

# The Impact of Development Interventions on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment Strategies and Outcomes in Eswatini: A Case of Dvokodvweni and Mafutseni Constituencies

K. A. Dlamini<sup>1,\*</sup>, M. V. Dlamini

<sup>1</sup>Dept. of Adult Education, University of Eswatini, Faculty of Education, Private Bag, Kwaluseni, Eswatini.

<sup>2</sup>Dept. of Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering, University of Eswatini, Faculty of Agriculture, Private Bag, Luyengo, Eswatini.

\*Corresponding Author: [khaboed@uniswa.sz](mailto:khaboed@uniswa.sz)

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**Abstract**— *The study investigated women led income generating projects in Mafutseni and Dvokodvweni both constituencies in the Kingdom of ESwatini. The aim was to gain some understanding on ways in which women transform their livelihoods taking into consideration household income, skills training, and access to finance and empowerment. The objectives of the study were to determine development intervention's influence on rural women's livelihoods, determining the extent to which these development interventions influence rural women's livelihoods and how education and training impact their livelihood strategies. The study established that there are an increasing number of women entrepreneurs who are becoming active players in sustainable development. Rural women in these constituencies were found to be playing an important role in economic development and poverty alleviation in their communities. Most income generating activities however, did not increase household's welfare for women who lack education and training, access to credit and management skills. It was concluded that there is a greater need to empower women for sustainable development if the country is to meet its vision 2022 developmental agenda.*

**Keywords**— *Rural women, economic development, intervention, empowerment, income generating projects and sustainable development.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Demographic studies estimate that 84% of Eswatini's poor population live in rural areas and of these 63% live below the poverty line (Central Statistics Office (CSO), 2007). Most of the rural population is characterized by high levels of food insecurity which need to be addressed. Social and economic indicators of household welfare show the growth of fundamental inequalities in access to incomes and assets in the country, (IFAD, 2012). The Eswatini's rural livelihoods are mostly driven largely by women as they do most of livelihood support activities: agricultural production and non- agricultural production such as petty trade, handicraft, and a host of other income generating

activities (IGAs), (FAO, 2009). These income-generating projects (IGPs) aim to empower women economically, since they form a majority of the people living in rural areas, while men migrate to urban areas or neighbouring countries to seek employment opportunities. The livelihood concept encompasses the many ways of living for rural women that meet their individual, household, and community needs (Chambers and Conway, 1992).

Empowerment is defined as the ability of a person to "take effective control on one's life in terms of being well informed and equipped with education, finance and relevant skills to take decision without any external influence" a quote from John Hoptipkins' cited by

Indabawa and Mpfu (2006). There are four basic elements of empowerment, which are: control of one's life, access to information and education and access to skills for decision making related to women situation. In Eswatini economic empowerment is perceived as women having access to finance and it is evident from many studies that women are performing poorly on entrepreneurship due to lack of finance.

Economic development has been defined as a multi-dimensional process that involves changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty (Todaro and Smith, 2011). Women participation in income generating activities aim to improve their livelihoods and also to bring economic independence in their households however, this is not the case due to many factors that hinders their projects such as climate change. Rural households have historically engaged in subsistence farming as the main source of livelihood; however women are not able to produce enough food and are receiving food aid due to climate change particularly in areas labelled as drought stricken. The situation reflects the changing dynamics of livelihoods for rural communities as the expectation is to have food production being the main activity. Such a scenario compounds the ability of rural households to have sustainable livelihoods as they have to compete with the urban counterparts for wages.

Education increases skill levels, which are required for some rural women on non-farm activities, or contribute to increased productivity. The Swaziland Household Income and Expenditure Report (2010) indicate that there was a strong relationship between education and poverty as contained in the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Action Plan (Swaziland Government, 2006). Extension and Community Development Officers employed by the Eswatini Government have made considerable interventions in the building of capabilities of rural women, to create awareness, improving their skills on on-farm and off-farm activities, developing leadership skills, linking with technologies, trade, financial institutions and local government that can empower them to take active part in socio-economic development at par with others. Such initiatives have led communities towards a literate and progressive society, directly benefiting every family and helped to bring rural women as key players and to empower them (IFAD, 2007).

