FEATURE STORY

POVERTY IN A RISING AFRICA

Africa experienced robust economic growth over the past two decades, growing at an average annual rate of 4.5 percent. Did this growth lead to substantial improvements in well-being? Did household income rise and poverty fall? Did other dimensions of well-being, including education, health, physical security, and self-determination improve? Did all countries and population groups benefit equally or did progress come at the expense of rising inequality?

The answers have been unclear, in part because poverty data on Africa are weak. The lack of reliable and timely statistics on Africa across a range of areas, including poverty, is increasingly recognized as a matter demanding greater international attention. Working with countries and partners, the World Bank Group will ensure household-level consumption and expenditure surveys every three years in 78 countries. The United Nations’ post-MDG framework calls for a ‘data revolution’ to provide timely and reliable household surveys and other statistics (such as indicators from national accounts). If it occurs, such a revolution will surely change the terms of the debate about living standards in Africa, which is now often dominated by data and methodological aspects. Data quality considerations remain very much at the forefront of any assessment of poverty in Africa.

POVERTY DATA ON AFRICA ARE WEAK AND NEED STRENGTHENING

According to the World Bank’s PovcalNet, the share of Africa’s population consuming less than USD 1.90 a day (in 2011 international purchasing power parity [PPP] dollars) declined, falling from 56 percent in 1990 to 43 percent in 2012. However, this estimate is based on surveys in a subsample of countries that cover only half to two-thirds of the population. For the remaining population, the poverty rate was imputed from surveys that were often several years old. For five countries (Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Somalia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe), which together represent 5 percent of the African population, no data to measure poverty were available.

Comparable, good-quality household consumption surveys, conducted at regular intervals, are the building blocks for measuring monetary poverty and inequality. Tracking poverty in Africa is difficult because the data are deficient on all three counts.

Countries in Africa, on average, conducted 3.8 consumption surveys since 1990 (about half as many as the rest of the developing world), and only 1.6 of them were comparable. Equally, if not
even more important, are concerns about the comparability and quality of the underlying household survey and price data. Guinea and Mali, for example, each fielded four surveys since the mid-1990s, but no two of these surveys are considered comparable for measuring poverty. In 2012, only 25 out of 48 countries had conducted at least two consumption surveys over the past decade. Taking comparability into account, only 27 out of 48 countries had at least two surveys from 1990 to 2012 with which to track poverty trends (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Lack of comparable survey in Africa makes it difficult to measure poverty trends

Other data needed to estimate poverty trends also face critical deficiencies. For example, data on price changes, which are used to convert consumption values to the benchmark year of the global poverty line, suffer from a number of issues. Among these concerns are the dated data on consumption patterns used to weight price data for a consumer price index. As of July 2012, for example, 13 percent of the African population was living in countries in which the CPI basket was based on data from the...
Only half of the countries had weights based on consumption within seven years of 2012. Secondly, the price data are from urban markets in as much as one-third of the countries. Availability of census data, critical for sample frames and national representativeness of survey data, has been improving. Still, eight countries, estimated to be about 13 percent of Africa’s population, had no census in the 2010 round (2005-14).

Insufficient funding and low capacity only partly explain the weakness of poverty statistics in Africa. Prevailing political arrangements often favor less (or less autonomous) funding for statistics. In some countries donor financing has replaced domestic financing, but the interests of donors are not always aligned with the interests of governments. Alternative financing models are needed. Regional cooperation and peer learning, as well as clearer international standards for poverty measurement, could help improve technical quality and consistency.

Better data can lead to better decisions and better lives. The Program for the Improvement of Surveys and the Measurement of Living Conditions in Latin America and the Caribbean (known by its acronym in Spanish, MECOVI) provides a compelling model for achieving better poverty data.

POVERTY IN AFRICA MAY BE LOWER THAN CURRENT ESTIMATES SUGGEST, BUT THERE ARE MORE POOR PEOPLE ON THE CONTINENT TODAY THAN THERE WERE IN 1990

According to World Bank estimates from household surveys, the share of people in Africa living on less than USD 1.90 a day fell from 57 percent in 1990 to 43 percent in 2012. Limiting the estimation to comparable surveys of good quality, drawing on information from non-consumption surveys, and applying price deflators other than the consumer price index suggest that poverty may have declined by more (Figure 2). However, even under the most optimistic alternative scenario, there were many more poor people in Africa in 2012 than there were in 1990 (more than 330 million, up from about 280 million), as a result of rapid population growth.

Africa will not meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of halving poverty by 2015 and projections are that the world’s poor will be increasingly concentrated in poverty between 1996 and 2012. Rural areas remain much poorer than urban areas, although the gap narrowed. The gap in the poverty rate between urban and rural areas also declined (from 35 percentage points to 28 percentage points). However, the ratio of rural to urban poverty rose (from 2.0 to 2.6), because the rate of poverty reduction was higher in urban areas.

