	1.80	2.26
Pieces of major equipment	1.8	5.9
Draft animals	2.3	7.5
Monthly mine remittances	8.40 Rands	20.60 Rands
Has bank account	32%	75%

Derived from Guma and Gay 1978, Tables 1.1, 1.3, 1.6

\* One argument often advanced in favor of progressive farming is that large landholdings are more efficiently managed and, therefore, more productive than small units. But preliminary analysis of farming practices in the Thaba Bosiu Project area reveal a strong negative correlation between field size and yield. More maize, sorghum, wheat, and beans are produced per acre on smaller fields than on larger fields. (Thaba Bosiu Planning and Evaluation Unit, TB Crop Data, preliminary computer analysis. Records from elsewhere support the finding that productivity is poorly or even negatively correlated with size of holding, (e.g., Lappe and Collins 1977).

### What is the role of progressive farmers?

Most commonly progressive farmers are viewed as early innovators who will, by example, spread new ideas among their fellow villagers. For example, the Leribe Project (Helman *et al.* 1975, p. 42) feels that the more capitalized farmers and contractors "constitute an important extension medium", and the Thaba Tseka Rural Development Program (1978, p. 9) hopes that "extension objectives can be achieved by training [lead] farmers in crop specific techniques and by letting them instruct their neighbors."

But history in Lesotho and elsewhere argues against such simple solutions: diffusion by demonstration is by no means an assured or even a well-known process. The hoped-for transfers from advanced to less-advanced farmers rarely take place for a variety of reasons, among them that the less-advanced farmers have neither the ability nor the incentive to adopt new techniques. It would be careless, indeed, to justify a progressive farmer program with all of its potential for disrupting village life and institutions on the hopes that somehow all farmers would learn and benefit.

The other role of progressive farmers, that of managers of the nation's agricultural resources, already has been proposed on some projects. For example, the Leribe Project report (Helman *et al.*, 1975) notes that certain individuals "already carry out a high proportion of all field operations." The Senqu River Project study (Gay 1977, p. 39) goes a step farther to recommend that a village "turn over the actual work of crop farming and livestock care to those competent and enthusiastic farmers, who will use the aid provided and the skills they have learned to help solve village problems." Although this approach is perhaps more straightforward than the innovator-demonstrator role, it calls forth important questions of equity and rural income and employment. Unfortunately, there seems to be a tendency to evolve from the innovator-demonstrator to the resource manager. Once the more capitalized, innovative, and aggressive farmers are recognized and provided with additional government support, it is probably only a matter of time until they will also want more land on which to practice their managerial talents. The process is perfectly acceptable, even necessary in free-market systems where land is privately held and the emphasis is upon production for profit. But would the processes be acceptable in Lesotho with its traditions of common rights to land and equality of income distribution, and its development goals of continued egalitarianism and increased rural employment?

### Who would benefit from a progressive farmer policy?

It is likely that those who would be identified as progressive farmers already are among the more prosperous in a village. The Farming Systems Research Project paper (n.d., p. 40) notes that "there is a high positive correlation between the early adopters or 'progressive farmers' in rural society and their level of well-being", and that ". . . care must be taken that those benefitting [i.e., the innovators] are not solely those whom are relatively better off." Phororo (1979a, pp. 82-83) expands on this:

Throughout the developing world there is a notorious tendency for the extension workers to concentrate their attention on those who are already better off, the supposed innovators who are deliberately sought out to lead the way by setting an example to others. The progressive or model farmers may serve a purpose in some aspects of agricultural development, but the approach tends to widen the gap between them and the rest of the poor farmers who are frequently invisible to the extension workers; they are the people who are rarely or never visited and who live largely out of contact with the modern world.

The problem remains whether or not the programs are successful. Progressive farmers start from an advantageous position. If government assistance programs (e.g., extension service, farm credit) are successful progressive farmers should advance farther and faster than ordinary farmers *even if ordinary farmers are following progressive examples*. That is, if diffusion from progressive to ordinary farmers is taking place (which is by no means assured) ordinary farmers will find themselves in an ever-poorer position relative to progressives. If diffusion is not taking place, the differences become greater even faster.

A related question involves possible retention of the progressive designation. Although at present land titles in Lesotho cannot be inherited, land use rights tend to stay within a family and certainly other important factors that differentiate progressive from ordinary farmers, such as animals and equipment, are inherited. The question is *whether progressive farmers would pass on not only land use arrangements and capital equipment but also their title of progressive regardless of the qualifications of their heirs*.

It is difficult to imagine a set of criteria so objective and so impartially applied that every young farmer would have an equal chance of becoming a favored progressive. If, in addition to being progressive, a head of household also was politically influential, it seems even more likely that the progressive designation would become a family possession. Once the title no longer was based upon performance alone, being progressive would degenerate into being simply the favored recipient of extra government attention and assistance.

