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**Livelihoods Changes and the Emergent Human Economy of Mokhotlong District
Households**

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Pretoria in fulfilment of PhD in Development Studies*

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Declaration

I hereby declare this is my own work except otherwise where indicated and due acknowledgement is given.

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Dedication

This research report is dedicated to the departed, my father Maele Ntjapeli Lehema and my brother Montja T'seliso Lehema, who saw the beginning of this work but unfortunately could not see the end.

May your souls rest in eternal peace, Batlokoa

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Abstract

Following the decline of the formal South African labour market, rural development policy in former migrant labour societies like Lesotho has placed rural transformation at the centre of the development agenda, portraying a picture of livelihood in crisis in terms of migrant labour shocks and agricultural marginality. The development community has therefore promoted agricultural development with the assumption that rural communities are relying on the productivity of the land they occupy. While the concerns are valid, they are recycling the outdated narrative of small rural farm households widely tailored for households that had access to arable land and overlook the environmental realities of the Highlands region that is characterised by land scarcity. This often ignores and underestimates the new trends in labour migration and livelihood activities, which are the basis of the human economy of the region. The study contended that the analysis of rural households' livelihoods should go further than the simplistic livelihood in crisis narrative and focus on their responses to the changes they are confronted with.

Using an ethnographic case study approach of thirty rural households this thesis analyses the livelihood impacts, dynamics of production and livelihood responses to the changes in the socioeconomic and natural environment in Mokhotlong District in north-eastern Lesotho. This type of investigation underscores the unique situation of a former migrant labour society. Using the Bourdieu theory of practice and the human economy approach, the analysis adopts a broad understanding of the background of rural households' livelihoods, their experiences, the challenges they face, and how they navigate them. The approach adopted for the analysis is grounded on rural household accounts including those of key informants to comprehend the livelihood dynamics fully.

The analysis revealed that households responded to changes by diversifying their livelihoods and developing new trends in labour migration, which although different in form and structure, still mirrored the old system. The thesis, therefore, provides evidence in the contestation of the narrative of the end of a migrant labour economy by demonstrating that migrant labour has remained central to the human economy of the region. While the current livelihoods have their own vulnerabilities, the thesis stresses the significance of agency and navigation. By focusing on the new forms of livelihoods, and particularly the aspect of navigation, the thesis provides a different perspective to the literature but also argues for the understanding of livelihoods and situation of households within broader debates on former migrant labour societies, and the

significance of migrant labour as an embedded culture that is hard to eliminate. The thesis, therefore, suggests that any attempt to understand rural households in Lesotho outside the migrant labour system misses a key facet in the country's history and that any policy that ignores this undisputed reality, is tantamount to social engineering. The thesis therefore argues for rethinking questions of transformation in rural development policy that emphasises social reality and the importance of informing policy based on the realities of societies in which labour migration has been embedded in the culture of communities. The thesis therefore advocates for a new development narrative that focuses on building livelihoods that are relevant and reflect the realities of communities and, thus, form the very human economy.

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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
M	Maloti (Lesotho's currency)
WFP	World Food Programme

Chapter 1

Tracing Trajectories of Livelihoods and Social Change in Southern Africa

1.1 Introducing the Research Study

The human economy framework challenges the conventional divide between economics and life's broader social and cultural dimensions. It advocates for a more integrated perspective on economic activities, emphasizing the centrality of social relationships and human well-being. This approach highlights the significance of informal, non-market, and community-driven practices, positioning them as equally important to formal market systems (Hart, 2010). It challenges the dominance of formal market systems by emphasizing the role of informal economies, social networks, and local practices in shaping economic realities, particularly in marginalized people. This is achieved through understanding people's lived experiences and aspirations.

The study traced and examined the trajectories of the livelihoods of rural households in the Mokhotlong District in north-eastern Lesotho in the context of social and natural changes that have taken place. The intention was to understand the human economy of the Highlands region by grappling with households' livelihood responses and decisions and positioning contemporary trends in livelihood trajectories within the wider context of a migrant labour economy. I hoped to add another dimension to the literature in Lesotho and the areas that were developed as migrant labour reserves. These were described in the literature by Murray (1981) in the context of Lesotho, and by Bush and Cliffe (1984) and Cousins et al. (1992), in the context of Zimbabwe. In Lesotho, experiences since the 1990s, when the country lost the formal South African labour market, have shown how the past can shape and influence social realities in the present, specifically in rural communities.

Development agents, drawing on poverty surveys, often placed rural transformation at the centre of the development agenda by portraying a picture of a rural population in crisis in the context of “migration shocks”, which are characterised by “retrenchments, non-renewal of contracts, and low rates of recruitment” in the South African mining sector (Mensah & Naidoo, 2011, p. 1018), and agricultural marginality (Boehm, 2003, 2005). Conversely, scholarly sources tended to characterise the end of the formal migrant labour system as a major livelihood crisis for rural households, and often ignored and underestimated the new trends in labour migration, and livelihood activities that are defined elsewhere as hustling (Monrose, 2016; Thieme, 2013), or in Zimbabwe as *kukiya-kiya* (Jones, 2010; Morreira, 2015).

Such characterisation and interpretations of the dynamics of life have shaped the general understanding of the rural economy, particularly the impact on households, because of the decline in South African mining jobs. This understanding was captured as follows by Cobbe (1982, p. 128):

Hence continued dependence on migration is essential to provide sufficient income for the survival of the household, except for those few households in rural areas that either become agricultural contractors or obtain adequate local non-agricultural sources of income—local wage or salary employment, and commerce or transport enterprises.

The actual realities are different. Like in other migrant labour societies in the region, there is an element of complexity, as the current study sought to highlight. Despite the focus on the worker peasantry and the lack of agricultural productivity, other scholars suggested the value of remittances to rural agriculture (Boehm, 2003; Cobbe, 1982; Worby, 2001). While this is certainly true and is briefly discussed, literature focused only on livelihood trajectories when agriculture experiences a crisis, as is the case in Lesotho. Ziervogel and Calder (2003, p. 405) observed the following:

While agriculture plays an important role in the lives of the Basotho, their livelihoods typically consist of ‘bundles’ of on-farm and off-farm activities. Although most households maintain some involvement in agriculture, the importance of alternative livelihood strategies is growing.

Some scholars argued that the challenges associated with crop production have forced a shift to livestock farming (Raitti, 2016). The literature also showed how Basotho have often displayed eagerness towards small stock, which Hoag (2018, p. 727) referred to as “clean-break commodities” or “goods that present few barriers to sale”. In a migrant labour economy, small stock animals have always been an investment for the miners returning from South Africa, and it became an aspiration for young men and women to own sheep and goats (Quinlan, 1995). Hoag (2018, p. 727) observed the following:

Over time, as Lesotho was marginalised and transformed from an agricultural centre to a labour reserve for South African industry ... sheep and goat production became both a retirement strategy for miners returning from South Africa as well as part of an economic dream world into which young men and women imagined themselves.

Over the years, small stocks have become increasingly identified with the rural economy as improved breeds were introduced, making Lesotho a major producer of mohair and wool (IFAD, 2014). With the shift from a formal migrant labour economy and following the loss of mining income, small stock animals became integrated into the rural economy to become “a full-fledged occupation and increasing the pace with which the animals are raised and sold” (Hoag, 2017, p. 727).

Thus, while labour migrancy remained a critically important strategy, rural households have continued with agriculture-based strategies. However, not all livestock is kept for cash, and small stocks like sheep and goats generate income through the production of wool and mohair, which is either injected into agriculture or to achieve food security in the event of agricultural failure (Rant’so, 2015). Over the years, livestock ownership has increasingly become identified with social status and also performs other sociocultural

functions, despite government efforts to commodify it. For example, cattle are central resources in “feasts, burial ceremonies, bridewealth, sacrifices and offerings” (Rohde et al., 2006, p. 307).

One of the most significant observations by scholars on Lesotho is that livestock is principally treated by households as savings (Gay et al., 2000). Basotho keep large livestock, such as cattle, but these are rarely sold and are therefore not regarded as commodities (Ferguson, 1985). The literature often characterised Lesotho as an agrarian society because of the prominent way in which the rural society practices livestock farming, even in the context of the impending death of their animals because of drought (Ferguson, 1985). The society continues to invest migrant labour income into agriculture (Boehm, 2003; Ferguson, 1985). This is regarded as critical in rural agriculture, where inputs are purchased to ensure soil fertility, despite the denigration of agriculture and its low status (Boehm, 2003).

This conceptualisation is in keeping up with the explanations of the complex relationship between proletarianisation and rural agriculture, in which labour migrants maintain rural land as a retirement strategy and embark on productive agriculture as a source of income. This observation was vividly captured in Thebe’s (2020) study in the mid-Zambezi Valley. Focusing on the question of who becomes a farmer, Thebe explained why former migrants dominated the cotton economy, arguing that petty commercial farming satisfied their income accumulation needs after retirement or retrenchment. Such conceptualisation helps explain the complex dynamics of the former migrant labour societies, particularly the role of agriculture, and the relationship between wage and agriculture (Boehm, 2003; Worby, 2001). Furthermore, such conceptualisations allude to the significance of livestock farming in a former migrant labour society where the non-commodification of cattle and the full commodification of small stock are the key aspects of the human economy and are central to livelihoods (Hoag, 2017).

The sustainability of a livestock agrarian economy rests on the availability of pastures, and the Highlands provide the rangelands, even for the lowland communities. Several authors portrayed the land, and particularly the pastures in Lesotho, as highly degraded

because of overstocking (Delves et al., 2021; Quinlan, 1995; Showers, 1989). Although this literature is noteworthy for its support for rangeland management, highland communities aim to continue with livestock production (Hoag, 2017). Moreover, through the introduction of the Range Management Areas, the government and development agencies reinforced the problems associated with pastures through the commercialisation of communal land (Rohde et al., 2006) and even weakened the local communities' rights to some grazing land (GCSR, 1999; Rwambali, 2000).

Recently, agriculture livelihoods have increasingly been hampered by recurrent natural hazards, including “frosts, hail and the amounts and timing of rainfall” (Turner, 2003, p. 4). The “variable character of the rainfall regime and the destructive nature of some precipitation events” are more significant for the livelihoods of many households (Gwimbi, 2013). The mediating role of the changing climate conditions in the transformations of the production systems and livelihoods of rural communities has been a subject of research by many scholars (see George, 2020; Gwimbi, 2013; Molaoa, 2016; Ziervogel, 2004).

1.2 The Focus of This Research

While the effects of changing social and natural environment on households' production are acknowledged, it is less appreciated how these changes transform households' livelihoods; that is, how households respond to these changes by creating a different human economy for the region. The government and other agencies emphasised the adoption of drought-resistant crops. This may be a fair point, but evidence showed declining interest in more drought-resistant crops, notably sorghum. Turner (2003, p. 4) observed the following:

The spatial and temporal distribution of rainfall in each growing season is highly variable, and its value for crop production is further degraded by various factors. These include heavy storms that limit infiltration and increase runoff and erosion and hail that damages or destroys crops. Unseasonal frosts can damage crops anywhere in the country but are a particular hazard in the

mountains where the growing season is never more than short, and frost can occur in midsummer. Heavy snowfalls in the mountains can limit grazing and sometimes lead to widespread livestock mortality.

Some authors, such as Thebe (2017), showed that elsewhere, natural changes can perpetuate the rural household disengagement from agriculture and reinforce the processes of deagrarianisation and depeasantisation in the countryside. While some authors argued that in Lesotho the local climatic conditions remain conducive for the growth of most temperate zone crops (Chakela, 1999) and that livestock remain a form of savings for rural households, rural households are diversifying livelihoods outside agriculture in ways different from when livelihoods were characterised by formal migration to the South African mines. In the current study, I situated the current situation in rural Lesotho, particularly in the Highlands region in Mokhotlong District, within the broader debates about rural transformation, particularly the deagrarianisation and depeasantisation processes in former migrant labour societies.

Bryceson (1996) used the terms ‘deagrarianisation’ and ‘depeasantisation’ to characterise the rural transformation that has been underway in most societies. She defined deagrarianisation as a “process of occupational adjustment, income-earning reorientation, social identification and spatial relocation of rural dwellers away from strictly agriculturally based modes of livelihood” (Bryceson, 1996 p.99). With regard to depeasantisation, she emphasised “a specific variant of deagrarianisation whereby the economic capacity and social coherence of peasantries are being progressively undermined” (Bryceson, 2004, p. 617–618). The key focus in this approach is different livelihood trajectories, both local and outside the country’s borders. The current study challenged the unilinear sequence view of the demise of a migrant labour society in Lesotho, and instead, looked at the diverse pathways that people have adopted in response to the loss of mining opportunities in South Africa. Therefore, I analysed the households’ livelihood responses and the human economy that has developed following the so-called migration shocks. I particularly paid attention to the continued migration for work, whether internal or across the border, albeit in a more informal form.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

The central aim of this study was to understand the livelihood impacts, dynamics of production, and livelihood responses to the changes in the natural and social environment faced by rural households in Mokhotlong District in northeastern Lesotho. The study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

Aims and objectives.

- Explore the socioeconomic and environmental changes and their impacts on rural households.
- Investigate how rural households adapt their livelihoods to socioeconomic changes.
- Investigate the challenges and vulnerabilities of livelihood activities that households have adopted.
- Explore the different ways households, navigate their vulnerabilities and challenges.

In broad terms, this study explores how rural households' livelihoods have been affected and transformed by the dynamics of change resulting from migration shocks and natural changes such as land degradation and climate variability. At the same time, the study aimed to investigate the extent to which the emergent livelihoods and production processes reinforce processes of deagrarianisation and depeasantisation. This type of investigation underscores the unique situation of former migrant labour societies.

As this study carried with it some policy implications, it was intended to provide the government with information that may allow it to adopt policies that are aligned with the economic and social realities of a former migrant labour society context where livelihood dynamics are complex. While the households embark on and practice agriculture, it is mostly part-time, and the processes of deagrarianisation and depeasantisation are already visibly underway. The study aimed to improve the understanding of these rural

societies, which occupy a vulnerable terrain, but where the dynamics of change and the human economy of households have been misunderstood. By grappling with the households' livelihoods, dynamics, and decisions, and by situating the emergent livelihoods and the new human economy of households within the broader debates on migrant labour economies, the study adds another dimension to the literature on rural development.

This subject remains understudied in the relevant literature in terms of understanding livelihoods adaptation to climate change impacts and vulnerability. It can help researchers understand the human economy of these areas. This study focused on the availability of alternative livelihoods in the context of agriculture and migration shocks, which now define the human economy of these households. To achieve this objective, the study sought to answer the following overarching question: What is the human economy of Highlands region households that was brought about by natural and labour market changes, and to what extent have social and natural changes transformed livelihoods and production processes or reinforced the processes of deagrarianisation and depeasantisation already underway in highland societies in the Mokhotlong District? This was explored with a particular focus on household responses, livelihood decisions, and their associated impacts. This overarching question was addressed by attempting to answer the following specific research questions that focused on specific themes:

1. How have changes in the socioeconomic and natural environment affected the production practices and livelihoods of rural households in the Highlands region of the Mokhotlong District?
2. What forms of livelihood and adaptation strategies have emerged in response to these changes, and what factors guide households' livelihoods and adaptation decisions in the Highlands region of the Mokhotlong District?
3. What are the specific vulnerabilities associated with these new forms of livelihoods that rural households are confronted with?

4. How do rural households navigate the challenges and vulnerabilities confronting their livelihoods?

1.4 Livelihood Trajectories in Lesotho

The contemporary human economy and livelihood trajectories in the Basotho rural society can only be understood within an analytical framework that draws on historical processes that have occurred over time. This is largely because these processes have shaped the culture and livelihood system of the households, particularly in the areas that were part of South Africa's labour reserve. In order to understand the livelihood responses of the households to the changes in the social and natural environment, it is necessary to examine the socioeconomic systems and how these were developed and nurtured, as well as how certain aspects became deeply embedded into the rural Basotho culture. The changes in the rural areas have always been contingent upon larger economic and political developments beyond the Lesotho borders (Murray, 1981). This situation has created livelihood constraints and opportunities for rural households in general.

A large majority of the rural areas in the Southern African settler states and peripheral territories were, and still is, categorised as labour reserves or migrant labour societies or economies (see Bush & Cliffe, 1984). Migrant labour societies in the region are often associated with the development of capitalism and the emergence of settler capitalism, particularly the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and gold in the Rand (Bundy, 1979; Wilson, 2011) and the Rhodesian experience of capitalist development (Arrighi, 1970). It is a development that is closely linked to the migrant labour system and the supply of labour for settler accumulation. It was created as a "cheap labour reservoir", which in turn, relates these societies to the "Native Reserves" in the former British settler Southern Africa (Cousins, 2007).

While these developed as Bantustans and Native Reserves in South Africa and Zimbabwe, they were expanded to peripheral territories such as Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia with the employment of extra-territorial workers. Thus, Lesotho became a migrant labour reserve for the South African mining industry as the recruitment of labour in the South African mines

expanded to neighbouring countries (Murray, 1981; Wilson, 2001). The concept of migrant labour economies is therefore a relevant framework for analysing the livelihood pathways and change in rural Lesotho.

Migrant labour societies can be defined as rural areas that were reserved for Africans to provide the labour-power, used elsewhere in the economy in capitalist production, on the terms that made it available cheaply, as some form of migrant labour (Bush & Cliffe, 1984). This “essential relationship” gave rise to the well-known phenomena of the “worker-peasant” and of “split families” (Bush & Cliffe, 1984 p. 77). Others defined these societies in terms of combinations of “hoe and wage” or “wage and hoe” (Bernstein, 2004; Cordell et al., 1996). Migrant labour societies are often discussed in relation to the “worker peasantry”, “semi-proletarianisation”, “split families”, or “divided families” (Bernstein, 2004; Bush & Cliffe, 1984; Murray, 1981).

Potts (2000, p. 808) alerted us to “the dependence of many, if not most, rural households on such remittances”, which were fundamental to their survival. From this perspective, the key point is how migrant labour became deeply rooted in rural society as a culture-shaping behaviour. In Southern Africa, this has left legacies that continue to shape rural livelihoods (Thebe, 2010).

1.4.1 Tracing livelihoods in Lesotho in different timeframes

Any attempt to understand the livelihoods in Lesotho requires reflecting on the livelihood trajectories at different points in time as different time phases have influenced the present rural households’ livelihoods. Murray (2000) highlighted the importance of studying households in structural and relational terms to trace livelihoods from different time phases in order to understand changes and how households were earning their livelihoods over time and how these influenced present livelihoods.

1.4.1.1 The period from 1966 to 1990

In 1966 Lesotho gained independence from being Basutoland, a British protectorate became independent. While migration was common among Basotho men post-independence, the 1970s marked an increase in the number of Basotho men being employed as

labour migrants in South Africa with over 200 000 Basotho men employed in South Africa (Murray, 1980). After many years of service without significant remuneration for migrant labourers in South African mines, the 1970s became a turning point for labourers when their wages significantly increased (Spiegel, 1980). In the years between 1970 and 1990, the rural households in Lesotho were heavily dependent on migrant labour, which concerned scholars because of Lesotho's economic reliance on another country (Cobbe, 1982). It was estimated that more than 70% of average household income came from migrant labour in South Africa (Ferguson, 1994). During this period, a households' major assets were able-bodied men capable of working in the mines in South Africa to support the rural households, which unfolded as a pattern in which men would migrate for labour and earn an income to establish households, pay bridal wealth, and get married to be allocated land for agriculture. Income earned was important for agricultural production as men bought implements and livestock used for ploughing as well as for investing for retirement; their children would follow a similar pattern. This pattern became known as the developmental cycle of the rural household. Investment in agricultural production livestock was a strategy men used to protect their livestock from being disposed to meet the daily needs of households (Ferguson, 1994).

During this period, women were prohibited from migrating to South African urban towns to seek labour, and as such, they were left at home working the land and raising children. The households that had migrant labourers were better off than those that had no members who were migrant labourers. This thus created social differentiation. The benefits of migrant labour influenced young Basotho men's desire to migrate for labour, and they saw this as a route for upward social mobility; many men refer to this time as the 'good old days' (Matsumoto, 2014). During this time, rural households had a clear path of how their livelihoods would unfold.

Remittances enabled the diversification of rural households' income through investment in sheep and goats to earn income through wool and mohair production. Reciprocal relations also meant that households that did not have migrant labourers benefited from caring for migrant labourers' livestock through the Mafisa system. The investment in agriculture meant that households were able to mitigate the impacts of climate variability because proceeds from migrant labour could be used to provide food and cushion against the devastating effects of droughts.

1.4.1.2 The period from 1991 to 2000

In the 1990s, rural households' livelihoods started deteriorating when the Basotho men working in the mines dropped from 127,000 in 1990 to 56,000 in 1999 (Central Bank of Lesotho, 2003; Wason & Hall, 2004). Most of those retrenched men did not have any formal education and were generally unskilled (Maphosa & Morojele, 2013). This change came with the new South African foreign policy to protect the labour market for its citizens to reduce unemployment among its nationals (Mensah & Naidoo, 2011). The retrenchment was not planned, and hence, was a shock that resulted in suffering for rural households and high unemployment in Lesotho (Maphosa & Morojele 2013). The decline of jobs for Basotho men came with great repercussions for households, which led to increased poverty in terms of food security, clothing, and school fees (Pae, 2001).

This period was associated with high livelihood crises. Evidence showed that poverty was deeply entrenched in rural households where non-farm income was limited, while the urban areas benefited from the textile industry (May et al., 2002). This was accompanied by high HIV/AIDS mortality because of people engaging in risky behaviours (Crush, 2010). During this era, the structure of rural households changed, and increased HIV/AIDS mortality in Lesotho affected the middle-aged group, resulting in the elderly taking care of both their sick children and orphaned grandchildren. The mountainous region was poorer than the foothills in 1994/1995, and 77% of households were classified as poor, which implies poverty in the mountainous region was three times that of urban Maseru (May et al., 2002). The severity of poverty was very pronounced in female-headed households and for the elderly, especially in the mountainous region (May et al., 2002). The proportion of households in Lesotho that were able to live through their agricultural production in 1999 was estimated to be below 3% (Gay et al., 2000). Furthermore, high stock theft resulted in the vulnerability of households that invested solely in livestock.

The decline of migrant labour heavily impacted the trajectory of young men in rural Lesotho, and where their trajectory was formerly clear, it became difficult to predict and anticipate. While this period was generally described as a period of crisis, not all households

and former migrant labourers suffered as all households were not uniform. Some of the migrant labourers had married teachers and nurses and had invested in education. When the migrant shocks hit, they were not on equal footing with other migrant labourers who had to depend entirely on their severance pay, which did not last for most rural households.

1.4.1.3 Livelihoods beyond 2000

Livelihoods during the turn of the millennium were characterised by indicators pointing towards a period of accelerated social change in rural Lesotho, with increased vulnerability and livelihood insecurity (Bloomer, 2009). The country noted a decline in household support from agriculture as the proportion of landless people increased to 40% (Gay et al., 2000). This resulted in the adoption of the non-contributory Pension for people aged 70 years in November 2004 to address the impact of HIV/AIDS increasing the vulnerability of rural households (Pelhan, 2007). The Old Age Pension came about as a means to eliminate poverty in households of the elderly and thus served as a safety net for orphaned children from the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Lesotho (Bello, et al, 2008). The old age pension politically associated initiative as it came as a one-off reform and not part of the social agenda adopted by Prime Minister Mosisili to improve the government's position (Pelhan, 2007). While the elderly people earned income in the form of an old age pension, it was unclear how the younger generations survived.

Lesotho experienced several droughts that impacted households' food security; for instance, in 2008, drought led to an estimated 553,000 people needing emergency assistance (Mhlanga & Devereux, 2008). Climate change was found to be a critical driver that led to the 2007 crisis in Lesotho, and it aggravated the ongoing decline in food production in the country (Verschuur et al., 2021). The impact of erratic and late rains in the cropping season of 2011/2012 added to the increasingly vulnerable situation in rural Lesotho after a poor harvest in 2010/2011 because of the heavy rains. The El Niño induced drought caused severe crop failure due to dry spells,

leading to growing food insecurity in Lesotho. According, to the Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (2002), around half the rural population was at risk of livelihood and food insecurity between May 2016 and April 2017.

In Lesotho, the livelihoods of rural people are highly vulnerable because of environmental degradation caused by overgrazing, which has left the physical environment barren and unable to support livestock. This has led scientific researchers to study the rangelands, which led to diverging conclusions, with some scholars claiming that rangeland degradation has resulted in unpalatable Karoo shrubs encroaching on the rangelands and competing with grasses (Morris, 2017). Other scholars argued that the shrubs are native species in the Lesotho rangelands that can withstand drought and are also important for forage (Hoag, 2017; Root-Bernstein & Hoag, 2022).

Recently, the country has grappled with food insecurity which has been addressed by offering cash-based transfers to poor households. In 2019, more than 30% of rural households experienced severe acute food insecurity, and the WFP was able to reach 37 000 food insecure people in different districts (WFP Lesotho, 2020). The WFP drought response supported 3 075 vulnerable households from Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka: Each household received USD54.75 per month in a combination of cash and commodity vouchers (WFP Lesotho, 2020). In 2007/2008, World Vision delivered cash and food transfers to 9 172 households for six months, starting from December 2007 to May 2008 (Mhlanga & Devereux, 2008).

The livelihoods of rural households are vulnerable to climate change manifestations, and the increased dependency on lean season relief for many rural households highlights a disconnection from the widely held assumption that 80% of rural households' livelihoods are dependent on agricultural production. Rural households have been increasingly supported through social policies like the Old Age Pension and the quarterly orphan and vulnerable children grant. Research in Lesotho however, focused on how projected climate disasters could be averted by reinforcing existing innovative structures (Mukwanda et al., 2016; Dick-Sagoie et al., 2023). The future projected analysis is highly reductive prevents a historically informed understanding of the challenges facing the communities and

singles out climate change as the only important factor affecting agricultural production in communities. The current study contributes to the climate adaptation debate by looking at the households' livelihoods from their perspective.

In rural Lesotho villages today, the deeply entrenched cultural, social, and economic ties with migrant labour persist, although the current context often means a partial reversal of gender roles and increased insecurity for those men and women alike, entering either the domestic or the South African labour market (Bloomer, 2009). It is widely acknowledged that there has been increasing migration, which includes women as domestic workers in South Africa (Botea et al., 2018). While the studies have focused on the experiences of migrant workers specifically women, they have overlooked the household's livelihoods as the unit of production which is guided by institutions that enable or constrain access to different opportunities.

1.5 The Structure of the Thesis

This first chapter provides a general introduction to the study. It particularly pays attention to the reasons and necessity of this study. It argues that even though the impacts of the socioeconomic changes in the rural households have been widely documented, the studies overlooked the household responses to the changes. Furthermore, households' livelihoods have been evolving with new challenges and navigations being explored by households over time. To provide a general introduction to the study, the chapter gives the focus of the study, and details the problem and the approach. Chapter 2 provides a review of the theoretical framework used for the study, which was the sustainable livelihoods approach. Bourdieu's theory of practice and the human economy approach were adopted to holistically capture the complexity and dynamics of rural households' livelihoods.

Chapter 3 is an outline of the research approach. The chapter considers the fact that rural households are usually researched from a communal perspective, which overlooks the household as a unit of analysis, and therefore, the current study adopted an ethnographic case study to focus on the livelihood dynamics of rural households. Finally, the chapter presents the methods used to collect and analyse the data. Guided by the main objective of the research, the chapter explains the overall approach and methods used and why

they were adopted, the sampling criteria, the data collection procedures, how ethical issues were managed, the limitations and the data analysis process. The chapter also discusses the opportunities that arose and some of the challenges encountered during field research. It deliberates on my positionality as the researcher and the impact this had on the overall research.

Chapter 4 starts by giving a profile of the study area to provide the setting and background of the households under study. It presents an analysis and assessment of the historical situation of rural households in the Khubelu catchment. The chapter also discusses rural households' livelihoods from the time of settlement in the villages, the period of heightened migrant labour, and livelihoods after the decline of migrant labour. It explores socioeconomic structures emerging with the continuous evolution of livelihoods, and traces and analyses the structural and social changes that were experienced by rural households. Chapter 5 discusses the rural households' livelihood activities with a focus on the livelihood decision-making process. It discusses different factors underlying rural households' livelihood choices and departs from an assumption of autonomous individuals making decisions to maximise their utility. The discussion also incorporates an understanding of institutions and how they shape households' livelihoods.

Chapter 6 discusses the vulnerabilities and challenges that affect the pursued livelihoods and the impacts these have on the households. Vulnerability is understood from both the starting point and end point approach. Chapter 7 analyses how households navigate the dynamic complexities and numerous obstacles that constrain their livelihoods, which is discussed in the previous chapter. The chapter is guided by an understanding of the human economy showing that when people are facing livelihood constraints, they always find ways to survive by informally organising themselves within the narrowed space of the economic system for their betterment, reaction, and protection. Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter and aims to pull the themes together, discusses the policy implications of the findings and makes suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The complex livelihoods remain a defining feature of rural households in developing countries (Scoones, 2009). Rural households consist of both on-farm and off-farm livelihoods (Ellis, 1998) However, there has been a widely held optimism on agriculture as the basis for poverty reduction, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa based on the assumption that diversification of livelihoods would emerge from agricultural success (Ellis, 2006). This assumption has been heavily disputed by many scholars who argue it misrepresents the livelihoods of the rural households which are undergoing deagrarianisation (Bryceson, 1996; Ellis, 2006). In the recent past scholars like Giller et al (2021) still maintain that while farming is still important for households for both the food supply and income in sub-Saharan Africa, such farming is no longer sufficient for survival and full-time occupation from which one could earn a living. In this chapter, it is strongly argued that the livelihoods of rural households in Mokhotlong are perceived to be based on agricultural production which considers rehabilitation of degraded land important in livelihoods sustenance. Therefore, there is a need for an alternative approach to the study of Mokhotlong rural households' livelihoods that starts with people's practices. Thus, the focus of this chapter shifts from the broad and general to the local. It is considered here that understanding the Mokhotlong people's livelihood responses to natural and socioeconomic changes requires a properly conceived framework.

The sustainable livelihood approach is therefore central to this discussion. It provides important insight and a strong starting point for understanding the dynamics of Mokhotlong rural households as it emphasizes ownership and access to assets which households use to construct their livelihoods. To improve the theoretical depth and make it more powerful analytically, this study draws from other two approaches' Bourdieu's theory of practice and the human economy approach. These theories were incorporated based on their applicability to the research problem and add an important dimension to the study. The three theories also share some characteristics and highlight several variables critical in understanding rural households' emerging livelihoods.

2.2 Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

The sustainable livelihoods approach emerged in the 1990s as an alternative approach to understanding the lives and livelihoods of the poor from their perspective (Kranz, 2001; Morse & Mcnamara, 2013). It is a bottom-up analysis of poverty in rural households that counterargues classical indicators formulated by experts' analysis of livelihoods in terms of productivity, income, and unemployment (Chambers & Conway, 1992). The approach argues that conventional understanding of livelihoods in economic terms is reductionist as it neglects other aspects pertinent to understanding livelihoods. Its main premise is that rural livelihoods are widely diversified, and households combine complex activities to survive (Ellis, 2000; Scoones, 2013). The sustainable livelihoods approach grew out of the realisation that change is accelerating simultaneously with human aspirations and relying on conventional approaches makes future conditions harder and harder to predict resulting in an incorrect and outdated anticipation of the future (Chambers & Conway, 1992).

Sustainable livelihoods approach is a people-centred approach to understanding the livelihoods of rural households based on their capabilities not on their needs. The goal is to build on what people already have. It aims to do away with preconceived ideas of what people need to achieve their goals and to develop a dynamic picture of how people operate in their environment (Carney, 1999; Department for International Development, 1999). The mainstream definition of sustainable livelihoods approach is as follows.

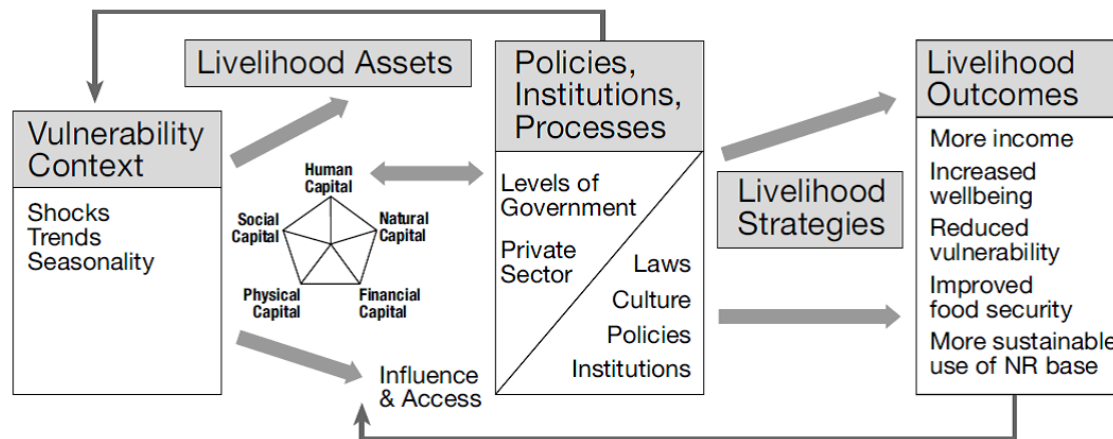
A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (both material and social resources), and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance the capabilities and assets while not undermining the natural resource base (Scoones, 1998). Stresses are defined as pressures that are typically continuous, cumulative, and to some extent, predictable, such as seasonal shortages, rising populations, or declining resources, and shocks are impacts that are typically sudden, unpredictable, and traumatic, such as floods, fires, and epidemics (Kranz, 2001).

Sustainable livelihoods are closely linked to sustainable development, which is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (World Commission on Environment, 1987). Sustainable development was informed by ecologists in the contemporary environment movement in the 1970s who were concerned about shocks and stresses to ecosystems. Sustainability was conceived as the ability to bounce back from such shocks to stable states. This sustainability traces more tangible links between the ecosystem and ecological footprint assessment, including the ecological footprint assessment and the development of carrying capacity, which is still widely used in most environmental interventions. Tangible assets are resources and stores, and intangible assets are claims and access. The sustainable livelihoods approach incorporates the following forms of sustainability: A livelihood is environmentally sustainable when it maintains or enhances the local and global assets on which livelihoods depend and has net beneficial effects on other livelihoods; and a livelihood is socially sustainable when it can cope and recover from stresses and shocks and provide for future generations (Chambers & Conway, 1992).

The livelihoods of poor people are understood through the sustainable livelihoods framework that defines livelihoods as a combination of capabilities, assets, material, and social resources required for a means of living (Chambers & Conway, 1992). Figure 2.1 shows the five key elements of livelihoods. It looks at the emergence of livelihoods within a particular context, and focuses on the socioeconomic conditions, history, and changing policy issues. Livelihood assets are usually presented in a pentagon form as capitals are not only assets that can be used instrumentally but also enable access to different livelihood strategies. The livelihood strategies

are mediated by institutional processes, laws, culture, and norms that can enable and retrain the access of individuals or households to livelihood strategies.

Figure 2.1 Five key elements of livelihoods (Source: Department for International Development, 1999)



2.2.1 Livelihood resources

The ability to pursue different livelihood strategies depends on the basic material, social, tangible, and intangible assets that people possess. From a technical point of view, livelihood assets are seen as capital that enables the production from which a livelihood is derived (Scoones, 1998). In this study livelihood assets referred to as livelihood resources are not only resources that people use in building livelihoods, but they are also assets that give people the capability to be and to act (Bebbington, 1999). This definition challenges the input and output direct relationship between assets and livelihood strategies, which is a simplified version of livelihood analysis often employed in the analysis of rural households' livelihoods.

The sustainable livelihoods approach emphasises the importance of assets as means of resources that people use to build livelihoods and also recognising that those who are poor may not have income but do have other material or non-material assets, such as their health, labour, knowledge and skills, friends and family, and natural resources around them (Rakodi, 2002). The ability of households to avoid or reduce vulnerability and to increase economic productivity depends, as suggested above, on their initial assets and on their ability to transform those assets into income, food, or other necessities by intensifying existing strategies, developing new strategies, or diversifying their current strategies (Rakodi, 2002).

A clear example of access to assets work is the one noted by Ellis and Allison (2004) that in the context of fishing wealthier households that own fishing boats, nets, and traps may have control over access to better fishing areas. The middle-income households may not have substantial fishing-related assets but may have shares in nets, and the lower-income households have access to fishing opportunities by working as crew members and labourers on fishing boats. This example confirms Bebbington's (1999) definition of assets as sources of the capability to act, engage, and change the world.

The assets can be categorised into tangible assets, such as housing and income, and intangible assets, such as claims for support on family or the state for assistance (Collins, 2004). Tangible assets are physical resources like land, water, ploughs, and irrigation equipment. Access is key in the use of resources, such as access to gather wood from the forest, access to information about possibilities for wage labour, and access to weather forecasts for farmers. Assets can be held in private or as common property; for example, physical resources such as rangelands and water sources are public resources, while livestock and farming implements are privately owned (De Haan, 2012; Ellis, 2000).

The assets are categorised as capital into five categories, namely human, natural, social, financial, and physical capital. However, some assets do not fit neatly into these categories, like livestock, which can be either financial capital or physical capital, therefore, for the current study, livestock was classified as physical capital since it must mostly be converted to cash before being financial

capital, even though in some instances, livestock is till battered to access other resources needed by the household. This capital can be stored, accumulated, exchanged, or depleted and put to work to generate a flow of income or other benefits (Rakodi, 2002). The following subsection discusses the five capitals.

2.2.1.1 Human capital

Human capital refers to the skills, knowledge, and ability to labour and the good health and physical capability that is important for the successful pursuit of different livelihood strategies (Scoones, 1998). Human capital can be enhanced by education, skills, and health enabling people to take advantage of economic opportunities (Rakodi, 1999). Recently human capital is not only important for livelihoods as stored potential but also needs an environment where people can utilise their expertise. This is evident in sub-Saharan Africa particularly in Zimbabwe where despite the education qualifications that people possess, youth struggle to access job opportunities to operationalise their skills and end up in precarious activities (Gurukume, 2018). A high unemployment rate impacts human capital as people do not have an environment suitable for exploiting their skills and energy for their livelihoods. In the case of Lesotho, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has increased the morbidity and mortality of the productive population, thus reducing the human capital of families (Drimie, 2002).

2.2.1.2 Natural capital

Natural capital consists of resource stocks, such as soil, water, trees, air, and genetic resources; environmental services; hydrological cycle; and pollution sinks from which resources flow and services useful for livelihoods are derived (Scoones, 1998). It is often argued that natural capital is mostly relevant capital in rural areas as people are perceived to derive their livelihoods from the natural environment (Barbier, 2012). While the majority of households still practice agriculture in rural households there is persistent low agricultural productivity and declining farm sizes with a rising (Alobo Loison, 2015).

2.2.1.3 Financial capital

Financial capital refers to capital base in the form of cash, credit, and other economic assets, including basic infrastructure, production equipment, and technologies that are essential for the pursuit of any livelihood strategy (Scoones, 1998). Financial capital is usually derived from the sale of labour, pensions, and remittances from outside the household that supply cash flows and can be saved when there is a surplus (Chambers, 1997). Credit schemes provide money for low-income households to spread the cost of more expensive capital investments and can make previously unaffordable capital costs affordable (Rakoli, 2014). Cash-based transfers as a form of social protection policies are also an important source of financial capital which had seen to be increasing human capital by keeping children in school (Bastagli, et al., 2016).

2.2.1.4 Social capital

Social capital is a widely used concept that often refers to the norms, and trust, which foster coordination and cooperation among community members and enable them to collaborate for mutual benefits (Putnam, 1995). Social capital is important in fostering the social networks and information needed to achieve collective action and sustain a social and institutional environment that is ready to adapt and change (Abenakyo et al., 2008). Social capital underscores the significance of relationships, trust, reciprocity, and shared values as vital resources that individuals and communities leverage to navigate challenges (Pretty & Ward, 2001). Social capital is key in enabling access to different capitals, and Bebbington (1999) mentioned that social capital facilitates access to credit and the possibility of saving these forms of collective action facilitates the accumulation of produced capital, which leads to more effective participation in certain markets. In changing climate conditions in sub-Saharan Africa social capital farmers draw upon social capital to build their adaptation strategies by forming cooperatives to reduce production and transportation costs (Connolly-Boutin & Smit, 2015).

Physical capital

Physical capital includes the basic infrastructure and producer goods that are essential for supporting livelihoods, such as transportation, roads, markets, water supply, schools, banks, cooperatives, employment centres, community development programs, communication, health and sanitation, and many other non-family services. It also includes tools and equipment used for production, such as ploughs, cattle, seeds, and pesticides. Physical capital is also key to people's adaptation, and Codjoe and Owusu (2011) pointed out that communities better served by roads have more available food. Physical capital includes tools, machinery, and buildings owned by households that enable the production of goods and services to earn a living. These assets can also be exchanged or rented out to get financial capital or other physical capital.

2.2.2 Policies, institutions, and processes

In the sustainable livelihoods approach, policies, institutions, and processes are a category that offers ways of assessing how policies and norms shape the livelihoods activities, access to assets and the vulnerability context they live in (Brocklesby & Fisher, 2003; Chambers & Conway, 1992). Institutions might either be formal or informal, and fluid but they influence the access to livelihood resources which in turn affect the livelihood strategies options and ultimately the livelihood outcomes (Krantz, 2001). For instance, in patriarchal societies, women are often not permitted to own or inherit land, and if they are widowed or divorced, the land to which they have been entitled within their marriage may be withdrawn from them hence limiting their access to agricultural production as a form of livelihoods. (Ellis & Allison, 2004). In the recent past studies showed the high prevalence of women joining livelihood activities that men previously dominated, like migration however the gender patterns in households have persisted (Bullock & Tegbaro, 2019).

Processes are the laws, regulations, policies, operational arrangements, agreements, societal norms, and practices that, in turn, determine how structures operate (Serrat, 2017). The processes are at the centre of the rural households as in the context of this study

the livelihoods pursued in South Africa are subjected to immigration policies. Only people who hold a Lesotho Special permit were eligible to study, work and operate business in South Africa while many other people who did not apply for the permit in 2015/2016 were ineligible for work and therefore were informal immigrants. Therefore, policies either enable access or hinder access to certain livelihoods.

However, institutions and processes are not static, and people manoeuvre their way through them. Sekonya (2022) study on the cross-border trade of mopane worms from Botswana to South Africa found that the informal and cross-border nature of the mopane worm trade compels actors to use their agency to adopt multiple strategies to navigate complex governance arrangements. Schapendonk (2018) sought to make sense of the travel experiences of African migrants navigating Africa and the European web of facilitation and control and highlighted that actors mediate their relations with relevant actors in migration industries, which are constantly shifting. In Lesotho informal migration, Griffin (2016) noted that migrants and smugglers do not simply avoid the legal apparatus that regulates migration, rather they strategically engage with the policies and practices, making a border social practice.

2.2.3 Vulnerability context

Vulnerability context is characterised as the insecurity in the well-being of households in the face of changes in the external environment (Serrat, 2008). The vulnerability context has two sides an external side which includes shocks, seasonality and trends and an internal side which is the lack of ability and means to cope (Ellis, 2006; Serrat, 2008). The vulnerability context includes shocks mainly conflicts, illnesses, floods, and droughts; seasonalities are prices and employment opportunities; critical trends include environmental, economic, and technological trends (Serrat, 2008). In rural Botswana, Sallu et al (2010) noted that large-scale environmental changes have altered the vulnerability context and influenced the livelihoods that households pursued.

While vulnerability analysis involves identifying not only the threats to individuals and households and their assets but also their resilience to mobilise assets to exploit opportunities and resist or recover from the negative effects of the changing environment

(Rakodi, 2015). Natarajan (2022) argues that the vulnerability context localises the causes and solutions overlooking the structural conditions and further points out that vulnerability is dynamic.

The vulnerability context is closely influenced by the institutions' policies and processes as these mediate households' ability to exercise their different capitals. For example, migration policies that discourage mobility impact households' ability to exploit their human capital to earn income and therefore curtail their potential to cope with the effects of environmental changes on livelihoods.

2.2.4 Livelihood strategies

Livelihood strategies refer to the manifold activities that rural people undertake to access food, housing, and money (De Haan, 2007). Chambers and Conway (1992) categorised livelihood strategies into three broad clusters, namely agricultural intensification or extensification; livelihood diversification; and migration. These cover the range of options open to rural people. Agricultural intensification refers to gaining more livelihood from agriculture and can include livestock rearing, aquaculture, and forestry. Through processes of intensification, more output per unit area is achieved through capital investment or increases in labour inputs and more land is cultivated. In Mokhotlong, agricultural intensification is limited by a lack of arable land as the area does not have land free for allocation, and land is rather passed down through inheritance.