The poverty rate among female-headed households is lower than among male-headed households, but households headed by widows are worse off (and these results may change once differences in demographic composition are taken into account). Poverty is a persistent condition for many poor; three out of five poor are chronically poor. Because Africa’s poor appear to be clustered around the poverty line, a small positive shock to incomes could lift...
many out of poverty, but a small negative shock could drive as many into poverty.

**NON-MONETARY DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING IMPROVED, BUT LEVELS REMAIN LOW AND PROGRESS HAS LEVELLED OFF**

By many dimensions, well-being in Africa improved between 1995 and 2012. Adult literacy rates increased 4 percentage points. Life expectancy at birth rose 6.2 years and the prevalence of chronic malnutrition among children under five fell 6 percentage points. The number of deaths from politically motivated violence declined, and both tolerance of and incidence of gender-based domestic violence dropped. Scores on voice and accountability indicators rose slightly, and there was a trend toward greater participation of women in household decision-making processes.

These improvements notwithstanding, the levels of achievement remain low across these domains and the rate of progress is leveling off. Despite the increase in school enrollment, more than two out of five adults are still unable to read or write, and the quality of education is very low. About three-quarters of sixth graders in Malawi and Zambia cannot read for meaning, providing just one example of the school quality challenge. The need to reinvigorate efforts to tackle Africa’s basic educational challenge and build Africa’s future human capital is urgent.

Health outcomes mirror the results for literacy; progress is occurring but outcomes remain the worst in the world. Nearly two in five children are malnourished and progress in immunization rates and bednet distribution is slowing.

Africans enjoyed considerably more peace in the 2000s than they did in earlier decades, but the number of violent events has been on the rise since 2010, reaching four times the level of the mid-1990s. Tolerance of domestic violence (at 30 percent of the population) is still twice as high as it is in the rest of the developing world. Greater tolerance of domestic violence and less empowered decision-making among younger (compared with older) women suggest that a generational shift in mindset is still to come. Africa also remains among the bottom performers in terms of voice and accountability.

**Beyond these region-wide trends, four findings stand out:**

- Fragile countries tend to perform worse than other countries, confirming the pernicious effects of conflict.
- There is a worrisome penalty to residing in a resource-rich country.
- Women can expect to live in good health 1.6 years longer than men but, among children under 5, it is girls, not boys, who are less likely to be malnourished (by 5 percentage points). Illiteracy remains substantially higher among women, women suffer high rates of domestic violence, and women are more curtailed than men in their access to information and less free to make decisions.
- Women and children in households with better-educated women score decisively more across dimensions (health, violence, and freedom in decision). More rapidly improving female education would be game-changing in Africa.

**INEQUALITY PATTERNS VARY ACROSS THE REGION**

Of the 10 most unequal countries in the world today, seven are in Africa. But excluding these countries (most of which are in Southern Africa and five of which have populations of less than five million) and controlling for country-level income, Africa appears to have inequality levels comparable to developing countries in other parts of the world.

Despite Africa’s double decade of growth and the important role natural resources played in that growth, there is no evidence of a systematic increase in inequality within countries in the region; for the set of countries for which inequality trends can be measured, inequality increased in about half and decreased in about half. Inequality tends to fall as poverty declines. However, in several countries poverty fell despite increasing inequality (Figure 4). In these countries, the growth in mean consumption was large enough to offset the rise in inequality.

Spatial inequalities (urban-rural differences and differences across regions) and education gaps between households account for a large share of overall inequality in many countries. Ignoring national boundaries, the Africa-wide Gini index rose by almost 9 percent (from 0.52 to 0.56) between 1993 and 2008; this increase reflects widening gaps between countries.

Inequality across households is the product of many forces. The circumstances in which one is born—for example, in a rural area or to uneducated parents—are one important force. Inequality of opportunity (or ascriptive inequality) is the extent to which such circumstances dictate a large part of the outcomes of individuals in adulthood. The share of inequality that can be attributed to inequality of opportunity ranges from about 10-15 percent of total inequality. But these estimates of inequality of opportunity represent a lower bound, because many circumstance variables (family wealth, parenting time, the quality of education) are not observed in household surveys and hence cannot be considered in the estimation. Another approach to measuring inequality of opportunity is to examine intergenerational mobility in education and occupation—the extent to which the daughter of a woman who has never been to school will complete secondary
or the son of a farmer will work in manufacturing. Where we have data, we do find that this mobility has improved, but it is still low, which perpetuates inequality.