A seemingly inevitable and for some even desirable result of progressive farming is that more and more of the nation's agricultural resources fall under progressive management. Presumably those dispossessed would benefit from rents for their lands paid in cash or kind, and by wage labor on progressive-operated farms (perhaps as laborers on their own farms!). But by definition progressive farmers are skilled managers, sensitive to operating costs and profit opportunities. It seems probable that they would select options, such as mechanization, that would substantially reduce the demand for labor. At a time when rural employment is one of Lesotho's main concerns, it seems reasonable to question the probable impact of progressive farmer schemes on rural employment and wages.

What would progressive farmers produce?

Most progressive farmer schemes are aimed at modernizing agriculture and increasing production. Especially desirable are those crops that enjoy a good return, or even an export market. But production of cash crops is not necessarily compatible with national self-sufficiency (Lesotho, n.d., v-1, p. 64) or individual subsistence goals (Pines 1976).

The impact upon nutritional levels can be especially severe. If substantial amounts of land are devoted to production for sale rather than production for consumption (subsistence) it is quite likely that the poorer members of the community will suffer a decline in nutritional levels. Efficiency arguments do not apply: although total and average farm incomes may increase, those benefitting are primarily the cash crop (progressive) farmers, and their increased production does not necessarily result in more food for the poor (McLaughlin 1969).

Focussing upon production totals tends to transform rural development into a technical problem, one of getting the "right", usually foreign-made inputs to "progressive", usually the better-off farmers, and can actually detract from basic development goals. As Lappé and Collins (1977) note:

. . . reducing the problem of agriculture to one of technology of production divorces agricultural progress from basic rural development. Agricultural modernization is but a mirage of rural development - a mirage that undermines the interests of the majority of the rural population to serve those of a few . . . To be cut out of production is to be cut out of consumption . . . Indeed, in many countries more food per person is being produced, yet more people are more hungry.

Before a program is launched that would place a major share of the nation's best farmlands in the hands of a few, market- or export-oriented producers, national priorities of food production, nutrition, and income distribution need to be clearly stated. Otherwise the seemingly cost-free benefits of a progressive farmer program could produce problems of great magnitude.

Is the concept of progressive farming compatible with Basotho cultural values?

Although mainly manifested as shared poverty, an egalitarian tradition is a source of pride for the Basotho nation. An equitable distribution of income in the rural sector derives from two factors: the relatively even

distribution of productive assets and the effect of migrant labor remittances (Lesotho n.d., v. 1, pp. 2-3).\*

The tradition of equality in poverty in Basotho culture is reinforced by elements of the "law of the limited good", that one person's gain necessarily is another's loss. Thus Dutton (1922, p. 91) notes:

The successful man is regarded with dislike if his land, by better cultivation, produces more than that of his neighbors; he has in some mysterious way stolen the richness of the adjoining land.

A democratic tradition is also found in political value systems. Although local administration and justice are controlled by a hierarchy of hereditary chiefs, they are "chiefs by the people" (Jingoes 1975) whose effectiveness is dependent upon the support of the population.

Progressive farmer schemes, in which a select few receive a disproportionate share of publically funded government services or of productive lands, clearly fly in the face of these social and economic traditions. If they were successful in raising progressive farmer incomes "above the level of surrounding farmers" they would further challenge traditional values and evoke the resistance inherent in the limited good concept.\*\* The argument here is not that traditional values must forever remain the same, but that acceptance of the progressive farmer concept would require significant value adjustments by the Basotho.

Structural and value changes are inherent in development, and if a traditional society accepts new goals, it must also accept necessary measures for achieving them and the cultural changes that inevitably ensue. These often painful adjustments are part of the cost of development, hopefully to be offset by benefits of higher living standards. But it is important that identification of national goals and calculation of social costs precede implementation of development measures. Too often specific procedures with seemingly indisputable benefits are embraced, and only later is it discovered that they involve undesirable social dislocations and contribute little to progress toward long-term goals. Although proponents of progressive farming schemes have been quick to identify immediate benefits, they have been less than rigorous in long-term goal analysis, and strangely silent on the likely social costs of such schemes.

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\* Basotho claims of economic equality may be more myth than reality. Substantial differences already exist in terms of income and wealth, and the differences will increase as the country becomes more monetized. But societies are based as much on myth as reality, and public acceptance of myth destruction is no less important than the structural changes themselves.

\*\* It seems likely that suspicion and resentment were factors in the failure of the progressive farmer scheme of the British administration.

For a nation strapped for qualified extension workers and burdened with large numbers of poor, conservative, and often part-time farmers, it understandably appears attractive to focus attention and scarce resources on those demonstrably superior few who would make maximum use of new facilities and technology and who might also serve as examples for the less-enlightened to follow. But history and tradition argue against such simple solutions. Progressive farmer programs are not necessarily effective in disseminating new methods, producing widespread benefits in the agricultural sector, or raising nutritional levels. In fact, there is little evidence to show that any others beside the progressive farmers themselves stand to benefit. Furthermore, they may create divisions that would actually impede agricultural development.

Compared to the risks of failure the potential gains seem meagre. Like a prudent farmer, a prudent society should carefully consider both costs and benefits before embarking upon a course of action.

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