Livelihood diversification is defined as the process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival and to improve their standards of living (Ellis, 2000). Ellis and Allison (2004) posited that livelihood diversification reduces poverty, makes the poor less vulnerable to food insecurity, and can provide the basis for building assets that can enable households to escape poverty. In sub-Saharan Africa, studies showed that rural livelihoods are heavily based on non-farm income and that the rural reality is that livelihoods are widely diversified captured in (Bryceson, 1999). The last strategy is migration, which is moving away and temporarily or permanently seeking a livelihood elsewhere.

Migration has been an element of Mokhotlong livelihood strategies for a long time, and more than three-quarters of households' livelihoods are dependent on migration (Cross, 1980). In most cases, migration has gone beyond a survival strategy to accumulation as remittances enable accumulation strategies in the form of housing or productive investment (Bebbington, 1999). The livelihood strategies have a synergistic relationship between farm and non-farm livelihoods (Loison, 2015). This relationship is common in rural households as migration earns migrant remittances, which rural households usually invest to promote agricultural productivity. In the same manner, agriculture is sometimes used to fund expeditions of new livelihood strategies, for example, selling sheep to migrate. While the sustainable livelihoods approach claims that people pursue different strategies, (de Bruijn & Dijk, 2003) argued that livelihoods emerge out of an iterative process in which a step-by-step procedure is applied to attain goals, preferences, and resources while constantly reassessing and adjusting means in unstable conditions. Therefore, in the dynamic environment in which rural livelihoods are based, a pathway is proposed as it is different from a strategy because a pathway needs not to be a device to attain a pre-set goal, which is set after a process of conscious and rational weighing of the actor's preference. Livelihoods should be treated as a moving target as people constantly learn what works with the experience, they gain pursuing different livelihood activities (Zoomers, 1999). Therefore, in rural households' livelihoods can include farm activities, non-farm but rural livelihood activities and also migration may be combined. These diverse activities may be used to support one another for the betterment of the overall household.

2.2.5 Livelihood outcomes

Sustainable livelihood outcomes are the last element in the framework and represent the actual products of livelihood strategies as mediated by the institutional processes within a given vulnerability context and access to different capitals. The outcomes are actual benefits that accrue to the households. The livelihood framework identifies increased income, increased well-being, reduced

vulnerability, improved food security, and a more sustainable natural resource base. The outcome can be positive or negative as some livelihood strategies can yield higher or reduced assets, reduce or raise vulnerability to food insecurity, and improve or degrade environmental resources (Ellis & Allison, 2004).

2.2.6 Critique of the sustainable livelihoods approach

The sustainable livelihoods approach has widely been applied in rural development initiatives to reduce poverty in rural households and is strongly guided by how the poor are organising their livelihoods. The approach is important as it seeks to understand the livelihoods of the poor from their perspective to develop effective support measures that align with the identified livelihoods and aspirations of rural people. It provides a counterargument to the hegemonic approaches that have dominated development inquiry and practice. However, the sustainable livelihoods approach with its narrow focus on agency has implications for the methodology used to understand rural livelihoods and tends to neglect structural influences on livelihoods. This provides a one-sided approach in the analysis of livelihoods, and Scoones (2013) highlighted that sustainability and resilience cannot always emerge through local adaptation in conditions of extreme vulnerability.

A second major critique of the livelihoods approach is its failure to translate theory into practice (Scoones, 2013). Scholars argue that the livelihood perspective has fallen back to the technocratic approach that it initially aimed to counter hence defeating the purpose by considering capital in an economic way and overlooking the social embeddedness of assets (Bebbington, 1999; Scoones, 2013; Sakdapolrak, 2016). The pre-determined modes of livelihood analysis inherent in livelihood perspectives and vulnerability are liable to make future predictions unreliable in a rapidly changing rural context (Chambers & Conway, 1992).

Thirdly, the weakness of the approach is that it is too broad and general. The sustainable livelihoods approach covers many aspects on micro and macro levels and takes into consideration many factors that affect the livelihood of poor people, but it falls short of showing the interaction between both because it may not be possible to analyse the underlying decision-making processes embedded

within the livelihood strategies. The sustainable livelihoods approach illustrates the elements that shape different livelihood strategies but does not show how and why people choose those strategies. Scoones (2013) pointed out that this weakness may mean that the analysis of livelihoods in precarious situations fails. This is a limitation in the study of rural livelihoods as precarious conditions characterise rural survival in many low-income countries (Ellis, 2000).

The fourth shortfall of the sustainable livelihoods approach is the immense focus on present livelihoods and how the households are earning their livelihoods without looking at the history that shaped the contemporary livelihoods. The livelihoods approach is ahistorical and takes the current situation as a given rather than identify the events that resulted in existing conditions (O’Laughlin, 2002). It is necessary to understand the livelihoods and how they came to be through different processes and policies. To understand social change, the circumspective and retrospective approaches must be combined to achieve a better understanding of changing livelihoods over time (Murray, 2001).

Lastly, the livelihood perspective is that it is not linked to the existing social theories. The theory of practice provides a clear understanding of the livelihood-making processes by shedding light on the decision-making process and the adoption of certain livelihood pathways embedded in how people make meaning of their situations. Despite the focus on agency, an explicit reference to a theory that explains people’s actions is lacking (Sakdapolrak, 2014). Thieme (2011) argued that a theoretical foundation is necessary to gain a better understanding of people’s access to and use of resources, the relationship between subjects and society, and socioeconomic dependencies. This shortcoming limits the analysis of power relations within the livelihood-making process within households and different age groups (De Haan & Zoomers, 2005).

The sustainable livelihoods framework did indeed help to focus the current research on core livelihood issues, but it is not an analytical framework that makes it possible to grasp the complexity of the interrelationships that constitute the livelihood realities. It also tends to support a specific understanding of rural development along more neo-liberal lines (Geiser et al., 2011), and therefore, to get a

deeper understanding of the challenges faced by people, more theorising is required. Therefore, I also adopted Bourdieu's theory of practice to address the shortcomings of the sustainable livelihood's framework.

2.3 Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

Bourdieu's (1992) theory of practice is a set of thinking tools for analysing complex and subtle social structures and relationships that contribute to differences in individuals' practices (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The application of the theory of practice has made a significant contribution to the study of livelihood dynamics as it narrows the gap between the theoretical and empirical, while also being practically engaged (Turner, 2011). Bourdieu's theory of practice is important to narrow the divide between the structure and agency inherent in livelihoods perspectives and can inform and contribute to the advancements in livelihoods research (Sakdapolrak, 2014).

The theory of practice offers a way to empirically understand not what the livelihood strategies of rural households are but how the members of households access different livelihood activities. To fully grasp the livelihoods of Mokhotlong rural households, the current study adopted Bourdieu's theory of practice, which has been used to narrow the gaps in the sustainable livelihoods framework to analyse the dynamic livelihoods prevalent in rural areas.

Bourdieu (1984 p. 101) expressed the theory of practice with the following formula:

$$[(\textit{habitus}) (\textit{capital})] + \textit{field} = \textit{practice}$$

Social practices are understood as a "set of ways of doing and saying, are pre-reflexive and should be conceived as habitual and routinised actions informed by practical knowledge and an implicit practical sense (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 167). Practice refers to individuals' actions and behaviour, which result from the relations between their dispositions (*habitus*) and their position in a field (*capital*), within the current state of play of that field (Maton, 2012). Bourdieu's concerns were to understand the practical logic of

everyday life and social action in order to understand relations of power and domination (Power, 1999) to address the livelihoods approach, which is limited in linking theory to practice.

2.3.1 Habitus

Habitus is a concept that Bourdieu uses to describe the embodiment of social structures in individuals. It is described as a set of dispositions, internal to individuals, that reflect external social structures and shape how individuals perceive the world and act in it (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu (1977) defined habitus as a collection of lasting, adaptable traits that guide mental functions to the extent that individuals frequently operate under their influence without conscious awareness. Similarly, the concept of habitus serves as a means to identify how social and cultural background influences individuals' thoughts and behaviours, even though habitus is not entirely structured and instead remains strongly influenced by historical, social, and cultural contexts. Although the social structures embodied in habitus do not determine behaviour, individuals are predisposed to act by the social structures that have shaped them, because, in effect, they carry those social structures with them (Power, 1999).

Habitus is an embodied reality that often goes unquestioned because of its inherent nature. It is cultivated through unconscious assimilation as individuals integrate behaviours into their lives by emulating other people through a process of iterative learning (Lane, 2000). Habitus is developed through socialisation, personal understanding, and learning. Women from a young age tend to learn housekeeping, child-rearing, taking care of the elderly, and carrying out agricultural work near the house. The man is seen as the main cash-income earner, and consequently, it is he who migrates for work, although these patterns are now changing (Thieme, 2008). The subordinate role women assume upon marriage is rarely questioned, and rather, women and societies in rural areas accept it as how things are supposed to be.

Habitus is employed to explain how the socio and cultural backgrounds shape individuals' thoughts and actions, which was crucial in the current study to illuminate the emerging livelihoods and factors that influence them. People's lived experiences (habitus) derive

from relative endowments of different forms of capitals, which in turn, define their historically evolving positions within social settings (Suminar, 2013).

2.3.2 Capital

Capital represents a theoretical concept that refers to actors mobilising their resources to maintain and improve their social positions. Further conceptualised, capital is a means of appropriating social energy that provides actors with chances of success with capabilities to influence their social advancement (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu's theory refers to all forms of power as capital. He identified three capitals, namely economic, social, and cultural capital, and these are interchangeable. Capital is mostly considered as a stock with which households are endowed that they can use to pursue their ends.

Economic capital refers to the overall amount of financial and other directly exchangeable resources that actors possess (Power, 1999). These include money, ownership of land rights, and property rights, which are easily disposed to earn cash. Economic capital retains a similar conceptualisation to financial capital in the livelihood framework. Social capital is represented by the quality and the quantity of relationships with family members, friends, and acquaintances and by forming social networks (Bourdieu, 2018). These manifests in terms of jobs and opportunities arranged by friends and fellow villagers. Being recognised by others as a network member is a precondition for gaining access to the resources that can be distributed through the network (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The relational perspective of Bourdieu's conceptualising of capital can be understood as he considers capital as all forms of valued resources. Bourdieu (2018) mentioned that capital functions as a social relation of power because this is precisely what determines the value of resources after interest is manifested. Livelihood strategies are manifestations of social relations of power of capital (Navarro, 2006).

2.3.2.1 *Cultural capital*

Bourdieu's (2018)) concept of cultural capital uses his distinction between objectified (material or tangible) and embodied (intangible) culture. Embodied cultural capital represents a set of cultivated dispositions acquired during the process of socialisation. In the context of rural livelihoods, the systems of knowledge, beliefs, customs, and norms (embodied) that contribute to a wide range of performances and artistic products (objectified) play a significant role in the everyday lives of the people. Cultural capital in objectified form includes material objects and media, such as paintings, books, sculptures, monuments, and instruments used for cultural composition (Cvetičanin, 2012). These material objects, such as paintings and sculptures, can be viewed as part of someone's economic capital while their carriers are regarded as having embodied capital (Cvetičanin, 2012).

Cultural capital in institutionalised form pertains to academic qualifications that tend to neutralise some features of embodied cultural capital, specifically those that concern bodily aspects (Bourdieu, 1986). These cultural assets have rarely been explicitly recognised within development thinking. Daskon and Binns (2010) argued that cultural norms and values are central to understanding how people access the social, economic, physical, human, and environmental capital that is the focus of the sustainable livelihoods approach. Culture shapes access to other forms of capital, but that culture should be thought of as an asset. It is argued that intangible cultural capital in the form of norms and values, generates important feelings and emotions like pride and identity, which sustain livelihood activities across time and space. Local cultural capital passed through generations to sustain people's livelihoods in holistic ways that no amount of external field schools, retraining, improved infrastructure, or education ever could (Daskon & McGregor, 2012). Chaminda, a young silversmith from Kiriwaula, emphasised intangible benefits as follows: "My whole family lives by sharing our family tradition, I learned silver works from my grandfather, and I was able to earn from my works at the age of 15, which made me so happy" (Daskon & McGregor, 2012; 556).

This is not surprising as the fastest-growing sector of world trade has been in cultural commodities, services such as entertainment, education, media, software and information, along with explosive growth in financial and transport services (Hart et al., 2010). In the livelihoods approach, human capital is often referred to as skills acquired, especially education, that enable people to gain financial capital (Rakodi, 1999) However, this often obscures the skills that have been unconsciously inculcated within an individual from socialisation which are better explained by the cultural capital (Bruin, 1999). The systems of knowledge, and norms of all activities embodied from cultural disposition are not usually constraints as often perceived in the sustainable livelihoods approach under the institutions they also play significant lives in people's livelihoods through the production of arts, crafts and music that people harness to improve their lives (Daskon & McGregor, 2012). The cultural capital enhances access to other capitals.

2.3.3 Fields

According to Bourdieu & Wacquant (2000), fields are defined, social spaces with specific internal logics (rules, topics, or issues, and forms of relevant capital) that may all change over time. There are various fields within the social world, and each field is a relational space of its own dedicated to a specific type of activity. Within these spaces, actors struggle over resources, stakes, and access to maintain or enhance their positions for legitimacy and/or power within a specific field. Powerful actors, endowed with the largest amount and best-structured types of capital, are in a position to change or even define the rules of the game. Fields are arenas of struggle in which actors attempt to accrue or control various resources such as economic, cultural, and social capital. It captures formally institutionalised relationships based on explicit codes or rules as well as non-formalised, customary relationships structured by cultural norms or practices. A field consists of a set of objectives and of historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). As such, fields constitute a network of positions or a playground where actors try to follow individual strategies. Playing according to the rules of the game as defined by the specific set of capital most valuable for holding or extending power within the field contributes to the reproduction of the fields (Bourdieu, 1977).

Bourdieu sees the concept of the field as superior to that of the institution as it conceives the conflictual character of social arrangement and includes fewer of the formal aspects of institutions. A field can be thought of as a space that is organised around a specific capital. The field exists as physical and social spaces in which people live, and it structures the habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu's theory of fields sets itself in a long line of reflections on the historical differentiation of social activities of functions and social division of labour. A field is a structure of relative positions within which the actors and groups think, act, and take positions. These relative positions are defined by the volume and structure of their capital (Hilgers & Mangez, 2014).

Bourdieu (1977) emphasised that positions in a field are determined by the unequal distribution of capital and not the individual characteristics of those who occupy them. In fields, the important struggles for individuals are to maintain and improve their position in the field, and these battles are mostly waged around enforcing a principle of hierarchy that works in favour of certain groups of actors. Fields are structured social spaces in which struggles are waged between actors who occupy subservient positions based on a particular capital. The established actors aim to maintain the status quo while the actors in disadvantaged positions challenge the strategies.

Thieme (2011) found that in the field of migration as adaptation, migrants are found in low-skilled informal market jobs and tend to accept occupational wage discrimination as they cannot organise themselves. People who are inherently disadvantaged in a particular field naturally adjust their aspirations (one embodiment of habitus) and very often turn to self-elimination without consciously assessing their real chances of success (Yang, 2014) Furthermore, the rules and regulations of the fields prohibit access for migrants to exercise their capital; for example, education and skills are solely based on their citizenship. However, no actor's position within the social field is absolute. It is based on the extent to which one possesses different kinds of capital. Individuals are automatically advantaged or disadvantaged based on their background (Thieme, 2011). The dominant or subordinate positions that individuals and group actors hold within a field are determined by their relative endowments of the various capitals (Suminar, 2013).

Bourdieu's theory of practice ties all three core concepts together by stating that the practice results from interactions between individuals' dispositions, the habitus, and their position in the field (capital) in the current state of play of that social arena (fields). A capital does not exist and function except concerning a field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Habitus is largely acquired through a prolonged process of internalisation of the social structure (ibid). Individuals internalise not only the rules of the social field they are engaged in but also their position within the field and their chances of success, which are determined by the dominant forms of capital in the field and their individual capital. The relationship between habitus and fields is two-way. On the one hand, it can be seen as conditioning as physical and social spaces in which individuals live shape the habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). On the other hand, it is a relation of knowledge and cognitive construction, and the habitus is the basis of our understanding of our lives and outside the world (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127).

2.3.4 Critics of Bourdieu's theory of practice

Bourdieu's theory of practice is meant to balance structure and agency because households are not rational entities aiming to maximise profit and are also not subjects that exist in isolation from social structures. However, Bourdieu's analysis of social practice heavily relies on habitus and critics argued that it is impossible to witness social change (Brubaker, 1985). This means that social practice is considered as a reflection and determined by past dispositions embodied in social agents, which results in limiting the focus on agential roles and creativity of subjects in facing new situations. The habitus creates the believe that the historical experience matters more, which curtails the creativity and agency that social agents employ in social practice in changing environments.

Practice is founded in habitus, which is the most widely different domain of practice and tends to reproduce the conditions of its production by producing the objectively coherent and systematically characteristic strategies of a particular mode of production (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu seems to fall prey to the fallacy he called "the abolition of the subject" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 10) to the

extent that it is the habitus that determines each of the steps taken by the agents, whose actions are doomed to reproduce the structures where they performed (Croce, 2015).

The role of habitus has been criticised for limiting human agency, which is not observable in practice by focusing on the social agents as the vessel of habitus. Alexander (1995) argued that the logic of practice is biased towards habitus, making it the main determinant of individuals' social makeup. Bourdieu's theory dwells more on the social reproduction of habitus and turns a blind eye to individuals' values and ideas (ibid). Many scholars therefore claimed that Bourdieu's theory fell into the trap of being deterministic and designed to work against it (Alexander, 1995; Shilling, 1992). The theory gives habitus the causal power to determine practices.

It imposes inescapable limits on agents' choices and undermines people's reflective attitude because considerations and seemingly conscious decisions that agents might take while performing actions have already been and had always been by habitus. Agents' considerations and seemingly conscious decisions turn out to be passive representations of cognitive processes induced by the context where the habitus unfolds (Croce, 2015). Habitus rules out the possibility of social change. It is argued that habitus imposes itself upon agents, and therefore, they can never construct new strategies for new situations because they are not aware of their habitus and cannot begin to interpret them (King, 2000).

In the rapidly changing livelihood context, individuals do not follow pre-structured dispositions and habitus, and instead, agents draw on the predictability of intersecting practices in a given moment. However, habitus is important in understanding the livelihoods of youth, and Schilling (1992) argued that youth piece together various materials and images in the immediate surroundings to retain some sense of themselves as capable agents. Here, the starting point can barely be the individual subject who calculates opportunities and optimises possibilities based on individual stocks of capital at their disposition. But there is something more to see in the fragmentation, fluidity, and temporality in young people's lives (Schilling et al., 2019). The theory of practice is criticised for being

too deterministic because it explains social action in light of people's backgrounds and thus fails to identify connections between people's actions and social change.

While Yang (2014) supported Bourdieu's theory of practice, he highlighted that in the rapidly changing world with a vast amount of information, people constantly review and adjust their inherited habitus to construct successful new habitus to suit the demands of different fields. The current study therefore adopted the human economy approach to analyse what people do in the face of adversity. The human economy approach acknowledges people's ability to constantly devise mechanisms for the betterment of their livelihoods in the unequal world (Hart, 2010). It fills the gap of the unconscious agent whose actions are informed by historical dispositions.

2.4 Human Economy Approach

The human economy framework challenges the conventional divide between economics and life's broader social and cultural dimensions. It advocates for a more integrated perspective on economic activities, emphasizing the centrality of social relationships and human well-being. This approach highlights the significance of informal, non-market, and community-driven practices, positioning them as equally important to formal market systems (Hart, 2010). It challenges the dominance of formal market systems by emphasizing the role of informal economies, social networks, and local practices in shaping economic realities, particularly in marginalized people. This is achieved through understanding people's lived experiences and aspirations.

Central to the idea of the human economy is the notion that economies share more similarities than the dichotomies often drawn between systems like capitalism and socialism suggest (Hart et al, 2010). This universality is evident as people employ diverse strategies to sustain themselves, blending government support, commerce, kinship networks, voluntary associations, and even illicit activities (Hart et al. 2010).

Two essential aspects important to the human economy also rooted in human existence are the need for self-reliance and the simultaneous need to belong and merge identities within diverse social relationships (Hart et al. 2010). Economies often present self-interest and mutuality as conflicting traits, positioning the economic and the social as opposing forces. According to Hart (2010) these aspects are inseparable in practice, and some societies have successfully integrated them by aligning private and public interests. This synthesis forms the basis of a new human universal, which envisions the unity of self and society as foundational to economic and social well-being. The human economy however is neither anti-market nor anti-economy. Its framework acknowledges the dual significance of large-scale institutions and self-organisation in shaping modern societies. It therefore argues for the coexistence of both institutions for economic development (Hart, 2013).

The human economy approach emerged from several scholars who have critiqued the impact of state bureaucracies and capitalist markets and science that have structured societies in ways that impersonalise economic life. Polanyi (1944) argued that the rise of market societies detached economic activity from its social context, transforming humans into "fictitious commodities". Hart et al. (2010) expanded on these themes, noting that technocratic expertise often alienates individuals by centralizing decision-making and marginalizing local knowledge.

According to Hart et al. (2010, p5) for the economy to be human it must have the following characteristics:

- “1. It is made and remade by people; economics should be of practical use to us all in our daily lives.”
- “2. It should address a great variety of situations in all their institutional complexity.”
- “3. It must be based on a more holistic conception of everyone’s needs and interests.”
- “4. It has to address humanity as a whole and the world society we are making.”

Despite the unequal economies, ordinary people have consistently found ways to express agency through informal economic activities. They organize within the gaps of dominant systems, forming associations for protection, betterment, and recreation (Hart et al, 2010). These actions exemplify the resilience of human economic practices, which persist in the "cracks" of formal systems. By examining these grassroots responses, the human economy framework sheds light on the diverse strategies people use to assert control over their economic lives. The human economy is therefore everywhere but often overshadowed by the dominant institutions.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

I combined the sustainable livelihoods approach, Bourdieu's theory of practice, and the human economy approach to developing the framework of analysis for the Khubelu households' case study. The principle that livelihoods should be studied from the viewpoint of the rural households themselves resonated with the objective of the study as the study aimed to understand how changes in socioeconomic and natural environments have impacted the production practices and livelihoods of rural households. From the sustainable livelihoods approach, my main interest was in Chambers and Conway's (1992) argument that change is happening faster and that conventional analysis with predefined models is liable to lag, which will lead to wrong expectations for the future. This approach was therefore indispensable in the analysis of rural household change for its contextual livelihood analysis. The sustainable livelihood approach is solely meant for rural households and was tailored to learn from the households themselves about their capabilities and aspirations in the livelihood-making process.

I thus considered the sustainable livelihoods approach as it offered a holistic approach to the complex and dynamic livelihoods of the rural poor. The approach enables the analysis of household assets central to exploring the socioeconomic changes in rural households and that negatively affected their agricultural production, practices, and livelihood pathways. The approach enabled me to understand the different capitals that the households have and how they use them to earn a living. It was vital to understand the physical capital,

mainly equipment, that the households have access to in order to understand their crop production and the natural capital significant for livestock production. The financial capital was important as it contributes to agricultural development in Lesotho.

I also incorporated Bourdieu's theory of practice in the study to understand how people adapt their livelihoods to the changing socioeconomic and environmental conditions. Unlike the sustainable livelihoods approach that provided an analysis of assets and institutional policies and processes that inform the livelihood strategies, the theory of practice provided an empirical understanding not of what the livelihood strategies of rural households are but how the members of households access different livelihood activities. The theory enabled me to tease out intricate details of what rural households do to adapt their livelihoods in precarious environments by using its core principles of habitus, capital, and field. The habitus gave a clear picture of how the livelihood strategies of rural households may have been unconsciously influenced by society and how it continuously shapes the emerging pathways of rural households. In this case, it was imperative to look back at the history of the rural households as their past conditions are reflected in future practices. Habitus functioned as a theoretical viewpoint of looking at and interpreting the empirical world. According to Saldapolrak (2014), the logic of practice helps to better understand people's decisions and choices.

The current study's framework was also built on capital in the theory of practice, which refer to accumulated labour power that places rural households in different social positions. The theory of practice identifies the three capitals, namely social, economic, and cultural capital. Social and economic capital are like cultural capital in the sustainable livelihoods approach, which is a distinct form of power that was used to understand the access of households to different livelihood opportunities. Culture should be seen not only as the institutional barrier that constrains the access that mediates livelihood activities households engage in but also an asset that opens barriers to resources. The identified cultural capital is the embodied culture, both objectified and institutionalised. In seeking to understand livelihood pathways, I discovered that some households were making a living plaiting whips and other handmade leatherworks, which are done using skills learned and passed down through generations. This is a form of objectified capital that rural households rely on to earn a living. At the same time, institutionalised capital pertains to the qualifications and skills learned. Cultural

capital enabled me to analyse the complex, subtle social structures that inform livelihood-making processes and how people access opportunities.

Field analysis was pertinent to understanding the vulnerabilities that households face in their pursuit of different livelihood pathways. Fields are used to interpret the experiences of households when deploying the capital they must use to access livelihoods. It was used to analyse the power dynamics involved in accessing different fields and how positions in the fields are unequal. However, it also showed the struggles and cooperation in the fields, which showed that the power dynamics are not absolute but rather that individuals and households at large are still navigating ways to advance their positions to reach a desired goal. The interpretation of fields included the constraints in the household level formed by embodied social relations, especially the gender dynamics that determine the position of women in fields and the activities that only woman can engage in for livelihood-making processes. Fields also refer to the rules and regulations imposed to access a living, such as the institutional, policies, and processes fields, which showed how rural households navigate the fields and even shape them based on their habitus and capitals. The fields were important to analyse the factors that contribute to vulnerabilities that rural households face.

The livelihood dynamism inherent in contemporary rural livelihoods made it clear that neither habitus nor fields are static, and therefore, it required me to understand livelihoods as a moving target that constantly had to be revised through habitus as past experiences shape the present pathways. This was important in the interpretation of how households adapt their livelihoods to changing socioeconomic and environmental conditions. However, the theory of practice overemphasises the role of habitus in the present, hence limiting individual creativity and reflection to manoeuvre, and therefore it was of limited use in the analysis of social change.

The human economy approach significantly contributed to interpreting how rural households navigate the vulnerabilities that confront their living. Despite the vulnerabilities of households, the human economy approach highlights that people do not sit in despair but find ways to better themselves in a highly unequal world. A clear example is that of artisanal mining in the rural Highlands of Lesotho

which is concealed by popular constructions that Lesotho is a labour reserve (Makhetha & Maliehe, 2018). I, therefore, analysed how rural households navigate their vulnerabilities against the popular depictions of rural households of crisis through the human economy lens as it argues that the rural economy is there and can be seen by the daily activities that people engage in to earn a living.

This chapter reviewed the literature to understand rural households' livelihoods in the context of changing socioeconomic and natural environments. The chapter adopted the sustainable livelihoods approach in the framework for the study to interpret the rural households' livelihoods as Chambers and Conway (1992) mentioned that change is happening faster and faster and called for an approach that puts people at the centre of analysis lest future livelihoods are incorrectly forecasted. Therefore, the sustainable livelihood approach was pertinent for this study as it enabled the analysis of the rural households' assets, institutional barriers, and vulnerability contexts that influence the livelihood strategies and outcomes. The sustainable livelihoods approach assets are regarded not only technically but also as capabilities that give meaning to the individual world. The sustainable livelihoods approach offered a counter-narrative to the conventional approach to livelihoods. Its main premise is that rural livelihoods are widely diversified, and households combine complex activities to survive, and therefore, it argues against the livelihoods approach that imposes what rural livelihoods should be. The approach guided the identification of relevant factors that affect livelihoods in the study area and helped structure the analysis.

However, an important process of how rural households earn a living in changing contexts and dynamic environments is somewhat overlooked by the sustainable livelihoods approach. While the livelihoods approach is meant to inform practice, it fails in practice and has been criticised for its narrow focus on the agency of rural households that neglects the structure (Scoones, 2009). Bourdieu's theory of practice was incorporated to understand how rural households adapt their livelihoods to changing socioeconomic and environmental conditions. The theory of practice seeks to understand and explain individuals' actions in the social world through the concepts of habitus, capitals and fields. Using habitus enabled me to look beyond the livelihood strategies adopted by the rural households by interpreting how disposition and socialisation inform the livelihood decision-making process. The capitals also

determine the power that households have that can be transformed for a living. The field is used to interpret households' position in livelihood-making, which enabled me to understand the power imbalances in livelihood-making that put some in a position of power while others are subordinate. The fields as a terrain of contestations interpret the vulnerabilities of emerging livelihoods.

The theory of practice is important for livelihood research but does not replace the sustainable livelihoods approach; however, it helps overcome its limitations, and thus, enhances livelihood analysis (De Haan & Zoomers, 2005; Saldapolrak, 2014). The approach that weaves through the framework is the human economy approach, which argues that when people face vulnerabilities, they are not deprived of their agency but rather organise themselves in the unequal terrain of exclusion for their betterment. While the vulnerabilities of rural households are commonly discussed, it is argued that the human economy, which are the daily practices of the rural households, are usually obscured by the dominant narratives. The human economy therefore undergirds the different ways rural households navigate the livelihood vulnerabilities that confront their livelihood-making processes.

Chapter 3

Methodological Approach

3.1 Introduction

The methodology that was adopted for this study of rural households' livelihoods in Mokhotlong is more qualitative and lends itself towards a case study approach. Firstly, the overarching is about how the livelihoods of rural households can be understood in the context of changing socioeconomic and physical environments, and this required an in-depth inquiry and analysis of the dynamics of access to diverse livelihoods and the historical context. Secondly, this study grounds the analysis of livelihoods from the household as a unit of analysis and the most fundamental unit of human society that is responsive to social, economic and political changes and functions as the unit of adaptation. The study benefited substantially from the accounts of community members, households, direct observations, and expert opinions. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), such an approach makes a qualitative design the most appropriate approach. This chapter describes the methodological approach that guided this thesis. I begin by discussing the philosophy behind the approach, the research design, and the research strategy, which is followed by a description of the research locale. Next, I discuss the research techniques used to collect data, the data analysis approach, the ethical considerations involved in the study, and the fieldwork challenges I encountered.

3.2 The Research Approach

3.2.1 Philosophical foundations

All forms of inquiry are shaped by philosophical traditions, normally referred to as epistemologies or paradigms, and they inform the selection of a research approach. The current study followed the interpretive and social constructivist paradigm. This study focused on understanding the livelihoods of rural households from the perspective of the people involved. This study was interpretive in the

sense that understanding the phenomena was derived from interpreting subjective meaning from interviews with individuals, and constructive in the sense that the meaning associated with the phenomenon was constructed through research (Silima, 2007). Constructivism aims to understand the social world of those being studied and requires interpretation of the world from the perspectives of those residing within it. It seeks to identify world views and subjective meanings and perspectives within social contexts and is dependent on the beliefs and opinions of those being researched to enable the researcher to identify patterns and themes in the complexity of views rather than narrowing down the meaning to a few categories (Creswell, 2009). The study involved an in-depth analysis of the household activities both farm and non-farm livelihoods that are meant to secure livelihoods and individuals' perceptions of their socioeconomic environment. This was used to develop a detailed understanding of a series of interaction processes and practices that, in turn, provided insight into the livelihood pathways. The constructive and interpretive approach accommodates people's perception and subjectivity, unlike positivism, which is premised on a single truth, and therefore reduces people to statistical figures (Hennick et al., 2011).

3.2.2 Research design

The research approach adopted for the current study on the effects of the socioeconomic and natural changes on rural societies in the Mokhotlong district was selected to understand the impact of these changes on livelihoods, the responses undertaken, the vulnerabilities and challenges faced, and how rural people navigate the vulnerabilities. The study particularly sought to explore how households' livelihood responses either reinforce existing vulnerabilities or cushion households against shocks. To work towards the aims of the study, a qualitative approach was adopted. This approach was most appropriate because of its ability to uncover phenomena in great depth. According to Creswell (2009), a qualitative design can explore and understand the meaning that individuals ascribe to a social or human problem.

The study investigated the different livelihood pathways that rural households use to secure their livelihoods in the context of the changes in the socioeconomic and natural environment. It explored how people make livelihood choices and whether the human economy or production processes have been transformed by the dynamics of change. This study aimed to counter the popular narratives on Lesotho society that focus on the demise of Lesotho's migrant labour economy status by exploring the contemporary livelihood trajectory and trying to understand them in the historical context. At the centre of the study were households' livelihood pathways, particularly how households have responded to what some researchers have termed "migration shocks" and the changing natural phenomena (Mensah & Naidoo, 2011). These are the factors that are specific and may differ from environment to environment but can be generalised in terms of their influence and how they guide human behaviour in the context of a former migrant labour society. Therefore, a case study was used for this study (Yin, 1994).

3.2.3 Research strategy

The study investigated the livelihood trajectories and adaptation measures of households in Mokhotlong that they adopt in the face of vulnerability. This study aimed to provide a counter-narrative to the popular description of the households' livelihoods and vulnerabilities in Mokhotlong. These explanations were guided by the decline of formal migrant labour for Basotho men in South African mines, which had been the major source of livelihood for rural households in Lesotho. The livelihoods have also been explained in terms of agrarian development in sub-Saharan Africa, which is explained in the modernisation discourses with the belief that rural households' development will start with agricultural improvement through technical measures. In general, the development programmes in Mokhotlong have been aimed at reversing land and wetland degradation to improve pastures and the livelihoods of rural households, which are based on agriculture. While agriculture forms part of the livelihoods in Mokhotlong, it has been widely noted that agricultural production in the Lesotho Highlands in general is highly dependent on income (Ferguson, 1994). To understand the livelihoods of rural people and the challenges facing agriculture and the environment, it was important to look at the activities

households adopted to earn a living. The livelihoods of rural people are diverse, and therefore, a qualitative case study afforded me the opportunity to explore or describe a phenomenon in context using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This further ensured that the issue was explored with a variety of lenses that allowed for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood. The various aspects the study sought to explore were local-level issues that could be understood through a case study approach (Yin, 1994). A case study is a suitable strategy of inquiry that allows for an in-depth examination of a phenomenon over a small geographical area to generate rich data that would not be achieved using large-scale survey methods.

3.3 Study Area

This study was carried out in the northeastern part of Lesotho in the Mokhotlong district. Mokhotlong has a total population of 100 442 and covers an area of 4 075 km (Lesotho Bureau of Statistics, undated). The case study was done in the Ha Rammeleke and Mahemeng villages within the Khubelu River catchment. The Khubelu River catchment suffers from highland and wetland degradation because of unsustainable land management practices resulting from overstocking of fragile ecosystems (ORASECOM & Lesotho Department of Water Affairs, 2018). Climate change and variability contribute to exacerbating the existing conditions through the volatility of rainfall and drought periods, which are projected to threaten the Lesotho water economy and livestock production if sustainable measures are not put in place to circumvent the degradation (ORASECOM & Lesotho Department of Water Affairs, 2018). Ha Rammeleke and Mahemeng villages that lie in the middle of the Khubelu catchment, upstream of the Polihali Dam Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, which is responsible for harnessing water from the Lesotho Highlands to supply industrialising South African cities. The area was ideal for the study that aimed to understand the changing natural environment and how it affects agricultural production and livelihoods in general.

3.4 Research Techniques

3.4.1 Literature review

The study benefited from secondary data analysis to determine the existing research and the gaps in the research that the study aimed to address. There is notable research on how land degradation impacts water resources in Lesotho's rural areas and the implications for rural livelihoods (ORASECOM, 2018; George, 2020; Hoag, 2017). This literature is mostly in the form of development reports and reports from fund agencies as they were undertaking different projects on land and wetland rehabilitation and agricultural development programs to protect Lesotho's dams from the looming threat of siltation. Many studies were conducted on pastures and water sources and the implications of the changes in livelihoods (ORASECOM, 2018; Renoka, 2021). As such, the livelihoods literature lies at the end of the conundrum. A vast amount of literature on migration in rural areas highlights the challenges rural households faced after the Basotho men lost their jobs at the South African mines (Pae, 2001; Matsumoto, 2014); May et al (2002). With increasing vulnerability in Lesotho, the literature on poverty that reported food insecurity and social grants was fundamental for the current study. Most of the recent literature argued that technical measures are important to promote land and wetland rehabilitation, which would eventually improve rural people's livelihoods. Some of the literature, mainly Hoag (2018), pointed out Lesotho's commodification of water and its depictions of water abundance despite the local realities of drought and limited access to water. The literature review continued throughout the research process as new information was published during the research process. The literature review guided the direction of this thesis and was sourced from books, journals, commissioned reports, media reports, and newspaper articles.

3.4.2 Ethnography

Ethnographic research was conducted in Mahemeng and Ha Rammeleke between December 2021 and March 2023. It was initially supposed to take one year but changes of focus from climate change and adaptation to the human economy necessitated further data collection to capture aspects of the human economy missed in the initial phase. The timing of the study targeted to cover major seasons to allow me to capture the livelihood dynamics adopted by the households. Ethnographic research is an appropriate measure to counter the methods applied by contemporary mainstream economics, which is more concerned with mathematical models of how people are supposed to behave based on abstract theories (Sharp et al., 2013). The ethnographic study largely focused on gaining critical insights into these communities, into how they interact with their environment, and into how they perceive the changes and make decisions. The ethnographic research looked at how changes in the social and natural environment affected livelihoods and explored emerging livelihood dynamics. In the 20th century, young men would be initiated as adults and herd livestock before migrating to South Africa to be wage labourers to build their herds for the bridal price (Murray, 1981). Since the massive retrenchment of Basotho men from the mining jobs in South Africa, little is known about households' livelihood dynamics. Any study of rural society in Lesotho will remain incomplete without an examination of the new forms of migrant labour, the significance of what elsewhere is termed the *kukiya-kiya* economy, and more importantly, the livestock economy in rural Lesotho.

Although my fieldwork started in December 2021, I observed several changing dynamics in the rural areas. In 2019, during my master's field research downstream of the Khubelu catchment, I was studying conflict dynamics over displacement and compensation during the construction of the Polihali Dam. During that time, I met several people who told me that their cattle died because of drought and the lack of forage to feed on. As I walked through the villages, I saw many attempts in which men helped cattle to get back on their feet after falling because of weakness, and in most cases, they had to slaughter the cattle because they were too thin and sick to survive. People said they were tired of eating lean meat and that even their dogs no longer wanted it.

This drought was followed by heavy rains that started in 2020 and wreaked havoc in Mokhotlong. The torrential rains experienced in late January 2021 in most parts of Lesotho that lasted 3 days led to severe flooding, loss of lives, and damage to crop, homes, and infrastructure, such as washing away roads and bridges. The preliminary reports indicated that as many as 33 bridges experienced severe damage, and 19 of these bridges were in the Mokhotlong district. The destruction of bridges and roads impeded access to essential services and the delivery of essential supplies to most areas. For instance, donkeys had to be used to transport medication to Molikaliko Clinic in the upper catchment of Khubelu. This was by far the worst weather-related experience, and even the eldest residents had never experienced anything close to what happened that January. Mahemeng and Ha Rammeleke were among the villages that suffered the loss of fields located near the riverbanks, which were left with sand deposits. Community members have been struggling with connections to the other side of the Khubelu River as the bridges had been washed away.

The current study initially aimed to understand the rural communities' explanations of extreme flooding and how it influenced their adaptation; however, I soon realised that rural communities adopted many measures to adapt, and the study of livelihoods was central to understanding the adaptation. Fieldwork started in the summer months December 2021 when there was a lot of rainfall that affected the households' agricultural activities as they often had to postpone weeding and cultivating. Everyone was talking about the rains, and people complained about the imbalance in their current weather patterns. They complained that "when it gets dry, it gets dry a lot; when it rains, it rains a lot". These unusual weather patterns made it easy for me to expand the subject to how changes in climatic conditions affected households and how are they dealing with the changes. This study benefited from the ethnography that allowed prolonged involvement in the lives of the participants to discern people's habits and thoughts as well as the social structure that binds them together.

The ethnographic research was built on a range of research techniques that complemented each other. During the period of ethnographic research, the study was divided into two levels: 1) community-level research and 2) household-level research. These two levels are discussed in the following subsections.

3.4.2.1 Community level

The community-level research involved an initial reconnaissance study that took place during the early stages of the research.

Reconnaissance

I started fieldwork with a reconnaissance study for two reasons. Firstly, I introduced myself and the study to the community flag bearers. I met the chiefs and the counsellor to seek permission to conduct the study. During this phase, I also conducted interviews with key community members, including the chief, the counsellor, community elders, and traditional healers. I used this phase to be introduced to the community by either the chief or the community counsellor and to familiarise myself with the environment. Although I come from this community, there are certain aspects of society that people take for granted despite their deep meaning. This allowed me to tour and explore areas that I had not visited before and to look for the changes in the natural environment and their impacts on agriculture. I observed and took photographs of the landscape and the fields. I also used this time to select the households that participated in the research study.

Key informant interviews

Key informants are people who have a good knowledge of either the community being studied or the subject under investigation. They provided information on the history of the rural community, the livelihoods in the past, and more general data. The key informants involved district officials, local chiefs, local government authorities, Agricultural Department staff, retired teachers, non-governmental organisations staff, old people knowledgeable about the community, and the village administration authorities, and they were interviewed to understand what they do to support livelihoods in the communities. In the early stages of the study, I used key informant interviews to collect the background information necessary to facilitate purposive sampling. The key informants provided useful information on different households, which enabled me to categorise the participating households. For instance, the key

informants in the villages record information on people who are receiving social grants and assist people with home affairs issues like when people want to register births, apply for passports, and register for Old Age Pension. In one of the villages, one of my informants focused more on the scourge of illegal mining and the clashing groups that have formed among young men in the region and have led to the deaths of more than 20 people in the Khubelu catchment.

Participant observations

While the main research activity involved visits to selected households to capture their perspectives, a great part of the study was carried out at the community level. Ethnography means being part of the community. I attended community events, including public gathering, functions, ceremonies and also funerals. The holidays are important for rural residents and migrants. I also attended these events and actively interacted with the community members to draw on their experiences and observe trends in behaviour. Agricultural and livelihood-related issues were discussed virtually everywhere, such as when people meet, when farmers buy inputs, and when elders meet over a beer. These platforms are the key sources of information, and I was able to capture how people maintain their livelihoods. My fieldwork was done before the national elections in Lesotho, and I used to be in the company of the community members, especially women, when going to political party rallies. I would listen to their conversations about their needs and hopes for the government; the livelihood challenges they hoped would be resolved once their representative gets into office; and how they have been disappointed by former governments that did not take their grievances into account. I particularly observed the traffic during the December holidays from Mapholaneng, passing by Mahemeng, and heading to the north of Khubelu. People frequently went to Mapholaneng to meet their relatives arriving from work in the lowlands, from South Africa, and from buying groceries at Mapholaneng. I walked with many people, and along the way we would converse. I learned that before Christmas, most people anticipate the arrival of their family members from the lowlands and from South Africa. I paid particular attention to agricultural production by attending *matsema* (work parties), and I also volunteered to harvest potatoes and interacted with cash crop producers.

Living in the villages, I met people weeding fields and going to the fields to cultivate, but this was cancelled many times because of the frequent rainfall that led to most fields being left untilled.

I saw the shrinking sizes of fields that were left uncultivated because there is not enough soil cover and because some fields have been reduced to gullies because they are situated on slopy terrain, while other fields on the riverbanks suffered sand intrusion. Some people would take donkeys to carry goods that came with the migrant workers. I saw most people using donkeys and horses to carry goods home, especially 80 kg maize meal, 25 kg bread flour, and small items like oils and sugar for Christmas. I was surprised at the high number of liquefied petroleum gas cylinders that were passing by on donkeys. Donkeys walking back and forth carrying crates of alcohol from the villages to Mapholaneng for alcohol refills during the festive season was also a common sight. I also noticed people, mostly the youth, taking their phones to Mapholaneng to charge as it is the only place where there is grid electricity, and they could not charge the phones using solar power when there were clouds that lowered the solar panels' ability to give power and charge phones and other electronic gadgets. The observations challenged the general assumption of rural livelihoods that are usually perceived as being marginalised from modern living.

3.4.2.2 Household visits

After selecting the households that would participate in the study, I conducted household visits to understand their perspectives on changes in the social and natural situation, how adaptation decisions are made, and what the emerging livelihoods are. I wanted to understand how households have adjusted their livelihoods, particularly farming, to changes in the environment. To ensure an in-depth understanding, I selected 30 households and conducted extended visits. I selected the households through a purposive sampling approach based on the activities the households engage in to earn a living. The households that participated were diverse in terms of headship, and there were households headed by men and some were headed by widowed women. Some of the households were extended and others were nuclear. In terms of establishment, there were households that were headed by old people and those that

were headed by young people. Rural households are engaged in an unremitting struggle to secure a livelihood in the face of adverse social, economic, and often, political circumstances. The circumstances and reasons for poverty must be understood through a detailed analysis of social relations in a particular context between the rich and poor households and the institutions of the market and the state. The assumption was that the diversity of participants would over time reveal the ensuing vulnerabilities and opportunities and how they impact the households.