Ellis (2000) maintained that by building assets, rural women will develop their capacity to cope with the challenges they encounter and to meet their needs on a sustained basis. Ellis (2000) observed that livelihood

strategies are at the centre of development while assets are the engine for action. Livelihood strategy refers to the ways and means with which actors put assets to use. Livelihood strategies can be made up of a range of on-farm and off-farm activities. Activities refer to the ways in which capabilities and assets are combined to achieve livelihood outcomes (DFID, 2000). Capabilities refer to a person's "ability to achieve a given functioning", while functioning are "valuable activities and states that make up people's well-being" (Alkire, 2005). Agricultural or on-farm activities that rural women engaged include; farming, vegetable and bee keeping, poultry. Non-agricultural or off-farm activities include; petty trade, sewing, gardening and the manufacture of peanut butter, floor polish and cloth softeners, Vaseline production, handicrafts, cooperatives, fruits and vegetables selling and hammer mill. The off-farm development activities, however, yield very low returns or income to provide basic needs and conditions which are inadequate for basic human rights than farm activities (DFID, 1999).

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2011) stated that women produce between 60 and 80 percent of food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world's producers and providers and their critical contribution to household food security is however, not recognized. FAO (2011) further revealed that while women are the mainstay of small-scale agriculture, farm labour for day-to-day family subsistence and engaging in off-farm activities, they have difficulties than men in gaining access to resources such as land, credit to increase productivity enhancing inputs and services. It has been argued that livelihood strategies employed by rural women could be enhanced by education and training for sustainable outcome (FAO, 2011). Evidence, however, still shows that rural women livelihood strategies are not sustainable as there is still high poverty rate, food insecurity and there is high reliance on food aid distribution in the country (Swazi VAC, 2012). For a livelihood to be considered sustainable, it must be resilient in the face of external shocks and stresses, if it is independent from external support, if it is able to maintain the long-term productivity of natural resources and if it does not undermine the livelihood options of others.

The paper aims to share results of a study on women economic empowerment conducted in two rural areas of the country. Implications of the study's results are presented in view of the key question raised by livelihood experts in the country: *How can Eswatini eradicate poverty and hunger, and jump-start its economic recovery?* It concludes with recommended actions that address the conference's objectives: lessons learnt and remaining gaps for future action.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study areas

The study areas are rural Dvokodweni and Mafutseni constituencies, selected because they have similar physical features and are shown in Figure 1. The two areas have high poverty figures, are drought prone and share similar

characteristic in terms of demographic, socio economics conditions and livelihoods assets. Dvokodweni had a total population of 29,803 with a population at risk (livelihood/Cash deficit at 6,485 (24%). Mafutseni had a total population of 17,045 and a risk factor of 7,403 (43%). Both areas had high levels of food insecurity in the Lubombo region (Swazi VAC, 2012).