Finally, the report notes that household surveys fail to capture high net worth individuals. In Africa, these numbers of such individuals and their wealth has increased. What do these increases reveal about inequality? Given the limited data on these extremely wealthy individuals, there is no straightforward answer. The source of wealth is seen to matter, particularly for sectors where rent-seeking behavior is more likely. The role of political connections in the wealth-generating process could have implications for development and growth. These include ‘rent-thick’ sectors, such as real estate, infrastructure, construction, mining, telecommunications, cement, and media, where the influence of political connections and the potential for rent extraction are important. As more data become available to track this in the region, more analytical evidence will shed light on how extreme wealth matters for growth and inequality.

The World Bank recently teamed up with a number of partners to prepare a report designed to contribute to the ongoing dialogue among policymakers and development practitioners about measures to reduce the vulnerability and enhance the resilience of populations living in drylands regions of sub-Saharan Africa. The two lead authors of the report, Raffaello Cervigni (Lead Environmental Economist, Environment and Natural Resources Global Practice) and Michael Morris (Lead Agriculture Economist, Agriculture Global Practice) share some important findings with us.

**WHAT IS THE OVERALL GOAL OF THIS STUDY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

**RAFFAELLO:** Drylands are at the core of Africa’s development challenge. They make up about 43 percent of the region’s land surface, account for about 75 percent of the area used for agriculture, and are home to about 50 percent of the population, including a disproportionate share of the poor. Due to complex interactions among many factors, vulnerability in drylands is high and rising, jeopardizing the long-term livelihood prospects for hundreds of millions of people. Climate change, which is expected to increase the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, will exacerbate this challenge.

**MICHAE:** Most of the people living in the drylands depend on natural resource-based livelihood activities, such as herding and farming, but the capability of these activities to provide stable and adequate incomes is eroding. Rapid population growth is putting pressure on a deteriorating resource base and creating conditions under which extreme weather events, unexpected spikes in global food and fuel prices, or other exogenous shocks can easily precipitate full-blown humanitarian crises and fuel violent social conflicts. Because they are forced to address urgent short-term needs, many households have resorted to unsustainable practices, resulting in severe land degradation, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss.

If the current situation is precarious, the future promises to be even more challenging. By 2030, the number of people living in the drylands of East and West Africa is expected to increase by 65 to 80 percent (depending on the fertility scenario). Over the same period, climate change could result in an expansion of the area classified as drylands, by as much as 20 percent under some scenarios, for the region as a whole, with much larger increases in some countries. This would bring more people into an even more challenging environment.

**HOW CAN EXISTING LIVELIHOODS BE MADE MORE RESILIENT IN THE SHORT TERM?**

**RAFFAELLO:** Proven technologies are already available that could greatly increase the productivity of existing livelihood strategies in the short run. Livestock-keepers in the drylands can be made more resilient through investments in improved management practices combined with support to new, complementary income sources. Improved crop production technologies can deliver sizeable resilience benefits by boosting productivity in rain-fed agriculture. Adding trees to current farming systems can further increase resilience. Irrigation can provide an important buffer against droughts, particularly in the less arid parts of the drylands. Integrated landscape management could help to restore degraded areas in the drylands, boost productivity, and improve livelihoods. These measures to improve livelihoods strategies can be supplemented by social protection programs, which can not only provide crucial safety nets to protect the most vulnerable people in times of crisis but also help build resilience at the household and community levels.
AND IN THE LONG TERM?

MICHAEL: Our analysis suggests that the predominant livelihood strategies in the drylands will have to change. The higher population density that will prevail in the future is not consistent with continued widespread reliance on traditional dryland livelihood strategies such as livestock-keeping and agriculture, which are based on harvesting of ecosystem services and are very heavily reliant on natural capital. The natural resource base will not be able to support denser populations without degradation and competition for resources, leading to conflict. As population growth outstrips the carrying capacity of the natural resource base on which most current livelihoods depend, livelihood strategies will have to shift to activities more reliant on human and physical capital, and those that complement use of natural resources with other inputs. This shift implies a gradual transition, not an abrupt wholesale conversion of large numbers of people from one set of activities to a different set of activities. Traditional livelihood strategies will need to evolve by adding human and physical capital to make use of natural resources more productive and sustainable.

As part of the larger transformation, significant numbers of people will have to exit from agricultural and natural resource-based livelihoods to seek employment in other sectors. Among other things, this means that the solution to dryland problems will come to a large extent from outside the drylands.

Short- and medium-term measures, designed to improve the productivity and stability of current agriculture and natural resource-based livelihood strategies and to ensure their sustainability, will have to be complemented with long-term measures to facilitate the transformation. Two broad sets of interventions will be needed. First, public policy will need to encourage investment in human capital, specifically in areas such as education and vocational training, health and nutrition, and fertility management. Second, public policy will also need to encourage investment in physical capital, for things such as transport infrastructure, communications, and housing.

WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION OF THIS REPORT TO THE ONGOING DIALOG ABOUT VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE?

MICHAEL: We believe that a major strength of the study is its quantification and location-specificity. The report describes major trends shaping the future of the drylands and spells out their implications in terms of numbers of people affected. The numbers are not averages common to broad regions but, instead, capture the heterogeneity of impact at the national level. The report discusses in some detail how different interventions strategies can bring down the numbers of vulnerable, again with locational specificity. The quantification allows notional costing of different strategies of intervention. The numerical dimension will capture the attention of policy makers in a way that more general discussion of the issues would not. It is really an impressive feat to have assembled this degree of quantification. Even if the estimates have a wide margin of error, they are very useful to focus country-specific discussion on alternative strategies to address the inevitable.

CAN YOU TELL US HOW ARE YOU WORKING WITH GOVERNMENTS AND PARTNERS TO SHARE REGIONAL AND GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE ON RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT IN DRYLANDS?

RAFFAELLO: Initial dissemination efforts have focused on making key partners and stakeholders aware of the report, its analysis, and the main findings and recommendations. A preliminary version of the synthesis report was introduced at the UNCCD COP held in Ankara in October and also at COP 21 in Paris. The final version of the report will appear in the African Development Forum series, with a formal launch expected in early 2016. In addition, we will be publishing about 10 of the background studies as standalone papers, as we believe they will be of great interest to different specialized audiences.

In addition to disseminating the results, we are working to convene regional meetings in Africa to bring together policy makers and development practitioners to discuss how the recommendations of the report can be operationalized. We are very fortunate to count on the strong support of partners such as the Africa Union/NEPAD, CILSS, and IGAD, who have taken strong ownership of the policy agenda and are adding important momentum to the effort to translate the insights emerging from the report into concrete actions on the ground.
SUMMARY OF AFRICA REGIONAL STUDIES

DUE IN FY16

Turning Natural Resource Wealth into Human Capital (P148368)
This report will assist countries in transforming natural resource windfalls into long-term sustainable development through strategic investment in human capital, which is essential for the eradication of extreme poverty and the promotion of shared prosperity.

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Participation in Regional and Global Value Chains as a Driver of Structural Change in Africa (P153793)
The objective of this study will be to invigorate and deepen the discussion about structural change in Africa and the appropriate trade and industrial policies that will allow countries in Africa to drive employment growth in higher value-added activities.

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Promoting Green Urban Development in Africa (P148662)
This study will improve the understanding and enhance the ability of national and local governments to make well-informed strategic, planning, land-use, budgetary and investment decisions that impact urban ecosystems and environment.

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Building African Cities that Work (P148736)
This study examines the spatial evolution of ten large cities across Africa, in order to assess the key drivers of city development and the implications of spatial evolution for productivity, living standards, and risk from natural hazards.

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State Ownership in Africa - A Regional Study on SOE Governance
This study aims to do a comparative analysis of SOE governance in the West African region, with a focus on companies with primarily commercial objectives. It seeks to determine how the state as an owner takes a more proactive role in improving SOE performance, and to identify the most important focus areas.

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Making Transformation Work for Africa: Leveraging the Earnings Potential of the Bottom 40 percent
This study aims to increase Africa’s capacity to reduce poverty by putting a ‘jobs lens’ to the Africa structural transformation agenda. It will identify the key elements, building blocks and cornerstones of a ‘transformational’ jobs agenda that can deliver sustainable ‘shared prosperity’ to the African continent.

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Accelerating Poverty Reduction in Africa, Report 2 (P149419)
This second report reviews the poverty-inequality-growth nexus in the Region. It looks at the basic building blocks and occupational and spatial development patterns that can enhance income opportunities for the poor and reduce household vulnerability to risk.

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Options for Improving Agriculture Public Expenditures in Africa (P153531)
The study intends to support better decision making by policy makers interested in improving the effectiveness of agriculture public expenditure programs as a way of stimulating economically efficient, environmentally sustainable, pro-poor growth in agriculture in Africa.

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GP= Global Practice
CCSA = Cross Cutting Solutions Area
DUE IN FY17 AND BEYOND

The State of Social Protection in Africa
This study aims to take stock of the state of social protection in Africa; document social protection’s contribution to reducing poverty and inequality, as well as boosting productivity and growth; and develop the evidence-base for further investments in the delivery and effectiveness of social protection systems.

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Skills Development Agenda for Africa
Skills upgrading has a role in the acceleration of economic transformation and productivity growth, both in the informal and formal sectors. The objective of this report is to provide policy guidance to African governments on the following overall question: How can AFR most effectively invest in skills to enhance inclusive growth and reduce poverty over the next 10 years and beyond?