Open-ended interviews

At the household level, interviews were conducted with the household heads and other members of the family on broad issues, including history, the issues of agricultural produce and climatic conditions, the natural environment and how it impacts their household, the strategies they employ to live, and the challenges they face. Open-ended interviews allowed the members of the households to elaborate on their answers and to provide their interpretations of experiences without me proposing interpretations. Open-ended interviews allowed the participants to tell their stories of livelihood aspirations, the strategies they employ to make a living, and the challenges and vulnerabilities that affect them. I chose open-ended interviews to ensure there was minimal research control of the conversation in order to get a better understanding of the participants' world in their terms (Rancoli, 2008).

Non-participant observations

The non-participation observation techniques were used to get insight into the dominant livelihood activities of the households and the relationship between the different livelihood strategies. Boehm (2003) noted that Basotho tends to claim themselves as farmers, yet farming activity constitutes a small part of their livelihood means, and hence, it was imperative to closely observe the daily activities of households and how they support their livelihoods in order to understand people's reality. Since these visits took place at different seasons, I was able to use observation to capture changing aspects of the environment perceived by the community members

and to demonstrate their emerging livelihood production activities. This technique was used to supplement and complement the open-ended interview technique. Sometimes, interviews can draw responses that are controlled and do not necessarily reflect the true situation because people may respond in a certain way because they think the interviewer expects a certain answer. Observations acted as a check mechanism. Thus, the observations were not rigid but responded to the situation found.

Life histories

The life history interviews were used to trace the rural households' livelihood changes and their impacts. It was important to trace people's life histories to elicit individual perceptions of ongoing processes (De Bruijn & van Dijk, 2001). Life histories enable people to interpret their own lives by looking at the past and the present and the changes they recognise in their lives. They offer the basis for understanding social interactions and processes (Rahamah et al., 2008). Life histories were used to focus on livelihood history, the changes that have occurred, and the livelihood pathways, and they helped me establish whether emerging pathways reinforce existing vulnerabilities or improve the welfare of the people.

3.5 Data Analysis, Ethics, and Fieldwork Challenges

3.5.1 Data analysis

The major purpose for conducting a qualitative study is to transform the data into the findings, and the purpose of data analysis in qualitative research is to reduce the volume of raw information, sift significance from trivia, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveals (De Vos et al., 2000). The data collected for this study were analysed using a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis precisely determines the relationships and linkage between the concepts and the identification of the variables, which helped me code and categorise the data into themes (Ibrahim, 2012). Thus, data were analysed using the following steps:

1. Reading through the data to develop an understanding: This step involved transcribing the interviews and fieldnotes to make it readable text.
2. Developing themes from the initial data (preliminary data analysis): This was achieved by coding, which is an analysis strategy used in qualitative data analysis that help with the identification of themes, patterns, and concepts that exist in the data and to better understand the livelihood circumstances of households. The data collection phase stopped when there was no new information were emerging.
3. Finding the relationships between the initial themes: This step involved comparing category groups and grouping similar categories to develop sub-themes, which were allocated codes. This process of comparison and grouping data was used to narrow down the themes to four broad groups that represented the thematic areas.
4. Constructing broader themes: At the end of data analysis process, four themes emerged: The significance of past livelihood experiences; the continuous primacy of labour migration in rural societies; the increasing vulnerability of rural households; and the coping mechanisms when facing risks.

3.5.1.1 Research area

The research area lies north of the Main North 1 Highway, the only gateway to Maseru and the lowland regions like Butha-Buthe and Hlotse. The highway that connects Mokhotlong town to the capital Maseru passes through Mapholaneng, which serves as a semi-urbanised service centre for these rural communities. The two villages (Mahemeng and Ha Rammeleke) are about 45 km from Mokhotlong capital and located within 15 km of Mapholaneng. Mahemeng comprises approximately forty households while Ha Rammeleke has around seventy. The choice of research area was based on several considerations. Firstly, the study aimed to provide a counter-narrative to the common depiction of Mokhotlong livelihoods as solely reliant on small-scale farming, specifically livestock rearing, despite the literature showing declining pastures (Hoag, 2017; Morris, 2017; Nüsser, 2002). The Khubelu River catchment

has been deemed highly degraded and has been a pilot study for integrated catchment management under the banner of protecting Lesotho's white gold (ORASECOM & Lesotho Department of Water Affairs, 2016). Capacity building of all stakeholders in range management and the technical measures to manually remove shrubs to promote grass growth have been put in place.

The catchment also suffered severely from the January 2021 floods when bridges and fields were washed away. Therefore, the study aimed to understand how rural people make a living in the challenging natural environment they inhabit. The village selection process involved my interaction with several people during reconnaissance through informal chats and the general knowledge of the other areas within the catchment. I looked for areas that are similar and connected but would allow for a wide range of different participants. In Mokhotlong, there are two major projects operating, the Polihali Dam and Letšeng Diamond Mine. It was therefore important to select areas that are not too close to the projects to holistically capture the livelihood aspects of the rural population away from their spheres of influence. The villages near these areas are given extra benefits to discourage riots and strikes near the project areas, which are internationally known; therefore, it was difficult to find a research area that contained Mokhotlong rural households. Furthermore, these villages have not been researched.

With the help of my research informants, I made an inventory of households in the villages, and the results were used to identify different livelihood activities undertaken by villagers and to shortlist households for the case study. In selecting the case studies. I was not seeking statistical relevance but rather wanted the results to reflect the range of livelihoods pursued by different households. To understand livelihoods, I used agriculture as a starting point because agriculture is highly reliant on income and it enabled me to find out how households were securing a living. This means that households practising agriculture in the following ways were selected: Cultivating fields, livestock production, sharecroppers, owners of fields who do not cultivate them, livestock owners without fields, people who provide labour, and herdboys. As the study looked at a former migrant labour society, I looked closely into former migrant labourers still present in the villages and current migrant labourers.

3.5.2 Methodological challenges

I experienced some major challenges during the fieldwork process. The first was the issue of household and community expectations, particularly during the initial phases of the fieldwork. This may have arisen because of the nature of the research and the focus on people's livelihoods. It was apparent from earlier interactions that participants thought I was registering people affected by flooding as preparatory work for disaster relief. The households that were not included would often ask me why their households were being skipped. This problem would show in some people exaggerating their poverty by claiming that their livelihoods are based solely on declining agricultural production, therefore concealing information about the members of households working elsewhere. Discrepancies would come up through deeper probing and repeating questions with the answers, which I thought were not clear, whereupon some interviewees would then go on to admit they feared being left out of program assistance. Exaggerating poverty was thus thought of as a means of increasing a household's chance of being assisted. While some of the households assumed I was assessing capabilities in agriculture and hoped to get incentives from the Disaster Management Authority and exaggerate their production, being in the field for a long time enabled me to see the household realities, and repeated visits allowed me to correct the initial depictions that deviated from reality. This compelled me to continually explain to respondents that I was simply a student carrying out academic research to write a thesis.

Secondly, the field research was carried out during the national elections in October 2022. The political sphere in Lesotho was a conversational issue during the months before the elections, and therefore, households' members would deviate from the topic to include politics and would often ask for advice on who they should vote for, which required me to constantly explain that I am a student and that it is right for a person to vote for any political party they like.

Thirdly, it was sometimes hard and emotionally draining to listen to the accounts of heartbreaking experiences of members of the household dying because of illegal mining. Whenever participants ventured on a path that led them to talk about heartbreaking

experiences in their lives, I reminded them to only share what they were comfortable with. One example of an emotional interview was with 'Me Malerato, who is in her forties. She broke down when she recalled the death of her husband and said the following:

It was only after a week he returned to work when we got the message that he was shot and died. I was in disbelief. Makoro was here at home to see us, was that his goodbye? How could he leave me with two young children? Who am I going to raise the ... I couldn't believe it. The reality kicked in when two coffins came to the family. He was shot dead with his nephew, they were very close, I can never forget that day.

I gave her time to express her feelings, and I suggested pausing the interview until the later day. 'Me Malerato took out her tobacco snuff and sniffed it, wiping his nose after several sneezes. She explained to me that tobacco snuff cleared her head and insisted that we should continue with the interview as she explained how her sad experiences led to her using tobacco. We carried on with the interview as she felt that reflecting on her life experiences helped her open up about her feelings.

Finally, another challenge was the households' expectations of me to solve institutional hurdles the household members faced. One example is Thabo, who was arrested on his way to work without a passport. His mother approached me for help as she knew I had been interviewing Thabo on his work-related experiences and thought that as I was living in South Africa, I could perhaps be in a position to facilitate his release. I assured her, told her to hope for the best, and explained that as a student, I did not know anything about border control and police. Some respondents seemed that that they had long been waiting to share their journeys with me as one claimed that they have never reflected on their life as they did during the interview. Others took their time to show me how they execute their duties at work.

3.5.3 Ethical considerations

It is vital that researcher consider research ethics during the fieldwork process (Mollet, 2011). I got an ethical clearance letter from the University of Pretoria that authorised me as a student at the institution to carry out the research for academic purposes. This letter was presented to the community leaders (local chiefs and community counsellor) when seeking permission to conduct research in their respective villages. I introduced myself to the household heads and explained the research interest and how the research process would unfold. The informed consent, written in Sesotho, was sought by signing the informed consent forms after the participants read and understood the consent forms. Some of the participants granted their consent verbally and did not want to sign the informed consent. All research participants were constantly assured that their confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed.

The study also adhered to the principle of anonymity. Participants were informed that the information they provided would not be linked to them and that I would use pseudonyms to refer to them and their households. The study also adhered to the principle of confidentiality. I assured the participants that the data would not be accessed by any unauthorised person and would be safely stored on Google Drive. I informed them that the data would be disseminated in the form of a dissertation, a journal article, or as a presentation at a conference. The participants were also informed that their participation was purely voluntary, and they had a right to withdraw from the study at any time, and more importantly, that no benefits will accrue from their participation in the study.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter on the methodology began with a discussion of the philosophical approach that underpinned the research study. This was followed by a brief account and justification of the study location in the Mokhotlong district. After this, the chapter provided a detailed discussion of the methodological approach adopted in the study. It discussed the significance of the literature review and the primary data collection methods employed, observation, life histories and open-ended interviews in providing in-depth information pertinent to understanding rural households' livelihoods. As part of the research techniques, ethnographic research was discussed together with

the various activities that were employed to collect data. Lastly, the chapter discussed the data analysis approach, the ethical considerations, and the challenges faced during the field research. The chapter shows that despite the challenges encountered they did not compromise research.

Chapter 4

Understanding the Socioeconomic and Natural Changes in Mokhotlong District

4.1 Introduction

The changing rural landscape in Lesotho is well captured in literature, and the factors influencing the changes are well articulated. Chief among these are changes in Lesotho's labour supply to South African mines, coupled with the social upheavals, such as the increase in women- and child-headed households due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. While these changes are not unique to Lesotho and also affect other countries categorised as migrant labour economies, the challenge in Lesotho is that the country is one of the poorest in the region and has limited land area for households to fall back on agriculture. The changes often described in the literature have been further exacerbated by changes in the natural environment, including climate variability and loss of land due to erosion. These changes have certainly been felt in the Highlands region, which have been migrant-sending areas, and where the natural landscape is characterised by mountainous terrain, leading to reduced arable land for agricultural production. Certainly, the changing natural and social environment in the rural Highlands has increased the complexity of the vulnerability of the livelihoods of rural households. Yet, it would be foolhardy to assume that the vulnerability of livelihoods has created a situation of destitution. The changing natural and social environments have only increased the complexity of livelihoods in the region.

This chapter engages with complex environments by focusing mainly on the changes that have taken place over time. This was done to provide a background to help better understand the human economy of the Highlands region. The chapter begins by providing the physical characteristics of the case study area. This is followed by a comprehensive description of the household and their historical context, which focuses on considering the type of households, the headship, and sizes. The next section interrogates the socioeconomic changes and setting of the rural households, and the last section discusses the changes in the natural environment. The aim is to

construct a framework within which to analyse rural households' livelihood decision-making processes and the vulnerabilities in the challenging areas where they live.

4.2 The Area and the People

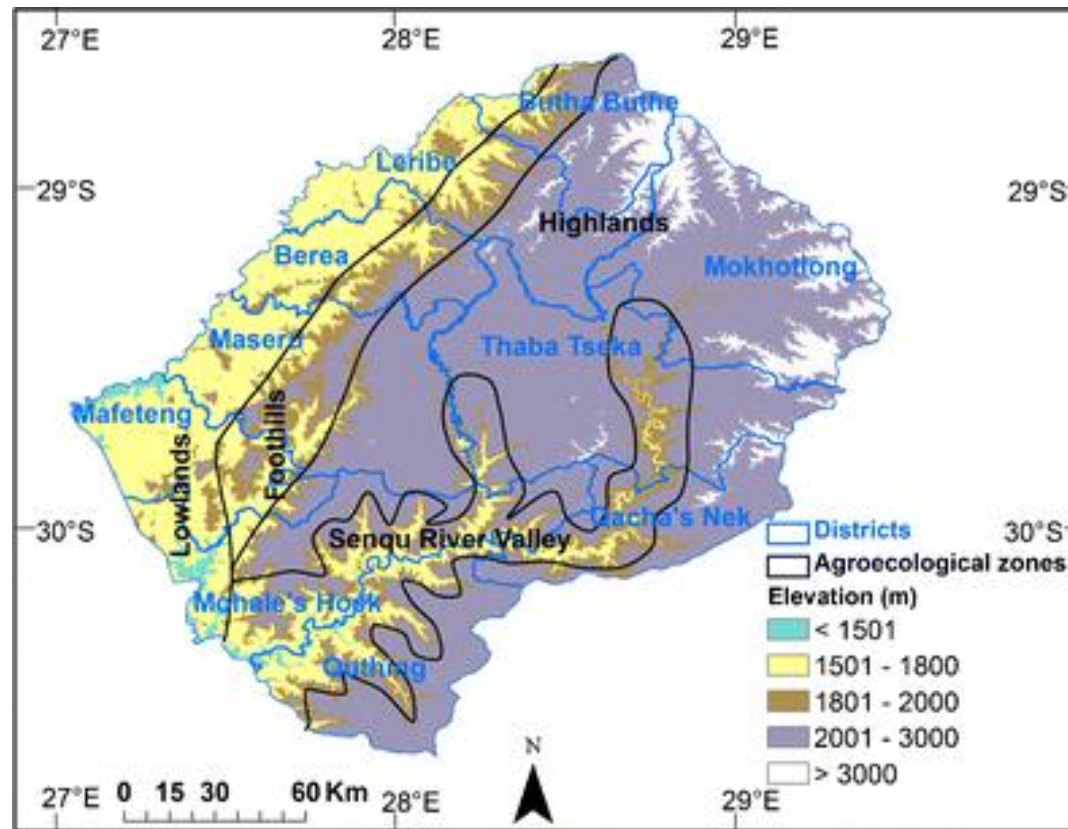
4.2.1 Providing the setting

Rural areas in Lesotho are mostly home to small farm households, which in ordinary circumstances would be dependent on the natural environment for livelihoods. The natural environment, therefore, would likely play a critical role in the livelihoods and survival of rural households. In policy terms, the focus would often be on developing the agricultural sector to provide both food security and employment. However, for a migrant labour society, this may not be the case, as is shown later. To better understand livelihoods, and in particular, the implications of the natural and socioeconomic changes on households' livelihoods, it is necessary to begin by understanding the natural environment where these households are located. In this case, a profile of the study area is necessary.

4.2.1.1 Geographical and infrastructural setting

Before providing a geographical profile of the study area, this subsection sets the scene by briefly describing the geographical setting of Lesotho's and the Mokhotlong district, where the case study area is located. Lesotho is a small mountainous country of about 30 355 km², and is surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. The Mokhotlong River runs from the north to the southwest of the country, forming a border between Lesotho and the Free State province in South Africa. The country is divided into four agroecological zones, the lowlands, the foothills, the Senqu River valley, and the mountains zone, which is where Mokhotlong district is. The country's geographical location is presented in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Map of Lesotho



Source: Walker & Moeletsi (2013)

Mokhotlong district lies in the mountains zone in the northeastern parts of the country, with the Drakensberg range forming the border between Lesotho and KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. Mokhotlong district is generally a mountainous district and has the highest elevation point in Southern Africa, with Thabana Ntlenyana reaching 3 482 m asl, and with a land cover of 4 075 km². It is the source of the Khubelu and Orange-Senqu rivers, which flow into the Atlantic Ocean. At the confluence of these two rivers is the

Polihali Dam, construction that is underway, that is the second phase of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project that harnesses water from the Lesotho Highlands through a series of dams to supply the Republic of South Africa, which subsequently pays Lesotho royalties. These rivers have formed V-shaped valleys populated by small- to medium-sized villages on the sides. These rivers are popularly used to define the areas adjacent to them, for example, the Khubelu and Senqu valleys.

Like the rest of the mountain regions, the valley experiences rainy summers and cold winters with snowfall. Summers are relatively cool and warm, while winters can be very cold. Most of rainfall is received between October to March, and snow usually is experienced between May and September. This valley area receives less than 600 mm of rainfall per annum (Pae, 2001). This is a big contrast to the high-altitude areas along the Drakensberg escarpment that have annual rainfall figures that range between 1 000 mm and 1,500 mm (Pae, 2001). This contrast is because Mokhotlong is situated far enough inland to be shielded from low-pressure systems reaching the Drakensberg range to the east. Mokhotlong has a low probability of a frost-free growing period, which limits the crop cultivation that occurs between March and October which makes the crops fail (Cross, 1980; Moeketsi & Walker, 2013).

The physical environment in Mokhotlong is characterised by basaltic mountains with steep valleys and ridges, and limited plant growth. The steepness of the slopes inhibits soil profile development, and on the mountains, there are shallow and immature soils. Deep soils only occur where the topography is flat enough to permit colluvium accumulation (Carol & Bascomb, 1971). Most fertile fields are located near the riverbanks because the flatness reduces gully formation. However, many of the fields in the Khubelu Valley suffered extensive sand intrusion during the January 2021 flooding that inundated the fields and crops. Lesotho is a savanna biome, and in the mountains, there is limited tree growth, most trees grow along the riverbanks, streams, and gullies and are meant to curb soil erosion. These trees are used as fuel wood by locals, and most of the trees along the water bodies are privately owned. The few wild animal species in the rural areas are jackals that prey on sheep and goats, and springboks that can be spotted along the hills.

The current study focused on two villages in the Khubelu Valley, namely Ha Rammeleke and Mahemeng, which are located in the middle of the valley. These villages lie about 50 km northwest of Mokhotlong town and about 20 km from the newly constructed Polihali Dam. Mahemeng and Ha Rammeleke lie north of the Main North 1 Highway, which is the only gateway to Maseru and the lowland regions like Butha-Buthe and Hlotse, and passes through Mapholaneng to Mokhotlong town. The villages are located within a 10 km radius of Mapholaneng, which is the second biggest centre in Mokhotlong district and provides essential services to surrounding villages. Mapholaneng provides services such as supermarkets, chain stores, government offices, Mapholaneng High School, a clinic, a police station, ATMs, a Post Office Bank, and guest houses. Mapholaneng is a busy area because of the many hawkers established along the main road. There is also a bus terminus for people heading to the lowlands and other areas.

As an urbanised centre, Mapholaneng does not only provide essential services but is also a place for socialisation and relaxation, with facilities such as taverns, and for youth, recreational facilities. There are electricity grid lines in Mapholaneng, and most households are connected to electricity, and therefore, most people from the surrounding villages, like Mahemeng and Ha Rammeleke, can be seen taking their mobile phones here to charge them. As such, Mapholaneng saves people from surrounding villages the trouble of travelling to Mokhotlong town (about 40 km) away for services. Typical of an urban centre, Mapholaneng has many homes, and the development of *maelene* (rental rooms), a popular phenomenon in urban and peri-urban Lesotho (Thebe & Rakotje, 2013), is on the rise because of the anticipated demand for accommodation because of the construction of the Polihali Dam. Mapholaneng thus acts as an urban centre for most villages and is a major livelihood centre.

In these rural areas, social services are mostly present in areas that are reachable by cars. In Mahemeng, residents draw water from wells as the taps have not been working for more than 10 years, except for one water pipe in the sub-village that is far from the main village, and people use donkeys to carry water home. Ha Rammeleke has many taps located within a cluster of homesteads. In both villages, streams are running down to the Khubelu River and are used to water animals and for washing clothes. Both villages do not have funded pit latrines like some of the villages in the Khubelu Valley, and there are only a few in the villages that people built for

themselves. In Ha Rammeleke, there is a primary school serving learners from surrounding villages, including Mahemeng, which has only a preschool. There is also a clinic in Ha Rammeleke, which is supposed to be a visiting clinic but has not been operational for more than five years. There had been no visiting nurses and medical doctors, and people from the surrounding villages access services at Mapholaneng and through community health care. Six healthcare workers from both villages facilitate health services at community level.

Like most of the villages in the Khubelu Valley, Mahemeng and Ha Rammeleke homesteads are situated on the middle of the slopes where the terrain flattens. The homesteads in these villages are clustered into segments formed by kinship relations, even though the newly built houses tend to defy this old rural setting. Ha Rammeleke has many households and a growing number of newly built homes because of the accessibility of road transport. The standard homestead comprises two houses, a rondavel used for cooking with fire, and rectangular houses *polata* that are roofed with (corrugated iron) that contains the family's furniture. There is a significant number of houses built with bricks and roofed with corrugated iron in Ha Rammeleke, and some are roofed with tiles and divided into a few rooms, ranging from two to five. People in Ha Rammeleke have invested in their homes, and some of these structures rival buildings in an urban setting. The homesteads also have peach trees and a few apple trees. Below is a picture of part of Ha Rammeleke village.

Figure 4.2 Part of the Ha Rammeleke village



Source: Author (2022)

At the end of the yard are the cattle pens, and close to these are the compacted cow dung bricks, wood, and shrubs used as fuel. Paraffin and liquified petroleum gas are also used for domestic energy. Households have small to large solar panels that are used to charge phones, play radios, and for lighting. Both villages have network access to the major telecommunications operators, mainly Vodacom Lesotho and Econet Telecom Lesotho.

In Mokhotlong, in addition to the A1 Highway that connects Mokhotlong with the lowland, there is the Kotisephola Pass A14 road that connects Mokhotlong to Pietermaritzburg through the Sani Pass. During the research period, a road was being constructed to connect the Polihali Dam to Katse Dam. However, within the Senqu and Khubelu valleys in Mokhotlong district, there is one gravel road for vehicles that connects the areas to the main towns and the A1 Road. In Khubelu Valley, the gravel road to Khubelu road offramps the A1 Road and travels on the eastern side of the river until it reaches Thabalimpe, where there is a bridge that connects the area with Ha Rammeleke.

The road only dips into the western side at Ha Rammeleke as it passes down the village for a short distance before travelling to the eastern side of the river, and the villages on the western side do not have access to road transport and can only be accessed using off-road vehicles when the water level is low in Khubelu River, except for Ha Rammeleke and Ha Motlalepula. These areas are reachable by a footpath from Mapholaneng through steep slopes and ascends and by crossing the Mabunyaneng River and Seate River. The path reaches Mahemeng and passes to Ha Rammeleke and the upper villages in the valley. Even though there is a gravel road for people in Ha Rammeleke, most rural people still walk to Mapholaneng to purchase their items using donkeys to carry crates of beer, maizemeal, and similar items.

4.2.1.2 Social and economic aspects

Agriculture forms the backbone of the Mokhotlong economy. Subsistence farming is the primary activity, with crops such as maize, sorghum, and beans grown for household consumption. However, due to harsh winters and poor soil fertility, agricultural productivity is often limited. Livestock farming, particularly sheep and goats, is more prominent, as these animals are well-suited to the rugged terrain and provide wool, mohair, and meat. Mokhotlong is particularly known for its contribution of wool and mohair in the country.

However, the ownership of livestock is not uniform in the district there are few farmers with relatively large herd of livestock and many other households with few and those who do not keep livestock.

Urbanization in Mokhotlong has grown rapidly in the past decades with a growing class of business elites in the transport sector, hospitality and retail. Some of the participants in the study depended on social grants, mainly the Old Age Pension earned by people 70 years old and above and who do not have another pension. They received M900 per month at the time of the study. Some households have orphaned and vulnerable children who received the grant for orphaned and vulnerable children for poor households and for households that have children in school. The grant is disbursed quarterly and indexed according to the number of children the household has, with one to two children receiving M360, three to four children receiving M600, and five or more receiving M750. The high food insecurity in the villages is often mitigated by the provision of food commodities to poor households that are not eligible for either Old Age Pension or children grant.

The unemployment in these villages is high as there are few job opportunities in Mokhotlong in general. The Letšeng Diamond Mine is the biggest mine in Lesotho but employs few people. Out of five participants who worked at Letšeng, three were permanent employees and two were on temporary contracts. The most anticipated economic opportunity was the jobs that were coming with the Polihali Dam construction, which is the second phase of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. At the time of the study, road construction and accommodation facilities for the project were already underway. Three participants were employed by road construction companies for the Polihali Dam. Originally, seven participants were employed there, but four were not called back after the COVID-19 lockdowns eased in 2021.

Other income-earning opportunities are conservation programmes to rehabilitate the pastures and wetlands in the areas, which are heavily degraded. Most poor women do casual labour by offering their labour to relatively richer households to do domestic chores. These are done in the villages, and some piece jobs are done in Mapholaneng. Brewing beer and selling groceries in smaller quantities

are also major activities. Men are also doing piece jobs like digging stones for building houses and thatching houses with wheat straws. Both men and women are taking casual jobs in Mapholaneng, which is the growth point of the villages, and women are doing domestic work and men are getting house-building jobs.

Remittances remain a major source of livelihood for the households that are faced with the decline in agriculture and scarce local and national job opportunities, particularly for unskilled labour. Most people in this area are labour migrants in Lesotho and informal labour migrants in South Africa, supporting households with remittances from domestic work, farm work, and self-employment activities. Both men and women are migrating to support their livelihoods, and some households have men left in the household while women have left for migrant labour. This is a changing pattern in Lesotho rural households where men used to be expected to financially support households, but now women have also become financial providers. Even though women are financial providers, the households are still headed by men and women only assume headship when they are widowed.

In terms of education in these villages, few households have members with tertiary qualifications, and even those who completed high school are few. The formal education in Lesotho follows the 7/5/4/3 rule, which is seven years in primary, five years in high school, three years for a diploma certificate and four years for a degree at the National University of Lesotho. Most of the members of households have primary education and some had dropped out during the early grades in high school. The few people who have tertiary qualifications and are still living in the rural areas are old, retired teachers. The younger teachers who had built houses in the village had relocated to Mapholaneng where they had better access to roads, electricity, and social services.

In terms of the children who acquired education, there is a clear difference between girls and boys in terms of education level. Within the households, more girls have completed high school than boys. Most of the boys dropped out of school during their first years of high school. In Lesotho, primary education is free, high school is self-sponsored, and tertiary students are provided with a loan bursary if they qualify for admission. The government of Lesotho still provides bursaries for orphaned and vulnerable children who cannot

afford high school tuition fees, but the dropout rate among boys is still high. The high dropout for boys is because of the livestock economy in rural areas that makes boys herders therefore women's literacy rate is 98.6% compared to 90.6% for men, while secondary enrolment is at 36% for girls and 22% for boys (Mosia, 2022). Also, most of the boys participate in traditional initiation school, which makes most boys reluctant to return to formal school after being initiated into adulthood (Mosia, 2022).

4.2.2 Understanding the people and households

4.2.2.1 *The households and their history*

Livelihoods change over time because of changing environments. For communities that are heavily reliant on natural resources, livelihoods change with changes in the natural environment, including land and climate. This means that livelihood practices observed at the present, may not necessarily be the same as those that households practised when they first settled in a particular area. To understand how livelihoods transition over time, we must trace them from a particular period in history to the present. For the study of households, history provides an important starting point, and sheds light on livelihood dynamism and how particular events and situations become major determining factors in households' livelihood trajectories. As societies develop, encounter new civilisations, or interact with other societies, livelihoods also get diluted and often change.

According to the information gathered during the households' life histories, the Khubelu River valley, also known as Tlokoeng locally, is home to the Batlokoa clan and other groups who settled there in the early 1900s. Batlokoa's occupation of the area to the late 1880s when Lelingoana Sekonyela of the Batlokoa lineage was granted rights to settle on the east of Malibamatso River and North of River Senqu as a reward for his assistance to paramount Chief Letsie I during the Gun War in 1880/81 when the Basotho resisted Cape government efforts to disarm them (Quinlan, 1995). Oral sources claim that the Batlokoa and other groups of people left Mount Fletcher, in what is now the Eastern Cape province, in the 1880s during land expropriation in South Africa and because of the demand of the Cape government to cull their cattle. Chief Lelingoana is said to have settled in Malingoaneng, which was regarded as the

centre, and after settling in the area, Lelingoana appointed his subordinates as chiefs to surrounding villages, thus consolidating the Batlokoa dominance of these parts of the mountain region. Mahemeng and Ha Rammeleke villages were part of Chiefs Lelingoana's group of descendants that left Mount Fletcher. Because of the dominance of Batlokoa, the area came to be known as Tlokoeng. Elderly people recalled that when their elders left Mount Fletcher they said, "*Rea loting moo khomo ea teng e fulang e bothile*", meaning they are going to mountains where it is peaceful and there are plenty of grasses for their livestock.

It is evident from the households' life histories that certain forms of livelihoods were dominant throughout the valley area and the mountain region in general. The Highlands region was settled by agropastoralists who practised crop cultivation in the lowlands, where most people migrated from in the late 1800s looking for pastures and land to cultivate. The settlers had plenty of livestock important for sociocultural and economic purposes. Cattle were used to cultivate land, pay bridal prices, and to perform rituals, which are still present to some extent in these rural villages. Cattle also provided the families with plenty of milk, hides used for clothing and leather work, and dung cakes for fuel. The cattle were also important economically as the households who had plenty of oxen used to loan them to Fraser's store, a pioneer trader who used oxen to transport wool from the Highlands to the lowlands and who would hire oxen from the villages to collect the goods from Sani Pass to take to Tlokoeng where the store was based. This act was known as *ho nka tokho*. There were two types of households in these villages. The first type was households with large herds and fields like that of Ntate Mokhalong, which were estimated to have 60 cattle and 500 sheep and horses and donkeys, and who would loan cattle to other households. The second type was nuclear households, like that of Sera, which had smaller pieces of land and livestock and would provide labour to richer households. Women from poorer households would also offer labour to richer households to grind grains with the hand mills that were mostly owned by richer households and to have access to the hand mill to grind their grain. The elderly participants mentioned that this was their parents' livelihood.

4.2.2.2 *The households and their background*

The households that participated in this study were quite diverse, and their experiences and ages differed immensely. Some households were established between the 1970s to 1990s when migrant labour to South African mines increased, some households were formed during the decline of migrant labour in the late 1990s, and some were established after 2010. Twelve of the households had been established between the 1970s and 1990s, and these were headed by old people in the villages. Some of them were over 70 years old and were earning the Old Age Pension. The households established after the migrant labour decline may not have experienced this period, but their livelihoods had been influenced by it to some extent, which makes this analysis important as it provides a base from which we can understand emerging livelihoods. The following is a brief analysis of the livelihoods of households.

4.2.2.3 *Understanding households' livelihoods in the past*

One of the striking features of rural households in these villages is that they are headed by men, and when women are the heads of households, they are *de facto* heads in the absence of the migrant men, who spent most of their time away from the rural area. Some of the households had been living on subsistence farming and animal husbandry. In this type of household, crop cultivation is the source of food security, and livestock, particularly small stock, is their source of income. These households have access to adequate land and a large pool of family labour from both family and social networks.

The second category is migrant labour households that are led by *de facto* women while men are absent working as migrant labourers in South African mines. In this study, there were a significant number of households that had a history of labour migration. Seven households reported having heads of households who were migrant labourers. In these households, men were always absent, and agricultural activities were performed by women, which gave them autonomy in decision-making (see also Thebe, 2017). These households were also involved in agriculture as the literature about Lesotho showed that agriculture was dependent on income (Ferguson, 1994; Murray, 1981). These households were well known for combining on-farm and off-farm activities to meet their

livelihood needs. They could hire labour and purchase inputs. These households could be classified as falling into the middle-class category in the rural social structure. An example was the household of Ntate David, who has worked in a mine in Salis in the Transvaal since 1971. He married M'e Maleseli and they have five girls. M'e Maleseli remained in the rural area, running the rural home and agriculture. Another example was Ntate Khotso, who has worked in the Western Deep-Level Mines since 1973. He has five children, three girls and two boys. His children also remained at home, working the land with their mother, while he worked for income. From the life histories, the migrant labourers were young men who wanted to support their families and to be able to establish their households independently.

Among the poor households, the characteristic feature was that they are nuclear and most of them were poorly resourced in terms of an able-bodied man that can join migrant labour. Spiegel (1980) highlighted that the most important asset for households is an able-bodied man. These households also did not have adequate land for agriculture. They held marginal lands on sloppy areas that were smaller than 1 ha. These were mostly nuclear households that were led by men. An example was the household of Ntate Mokopu, who had been living with his wife M'e Makhang since they were married in 1981, and they have seven children. Ntate Makoaela is another example: He was raised by his mother, M'e Mamakalo, whose husband had disappeared in South Africa, leaving them without proper support. Abandoning households is a common practice for Basotho men in migrant labour (Murray, 1981).

4.2.2.4 Agricultural production

Arable land is a critical resource in agricultural production, and in Lesotho, particularly in mountainous districts like Mokhotlong, land is a scarce resource. The farming households who took part in this study were those that had big fields with good soil that were located by the river and on flat plains. The households had accessed land through inheritance from previous generations and were mostly second and third generations of initial settlers. Households that had bigger landholdings were mostly those of elder sons in the agnatic family and had fewer boys that settled in the area. These households owned an estimated 3–4 acres of land. The migrant labour

households' access to land was also through inheritance. Even though some men assumed land ownership at a later stage when their parents had died, they actively contributed to the households' agricultural production with their households. Also, some had been allocated fields by the households even though this was not formalised until the parents were deceased. Some of the migrant labour households had big, 3–4-acre fields. The poor households had smaller pieces of land that were less than a hectare, mostly situated on sloppy terrain, compromising the quality of the soil. For example, the household of Ntate Makoaela had a small field, estimated to be less than one hectare, and his household was descended from the younger brothers of the ancestor of two generations above the living generation.

Livestock was an important source of livelihood for draught power and income, especially sheep and goats that produced wool and mohair. Large herds of cattle appeared to be the main reason that the heads of households did not migrate for labour as one of the household heads who only practised farming said, "I have never left the rural households to anywhere. I had livestock from my father, and I had accumulated livestock when I was very young. I had to look after the animals for them to look after me" (int., Tanki, 2022). This excerpt shows that households that had livestock were reluctant to leave them behind. In terms of livestock endowments, Ntate Tanki had an estimated 300 sheep and 20 cattle. The migrant labour households built their livestock through purchases as one of the migrant labourers, Ntate Khotso mentioned that he purchased four cattle three times in the 1970s. It shows that in Lesotho, an increase in mining wages increased animal purchases (Cobbe, 1982). The poor households had accessed livestock through herding the livestock of both farming and migrant labour households. For example, Ntate Mokupu was a herdsman for Ntate Mokhalong and was paid in cattle.

Access to agricultural implements like ploughs, harrows, yokes, and planters were important because it allowed households to work the land. Both the farming households and the migrant labour households mentioned their endowment with agricultural assets. The ownership patterns of agricultural implements were through inheritance, buying, and reciprocity. Ntate Motjebeli, whose father only managed to buy a plough during his working time, contributed by purchasing animal-drawn cultivators and yokes. He said, "Though

we could still use our uncle's implements, I needed to have mine so that my crops would not fail while waiting to borrow a weeder. I wanted to have everything necessary for cultivation to have a good harvest" (int., Motjebei, 2022). Most of the migrant labour households strived for independence in agricultural production by owning implements. Households could gain access to agricultural implements through borrowing from others and providing labour like herding cattle and working the fields for the households endowed with the assets. This practice was common among poor households and most of those who had not inherited agricultural equipment rely on reciprocal relations.

In agricultural production, there appeared to be an interdependency between poor households and those that were migrant labour and farming households. The farming households mostly used their household members for labour. This explains why many of the people from farming households could not access education. They got their labour from poor relatives. For example, Ntate Makoaela was born to a family with a small piece of land and lost his father at an early age, and became a herd boy when he was young. He told his story as follows:

I have herded Ntate Mokhalong animals since I was 11 years old, supporting my widowed mother as I was paid 12 sheep per year. My mother could buy food and clothing for my other siblings from herding the cattle. I also got my first herd of cattle from herding cattle. Ntate Mokhalong gave me three cows as payment, and I was able to start my herd. Besides herding cattle, my mother provided agricultural tasks to Ntate Mokhalong household and was paid either cash or through grain (int., Makoaela, 2022).

While men migrated for labour, women were left in rural households to take care of agriculture. Women in these households hired labour for herding livestock from other households, and as such, migrant labour households remained critical as a source of labour for other households. The households' assets and agricultural inputs were purchased using remittances from migrant labour. Such an observation is in line with earlier publications (for example, Cross, 1980; Ferguson, 1994).

Rural households' agricultural practices were heavily tied to sociocultural practices that promoted working together in crop cultivation. It appears that households that shared the same grandfather worked together in the fields. Most of the households mentioned that during the start of the ploughing season, they would perform rituals together as a family for the seeds to yield and the head of the family would often invite traditional doctors to protect the family members against thunderstorms during the ploughing season. At these social events, the households would discuss their cultivation plans and schedules according to the resources they had. M'e Mathetso, the wife of Ntate Moheshe, mentioned that her father-in-law, Ntate Motlokoa, would not allow his relatives to work fields individually and they had to work them as a unit, especially during weeding and harvesting.

For bigger tasks like harvesting, both farming and migrant labour households called *matsema* (work parties) that enabled the household to perform laborious tasks within a short space of time. Work parties were held to perform tasks like wheat harvesting and thrashing, which was laborious and for which there was only a short time as it dried in April, and therefore, households would rush to harvest before snowfall from May as the wheat would germinate once exposed to moisture. In *matsema* (work parties), women were given grains after working, called *moella*.

In terms of agricultural performance, households that had 3–4 acres mentioned produced three bales of maize and two 80 kg bags of wheat, sorghum and beans. The produce lasted the households a year, and some had a surplus that they gave to poor households. The households mentioned that in bad years, they still managed to get at least a bale of maize that lasted them a period of about six months before they had to buy maize. This was attributed to climate patterns, especially rainfall, which enabled them to start cultivating in August because they knew the rains often started in September. They also attributed their success in agriculture to having livestock, which they used to cultivate their fields at their convenience and were able to cultivate their fields on time. The migrant labour households also had cattle and hired labour to work their fields. As they had invested in livestock, they used income from the sale of wool and mohair to supplement food shortages in bad seasons.

The poor households could not support themselves from their own agricultural production. They met their food security mainly through piece work, working in other people's fields and minding their livestock. It emerged that on their small pieces of land these households could produce two 80 kg bags of maize. The remainder, they received for weeding fields for other households that provided labour and grain for helping during harvesting. This combination often lasted six months before they could shed off livestock earned through herding livestock bought through income from other self-employment activities. Even the poor households could still achieve food security through their farming by offering labour to households with resources in exchange for having those households plough their fields. For these households, the consumption of their grain often started early during the harvest season, where households had to dry the grain at an early stage and then mill it to get maize meal.

Agriculture forms a big part of the livelihoods of rural households in Mokhotlong, and virtually all the rural households are engaged in agriculture for a living. Some of the rural households are known to survive on agriculture because their grains that can support them for the entire year, and their large herds of livestock is their main source of livelihood. Livestock determine wealth in most rural societies in Lesotho. According to one household head, "Cultivating crops and keeping animals was our way of living. We ate from our fields and the pastures also supported our animals" (int., Mathapo, 2022). Similar sentiments were shared by Ntate Tanki, who confirmed the role of agriculture in rural livelihoods as follows:

Agriculture was the source of my livelihood. I was able to send all eight children and four grandchildren to school. Three of them became teachers in the late 1990s, and were able to assist their siblings when I no longer had the resources to do so. In general, my children are educated in relative terms (int., Tanki, 2022).

For the households that have wage labourers, agriculture was a diversified income earned from wage labour as households invested it in agricultural production. This was particularly common among migrant labour households. Investing in agriculture enabled the households to benefit from the growing herds of animals like sheep and goats that earned households income from the production of

fleece and from selling old animals. Agricultural production was meant to finance the rural household while remittances were saved.

I thus learned the following:

I registered my wife as the owner of our livestock so that she could sell a sheep or a goat when they needed something in my absence. Livestock was a form of investment and store of wealth that could be disposed to address basic needs like food shortages, paying school fees. At the same time, keeping sheep and goats guaranteed the production of wool and mohair, hence diversifying income streams for rural households (int., Khotso, 2022).

The role of agriculture as a subsidy to income from migrant labour has been well documented in the literature on rural households in the Highlands region of Lesotho (Ferguson, 1994; Murray, 1981). Agriculture was also a source of employment for poorer households whose members were hired in the villages by both farming households and migrant labour households, and who could not migrate to towns and South Africa for wage labour. Employment comprised mainly minding cattle, which were mostly grazed in cattle posts. In the study, 10 households indicated that they had members who were employed by other households.

This section showed that households practised agriculture differently and that farming households would sustain their livelihoods with agricultural production. When the household fell short, they used their income from the sale of wool and mohair. The migrant labour households at the peak of their production had income from the wool and mohair, which was used for food, and remittances, which were used for other things. These households could survive the dry seasons.

4.2.2.5 *Non-farm livelihoods*

There are different non-farm livelihood strategies that migrant labourers engage in. Wage employment was the most important strategy employed by rural households to achieve food security and livelihoods. Through wage employment, rural households earned income that they used to accumulate agricultural equipment and inputs and to rely on in the event of crop failures. Wage employment enabled

young men to establish their livelihoods and purchase livestock and agricultural implements. The migrant labour in these households were mostly men who worked in the mines. Rural households used the proceeds from migrant labour to purchase their food. Wage employment was a widely valued livelihood strategy that diversified the household income.

The most important aspect of migrant labour was the high income that enabled households to invest in education. Education is one of the important livelihood resources because it is an embodied cultural capital that enables access to job opportunities and earning financial capital. Three of the migrant labour households had helped their wives to further their education after they were already married, and these women became teachers in nearby schools while also taking care of the agricultural production. Investing in the education of the wives diversified the income of the rural households. Some households mentioned that the income from formal labour was used to take care of households, and the income from the migrant labour was used for bigger investments. These households had become relatively richer in the villages. In both farming and poor households, women were engaged in informal activities like brewing beer to earn income. Poor households also offered their labour in domestic activities to both farming and migrant labour households, which was important to mitigate food shortages during the summer season when the grains they had earned during winter harvesting had finished.

4.3 Socioeconomic and Natural Changes

4.3.1 Social changes

The social structure of households in this study has significantly changed in terms of their composition, size, and headship. The structure of the households has changed in two major ways: Some households have disintegrated, and some of the households are expanding. The disintegration of rural households happens as members of households establish independent households, and with the inevitable death of household members, which changes the size and headship of the households. Among the effects of disintegration is the withdrawal of labour. The households are left with aged men and women, some with few grandchildren. Some of the households

are becoming extended as children are marrying while still living with their parents. In terms of headship, there are more households headed by widowed women than by widowers. Many of the households that have married couples have members in wage labour, which may include men and women. In terms of social structure, some of the household's success in farming was based on the labour provided by their children. The household of Ntate Tanki, for example, used to be successful in farming in terms of both crop production and animal husbandry. He raised his eight children and four grandchildren of different generations, and they were instrumental in agriculture during school holidays. However, with the relocation of some household members, the household lost an important source of labour. Ntate Tanki as the household head and at 83 can no longer perform farming operations as he did before. It was clear during the fieldwork that household sizes are getting smaller. There were six widow-headed households and two widower-headed households that participated in the study.

4.3.1.1 The disintegration of the households

One of the most striking structural changes observed is that many households are headed by old men and women who cannot expend the same energy in the fields as they had before. These households have bigger fields and have accumulated farming implements. These households are relatively successful in agricultural production and are headed by former migrant labourers. Most of the households that are disintegrating have educated their children who have left the rural areas for jobs in urban areas. Some households have children who have relocated to the lowlands or to Mokhotlong town where they work. For example, Ntate Ntsie's household shows signs of fragmentation, and he now lives only with the herd boy who takes care of the cattle. He has five children, four girls and one boy. All the girls are married and live in the lowlands where they work. His son, Ntate Moetsuoa, is a teacher and has relocated to Mapholaneng.

Similarly, I learned about Ntate Tanki's household. He is an 83-year-old man who successfully farmed while raising his eight children, four daughters and five boys, and later, four grandchildren, two boys and two girls, from his unmarried first daughter who died in the

early 2000s. Most of his children and grandchildren are educated and work as teachers, police, or civil servants. They have established their households in the lowlands and Mokhotlong town. His two sons who live closer to the family are Mopeli and Ts'itso, and they did not further their education beyond high school. Both have established their households in Mapholaneng, and Ts'itso is a builder and Mopeli works at Letšeng Diamond Mine. They both provide labour for agricultural activities in the households; however, Mopeli has since relocated with his animals to his households in Lithoteng, a village closer to Mapholaneng, where he sharecrops with other households. Ts'itso is the only one looking after agriculture for this household. During the fieldwork, I saw Ntate Tanki and his wife weeding their field near the villages, taking many breaks. They have lost their strength and can no longer perform farming operations as they did before. This household used to be known for farming and drew the bulk of their labour from their children, but now there are only two old parents and grandchildren of school-going age.

