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CASE STUDY – MATHEBE NUTRITION GROUP

(Uniform Sewing)

Conference on Income Generation in Lesotho

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Introduction

The Mathebe Nutrition group, the fifth LDTC Assistance Fund group, is located south of Maseru in Mafeteng District. By the time the LDTC started working with Mathebe much had been learned from earlier experiences with groups at Khobotle, Koloni, Ipopeng Leribe, and Lekhalong La Baroa. Specifically, trainers had developed an Intensive Training Model that provided group members with skills necessary to manage their income generating activities, and we were working for the second time with a school uniform sewing group. A unique feature of this group was their close association with nutritionists in the area. Our experiences with the Mathebe group are discussed in this case study.

Date of Contract Signing: 18 April 1984

Loan Total: M3000.00 + 336.00 interest = M3360.00

Payment Schedule: M336.00 quarterly;
M500.00 paid back as of 21-11-84;

Nature of Income-Generating Activity/Group Structure

The group requested a loan of M3000.00 for the purchase of four sewing machines (two zig-zag and two simple), five rolls of cloth, thread and buttons.

Since it was difficult for all 30 members of the group to work on the four machines at once, members had divided themselves into four groups of roughly six to eight members each, according to village. Each group works one day per week at the work location (the house of a member). Some of the members cut uniforms from patterns while others use the sewing machines.

The market for uniforms is comprised of schools in the area. The group sews to meet orders from these schools. There is a proposed arrangement initiated by Mathebe to cooperate with another Assistance Fund group in the area - Mathebe would advertise their uniforms in the Matelile area, and the Matelile group would advertise their school jerseys around Mathebe.

Progress on Income Generation

An examination of the bookkeeping records from May to July 1984 showed no income coming from the sale of uniforms. It could be the group is still spending a lot of time learning how to sew properly. However, twenty dresses were sold in July - August through the nutrition superintendent from Mafeteng, although the group hasn't yet received the money.

While no profits have been shared to date, the group has jointly set profit as at least one of their goals. In a June training session the group stated that "our objective is to get money through this sewing...all members must sew, sell sewn articles, and keep time."

Group Dynamics

There are about 30 members total in this group, although only 15 signed the contract. The group was started by a Ministry of Agriculture nutritionist who is still in close contact with the group. She always attends meetings. The leader of the group is also the chief of the area. She is not a dynamic leader but does not impede the group's progress.

Following are a few characteristics of individual members:

- Average age: 37, ranging from 23 to 57.
- Average education: Standard 7
- Average household income per month:
between M121.00 and M150.00

The income of those Mathebe members who had money coming from the South African mines (7 out of 12) was higher - ranging from M91.00 per month to over M450.00. Those whose income came solely from selling beer, livestock, and knitting and sewing made between M30.00 and M90.00 per month.

Originally the secretary and treasurer were performing the same responsibilities, but after the three-day Intensive Training was conducted at Mathebe, the group decided their newly-elected treasurer and secretary should follow more standard role divisions: the secretary writing up minutes, and the treasurer handling and recording money.

Ministry of Agriculture nutritionists identified the Mathebe group as one which would be interested in the Assistance Fund. The nutritionist for the group has always held strong interest in its progress, but since the advent of LDTC assistance she has become an increasingly strong adviser. She acts as the

coordinator between LDTC and the group, and took part in the intensive training along with other members. In the beginning, she tended to dominate group decision-making. Then LDTC brought up the possibility of her leaving at some point, since nutritionists are frequently transferred, and stressed that the group should not become dependent upon her leadership. Both group members and the nutritionist agreed with LDTC's point that they should be able to stand on their own. Since that time the nutritionist's style has become increasingly "facilitative".

There have been several misunderstandings between the district nutritionist (a supervisor) and group members. 1) when the group hired someone to help them design new uniforms with their own money, the supervisor brought in some of her own people to be trained without consulting the group or offering to contribute to payment of the consultant; 2) the nutrition supervisor had one idea about the price at which uniforms should be sold to nearby schools, the group had another -- it's not certain whose opinion prevailed, hers or the groups.

A recent monitoring visit revealed that group members wanted the school officials to pay the price they as a group had set, and so asked the supervisor to take them to the officials to whom she had quoted her price. The supervisor and the group went together to the officials and the members informed them of the price the group had set. This action was taken after group members had had a conversation with LDTC trainers in which they were encouraged to settle the problem themselves.