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Forced Displacement in AFR and MNA
This study aims to provide ‘hard’ evidence to inform the debate on forced displacements among country-level policy-makers and international stakeholders; identify specific interventions (including desirable policy reforms) and priorities for governments and their external partners; identify critical knowledge gaps; and help further shift the forced displacement agenda from humanitarian only to humanitarian + development.

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Energy Access in Africa
This study will look into ways to promote broader access to energy in Africa to support economic growth and poverty reduction in Africa. Questions include: What’s the current state of affairs? How does the picture vary across countries (and rural and urban areas)? What are the most pressing challenges (for example, is it primarily about generation or transmission?), and what are the economic reasons for market failures in the identified bottleneck markets?

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Boosting African Productivity
Sustaining growth in Sub-Saharan Africa in the midst of an uncertain global environment and headwinds from commodity prices requires efforts to boost productivity. This study will document the evolution and determinants of productivity in the region — overall and sectoral productivity. It will also examine whether international integration has an impact on the type of structural transformation that the region is experiencing.

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GP = Global Practice
CCSA = Cross Cutting Solutions Area
Women in Sub-Saharan Africa are less likely than men to own land. They also use less land and have lower tenure security over the land that they use. This gap is costly in terms of lost productive output. In the first experiment of its kind, the World Bank’s Africa Gender Innovation Lab, in collaboration with DEC and the Paris School of Economics, tested whether land demarcation was sufficient to effectively increase agricultural investment for women and men. This study provides the first set of experimental evidence on the causal impact of a large-scale land formalization program.

**KEY FINDINGS**

1. Early results show that improved tenure security through land demarcation increases long-term investments in cash crops and trees and boosts women’s fallowing of land – a key soil fertility investment.

2. It is important that interventions cover as much of a household’s landholdings as possible: Some women shifted their agricultural production to plots of land that did not benefit from demarcation so that they could guard these less secure and less productive plots.

Throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, policy makers seek instruments to strengthen the property rights of landowners and farmers in rural areas, where customary laws and norms tend to shape people’s access to and ownership of land. Under customary law, women typically obtain secondary land use rights through male spouses or relatives. These undocumented rights can evaporate in the event of a spouse’s death or divorce. The lack of secure land rights for women and men can lead to under-investment and lower agricultural yields.

The typical policy response to the challenge of under-investment in land has taken the form of costly and time-consuming land titling programs. The World Bank’s Doing Business 2014 report indicates that the property registration process across the region requires six steps and 120 days to complete on average, leading to a cost of about nine percent of the total property value. Moreover, freehold titling programs tend to ignore the importance of customary law in shaping land access and use in rural contexts. This situation highlights the need to make land administration programs more efficient and cost-effective and to embed these programs within existing customary laws.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), through its compact with the Government of Benin, provided technical and financial support to the PFR program. The program formalized customary rights of rural households through two main steps. First, the program demarcated all land parcels in a community, assigned land rights through a full land survey, and laid cornerstones to serve as clear markers of property boundaries. Second, the program will deliver land certificates to households.

The World Bank’s Africa Gender Innovation Lab, in collaboration with researchers from the Development Research Group and the Paris School of Economics, set out to evaluate the PFR program’s impact through a randomized controlled trial. The researchers set out to study the initial impact of the first step of the program—land demarcation—on agricultural investment in Benin, prior to the issuance of land certificates. The resulting short-term effects shed light on the investment impact of integrating customary land tenure systems into the formal system of land rights. **This study provides the first set of experimental evidence on the causal impact of a large-scale land formalization program.**

**THE APPROACH**

To establish a rigorous estimate of the program’s impact, the research team relied on a unique feature of the program rollout. All PFR villages were selected through district-level lotteries that provided a public and transparent identification of program and comparison communities. One year after the start of implementation, a survey was conducted in 291 of these communities to compare differences in outcomes between the randomly-chosen PFR and non-PFR villages. The survey encompassed an expansive geographic area, including data from nine of Benin’s 12 regions. The study sample covered households with at least one parcel of land in their village, including 2,972 households with a total of 6,094 parcels (5,329 of which are located in the household’s village of residence).
**THE RESULTS**

Early results show that improved tenure security through land demarcation increases long-term investments in cash crops and trees and boosts women’s fallowing of land – a key soil fertility investment. The demarcation of parcel boundaries led to an initial increase in tenure security, which translated into an increase in long-term investment, both in trees and perennial cash crops, for both male-headed and female-headed households. One year after the start of land demarcation, participant households increased their investments in cash crops, such as oil palm and teak, by 39 percent, and in tree-planting by 43 percent–relative to the comparison group. These findings point to a substantial increase in long-term land investment.