This disintegration of the households because of relocation has become a major impediment to agricultural production, which is one of the important livelihood practices of rural households. In the past, household heads invested their time and resources into agricultural activities for food security and to sell the surplus, which resulted in households like that of Ntate Tanki being able to educate all their children without migrating elsewhere for income. Rural households are therefore experiencing serious labour constraints as their children who helped during school holidays are no longer there. These elderly people pointed out that during school holidays, their sons would relieve them and go to the cattle post while the daughters helped their mothers with weeding and preparing for the cultivating teams. One of the household members who used to depend on agriculture as a main livelihood confirmed this argument:

I remember back then when we used to produce lots of maize and beans, but now I'm no longer fit to work in the fields. My eyes do not see well. I also do not have strength anymore (int., Ntate Tanki, 2022).

The contraction of rural households has affected the households' access to labour. The children are an important source of labour for the rural households. I was informed of the following:

We only produce maize that can only last us for three months. My son who's taking care farming lives in Mapholaneng. He only has time during the school holidays and weekends to work the fields, which he shares this time operating his taxi (4+1) business. He therefore comes to work the fields when his 4+1 business is not good. When it is already late as sometimes, he cultivates maize and does not remove weeds. He does not have time for agriculture (int., Ntate Ntsie, 2022).

The findings showed that the households headed by older farmers who value agriculture has changed. In these households, farming leadership is in the hands of wage labourers, who cannot give their full attention to agriculture. This leads to inconsistent cultivation, and as Ntate Tanki highlighted, some households are experiencing a decline in harvest because of delays in cultivation. This is different from the agricultural production the households used to achieve before. The allocation of time to an activity can be used as a measure of social change, and Barth (1967) showed that children assume the agricultural role in their parents' households as allocated to them. However, as they grow and pursue other activities, they only have limited time allocated to agricultural tasks. Similarly, Ts'itso from Ntate Tanki lives between his job as a builder and farming on holidays or when he has completed his tasks. With his limited time, Ts'itso is tasked with looking after animals at the cattle post, crop cultivation, and looking for piece jobs to support his family. These tasks all compete for his limited time, which leads him to make choices, and in most cases, his priorities are outside of agriculture.

In these households, agricultural production is led by men who are not fully engaged because they also have other activities such as wage labour, and therefore, they have less time for agricultural tasks. This appeared to be the case in Ntate Ntsie's household because his son, Moetsuoa, who is a teacher and lives in Mapholaneng. While he has land in the village, he spends most of his time at his place of work, which has led to limited focus on the land. Another example is the household of Ntate Moheshe. He lives in the village with his wife M'e Mathetso, while their six children live in Maseru where they were said to be looking for jobs. I was informed that they

only come home during emergencies, death in the family, or other ceremonies. In African culture, and Lesotho in particular, funerals are family events where most family members would attend to say their goodbyes to the dead. However, they would leave after the ceremony, which in a way takes the family back to its initial position. As one of the elderly heads of household summed it, “they would leave with their labour” (int., M’e Ntloki, 2022). This has implications for the rural production process, but more importantly, it affects households that depend on agriculture in their pursuit of agriculture-based livelihoods. The situation discussed above also demonstrates not only the changes that have taken place but how these changes has contributed to the disintegration of certain households, which has implications for productivity.

The disintegration of households is also visible in the households that used to be extended, such as the households of Ntate Mosoeu from Mahemeng. During the life history interview, he said he has seven children, born between the 1970s and the late 1980s. His two daughters had three sons before they were married. The households in the recent past had relied on the labour of the three grandsons as the children on Ntate Mosoeu had relocated to the lowlands and Mokhotlong town for work. The household currently relies on the labour of the three grandsons from the two daughters, but at the time of the study, only Ntate Mosoeu and M’e Malefa were living in the household with only the youngest grandchild. The other grandsons had left to seek for jobs in South Africa and had not returned.

Even though the households can still be considered extended, the young adults in these households are engaged in wage labour elsewhere. For those who had children in the village, were left with the elderly in the households of their parents. In agriculture, the households are also struggling for labour, similar to the households that have disintegrated. What is even more problematic is that, even those grandchildren who were raised by their maternal grandparents have to work and become independent, and one household head explained it as follows:

My grandsons were very helpful to the households, especially with the labour in agriculture, but they have to work and be independent. As you know, per our customs, my grandchildren cannot inherit my property when my sons are still there. Even

though my sons are living elsewhere, when I die, they will claim everything as theirs, even though I raised my grandsons like my own children. My sons have relocated, but they have the power to decide if they would give them anything or not. (int., Ntate Mosoeu, 2022)

Similar sentiments were shared by the elderly Ntate Thabang. He raised his two grandsons, left behind by his daughter who died in the early 2000s. He has other grandsons in their mid-twenties, who have left Ntate Thabang alone in the rural village when they migrated for wage labour in the Gauteng Province in 2022. Their chances to inherit their grandfather's assets, mainly land, are slim as Ntate Thabang's son is still alive, even though he works in Maputsoe. This clearly shows the complexity of the challenge faced by rural households and the potential impacts on the livelihoods of such complexities on members who are not fully regarded as members of households.

Some of the nuclear households are extended by sons, who married while still living with their parents and who have not established their households. An example is the household of Ntate Motjebei, a 70-year-old widower, whose household consists of his son Ntate Poloko and his wife and their two children. A similar case is M'e Masetempe's household, which comprises of five children, three boys and two girls, who are not married but have children. This household comprises five children, three grandchildren, and M'e Masetempe's husband, who is disabled after suffering from a stroke, which means the household has 10 members in total. In some cases, household members who had established their own homes returned to live with the main households. The household of Ntate Mokopu comprised of his son Moletsi, who has established his house closer to the main households who left his children under Ntate Mokopu's care since both Moletsi and his wife, 'Me Mathabiso, are migrant labourers.

Another change observed is the significant number of households headed by widowed women. In the sampled households, six households are headed by widowed women. An example is that of M'e Marealeboha, who is already of advanced age. Many of these widowed women lost their husbands at an early age. For example, M'e Marorisang's husband died in 2003, leaving her with three

children when she was only 25-years old. As a woman who did not have older male children, she faced difficulties accessing her husband's livestock because her in-laws refused to give her the livestock that her livelihood was based upon. Women often lose property to relatives after their partners die. M'e Marorisang told her story as follows:

My husband died in 2003. He was a herdsman and had accumulated livestock during his life. When he died, he left 74 sheep, but my in-laws gave less than half of the sheep after his burial. This is after I took the matter to the police station because they were refusing to give me my husband's livestock, saying they were waiting for a cleansing ritual to be done before I could be given them. They would tell me that my sheep have not mated only to mark their progeny on them. You'll be surprised to see your sheep being sucked by a lamb that is said is not yours and be told its lamb was dead. Because of the sour kinship relations with my in-laws, I had to raise my kids on my own as I did not have parents, and wait for them to grow up before I could look for a job far away where I could get paid (int., M'e Marorisang, 2022).

From another widowed woman whose husband died in 2018, I learned the following:

My husband had livestock, sheep and goats, and they were left with his brothers as he had been working at a contraction in Botswana before joining artisanal mining. I know he used to send money to his brother to buy food for the herd boys at the cattle post and contributed by buying medicine, and sometimes paying a herd boy. When he died, I was told he had no cattle left. The animals that he had were the ones used for his burial (int., Malerato, 2022).

These stories highlight the impact of the loss of a husband, which changes the social structure, the agricultural production, and the livelihoods of the widowed rural household. In the event of change, they are robbed of their assets and their participation in agriculture is only by providing their labour to other households as they would have lost their assets that could provide them with financial capital. This further shows how the exclusion of women from animal husbandry deprives them of the knowledge of the number of livestock the households own. It is easier to know the number and to identify big animals like cows and donkeys because they are used

domestically and their marks are visible, but women often do not know how many sheep and goats their household owns. Some women know how many livestock they own, but do not know their marks. Following the death of a husband, this leaves the women unable to claim the livestock, depriving them of the assets important for their livelihoods. This also jeopardises the relations between the widows and their in-laws, which results in a lack of support when raising their children.

One of the prominent social changes is households headed by men who lost their wives at an advanced age, in contrast to the women who lost their husbands at a younger age. Three households that participated in the study are headed by widowers, and they are mostly men who survive through Old Age Pension. An example is Ntate Ntsie, whose wife died in 1999. He has since raised his children, who have moved on and established their homes in the lowlands and Mapholaneng. His situation is different from Ntate Motjebei, who is widowed but lives with his sons and his daughters-in-law.

Many of the nuclear households are headed either by men whose wives have migrated for labour or women whose husband migrated for labour. The households of Ntate Makoaela and M'e Maseriti, with only six children, are left with only two primary school-going children because the two older daughters are married and the sons are informal migrants. Their labour is not available for on-farm tasks. As such, most of the households tend to lose the labour of their children. Ntate Lehola has five children, and two are married, leaving the household with three school-going children. It emerged that young men are leaving the rural areas to try their luck in the urban areas and across the border in South Africa. According to Ntate Makoaela, "our children leave when they get older. We cannot keep them here because we do not have land" (int., Makoaela, 2022).

All 30 rural households that comprised the research sample had members who had left the rural households in search of wage labour. These could be the husband, wife, sons, or daughters. Some of the households do not have fields, and their children left to find wage labour. The emergence of a new generation of landless households has shifted to a large degree towards migrant labour. Indications

of the growing generation of households are well documented (Thebe, 2018b). Agriculture is not a livelihood option for some whose parents have small fields.

4.3.2 Economic changes

The economic changes that affect rural households started with the decline of migrant labour for men in the villages. Migrant labour had been the main source of livelihood for the people in Mokhotlong, where mountainous terrain and harsh climatic conditions limit agricultural production. At the peak of labour migration to South Africa, more than three-quarters of households lived on remittances. Some of the households in this study were established in the 1970s, a period when labour migration significantly increased, and led to higher wages and investing in livestock. This shaped the socioeconomic and natural environment for the households' livelihoods.

4.3.2.1 Changes in migrant labour

The two villages' life histories showed a negative economic change that rural households experienced just before the turn of the century. There is evidence of some rural households' livelihoods being in crisis because of the growing unemployment that began with the job losses in the 1990s, but not all households are in the same bracket, and even those households that could be categorised as being poor are making means to survive. The job losses happened because of changes to foreign policy in South Africa, which aimed to reduce South Africa's reliance on foreign labour. The migrant labour route had been the mainstay of rural households in Lesotho for decades, and supported both agricultural production and the livelihoods of rural households, and provided jobs for poor households.

According to the life history interviews, most of the migrant labourers recalled the negative sentiments in the 1990s towards migrant labourers who were not South African. This was a significant change from the 1970s, when men were recruited to work in the mines because Basotho men are hard workers and widely preferred in the mines.

All the former migrant labourers in the study were retrenched in the 1990s, and they said that this was because of the decline of the value of gold in the world market. While it may seem like it was an economic move to decrease labour because of low demand, Mensah and Naidoo (2011) pointed out that the retrenchment of Basotho mine workers happened because of a labour policy that aimed to protect the labour market for Black South Africans, who faced unemployment. As such, migrant labour from Lesotho declined from 48% of Basotho men working in South Africa in 1976 to only 7% in 2002 (Hall & Wason, 2002).

4.3.2.2 *Retrenchment*

After retrenchment, migrant workers had to leave the mining houses to return to their rural households as they were not allowed to stay in the urban towns when their work contracts had been terminated. All the migrant labourers returned home to survive on agriculture, except for a few households, like that of Ntate David who had sent his wife, M'e Maleseli, to school and later became a teacher.

While working as migrant workers, they had not abandoned rural life, and most, like Ntate Thabang, used their income to invest in agriculture. Ntate Thabang was retrenched from the mines in 1995. Motjebei, who was employed in 1983 and retrenched in 1995, also returned home and concentrated on selling milk from his cows in the village. He remembers thinking at the time that “at least I have money. I can plough back to agriculture into farming” (int., Motjebei, 2022).

The loss of income was however cushioned with the prospect of getting severance packages, and all the migrants had hoped to use the money for things they had not achieved with their monthly income. When they received the lump sum, many rural households

built houses with corrugated iron roofing and furnished them with wardrobes, kitchen cupboards, and cemented floors. This was an upgrade from the rural houses with huts roofed with wheat straws. Ntate Khotso remembered that their households differed in these villages, and one could tell where miners lived.

However, the severance pay did not last as long as expected. Among the things they invested in were opening small grocery shops in their households that they had hoped would generate income security for the long term, but the business ventures had been unsustainable. This was captured in the interviews:

Opening the business was the biggest mistake because here at home most of the people bought things on credit and struggled to pay. Even in my households, I don't think they understood business because whenever they felt like eating fish, they just took it from the shelf. They never understood that it is the profit that would support the households. I did not profit from it; instead, I funded it with all my money until it collapsed. (int., Thabang, 2022)

Other households had similar examples of businesses they thought would provide better income security for the long term, but the business failed because of credit buying, and instead of generating profits, generated losses and required new capital, depleting the household's financial capital. This was partly due to neighbourly relations that made it difficult for the households to ask for their neighbours to pay their credit. This shows the ex-miners' lack of entrepreneurial skills described by Maphosa and Morojele (2013) and the social relations that made it difficult to collect debts (Spiegel, 1980).

Some of the households, used the lumpsum from the severance pay for sociocultural practices. Ntate Khotso used his lumpsum to initiate his two boys into adulthood. He remembered holding a big ceremony for their graduation, slaughtering a cow. He performed *kapeso* (A ritual whereby black beast is slaughtered for the deceased) for his parents, slaughtering two animals. He had to use his income to meet the daily household needs and mentioned that his money did not last. Most of the migrant labourers mentioned that in two years, their severance pay was finished. Ntate Khotso highlighted that a big sum of money deceives because it looks like it can

achieve a lot of things at once, but it cannot. The severance pay was not sustainable for many households as it did not yield new income-generating livelihood portfolios.

Many former migrant labour households returned to agriculture as their main source of income. During their time in the mines, income from agricultural production, specifically from the sale of wool and mohair, was used to sustain agricultural production, like purchasing animal medication. Remittances enabled households to buy food, clothing, and other things the household needed. The loss of remittances meant that households had to fully depend on agriculture for children's education, food, and clothing, which many said was not enough. Ntate Motjebei explained the situation they faced by having to fully depend on agriculture with five children, two of whom started high school in 1998: "The challenge of retrenchment, unlike retirement, is that you lose a job while you are still raising children, who need full support. Unlike when one retires, and children are already able to support themselves" (int., Ntate Motjebei, 2022).

Farming was not enough to support the livelihoods of many rural households that had used remittances to support both livelihoods and agriculture. Thus, households had to dispose of their livestock for food and school fees. In usual circumstances, rural households used to dispose of their livestock only when they were old, but now they had to sell their livestock to sustain their living. Ntate Mosoeu, one of the migrant labourers who had eight children, three of whom were in high school from 1995 after he was retrenched in 1992, had to sell his livestock to keep his children in school. He said the following:

I remember clearly in 1992, I had 12 cattle. I had to sell two cattle each year to pay for school fees and feed the family. In 1995, I did not have a choice but to withdraw three of them from school because the rest of the children were suffering. Only my second daughter was able to complete her studies with the goodwill of teachers because she was always the top in her class. (int., Mosoeu, 2022)

While withdrawing children from school affected the children's ability to access formal employment, it was the strategy that households had to take to keep livestock, which enabled them to provide food for the families. The financial strain impacted the children's education prospects. A similar situation affected Ntate Motjebai, who also withdrew his children from school because of a lack of funds.

4.3.2.3 Unemployment

One of the striking ways in which retrenchment affected households is the growing unemployment. While a significant number of household members reported having faced retrenchment, prospective job seekers who had hoped to join migrant labour could not find any formal jobs. This confirms Cobbe's (1982) assertion that the decline of recruitment labour would result in high unemployment in the rural areas of Lesotho. The unemployment specifically affected young men who were reaching adulthood and had hoped to secure mining jobs and did not realise the importance of education. Ntate Khotso mentioned that he wanted to put his two boys through school, but they dropped out in early high school:

“I wanted to educate my children, but they disappointed me. They did not like school, and I couldn't force them. Perhaps they were looking forward to also getting migrant labour jobs when they grew up” (int., Khotso, 2022).

In Mokhotlong, young men did not care about education as they were anticipating South African mine jobs that absorbed unskilled labour, and as such, they were reluctant to attend school (Pae, 2001). In most cases, the income gap left by retiring men would often be covered by sons who would take over as migrant labourers. However, the reduction in migrant labour made such arrangements impossible. Most of the men in the participating households only had primary school qualifications as some had been affected by their parent's loss of income in the 1990s. Seven men who are heads of households mentioned dropping out of school around that time. Some had dropped out of school voluntarily after completing the initiation ceremony. It is common among young graduates from

initiation schools in Lesotho to drop out of school and pursue the life of adults, including marrying and seeking for jobs. However, in the absence of formal migrant labour opportunities, such prospects also diminished.

4.3.2.4 *Loss of livestock*

The economic changes in these households were also exacerbated by high livestock mortality because of the heavy snowfall in 1996, which eroded the households' key assets that many households had invested in, while working as migrant labour. The snow in 1996 killed many households' livestock; for example, M'e Mathapo had an estimated 130 sheep and goats, but was left with less than 50. For more than two weeks, the animals could not forage and died of the cold. Most people in the villages vividly remembered the high livestock mortality that came with the unexpected snowfall in 1987 that fell in October and lasted three weeks, killing hundreds of sheep and goats. Many households had taken their livestock to the cattle post for summer grazing, unknowingly exposing their livestock to heavy snow at the higher altitudes. Quinlan (1995) estimated that 25–30% of livestock died during the snowfall in 1987 in the Mokhotlong District.

Households like that of Moheshe lost all their goats as they used to send their animals back to the cattle post as soon as the ploughing began. Many households lost animals and did not recover from the 1987 snowfall, which was followed by 1996 snow that also caused many livestock deaths. Both disasters severely impacted households known for their agricultural production. The households that were known to have a lot of livestock declined. One of the households' members that lost livestock mentioned the following:

The 1996 snow was disastrous. I had never experienced such a high level of helplessness when you see animals that had been grown for some many years dying in two weeks. In 1996, out of the 150 sheep and goats, we lost more than 100 with goats being severely destroyed because of coldness and lack of forage. The only animals that I can say survived were cattle, but they were also thin. The challenge was the lack of forage. We tried to clear, but the snow took weeks to melt (int., Lehola, 2022).

The heavy snowfall exacerbated the economic changes of the rural households that were already facing retrenchments. The effects of these economic changes were the loss of jobs for poor rural households that used to provide labour to the relatively richer households; for example, Ntate Khotso used his sons to provide labour.

One of the effects on rural households, of the changing economy was the increase in participation of household members, especially men, in self-employment activities. In rural households, men started engaging in cannabis trading from Lesotho to South Africa to earn income. Six participating households confessed that they had supported their livelihoods with cannabis trading from Mokhotlong to KwaZulu-Natal using donkeys. Cannabis trading was a lucrative business as a 50 kg bag was sold for M1500 after buying it for M500, which was a lot more profitable than a bag of maize that was sold for M100. They pointed out that with the economic changes, cannabis trading was the only way to earn money. However, it was risky, and one man said the following:

Selling cannabis was our way of earning income. It started well but was later infiltrated by hijackings as it was illegal to operate in both countries. People took advantage of the inability to report the incidents of theft. I stopped trading cannabis for security reasons, and many people stopped trading eventually (int., Mabusa, 2022).

These sections highlighted the shift from formal to informal livelihood activities and non-farm activities following the decline of formal mine wage labour. In this study, nearly all the households had people who are involved in one informal activity or another. Some of the activities take place locally, some in Mapholaneng Centre and urbanised areas in the country, and others beyond Lesotho's borders.

4.3.3 Environmental changes

The main environmental changes that affect households are climate variability and land degradation. Climate variability manifests in persistent droughts and frequent flash floods, and land degradation has led to a decline in livestock production, which was the main form of livelihood in Mokhotlong District.

According to the elderly participants, the climate patterns in this area were normal, and they had some years of good rains and some drier periods. They have experienced droughts before, but not like the recent recurring droughts. For many farmers, the drought that stands out is the drought of 2015, and most people vividly remember cultivating their fields on time, and that their crops failed because of the unbearable sun. The 2015 drought reduced the harvest significantly and resulted in high food insecurity levels in Mokhotlong District, causing a humanitarian crisis that had been addressed by lean season assistance spanning from October to March 2020 (WFP, 2020).

Many households mentioned that their crops have not been successful after 2015 as they were also hit by droughts in the subsequent years. Lesotho in general has recorded three back-to-back failed harvests: The 2017/2018 poor season, the 2018/2019/ late on-set rains with extremely hot temperatures, and the 2019/2020 below-average rainfall that affected 30% of the rural population (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020). One of the elderly men said, “We can’t deny that droughts are part of our climate. They have hit us before, occasionally and things would return to normal. In the recent past, droughts have become a feature of our climate conditions” (int., Ntsie, 2022).

The impacts of droughts are dire in these communities as they reduce vegetation growth on the pastures and in turn reduce the livestock forage. The community also suffered water shortages because the perennial springs dried, and the streams were too low for the animals to drink from. These factors have led to a decline in crop production and the deteriorating health of the livestock. In 2019, the recurring

droughts resulted in many cattle deaths in the villages. One of the households that was among the few households that had large herds lost 14 cattle in 2019 between September and December. Ntate David describes his loss as follows:

I did not suffer much from theft, but our climate failed me in 2019 alone. I started cultivating in July/August, waiting for rain to start seeding, but there was no rain and no grass. I took them to my relatives in Maholing (the upper village of the catchment) where there are pastures, but the problem was that there was no water. The cattle were grazing on the mountain and drinking down the Khubelu River. When it started raining, they were already weak and died I do not know the exact cause of death, but they were bloated. I think they ate poisonous plants. These days we do not know (int., Ntate David, 2022).

Similarly,

I lost three cattle in 2019 due to hunger and heat. I used to think that it would rain, and grass would grow in Spring not realising that the cattle were becoming weak. When I started to buy feed for them it was already late, because they would no longer be able to travel back home. I fed them at pastures and drew water for them take them with the help of other men here in the village but still they could not survive (int, Ntate Tshepo, 2022).

Evident in the above is the challenging impacts of climate variabilities on livestock production and that farmers do employ different strategies for their livestock, but their means were still not sufficient to curb the impacts of extreme drought faced in 2019. It was also highlighted that farmers do use their social capital in their struggle for cattle to survive. The emerging challenge is that the farmers' knowledge was being challenged by the rapidly changing climate conditions as from Ntate David's excerpt it was difficult for him to identify the real cause of death for his cattle.

The households have also noticed a change in rainfall. Most of the elderly people mentioned that they used to receive rains that were spread over time, which allowed households to start working the land from August, knowing that the first rains would start towards the end of the month. However, recently there have been rainfall delays, and sometimes the rain only starts in October. Delayed rainfall

is generally an impediment to agricultural production, especially in Mokhotlong where the ploughing season is short because of frost (Moeletsi & Walker, 2013).

Another change in rainfall is the change from intermittent rainfall that most household members remember to heavy downpours over a short period. This high-intensity rainfall erodes the soil on the sloppy terrain towards the Khubelu River, which has developed gullies that run down the pastures and fields in the villages. Many households lost their fields to gullies caused by stormwater. The floods that stood out for all the participants and affected many households are the floods of January 2021, which damaged bridges, inundated crops, and destroyed many fields along the Khubelu River with the sand intrusion. These fields used to be good for growing crops as the soil is deeper than in the sloppy areas. The flood caused permanent damage to the fields. Sand intrusion affects five participating households that have fields along the Khubelu River. Some of the fields, like that of 'Me Marealeboha in Figure 4.3, can no longer be cultivated.

Figure 4.3 A picture of a field damaged by flooding



Source: Author (2022)

Many participants mentioned the extreme climate changes felt in the rural areas, such as the recurring droughts from 2017 to 2019/2020 that were followed by 2021/2022 high-intensity rainfall and flooding. There seemed to be no balanced rainfall patterns, and one of the participants said that when it rains, it does not stop, and when it stops, it takes forever. The imbalanced rainfall came up in many conversations. The climate variability makes it difficult for households to determine the precise time to cultivate crops. Many households mentioned that they used to have a ploughing calendar to get good harvests, but they could no longer use that knowledge. One of the farmers explained his cultivation as follows:

In the past, I knew my large field by the river was supposed to be cultivated in mid-September after the first rains. Missing that window meant the maize would struggle against weeds that compete with crops grown in October. However, recent years have seen a troubling shift; the rains no longer come in September as they once did, making it increasingly difficult to time the planting season (int., Mosoeu, 2022).

The impact of climate variabilities felt in the rural household is challenging the knowledge systems people hold about their agricultural production. According to farmers, learning how to adjust their cropping season to the changing weather patterns is difficult. During my fieldwork in 2022, the rainfall was also persistent in these areas and the frequency of rainfall impeded cultivation as households would prepare food and organise labour only to have to postpone it because of rainfall. The fields were too muddy to be cultivated. In some of the fields that were cultivated, farmers could not remove the weeds because of the constant rainfall during the ploughing season.

Land degradation has significantly changed the landscape in this area. The steep slopes and high elevations with shallow soil cover are vulnerable to erosion by wind and heavy downpours. Soil erosion has affected many fields that were constructed on the slopy surface, and some are no longer cultivable, while other shrank because of shallow soil. It was not surprising to have people like M'e Mabonang saying, "I have a field, but it does not have soil". From observation, many fields on slopy areas have deep gullies running through them, leaving fewer areas with deeper soil to cultivate crops. Ten of the participating households do not own fields. Previous studies in Lesotho showed that nationally, the proportion of landless households has risen to above 40% (Rocchi & Del Sette, 2016). The loss of land has affected households' agricultural production.

The changes are also visible on the pastures and people mentioned that their pastures do not have sufficient grass to support their livestock. Most farmers noted the severe decline of grasses that used to be dominant in pastures, and grasses like *seboku* (Themeda trianda) are now dominated by drought-resistant shrubs like *sehalahala*. The Land and Conservation Programme is employing people

to remove shrubs to encourage the growth of grasses. The cattle posts used to have grasses but have been overgrazed. The increase in invasive shrubs are due to overgrazing around the 23 cattle posts in Mokhotlong. Overgrazing has been widely documented in the Highlands region (Morris, 2017; Nüsser, 2002).

The decline of pastures has affected many rural households, and Ntate Moheshe illustrated the challenges caused by pasture degradation. In 2012, he exchanged his fields for nine sheep, but by 2022, his flock had only increased to 12 sheep. This minimal growth over a decade highlights the severe impact of pasture degradation. Ntate David mentioned losing lambs every year because of cold and lack of forage, especially when the animals give birth in the mountains where there is not enough adequate grass. The reduced availability of nutritious forage leads to malnourished and less productive animals.

Figure 4.4 The landscape of the villages and pasture



Source: Author (2022)

4.4 Chapter Summary

The chapter started with the description of the Mokhotlong District that included a broad geographical location and physical environment aspects. After the broad profile of Mokhotlong, the description focused on the two villages in the Khubelu catchment area, Mahemeng and Ha Rammeleke, that were part of the case study. The profile discussed the location of the case study, the infrastructure, and the social services available to rural households in the villages. The social-economic aspects were also discussed to highlight the livelihood strategies of the rural households.

The second section was focused on understanding the area and the people by looking at the history of settlement in the area and the household categories that emerged soon after settlement. After this, the chapter discussed the historical background of the households that participated in the study, and they were categorised into farming, migrant labour, and poor households, which earn their livelihoods by working for farming and migrant labour households.

The history of livelihoods was also discussed to show that agriculture is the main form of livelihood for some households. The farming households are mostly those that have inherited big fields and large herds of livestock. The migrant labour households also have big fields but most of them earned their livestock through purchasing them with remittances. The poor households are those that had inherited smaller fields and that did have remitting members. The main form of non-farm livelihood that made households relatively richer in the villages are those that have invested in education of their wives.

The third section discussed the social and economic changes of rural households and showed that the households had disintegrated socially as some households that used to have many members to help with agriculture had relocated, creating serious labour constraints in agricultural production. Some of the households were integrating young men and women who married and kept their children at

their parents' house so they can pursue wage labour, which are extending many households. Many households have shrunk because of household members dying.

The economic changes started with the decline of formal wage labour as most of the men were retrenched, which led to high unemployment in rural households for young men who anticipated mine labour opportunities. The economic changes also included changes in livestock holding as many households lost their livestock because of heavy snow in 1996. These economic changes have resulted in a shift towards informal labour activities.

The environmental changes have been caused by land degradation and climate variabilities that manifest in prolonged droughts and heavy rainfall, which exacerbates land degradation through erosion. The rainfall distribution has significantly changed, and currently there are rain delays and high-intensity rain rather than soft intermittent rainfall evenly spread across the ploughing season. These changes have resulted in crop failures and livestock mortality.

Chapter 5

Emerging Livelihoods: Adaptation Strategies and Factors Guiding the Decision-making Process

5.1 Introduction

For anyone unfamiliar with Basotho society, Basotho's livelihoods seem quite simple. Following the literature on Lesotho, it is easy to conclude that the country has lost its migrant labour reserve status, after what has been termed "migration shocks" (Mensah & Naidoo, 2011, p. 1038) at the end of the migrant labour system when immigrant miners were retrenched from South African mines (see, also Boehm, 2003). Furthermore, agriculture continues to fail because of many factors, including lack of land (Rantšo, 2016). According to the literature, livelihoods in textile jobs are vulnerable and often characterised by insecurity and low pay (Morris & Staritz, 2017). However, when looking at the situation of rural households in Mokhotlong District, it is clear that the livelihoods of rural households are complex and multifaceted and often based on different activities that people combine to survive under difficult conditions.

This chapter provides evidence in contention of the narratives of the demise of a migrant labour reserve economy, and that of poor rural households, who have lost their major source of income, and encounter challenges with agriculture. Of course, some of these issues may be true for some households, but as this chapter shows, this is not a general situation. The chapter confirms the findings of some studies that rural households are not entirely dependent on their agricultural production but also depend on a portfolio of livelihood activities, most of which are carried outside the rural space (Ellis, 2000).

In the Lesotho Highlands, in areas such as Mokhotlong District that have a mountainous typology, the rhetoric on livelihoods has centred on agriculture, particularly the production of wool and mohair (Matsumoto, 2014). In Mokhotlong District, following the implementation of Polihali Dam, which is the second phase of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, the issues of land degradation and livelihoods have been brought back to the fore in livelihoods debates because there is a fear that the land degradation could

potentially threaten the dam project and rural livelihoods, which have been presumed to be agricultural based (George, 2020; ORASECOM, 2018). While this is partly true, this chapter shows that the livelihoods of rural people are highly diversified. More importantly, households have continued sending labour across the border to South Africa, albeit in a rather less formal manner. In contrast, employment opportunities, whether formal or informal, have also risen within Lesotho, and in the case of households in Mokhotlong District, within the district itself. This chapter illustrates how rural people continuously strive for livelihood alternatives to respond to their constraints. By exploring the livelihood strategies of households, the chapter shows that rural people are not passive recipients, but active decision-makers who influence their outcomes following a crisis.

The chapter begins with a discussion of agriculture-based livelihoods, followed by non-agriculture-based livelihoods. Some of the activities are undertaken in both rural and urban settings and are discussed in the third section. The fourth section summarises the chapter to show that farming alone does not suffice for rural households. The rural households' livelihoods are earned from a wide range of activities. This empirical evidence affirms the findings of other studies on former migrant labourers in Southern Africa where non-farm livelihood diversification is more likely the result of a decline in agriculture and formal mining wage labour.

5.2 Locally Based Livelihoods

The natural and socioeconomic changes that brought significant changes to households' circumstances and livelihoods led to new trends emerging, and these are worth discussing. New and different ways of doing things emerged both locally and outside the community or the Highlands, and even across the border in South Africa, as households use their agency to respond to constraints and exploit new opportunities.

Locally based livelihoods can be divided into those that are dependent on the natural environment and non-natural resource-based activities. Both these are common among the participating households, although everyone does not participate in the same activities, with some households depending on one form of livelihood and others on another, depending on circumstances. Some households are

poor and have limited options, while others can afford to spread their wings and partake in numerous activities. Locally based livelihoods are common and practised virtually by everyone but are often denigrated and despised and performed as a temporary or last resort. The phrase “lack of choice” emerged often during the study, which emphasises the importance still attached to migrant labour. For a migrant labour society, this was expected as a culture had developed that Boehm (2003, p. 5) described as follows:

“Rural households’ prime attention was, and still is, geared towards jobs—not farming”.

“What further complicates the attitudes of rural dwellers towards farming in Lesotho is that farming is seen as a domestic and ‘female’ chore rather than a real profession”.

“Once offered a job, a Mosotho man will always leave his field to others and go for the cash, which he needs badly”.

“Farming has come to be low status, something to be left to women and elders. Men were and are supposed to make money”.

However, some households that are considered rich had built their wealth by engaging in local productive activities. These activists mainly include animal husbandry, although there is a growing trend of people who are engaged in diamond mining in Letšeng Mine.

5.3 Agriculturally Based Livelihoods

Despite the changes that have marked effects on agriculture and its practice by households, for a rural community, households cannot completely divorce themselves from agriculture and its practice. Agriculture remains the main local livelihood activity and consists of crop cultivation and animal husbandry. Like other rural areas in Lesotho, in most households, the people claim they are engaged in agriculture, regardless of scale. Thus, their livelihoods are based on agriculture as the practice they inherited from their elders and that they will pass on to their children. This is connected to Boehm’s (2003) analysis of the concept of *realema* (we are farmers) because households’ definition of being farmers conflicts with the general understanding of farming used elsewhere in rural societies. The true definition of being a farmer is someone who produces crops and depends on their agriculture for a living. In other words, agriculture should be, if I am to use Boehm’s terminology, ‘yielding’. I do not want to pursue this point here because it has been thoroughly

covered in Boehm's anthropological study. The focus here, however, is the emerging agriculture-based livelihoods among households. The agriculture-based livelihoods practised within the villages can be classified into three categories: crop cultivation, animal husbandry, and cash crop production.

5.3.1 Production of crops

Crop cultivation remains a livelihood activity widely practised by households but has significantly reduced in scale. This is a result of an array of socioeconomic and natural changes, including shrinking fields, loss of reliable sources of income that agriculture was dependent on, and social issues that have led to high stock theft. These changes have eroded many of the rural households' ability to farm on their own as many households had lost cattle, sold their implements, and were unable to recover their losses as they lost financial capital. While agricultural production is not an emerging livelihood, this discussion leans towards different ways households adapt their agriculture to changes observed.

5.3.1.1 Changing cropping arrangements

During fieldwork, it became clear that many households cannot farm on their own as there are households that have fields and agricultural implements but do not have draught power. These are mostly households headed by elderly people who lost their livestock to theft and have not been able to recover. Some households have livestock but do not have fields, especially the households that are headed by younger men who have accumulated livestock through herding. Also, many of the households that do not have fields do not have farming implements.

To cultivate, the households have to pool resources in multiple ways. Some households have formed ploughing teams to combine all their agricultural inputs and work together in both crop cultivation and animal husbandry. Ploughing teams enable households to access implements and animals that they do not have. The ploughing teams as seen in these rural households bring together the animals

they have, agricultural implements, and labour to produce crops. The ploughing team are controlled by the households that have cattle. Ntate Moheshe and Ntate Motjebei belong to a ploughing team that have been working together for more than 15 years, and they each have two cows. They are under Ntate Lehola's ploughing team, who has eight cattle. Ntate Moheshe said, "After losing our livestock, we realised we could not cultivate. The only way was to combine little inputs we had to cultivate so that our fields do not lie fallow". Ploughing teams give members access to combined resources beyond ploughing as the households of Ntate Moheshe have to use Ntate Motjebei's donkeys to perform other household tasks, like carrying groceries from Mapholaneng. Similarly, when the cattle are not cultivating, the households of Ntate Moheshe can still use Ntate Lehola's cattle to drag wood logs for fuel. When a member of the ploughing team enters an arrangement, like sharecropping, with other households outside the collective, they can still use the resources from the ploughing team.

While ploughing teams are mostly joined by households that owned fields, sharecropping is an arrangement mostly between the elderly households that have arable land and the younger households that have draught power. The low cattle ownership by the households makes it almost impossible for households to cultivate all their fields in a season, despite being members of the ploughing teams. Households that have large fields must still make other arrangements, such as sharecropping with households that have draught power. To cultivate some of the fields that are not ploughed by the ploughing teams because of the lack of cattle, Ntate Mosoeu sharecrops some of his fields with Ntate T'sepo, a 35-year-old man who does not have fields but has cattle.

The third arrangement is hiring cattle or hiring out a field. Some of the households that do not have fields are hiring them to cultivate, like the households of Ntate Khethang, who hires a 2-acre field for M2000 to Ntate Khahliso to cultivate cash crops. Ntate Khahliso's household does not have all the agricultural implements and cannot join the ploughing team. Some of the households are hiring out their fields in exchange for livestock, like Ntate Mosoeu who hires one of his 2-acre fields for two ewes per annum as he wants to grow his herd. 'Me Maseriti hired out her field to get a goat to cleanse her son after imprisonment. For rural households, ownership

of a field does not only mean they use it for agricultural production but it also enables the household to access a range of resources for their livelihood fulfilment, which is not only material but also sociocultural, as seen with ‘Me Maseriti’s situation.

5.3.1.2 Choice of crops

The rural households’ choice of crops is guided by different factors. Maize, which is the staple crop, is the main crop cultivated for consumption. It is grown and eaten as green corn and milled to get maize meal. Maize is needed in large quantities for both the family and to feed herd boys at the cattle posts where they live for summer grazing. Cultivating maize spares the household from buying maize meal for two households at the same time. I was reminded of the following:

You know most of us here have two households. When I have maize, and it’s my turn to feed the cattle post. I just take it from the store and give them to grind. It is better than having to buy an expensive mealie meal every time. (int., Mathapo, 2022)

Many households grow maize to save costs and also for crop stover to provide forage for livestock during the spring season, usually the lean season for animals because of reduced forage following overgrazing of pastures during the winter season. In winter, all the animals are brought back to the villages to protect them from the harsh, freezing conditions at higher altitudes, where livestock is kept for summer grazing. The households have been facing the challenge of cattle losing strength during the ploughing season because of a lack of forage, and therefore, many small-scale farmers have resorted to supplementing feeding for livestock.

Figure 5.1 Picture of maize crop stover after winter harvest



Source: Author (2022)

Households privately collect their crop stover for livestock feeding, and some of the households even take the stalks and poor-quality maize to the mill for feeding livestock. Cultivating maize to supplement feeding is common as some of the households were seen cultivating maize in November, which is late as maize is cultivated in spring to mature before the March frost. When asked if the maize would succeed, Ntate Moetsuoa replied, "as long as I could get stover for my cattle, it would still be fine". It appears that most households aim to cultivate maize not only for household consumption but also to cater for their livestock because of the declining pastures.

The households have also incorporated beans as important crops for both consumption and income. Most people refer to the cultivation of beans as the cultivation of money as a 20-litre bucket of beans is sold for M600 in the villages, which is a very high price compared to maize, which is sold for M100 for a similar-sized bucket. Beans are usually cultivated in late November and December as they take a shorter period to germinate and grow, and they are harvested in late March and April. Farmers often cultivate them in between maize rows while weeding to maximise production. Beans are often cultivated on the maize fields when the farmer sees the maize is not growing well to increase the yield. Ntate Ntsie explained the reasons most farmers have adopted beans as follows:

We learned from Grow [a non-governmental organisation that used to teach farming in Mokhotlong in the early 2000s] that our shallow soils can successfully support the growth of beans, and also unlike maize, beans are grown in summer when it has already rained and matured in March before the frost hit them, so they were yielding compared to maize that takes a long time and vulnerable to different weather patterns.

Beans appear to be the preferred crop for income as rural households with an 80 kg bag of beans can earn M3 200. Ntate Moheshe mentioned that he used to pay school fees with beans at the local high schools. Beans are also preferred for ease of storage, which allows households to keep them when the supply is high in winter, and then sell them in December during the ploughing season when the demand is high. Crops like pumpkins, potatoes, and peas are cultivated to a lesser extent and is usually intercropped with maize and beans to maximise their production.

Sorghum is also considered a crop that yields well and is valued for making sour porridge, highly consumed in the villages and it is also used to make malt for brewing Sesotho traditional beer. In this process, sorghum is soaked with water and kept for 2–3 days to germinate. Then the sorghum is removed to dry and milled to get malt an important ingredient in making traditional beer, mostly sold in the villages, and often people buy it from the supermarkets. Ntate Mabusa households sell malt to people brewing beer, and it is always in demand. Sorghum stover is also important for feeding animals' post-harvest.

While the participants expressed the challenges of their production, which has been severely reduced by a combination of changing climatic conditions and technical inputs, most rural households still emphasised the importance of crop cultivation. The agricultural practice is heavily supported by cultural beliefs and most elders emphasised their lack of choice when it comes to the practice of agriculture: They have to cultivate despite the decline in agricultural production. Even though agricultural production is not yielding, it is part of the rural household culture. One of the elderly women said, “We cannot just look at our fields without using them. We have to cultivate. Imagine the owners of these fields, how would they look at us if we do not cultivate because we do not get enough maize”. (int., ‘Mme Marealeboha, 2022). The concept of traditional obligation to work the land was often used to justify the cultivation of crops despite declining yields. This is similar to the concept of hope that Boehm (2003) highlighted and is applied when deciding to plough or not to plough.

5.3.1.3 Cash crop production

In these villages, it is common for households to have gardens for growing vegetables, mainly for consumption, but some households grow vegetables on bigger plots for sale to the villages to support their livelihoods. The production of horticultural crops for cash is driven by the need to generate income after the retrenchments from the South African mines, which led to a loss of earnings. Ntate Lilemo, who started growing vegetables in fields using his experience of working on commercial farms in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, explained how he started producing vegetables for sale as follows:

I worked in commercial farms in Natal since 2011. When I visited home in 2015 December, I realised that I could make money here in Lesotho. Old Age Pension was raised, and I could see most people had left home to work for money, so I decided to cultivate cabbages. I had clear knowledge of how to grow vegetables. I knew the pesticides needed and how to irrigate properly. I then hired 1 acre of fields to grow vegetables while my wife working the farms assisted me in buying a water pumping machine, pipes, and pesticides in Natal. It was very dry, but because the field was near the stream, I made sure that I irrigated my vegetables

grew well and most of the households in these villages were buying from me. I made more than M4000 profits, which I invested in buying a 2000-litre tank, as I saw that this production was yielding, and I was able to support my family. (int., Lilemo, 2022)

The above instance illustrates how prior experience working in large-scale farming in South Africa enables Ntate Lilemo to acquire knowledge and skills to produce cash crops, which have higher returns than traditional crops. He benefited from the skills he acquired on commercial farms and was able to profit in dry conditions. He also shared his skills with other households like that of Ntate Khethang, who were already producing vegetables for sale. Growing vegetables is important for their household consumption, even though it is seasonal, they can make an income during the summer season and also extend the benefits by drying vegetables to sell in winter.

During the time of the study, the households that had been cultivating cash crops were beneficiaries of potato seeds gifted to Mokhotlong farmers by Potatoes' Association Lesotho. The association donated seeds to more than 90 farmers in Mokhotlong. These farmers mentioned that they were given 30 bags of potato seeds in the 2021 ploughing season and their production was very successful in 2022. Ntate Khethang, one of the beneficiaries, had sold an average of 50 bundles of 7 kg bags of potatoes per month from February 2022, with a bag priced at M50.00. The potatoes were sold in the villages and Mapholaneng. Through the potatoes association in Mokhotlong, the farmers sourced markets in local companies like Letšeng. The successful production of potatoes is important for other households, especially the poor, as the farmers allowed anyone who wanted to assist in digging and washing potatoes to earn a 7 kg bag of potatoes per day. Many of the households in the villages were observed consuming potatoes and 'Me Mapaseka, who assisted in digging, ended up selling the potatoes she earned as she lives alone.

5.3.2 Animal husbandry

Animal husbandry is an important source of households' livelihood in these rural areas as different animals serve different purposes, such as the provision of draught power for the fields, and they also perform sociocultural obligations. Cattle are an important source

of draught power, and sheep and goats produce wool and mohair, and hence, are an important form of cash income. The livestock holdings have generally declined as the households that were regarded as having a high number of small stocks had about 70, which is very low compared to the 1980s when households that had big herds had 300 and more.