Cooperation with Other Organizations

The LDTC has gained a lot from working with the nutritionists, and hopefully the Ministry of Agriculture has learned from working with LDTC. Most important are gains to the group. Three benefits in particular of this network should be mentioned:

1. LDTC has better information about the group. The nutrition assistant has regular contact with the group. She can explain to LDTC why certain problems crop up, about changes in the group, etc.
2. Communication between LDTC and the group is improved. The nutrition assistant lives between Maseru and Mathebe and has a phone. LDTC calls her to schedule meetings with the group, and she calls LDTC if a meeting has to be postponed.
3. Group members are more confident about doing what they want to do. Before there was a tendency for members to let others set the agenda for them. Through working with LDTC trainers and the Ministry of Agriculture nutritionists they have come to realize that all outsiders can do is advise -- they as a group determine their own goals.

4. The Ministry of Agriculture Nutrition Assistant is more willing to listen to the group, not to dominate. She originally thought her role was to tell members what they should be doing, rather than advise.

Drawbacks of the network between the group, LDTC and the nutritionists have resulted mostly from personality issues. If there is a misunderstanding between the nutrition assistant and the district supervisor, the group may suffer -- although in this case resolution of conflicts between the supervisor and the assistant gave the latter more confidence in her own capabilities. The same can be said for resolution of conflict between the supervisor and the group regarding the pricing of uniforms -- group members feel ready to fight their own battles.

Attendance/Functions to Training

As frequently happens with the AF groups, it is difficult to determine which members are paid up-to-date, and thus considered official members. As mentioned, there are about 30 members reported, but considerably less are active. They meet about once a week, and during the LDTC monitor's visits in May, July, and August, there were between 7 and 12 members present.

Training visits to Mathebe were cancelled twice, due to the chief's insistence that all work in the village cease during a funeral. However, members who attend are generally enthusiastic at LDTC trainings and are disappointed if for some reason LDTC can't make it.

Training from LDTC

Mathebe is one of the first groups to receive all training through the Intensive Training Model (ITM). The three-day training was held from the 16th to 18th of April 1984. The ITM consists of training in bookkeeping, group functioning and financial procedures, and programme planning. Since the initial training in April the group has received two follow-up visits from LDTC: further training in bookkeeping and group functioning in May, and more training in bookkeeping in July. Thus the total number of sessions per topic breaks down as follows:

Simple Bookkeeping	3 sessions
Group Functions/Financial Procedures	3 sessions
Programme Planning	2 sessions

The next section examines results of an evaluation of training from LDTC.

Evaluation of the Impact of the Intensive Training Model

We evaluated the impact of our training of the Mathebe group in three ways: 1) administering "tests", or simple exercises, in bookkeeping, group functions and financial procedures, and programme planning. Ten out of approximately thirty were tested. As has been mentioned, these are the ten who have attended training sessions most regularly; 2) examining the groups bookkeeping records and minute book to see how well they are able to apply training, and 3) asking members how they have used their training, within the group or outside.

The following tables look at results of these evaluation efforts. Table 1 displays the frequency of scores on the bookkeeping test:

Table 1
BOOKKEEPING

<u>Scores</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
98%	1
94	2
91	1
87	2
83	1
80	1
74	1
68	1
Total	<u>10</u>

The group mean on the bookkeeping exercise was high - 86%. All got more than 50% correct.

We received the following responses when we asked how members had used their bookkeeping training:

- Five mentioned only that they now understand bookkeeping better;
- two said they used it with their church group or other groups;
- one said she uses it at home;
- one can now understand the group treasurer's report.

Table 2 looks at the specific errors made in the bookkeeping exercise.

Table 2
BOOKKEEPING ERRORS

<u>Kind of error</u>	<u>Number of Members Making Error (N=10)*</u>
No postings w/figures	4
Entries put in wrong columns	3
Could not match postings with headings	1
Omitted names of columns	4
Mistakes in arithmetic (+,-,x)	2
Balancing	0

*Members often made more than one error.

All errors were made by less than half the members tested, which reinforces the idea that members understood bookkeeping concepts well.

Table 3 displays members' scores on questions relating to responsibilities of group members and procedures for handling group finances.

Table 3
GROUP RESPONSIBILITIES/FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

<u>Scores</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
100%	2
92	1
83	3
75	1
67	1
50	1
33	1
Total	<u>10</u>

The mean score was 77%. Only two member got half or less correct.

Table 4 explains further respondents' understanding of the test items relating to group responsibilities and financial procedures.