The program also erased Benin’s gender gap in land falling, a vital practice to replenish soil fertility (Figure 1). Female headed-households in PFR communities were more likely to fallow their land when compared with both male-headed households in PFR villages and male-headed households in comparison villages. Strengthening women’s land security may have allayed their fear of land loss during fallow, leading them to undertake this important investment.

**THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The early findings from this study highlight the complexity of rural land issues but also offer promising policy recommendations. Hybrid land formalization interventions that recognize customary land rights can lead to important increases in investment in cash crops and tree crops for women and men, and fallowing for women, even after a short period of time. Meanwhile, this study also highlights the need for a spatially comprehensive approach to land registration—through the inclusion of all lands held by rural households—to ensure that those with weaker property rights share in the full benefits of the program. A new round of data collection, which took place earlier this year, will shed light on the longer-run impact of demarcation on women and men.

POLICY AND SOCIAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

SAFETY NET TO END EXTREME POVERTY IN LESOTHO

INTRODUCTION
Over the past two decades, Lesotho has experienced significant economic growth. Textiles exports, mining, and public expenditure have underpinned this growth. Agriculture—the sector where the majority of the poor earn their livelihoods—has lagged. As of 2010, nearly 60 percent of households lived below the basic needs poverty line of $1 a day and almost 40 percent lived below the food poverty line.

Lesotho faces serious fiscal challenges as a result of high public expenditure (67 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2009/10) and excessive reliability on the Southern African Customs Union. As a response, the government has reduced recurrent spending, reduced the burden of the wage bill over time, and increased the share of investments in the budget while improving the quality of spending on investments.

OBJECTIVE
This study was carried out to determine what role safety nets and transfer programs should play in the next decade to even out income inequality and improve the livelihoods of the absolute poor in Lesotho. The study seeks to answer the following questions: (i) could an increase in spending be used to accelerate poverty reduction in the medium to long term? (ii) Which groups and aspects of poverty would it make sense to target with transfers? (iii) Which programs will have the greatest impacts for the most affordable price?

POVERTY
With a Gini coefficient of 0.53, income distribution is extremely unequal - one of the worst in the world. Little information exists on household incomes, making it difficult to distinguish the poor from the absolute poor. Further, there are few demographic or other characteristics that can differentiate the poor from the absolute poor. For example, groups that might be considered to be disadvantaged, such as orphans and vulnerable children, people living with HIV/AIDS, the elderly, and the disabled, are not disproportionately poor. Rural areas have higher poverty rates than urban areas, yet there is no other geographical pattern to poverty in Lesotho.

About 200,000 to 400,000 people (or 10 to 20 percent of the population) are food-insecure. High levels of malnutrition have a lasting impact on productivity and incomes. Most of Lesotho’s poor are chronically poor because of their low productivity, low returns to their labor, low assets, or the destitution of their households. They are also exposed to a range of shocks: theft, drought, unemployment, food price increases, illness, and death caused by disease.

CASH TRANSFERS
This study examines the 10 programs that transfer money or goods to individual households in Lesotho. All 10 programs represent a large share of public spending that is directly transferred to citizens.

Figure 1: Estimated coverage of the poor by existing programs

RESULTS
Overall, total spending on transfer programs amounts to US$197 million annually, or about US$104 per person. If these amounts were transferred to the poorest quintile, each recipient would receive US$340—almost equal to the estimated poverty line income.

As it currently stands, only a small share of transfers actually reaches the poor. Most large-scale transfers (agricultural subsidies, tertiary business, and school feeding) benefit the nonpoor (figure 1). Moreover, while some of the programs aim to raise the poor from poverty in the longer term, most do not explicitly include any measures to increase the productivity of the poor permanently.

There is no framework or institution coordinating transfers to the public. As a result, overlaps and duplication of transfer programs and beneficiaries occur. Further, existing programs cannot be easily scaled up or down to respond to potential shocks: weather or prices. And the lack of an overall strategy or framework makes it difficult for leaders to get a sense of total spending on transfers, and evaluate trade-offs between programs.

Only one of the existing programs has been evaluated, making it even more difficult for policy makers to know which programs have the most impact and are effective in poverty reduction. Moreover, the weakness of the data, on household...
and the coverage and impact of programs, reduces the ability to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of transfers.

**CHALLENGES**

Multiple ministries currently implement Lesotho’s transfer programs, with donors being significantly involved in the design of several of these programs. The draft National Social Development Policy states that the policy goal is to prevent and reduce poverty for all Basotho people. To achieve this, a social protection strategy needs to be put in place. A new Ministry of Social Development was created recently, demonstrating the government’s commitment to put in place a strong social protection strategy, but its success is dependent on effective coordination of all the safety net programs.