Unlike fields that can only be inherited from the parents, livestock can be accumulated by young men through labour. Many young men in the villages owned livestock through herding. The ownership of livestock is not biased toward households headed by older people like the ownership of land. The small stock is the source of income for households that sell either sheep or goats to buy food, pay school fees, and meet household needs. It appears that livestock sustains livelihoods amid unemployment. One of the household members said,

Livestock is our backbone here in the villages where there are no jobs. When I don't have mealie meal, I sell one goat, and whenever I need transport to go and look for work, I sell a sheep (int., Boroa, 2022).

The above statement supports the fact that in rural areas livestock is the store of financial capital of households particularly small stock is preferred for ease of disposal, which allows households to use them whenever the need arises (Hoag, 2017). During the fieldwork, the price of sheep ranged between M900 and M1 200, while the price for goats ranged between M700 and M900. Livestock is sold in the villages and in Mapholaneng where there is a high number of butcheries because of the influx of people due to the building of Polihali Dam. Some of the households have members who sell sheep and goats beyond Lesotho's boundaries, where the price is double. I learned from interviews that there is a market for goats in KwaZulu-Natal as Zulu people perform rituals with goats, and sheep are sold in Qwaqwa, the former Bantustan for Sotho-speaking people in the Free State, which is closer to Lesotho.

In this study area, one of the main reasons most households keep livestock is to be able to perform rituals and social obligations using different animals. Elderly people often mention that they keep cattle that will be slaughtered for their funerals. Many households still perform *kapeso*, whereby a black beast is slaughtered for the deceased after burial. While several households no longer keep cattle to

perform this ritual, they often resort to using money to buy the black beast to perform *kapeso*. The household that performed *kapeso* during the time of the study was that of 'Me Mabonang, for her husband who had died more than 10 years ago. The other households that had recently Ntate Motjebei told me he performed *Kapeso* in 2018 with two beasts for his parents by buying one and exchanging the cow he had for the black beast as the colour is important. Households like that of Ntate Makoaela mentioned that they still owed their parents *kapeso* because they did not have the means.

All the animals are also important for paying lobola as most households do not have cattle for the bridal price, and therefore, a combination of sheep, goats, donkeys, and money are used for the bridal price. Sheep are still used to welcome a new baby into the family and to welcome a new bride after her abduction, the popular form of marriage in this area. Goats are important for cleansing after misfortunes and appeasing the ancestors, which most households perform before members, especially migrant workers, leave for work. These cultural practices are commonly practised, but some households could not afford to buy the animals, and therefore, exchanged fields to perform rituals. For example, Ntate Makoaela's household exchanged a field for a goat to cleanse their son after imprisonment.

It was evident that rural households valued performing rituals to an extent that they used their income to perform them which is contrary to the findings of Turkon (1996), who mentioned that in Mokhotlong, people were no longer keen on performing rituals as they had adopted modernity values. These cultural practices were common thus enabling the livestock production economy to thrive, which is an important livelihood strategy for rural people.

Livestock keeping as one of the important livelihood strategies has faced a decline due to many socioeconomic and environmental changes, and the households have resorted to many ways to adapt their livestock practices by sharing labour requirements. In animal husbandry, like crop cultivation, households combine their livestock to reduce labour expenses. To keep livestock, households ideally need two herdsmen, one who looks after cattle at the villages and another who looks after other livestock at the cattle post. However,

many households cannot afford to pay two herdsman because of their low livestock endowment, and therefore they share herd boys. For example, 'Me Mathapo and Ntate Motjebei hired a shared herd boy to take care of their livestock and assist with agricultural activities.

Even though households were sharing a herd boy they are also part of the wider herding team, whereby their livestock is kept under a farmer who has a cattle post for summer grazing. The farmers who have large herds, like Lehola with an estimated 70 sheep and eight cattle, have established a cattle post where households with fewer animals can put their animals under his watch, and then the households take turns feeding the cattle post. In this arrangement, the households that have many animals usually provide labour while the other households supply them with food.

The combining of herds is also meant to safeguard the animals from thieves by having at least two herdsman at the cattle posts. In addition, at village pastures, and in winter when all the animals are at home, they grazed in separate areas daily: The sheep and goats usually graze along the hills, while the cattle and donkeys are taken to forage crop stover left after harvest on the fields. The separation is meant to prevent the dried thorny plants named *Shoba*, in colloquial language which is a large cocklebur, from clinging to the wool and mohair, especially during the winter season when the spikes are dry. The large cocklebur makes wool unattractive and reduces the quality and income.

5.4 Non-farm-based Local Livelihoods

The contribution of agriculture to the livelihoods of rural households is marginal, and most members are engaged in different activities to earn income. Most of the households mentioned that agricultural produce does not allow them to buy daily necessities like oil and soap that need money to purchase. While for some households, agriculture is still not rewarding, the gap used to be compensated by mining income. In the absence of any income from the mines for households that had members in South Africa, households often

moved to alternatives, either within the country or outside. The alternatives available locally include social welfare grants and formal employment in the nearby areas within the Khubelu River catchment and informal and piece jobs in the growing Mapholaneng town.

5.4.1 Social grants

Social welfare is one of the major sources of support in the study area. Some of the households in the villages receive government social grants in the form of the Old Age Pension, child support grants, and food commodities. Many households in the villages are supported by elderly people who earn an Old Age Pension, which was M850 per month per person at the time of fieldwork. Nine of the participating households are headed by the elderly who receive the Old the Age Pension, and five households have children who earn orphaned and vulnerable children grants. In some of the households, the elderly are left with grandchildren, who are orphaned and vulnerable children, and they benefit from the child grant programme support indexed to the number of children, which was M360 for one to two children, M450 for three to four children, and M750 for five and more. For example, 'Me Marealeboha is 73 years old and living with two grandchildren who are under her care. She is widowed and the children's parents have died. Her last-born daughter, who was not married, died in 2015 and left two daughters, aged 8 and 13 and 8, and a 4-month-old baby daughter, who has now started primary school. All the children are registered for child support, which assisted in their upbringing. Similarly, two grandchildren were left in the care of 'Me Mantsebeng and Ntate Mokopu, aged 68 and 72, respectively. Ntate Mokopu is an old man who had been living on piece jobs in Mapholaneng but in 2018 he retired from his job as a security guard in Mapholaneng because of advancing age, and 'Me Mantsebeng is a housewife, who has never been formally employed. She said the children were left by Ntate Mokopu's sister, who died in Gauteng, and the family did not know the maternal relatives of the children and they had to assume care when his sister died.

In Mokhotlong, the proportion of orphans who are left in the care of grandparents or are heads of households is high, mainly because of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Block, 2016). These children qualify and are mostly recipients of a child support grant. While the children's grants are disbursed quarterly, most beneficiaries claimed it would make a difference if it was received monthly.

In the villages, households that are not beneficiaries of grant support usually rely upon food commodities during the lean season from October to March to reduce food insecurity. These vulnerable households are identified through a public validation process that confirms their need for assistance. There were six households in the study that had benefited from the lean season relief. This program funded by the World Food Programme (WFP), besides reducing food insecurity it aims to create sustainable markets in rural areas by involving small businesses in distributing essential commodities. Small businesses in these villages are tasked with providing goods worth M1,100 to beneficiaries, including 12.5 kg of flour, 25 kg of mealie meal, a tray of eggs, canned fish, milk, soap, oil, and paraffin. For example, 'Me 'Mapaseka a 66-year-old woman living alone, is one such beneficiary. With no fields to cultivate and no financial support from her children, who remain in South Africa, she relies on these provisions. After spending much of her life working in South Africa, she returned to the village following her parents' deaths, refusing to abandon their home. It is believed that unoccupied houses will collapse if no one lives in them. For 'Me Mapaseka's household and others in her situation, these food supplies act as a crucial lifeline, guaranteeing their nutritional requirements are fulfilled during times of scarcity.

Local livelihood activities

5.4.1.1 Casual labour

In the absence of formal wage labour, members of the household have found innovative ways to exploit their labour to earn a living. This is especially true for poor households who provide labour to relatively richer households. Women frequently engage in domestic

tasks such as doing laundry and smearing the floor with cow dung and soil to clean the huts. For their efforts, they receive payments in grains or cash. The prices are not fixed as most women mentioned that they negotiated prices depending on the household or the work to be done, with rates typically starting at M70. The non-farm activities done by men include digging foundations for houses, building, repairing damaged houses, and thatching huts with wheat straws. Casual labour is taken by people who are not in a position to migrate and look for jobs elsewhere; for example, M'e Malerato is a widow living with two young children and she does not have close relatives to take care of the children if she is away. She, therefore, prefers doing local tasks, which by her own submission are less remunerating.

This casual labour is also taken in Mapholaneng, where many households have money because they are teachers, police, and work at Letšeng Diamond Mine. Mapholaneng Centre, the growing economic hub of Mokhotlong, provide diverse livelihood activities for many rural households. While the town is more than an hour's walk from the villages, young men and women were seen walking every day to Mapholaneng. Men are mostly employed to build rental houses that are in growing demand for the construction workers at Polihali Dam. Young women work in hair salons and restaurants, and some are employed in street vending, selling vegetables and second-hand clothes. Many of the household members working in Mapholaneng harboured the ambition of being employed in the Polihali Dam project, and they were working in Mapholaneng because they would learn about job opportunities there.

5.4.1.2 Trading

There is a range of trading activities in the rural villages to generate income, including selling shrubs, beer, and groceries, and also providing charging services and traditional healing. The households in these villages mainly use wood for cooking and warming up the house. Most households use dung cakes and wood, which need shrubs to make a fire. Many households in this study are headed by elderly people who cannot gather shrubs from the mountains because they lack strength, and other households prefer to buy shrubs. Therefore, poorer households survived by gathering shrubs for sale to the villages. A bundle of shrubs was sold for M70. Both men

and women are selling shrubs, but women carry the bundles on their heads while men use donkeys, enabling them to carry two bundles at once. Selling shrubs enables poor households to earn financial capital from the natural capital, which enables them to purchase food and basic items.

Brewing beer is the most common strategy undertaken by many women, even in households where members earn an income from elsewhere. Most patrons are elderly men and women who earn the Old Age Pension. While some households are selling beer for extra income, the income allows poor households to buy maize meal and basic needs like soap, oil, and paraffin for lighting. Most women mentioned brewing a maximum of 40 litres of beer to earn M250; however, they usually collect a lower amount, but it still enables them to survive food shortages.

Selling groceries is one of the livelihood strategies for rural households. The shops differ in scale, and some households have large quantities of stock and shelves for displaying items like sugar, fish, flour, tobacco, and candles. These are convenient for the people in the villages, which are one to two hours from Mapholaneng where there are big supermarkets. Selling groceries appeared to be an innovative solution to adapting livelihoods to the high unemployment rate in the area, which is even affecting people who have qualifications. An example of a sole trader is Ntate Khethang, a 35-year-old man who got his Teaching Diploma in 2015 but had never had permanent employment. He explained his entrepreneurial ventures as follows:

I started my business in 2017 with the income I earned from a six-month contract I got at the Independent Electoral Commission as I could see that there were no jobs, and I had to find ways to earn money. This business has supported my family and has grown as I'm now selling animal products and medication.

Using income and directing it towards sustaining the households is common within rural households in Lesotho as this aligns with Makhetha's (2016) findings in the study of artisanal miners in rural households where she observed that they prioritise the sustenance of their livelihoods in the face of economic hardships and do not squander their erratic income.

Some households do not have large capital and are involved in petty trading in the villages. They sell a few goods like tobacco, candles, matches, and snacks. Petty trading is mostly done by women who need income from the family's upkeep and daily consumption needs. The households carry the goods by themselves or with donkeys from Mapholaneng. Assisting with retailing was the responsibility of every member of the household, as children were sent to buy stock in Mapholaneng and still sell to the customers and packaging.

Some of the women are hawkers who sell different products, popular items include herbal teas and food supplements in the form of tablets. These products are usually sourced from various network marketing businesses that women have joined, often as a means of generating additional income. These items are predominantly marketed toward elderly individuals, with claims of alleviating symptoms associated with chronic health conditions, such as high blood pressure and joint pain. The target for elderly individuals was also because of their ability to pay from their guaranteed monthly pension. The income from these businesses is used to take care of emerging responsibilities in the households.

Some of the households had bought solar panels which besides using for lighting was mainly to charge phones as a business. These phones were charged for M3 per phone. In these villages, there is no grid electricity and solar panels are a source of electricity. Many people loathe the idea of travelling to Mapholaneng for an hour just to charge a phone. Therefore, charging phones business was one of the ways households earned income with solar panels mentioned making a minimum of M30 per day when there was full insolation.

5.4.1.3 *Traditional healing*

Traditional healing emerged as one of the activities that contribute to the households' livelihoods. Traditional healing is done by both men and women, and in the sampled households, four households had members involved in traditional healing, but they differed in scale, some traditional doctors are widely popular and have many clients, while others had a few clients. The traditional healers in

these villages are mainly people who had an ancestral calling to practice and are using their embodied capital to live. An example of a prominent traditional doctor in these villages is Ntate Lehola narrating his traditional healing practice he mentioned:

“I saw in a dream that I was called to be a diviner in 2002 when I was selling cannabis to KwaZulu Natal in 2002. I however ignored the calling because my business was doing well but I was later hijacked on the way to Natal when I felt the need to understand misfortune. It was then revealed that I was not listening to my grandfather’s calling therefore I should expect more misfortune. I, therefore, heeded to ancestral calling and started practising”

Traditional healing through ancestral calling was one of the embodied capital households used to earn income. The services offered are mostly used by migrant labourers who want a spell for jobs and for those in informal trading to have their goods sell quickly. Traditional healers’ services are mostly used by migrant labourers who want a spell for jobs and for those in informal trading to have their goods sell quickly. The belief in traditional medicine and performing rituals came up during interviews mostly with all artisanal miners who attributed their success in finding gold and protection from harm to traditional medicine and rituals guided by healers. One of the artisanal miners mentioned.

The work I am doing is very risky, so I have to be protected in all the ways. Every time I leave home, I make sure that at least I brew beer to appease the ancestors to be with me at work. I also take traditional medicine for luck and protection because we work with different people from different places who use their medicines, I also have to use mine to strengthen myself and to be successful (Int. Thatho, 2022).

Many people in migrant labour believe in the importance of traditional medicine to bring luck in their job search and success in their informal ventures. The use of rituals in artisanal mining is common in Africa as D’Angelo (2015) observed in Sierra Leone where artisanal miners use ritual specialists to find diamonds.

Apart from that, rural households value traditional healing practices and often regard them as more effective than biomedical healthcare. A clear example is that M'e Mabonang, a 42-year-old woman who worked in Gauteng, expressed her trust in the traditional healers, and she claimed they are “seeing beyond the modern doctors’ machines”. She mentioned being healed after consulting a conventional healer during her difficult pregnancy when biomedical doctors from the clinics and hospitals in Gauteng where she worked could not help her. She was assisted by ‘Me Mathari, who gave her herbs and instructed her to perform rituals for the ancestors. She was healed and went into labour without problems

This strong belief in traditional remedies raised concerns among health support groups in the villages who emphasised the challenges of such perceptions, particularly to the people managing chronic illnesses like HIV who had to adhere to the prescribed medication. Therefore, Traditional healing is a livelihood strategy whereby healers earn from consultations and selling herbs and remedies. While some people pay cash, others pay with animals. The traditional healers mentioned that they were fulfilling their calling without motive for profit, but households like that of Ntate Lehola had most livestock and could build brick houses using the money from traditional healing.

5.4.1.4 Mining

Some rural households’ livelihoods are supported by income from the Letšeng Diamond Mine, which lies 20 km from the villages. Three households had members who are working full-time at Letšeng, where the jobs were highly sought after. Letšeng is one of the few formal job opportunities in Mokhotlong that offer opportunities for unskilled labour. Three households had members who worked full-time, and at the time of the fieldwork, Ntate Mabusa, who is 55 years old, mentioned that he is working on a six-month contract, which was the fourth short-term contract he had at Letšeng. In comparison to other opportunities found in Mokhotlong, a job at Letšeng offers a better working environment. The remuneration at Letšeng is higher; the mine provides accommodation and food for workers, reducing living expenses; and the workers are entitled to paid leaves. The households that had members working in Letšeng

had invested their income in housing, and many of them built brick houses, and most of the rural people mentioned that they lived well. For example, Ntate Tsepo, who worked in Letšeng with his wife, mentioned the convenience of working closer to home because after two weeks of working, they are given five days off, and ‘Me Mabotle used the time to help the four children with laundry and buying groceries. During his time off, Ntate Tsepo worked the fields and looked after their livestock.

5.4.1.5 Conservation

Conservation and land reclamation programmes also provide households with casual labour. In the Seate community council, there are different conservation programmes aimed at reducing land and wetland degradation to reverse the potential threat of siltation of the Polihali Dam that was under construction. Ward councillors recruit unemployed people in the villages to work in these conservation programmes, whereby they are mainly tasked with uprooting unwanted shrubs on pasture to encourage the growth of grasses. Also collect stones on pastures and build stone lines to reduce surface runoff. The recruitment is done in such a way that all households can benefit by taking one person per household for 20 days of work. In these programmes, people earned M2 400 after 20 days of working for the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority-administered program at Phaphong, while the government conservation program in Ha Rammeleke offered M1 500 after 20 days. The income is important for rural households’ food security, buying clothes and investing in income-generating activities, like brewing, which women reported sometimes have to stop because of a lack of ingredients.

5.5 Migration-based Livelihoods

In a former migrant labour society, it was not surprising that out-migration for work outside agriculture was still a trend among people in this rural community. As Thebe (2017) observed elsewhere, migrant labour and the culture of remittances are the defining culture of rural households, which is deeply embedded and difficult to eliminate. In fact, the rural social system is often adapted around

migrant labour and remittances that other aspects of livelihoods become subordinated to these two aspects of life. This was noted in the context of the emergence of communal tenure in Zimbabwe, which according to O’Flaherty (1998, p. 357) was “shaped by local interests to enable the coexistence of subsistence farming and migrant”. In this study, more than 80% of the participating households were living on remittances from family members who have migrated to the Lesotho urban areas like Mokhotlong, Maputsoe, and Maseru, are working in the mines in Mokhotlong, or are living in the Republic of South Africa. What is more important is that there has been a change in the profile of these migrant members, as both women and men are engaging in migratory activities, unlike the general stereotype of a Mosotho migrant who is formally engaged in the mining sector in South Africa, or formally employed in Lesotho (Ulicki & Crush, 2000). Of course, this is not entirely new as women also used to migrate, but their numbers were small and as Gay (1980) has shown, they initially migrated following their husbands. This is in line with the general gender stereotype of women migrants as companions of men. Otherwise, women were expected to remain behind looking after men’s interests in the rural areas. The development of a culture in relation to households and labour migration in a migrant labour society context is captured by Nyambara (2001)’s observations in Gokwe District, Zimbabwe, where men would “book” land by leaving their wives and children on the rural land acquired and continue as migrant labourers. This thesis pays particular attention to this fact and argues that migrant labour has remained a culture of households, even after the demise of the formal migrant labour system.

The changes in the economy and the South African labour market have led to the loss of formal labour migration opportunities in the mines, and now most migrants are involved in the informal labour migration to South Africa, and migration to seek livelihood opportunities within Lesotho has increased. In the study area, there are of course some who have formally migrated to South Africa and hold the Lesotho Special Permits or some other permits, and those who are formally employed within Lesotho, working in government departments, industry, retail, or the textile sector. The textile sector has emerged as a major employer, filling the gap created by the loss of South African mining jobs, and mainly employs women from rural areas (Talasi & Thebe, 2023). Thus, different categories of livelihood opportunities emerged during the study of households, and these are mainly locally and across the border in

South Africa in commercial farm work, formal labour, security services, domestic work, textiles and industry, artisanal mining, handicrafts trading, and sole trading.

Cross-border migration remained attractive for many people from this area due to the expected returns. Among the cross-border migrants are married men, unmarried household members and women, who often seek livelihood opportunities that would change their own and households' circumstances. Some have accumulated capital and are seemingly successful, while others are struggling and getting by. Some have disappeared in South Africa and have not returned or remitted anything. Others have died in South Africa and came back in body bags. The risks are high, but according to many in this area, it is worth the gamble. Primarily as a result of the prospective benefits, the number of people leaving the village for job prospects, whether seeking seasonal jobs or full-time occupations, has increased. In 2022, when the study was carried out, virtually every household was associated with labour migration. Some people had returned, but they were planning to go back. These were mainly those who migrate only for seasonal job opportunities, but mainly spend the bulk of their time in the rural village.

The migrants are men and women who visit home during the holidays. Some of the migrants have been living and working in South Africa for more than 10 years, and they hold the Lesotho Special Permits that allow them to work without having to renew their stay every 30 days at the Lesotho border posts. The Lesotho Special Permit, often referred to as a work permit, was held by four participants in the study. Two of them are widowed women who have been working in South Africa since 2010, and one is a middle-aged man who is working in the construction industry. They worked in South Africa before 2015 and were allowed to apply for a work permit, which was closed for new entrants in 2016. All of them had been working in South Africa before the introduction of work permits allowed them to access better jobs.

The main destinations for migration beyond Lesotho's borders are Gauteng, Free State, and KwaZulu-Natal. According to the informants, this migration has been part of the community for a long time, and the difference is now that women are also migrating

for jobs to Gauteng, where formerly only men were allowed to work because of laws that restricted women from spending a lot of time there. According to key informants, the hiking route between Mokhotlong and KwaZulu-Natal has been used for a long time by people who went to buy goods at *Thekong* (Durban) to sell as hawkers, and the rural men who were trading cannabis in the early 2000s used the same route to transport cannabis with donkeys. This type of migration is familiar to people, and some of them have used the passes to transport goats to sell in KwaZulu-Natal. Currently, most of the migrants using this route are those who do not have passports and are travelling freely using the Drakensberg passes. This type of migration may therefore be said to be a long-known strategy that has been used by households over the years. However, this form of migration has become a major trend, which has become a central part of the human economy of the region.

5.5.1 Working in the textiles

Some of the households in these villages have members who work in the textile industries in the lowlands in both Maputsoe and Maseru. The textile industry in these households is pursued exclusively by women. There were five women among households in this study who work in the textile industry, and the majority of them have over 10 years' working experience. They pointed out that when they joined the textile industry, it was easy for women without sewing skills and seeking labour to get on-the-job training. However, during the time of the study, many of the factories were downsizing in Lesotho, and they were only employing people who had skills. In 2022, during the fieldwork, of the five women who worked in the textile industry, only two were working in Maputsoe, and the other three had been retrenched because of the 2020 factory closures that led to 11 000 people losing jobs in Lesotho (see Latela & Brown, 2022).

Some of these women now work in the textiles industry in Newcastle in KwaZulu-Natal. These are the women who were retrenched in 2020. They had lived at home for the whole of 2021, and then decided to migrate to Newcastle in 2022 when they were informed by friends and colleagues that factories in Newcastle were hiring skilled labourers. Working in factories in Newcastle has emerged as

a new destination for many retrenched Basotho women in the textile industry. They reported getting jobs in less than a week upon their arrival as the factories prioritised people who had skills and were willing to work hard. They therefore exploited their embodied capital. Although opportunities in Lesotho for textile work have decreased, new opportunities have emerged in South Africa.

5.5.2 Domestic work

The loss of South African mining jobs for men has resulted in women migrating to South African urban towns for domestic work. Even though the wages are low compared to those in the mines, it makes a difference to rural households. From the interviews, it appeared that migrating for domestic work started as a livelihood option for widows who had to fend for their children after the death of their husbands. An example of a woman who pioneered working as a domestic worker in South Africa is ‘Me Mabonang, who started working in South Africa in 2011. Her husband used to be a tractor driver in Maseru and died in 2009, leaving her with two children. Like many other women in these households, ‘Me Mabonang did not have land to sustain her household and as she had been supported by her husband’s income. This left her with no choice but to look for a job elsewhere as the local jobs only offered casual labour. She explained her decision to migrate for labour as follows:

I never imagined myself leaving home for work. My husband was the one providing. I had to look for a job where I would work and provide for my children. It was a hard decision to make, especially knowing how people viewed women who worked in Gauteng, but I had to go where there were jobs (int., Mabonang, 2022).

Interestingly, most women who pioneered domestic work mentioned in the interviews that they never imagined working elsewhere, but widowhood left them with limited choices. It highlights the stigmatisation of women who were migrating for labour as it was believed that most of the widowed women were leaving the rural households to go live with men in South Africa under the pretence of going to work. This also shows that women had internalised the fact that women stayed at home to take care of children while men worked for money. This reflects the role of habitus which in this study is the ingrained disposition of rural women in a system of

migrant labour characterised by the migration of single men to the mines, while women were not allowed to migrate for work to South Africa and were left home to take care of children and agriculture.

As one of the livelihood strategies that are socially embedded in this subsection, the study aimed to understand the households' livelihood decision-making process in relation to women migrating for labour, especially those who have husbands. It appears that widowed women have the autonomy to decide on migration, but it is different for women who have husbands, even though many of them are migrating for labour. As one of the emerging livelihood strategies, this section aims to understand factors that enable women to migrate for labour and adapt their livelihood to changes. While it has been widely documented that women migrate for labour, there are few discussions about how the decisions to migrate are made in the households.

In most rural households, men are the ones who look for wage labour, leaving the women behind to look after the family. However, women reported that their husbands were not remitting, even though they had left the rural home to work for their families. One of the reasons women left for work was that their husbands defaulted on remittances. Most women expressed that men generally did not care for their children like they do; therefore, women had taken it upon themselves to work for their children. An example is 'Me Malibakiso, who started working in Gauteng as a domestic worker in 2019. She mentioned that her husband, who was working as an independent contractor, would go for more than six months without remitting because he did not have a job. She said the following:

I had to look for a job when my husband failed to contribute anything to the household. I kept calling him, but at some point, he ended up not taking my calls and changing phones. I couldn't reach him for months, but we know men always get married so I had to go to work like other women and provide for my children and send my daughter who was then approaching high school.

The defaulting on remittances was pointed out as one of the factors that lead women to seek wage labour elsewhere. Many women start seeking wage labour when their children are approaching high school as they have to start paying for school. In Lesotho, primary

education is free, but parents have to pay for high school. There is a confluence between women's migration and having to pay high school fees.

The other reason women engage in migrant labour is the inability of men to secure jobs. Some men have looked for work in the lowlands and Gauteng but were unsuccessful. They realised that it was easier for women to get jobs in both the lowlands and Gauteng. One of the men simply put it as follows:

If you can look closely at the job market in urban areas, the jobs that are currently present are for women. There are no opportunities for men anymore in Gauteng. I worked in Gauteng in construction, and I know the difficulties men face when looking for a job (int, Mokhethi).

This highlights the accepted shift that the economic hubs which formerly provided limited opportunities for men and women have found it relatively easier to find jobs in these regions. The jobs available align with traditional roles of women such as domestic work and caregiving and are therefore easily accessible to women. The above notions are consistent with habitus as the socialisation in gendered roles of caregiving as women enabled them to pursue roles in domestic labour which they are already familiar.

Some men pointed out that they returned from the South African urban areas because of the poor living conditions to which they were subjected when seeking work. Most said that the men have to live in dilapidated shacks without proper sanitation in violent neighbourhoods. Both men and women mentioned that conditions for women working in domestic labour are better as they do not have to worry about accommodation, and therefore, they agreed that domestic work is a better livelihood strategy. This comparison of living conditions that men are subjected to when looking for jobs in Gauteng is one of the factors that enable women to migrate for labour, especially to work in domestic work.

In addition, domestic work despite being informal, is considered a safer job opportunity as it is regulated by informal recruitment agencies in Gauteng, and the agent knows the details of the worker and the employee. Most women preferred being recruited by the

agency compared to extended referrals by phone calls to protect themselves from human trafficking. The agencies provide women with accommodation while they wait for employment. All domestic workers live with their employers, which saves them the hassle of looking for accommodation (Griffin, 2010). The recruitment agencies prepare women for work by teaching them basic household chores like ironing, folding clothes, and cleaning, and if the worker is not satisfied with the working conditions, she can return to the agent to look for another job.

In some of households, women migrate for labour, leaving their husbands behind to cut labour costs in agricultural production. These were households that mostly had fields and livestock, men were left to take care of agriculture as many activities like ploughing and herding are roles of men. Therefore, in some households like that of Ntate Sekonyela he was left at home to take care of livestock and cultivate fields. Similarly, Ntate Mokhehi, a former migrant labourer, is looking after his livestock and fields while 'Me Mabohlale is a domestic worker and provides the households with a monthly income. Therefore, weighing the options, some households found it better to leave the man in Lesotho while the women provided an income.

While the households mentioned many factors, the main reason for working in Gauteng is the low pay offered in Mapholaneng or locally in Lesotho. Some of the women had tried working in Mapholaneng before migrating to the Gauteng Province, but the Mapholaneng rates for domestic work was around M500 per month, while in South Africa, the minimum wage for domestic workers was M5000, or R2200 for the lowest paid worker. Therefore, domestic work in South Africa offers better remuneration. This has been highly impactful in the households as some households had put their children to school with the income from domestic work. Some households here live entirely on income from wage labour.

For women in these communities, access to wage labour depends on having relatives to take care of young children. While some of the women want to migrate in search of labour opportunities, their prospects are restrained by a lack of caregivers. Having close relatives matters, but it is not enough, and there must also be good familial relationships, as one of the women, 'Me Marorisang, was

able to leave home for work only after her children were old enough to care for themselves. This delay was partly because of strained relations with her in-laws because of disagreements over her husband's livestock. These tensions meant that relying on her in-laws for childcare was not an option. This underscores the importance of social capital in enabling women to access wage labour.

On the other hand, women who maintained close ties with their extended families often had more flexibility in seeking wage labour. For instance, in households like those of Ntate Mokopu and Mokhethi, both the husband and wife have migrated for labour, leaving their children in the care of grandparents. This arrangement is only possible because they still have living parents who can step in as caregivers. The presence of grandparents provides a crucial support network, enabling these women to pursue wage labour while ensuring their children are cared for.

Recent studies on the migration of Basotho women to South Africa have clearly demonstrated that Basotho women migrants are indeed in demand in South Africa and are preferred by employers. However, little is known about their households' situations, and the significance of such migration to their households. Moreover, there has been no attempt to locate this trend within the new human economy of households. This study seeks to emphasise the significance of this emerging trend and argues that it has become a part of the emerging human economy. Furthermore, it attempts to show that this trend, among other migration activities such as cross-border migration for commercial farm work, artisanal mining and informal trading, depict a continuation of the culture of labour migracy. This point is significant in that it challenges the general thesis of the demise of a migrant labour economy, and that of rural households in crisis. Informal trading in South Africa

5.5.3 Informal trading in South Africa

The lack of formal jobs in sub-Saharan Africa has increased, and most households live from self-employment activities. The people are using their agency to earn a livelihood. In Zimbabwe, for example, what has become known as the "*kukiyakiya*" economy is now formalised and nearly everyone makes a living through "making a plan". In South Africa, they talk of "*ukuphanda*", or "*ukuzula*".

These form part of the parallel economy, which absorbs the bulk of people and constitutes a major livelihood pathway. In this study, some of the members of households are living by plaiting whips/sjamboks that they sell in South Africa. There were more than 10 men in the villages who were introduced to rudimentary leather processing to make whips by Mr Motjebei, an old man from Mahemeng, who after losing a temporary job in the mines and his cattle were stolen in the early 2000s, decided to trade in cannabis by taking it in bags from Mokhotlong to Qwaqwa. However, after a year of success, he was caught at the border for possession of cannabis, which was illegal in both South Africa and Lesotho, and he was imprisoned for six months. He then looked for farm work in Harrismith, which he claimed paid low wages, and hence, he defaulted on remitting money back home and was reluctant to return home without anything. Therefore, he spent seven years without meeting his family and his children who were in high school and later dropped out of school. He mentioned that, while working on the farm, he met a man who was selling whips along the highway in Harrismith, and in a short time he sold about six whips to white farmers passing by. He realised that the market was good. He therefore set up a station for plaiting whips where he was left to guard a house in Kestel and started selling whips. He already knew how to plait whips from his childhood, but never thought he could earn money from it. He worked for a year on his own, after learning about the employment challenges at home, he taught his children and other willing men in the villages to plait whips at his working station in the Free State. Kestel, where the working station was established, is a small town near Bethlehem in the Free State, and he prefers it because of its proximity to butcheries where he can buy cow skins. They hand process the skin by soaking and rubbing it until soft, and then they cut it into smaller pieces to plait. One of the men plaiting whips as his main livelihood mentioned that he plaits about 30 whips in two weeks, and then travels to different places in South Africa to sell whips near the farms and villages. He travels as far as Limpopo and Kuruman, and each whip is sold for M300.

Eight men in the study benefited from Ntate Motjebei's skill of plaiting whips. These are married men and young unmarried men who use whip plaiting as their income-earning strategy. After five years of working, Ntate Poloko had been able to build a one-room brick

house with his proceeds from selling whips. Most men return home after selling their whips, especially during the ploughing season, to assist and return to work. The lack of jobs has resulted in people exploiting their cultural capital to earn a living.

The selling of whips is part of a striving informal economy, which takes place locally in Lesotho and South Africa. Involvement is not only limited to men doing whips but to vending either at the local centre, urban centres such as Mokhotlong and Maseru, or in South Africa. It also includes cross-border trading by mainly women, who source their wares from Botswana, the Gauteng Province or Durban. Among the households, informal trading was one of the livelihood alternatives, particularly by members who have migrated. I was informed that some community members were selling various items in Maseru, and they were using the proceeds to support their households. While this was not lucrative and was mainly performed as a last resort, it was better than remaining in the village, doing nothing. It was a different way of making a living away from agriculture, and in the absence of jobs locals and limited cross-border migration prospects, it was proving to be popular occupations. My informants emphasised that during such occupations were easy to gain entry, into since they require little capital. One informant remarked: 'This is the easiest occupation when one is beginning life,...but, these occupations can become permanent if no formal job opportunities become available. I started trading in belts, wallets and other items in 2014, and I am still doing it now' (int., Pitso, 2022).

5.5.4 Work in white commercial farms in South Africa

Some of the households support their livelihoods through farm work, mostly by women and men working in crop plantations, farms, and factories in KwaZulu-Natal. Mokhotlong is closer to KwaZulu-Natal, and most of the people in Mokhotlong District mentioned that KwaZulu-Natal is easier to reach as they can hike through the mountains in groups, which takes only two days. Most people take this route because they do not have passports and there are hardly law enforcement operations for illegal crossing, unlike on the southwestern border between Lesotho and the Free State. They also mentioned that the route has been used for a very long since most people in the Highlands used to buy clothing and other goods from Thekong (Durban in Sesotho terms)

Six households in this study had their members working on the farms in KwaZulu-Natal many of them had networks of friends and relatives who had been staying there for a long time. For example, Ntate Boroa, a 40-year-old man, has four siblings with established settlements in KwaZulu-Natal. These networks provide migrants with accommodation and introduce them to jobs which include working in sugar plantations and farms growing maize, cabbages, or potatoes, and factories, like tree cutting, and livestock herding. Most people working in Natal noted that the wide range of farm activities in Kwazulu Natal makes it easier for them to find casual jobs as compared to Mokhotlong and Lesotho in general where the main farm activity was livestock herding. Most people mentioned that they never sought labour in the lowlands before, and after failing to secure employment in Mokhotlong they headed to KwaZulu Natal for job opportunities.

Livestock herding is one of the activities done by young men on the farms in KwaZulu-Natal. The young men prefer working on commercial farms to herding in the villages because they feel that the herding conditions in South Africa are better than those at home, which worried many elderly men who complained about the difficulty of finding herd boys in the villages. A major reason the young men do not want to herd animals in Lesotho is that the herding jobs are based on a six-month or a-year contract, and the herd boy is usually paid at the end of the contract. This is not in line with the young men's needs as they want to start families, and therefore, need to buy clothes and food, but they are unable to do this if they are only getting paid after six months or a year. Therefore, young men establishing their families prefer working for income to support their wives and to build homes.

Cattle herding jobs in South Africa also pay more than in the villages. These young men claimed that in the villages, they take care of many animals from different households and are paid by each household, but in South Africa, each farmer pays them for the number of cattle they look after. In South Africa, they earn M2 000 to M3 000 per month, but in Lesotho, they earn M8 000 per annum. The monthly salary enables the herd boys to support their households with food and clothing, and some of the herd men like Ntate Thabo and Ts'otetsi were able to build their houses after three years of working. They argued that farmers in South Africa trusted Basotho's skills in animal husbandry: "They are always amazed at how us Basotho know how to tame cattle" (int., Thabo, 2022).

The participants also compared the working conditions between the two places: In the villages, the herders felt they were heavily involved in many duties like crop cultivation, taking care of livestock, and other household duties like drawing water and being sent to buy groceries. All activities that involve the use of draught power are performed by the herd boys. They therefore argued that on the farms, they focus on caring for the animals and only have to ensure they are grazing and healthy.

5.5.5 Artisanal mining

Another emerging livelihood strategy, which falls within the parallel or informal economy, is artisanal mining in the gold mine dumps in South Africa. Among the local people, artisanal miners are said to be working at *litotomeng* (mine dumps), and the artisanal miners are referred to as *batho ba litotomeng* (people working at mining dumps) or *batho ba likobo* (people with blankets). The former is because of the work they are doing, and latter because of the different designs of the Basotho blankets that artisanal miners use to identify their different groupings with. Five households had members working in artisanal mining. Based on the information from the key informants, there is a notable rise in migrant artisanal mining as a livelihood strategy.

Those involved said their motivation for mining is unemployment, low income, and the need to provide for their families. Some participants indicated that their job-seeking efforts were hampered by the limited opportunities available. Most participants cited that they have to do this to be able to look after their children, pay school fees, and meet their households' financial obligations. One artisanal miner shared the following:

I have been working as a security guard for many years, but I have not seen any progress in my life. My two sons left school because I did not have money for their fees, and I was only working for food and rent. (int., Thatho, 2022)

The interviews revealed that artisanal gold mining is preferred as a livelihood strategy because there is the possibility of making a lot of money. According to the artisanal miners, they draw inspiration from the luxurious lifestyles of the pioneers of artisanal miners in

the Khubelu region in the village closer to Ha Rammeleke, called Ha Motlalepula. Artisanal miners in these villages have built big houses, drove 4x4 vehicles ideal for the dirt road of Khubelu, and had hired a construction company to make a road to Ha Motlalepula. They live in gated yards and rear high-breed sheep. Most participants reported that they had realised that it was possible to achieve big things even when one is uneducated. The artisanal miners are much wealthier than people who are educated and in formal labour. This shows that the motivation for men joining artisanal mining emerged from their experience of the livelihoods of former mine migrant labourers who are known to live well.

Introduction and encouragement by friends and relatives are one of the factors that play a crucial role in some of the participants choosing to join artisanal mining. Some of the participants made the choice after their close friends joined artisanal mining. Most artisanal miners admitted that they were attracted by the money in artisanal mining but that they had reservations about joining owing to the violence surrounding it. Entry into artisanal mining is also facilitated by existing networks of friends and relatives who are already working there. They play a crucial role in alleviating the concerns of other men who are uncertain about artisanal mining. One of the young men who was concerned about safety in artisanal mining recalled, “At first, I was sceptical about my safety in artisanal mining, but when Thabelo returned from work and explained to me how the work was, I felt that it was doable, and I knew that I was not alone” (int., Thabiso, 2022). This example underscores the significant influence of social relationships on the decision-making process of most of the artisanal miners. The men live together in the mine dumps and work as a team, and the new artisanal miners learn to identify gold-bearing ore and process it into gold from their family and friends already working there. Artisanal miners work as a team and has leaders in charge of security against opponent groups.

The household interviews revealed that even though artisanal mining is dangerous and unregulated, it is one of the few accessible avenues where someone can earn a significant income. This money is vital for meeting basic needs, such as food and clothing, but also for making critical investments in the household’s future. For example, Ntate Katiso, a 26-year-old miner, used his earnings to help build a second house for his family of five who had been living in a single hut. His story is not unique, and many households in

these communities rely on the income from artisanal mining to improve their living conditions and invest in their long-term security. While they have not fully realised the benefits of working in mining dumps, it has changed their livelihoods as Ntate Thatho had also built a house and is funding his son's education to a technical school in Maseru.

There are striking similarities between the situation and of those described in Zimbabwe, where artisanal mining has become a major attraction, which has taken men away from agriculture (Hwehwe & Thebe, 2021). Also, while it is dangerous and sometimes uncertain, it provides a livelihood for the unemployed. The occupation of artisanal mining appeals to young men due to the prospects of achieving wealth and it offers a pathway out of poverty.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter aimed to discuss the livelihood strategies, factors that influence adaptation, and the livelihood decision-making processes behind the livelihoods being pursued in Mokhotlong. The chapter started with the discussion of farm livelihoods it has been revealed that households still practice crop farming despite the degrading environment and climatic changes. They had adapted their livelihoods by pooling resources in the form of ploughing teams, sharecropping and hiring out their fields. Households grow crops like maize, sorghum, and beans not only for consumption but also for crop stover important for animal feeding and also for selling to earn income. Some of the households had ventured into cash crop farming of vegetables inspired mostly by the experiences of one man who worked in commercial farms in South Africa and had used acquired knowledge to grow vegetables and impart skills to other households. Animal husbandry is also an important source of livelihood whereby households keep livestock for draught power source of income by disposing of small stock whenever there is a pressing need. Also, it was evident that livestock was mostly kept for performing rituals that households still heavily practised by the households and small stock is particularly kept for the production of wool and mohair as well as a store of wealth that can be used anytime the need arises.

Apart from agriculture, households are living on social welfare grants, which include the monthly Old Age Pension, orphaned and vulnerable children grants that is disbursed quarterly to the households and food relief for the lean season which usually runs between October to March depending on the level of food insecurity event. The locally based formal jobs include conservation programmes and the Letšeng Diamond Mine, which is preferred because of the good pay for unskilled people. There are also different informal activities that households use to earn livelihoods. Women usually provide domestic labour to relatively richer households for income and brew beer to sell. Men are engaged in building, roofing, and repairing houses. Sole trading and traditional healing are also some of the income-generating strategies that households use.

Most households have migrant labourers who work in the textile industries in Maseru and Maputsoe. While many of the factories had closed some of the women who had migrated to the textiles in South Africa were working as informal migrants. Many households have members who earn a living by working in South Africa, where many women are domestic workers in Gauteng. These women leave the men to take care of the households and agriculture when they migrate for labour. Some of the households earn a living by working on commercial farms and plantations in KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State, and some do crop farming and herding livestock in these provinces. Wage employment is limited for most men, and therefore, they engage in informal trading activities such as making whips and artisanal mining in South African mines.

Therefore, contrary to the general understanding that the migrant labour system died with the retrenchments in the 1980s and 1990s, the chapter provided evidence that showed how the highlands region has remained a vibrant migrant labour sending area, and how households continue to derive benefits from migration, albeit in a different form. The migration of women for domestic work and men to KZN is a clear example of how households continue to build their livelihoods on migrant labour. While the benefits may not be the same if compared to the formal migrant system, the emerging picture is less ambiguous. This has created continuities and differences, which cannot be ignored, and the significance of history and how it continues to inform the present needs to be emphasised.

Chapter 6

Specific Vulnerabilities and Challenges of Livelihoods Adopted by Rural Households

6.1 Introduction

In Lesotho, the loss of formal migrant labour opportunities following the restructuring of the South African mining sector in the 1980s and 1990s (see Boehm, 2003) has left a trail of socioeconomic repercussions for rural households that had relied on the South African economy for livelihoods. Agricultural production, which had been a subordinate livelihood source for rural households, cannot on its own sustain the households because of the growing population, the subsequent lack of arable land, and climate variation manifestations. Thus, agriculture cannot fill the gap left as a result of the migration shocks, which plunged some households into a livelihood crisis. This background must be understood in any attempt to understand the contemporary situation in the rural Highlands region of the country, which certainly bore the brunt of the restructuring of the mining sector in South Africa and the natural and physical changes locally in Lesotho. Repeated attempts to understand poverty in the rural Highlands in Lesotho start with the question of the relationship between land-use practices and declining agricultural productivity. This is an important starting point in a country where the development of agriculture has a long history, and aid from the donor community has been channelled towards developing the country's agrarian sector (see Ferguson, 1994).

On the basis of the culture that had developed over time, and had become deeply embedded in the social system, households found ways of navigating the crisis by falling back on familiar livelihood pathways, which in a way cemented the culture that had developed. However, this was not without challenges, as these livelihood pathways had their own vulnerabilities, which threatened the very social system and tested the households' resolves. In this chapter, I discuss the challenges and vulnerabilities associated with the livelihoods that households adopted in response to the changes in their social and natural environments. I begin by discussing the vulnerability of

land-based or agriculture-based livelihoods. This follows the evidence in the previous chapter that households did not abandon agriculture but continued agricultural practices in ways different from the past. I then proceed to look at those vulnerabilities associated with local non-farm livelihoods. I conclude by discussing the challenges and the vulnerability of the emerging migrant labour system. From a system that was based on formal processes and guaranteed returns, the emerging system migrant labour system came with numerous vulnerabilities and challenges, which should be understood, for us to understand the human economy of the highlands, and whether it can be sustained over the long run.