Table 4
 GROUP RESPONSIBILITIES/FINANCIAL PROCEDURES
 (N=10)

<u>Test Item</u>	<u>Correct</u>	<u>Incorrect</u>
Treasurer signs name when mistake made with entry	4 3 (1/2 correct) ¹	3
Incoming money given to treasurer	8 2 (1/2 correct) ²	
Receipt needed for money spent	9	1
Treasurer or other member chosen by group can deposit money in bank	10	
Chair issues letter to treasurer authorising amount to withdraw	2 7 (1/2 correct) ³	1
Chair, secretary or treasurer should sign bank book after withdrawing money	7 1 (1/2 correct) ⁴	2

¹Understood only idea that mistake should be fixed.

²Said money could be given to treasurer or secretary.

³Said only that group should meet and decide amount.

⁴Said only that members should show identity at bank.

When asked how they were using this training,

- Seven said they now knew the distinct functions of group members;
- one said she knew the important of being punctual for group work;
- one said she was using this training with her burial society.

Members were then asked to list up to six programme planning steps in preparation for having school uniforms ready for sale by a certain date (a hypothetical case.) The steps listed were scored on both activity mentioned and the time frame. Scores are reported in Table 5.

Table 5
PROGRAMME PLANNING

<u>Scores</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
50%	7
42	1
17	1
8	<u>1</u>
Total	10

The reason members did so poorly on the programme planning questions was that most forgot to specify a time-frame for the programme planning activity they mentioned, and thus received one point per step instead of two.

Members were asked how they planned to use training received in programme-planning:

- Three said they now knew how to plan work;
- three said they could now set realistic time-frames for their planning activities;
- one said she was able to distribute work properly among others;
- one said the group now worked together better.

Summary. Group members at Mathebe did very well on the bookkeeping exercise, although only four gave specific uses for bookkeeping - five mentioned only that they understood bookkeeping better. As with other groups, the errors Mathebe members made in bookkeeping related primarily to matching columns, posting and figures.

Members also made very few errors on the financial procedures test questions. Most mentioned knowledge of the distinct functions of group members as being most important, rather than specific applications of training content.

Scores on the programme planning questions were poor, with none above 50%. It appears likely that trainers did not stress the importance of a time-frame for planning steps.

Monitor's Observations

The LDTC monitor for Mathebe made the suggestion that those members who did well in bookkeeping act as helpers for assignments given as "homework" by LDTC between training sessions. Newsprint could be provided for the group or a board with simple bookkeeping lines. This suggestion should be

followed up - helpers from within the group could also be encouraged in other Assistance Fund groups.

A review of the minute book revealed what group members thought important enough to record:

- Visits from nutritionists, LDTC trainers, other organisations;
- Use of group monies, records of fines, fees paid, payments for dresses bought by members;
- Contributions of food and utensils for group meetings;
- Recruitment strategies (involvement in Agric shows so that husbands would be encouraged to let wives join group);
- Policies on loaning money to group members plus interest charges;
- Discussions about loan request to LDTC - whether it should be for sewing machines or pigs (decision made to stay with sewing).

The monitor also summarised some of the strengths of this group: Group members were concerned enough about their sewing skills to hire a trainer for five weeks to show them how to cut from patterns. Cost to the group was M180.00. As discussed in a previous section, this developed into conflict when the District Nutritionist decided to bring others along to the training, but nonetheless it was initiative on the group's part.

Weaknesses in the group were due to what are now seen as the normal "growing pains" of groups trying to make their income generating activity work.

Group's Future Plans

Members had a number of ideas for future activities:

- Five said they wanted to sew in the cooperative building, or get another site that would belong to them;
- four said group membership should expand;
- three said they should diversify their sewing and work on trousers and "lishoeshoe";
- three said more sewing machines were needed;
- two said interpersonal relations should be improved;

- one said the group should increase sales to schools;
- one said they should start vegetable production;
- one said profits should be shared;
- one said the group should first consolidate present activities before expanding further.

Lessons Learned by LDTC.

1. The Intensive Training Model can yield good results. The Mathebe group received more thorough training than other groups and performed better. Given that the ITM has proved functional to the group's needs, further training is unnecessary, except perhaps in programme planning, which was not sufficiently explained. Future LDTC assistance should be confined to advisory visits.
2. LDTC's model for the role of development workers with rural groups is perceived as useful, and has been at least partially adopted by others. As mentioned, the style of nutritionists at two levels changed after they worked with LDTC and the group. Witnessing LDTC's supportive, rather than directive approach toward the group encouraged the nutritionists to work more at helping the group towards self-reliance.
3. Group members who do well in training can serve as links between LDTC and the group. Often too much time passes between training sessions. LDTC could train members who perform well in training and who are enthusiastic about helping their fellow group members to facilitate learning and practice of Assistance Fund concepts. These helpers could be equipped with distance education materials to use with the group.