To improve the effectiveness of transfers, policy makers need to improve targeting. Targeting in Lesotho is particularly difficult because: (i) a large share of the population is poor, and it is difficult to distinguish between the poor and the absolute poor; (ii) there is little up-to-date information on household consumption; and (iii) administrative capacity at the local level is limited.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

There are several overall, crosscutting recommendations for transfers to have a more permanent impact. Transfers should be more predictable so that beneficiaries can take more risks and plan better.

Programs need to be evaluated more rigorously to ensure effectiveness. Once frequent evaluations are carried out, measures can be taken to improve the targeting and coordination of the most effective programs. Part of the evaluation process will involve improved and increased data collection (household consumption and program-specific data).

Moving toward a more unified, national program, which could consist of multiple distinct interventions but should operate as an integrated approach with clear objectives and targets, would strengthen further effectiveness.

The challenge for Lesotho is to select the most cost-effective instruments for transfers and conduct them in a manner that is fiscally sustainable. Existing expenditures should be used to minimize the need for new spending and improve targeting, while ensuring that programs can be scaled up or down depending on fiscal conditions and the need for social assistance.

To create a more unified national social protection program, the government needs to establish a national safety net strategy for the next five to ten years. This strategy should outline poverty reduction objectives, desired target groups, and coverage and program choices.

It is imperative to establishing a central body with policy oversight and expenditure planning authority over all the transfer programs to improve the overall coordination of transfers. Such a body can oversee the creation of an integrated beneficiary registry system, which would be useful in eliminating duplication of coverage.

**CONCLUSION**

Lesotho’s solution to poverty would involve continued migration from rural to urban and increased agricultural productivity. However, until then, given the high levels of poverty and inequality, a national cash transfer program that focuses on improving the food consumption of the poorest Basotho at the food poverty line would be clear and easier to coordinate. Such a national program should be linked to addressing some of the basic national priorities. For example, the program should address early childhood malnutrition and the intergenerational poverty effects of HIV/AIDS. Transfers could be a combination of categorical support, for very specific groups of the absolute poor in the poorest areas of the country, and transitional productive support to those who are either left behind by growth or who live in low-productivity areas.

This study recommends a national program that targets populations with insufficient food, which represent the poorest 10 to 20 percent. Such a program is affordable given Lesotho’s current fiscal position. A small program reaching 380,000 individuals at M 37.50 (US$5) per month might amount to M 200 million (US$27 million) annually. A medium-sized program (380,000 beneficiaries at M 75 (US$10) per month) would cost about M 411 million (US$55 million) annually, representing 2 percent of GDP—far below current expenditure, which is at 9 percent of GDP. A single cash grants program targeting households with no able-bodied members could be implemented. In addition, a cash-for-work program or food-for-work program could be used to employ the rural poor during the agricultural slack season. The existing Watershed Management program could provide the framework for a public works program employing the very poor in reforestation, environmental works, and rural road maintenance.

Current fiscal space does not give room for large-scale expansion of cash and in-kind transfers. However, there is scope for making more use of narrowly targeted transfers to reduce extreme poverty by improving the performance of existing programs.

*Emma Mistiaen, Social Protection Specialist, Social Protection and Labor, Africa E Global Practice*
One key determinant of teacher absence was absence among Directors. When a Director was present at the school the average teacher absence rate was 34 percent, while when a Director was absent the average teacher absence rate was 64 percent. This implies that in schools where the Director was absent, teachers were almost twice as likely to be absent, suggesting that leadership and accountability matters in the performance of teachers.

Cumulating the sources of lost teaching time, pupils received roughly 39 percent of the scheduled teaching time. This means that out of a possible 190 school days, pupils received only 74 effective teaching days (or 317 hours of class time), or an average of 1hr 41min of teaching per day as against a total of 4hr 17min they should have been receiving.

ARE TEACHERS COMPETENT IN THE CURRICULA THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO TEACH?

The share of grade 4 teachers who mastered 80 percent of the grade 4 curriculum was shockingly low: 1 percent. Women, recent graduates and teachers in the south region performed better in the teacher assessment. Pedagogical skills were consistently worse than teachers’ competencies in mathematics and language. On average, teachers scored only 15 out of 100 points in pedagogy, reflecting difficulties in successfully preparing a lesson plan (19 out of 100), correctly assessing children’s writing (14 out of 100) and using pupils test scores to make some statements about class learning patterns (7 out of 100).

Mozambique is poised to meet the MDG goal of 100 percent primary education enrollment. However, pupils in Mozambique are the lowest performers among SDI countries, scoring an average 24 percent compared to an average of almost 53 percent in other SDI countries. Education quality will critically determine whether the promise of the newfound mineral wealth is shared among all Mozambicans, and whether the economic growth will be concentrated in the extractive industries, while innovation, education and training remain underdeveloped.