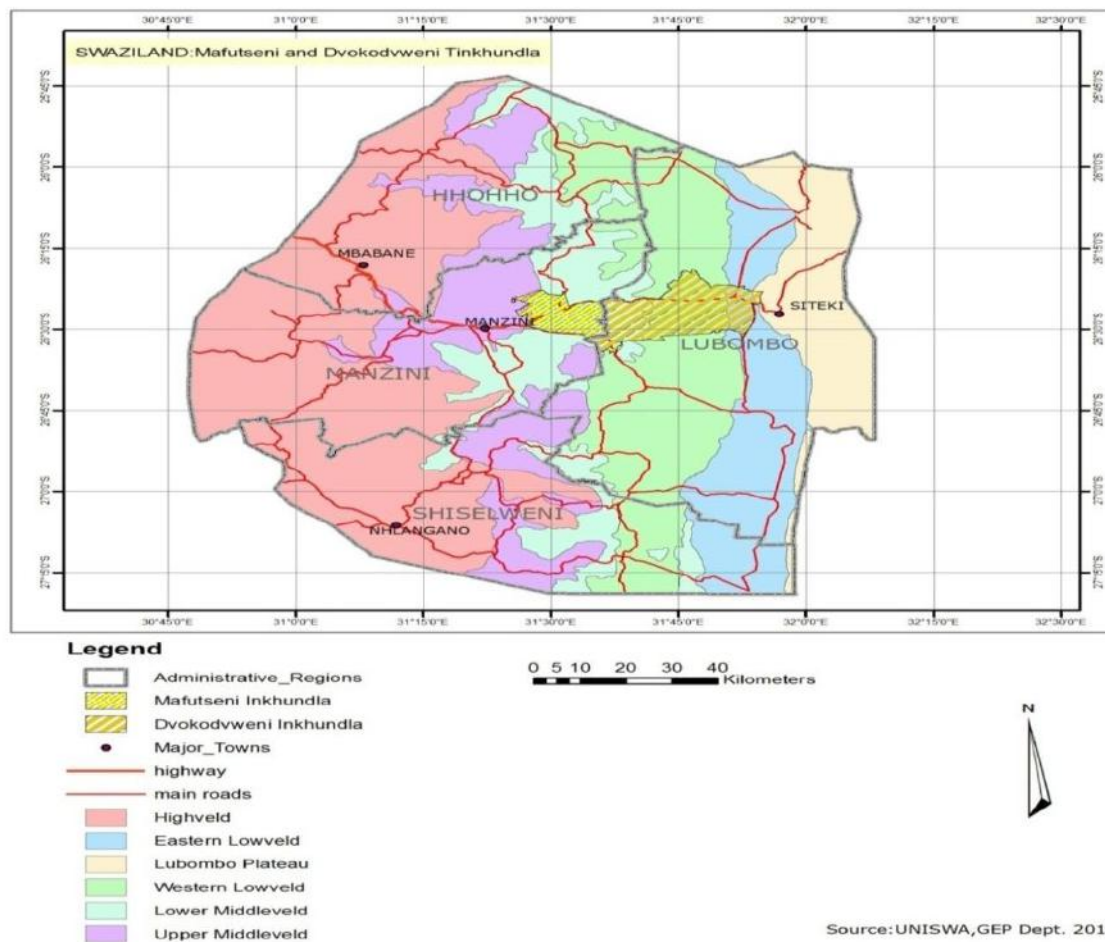


Fig. 1. The Map of Eswatini showing the location of Mafutseni and Dvokodweni

The target population was 273 women in development projects for both areas. Mafutseni had 192 members while Dvokodweni had 81 members. Dvokodweni had 10 women dominated projects while Mafutseni had 19 women dominated projects.

The women in both study areas are engaged in income generating projects, and tend to vary by the socio-economic status. According to the Swaziland Vulnerability Assessment Committee (Swazi VAC, 2012)

shown in figure 2, the most common sources of livelihood for households in rural areas is formal wage employment, which accounts for almost 20 percent, followed by food crop production and sales at 14 percent, with a tie in small businesses and remittance. Consequently, many households in the rural areas are highly dependent on remittances as their main source of livelihood at 13 percent, followed by pension at 11 percent and petty trade at 10 percent.

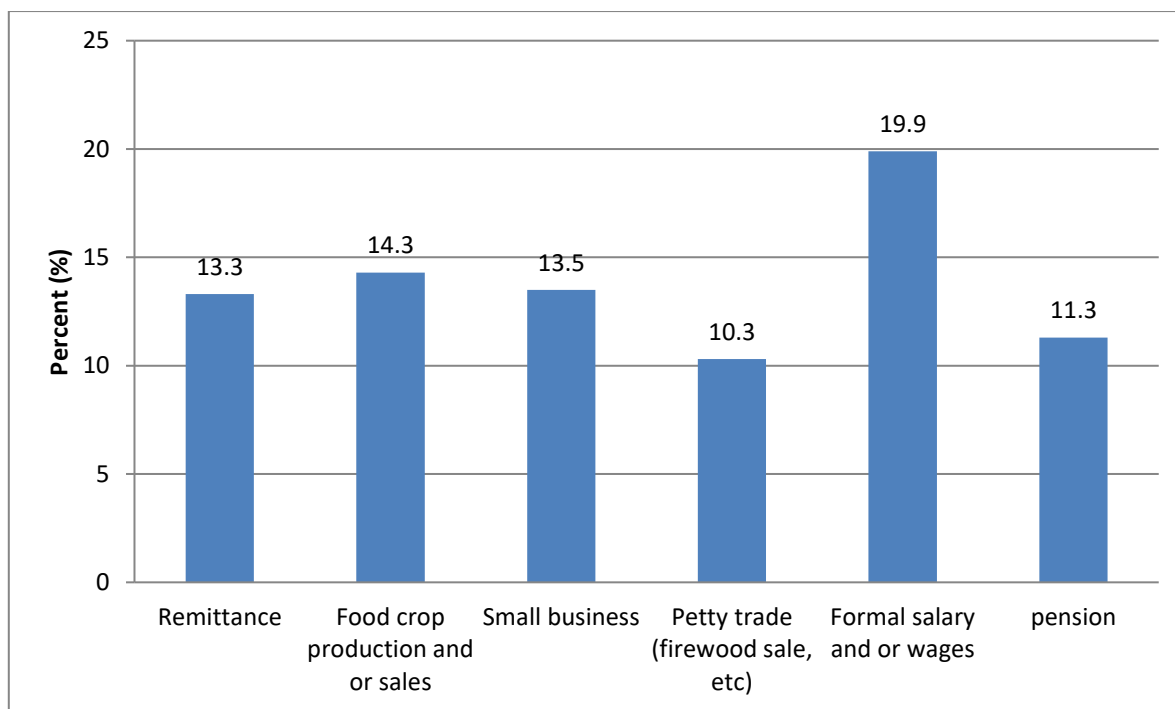


Fig. 2; Sources of Household Livelihood income (Swazi VAC, 2012)