6.2 Agriculture-based Livelihoods

Agriculture forms part of households' livelihoods in Mokhotlong District, and it is important for food security, earning income, and cultural purposes. Agricultural practices can be categorised into three forms, namely crop cultivation for subsistence, cash crop cultivation, and livestock production. Agriculture is important for rural households as many people claim that "agriculture is our way of life". This can be better captured by Boehm's (2003) problematisation of the concept of *rea lema*. Similar to Boehm's observation, this rhetoric does not last long before people identify the noticeable challenges faced in the practice of agriculture in the region and Lesotho in general, which have decreased their agricultural production in both subsistence and cash crop cultivation. Livestock husbandry is equally beset with challenges, which has made the venture less rewarding. While the Government of Lesotho and other development agencies promote agriculture, critical literature has shown that promoting agriculture is tantamount to rewriting a deeply embedded culture of labour migrants, and that agriculture continue to experience numerous challenges, as attested by the proportion of households that have stopped embarking on the agricultural enterprise. Rather what actually happens at the household level, is what according to Boehm (203, p.3), "fields without money, money without fields". The challenges faced by households in relation to agriculture livelihoods differ per household and according to different forms of agriculture. To illustrate this point, while crop production continues to fail, livestock production continues to be done with some success, and mohair and wool are the most profitable

agricultural activities. However, the production of small livestock also has its challenges, mainly due to changing climatic conditions and shortage of pastures. This section discusses the vulnerabilities and challenges confronting households in their pursuit of agriculture-based livelihoods.

6.2.1 Crop cultivation/declining crop yields

Crop production in Mokhotlong is based on subsistence agriculture by resource-poor households. They face several challenges that limit their production, food security and livelihoods. The constraints include uncertain weather conditions, lack of draught power, and high levels of land degradation. The increasing droughts exacerbate the situation often resulting in crop failure and increasing poverty among the rural households. The challenge of agricultural sustainability has become more pronounced throughout the years with climate change and degradation of the ecosystems negatively impacting these poor farmers. The common complaint by households is that they invest in their fields and gain no returns. According to one household head, “we take our produce to the fields and return with nothing” (int., Mathapo, 2022). There are several factors responsible for the declining crop yields, namely loss of arable land, lack of draught power, changing precipitation patterns, and declining willingness to work together.

6.2.1.1 Loss of arable land

Annually, Lesotho loses an estimated 40 million tons of soil due to erosion (IMF, 2022). As a result, projections have shown that all topsoil will be lost by the year 2040 (Hall, & Green, 1989). The proportion of landless households has risen to above 40% (Rocchi & Del Sette, 2016). In the highlands areas loss of arable land through soil erosion is more pronounced due to the mountainous terrain of which fields are exposed to erosion by the strong winds of the highlands.

The high-intensity rainfall characteristic in the study area is another cause of soil erosion in the household fields. When the erosive rains fall, the shallow soils on the slopy terrain where many fields were established easily wash away the topsoil down the slope. This high-intensity rainfall disintegrated the soil structure removing smaller particles and leaving the granular coarse soil many people pointed out that their soils were coarse and sandy and no longer nutritious for the crops. Most fields located on slopy land have been reduced to gullies and can no longer be used, while some of the fields are left as smaller patches.

Most fields have shrunk in size, and it is common for households to mention that they have fields without soil. Some of the fields are no longer identifiable as it is only rocks protruding from the surface. In this situation, some households that used to have fields had become landless. For example, Ntate Mokupu's household had one field on slopy terrain and no longer had a field as he had only one field below the village of Mahemeng in the area, but it has been eroded and can no longer be cultivated.

Another major factor contributing to the loss of arable land is flooding caused by high-intensity rainfall. The extreme floods of January 2021 damaged many fields along the Khubelu riverbank with sand intrusion. These are fields trusted for good produce as the soil is deeper compared to those in the slopy areas. The flooding has caused permanent damage to the fields, leaving most people with questions about what caused the severe flooding, and many elderly people claimed that they have never seen such extreme weather conditions. In this study, five households lost land during the January 2021 flooding. One of the households is that of 'Me Marealeboha, and Figure 6.1 shows how her field is damaged and can no longer be cultivated.

The increasing soil erosion and the sand intrusion have reduced the household's field sizes and their productivity poses a major challenge in these rural households as there is no land available to allocate to the households. Arable land can only be passed down

the generations, but many emerging households were inheriting landlessness. Yet, population growth has resulted in many households not inheriting land that is suitable for cultivation, while others have lost it through the loss of soil.

Figure 6.1 A field damaged by flooding (Source: Author, 2022)



6.2.1.2 *Changing Precipitation Patterns*

Agricultural production is mainly rainfed and therefore climatic conditions play a huge role in household production. In Lesotho Climate change was found to be a critical driver to the food production crisis (Veschuur et al, 2021). The households reported declining harvests due to climatic fluctuations. Many households reported they were used to cultivating maize between August and

September after receiving the first rains to soften the land to cultivate. However, in the recent past, they mentioned that precipitation patterns have been fluctuating, and in some years, when they were cultivated in August, the rain delays during planting inhibiting germination due to the lack of moisture. In some of the years, when the households delay cultivating to wait for the rain, the rain does not stop. It is therefore difficult to learn the precise time for cultivation as crop production is rainfed. The rural households mentioned that their knowledge does not apply anymore, and a participant explained it as follows:

In the past, I knew my large field by the river was supposed to be cultivated in the first week of September after the first rains, and missing that window, the maize struggled against weeds and pests. In some years, it has been difficult to cultivate as fields are too hard to cultivate and postponed to October, the weeds outgrow the maize plants leading to poor harvest (int., Moheshe, 2022)

According to the farmers, unpredictable rain makes the cultivation process challenging as they struggle to determine a precise time for planting. It is difficult for farmers to learn and devise measures to mitigate challenges using their observations from the previous season as the patterns they experience over the years are quite different. This was brought to light in line with their experience of the prolonged dry season in the 2019/2020 season, followed by heavy rain showers in 2021/2022.

The persistent rainfall of 2021/2022 ploughing season highly constrained crop cultivation as households would prepare food and organise labour but then had to postpone because of rain that made the fields too muddy to cultivate. The rain also interrupted the cultivation of summer crops, like beans, and the weeding. Some of the households ended up not cultivating their fields because of the imbalance of the rainfall that came up in many conversations and many people mentioned that when it rains, it does not stop. Many farmers pointed to the lack of seasonal weather forecasts as an impediment to their crop production as they cannot prepare for the season accordingly and thus experience crop failures when they plant against the climatic patterns. They sometimes plant early only to experience rain delays damaging the crops despite using their scarce resources.

6.2.1.3 Lack of draught power

Draught power is the critical component of farming in crop production in households. However, there is a general shortage and decline in the quantity of livestock which results in untimely ploughing and eventually reduced crop yields. Many rural households no longer own livestock due to the high stock theft they experienced in the late 1990s (Pae, 2001). It has thus been argued that poverty and unemployment are the main causes of stock theft (Khoabane & Black, 2012). Many households had accumulated livestock through purchases but with the loss of migrant labour, they could no longer afford to purchase animals also many households pointed to a decline of bridal prices which male households accumulated cattle from. The bridal price, which was a means for households to accumulate livestock, was hardly made up of cattle, bridal prices were mostly settled with small stock and money if ever it was paid. Therefore, there was low cattle endowment in the households.

Similarly, few households had all the agricultural implements many of the households as seen from the previous chapter were relying upon resource pooling to plough. Labour was also constrained for many of the rural households. From the rural households, there were only three households that could cultivate on their own. All the other households are members of ploughing teams. Despite the combination of cattle, implements, and labour to cultivate it was evident that few cattle were a constraint to ploughing. As some ploughing teams had four members with approximately ten acres of combination of fields the span of oxen that the ploughing team had could not complete in a ploughing season. Most of the households mentioned the span of oxen became weak before cultivating all the fields. Many households mentioned that the oxen become weak after ploughing the first big fields for maize. As such some of the household's fields were left fallow.

Resource pooling also meant that the households could not plough their fields at their convenience as members of the ploughing team took turns to cultivate. The research found that most of the households were ploughing maize in October and November which they mentioned that it was already late. One of the farmers shared his concerns:

Most of us do not have cattle so we must wait for those that have cattle in order to plough. When you do not have cattle, farming becomes very tricky (Int, Moheshe, 2022).

From the households, the span of oxen was controlled by the households which had more cattle and usually cultivated their fields first while households that had other inputs plough their fields later. Further many households that were members of the ploughing team highlighted that their fields would lie fallow on account that the cattle were weak usually when it was their turn to plough but those that had cattle would complete ploughing their fields. Households that had other farm implements not cattle complained about this unfair practice that ignores the value of other inputs in ploughing teams.

Some households usually resort to hiring tractors to till the land, but using tractors also had challenges mainly with delayed service delivery. There were two service providers in the entire Khubelu region and Mapholaneng. Most households reported that the service providers often make excuses that the tractor is broken, only for them to see it tilling fields in another village. In 2022, some of the households paid for their fields to be tilled in the previous year but they were postponed with many technical excuses until September, and then the high rainfall and flooding throughout the ploughing season meant that the tractors could not cross to the other side of the river where their fields are. This meant that some of the households' fields were left uncultivated, even though they had paid for the tractors to cultivate them.

Despite the hiring of tractors crop cultivation is still indispensable to the use of cattle as the tractors in these villages were only used to till the land. Households still need to have cattle for sowing the seeds and harrowing which therefore ties the households to the ploughing teams and sharecropping, even though they expressed their dissatisfaction with the ploughing teams.

While the households value crop cultivation, it is costly. I adopted the budgetary calculation of cultivation in Boehm's (2003) analysis of contemporary Sesotho farming and worked out that Ntate Mosoeu's budget is as follows: To plough his 2 acres, Ntate Mosoeu hired a herdman to provide labour for three months from September to November and paid him M1500. His household had to prepare

food for the people who were doing the ploughing and must allocate at least 50 kg of mealie meal for preparing pap, sour porridge, brewing beer, and vegetables to feed them. He only harvested about four 80 kg of maize meal and two bags of low-quality corn that can be only used for making sour porridge or feeding animals. The produce gives Ntate Mosoeu three months before he has to buy maize meal from the supermarkets. The cost of cultivating the field was more than M2500, but he only got maize equivalent to M1500, without including the costs of ploughing, weeding, and harvesting.

6.2.2 Challenges facing animal husbandry

6.2.2.1 *Lack of pastures*

The main challenge facing rural households is the pastures generally have low vegetation. The declined pastures have been attributed to overgrazing. While the villages are trying to rehabilitate the pastures through rural grazing management, their efforts are ineffective. Some households were not observing the resting period for animal grazing and keeping their livestock to forage on village pastures for the whole year. This, therefore, reduces the ability to rest pastures for winter grazing when all animals are kept at home to protect them from extreme cold at the cattle posts. Keeping animals in village pastures reduced the capacity for pastures to handle the high-pressure grazing for the winter season.

The devastating effects of the lack of pastures are felt during spring a critical time when cattle are needed for cultivation, while the pastures are usually depleted due to high-pressure winter grazing and frequently delayed rainfall. During this lean season, the low nutritional uptake weakens the cattle significantly reducing their strength during the ploughing season.

The lack of pastures is also attributed to ‘blame game’ politics in land-use management of pastures. The grazing committee members on one hand blamed some members of the community for threatening them when they tried to enforce grazing regulations by confiscating their livestock for defying the grazing policies. The farmers, on the other hand, pointed out that grazing committee

members are often the first to graze their livestock on restricted pastures prompting others to follow suit. One of the key informants in village administration mentioned that the challenge of Range management began with the introduction of councillors who are regarded as the head of the development of rural villages where conservation is being implemented. He mentioned the following:

It is now difficult to take people who defy grazing regulations to a local court in Mapholaneng because when you get there as a customary authority, they need you to bring *councillor* who oversees development. The customary authority cannot exercise power on their own in taking people who disregard grazing to court, but *councillors* would never do that because they are looking for votes and to be liked at the expense of conservation. (int., Kopano, 2022)

This situation underscores the challenges of declining pastures, shaped by complex power dynamics in conservation management, and the lack of enforcement of grazing regulations. In the absence of controlled grazing, pastures are not being preserved for forage deficits in spring. As a result, many households face significant losses of livestock due to insufficient forage.

Many households shared that they no longer produce the animal products they once relied upon. For instance, milking cows has become uncommon as insufficient forage leads to reduced milk production and farmers opt to conserve milk for the calves. Rather the households pointed out that the scarcity of pastures has introduced an additional financial burden to livestock production as households must supplement their animals' feeding especially after animals give birth and during the ploughing season. The households therefore rely on crop stover and purchasing animal feeds. Even though animal feeds were subsidised at shearing centres supplemented with crop stover and buy animal feed from the shearing centres at a subsidised price. One farmer explained the extra household expenditure for livestock as follows:

Before, we did not have to support our animals like we do today with supplement feeding. There were grasses, and we had sufficient rains, not the current drought conditions we are facing. Once they give birth, you have to supplement their feeding or else they die or become ... They are weak, which will still end up not giving good wool and mohair (int, David, 2022).

The benefits of livestock to the rural households have been reduced but also the increased cost of production that the rural households incur to keep them alive. The households are spending more on production, but they are receiving fewer benefits.

6.2.2.2 Stock theft

Stock theft is one of the biggest challenges facing livestock production when the household herds are already small. In these villages, key informants highlighted a shifting pattern from cattle theft, mostly experienced in the late 1990s, to increased theft of sheep and goats. Most of the sheep and goats were reported to be stolen from the cattle posts. More than six households had reported livestock theft, and Ntate Mosia's household lost 30 sheep in one night in November 2022. Stock theft is a challenge for households as they lose not only physical capital but also financial capital as households invest a lot of money to keep the livestock.

According to the participants, they have noticed that the increase in livestock theft simultaneously increased with the sale of livestock to Qwaqwa as one of the emerging livelihood pathways in this region. The cattle post in the mountains makes them vulnerable to theft as both sheep and goats are easily ferried to Qwaqwa, which is just below the Drakensberg passes in the Free State. Despite many households being members of associations to combat stock theft, households claimed that their livestock is still being stolen. Farmers blamed their herd boys for not acting in good faith and accused them of working with the thieves. These accusations came from a farmer who lost 12 sheep and goats at the cattle post in 2022. He was only alerted by the herd boys that the animals were lost after three days. He explained this incident as follows:

The problem we are having is herd boys who are no longer trustworthy. I was told about the loss of 12 sheep at the cattle post after three days, although herd boys had cell phones and solar panels to charge the phones to alert us immediately when animals were missing. They decided to keep quiet, claiming they were still looking for three days. It's clear that they sold them to thieves, who take them to Qwaqwa, and they wanted them to reach their buyers before we could alert our association to look for them. (int., Lehola. 2022).

The loss of stock theft to Qwaqwa is common in the region and key informants mentioned incidences whereby some farmers from the nearby villagers were able to find their livestock in Qwaqwa already on their way to the market being ferried by thieves. In this case, the farmers were alerted immediately after their livestock was stolen and were able to reach Qwaqwa on time to trace their livestock. This was the main way to find their livestock as they expressed a lack of confidence in the police stock theft combat process which they mentioned does not work as it becomes a long process for the police to relay the matter to their South African counterparts. The earlier alerts of stock theft and trustworthiness herdboys were the main way of fighting livestock theft but in most cases, farmers mentioned the lack of loyalty. This highlights the persistent challenges of raising livestock, even with improved communication channels, such as cell phones, livestock are still being stolen.

6.2.2.3 Difficulty in finding herders

In these villages, many farmers reported the difficulty of finding a herdboys and the high demand leave them with no choice but to keep the ones they are dissatisfied with for long. The key informants mentioned that after being initiated as adults' young men opt to either go to Natal or join artisanal mining hence only a few were left in the rural households. During fieldwork, it was evident that most young men want to earn a regular income, and not the six monthly or yearly payments that herd boys get and that makes it difficult for them to support their households. The reluctance of young men to mind livestock was also due to the low stock numbers, which has seen the remuneration of herd boys decrease from 12 ewes, which used to be the standard pay for herd boys (Quinlan, 1994). The herd boys, especially beginner herd boys, currently accept payment in the form of a mixture of sheep and goats, or even eight small stocks due to low stock rates.

This aligns with the findings of other studies conducted in sub-Saharan countries in Africa that showed that despite the high unemployment rates, the youth do not want to participate in agricultural activities (see Thebe, 2018a).

Another challenge facing farmers with the herdboys is their lack of care for the livestock and their waning enthusiasm for herding. They pointed out that the herdboys were not making sure that their livestock was well-fed and in healthy conditions. It was mentioned that the livestock was no longer well cared for to detect illnesses to be treated at earlier stages for treatment. Also, farmers pointed to a lack of care for livestock in general against the harsh weather patterns. This problem was raised by many households, and I saw evidence of this when I arrived at one of the households and noticed two lambs being kept in the hut for warmth while another was already dead and being slaughtered. The farmer lamented:

They delayed taking the lambs into the hut to keep them from cold, and now they are dead. The problem we are facing is our herdboys do not care for animals anymore. After kraaling them, they go to Mapholaneng, and one wonders where they get money for alcohol from (int., David, 2022).

There is also the challenge of the harsh climatic conditions and the herdboys' lack of interest. Many of the farmers reported that the untrustworthiness of the herdboys highlights the lack of mutual support between farmers and herdboys, who despite the reciprocal relations extended to them reside with their livestock at the cattle post without having to buy medication and contribute to food and earning full pay despite animal deaths and losses.

6.2.3 Cash cropping challenges

Cash crops are heavily based on income as farmers need pesticides, seeds, and money to hire a field. In 2023, the cash business of Ntate Lilemo, the pioneer of cash crops, had declined as he could not secure a field because of a lack of income. Cash cropping is mostly successful in dry years, such as 2017 to 2019. In 2021, when there was a lot of rainfall, most households had *moroho* (vegetables) in their gardens, which resulted in a low demand in the villages. The irrigators mostly produce cabbages that they cook, dry, and sell in winter when vegetables are scarce. Lilemo's losses were exacerbated by his wife returning to have a baby as he could no longer afford the transportation costs to buy inputs and pesticides, and he could not afford to pay the owner of the field. The success

of his agriculture project was based on support from the income from his wife's job. In Lesotho, as is the case with other migrant labour systems in Southern Africa, the practice of agriculture is supported by wage income (see Cousins et al., 1992, on Zimbabwe). Lilemo had to grow vegetables in the garden near his household, which has poor coarse soil, and his vegetables, especially the cabbages, were attacked by pests. In Lesotho, in particular, agriculture is inputs-oriented, and households that cannot access inputs cannot engage in successful farming.

Lilemo had to resort to selling *patsi* shrubs within the community to raise money for fuel to use a water pump to irrigate, but the crops were still poor, and his household was among those that received food commodities during the lean season. Lack of income also heavily affected Thabo's cash crop production because in Lesotho agriculture is heavily dependent on income (Ferguson, 1994). Although Lilemo's exposure to large-scale farming in South Africa gave him the necessary knowledge to produce cash crops, his lack of financial capacity to buy inputs negatively affected his production. This demonstrates the vulnerability of agriculture-based livelihoods, even when people have the necessary expertise. Figure 6.2 shows Ntate Lilemo's garden near his household as he was expanding it the bedrock appeared and most of the soil was coarse sandy which he mentioned also contributed to the poor plants.

Figure 6.2 Ntate Lilemo's garden (Source: Author, 2023)



Potato farming also faced challenges. They had been given 30 bags of seeds by the Lesotho Potatoes Growers Association, which claimed they donated seeds to about 90 farmers in the whole of Mokhotlong. In these villages, three households benefited from this initiative. The biggest challenge in the villages was that the potato growers did not have a market and the correct storage for potatoes, which led to the crops going bad quickly. Potato farmers hired other villagers to assist in digging and cleaning the potatoes, and they paid them with bags of potatoes, which reduced the market within the villages as these helpers also sold their potatoes at cheaper prices. One of the farmers had an arrangement to supply the local high school with potatoes, but after supplying 10 bags, the arrangement was terminated by the school. The termination followed a change in the school's policy for paying schools, which allowed

the school to receive payments in agricultural produce. As a result of this policy change, the school had enough potatoes, and people who were paid with potatoes after working for potato farmers used the potatoes, they received to settle school fees.

The other challenge facing farmers is the snowfall in Mokhotlong district, particularly in the winter season. This often forces farmers to harvest before winter to avoid their crops being damaged by snow. As a result, the supply of potatoes far exceeded demand as farmers harvested potatoes in large quantities. The farmers who resisted the temptation to harvest their potato crops in bulk, and harvested only what they could take to the market, often lost large quantities because of the harsh winter weather.

Another challenge in cash crop production in the villages is their ineligibility to access cash crop funding from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security under the Small Agriculture Development Programme. One of the requirements to apply for funding is to have full ownership of land in the form of a 'Form C certificate' of commercial land, an active bank account, and to be able to raise 20% of the total cost of the project. In crop production, for instance, the Small Agriculture Development Programme enables farmers to have shade nets, greenhouses, boreholes to water the crops, and ongoing assistance from the Department of Crop Production. However, these cash crop producers could not fulfil requirements, especially owning commercial land, as they hold Form C certificates for domestic purposes and not commercial land, and they cannot afford to change the land ownership from domestic to commercial purposes. Furthermore, they do not have enough money to raise the 20% required. They were also ineligible to apply for funding because they were actively producing cash crops on hired fields in the summer.

A major challenge facing Lesotho rural households is the local high unemployment level as there are few avenues beyond agriculture, which I showed is not profitable, that people use to earn a decent living. Locally available opportunities are restricted to programmes such as the conservation programmes, Letšeng Diamond Mine, Polihali Dam construction, working at Mapholaneng Centre, and informal trading. These diverse livelihood opportunities have different challenges that this chapter focuses on. Most of the people in these villages mentioned that there is no work in the rural Highlands.

6.2.4 Lack of jobs

In Mokhotlong, one of the biggest challenges confronting the households is unemployment, and most people interviewed explained that there are limited decent jobs locally, and interviews at household level revealed that children are doing nothing. This includes those who have tertiary qualifications because they are struggling to find opportunities aligned to their qualifications. For example, one man interviewed had graduated from a teaching college in 2015, but still did not have a job in 2022. There are many people in a similar situation, including university graduates, whom parents said are in Maseru still searching for jobs. However, this does not mean that these households' livelihoods have plunged into crisis. There are indeed few opportunities for rural households, even locally. For instance, the biggest mine in Lesotho operating in the upper catchment of the Khubelu Valley employed 1 804 people to produce 120 000 carats of diamonds (Sello, 2020).

In these villages, most of the younger participants aspire to work at the Letšeng Diamond Mine, but getting a job at the mine is challenging. To get a job, the prospective employer has to request a letter from the local chief, which acts as the proof of residence required to register for a job at Letšeng. When the company recruits, the registered names are called in order and only those who are physically present on the hiring day are employed. The prospective employees must frequently go to Letšeng to check how high on the list their names are so they will not be skipped. When the prospective employee's name is higher on the list, they must reside at Letšeng village waiting for hiring day, which is not known or announced publicly. The announcement for hiring is made only when the recruiting company is already there, and then people gather around to listen to the names being called.

In addition, the challenging part is that people being recruited only get to know the period of employment after being recruited, which can be casual work for two weeks, a month, 10 months or a permanent job, depending on the company. People waiting to be recruited must live at Letšeng village, which lies above 2 500 m asl and has extremely cold winters with the temperatures dropping below -20 degrees Celsius in winter. The mean daily temperature ranges from a minimum of 0°C in mid-winter to a mean daily maximum of

>15°C in midsummer. Most people who have once registered for the recruitment process at Letšeng mentioned that it had been discouraging as they waited for more than three months, only to be employed for two weeks. To live in Letšeng, the prospective employees incur expenses to buy food and to rent a place, and most men mentioned that most of the time they must sell their sheep or borrow money, hoping to get a long-term job. One of the men who has been only getting casual jobs at Letšeng complained:

Letšeng's job is pure luck. I had been there for many years but only to get piece jobs for six months, sometimes one, two, or even weeks. The longest contract I worked at was 8 months. They always said to leave your contacts after that short period you worked, but they will never call me. I'm 55 years old now, and they said I no longer qualify for the permanent job because they are saying I'm too old, yet I have seven children to raise. (int., Mabusa, 2022)

This highlights the challenge of casual labour faced by many people in Letšeng because they register for jobs and wait without knowing the duration and type of work they will do. This results in people lodging for many months at Letšeng waiting for the recruitment day which is not publicly disclosed. Therefore, seeking a job at Letšeng was highly uncertain. The other challenge facing the people working at Letšeng was that they were being hired by companies, which have contracts with the mine and when the companies' contracts ended the employees' contracts also ended. During fieldwork, two households had members who were retrenched from work at Letšeng when the contract for the company for which they worked for nine years expired.

A similar recruitment process is used in the villages for people to work at conservation programs like Phaphong Conservation and the rehabilitation of rangeland and wetlands, which have been operational in the Seate community council for more than five years. Local people register with their chiefs and community councillors to work, and a limited number of people is recruited from each village per month. The people registered for recruitment take turns to work, and a person probably gets a chance to work once per year because, during winter, the operations are closed. While people would like to work for a long time in these programmes, it is impossible because of the high number of unemployed people in the rural areas looking for a job.

Polihali construction also presents a lot of opportunities for rural people who hoped they would all be employed at the kickstart of the project, but many of the people who were employed before the COVID-19 pandemic at road work constructions were not called back to work after the COVID-19 lockdowns. Out of the seven people who were hired in both villages, only one person was called back. One of the key informants argued the following:

Even though big projects are running in Mokhotlong, there are no jobs as the labour is not centred where the project is. In both Letšeng and Polihali, you see buses full of people coming from the lowlands every week. They don't care about the local people. (int., Tiiso, 2022)

One of the men who used to work on commercial farms mentioned that he was happy to have been given a job closer to home, though they are not paying well. He was ready to settle for a job but was never called back after the COVID-19 lockdowns. The companies working in Polihali brought their labourers, who included unskilled workers that they recruited locally from other districts and as far as South Africa where most of the companies are based (see Lehema, 2020).

6.2.5 Low remuneration

Most people in the villages who are at home year-round live on piece jobs they do in Mapholaneng, such as laundry for families and working at hair salons, shops, and restaurants. Although Mapholaneng is a growing business centre because of its proximity to the Polihali Dam, many people are hired in the informal sector and earn very low wages. Some of the women who are employed as street vendors mentioned that they earn M500 per month, which is not enough to buy food for a month.

One of the men who works piece jobs as a Welder claimed that in Mapholaneng it is rare to earn M1000 as most employers take advantage of the fact that workers can walk to and from work. It is mostly the poorer households that take local jobs such as doing laundry for richer families, and they claim they earn M400 per month. Most people interviewed underscored the low wages they get

from rural-based employment. While the wages are very low and amount to what could be termed starvation wages, food and other basic commodities are relatively expensive than in urban areas such as Maseru or in South Africa.

Activities like selling shrubs are free but time-consuming and physically taxing for women who have to collect the shrubs and carry the load on their heads from the mountain to the village. Most women who sell shrubs therefore only do it occasionally, and the men who use donkeys do it more often. Women only considered selling shrubs when they had used their capital for beer brewing, and therefore, needed to turn to natural capital when they were in need.

6.2.6 Low value of grants in rising cost of living

Social protection measures in terms of cash transfers provide livelihood sustenance for poor people where natural-based livelihoods and wage labour are unreliable (Fisher et al (2017). Lesotho has been applauded for their social protection policies specifically the children's grant programme despite the budget constraints the government prioritised the policy (Pellerano et al, 2017). While many households mentioned that the children's grant is not enough when compared with the cost of living.

Many of the households earning grant were earning it for mostly one to two children which they received M360 per quarter many households pointed it was too low and could not cater for the needs of children, so they were told to prioritise school uniforms with the grant. They reported that the grant was very low when they got it was only enough to buy either shoes or a few winter clothing without any remainder for food. Because of the terrain, most households reported that the shoes do not last for a long time and also cold winter requires winter clothing which all needs could not be satisfied with the children grant. One of the widowed women earning a grant for her two children complained:

The money they are giving us is not enough especially for growing children, and it would be better if we were given the same amount as the old age pension (int, Malerato, 2022).

These were shared by many households who claimed that raising children needs more money and M360 which many received could not make a difference for the children. Old-age pensioners were also burdened by taking care of many grandchildren and their income was also low as they claimed their children who left for work were not remitting throughout the year. They would only contribute during the Christmas holidays when they are at home.

6.2.7 Challenges facing small-scale trading

Another challenge raised by the trading households is low purchasing power as people do not always have cash in hand. Most of the customers are buying on credit that they pay when they get grants or remittances. This means that most households brewing beer sometimes have to stop operating while they wait to collect income to buy ingredients. The households that are selling groceries reported that they cannot buy new stock while waiting to collect outstanding payments. This challenge is exacerbated by the social relations that traders have with their customers as they mentioned that it is a challenge to do business with relatives who use the relationship to take advantage of them by buying on credit and delaying payment. For example, 'Me Mampho sews winter jackets for children after being retrenched from the textile industry. She mostly sells the jackets to her relatives, who buy them on credit, but when they receive their income or grants, they cannot pay their accounts in full. The debt of M350 ended up being stretched over six months. The delayed settlement of debts affects businesses negatively as it stalls the production of goods and services. The rural people have many different connections that make it difficult for those who start businesses to operate objectively with the people they have kingship relations with. Spiegel (1979) observed the fall of village café operations because kin and neighbours demanded credit.

6.2.8 Vulnerabilities and challenges of textile jobs

One of the challenges workers in the textile industry face is the downsizing of the textile industries that began during the COVID-19 pandemic. The biggest companies, Nein Hsing Textiles, Glory International, and C & Y Garments, closed, resulting in the loss of 11,500 jobs between March 2020 and December 2021 (Mphatsoane & Mokhopi, 2022). Two of the five household members who used to work in the textile industry were retrenched. In 2022, other textile companies were continuously downsizing, which raised concerns about job security, and those who had been retrenched but were hoping for the return of the companies they worked for were also worried. The employment trends show that in March 2018, there were 49,945 jobs, but in March 2024, there were at 34 151 jobs (Lesotho National Development Corporation, 2024).

The workers were faced with many temporary layoffs from work, and they said that some weeks they work only three days a week, and sometimes, they are given a whole week off. This was due to supply chain disruptions that started with the COVID-19 lockdowns which ultimately affected their income as they earned based on the number of days they worked. The women who worked in textiles mentioned that they were just working to keep their jobs as their income with reduced working days was only enough to pay rent. Most workers were worried about the uncertainty of their employment as the big companies had already closed down.

6.3 Migrant Labour-based Livelihoods Vulnerabilities

Migrant labour in South Africa has been the mainstay of rural households' livelihoods in Mokhotlong. The livelihoods of most rural households were supported by men who worked in the mines and were recruited through the Employment Bureau of Africa (TEBA) which had an office in Mokhotlong. Because of the lack of a road network most of the former migrant workers were flown from Mokhotlong to Natal for rail network to their respective mines to the Transvaal. During this time migrant labour for men was guaranteed and formal. However formal migrant labour had significantly declined for Basotho men many in this study were retrenched in the late 1990s giving rise to informal migrant labour. The migrants had to travel to work on their own in search of employment in

South Africa. Both men and women ventured into seeking labour in farming and mostly travelling using their passports. Post 1994 when South Africa gained independence Basotho were allowed to travel to South Africa and were given a six-month visa and could travel with a permit a temporary document that was issued for people who applied for a passport and were waiting for issuance. Therefore, in this case, people could stay in South Africa formerly for six months while looking for jobs.

However, the six-month visa and the use of the temporary permit were banned in 2010 before the South Africa World Cup. Following the ban on six-month visas in 2010, which most Basotho migrants used to legally travel to South Africa, the number of illegal migrations increased as migrants were given only 30-day visas. This is because most people are working far from the Lesotho border in South Africa, such as in Gauteng province, where they cannot regularly renew their stay at the border post. The South African government adopted the Lesotho Special Permits to document the number of illegal Basotho migrants that lived in South Africa, and this permit allows Lesotho citizens to legally study, open a business, and work in South Africa. The application for amnesty started in 2014, and the deadline was 30 September 2016. The permit expired on 31 December 2019, and since then, it has only been renewed for the initial holders. People who did not apply before the cut-off date were no longer eligible to apply. As such, many of the migrants do not have work permits and use visitor visas that allow them to stay in South Africa for only 30 days to seek employment or pursue other informal economic ventures. In this study, there were only four participants who had work permits, and all other members of the households that worked in South Africa did not have the required documentation and were irregular migrants.

Among the irregular migrants some did not have passports at all and only had Lesotho identity cards. Many were new migrants who had started in 2022 and mentioned that they did not have money to apply for a passport and saw it fit to travel to look for a job and would apply for it when they had earned income. While some of the migrants had applied the passports were taking too long to be issued therefore many walked the Drakensberg range in search of employment in South Africa. As mentioned by some of the migrants

hiking was also not easy as such in some instances, they used road transport which made them vulnerable to being arrested by the border controls and detention and deportation while already in South Africa. Some of the informal migrants especially men had their passports suspended for five years for overstaying and illegal crossing. Some of the migrant's passports were suspended during COVID-19 in 2021 whereby they illegally crossed the border to avoid COVID-19 tests because of lack of income but were apprehended at the taxi rank in Fickburg and therefore had been declared persona non grata. Some of the men had been arrested for artisanal mining and deported and their passports were suspended. Therefore, many of the migrants were informal. They worked informally in domestic work, textiles, as informal traders, in artisanal mines and also in farms.

The findings showed that the challenge faced by the members of the households in irregular migration is that their livelihood strategies are confined to low-paying jobs like domestic work and working on farms. The formal jobs in South Africa require migrants to have a valid work permit to qualify for a job. For example, 'Me Mabonang is working at a security company in Johannesburg, and she started working in Gauteng in 2010 as a domestic worker. She could not apply for any other job as she did not have the correct papers. In 2013, she had a friend who found her a job at a security company as she has a Form 5 certificate, but she did not get the job because she did not have a work permit and was considered illegal in South Africa. She continued working as a domestic worker and was able to get a job at the security company when she got her work permit in 2016. This meant better income for her, and she described it as follows:

Getting a job in a company has been life-changing for me. I have been able to provide for my children. They are both in school. I furnished my house. In Gauteng, I have bought a site, and I have my shack where I live, and I don't pay rent. I couldn't have done all this if I was a domestic worker. (int., Mabonang, 2022)

This highlights the importance of a work permit, which elevates migrants from informality to formal employment that pays better. However, this is not the reality for many women in this study who are working in domestic work but have no alternative. One of the

biggest challenges the migrants face is the travelling expenses irregular migrants incur for overstaying in South Africa when they return from work. They have to pay border-crossing facilitators to help them cross to Lesotho and return to South Africa. Paying the facilitator to cross the border is meant to ensure they are not fined and can legally return to South Africa, especially after the holidays when the police roadblocks usually stop taxis to verify that travellers in South Africa are legal migrants. The border-crossing facilitators therefore facilitate both movements to and from South Africa, and they charge the migrants for facilitating the crossing into Lesotho without correcting their passports at immigration. These migrants have to pay for their passports to be corrected upon their return to South Africa.

They pay M200, and when this is added to the other expenses of travelling from Gauteng to Mapholaneng, a single trip home can cost M1000. Even though the travel expenses are very high, most of the migrants mentioned the importance of having the correct passports to cross the border legally when they return to work and to be able to pass the border patrols who usually check migrants' documents on their way to Gauteng. The exploitations are common as some of the border-crossing facilitators

This shows the exploitation of migrants by border-crossing facilitators who are making a profit from the vulnerability of the irregular migrants. are not genuine. 'Me Libuseng remembered being robbed by a man who pretended to be a border facilitator but who disappeared after she paid. Crossing the border is challenging for migrants who do not know how genuine the people who are helping them are, particularly the women who are vulnerable to border-crossing facilitators exploiting them. The issue of exploitation at the borders is evident in the scholarly works of Yusuff, (2014) and Matose et al, (2022).

6.3.1 Textile jobs

The women who are irregularly working in textile companies in South Africa also face job insecurity. Some of the women migrated to South Africa for jobs in the textile industry, where their skills are in demand. However, they were vulnerable to the raids in South Africa to find irregular migrants working without the correct documents. In November 2022, South African law enforcement raided

the homes and industries where migrant workers lived, and around 500 irregular migrants were deported back to Lesotho from Newcastle. While they mentioned that they are working in a smaller factory that did not raise concerns about employing undocumented immigrants, they are living in fear of irregular migrants raids at the factories in New Castle. One of the women who works in the textile industry mentioned the following:

‘The difficulty of not having a work permit is now we are at the mercy of our colleagues not to call the police on us because they know we do not have papers because in most cases it’s the employers’ people who call the police on the workers when they do not want to pay (Int, Mosele, 2022).

The foreign workers are faced with high antimigration sentiments in South Africa as the Republic is also facing high unemployment levels. As such many foreign workers are subjected to raids at different working sites and it has been common for employers to exploit the workers by calling the police on payday (Crush, 1999). The raids involve detention and deportation back to home countries (ibid). Despite being skilled irregular migrants’ livelihoods were highly insecure.

6.3.2 Domestic work

Domestic workers are also mostly informal migrants whose lack of work permits leaves them vulnerable to exploitation. Being irregular migrants have made them vulnerable to exploitation by the recruitment agencies, and they mentioned that every time the agents address them, they remind them that South Africa has laws for foreign labour and that the government is strongly opposed to people working without documents as the country has a high unemployment rate. In other words, the recruitment agencies are doing them a favour by connecting them to employers despite them being irregular migrants. This is done to make the women more willing to accept low offers. The domestic workers mentioned that their starting salary was M2 000, which is very low compared to other domestic workers’ salaries that are not below M3 000. However, they have no choice but to accept the offered salary as expressed by one of the domestic workers:

The employers do not want to pay higher salaries, although they are the ones desperate to find workers as women who have work permits want higher salaries. Some of them work for cleaning companies that pay them better, but because we do not have papers, we cannot do anything about it and they know we cannot go anywhere (int., Mathabiso, 2022).

Based on the above statement it's evident that the recruitment agencies are using the domestic workers' irregularity to underpay them, despite their high demand for workers. This is especially true in domestic work where women with work permits earn more money and can negotiate their salaries. However, the informal domestic workers and migrants, in general, do not have the power to resist their exploitation. Most migrants have accepted the situation as many views expressed by the participants including the following. Rosa expressed 'There are no jobs here in Lesotho and it is difficult to find domestic work that pays M2 000, therefore we have to take job offers that are unfair' (int, Rosa 2022).

Based on the above statements it's evident that employers rationalise the exploitation of informal migrants by constructing narratives that frame them as 'underserving' of jobs and portraying their employment as an act of favour which the migrants should be thankful for the opportunities despite the unsatisfactory conditions of employment. This dynamic is a clear illustration of the power imbalances explained in the concepts of fields by Bourdieu's theory of Practice. In the fields, employers wield significant power to legitimise wage discrimination especially to migrants often lacking legal documentation and the inability to organise themselves (Thieme, 2011). Therefore migrants are left with little choice but to accept the conditions.

Many of the participants indicated that another challenge they face is working long hours. Their daily routine normally begins at 4 am, and they work until 8 pm. They have to wake up early to help their employers prepare for work by ironing clothes and preparing children for school. During the day, they clean the house, take care of the baby, cook dinner, wait for everyone to have dinner and wash the dishes before they go to sleep. Most participants mentioned that this is their daily routine seven days a week, and they mentioned that there is more work over weekends as the family is at home the whole day, which requires a lot of cleaning.

Another challenge is the lack of clear work scope as they live with their employers, and do not follow the contractual agreements. For instance, some women mentioned they were hired to take care of a baby and clean the house, but in most cases, they have to take care of the baby and also clean up after the adults, which was not mentioned during the recruiting. Most women attributed this challenge to living in a house with their employers were being given a lot of tasks within the households.

While most women mentioned many challenges, they were facing at work many mentioned they were reluctant to lay their grievances to their employers. One of the domestic workers showed me her hands and how the skin was peeling off her hands which she mentioned was because of the detergents she uses to clean. When I asked why she did not buy gloves to clean with, she said she had not thought about it. However, she immediately added that if she were to buy gloves on her own, it would look rude to start cleaning with the gloves without notifying her employer. Instead, she thought it would be better to ask for permission first when she gets back to work. This is one example that highlights the submissiveness of Basotho domestic workers and how vulnerable they are in trying to please their employers even when they are suffering. This confirmed Griffin's (2011) assertion that Basotho domestic workers portray submissiveness and hard work to become attractive to employers, but this works against them because their employers exploit them.

Another challenge that domestic workers face is the language barrier. Most of the women working as domestic workers only have primary school certificates and can only speak Sesotho fluently. In the households where they work, most of the people communicate in English, and the young parents prefer their children to learn English from an early age. Therefore, speaking English is a very important skill as it enables people to work in better households where they are paid more money. 'Me Marorisang lost her job because she cannot speak English. She lost her job taking care of a baby when one of the parents wanted the baby to start learning English. Most women highlighted their English language barrier constraining prospects for jobs in better households which they mentioned were being taken by Zimbabweans as many of them have good command of the language.

Another challenge they mentioned was not being able to perform certain duties due to a lack of knowledge and cultural background. Specifically, most women mentioned the challenges in cooking because they are not familiar with some of the dishes that use lots of ingredients. These women pointed out that most of their employers assume they know most of thing failure to perform is usually assumed to be laziness and their unwillingness to learn. Most women mentioned they are cautious not to spoil either the food or appliances. However, they mentioned most employers were often impatient with them. This brings to light the fact cultural backgrounds determine performance in the field as mentioned by Bourdieu (1992). The women's background of growing up in rural areas and lack of exposure to language and other cultures limit their ability to perform some of the duties in their workspace.

A challenge raised especially by the widowed women in migrant labour is the inability to parent their children. Some of the women mentioned that being away from their children makes them vulnerable to bad influences, and some children quit school and others get married at a young age. During the time of the study, I met 'Me Mabonang, whose son had joined initiation school without her consent after completing Standard 7, when he was supposed to further his studies at the high school level in Grade 8. In January 2023, when the schools opened, the boys were still in traditional school in February. After completing the initiation, he eventually declined to go to school on account that it was already late. 'Me 'Mabonang expressed her disappointment as follows:

I had talked to my son before I left that he had to pursue education and that he could join these things when he is done with high school, but I know when I leave, many teachers in this village influence him otherwise so that he ends up as nothing (int., Mabonang, 2022).

Similarly, one of the widowed women working as a domestic worker mentioned that her daughter fell pregnant in Grade 9 and dropped out of school. She later got married to the father of her child while both were underage. Most women mentioned that it is the lack of

parental guidance that leads to this type of behaviour among their children. They feel guilty for leaving their children, who are mostly living on their own. The parents prioritise education but have been disappointed by their children.

6.3.3 Working on the farm

Some of the household members are working on commercial farms, mostly in KwaZulu-Natal. Many people find the farm jobs accessible as they can walk to KwaZulu-Natal when they do not have passports. However, the challenge they face is that the jobs in KwaZulu-Natal are mostly temporary, except for herding animals, which is done by four men. Both men and women who worked in crop plantations mentioned that they are getting one-month contracts, and sometimes three-month contracts. This means that when the work is complete, they must look for another job in order to survive. Hopping from one job to another is a challenge as the money earned from the previous job is used to survive while searching for a new job. The income is used for rent, to buy food and for transport while looking for another job. This reduces the amount of remittance money they earn because they have to save money to look for another job.

Given the high unemployment in South Africa, most of the migrants who are working casual jobs in KwaZulu-Natal are exploited because they are not paid the same salary as the workers from South Africa. The participants reported that most foreigners are treated differently from the South Africans. South Africans are paid M20 per hour, but the foreigners are paid M15 per hour because they do not have documentation and because of the high demand for work. This reduces their income and the money that reaches their household back home.

6.3.4 Informal trading

In this study, informal trading refers to the men who are selling their handmade whips made from cowskin from their production base in Kestel in the Free State. The tanning and processing of the cowskin to make it soft for plaiting is done manually. Many artisans

mentioned that the work is laborious because it includes soaking, tanning, and cutting before plaiting. Most of the men reported suffering from painful hands because their hands become bruised and swollen when tanning the cow skin. This led some men to leave informal trading for artisanal mining and farm work. Bad weather conditions are also an impediment to the artisans as they do not have a sheltered place where they sell their whips. They sell it along highways and in open spaces near taxi ranks, and therefore, they cannot sell their products when it is raining or windy. The 2021/2022 high rainfall severely disrupted their business and they had to spend months without working.

Another challenge is that the market is saturated by other traders selling similar products. When they started, there were only a few artisans, but many people realised the potential of making a livelihood out of making whips, and now the market is saturated. After making about 30 whips, they must travel to other provinces, as far as Limpopo and the Northern Cape, to sell their whips. They then have to find accommodation in the area and pay for their transport to different places.