1 IN ORDER FOR PUPILS TO LEARN, A TEACHER HAS TO BE PRESENT AT SCHOOL, IN THE CLASSROOM AND ACTIVELY TEACHING.

One key determinant of teacher absence was absence among Directors. When a Director was present at the school the average teacher absence rate was 34 percent, while when a Director was absent the average teacher absence rate was 64 percent. This implies that in schools where the Director was absent, teachers were almost twice as likely to be absent, suggesting that leadership and accountability matters in the performance of teachers.

2 ARE TEACHERS COMPETENT IN THE CURRICULA THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO TEACH?
3 **ABSENTEE RATE AMONG ENROLLED STUDENTS IS HIGH AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE IS LOW**

While officially there are over 40 pupils enrolled per class, only an average of 17 pupils effectively attend. Pupil absence is highest in the center (62 percent) and the north regions (65 percent) and relatively less in the south region (24 percent). The SDI survey tested grade 4 pupils and found severe gaps in pupil knowledge. In particular, results show that among the pupils assessed only a quarter could identify words, only 17 percent could read a sentence and less than a tenth could read a paragraph. In mathematics, only half of pupils could do simple addition and only 18 percent could do double digit addition. Girls in the center and north performed substantially worse. For example, in the central region boys scored 42 percent higher than girls in Portuguese and 18 percent higher in mathematics. Similarly, in the north, boys scored 48 percent higher in Portuguese and 24 percent higher in mathematics. These results may partly reflect the fact that the average number of female teachers is lower in the central (32 percent) and north region (20 percent) compared to the south (46 percent).

![Figure 4: Gender gap is particularly evident in the Central and North regions.](image)

4 **THERE ARE LINKS BETWEEN TEACHER PERFORMANCE AND PUPILS’ LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The schools with the best pupils had teachers that were absent less often (30 percent versus 43 percent) and performed better on the test (41 percent versus 35 percent). There were no significant differences in the availability of inputs such as textbooks, equipment and infrastructure.

![Figure 5: How do schools of the top 5% pupils differ?](image)

# ECONOMIC SECTOR WORK (ESW) DELIVERED IN FY16

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*As of December 17, 2015*
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*As of December 17, 2015*
UPCOMING EVENTS

THE ANNUAL BANK CONFERENCE ON AFRICA: MANAGING THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF URBANIZATION IN AFRICA

The third Annual Bank Conference on Africa (ABCA) will be held at Oxford University, on June 13-14, 2016. It will cover various topics pertinent to the drivers and the consequences of urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is being organized jointly by the World Bank Africa Region and the Centre for the Study of African Economies at Oxford University, in association with the Blavatnik School of Government and the Department of Economics at Oxford, the London School of Economics, and the International Growth Centre.

The conference will include a Keynote Address by Professor Paul Collier (Oxford University and Director of CSAE), and opening remarks by Makhtar Diop (World Bank Vice-President for the Africa Region), as well as invited contributions by Paul Romer (New York University), Tony Venables (Oxford University), and other senior scholars.

Submitted papers with a focus on Africa are now welcome on any of the following topics:
• analysis of the dynamics of urbanization in Sub-Saharan African countries
• the impacts of urbanization on: economic growth and poverty reduction; trade and foreign investment; public service delivery; environment and natural resources
• the impacts of government policies on urbanization
• the political economy of urbanization
• data and measurement issues pertinent to urbanization

As well as papers that examine the following in the context of urbanization:
• economic growth, conflict, structural transformation, agriculture, education, health, labor, safety nets, or gender

Full papers should be submitted in pdf format February 26, 2016.

Submissions should be e-mailed to abca@worldbank.org, and will be considered by a program committee including Markus Goldstein (World Bank), Tony Venables (Oxford University), Vernon Henderson (LSE), Somik V. Lall (World Bank), and Moussa P. Blimpo (World Bank), Decisions will be made by March 31. Limited funds to support travel for successful African presenters may be available.

AFRICA ECONOMICS SEMINAR SERIES

Experimental Evidence on the Demand for and Costs of Rural Electrification
Catherine Wolfram (UC Berkeley)
March 3 | J-8-044

Cash for Carbon: A Randomized Evaluation of “Payments for Ecosystem Services” to Curb Deforestation
Seema Jayachandran (Northwestern University)
April 7 | J-8-044

Does Debt Relief Improve Child Health? Evidence from Cross-Country Micro-Data
Anna Welander (World Bank)
April 21 | J-8-044

Women Left Behind? Poverty and Headship in Africa
Dominique van de Walle (World Bank)
May 5 | J-8-044

For more information, contact:
David Evans (devans2@worldbank.org)