6.3.5 Artisanal mining

Despite providing livelihoods for many households in the villages artisanal mining livelihoods face significant challenges owing to the nature of the activities. Artisanal mining in South Africa is considered illegal according to the Mining Resources Act which only allows industrial mines to hold, or process mined material, and only registered industrial mines can obtain permits (Thornton, 2014). Artisanal miners also are irregular migrants in South Africa as none of them had a work permit to work in South Africa.

The irregularity of the artisanal miners and their operations made the activities vulnerable to law enforcement raids aimed at eradicating illegal mining. Also, in artisanal mining because the different groups of Basotho men fight each other over the gold mine dumps. The violence in artisanal mining has garnered negative press, which overshadows the positive impact on livelihoods. The violence in artisanal mining in South Africa has attracted a lot of attention, especially from the police to the detriment of the miners

who are experiencing raids often, which disrupts their operations. This cessation of operations means that miners do not work consistently, and they do not make money while hiding from the police.

The artisanal miners therefore face law enforcement raids during which they have to stop their operations and hide from the police. During these raids, the artisanal miners leave everything behind in their working camps, even the ore that is almost processed and all the instruments they use in processing gold to ore. According to artisanal miners, during these raids, they often find themselves with very limited time to react or prepare.

According to artisanal miners during this raids they usually have limited time to run. One of the artisanal miners compared himself to an athlete who is always ready to run: “We are always on our marks to run away from the police, leaving everything behind, and start over when the dust settles” (int, Thatho, 2023).

The artisanal miners mentioned the police often raid their working camps to disrupt their operations and deter them from operating. During these police raids, the work sites are dismantled, the tools they use for crushing and processing ore are usually destroyed, and their access to water is cut. They therefore have to spend money to buy more tools to operate. This is challenging as when they are not working, they do not make money and usually have to start from scratch in collecting their tools and constructing their working stations.

Most of the men mentioned that they could escape most of the raids, but sometimes they are caught and arrested, and they are charged with both illegal migration and illegal mining. For example, Mosito was arrested for illegal mining in 2022 and imprisoned for nine months. ‘Me Masetempe’s son was imprisoned in 2018, and during the time of study in 2022, he was still in prison which led to a decline of livelihood for his household because they were no longer receiving remittances.

Whenever I don't hear anything from my son, I'm always fearful of what might have happened. I worry whether he has fallen in the mine shaft and has died or whether he is shot and killed. We lay our fears when they say he is arrested. At least we know he is alive. We live in difficult times (int., 'Me Maseriti, 2022).

A similar challenge faced 'Me Masetempe, an old woman who is taking care of her husband who had been disabled from a stroke. Her family of five used to be supported by her son Ts'okolo, who is an artisanal miner, but they have been suffering since his son got arrested in 2019. According to her:

When Ts'okolo started working in 2015, he used to send us money, sometimes M5 000 money per month between 2017 and 2018. We lived well. In 2019, I don't know what happened but there were fights in which some of his group members died and heard that he was arrested. It's been four years. We do not know what fully happened. They always say he is going to appear in court. Sometimes the hearing was postponed. We do not know (int, Masetempe, 2022)

This highlights the precariousness of artisanal mining, and household members are living in fear for the lives of their family members. Many of the rural household members do not understand what exactly is happening in artisanal mining as it is treated as a secret. Most of the artisanal miners do not discuss their work and the violent acts they are involved in, and most of their household members do not know about the challenges they face. The miners are also scared to discuss their work because, within the villages, people support different artisanal mining groups that are fighting against each other.

Artisanal mining is characterised by high violence as miners have different groups that identify themselves with different Basotho blankets and famo music and fight each other. Artisanal mining as a livelihood makes the households vulnerable to the shocks of losing the breadwinner, which may leave the family in poverty. This does not only happen in Khubelu Valley, and a key informant reported that since the men start working in mine dumps, more than 30 men have died from gun violence. In the study, three households

had lost husbands to illegal mining gang-related shootings. ‘Me Malerato, a 42-year-old woman with two children, lost her husband to a shooting, and she said the following:

My husband worked in Gauteng from 2009 at the contractors. We got married in 2013 while he was still working there, and he even got a work permit in 2015. I do not know what happened in December 2016 when he came for holidays. He told me he was working at mine dumps as he could not see any progress working at the contractors. I told him it’s better to work where you earn less but you’re safe, but he could not listen. He was shot and killed in Gauteng in 2018, leaving me with two young children. (int., ‘Me Malerato, 2022)

The loss of life is the most challenging part of artisanal mining as the households lose human capital leaving the household vulnerable. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the fact that artisanal mining is informal and unlike the formal mining job there are no insurance funds for the households to live on. In most cases, when a member dies while working in Gauteng, the group members contribute to the repatriation of the body and the burial, but after that the household receives nothing. Unlike the women whose husbands died in formal mining, the widows of artisanal miners must fend for themselves.

Artisanal mining as a livelihood also poses a risk not only to the artisanal miners but the conflicts within their different factions also affect the relatives of the miners. When opponents fail to attack the artisanal miners, they often turn to family members. This happened in Ha Motlalepula, a village near the case study site, and on 3 January 2021, a total of eight people were killed at Ha Motlalepula. The incident is believed to have been caused by conflicts between the illegal mining groups in Gauteng that came back to Lesotho to kill the relatives of their enemies, including women, by shooting, burning down houses, and battering cars. Many of the rural households have members in artisanal mining as were concerned that illegal mining-related shootings are already taking place in the rural areas. Most people mentioned that the miners had brought their Gauteng fights to the rural areas.

There was a general concern about the uncommon practices in the rural villages as most people commented on the strange way they handled the funerals of their deceased members. Instead of mourning for the deceased, they did the opposite: They sang their songs, chanted their slogans, danced near the coffins, and held sticks while insulting the deceased. They beat the coffin while telling the deceased that they must fight for themselves. They also openly carry their guns, and when they go to the cemetery. Many people in rural households are concerned about this militancy of the artisanal miners and their unusual ways of operating in funerals.

Also, many of the rural households were concerned about the divisive nature of artisanal mining as the men joined different groups which are rivals though from the villages most people were related to each other. Therefore, many rural households were worried about the conflicts that artisanal mining brings within the rural households.

6.3.6 Inconsistent remittances

One of the challenges of informal job opportunities is that the remittances are irregular, leading to rural households struggling. This precarious livelihood sometimes creates a long absence of migrants, who fear to return home without anything. One of the migrants, Ntate Sebata, complained that when he returns home with nothing, he is called names, such as “they are saying we are married”, while in reality he had difficulty finding work. They are responsible for all the needs of the school children, including books, cosmetics, and food, as their parents never sent anything. Many caregivers reported that the parents neglect their children for the whole year, and only meet the household needs for the children in December to buy clothes for the festive season, and then they disappear again for the whole year without remitting anything back home.

6.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the challenges and vulnerabilities facing the livelihoods of the rural households. The rural households both live on farm and off-farm livelihood strategies therefore the chapter began with a discussion of the vulnerabilities facing agricultural

production. It was found that crop production is declining due to land degradation caused by soil erosion and in the recent past flooding that had deposited sand on riverbank fields. As such households are fields were shrinking in size. Also, the frequent extreme climate conditions mainly drought and flash floods contribute to the decline of agricultural production as crop production is mainly rainfed. The lack of agricultural inputs specifically cattle is a challenge in crop production as households are then forced to form ploughing teams which are also unreliable. The households had resorted to hiring a tractor, but it also presented a challenge as only two tractors were operating for the entire Khubelu region leading to the delays.

Animal husbandry was also faced with degraded pastures which could not provide for enough forage, this had resulted in livestock mortality during droughts. Animal products had highly been decreased to lack of forage and most farmers had resorted to supplementing feeding for their livestock using income. Many households pointed to the hardships of raising livestock with inadequate pastures. Additionally, land use management was not effective as households pointed fingers at each other for defying grazing regulations. The farmers were also faced with stock theft and labour constraints as young men preferred wage labour to herding.

Cash crop production was also seasonal, and households could not fully rely on it and was unprofitable during the years when there was high rainfall as most households planted their vegetables. Crop production also required pesticides which needed money to buy overall it came to light that despite the knowledge households had of planting vegetables there was a need for income. For the households that were given potato seeds, their production was high in Mokhotlong and there was no market which led to damage to harvest due to snowfall while they were kept in fields as they did not have long term storage.

The challenges of the non-farm local livelihoods were mainly the lack of jobs many households depended on social grants which were not enough particularly the children's grant that is received quarterly. The old age pension was burdened by the care of many family members. self-employment activities like brewing earned the households a little income and they were vulnerable to credit buying

with delays in returns compromising the businesses. There were few jobs at Letseng diamond mine, and most were taken temporarily. For many local jobs, the remuneration was too low.

The households were supported by livelihoods taken in the textiles industries in Lesotho of which many were closing. Some people left for South African textiles their jobs are not secure as there were police raids for informal workers in textiles. Many members of the households were mostly informal migrants in South Africa whereby they were ineligible for work due to lack of proper documentation. They were therefore confined to low-paying jobs like working on farms and domestic work with few in textiles. Lastly, the chapter discussed the vulnerabilities associated with artisanal mining which include frequent police raids to deter informal artisanal mining which is deemed illegal. Also, the violence between the different groups of Basotho artisanal miners fighting over mine dumps has led to the death of miners leaving their households vulnerable and also the moral decline within the rural communities since the rise of artisanal mining.

Chapter 7

Navigating Livelihood Vulnerability

7.1 Introduction

I begin this chapter by telling the story of Thabo, a member of one of the rural households that participated in this study. On 3 January 2022, shortly after the new year, Thabo was arrested on his way to the commercial farms where he worked in South Africa because he did not have a passport and had crossed the border informally. While he was warned not to travel immediately after the holidays since there are increased border patrols after Christmas, he nonetheless travelled because he was needed at work. He said the following:

I was supposed to be at work and had no choice than to travel. Patrols could not stop me from going to do my job in the process of performing theirs. These patrols have always been there. They present a hurdle to people in their pursuit of a livelihood, but we have learned to navigate these hurdles. Remember that these patrols are done by people, and people are always people. We always try to avoid them, if we cannot avoid them, we negotiate. But, at the end, we end up getting to work. However, this time around, I did not have money since I had used all the money during the festive season. So, negotiations were not successful. (int., Thabo, 2022)

What is intriguing about his story is not the circumstances surrounding his arrest, but his attitude, how he explained the reasons for his arrest, and what he said he should have done to avoid arrest and continue with his livelihood objectives. These explanations draw our attention to the question of agency as households pursue livelihood pathways, and in particular, how people navigate the vulnerability of livelihoods by negotiating challenges and barriers standing in the way of fulfilling livelihoods. The issues of agency and negotiation are particularly significant in understanding livelihoods in the context of change. Thebe and Maombera (2019) highlighted the complex system of negotiating the border as Zimbabwe migrant mothers seek to overcome changes in migration laws

that are threatening their migration objectives. This raises the question of how rural households navigate the odds that are stacked against their livelihood-making. Using the human economy approach, this chapter focuses on what people are doing themselves to earn a living, and not on what the government and the international organisations prescribe to them as preferred livelihood strategies. According to this approach, people find ways to practically insert themselves into economic life on their own account. However, what they do is often obscured, marginalised, or repressed by the dominant economic institutions and ideologies. Hart et al., (2010) observed that in the 20th century society is supposed to be impersonal because life is organised by state bureaucracy, capitalist markets, and scientific experts. Not surprisingly, most people felt estranged and powerless but did not sit on their hands and instead expressed themselves in domestic life and organised informally in the cracks of the economic system for their protection, betterment, and recreation.

This chapter analyses how households navigate the dynamic complexities and numerous obstacles that constrain their livelihoods. Following the demise of the migrant labour system, Basotho rural households suffered immensely because of losing their main livelihood activity. They were left to survive on agricultural production, which was their subordinate means of living, yet also heavily dependent on income. The government of Lesotho failed to create a clear rural development plan for the rural households, and instead implemented conservation practices to improve livelihoods; however, these efforts bear more resemblance to the rural development policies that persistently failed to reduce land degradation and improve livelihoods. This chapter shares the conviction that rural people do not sit in despair in the face of challenges. Instead, they use their agency to navigate the challenging terrain for their development and betterment. Even though their methods may not be sustainable, they aim to sustain their vulnerable livelihood activities.

Livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa have been understood in terms of how people are expected to live and not in terms of how they conduct their daily lives in ways that suit them (Bryceson, 1999). The livelihood trajectory in rural Lesotho still expects rural households to depend on agriculture, and migration is largely regarded as a nuisance. Rural development has been at the centre of development for a long time, but the poverty levels have persisted.

The chapter begins with how households mitigate agricultural production vulnerabilities. Agricultural production has been evolving in the rural Highlands of Lesotho, and during the period of formal migrant labour, men valued their livestock and were reluctant to part with it by selling. Ferguson (1994) termed this the ‘bovine mystique’. Recently, Hoag (2018) observed increased production and sales of sheep and goats for income to meet immediate household needs. This first section of the chapter explores the measures households undertake to grow crops and keep livestock in a challenging environment. The second section discusses what rural people do to access and maintain livelihood opportunities beyond Lesotho’s boundaries. Based on interviews, the section argues that migration has become a source of hope for improving living standards for rural people who are willing to risk detention and deportation. The third section delves deep into the households to understand how they maintain their households and priorities and how they fulfil them. The last section summarises the chapter.

7.2 Navigating Agricultural Vulnerabilities

7.2.1 Crop cultivation

Crop cultivation remains one of the most common livelihood activities practised by rural households, but these households mentioned that droughts and climate variations have changed their perspective on farming. One of the incorporated lessons that came up is that it is important not to cultivate against the weather patterns, and therefore, they adjust their cultivating timetables according to the rains they receive each season. Farmers drew lessons from the 2015 and 2019 ploughing seasons when drought damaged crops and killed many of the cattle that were working in dry conditions without forage. In uncertain weather conditions, most households have devised the risk mitigation strategy of not cultivating when it is too dry to prevent cattle deaths. One of the farmers mentioned the following:

I have to determine carefully whether there is going to be good rains or not, so I do not risk my cattle and work to death without any use because when there is no rain, there is no use to cultivate. (int., David, 2022)

The households have learned lessons from the past uncertain weather conditions and are using these lessons to inform their crop cultivation. The main challenge in crop cultivation is the lack of draught power, and rural households are adopting conservation agricultural practices like *ngoapa o jale* translated as digging and planting a seed. In this practice, people use hand tools, like hoes, spades, and hand forks, to plant crops, mostly beans and other crops like potatoes. In this practice, small holes are dug for seeds instead of cultivating the entire field. Conservation agriculture has been promoted by the Department of Soil Conservation in Lesotho to reduce soil erosion since there is less disintegration of the soil structure than when using ploughs, which disintegrates the soil particles and becomes easily eroded by wind action and surface runoff. While the farmers have been trained on digging and planting for a long time, most farmers expressed their reluctance to adopt it but had realised its importance and one of the farmers said the following:

We have been trained on *ngoapa o jale* for a long time by the agricultural officers from Mapholaneng, but we felt like practising it was yoking oneself and was taking us backwards, but we realised it was doable, especially when there is enough moisture in December. The beans still become successful, especially now that the fields are shrunk. (int., Maseriti, 2022)

Digging and planting allow households to cultivate crops despite a shortage of tools and cattle, donkeys or horses, or income to hire tractors. Interestingly, women were the ones practising digging and planting with hand tools as they mentioned that men do not even want to participate in weeding using hoes, they only work the fields with animals and implements. Women had been responsible for weeding for centuries in Lesotho while men adopted technological advances in agriculture (Eldredge, 1991). This thus seems to influence the adoption of hand tools in cultivation.

One of the challenges facing the households was the inability to plough on time either due to rainfall delays or lack of implements which thus shortens the ploughing season. The households responded to these changes by buying seeds from the agricultural office that take less time to germinate and mature.

Basotho are known for using the *matsema* (communal work party) to perform tasks beyond their abilities. In these villages, harvesting wheat is usually done using communal work party and people feast on food and traditional beer prepared by the family whose wheat they are harvesting. *Matsema* are still practised especially for wheat that dries up between April and May and households are compelled to harvest it quickly before snowfall that to prevent it from germinating. The elderly mentioned that after *letsema*, women are given grains, called *moella*. In most cases, relatively richer households invite poor women whom they usually work with, and they give them grains for their work. Poor households headed by women, like ‘Me Masetempe and ‘Me Mapaseka, were observed on different harvesting occasions helping Ntate David’s household to harvest wheat and helping Ntate Khethang harvest potatoes. This corroborates Turkon’s (1996) findings that owners selectively choose who help in their fields.

Poorer households with young children and grant recipients are usually given seeds to plant vegetables to combat stunting in children, which is very common Mokhotlong. Gardening is therefore an important source of food for households as it spares them from buying cabbages in summer because they have fresh vegetables, and they can dry these vegetables to eat during winter. Growing vegetables is used to extend relations between rural households as poor households give richer households that usually assist them in time of need some of their vegetables. One villager said, “I always allow ‘Me Mathetso to just take vegetables from her garden she gives me food when I have nothing. *Mosobelo* is the act of giving food to a neighbour who does not have food without an explicit promise to return but with implicit expectations for return (Turkon, 1996). According to Turkon (1996), the receiver of *mosobelo* makes themselves available to the needs of the receiver and in some instances, the poor households provide labour to the richer households in various ways.

7.2.2 Animal husbandry

Since the pastures in these villages are very degraded, some households keep their livestock in areas where there is still enough vegetation for better grazing. Most households in these villages entrust their livestock to relatives in areas with better grazing. These

areas are usually in the upper catchment of Khubelu. For example, ‘Me Marealeboha keeps her sheep and goats under the care of her son-in-law in Matsoku, where the pastures are not heavily degraded like in Mahemeng. Splitting livestock into different areas is another mechanism to protect households from having all their livestock stolen from one place because keeping them in different areas reduces the risk of losing all the livestock at once. This is a continuing practice as Turkon (2003) observed that when a person has animals but the pasture around their cattle post is distressed, they may try to place some of their herd in the care of someone who has access to a better pasture. Some of the households are keeping their livestock, especially those that are weaning, at home for supplementary feeding and extra care.

While many Basotho farmers are known for their desire to have large herds of livestock, most of the farmers in this study are prioritising the value of wool and mohair, which gives them a higher income at the market. Some households have bought hybrid rams to produce good quality sheep that grow so big that they are often compared to calves in these villages. Farmers mentioned that they have been learning about hybrid sheep production from the Agricultural Department, and therefore, they want to incorporate some into their herds, despite having limited income for buying rams. They claimed that the rich farmers usually buy these rams from South Africa. The participating farmers often pay households with hybrid rams to breed with their ewes.

7.3 Rural-based Livelihood Pathways

7.3.1 Reciprocal relations

In these areas, there are various ways in which households reciprocate to sustain their livelihoods. Most of the households are living by the principle of *ho thusana*, which means helping each other, as many households, even the richer ones, do not have everything to rely only on themselves, and they have to ask for help from other households to perform some activities. An observed example was that of relatively richer households living with children from poor households, usually boys, who help with agricultural activities during winter and summer school breaks. They reciprocate the labour by buying them gum boots and school uniforms. This is the

case for Ntate Makoaela's 11-year-old son who lives in Ntate Moheshe's households during the school holidays to help herding animals and working the fields. This practice equally gives the children from households that do not have livestock to learn livestock tending.

Reciprocity is one of the essential aspects of survival for rural households that do not own everything they need. The rural households sustain their precarious livelihoods through borrowing from each other; for instance, households borrow animals like donkeys from neighbours to carry their groceries back from town. Food is one of the most borrowed items, and people borrow maize meal, sugar, salt, and oil. When borrowing, it is expected that when one gets maybe mealie meal the household borrowed should return the favour. It was often mentioned that one cannot borrow the same thing more than once because it is like eating together with that household. Therefore, instead of borrowing food again from the same household, people will rather borrow money to buy mealie meals.

Most households mentioned the importance of returning borrowed items to keep relationships as people who do not return items they borrowed are likely to be turned down in future when they need assistance. Households that can borrow many times without returning are poor because people in the villages often say we understand that they are struggling. Some of the households who live on remittances mentioned that sometimes when there are money delays, they survive by borrowing money for mealie meal, and they repay the money when they receive their income. Reciprocal relations are important for households as they cushion them against the uncertainty of remittances from the precarious livelihoods that most households depend on.

The reciprocal relations were evident during the funerals and ceremonies because households would bring items they know are needed, such as big pots, water drums bowls, tables, and chairs. Men, on the other hand, help to gather logs.

7.3.2 Social organisation

The households have different organisations structures that enable them to navigate the unpredictable income and low-value social grants by forming informal saving schemes such as pooled funds called mokhatlo and mekhatlo in plural. *Mekhatlo* is widely embedded in Basotho women's culture and is mostly known as a women's thing (Maliehe, 2018). In this study, even men were part of financial clubs. The primary reason highlighted for the pooling of income was meant to encourage saving and to have access to capital to fund business ventures as many households lacked access to formal banking institutions

7.3.2.1 'Shebeening'

'Shebeening' is one of the income-generating social clubs run by women. The women take turns hosting parties in the villages where they sell food, and drinks and play music to entertain people. Shebeening, started an income-generating activity for poor households, usually widowed women, who do not have a remitting husband however shebeening is now one of the income-generating activities pursued by women whose husbands work as migrant labourers. It is mostly used to diversify their households' income as they mentioned that remittances are left for bigger household projects, like building a house. The income they generate from shebeening enables them to buy clothes and gives them the cash that they can control.

Shebeening, as experienced in the villages, the group members contribute capital to fund the woman who is hosting the party so she can buy food and drinks to sell. For example, participants mentioned that the members of one group each contributed M250 that was given to the host to organise the party. The host then bought bottled beer, brewed homemade ginger beer, and cooked food that she sold during the party. The food included bread, sausages, chicken feet, fat cakes, fries, and snacks. The members of the group were supposed to spend at least M100 during the event and to invite people to the event, which ran from late afternoon until midnight. During the party, they sold food and alcohol, and they also charged people for song requests to be played on the DVD player. The

women mentioned that their average profit is M1 000, which is enough for the households to survive during the time the husbands had delayed remitting.

Shebeening is done during the weekends right after people receive their social grants or those working at conservation programs have been paid, and during the December holidays, these events are held every weekend, targeting the migrants on holidays. Most women worked together to enable each member to sell and make an income as they did not want to share their patrons by holding individual events and also as an entertainment business it needs many people for it to be successful. The shebeening business is supported by capital from the men's remittances, and the men attend the events when they are at home. In the 1990s, Sharp and Spiegel (1990) noted the objections of men in Qwaqwa towards their women running shebeening in these villages, but it was accepted as a viable means of earning an income. While in their study women would hide by operating from other widowed women's households in this study women were free to operate with their husband's financial support.

7.3.2.2 *Rotation schemes*

In these financial rotation schemes, members contribute a certain sum every month, and the total contribution is given to a different member each month. Whoever gets the money in the first month is obligated to continue contributing. This lumpsum allows the member to buy or take care of tasks that she cannot do on her own. Whoever gets the money first is obligated to continue contributing. In this way, the members have access to money which enables them to buy things they would not afford with their monthly income. An example of a financial rotation club is the one that 'Me Marealeboha joined whereby they each contribute M100, and the total is given to one member at the end of the month. 'Me Marealeboha explained the importance of *mokhatlo* as follows:

I have joined *Mokhatlo* with four other people who are earning pensions like me we contribute M100 of us every month. I was able to buy my granddaughter a blanket when she went to the hospital to have a baby because it's difficult to buy expensive

things from the M900 we earn monthly as we live on it to buy daily needs. When added to our monthly M900 pension, it makes a difference (int., Marealeboha, 2022).

This comment clearly shows that financial clubs help households navigate low social grants through funding rotations and pooling money that enables borrowing. It is not just people living in the rural areas who join *mokhatlo*, different members of households who work elsewhere have also formed financial clubs. For example, ‘Me Mabonang is a security guard in South Africa, and she has furnished her home with sofas, which is rare in rural households. She joined an informal financial club formed by women from Mokhotlong who work in Gauteng and mostly those who have work permits. She met the women online because they wanted to hire a truck to deliver goods to their homes in Lesotho, and since then, they have formed a savings club whereby they contribute money monthly that is shared per individual contribution at the end of the year and allows them to save money as she mentioned.

‘As women who worked in South Africa for a long time, we joined *Mokhatlo* that our contributions help us to save for Christmas holiday costs, you know people will be looking at what you are coming with during the Christmas holiday, so we want to show that indeed we went to Gauteng to work by improving our homes’ (Int, Mabonang, 2022).

The financial clubs were mostly formed by people who had similar financial backgrounds like Me Marealeboha’s group formed by people earning pensions and also women working in Gauteng and even men in artisanal mining mentioned having their financial clubs. Similar to Kinyondo and Kagaruki (2019) findings in Tanzania the findings show that informal financial groups enable financial inclusion among the poor.

7.3.3 Handling money with care

One of the ways of coping with vulnerability is using money carefully for specific purposes and to fulfil basic needs first. Ferguson (1994) clarified that wage income is a fleeting asset that does not stay in place for a long, and therefore, households' main aim is to ensure income is used sparingly. Most women who are left in rural households mentioned that they make sure they buy something they can show to their husbands and do not spend all the money on food. Money is not easily found, and therefore, it is necessary to do something concrete with it once you get it. Therefore, there are significant pressures on women to maximise their savings. For example, 30-year-old Mabolle, the wife of Ntate Poloko, who is building a brick house room, said that whenever she gets money, she takes it directly to the hardware store to pay for the roofing. She did the same for the bricklaying, and she said, "I made sure that money went where it is supposed to". Savings are facilitated by several strategies, for instance, women compromise on food to buy something they can show to their husbands to prove that something has been done. Most women mentioned that it does not have to be a big thing, and can even be something like cutlery, as long as they can show their husband that they did something. This resonates with findings from earlier studies on migrant labour societies that established that a good wife is one who diligently invests a portion of her husband's remittances (Sharp & Spiegel, 1990).

The notion of a 'good saving wife' has been internalised by men, who mentioned that women are supposed to know how to use money, by which they mean that they should know how to save money. This came to light when Tholang, 42-year-old man, left his 23-year-old wife to trade livestock in KwaZulu-Natal. During his stay, he remitted M5 000 to his wife in May, but he claimed that when he returned two months later, there was nothing to show for his money. This led to serious conflict between Tholang and his wife because she did not know how to use money. In conversation with Tholang, he said, "I sent money to my wife, hoping she would buy food and something visible with it, but there was nothing. She did not even have money to buy candles. How do you build a household with someone like that?" The interviews revealed that the wife used the money to buy clothes and nice food. This was different from

how most women handled finances in these villages, as most of them mentioned that to gain men's trust, the money must be saved and used correctly.

Saving money is a serious concern for most migrant men. For example, Thabo was also disturbed by what he claimed was the improper use of money by his wife as he accused her of buying food and clothes instead of thinking about important things, such as saving to build a house. Like other young women, Thabo's wife was criticised for her desire to show off money by buying clothes and nice food. When he was building his brick house, he sent his money to his mother for instalments to pay for bricks, sand, and roofing. Thabo said, "I trust my mother". Trust emerged as the main aspect that migrant labourers use when considering who to remit to. In cases where immediate family members cannot be trusted to use the money wisely, an extended family member can be asked to handle the money and perform the required tasks. Katiso used to send money to his uncle to buy roofing for his parent's house because he trusted him to handle the money wisely and buy the roofing. He explained it as follows:

Of course, I send my parents money for food and other things they need, but I know that even this one for roofing, they would use it for their purposes. So, I trust my uncle. He even kept the receipts for me to see the prices.

The sentiment expressed by most participants was that their hard-earned money should make something tangible within the household. Therefore households, mostly headed by de facto women, used various strategies to use the income wisely. For instance, to reduce spending in households people eat basic food like pap and cabbages throughout the year and only incorporate meat and other nice meals when their husbands are visiting. Even though most households have a gas stove, they rely on wood and dung cakes as fuel for cooking. Gas is used for cooking food that requires less time to cook, like eggs, to save money, and gas is also used during the holidays when there are visitors. This selective strategy use of gas highlights the effort to minimise expenses.

The rural households were faced with limited resources and competing demands. Many participants expressed they use tight budgeting to channel their resources towards the most important needs of the households at a particular time. one of the participants working in the farms highlighted.

‘When my daughter was in high school, I made sure that when I arrived in Mapholaneng I headed straight to school to pay fees even before getting home because I knew once I got home, I’d be presented with many demands that would finish the money for school fees. Everything whether its food or clothing would come after because I wanted to educate my child’

From this statement, it's clear that migrants prioritised education and deliberately ignored some needs that might hinder households from achieving their household's main goal. The careful planning of income earned was done to secure the future of the households. Interestingly, women who are labour migrants do not entrust all their income to their husbands who are left with the households. They send money for food, school fees, and things that are needed in the households, but they keep some money to buy things that most women think are necessary, such as beds, wardrobes, and tables. One of the domestic workers explained the importance of sending money home as follows:

We must send money home so our husbands see that we are working and can allow us to go to work. But also we can't send money to give the man to buy a wardrobe. They would use that money to buy animal medicine and spend the rest on alcohol and tobacco. Of course, we should send money for tobacco so that they look like other men as they are working hard raising children, but we also have to buy something for the households to point at the end of the year. (int., Rosa, 2022)

This comment makes it clear that women are providers for the households but for those who have husbands left at home, they need permission of men to work therefore they have to please them as was discussed in Chapter 5. However, similar to Basotho men who worked in the mines in Ferguson's *Bovine mystique* (1985) who used to buy livestock to protect their money from being used on immediate consumer goods women in this study kept their money secretly from their husbands to buy things like furniture and other

household items they deem important. Women in migrant labour like former migrant labourers do not disclose their exact wages to their husbands.

7.4 Navigating Cross-border Challenges

The livelihoods of rural households are supported largely by the informal migrants whose status limits their access to better opportunities. They are confined to menial jobs like domestic work, farm work, and other self-employment activities, such as artisanal mining. Irregular migration exposes migrants to exploitation, low pay, job insecurity, and being at risk of being deported. The challenges of cross-border migration start at the physical border where members of the households have to navigate travelling to South Africa's urban towns with expired visas, suspended passports, and without passports. The other challenges are exploitation at work because of lack of work permit, irregularly working, and remitting money back home. However, these migrants do not sit in despair as victims of their circumstances; they explore various mechanisms to improve their livelihoods.

7.4.1 Negotiating through the border

Most Basotho working in South Africa do not have work permits and rely on the 30-day visa given at the border. This visa can only be renewed by crossing back into Lesotho and returning to South Africa. Many migrants overstay in South Africa as they do not have money to renew their visa at the border post. Most of the migrants who overstay pay bribes to the informal migration facilitators who have networks with the immigration officers to correct the status of the migrants' passports and enable them to cross legally. However, some people who do not want to pay use the illegal route to cross the river to the Ficksburg taxi rank, which is the main crossing across the western border and where there is no surveillance. Bribing the police appears to be a normal practice for migrants to avoid arrest and to be released from the police station (Moletsane et al., 2017).

Avoiding the border posts and travelling with an expired visa or without a passport does not always work. Thabo was going to work on the farms and was arrested after crossing the Ficksburg Bridge. He was fined for overstaying his visa. He thought he escaped arrest for illegally crossing the border when he got to the taxi that would take him to Qwaqwa, but on the way, immigration control was checking passports and visas, and he was detained for three days. After being released, Thabo returned using the same route and travelled back to work because he could not stop working just because he did not have a passport while his employer was waiting for him. Thabo said, “The police are doing their job. We cannot stop them, but they also cannot stop us. I have to work. My employer is waiting for me, and my children are waiting for me to feed” (int., Thabo, 2022). This is a popular trend among migrants, and studies have covered this revolving door syndrome (Crush & Tevera, 2010).

Most of the migrants mentioned that the police are aware of their irregular migration but cannot detain everyone. Therefore, detention means an unlucky day but does not necessarily deter them from looking for jobs and overstaying in South Africa. They have developed different tactics to prevent detention. For example, one of the women who was once caught with an expired visa played a victim and told the police that she was a widow trying to provide for her children; and others try to negotiate with the police when they are caught by the patrols. One participant mentioned that “those are human beings. They understand our circumstances” (int., Rosa, 2022). The labour migrants are indeed aware of their manipulation of the migration border systems and when necessary, they use bribes (Griffins, 2018; Kelly et al., 2017). Most women mentioned that they were scared the first time they travelled, but with time and experience, they now regard the challenges they face at the border as part of their journey. The interviews showed that despite being arrested and intimidated by law enforcement, the participants displayed a low-risk perception of irregular migration.

For many of the migrants, the border gates have become easier to navigate with the use of smartphones and social media platforms. Most labour migrants have the contacts of the informal border-crossing facilitators, and they will inform them ahead of time when they are travelling home and returning for work. Working with informal border-crossing facilitator appeared to be a safety net for women to protect them from the risk of being scammed by men who only pretend to be facilitators at the border and who usually flock

around taxis shouting their services as the door opens. Some women mentioned being victims of border-crossing facilitators' extortion whereby the border facilitator changed the price along the way and asked for more money than initially agreed upon. Illegal crossing has led to people drowning, and most of the migrants only want to use border-crossing facilitators who work with the officials so they can cross using the bridge and not the river.

Most of the migrants are using informal border-crossing facilitators they met from different social media platforms, mostly Facebook. The informal migrants mentioned that they started using social media to get travel information during the COVID-19 lockdowns. During the lockdown travel information was mostly disseminated through Facebook and travel information has now become an important source of information for informal migrants in finding border-crossing facilitators. For example, one of the participants narrated her ability to secure border-crossing facilitators as follows:

“I got the numbers of my border facilitator from a Facebook post he made on many Lesotho pages. I read the comments, and I saw that he had helped many people cross, and the comments were positive, but I was not convinced because you know on Facebook someone can lie a lot. Fortunately, on the list of comments, I saw someone I knew, and I contacted her to verify and yes, she told me indeed she was helped by him, and from there I saved his contacts. I have been assisted by him three times when coming home and when going back to work. What I like most about him, is he knows many officials, so we cross on the bridge it's safe” (int, Mathabiso, 2022).

Based on the statement above it's clear that social media has transformed the nature of migration as it opened communication channels and information that enable the migrants to verify the identity of informal border-crossing facilitators. This thus protects the migrants especially women from the common risks of robbery and sexual harassment that most women are vulnerable to when using informal border routes (Matose et al., 2022). According to Dekker and Engbersen (2014), social media makes potential migrants 'street wise'.

Another aspect of protecting themselves against apprehension by law enforcement was through checking the Facebook pages for warning post on social media for patrols on the roads before travelling. Most participants highlighted that they usually share this information even at the taxi ranks before boarding from border ports to make sure that they travel securely and to avert risk of apprehension. According to one participant

‘When travelling I always make sure to check the posts on Facebook and see if there are police and also I always share with other travellers that my passport is not okay and I usually find someone who has similar problem and also communicate with drivers and let them know my situation because they are the ones who can call other taxi drivers to let them know if the road is clear.’

This shows that despite the vulnerabilities facing informal migrants, they have found ways to protect themselves in informal cross-border, hence protecting their livelihoods. Social media provides irregular migrants even men with information that enables them to schedule their travelling securely. Knowledge-sharing appears to be a mechanism that informal migrants use to navigate the border as the state bureaucratic institution that controls access to their informal livelihoods. As Hart (2010) mentioned people always use their agency to navigate dominant structures for their betterment.

Using smaller border posts

The participants also mentioned avoiding travelling through the big border posts on the Mokokare River mainly Ficksburg, Maseru and Caledon Spoort as they are mostly heavily secured by law enforcement. These were mostly migrant from the Free State and Natal whereby they mentioned they sometimes travelled through small border posts like the Mononts’a border post between Bothabotho and Qwaqwa and those working in Natal used the Sani pass border post to Mokhotlong. Both border gates had less traffic and were not

heavily guarded like others therefore migrant used this border to avoid the risk of having their passports suspended due to the border controls.

7.5 Navigating the Vulnerabilities in the Workplace

7.5.1 Domestic work

Chapter 6 identified the vulnerabilities of irregular migrants in the workplace because they are faced with exploitation, such as long working hours with low pay because they do not have work permits. The vulnerabilities of Basotho domestic workers have widely been acknowledged in the literature, and Griffin (2010) likened their situation to imprisonment marked by captivity, social isolation, and invincibility. She noted that domestic workers stay indoors at their employer's home in South Africa, and this spatial immobility impedes their social networking. According to Griffin (2010), the walls and gates of the employer's home often signify the bounds of Basotho domestic workers' social relations, and the social isolation denies them safety and access to alternative job opportunities.

The findings of this study largely contradicted to those of Griffin (2010), and the current study's findings showed that domestic workers depend on wide social networks that are facilitated by social media platforms. The domestic workers are virtually connected and use this connection to share information pertinent to their work. All of the domestic workers who participated in this study are socially connected with friends, family, and most importantly, other Basotho domestic workers. They have smartphones, and most mentioned that they are always connected to the Wi-Fi at their employer's home because their employers want to be able to contact them to give them orders during the day. They use WhatsApp chats, calls, voice messages, and videos to communicate with others about work. For example, 'Me Rosa, a 38-year-old domestic worker, is part of three WhatsApp groups related to her work. These groups are the group for her agent, a group for Basotho migrants in Pretoria where she is based, and a group for domestic workers from Mapholaneng.

The social networks that households have enabled them to share their experiences with people in the same situation as they are as most of the working conditions were stressful. These groups were providing support for the women to share their work-related on-floor challenges, especially for those who do not have experience. In these groups, they shared information on how to perform chores with ease without overworking themselves. One of the women mentioned:

I used to spend an hour cleaning the shower because I knew that's one thing my boss, insisted on shining every day. It was tiring. One day I asked other women in the group how were they cleaning the showers, and they told me to use hot water to wash the glass. It worked and made my work easier because I could do it in 15 minutes. (int., 'Me Marorisang, 2022)

The eased medium of communication enables women to share their challenges and to learn from each other. They learn to perform unfamiliar chores and learn tricks to cheat the heavy workload, such as only cleaning within reach during the week because their employers make unreasonable demands. Further, the migrants mentioned in these social media provide them with psychosocial support as they chat with friends, share their problems, and laugh about them. They pointed out that there is a lot of content made by domestic workers on TikTok, and they enjoy watching it because it makes them feel better when they realise other people have the same problems.

Social media enable migrants to have a wide social network that they use to assist each other in different ways. One of the most important ways they help each other is by taking items home or bringing items from home. For example, 'Me Mathabiso found someone in her group chat to deliver her chronic medication from home, saving her the need to return home for the refill after three months. Also, for most women the other challenge was that of the domestic workers one of the challenges, they faced was being far from the agents' place where they took month-end leave. They have since located other Basotho migrants who had established shacks near the places where they work. They use these platforms to find lodging places near their work. One woman explained:

Before I had to travel to Soweto to take a leave at the agency where I was recruited, which was far, but since being in many groups of different Basotho domestic workers, I found someone who has a shack in Pretoria Atteridgeville, where I usually go there Friday afternoon and return to my employer on Sunday evening, We have since become friends as since she has been in Pretoria for a long time, and she is the one who shows me places, like Marabastad where things are cheaper.

This also highlighted that Basotho women can build social networks in South Africa and that they form friendships with other migrant women, recreating new ways in an urban environment (Gay, 1980). The women are actively shaping their presence in the urban environment despite their irregularity.

7.5.2 Informal Traders in South Africa

Informal traders that participated are selling their handicrafts, mainly whips, in South African towns and along the highways leading to farms. This work requires them to interact with the public, and it makes them vulnerable to police inquiries about their immigration status in South Africa. These participants cannot hide from the police and their strategy to avoid arrest when confronted with law enforcement is to always have a passport in their possession, regardless of the fines on their passport. A passport is regarded as an important form of identity, and they mentioned that South African police are more interested in confirming their identity than in the duration of their stay in the country or whether the passport is still valid. One participant said the following:

Sometimes when police suspect you're a foreigner, I don't know how, maybe it's the way we dress, they might approach us and ask for IDs, and when you show them a passport, they open the first page, look at the passport and look at the picture to confirm that it's you, and give back the passport. (int., Poloko, 2022)

The participants also mentioned that being friendly and truthful about their citizenship is another way to protect themselves from deportation, even if their passports are fined. Another strategy is speaking with the police with respect without trying to act like a

South African because when the police confront migrants and find out they are not South Africans but are acting like South Africans, they get into more trouble for lying. They openly acknowledge that they are from Lesotho, which saves them lots of questions. Ntate Poloko mentioned that when he encounters police and they find out he is from Lesotho, they usually tease him with common phrases like *maja pere* (horse eaters), and just let them continue with their business. One of the men added that “they see that we are trying to make a living and we are not stealing from anyone” (int., Mosebi, 2022). This shows the embeddedness of informality in the interactions between law enforcement and informal traders because cultural similarities feature in the discussions.

They also said that if they are in the city, concealing their nationality is a survival strategy. Another strategy they use to avoid the attention of the police is to dress like South Africans, and not to carry blankets and sticks like typical Basotho men, which makes them more visible in South African towns. Tsela, who has been working in KwaZulu-Natal for a long time mentioned said, “When I speak isiZulu, no one would tell me apart”. Learning a language and adopting a local accent is one of the ways members of the households are able to stay in South Africa on an informal basis. In her study of the experiences of undocumented migrants in South Africa, Opfermann (2020) found that learning a South African language and accent is an important strategy undocumented migrants use to integrate into local communities.

7.5.3 Casual farm work

Most of the casual workers do not have passports and are mostly working in Pietermaritzburg. They hike to get to Pietermaritzburg. They mostly rely on friends and relatives who are based in KwaZulu-Natal for full-time work. Their jobs involve working on short-

term contracts on farms, and they mentioned that they rely on their social networks to locate emerging opportunities on different farms. One participant explained as follows:

Instead of lying idle in Natal where I must pay rent when nothing is promising, I return home and assist in agriculture or buy sheep and goats to sell while waiting for the call from my brothers who are in the farms for jobs. (int., Boroa, 2022)

The labour migrants are straddling the rural and urban divide by reducing living expenses when there are no jobs and working on their agriculture production, which is still an important source of livelihood for the households, especially when there are no jobs. The women in casual farm work mentioned that when they do not have jobs, they resort to brewing beer in the informal settlements where they live to be able to survive while looking for a new job. They also sell food, such as steamed bread, to the farm workers or do laundry for them. Most of the women mentioned that these informal activities were the ones mostly supporting their livelihoods as farm jobs usually hire South Africans and those who had work permits first.

The other strategy to find a job easily was to purchase fake work permits to present to employers, as most of the migrants mentioned that most employers are reluctant to hire people without permits for fear of landing in trouble for hiring illegal immigrants. These work permits cost M500 and M1 000. These migrants highlighted that in South Africa, most employers do not know what the work permit looks like, and as long as the biographical details on the permit match the ones on their passports, they are easily accepted and guaranteed better remuneration than when one does not have papers.

7.5.4 Artisanal mining

Artisanal mining in South Africa is a highly precarious livelihood because of the conflicts over mining dumps and police raids. Artisanal miners work in groups and networks that alert them to possible raids on the mining dumps. The artisanal miners also mentioned that they have connections with the police and get tip-offs about potential raids. They live together and share food and

tasks, such as processing gold from the ore they mined. In addition, in case of the death of a member, which is common, they have money-saving schemes to deal with the burial of their members, and when a member dies in South Africa, they assist the family with the cost of repatriation, burial and grace the family with their presence.

7.5.5 Reducing travelling and remitting money

The remittances are one of the main sources of livelihood for rural households in Lesotho. While the former formal migrant labourers used Teba to remit money the technological innovations have eased the migrant transfers from South Africa to Lesotho. Most of the households were reducing travelling back home and remitting money through Shoprite checkers and mobile money services. At Shoprite, migrants mentioned that some of the requirements are their identity and proof of residence in South Africa to remit and they mentioned that whenever they do not have the required documents, they ask their employers and friends to remit on their behalf. Almost all migrants highlighted that Shoprite charges were fair as amounts between M100 and M5 000 can be sent from Lesotho to South Africa for a cost of M20. However, in both villages they were farm from Mokhotlong town where Shoprite was located to withdraw money and the one of the participants mentioned how the process of receiving money as follows.

‘When I send money with ShopRite, I usually ask my relatives living near Shoprite in Lesotho to withdraw money and they would deposit money to my family through Mpesa to save transportation costs from Mokhotlong town to home as it costs almost M100.’

While Shoprite is the main way to remit money home, but some of the migrants send money through M-PESA outlets in the cities where they work. The Vodacom mobile money service is not operational in South Africa, but some Basotho in South Africa who are M-PESA agents operate from South Africa by collecting money from migrants and sending it to mobile phones in Lesotho at higher prices than what M-PESA charges. They mentioned that they charged 10%, and that it is easier because people at home are used to M-PESA, and it is deposited directly to their phone.

The technological innovations in terms of communication have opened different platforms for migrants and informal migrant to remit money despite being informal, they use their social networks to use the platforms that they are often at times ineligible because of being informal. This confirms the Hart et al (2010) assertion that human beings can cooperate to navigate the hurdles of the formal economy. While migrants are looked at as powerless individuals in the face of institutional policies, they have found ways to manoeuvre around the barriers

7.5.6 Demonstrating a strong work ethic

To maintain employment in a highly fluctuating environment, in a foreign country migrants work hard to impress their employers. These were mostly women who previously worked in Chinese-owned textile companies in Lesotho and mentioned they were accustomed to demanding work as mentioned they are used to working hard because the Chinese companies always pushed workers to work hard. It is known that Asian factory workers in Lesotho textiles have quite a negative attitude towards locals because they say that they are “lazy workers” and for “their unproductive culture” (Morris et al., 2011). One of the women working in the factories mentioned the following:

As a foreigner, I know I have to work hard to keep my job. I can’t compare myself to South Africans who are entitled to work (int., Lineo, 2022).

Working hard enables the migrants to create good networks with employers, who often refer them to other employers when they do not have work. It has been mentioned that Basotho immigrants are willing to work harder for less (Johnson, 2007). This is also true for the farm workers who mentioned that their employers prefer Basotho over locals because they work hard for less pay. A clear example is Thabiso, who started working on Free State Farms in 1999, and because of his hard work, he was promoted to work in food processing, where he is now working as a supervisor. Thabiso mentioned that factory jobs need someone who works hard and

that the company trusts him. He has won many awards within the company for his work ethic. Many other formal migrants who started working in South Africa informally attributed their access to jobs and retaining jobs to hard work.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the various ways rural households navigate the vulnerability confronting their livelihoods. In this chapter, it has been shown that despite the livelihood vulnerabilities and challenges households encounter they find alternative ways to survive. The chapter began with a discussion of how households tackle the decline in crop production, and it emerged that households are incorporating conservation agriculture to cultivate crops and that some households are adapting their agriculture to the climate variations; for example, when it is too dry, they refrain from cultivation to save the cattle to prevent livestock deaths. In animal husbandry households are splitting their herd to keep them in areas with better pastures and by introducing hybrid sheep.

The household members at home are pooling their financial resources to generate income, such as *shebeening*, creating financial clubs that generate money, and credit rotating clubs. Households have socially constructed ways of handling money that encourage households to stick to tight budgets and keep money safe by reducing expenditure. Earning income is a difficult issue for most rural households, and therefore, the money they earn are often used for things that make a visible and concrete impact on the household.

The chapter further discussed different ways members of households working elsewhere navigate the barriers of informally working in South Africa. While travelling to South Africa is a major challenge for irregular migrants, the findings showed that most migrants have a low-risk perception about irregularly migrating as they highlighted its normalcy and the porous border between Lesotho and South Africa. Recently, social media platforms have provided migrants with information about border-crossing facilitators, which makes it easier for them to find and verify the identity of border-crossing facilitators to safely cross the border. The social networks facilitated by social media enable domestic workers to share their work experiences and learn and have also led to physical connections that help the women manoeuvre the urban environment. Similarly, casual farmworkers rely on their social networks for emerging

opportunities that they share. To navigate their vulnerability with law enforcement, most men highlighted the importance of having a passport as proof of identity, other tactics include concealing their nationality to avoid the attention of the police or acknowledging being a Lesotho citizen. In artisanal mining, men worked in groups and share living expenses and also in case of death the group members support the family of the deceased with burial.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

8.1 Introduction

The thesis focused on how rural households construct livelihoods. A study into the livelihood experiences of rural households was necessary because there is a dearth of systematic research on rural households' livelihoods in the challenging mountainous terrain of Lesotho, particularly following the migrant shocks associated with changes in the South African labour market. More so, there is a dooms narrative associated with the end of the migrant labour system that relegates rural households' agency to the periphery. Engaging with current literature on livelihoods in the Lesotho Highlands region, it is widely accepted that environmental degradation is the most important variable that impacts rural livelihoods that must be addressed using technical measures. While the concerns are valid, they are recycling the outdated narrative of small rural farm households widely tailored for former migrant labour societies that had access to arable land, and overlook the environmental realities of the Highlands region that is characterised by land scarcity. Rural households have been undergoing significant changes, and this thesis acknowledges that one of the main alterations has been the decline of formal migrant labour opportunities. This collapse undermined livelihoods, leading to the return of men who failed to secure waged employment in the Lesotho urban areas. However, the households responded by diversifying their livelihood activities and by devising alternative ways of moving capital from urban areas to rural areas, which resulted in a wide range of activities, most of which are not rural based and even not local based. The scope for diversification locally is limited, and therefore, the rural households found alternative ways back into migrant labour, albeit in an irregular and informal way.

This led to the central objective of this thesis: To understand the livelihood impacts and dynamics of production and livelihood responses to changes in the socioeconomic and natural environment by rural households in the Highlands region of Mokhotlong

district, Lesotho. This investigation underscored the unique situation of former migrant labour societies, a subject that remains little understood and understudied in the relevant literature on climate change impact and vulnerability.

I argue that the main research question for this study has been ignored by scholarship interested in Lesotho rural households' livelihoods, particularly in the Highlands region. Therefore, the study attempted to answer the following main research question: To what extent have social and natural changes transformed livelihoods and production processes or reinforced the processes of deagrarianisation and depeasantisation already underway in highland societies in the Mokhotlong district? The study also attempted to answer the following specific questions:

1. How have changes in the socioeconomic and natural environment affected the production practices and livelihoods of rural households in the Highlands region of the Mokhotlong district?
2. What are the forms of livelihood and adaptation strategies that have emerged in response to these changes, and what factors guide households' livelihoods and adaptation decisions in the Highlands region of the Mokhotlong district?
3. What are the specific vulnerabilities associated with these new forms of livelihoods that rural households must confront?
4. How do rural households navigate the challenges and vulnerabilities confronting their livelihoods?

To answer these questions, I used two steps: Firstly, I reflected on and analysed the history of rural households' livelihoods since the settlement in the Highlands region. I placed rural livelihoods within a framework that presents livelihoods as a process guided by their capabilities, while also taking into consideration institutions that had informed the livelihood-making process over time. While rural households' livelihoods are influenced by dispositions over time, they are constantly evolving as people have interests, visions, motivations, and intentions. Secondly, I had to understand the livelihood practices and fields. In this chapter, I provide the conclusions I arrived at based on the answers to the above questions and guided by empirical findings from the field, while also making suggestions for future research.

The chapter is organised in three broad sections. The first section is the outline of the original contribution of this thesis to conceptual debates on rural households' livelihoods and identifies how the study adds new dimensions to our understanding of contemporary rural households' livelihoods in Lesotho. The second section provides a nuanced view of the empirical questions and debates about the lived experiences of communities that emerged after the decline of migrant labour in Lesotho. The chapter makes suggestions for further research and aims to pull certain themes together in a discussion and to discuss the policy implications of these findings.

8.2 Conceptual Issues

This study began with an analysis of the rural households' livelihood context. This was done to understand the livelihoods of rural households, and therefore, it was essential to analyse the social, economic, political, and environmental contexts in which they emerged. This context included the analysis of rural households' settlement in Mokhotlong, and the findings were that contrary to the popular narrative that the region is suitable for agricultural production, the climatic conditions of rural households are challenging for agricultural production, particularly the cold temperatures to which farmers have to adapt their crop cultivation. The analysis also focused specifically on livelihoods during the period of migrant labour and compared it to livelihoods after the decline of migrant labour in rural communities. It was revealed in Chapter 4 that the Lesotho Highlands have an unsuitable, fragile natural environment, and that this combined with the desire to create a livestock economy resulted in increased soil erosion that reduced the productivity of agricultural land. Therefore, the rural households had to rely on migrant labour, which resulted in social differentiation because households that have access to migrant labour are better off than those that do not have direct access to remittances. The rural households' participation in migrant labour for survival widely remains alive in the livelihoods of the rural households. This thesis argues that while the ethical argument is legitimate and that rural households in Lesotho are agricultural based, it is clear that it ignores the socially entrenched institutions that accompanied migrant labour when looking at limited industrial potential based on the loss of formal migrant labourers' jobs.

8.2.1 Rural households' livelihoods in Mokhotlong

The widely acknowledged impacts of the migrant labour decline on rural households has forced households to find alternative ways of earning a living. This has been the case with rural households in Mokhotlong as they learned that they have to live, especially when confronted with structural constraints and the change of foreign labour policy in South Africa. The evidence presented in Chapter 5 shows that the livelihoods of rural households have significantly changed from the linear pattern in which able-bodied men who are of age migrate to the mines to earn income to establish households and invest in animals, which the household would then depend on upon retirement. Rural households' livelihoods depend on farm livelihoods, non-farm livelihoods in rural areas, and mostly, non-rural livelihoods in the lowlands district of Lesotho and in South Africa. Livelihoods activities include herding, weeding, doing laundry, conservation works, Old Age Pension, orphaned and vulnerable children grants, mining, trading livestock, making whips, commercial farm work, domestic work in South Africa, informal trading, producing and selling cash crops, investing in *malaene*, formal work for teachers, driving, and artisanal mining.

Various factors influence the activities people engage in. Agricultural production is pursued to contribute to food security and to get crop stover to feed animals. Non-farm but rural livelihoods are mostly pursued by poor households whose mobility is constrained forcing them to look for work locally. Usually, these are mostly single women raising young children without solid kinship support and women too old.

8.2.1.1 *Farm-based livelihoods*

Agriculture is the main livelihood activity occupying most of the rural livelihoods, and includes crop cultivation and animal husbandry. Crop cultivation is one of the main activities the households engage in, despite Boehm's (2003) analysis that agriculture is no longer

yielding. The main crops include maize, beans, wheat, sorghum, pumpkins, lentils, and peas. While different crops are important for consumption, this study discovered that crop stover is also valued for feeding livestock during the lean season. The choice of crop cultivation depends on different factors; for instance, maize is normally cultivated for crop stover, beans for earning an income, and sorghum for brewing. Cultivating crops requires labour, draught power, and fields. In these rural communities, few well-off households possess all the inputs and can farm on their own. Many households rely on pooling resources by forming ploughing teams and sharecropping.

Animal husbandry

Livestock keeping is an important part of the rural household, and the animals they keep include cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys, and horses. These animals are kept for various purposes. Cattle are important for ploughing, sheep and goats provide wool and mohair, which are sold to earn income, and donkeys and horses are used for transport. Livestock has many sociocultural significances, and it has been widely acknowledged that in the Lesotho Highlands, men prefer to have many livestock for social status and resist commodification. However, recently Hoag (2017) showed that farmers in rural households are breeding sheep and goats to make money instead of hedging them for social status. The rural households sell their animals, especially sheep and goats, in Qwaqwa in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal because they get better prices there than at the local markets. The social and cultural purposes of livestock include settling lobola, cattle for slaughtering to perform rituals for the deceased, sheep for welcoming brides and newborns, and goats for cleansing.

Cash crop cultivation

Some of the rural households are producing cash crops, like potatoes, vegetables, tomatoes, and cabbages, to sell in the villages and Mapholaneng. It was found in this study that people who produce cash crops had learned their skills from working on commercial

farms in South Africa, and they have shared knowledge about seeds and irrigation with other people in the villages. Cash crops are preferred for their ability to withstand drought as they are irrigated. Cash crop production is also easier since it does not require a lot of inputs, in comparison to traditional crops like maize and beans, which need labour, implements, and draught animals, all of which mostly require social capital.

Renting out farm implements, labour, and fields

Ploughing requires different implements and most rural households do not have access to some of the inputs, which has led to the commodification of agricultural inputs by renting out farm implements, like span of oxen, to households that have fields but no livestock. It is also common to rent out fields if a household is unable to cultivate for income or in exchange for livestock. Furthermore, men are hired during the ploughing season and women are hired to do the weeding. Some of the households live by hiring out their boy children for income and to be paid with livestock, or they attach a boy to a family that practices agriculture to provide the other household with labour and to reduce the child's household burden for clothes and food as the other household is expected to buy the boy clothes and provide them with food.

8.2.1.2 *Non-farm rural sources of livelihoods*

Within the villages, there are many livelihoods and domestic activities, such as doing laundry for better-off and rural households, smearing the floor, gathering shrubs for sale, digging foundations, brewing beer for sale, informal trading, and traditional healing. Domestic activities are usually performed by poor households to earn an income or to reciprocate assistance from better-off and wealthy households. People also do conservation works in the Khubelu catchment meant to decrease land and wetland degradation to reverse the potential threat of Polihali Dam siltation. These formal labour opportunities include projects to decrease pasture and wetland degradation by manually removing of shrubs from designated pastures, and people take turns to do this work to enable as

many people as possible to access this income. Some of the households have members who are employed in the Letšeng Diamond Mine, located in the headwaters of the Khubelu River valley. Mining is a widely preferred job opportunity for better remuneration and working conditions, and because of its proximity to the rural households. Rural households are not confined in Mokhotlong and people also migrate to the lowlands to work in the textile industry in Maputsoe and Maseru, where most jobs are taken by women, while men work as security guards.

Livelihoods tend to differ according to wealth status, and those who are formally employed as teachers and those working at Letšeng Diamond Mine have secure livelihoods and also practise agriculture. Better-off households include households that have some members working and consistently earning an income, which can be invested in agricultural production. Livelihoods in the lowlands include working in textile factories and security guard jobs. However, these are not bounded categories as some households lose their source of income, are plunged back into poverty, and have to receive relief aid. This chapter showed that income is significant in the livelihoods of rural households because even agricultural production depends on it.

8.2.1.3 Non-agriculturally based livelihoods in South Africa

The livelihoods of rural people are highly diversified. Importantly, households have continued sending labour across the border to South Africa, albeit in a rather less formal manner. Employment opportunities, whether formal or informal, have also risen within Lesotho and in Mokhotlong district itself. Several reasons have facilitated women leaving the rural areas for work, which was uncommon for a long time. Some of the women in these areas left their husbands to take care of the family and agriculture to go and work as domestic workers. Men, mostly in Mahemeng, are earning a living by plaiting whips for sale in South Africa. The potential to earn from handicrafts was realised by an old man who had skills in plaiting, and he introduced many young men to plaiting and selling whips in South Africa. Some of the household members are working on commercial farms in KwaZulu-Natal in crop

production, but most young men work on livestock farms. It emerged from the study that Basotho men are preferred labour on livestock farms because of their ability to tend the animals. In these villages and in Mokhotlong in general, there has been a growing number of young men joining artisanal mining in South African mine dumps.

8.2.2 Rural households' livelihood challenges and vulnerabilities

One of the themes that emerged from the data was the vulnerable livelihoods pursued by rural households. The agriculturally based production, which had been a subordinate livelihood resource, cannot sustain the households because of the growing population and subsequent lack of arable land and the climate variations manifestations. Thus, agriculture cannot fill the gap left because of migrant shocks, and agriculture is in a vulnerable state because it lacks the income support it had leaned on in the past. Therefore, rural households' resort to non-farm livelihoods that are not limited to Mokhotlong and Lesotho but include an irregular migration to South Africa.

8.2.2.1 Agriculturally based livelihoods vulnerabilities

Rural households in Lesotho identify as farmers, and farming is their way of life despite the noticeable challenges facing their agricultural production. Beginning with crop yields, it was found that yields have significantly declined, and households cannot depend on their harvest for the whole year, which impacts their food security. There are several factors responsible for declined yields, and these are discussed in the following subsections.

Loss of arable land

Mokhotlong district in general is mountainous, and as a result, fields have been established on slopy terrain; however, repeated cultivation has exposed the soil to erosion by strong winds and surface runoff from flash floods. Most households do not have fields

as these have been reduced to gullies and cannot be cultivated like before, and other households still have fields, but they have been reduced to smaller patches with protruding bedrock.

Uncertain climate conditions

Most rural households mentioned the challenging impacts of the unpredictable weather patterns on their agricultural production, and they argued that they used to get rains earlier in the season when they would plough. However, recently they realised that fluctuating precipitation patterns prolonged droughts and flooding which resulted in sand intrusion in many fields along the Khubelu River, which used to have better soils than those in slopy areas. Another challenge is that the households' knowledge about when and what to plant does not apply anymore, and therefore, it is difficult for them to follow new trends and learn from previous seasons.

Lack of agricultural inputs

The main challenge facing rural households is the lack of labour, draught power, and agricultural implements. Few households can cultivate on their own, and most must join ploughing teams and pool resources. Even though they pool their resources, it is still not sufficient to cultivate all the fields during the ploughing season. In some cases, three households have only one span of six oxen that would not get weak before completing cultivation. The implements are also a challenge to agricultural production as some ploughing teams have one plough or harrow, which makes it difficult for households as they have to take turns to work their fields, which affects those who have to wait longest. The lack of implements make it difficult to take advantage of the few suitable days to work during uncertain weather patterns, especially the 2021/2022 ploughing season when there was a lot of rainfall that made working the land difficult. Ox-drawn cultivation also requires many people to work, increasing the costs of the overall agricultural production as households must provide food and organise work parties without increasing their returns. To cultivate, the households engage in a series of arrangements that leaves some fields uncultivated because of a lack of cooperative partners.

Challenges of animal husbandry

Mokhotlong is faced with degraded pastures that do not provide enough forage for livestock, and the participants argued that this has resulted in low-quality animals and animal products because the animals are not eating well. During fieldwork, I saw that the cattle cannot work until the end of the ploughing season because they are too weak. Households have to supplement livestock feeding to keep them alive. This is supported by the following comment from a participants:

Before, we did not have to support our animals like we do today with supplement feeding. There were grasses, and we had sufficient rains, not the current drought conditions we are facing. Once they give birth, you have to supplement their feeding or else they die or become ... They are weak, which will still end up not giving good wool and mohair (int, David, 2022).

The most challenging part of livestock rearing is the requirements of land-use management that means livestock must be at the cattle post during summer to enable the regrowth of pastures in the villages. This means households need two men to look after the livestock at the cattle post and the cattle in the village working the fields. Similarly, livestock must go to different pastures, requiring households to work together to tend to animals as most households also have a shortage of labour. This means that households must share the work of tending animals at local pastures as well as at the cattle post. However, it emerged from the interviews that a lot of livestock are stolen from the cattle post, and most farmers believed it is the herd boys selling the livestock to thieves.

Climatic factors also play a major role in animal husbandry, and the extremely cold temperatures in Mokhotlong compel farmers to move their livestock from the cattle post to the local pastures in winter. This exacerbates overgrazing of the degraded pastures, and means that during ploughing season there is not enough grass cover in the village pastures to support the ploughing cattle. The ploughing season is often characterised by long periods of drought, challenging the regrowth of grasses and leaving nothing for animals to forage. This led to some of the households losing more than 10 cattle during ploughing season because of the drought of 2019. Most farmers mentioned that animals cannot withstand the heat and hunger, which makes the animals very weak. Lack of forage

result in farmers having to supplement feeding with crop stover and by buying grass and grains. Furthermore, extreme cold also kills some animals. The challenges of raising livestock and reduced livestock holdings have in turn also affected the remuneration of herdsmen as farmers cannot afford the 12 ewes that had been the standard pay for many decades, and the payment at the time of the fieldwork was eight sheep.

Institutions at the household level exclude women from livelihood activities such as herding and working with animals. This leaves them vulnerable when their husbands pass on as they are unable to claim their property. Women should therefore be empowered with the skills to herd domestic animals, including sheep and goats, so they are not excluded from benefitting from them. Currently, women are empowered to take part in decision-making about animals but are not given practical skills.

Cash crops

The findings of this study showed that some of the households depend on seasonal cash crop cultivation with skills from their experience working on commercial farms. These farmers have tools like tanks and irrigation systems. However, crop cultivation also strongly depends on income, as some of the farmers' cash crop failed because the farmers could not buy pesticides and insecticides because they did not have an income. This is a reminder that Lesotho's agricultural production is strongly dependent on income. It was found that in years when there is high rainfall, the sales of vegetables are lower as households plant their own cabbages, which thrive without irrigation when there is enough rainfall. During fieldwork in 2022, some farmers planted potatoes that they were gifted, but they did not have a market for the potatoes, or suitable storage. This led to a lot of potatoes being spoiled by the cold weather in May and June.

8.2.2.2 *Non-agricultural livelihoods challenges*

The rural households' biggest challenge is low remuneration, which is only enough for food. Informal activities like brewing and trading are challenging because customers buy on credit, which is difficult to settle because of the social relations that binds the rural households and other forms of reciprocation that make it difficult for the traders to lay claims. For livelihood activities at home and opportunities like conservation work, people take turns working, and a household can only have a member working once a year. Letšeng Diamond Mine is the most preferred opportunity, but the mine does not recruit many people, which makes recruitment a difficult process that forces men and women to leave their households to queue for work for months, only to get temporary contracts. Social grants are an important factor in providing households with income, but most of the people who receive the Old Age Pension have many dependents, and the pension is not enough to support everyone. The orphaned and vulnerable children grants are very small and only disbursed quarterly, which means it is not enough to cater for the needs of a household, and in some cases, it is misused by caregivers who live elsewhere.

8.2.2.3 *Cross-border migration challenges*

Cross-border migration is one of the main livelihood strategies in Mokhotlong, but only a few people in the study have work permits that enabled them to work and travel to South Africa. The majority are irregular migrants. Migrating to South Africa irregularly makes them vulnerable to being arrested for illegal migration, and constrains their access to formal jobs, which puts them in the precarious position of getting temporary jobs and being exploited, which leads to inconsistent remittances for households. To travel for work, irregular migrants must pay bribes to cross the border, which takes from their income that would have been useful in the household, or they must endure a long journey walking on foot through the Drakensberg passes where there are no patrols.

The temporary jobs that most household members depend on affects the household's ability to remit money. Most participants working on farms mentioned that after harvesting, they must spend some time without a job, and therefore, have to rely on their savings, which

could have been remitted if they had guaranteed long-term income. Defaulted remittances mean that children are neglected for the whole year, and some people only support their children when they come home during December.

The most vulnerable livelihoods are illegal gold mining in South Africa. There has been growing interest in illegal mining, that have resulted in young boys being disinterested in education in Lesotho and being lured by the ability to make a lot of money and the wealth they see from people who work in the gold dumps. Artisanal mining is also popularly known as *batho ba likobo*, and the different groups are usually engaged in fights over the gold dumps, which has led to the loss of lives, leaving widowed households vulnerable. More importantly, the households live in constant fear of the risky environment their members work in.

8.3 Navigating Challenges and Vulnerabilities

In Chapter 7, it emerged that while rural households in Mokhotlong district detailed the challenges facing them, which are mostly associated with the vulnerability of their livelihoods, the issues of agency and negotiation are particularly significant in any understanding of livelihoods in the context of change. The agency is a tool that both households as units and household members as composite but significant parts of households display to overcome challenges. Thebe and Maombera (2019) highlighted the complex system of negotiations at the border as Zimbabwean migrant mothers seek to overcome changes in migration laws that are threatening their migration objectives. In the current study, many households straddle the rural-urban divide to mitigate the vulnerability associated with certain livelihoods. The importance of remittances and self-employment activities in the lives of rural households cannot be overstated as they cushion the vulnerability of agriculture. Many households in the community depend on informal migrant labour activities, which are also vulnerable. Many rural households' livelihoods are mostly based on irregular migration and even those who have work permits used to be irregular migrants. Listening to people talk showed that they feel that migrating to South Africa holds better opportunities than staying in Lesotho because the income is better and there are more options.

The study found that in rural areas, reciprocal relations help households survive because they assist one another through a system of resource pooling, which allows households that lack certain resources to survive. Poor households often provide labour to richer households, who reciprocate by providing them with food and giving them access to their resources, such as their animals. Borrowing is another way that rural households survive food insecurity and fulfil other basic needs, and most people highlighted that the main reason they remain where they are in kinship relations is because their livelihoods are based on helping each other (*thusano*). It was also found that although men often migrate to South Africa to informally trade animals, goods, and work, it is mostly temporarily, and they regularly return home to practice agriculture. Furthermore, agricultural production, especially rearing sheep and goats, is thought of as an investment, and sheep and goats are sold when people need money.

Households, especially those headed by de facto women, are diversifying their income through stokvels to which they contribute monthly, and where they can borrow money with interest and share the accumulated amount at the end of the year. This helps them achieve bigger goals, like buying furniture and paying school fees. Another important way that households navigate their challenging livelihoods is by handling the money they have with care by compromising on food and clothing to achieve bigger goals like shelter. Most women who receive remittances ensure they invest in concrete assets that their husbands can see. The men often said they prefer women who can use money sparingly. This resonates with findings from earlier studies of migrant labour societies that established that a good wife diligently invests a portion of her husband's remittances (Sharp & Spiegel, 1990). However, women who earn money do not trust their husband's money-saving abilities, and they send remittances to their husbands but keep money to buy things they need for their household.

Immigration rules and regulations cannot prevent their determination to migrate to South Africa to look for ways to live. While people understand the implications of irregular migration, and some have been detained, they are not deterred. They negotiate their way across the border, and once in South Africa, they use hard work and humility to retain their jobs. The migrants use social networks to navigate the challenges and to find job opportunities in South Africa. Social networks are also important for precarious livelihoods,

such as artisanal mining, because migrants share food and shelter and are alerted about raids through their social networks, which allows them to escape.

8.4 Conclusions

The Lesotho Highlands provide ample evidence of the centrality of the smallholder farming model in rural development in Southern Africa. From the livelihoods perspective, I argue that Lesotho is an excellent test case for assumptions that have long guided rural development policy planning in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular assumptions about rural areas, the role of agriculture in rural households' livelihoods, the effective use of land, rural households' livelihoods, the households' challenges and vulnerabilities, and ways to navigate the challenges. This has not been investigated in the specific cases of the former peripheries of the development of capitalism in Southern Africa. In Lesotho, these assumptions have led to scholars and development communities accepting that rural communities are relying on the productivity of the land they occupy. This has resulted in the general acceptance of the agricultural drive by the government, including models such as block farming agriculture.

In Lesotho, the political elite and development practitioners alike support promoting rural agri-based development. This discourse has been guided by three assumptions: Lesotho's rural-based livelihoods are supported by agricultural production, particularly animal husbandry; after the decline of migrant labour opportunities, rural households either fell back on agriculture as a main source of livelihood or plunged into a livelihood crisis; and the rehabilitation of land and pastures would technically yield benefits through protecting Lesotho's strategic water resource by curbing the looming threat of siltation of dams to be able to export water to South Africa and would eventually improve the livelihoods of the citizenry. The legitimacy of the decline of formal migrant labour opportunities for Basotho men in South Africa and the construction of the Polihali Dam in Mokhotlong have been recently used as evidence to support such assumptions. The rural Highlands are viewed as a strategic resource that will support the national economy

through dam construction for water for export and support rural households through the production of livestock for wool and mohair to provide an income for them.

While the thesis challenges these assumptions, the findings showed that crop cultivation and animal husbandry are still important resources in rural communities where farming is not a major livelihood activity for rural households. Based on the findings of the research, I argue that many rural households engage in agricultural activities despite climate uncertainty, poor soil, and degraded pastures. Animal husbandry is still a major practice as different animals are used for a range of cultural practices; however, the degraded pastures mean that rural households have to incorporate crop cultivation to feed animals. The findings showed that there is a symbiotic relationship between animal husbandry and crop cultivation. Even though some rural households may not have draught power or fields of their own, their financial capital is used to support agricultural practice.

In general, Lesotho has been subjected to many environmental programmes aimed at reducing soil erosion to improve pastures for livestock production to grow the rural economy. This began in the lowlands in the early 1900s and was adopted in the Highlands region where the production of livestock was seen as a threat to the transborder water resources. The rural development programs intensified with the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, which is aimed at harnessing water from the Lesotho Highlands through the construction of a network of dams to supply water to South Africa to earn royalties. This project made the Lesotho Highlands a strategic resource that is significant for both national development and for the rural households' livelihoods. However, these programs neglected the widely entrenched migrant labour system that was the main source of livelihood in the Highlands of Lesotho and had bearing on agricultural production. The rural development programs were blanket approaches tailored for former migrant labour societies that had arable land, and these programs were implemented despite the country being mountainous, which makes agricultural production a risky enterprise (see Thompson, 2004, about Zimbabwe).

The literature revealed that the peripheral countries of former settler colonies have faced a wide range of environmental challenges because of their confinement to fragile lands and their population growth (Murray, 1980; Weiner, 1989). These environmental challenges instigated the livelihood participation of migrant labour, and these migrants used their income to support agricultural production in rural communities. Given the context of Lesotho, it is surprising that agricultural production is still regarded as the main livelihood pathway for rural households amid the uncertain climatic conditions, with most people relying on remittance flows to sustain their livelihoods.

In Lesotho's case, the continued preference for livelihoods based on agriculture is even more difficult to understand as the Highlands region is experiencing increasingly frequent droughts and floods, forcing many rural households to survive on relief aid. The country has experienced several adverse weather conditions that killed cattle and destroyed fields through sedimentation and erosion. Although the government and international organisations are optimistic about the rural households and agricultural production, some have reservations about the long-term sustainability of rural households and even the large dam development in Lesotho Highlands because of how mountainous the country is and high levels of land degradation (Hoag, 2017). Lesotho does not have any significant industrialisation to absorb the growing unemployment, and therefore, rural households tend to use the few resources at their disposal to earn a living.

According to the country's land-use planning, Mokhotlong district is suitable for rearing livestock because the district is completely mountainous. As highlighted, by Ferguson (1985) even in the 1980s, livestock production and animals were bought through remittance income from wage labour. However, the studies in Mokhotlong failed to provide significant justification for the continued preference for agriculture-based models that began when Lesotho was a British Protectorate. These models are pursued intensively in Mokhotlong. Hoag (2018) mentioned that since its subordination to South Africa, Lesotho as a former periphery to the settler colony aimed to be the water reserve, following its long-term position as a labour reserve to the South African mines. The findings in this study were contrary to the popular narrative circulating in Lesotho, rural households had never been sustainably living on agriculture

in the Highlands region. The rural households left the lowlands looking for pastures, but since they have settled in the Highlands, climatic conditions and topography have widely affected their production and necessitated migration to either commercial farms or mines in South Africa.

Did the analysis of the households' livelihoods, their agency, and the geographical areas of livelihoods tell us anything about the human economy of Highlands households? The findings of the current study showed that the demise of the formal labour system did not contribute to destitution and powerlessness but that households used their agency to construct livelihoods, and although their livelihoods are vulnerable, they are supportive and constitute the new human economy. The findings of the current study suggested that the critical livelihood alternative remained labour migration, whether locally within the Mokhotlong district or in Lesotho or outside the country in South Africa. At the time the research was conducted, nearly every household had a member earning a living outside the agriculture sector, and if they were involved only in agriculture, they at least derived returns through income. Climate change and other natural events have increasingly made land-based livelihoods virtually unremitting. While some households are still actively involved in some form of natural resource-based livelihoods, they are also diversifying and getting support from other sectors.

With so much focus on the demise of the migrant labour system, it is easy to neglect the realities of Basotho livelihoods, and in particular, the fact that migration still exists in Lesotho, whether from the rural areas to the urban areas in Lesotho or to South Africa. Migration is undertaken by both men and women, and they use their income to support their households. For example, members of households migrate to seek livelihoods in Durban, Gauteng, the Free State, and even the Western Cape. Some migrate internally to Mokhotlong town, Maputsoe, and Maseru, and others are making a living from jobs at the Polihali Dam and self-employment activities at the local centre. These numerous and often supportive livelihood activities cannot be taken for granted, and tell a common story about the human economy of the households. Furthermore, these livelihood activities indicate the significance of livelihoods outside agriculture, which Thebe (2018a) shows is an embedded culture of migrant labour societies. Culture is dynamic but takes time to change. Culture develops from the inside and cannot be imposed by an external force. Commenting on the emergence of communal

tenure in Zimbabwe, O’Flaherty (1998) argued that it was “shaped by local interests to enable the coexistence of subsistence farming and migrant”. Perhaps, the new human economy could be said to have been shaped by local interests to maintain the migration and culture of remittances.

However, instead of appreciating the culture and the realities of livelihoods, these have been ignored, and the narrative of the demise of a migrant labour economy has been popularised. Perhaps the question must be asked whether the migrant labour economy is dead in Lesotho. This is a complex question, and the findings of the current study do not support it. The findings of this study showed that migration is a growing trend, and remittances, whether from self-employment, informal migration, or other activities, remain the basis for households’ sustenance. With the growing popularity of artisanal mining, the culture of migrant labour has been reborn and now manifests itself in different forms. My analysis showed that some households have members who are involved in artisanal mining in South Africa and that the members at home support what the miners are doing. Some of these households are rich and even employ some poor households.

The contribution of other sectors cannot be ignored. The domestic sector in South Africa, despite the vulnerability of the jobs, provides jobs that are keeping households afloat. Furthermore, men and women use the proceeds from jobs on commercial farms to support households. South African farmers and employers in Gauteng are said to favour Basotho workers (see Griffin, 2011; Ulicki & Crush, 2000, 2007). The border between South Africa and Lesotho is porous and allows Basotho to use their agency to negotiate the border. Maphosa (2023) conducted a study of women cross-border traders to Botswana and showed how the border can be negotiated to facilitate goods entering the country. This is also the case with the movement of Basotho residents into and out of South Africa.

These movements have become critical to livelihoods after the end of the formal labour system and ignoring them risks misrepresenting reality. Formal migrant labour opportunities may have decreased, but it did not prevent Basotho from earning a livelihood in South Africa. Scholarship in Lesotho has misjudged the significance of these migration practices for households, perhaps

because they are informal. Migration has never been as significant to livelihoods as it is now when agriculture has become unreliable. In this respect, livelihoods outside agriculture remain critical to households' survival. Migration for work may be informal, but it is a living reality for Basotho, and especially for these Highlands communities. It is also increasingly obvious that Lesotho remains a migrant labour society. The only difference is that the current system is informal, insecure, and vulnerable, but it remains equally significant as part of the human economy of the people.

8.5 Contributions of the Study

The contributions of this thesis speak to academics, policymakers, and society in general. The thesis offers a different perspective on the conceptualisation of rural households' livelihoods after the decline of formal migrant labour. It highlighted the problem of generalising livelihoods under the crisis of migrant labour decline and challenged the assumption that rural households returned to agriculture as their main livelihood source from the human economy lens. This takes me to Prof. Vasu Reddy' summation of Prof. Thebe's Professorial Inaugural Lecture presented 10 June 2021. In his summation, he thanked Prof. Thebe for presenting us with an insight of former migrant labour societies, which is also the main focus of this thesis. He noted that through his lecture, Prof. Thebe was 'obliging us of rethinking our underdeveloped assumptions about migrant labour societies'. His lecture reminded 'us that our reassessment needs to appreciate the multiple crisis we face, such as growing poverty, inequalities and large-scale unemployment and indeed, climate change". On its policy implications, he noted, "in addition, policies that imported outdated notions of how to promote development are not only damaging to these societies but are doomed to fail". He also pointed out that "Prof. Thebe has presented us with a truly decolonised reading of these societies and the colonial-inspired social engineering project aimed at transforming them". According to Prof. Reddy, the lecture "demonstrated yet again the growing importance of an African-oriented development studies stream in the faculty, providing an exciting and challenging research agenda that requires us to critically examine our approaches and assumptions based on the realities of our time and place". This thesis represents the rethinking that Prof. Reddy was referring to, and

a critical examination of old approaches and assumptions based on the realities. In literature terms, this study is novel in that, it is different from other studies. It is one of the few studies, which have looked at the context of rural households in Lesotho from the perspective of a migrant labour society, and thus, grounded the analysis on households' livelihoods on debates of former migrant labour societies and issues of transformation. In addition, it looked at livelihood activities and decisions by households as constituting the human economy of the region, thus, bringing the human economy perspective into the analysis.

In addition, the concepts of Bourdieu's theory of practice explain how lived experiences relative to the endowments shape the different livelihoods of rural households. This thesis provided empirical evidence that there are diverse livelihood portfolios that households combine to earn a living. It thus adds to the literature on livelihood adaptation debates on the need to acknowledge social changes in rural households. In addition, through the analysis of vulnerabilities and how rural households navigate them, the study adds to the literature on contemporary livelihood vulnerabilities and the ways households mitigate the vulnerabilities they face, which are important to understand the realities of rural households. Existing research on rural households' livelihoods focused on farming affected by ongoing land degradation and climate variation, but this study provides a new perspective that adds new livelihood experiences of rural people. The study also adds awareness of the often-overlooked livelihood experiences of rural households.

8.6 Policy Implications

8.6.1 Some broader policy implications

Rethink the question of transformation

The main question here is whether to reform or transform. Prof. Vusilizwe Thebe raised this question in his inaugural lecture that focused on former migrant labour economies and questions of transformation. Emphasising the specific issue of social reality, and

how it is important for policy to align and foster the realities in these societies, he questioned the effectiveness of any policy geared at transformation. The transformation of these areas has been a subject of debate ever since some of these countries that served as South Africa's labour reserve, such as Lesotho gained independence. In Zimbabwe, this area was captured in Bush and Cliffe's essay written just after independence, where they focused on agrarian transformation in Zimbabwe, and suggested that land reform should focus on providing land to the worker-peasantry. This would suggest an agrarian path to development and demonstrates some continuities with previous attempts to end labour migrancy. This was the policy direction taken in Lesotho by many development agencies, which Ferguson (1994) and Ferguson and Lohmann (1994) suggested to an intense critique. This analysis has shown that labour migration has become an embedded culture in these communities, which will be difficult to eliminate. Governments and development agencies should accept this reality, promote and nurture it, and develop policies that would facilitate labour migration as a livelihood pathway. The bilateral agreements between South Africa and Zimbabwe and South Africa and Lesotho, centred on special dispensation permits, are a way towards the right direction. This will not only prevent informal migration but also improve the security of livelihoods and eliminate vulnerability.

Strengthen gender equity

What this analysis has shown is that migration dynamics are changing, with women increasingly participating in labour migration. This is particularly significant, given the growing proportion of female-headed households. As more women migrate for work, there is a need for policies that protect women as workers and as partners. Countries are encouraged to enact laws and policies that empower women since the increased participation of women in labour markets has poverty reduction implications. Times have changed, and the place of women in the kitchen has passed. In a migrant labour society context, and the absence of husbands, the culture that began with the emergence of capitalism in the region must continue, and women should take the mantle and assume roles that were previously seen as male roles. Moreover, women can play the role better and support their households because they rarely disappear, which was the challenge with men in the previous system.

Changes in gender stereotypes

Societal attitudes need to change. In a study of women in Lesotho's textile industry, Talasi and Thebe (2023) made an interesting observation. They showed that the industry continues to be dominated by women, and where men are employed, they are seen as women and labelled as "basali bali femeng". This is an interesting observation that shows that society still holds certain gender stereotypes. Without changes to these, it will always be difficult for women to migrate for jobs, and for men to take up available opportunities in industries or sectors that are seen as less masculine. Also, women who leave their homes to work are often labelled by society and seen as loose or promiscuous. This discourages women from migrating and taking up opportunities, which are key to wealth accumulation and household welfare. The government have a major role to play, and the development of gender-sensitive policies, which will not only define women's places and role in society but also at the workplace, is key.

Move away from policies that promote agriculture

In some countries that were former settler colonies in the region, where migrant labour reserves were created, land reform is currently underway. A radical land reform process has taken place in Zimbabwe and land reform continues to dominate policy debates in South Africa and Namibia. The focus on land reform has implications for livelihoods. Women as falling within the vulnerable group category, are more likely going to be one of the target groups, and judging from literature on gender and land, they should be prioritised in land reform. Also, youth fall within this category of policy focus. The study has shown that it is indeed youth and women, who migrate for jobs, and in the case of Lesotho, employers prefer women (see Ulicki & Crush, 2007). However, land reform that focuses on these groups may be missing the point. Literature has shown that youth do not see agriculture as employment, and this is particularly true in the context of a migrant labour society (see Thebe & Shawa-Mangani, 2023). Focusing on developing agriculture and incorporating these groups into an agrarian path of development has serious implications. Women and youth may find themselves stuck on land, which has no livelihood value for them and their households. This has of course happened in Zimbabwe, where land

beneficiaries are stuck on land that is failing to yield. This is particularly so in a context of climate change, where precipitation has become a major issue in agricultural production. Government, therefore, should move away from policies centred on the land, to those centred on creating employment, where households' livelihoods could be secure.

8.6.2 Specific policy concerns to Lesotho

South Africa and Zimbabwe have a unique context different from Lesotho. Migrant labour reserves were created within the country and abroad, with the bulk of rural areas incorporated into the country's labour reserves, together with extraterritorial zones. To the contrary, Lesotho as a country was a migrant labour reserve for South Africa. As a result, labour migration was mainly across the border to South Africa, and the system proved to be a major drawcard for men, and according to Boehm (2003, p. 5), "brought substantial incomes to rural economies...". More importantly, "investments or improvements in agriculture gave increasingly little compared to the still abundant wage labour opportunities in South Africa." Thus, "rural households' prime attention was, and still is, geared towards jobs – not farming." "What further complicates the attitudes of rural dwellers towards farming in Lesotho is that farming is seen as a domestic and 'female' chore rather than a real profession." In policy terms, this entailed different policy provisions. Similarly, my study has raised interesting policy issues, with serious implications for livelihood, poverty reduction and household welfare.

Encourage labour migration through bi-lateral agreements with South Africa

My analysis has shown that rural households earn the bulk of their living through migrant labour and that while most migrants hold work permits, the bulk of migration is informal. Moreover, the livelihoods were often insecure and vulnerable as migrants were either exploited or lived in fear of arrest for irregular migration and working in the country illegally. The study also showed that Basotho labour was in high demand in South Africa, something corroborated by studies. The government of Lesotho can exploit this opportunity by developing a bilateral migration agreement and strengthening current labour agreements with South African commercial farmers.

While current arrangements mainly concern labour for wine plantations in the cape, these can be extended to farmers in the Free State and KwaZulu Natal.

Regulate the textile industry

The textile industry has emerged as a major employer in Lesotho, bridging the gap created following the demise of the migrant labour system and the loss of South African mining opportunities. Studies have also shown that the textile sector attracts mainly women workers. However, their salaries are very low, and their employment conditions are horrible. In the context of increased migration of women, regulations may be introduced to ensure that the industry becomes a major livelihood and employment hub, where employment can improve the welfare of households. Regulating the industry will also ensure that more women are absorbed in the sector, in the context of increased female-headed households. Improvement in employment conditions may also reduce irregular migration to South Africa, while also ensuring that households' livelihoods are more secure.

The construction of the Polihali Dam to benefit local communities through employment

Lesotho is in the process of implementing the LHWP II through the construction of the Polihali Dam. Currently, construction work for other infrastructural facilities including the roads and tunnel is currently under way. Lehema and Thebe (2024) have shown how the local communities have demonstrated against the failure of construction companies to employ locals. While there appears to be an agreement between the LHDA that local people would be prioritized, at least in positions that require little skills or expertise, these companies have apparently brought their own staff, which is to the detriment of local individuals. This is mainly due to a lack of enforcement of the agreement by the water authority. My study has shown that local people from the village need jobs and would take up employment in these companies if it is available. The LHDA should prioritize local people in unskilled labour in construction companies. As the LHWP II process gets underway, the LHDA must monitor contraction companies and set employment targets for

locals. This will ensure that the development of the dam not only has negative impacts on local communities through displacement and loss of a familiar environment but also impacts the livelihoods of local households positively through employment.

Intervention by the non-state sector to promote non-farm livelihoods

The non-farm sector, in the form of agencies and non-governmental organizations, plays a crucial role in cushioning livelihoods, poverty and food insecurity. In Lesotho, development agencies have a long history, and their activities have been discussed in literature. While these have promoted agriculture and attempted to develop an agrarian society, this amounted to social engineering, and their activities have been suggested for critique by scholars such as Ferguson (1985) and Ferguson and Lohmann (1994). For appropriate intervention, these organisations must focus on building livelihoods that are relevant and reflect the realities in these communities. For vulnerable communities, projects outside agriculture, and skills development to youth, women and unemployed men, would go a long way in ensuring that households move out of poverty and that people engage in projects that align with their aspirations.

Increase social welfare

Lesotho is among the few countries in the region, which have a social welfare system. My study has demonstrated the significance of social welfare grants to households, with a large majority said to live on these grants. However, as it is known, the grants are generally small and hardly enough to emancipate households and eradicate poverty. It has been shown elsewhere, particularly in South Africa, where social grants paid by governments are bigger, many households can survive through grants. Lesotho can increase these grants so that recipients' lives can improve.

8.7 Suggestions for Future Research

This study focused on understanding emerging livelihoods in the context of social, economic, and environmental changes. It is hoped that this thesis on livelihoods will stimulate other scholars to pursue research that aims to understand the contribution of different livelihood strategies to rural households. Weighing the extent and impact of each livelihood strategy in rural households was beyond the scope of the study. The findings of this study showed that most of the livelihood strategies are taken beyond Lesotho's borders, and it would be worthwhile investigating the livelihood dynamics at their different destinations in both urban areas and on farms where most households' members work as informal migrants. The study relied on the household members who are migrants describing their livelihoods in urban areas and farms. It is, therefore, necessary to conduct an ethnographic study at the destinations where migrants live and observe how they make a living to understand some aspects of livelihoods that migrants were unable to describe. Research in this regard could focus on observing migrants' living arrangements, daily activities, and social interactions in general.

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