The data on rural livelihoods in the country has shown that there is heavy reliance on wages (20%) for household, yet these wages tend to be low and women often rely indirectly on these, as the bulk of respondents receive remittance (13.3%). The situation reflects the changing dynamics of livelihoods for rural communities as the expectation is to have food production being the main activities. Such a scenario compounds the ability of rural households to have sustainable livelihoods as they have to compete with the urban counterparts for wages, (CSO, 2007).

According to DFID (2002) *vulnerability* in this context refers to things outside the women own control. It encompasses population trends and economic indicators, shocks such as *natural* disasters, conflict and sudden economic changes, and seasonality in resource availability and employment opportunities.

Assets are the building block of any developmental activities to take place. The strategies that had been chosen by rural women on the availability of assets influence the choice of livelihood strategies. Development interventions have an influence on livelihood strategies which also influence the livelihood outcomes and vice versa.

#### Data collection Methods

The study employed a survey approach to collect primary data using both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

Methods used in collecting data were face-to-face interviews, administered using interviews (Questionnaire) that were used to collect data about the respondents' socio-economic characteristics as well as income generating activities, and focus group discussions. The sample size was 162 women and two extension officers. The major independent variables were the rural women livelihood assets and development interventions. Dependent variables were the livelihood strategies and outcomes.

#### Measurement of the dependent variables

The livelihood strategies are dependent on how the rural women use the assets and development intervention on their income generating project to come out with outcome.

The sustainable livelihood outcome from DFID states that the outcome must have increased income and well-being. The poverty index was used to determine the well-being of rural women before and after they embarked on the projects to see if the livelihood strategies had improved their standard of living. The poverty index was based on the rural women's own experiences on the extent to which the strategies were able to secure the basic necessities of life such as food, clean water, medical treatment, cooking fuel and cash income. The women responses were coded using Table and computerized to get an aggregate single index.

Table 1. Lived poverty index values

Conditions	Never	Just once or twice	Several times	Many times	always
X	1	2	3	4	5

### Measurement of the independent variables

The independent variables of this study which influenced the respondents' livelihood strategies were assets and development intervention received which determined their livelihood outcome. The data collected in this research were quantitatively and qualitatively analysed.

#### Quantitative data

The collected quantitative measured data variables in the questionnaire such as household income sources, type of assets, demographic characteristics, training and other variable like poverty index, standard house hold demographic survey (HHDS) were analysed. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Other statistical tools such as frequency tables, pie chart, cross tabulations table were used to aid in the interpretation of the data.

#### Qualitative data

Qualitative data obtained through the in-depth interviews for extension officers and focus group discussions of project members from different categories were also analysed, through narratives where themes emerged and used for discussion. For purposes of analysis, the interpretative analysis method was used. This is a method of analysing qualitative data where recorded data from focus groups was interpreted and transcribed verbatim and put into themes to solicit information.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study focused on two main development interventions which were funding and training given to the women on their income generation projects. The results show that different stakeholders financed women's projects. Findings revealed that there is no profit made from projects and also little savings was made for personal use. On the other hand training was received such as business skills. It then looked at livelihood outcome which measured income by profit made in enterprises. The well-being outcome was measured by the lived poverty index that indicated higher index scores which means higher the level of lived poverty.

#### Sources of funding for the women projects

The results on the sources of funding for the women projects in both areas are shown in table 1. The results show that the women projects from both regions, Mafutseni and Dvokodvweni were funded. In both regions / areas, the Government was the major contributor followed by NGO's and Stakeholders. At Mafutseni the Government contributed almost 50% of the funds and at Dvokodvweni 41%. More than a quarter of women at Dvokodvweni (29.6%) indicated that NGOs funded their projects compared to (18.5%) at Mafutseni. Different stakeholders were also found to play a crucial role in financing rural women projects. There were (18.5%) women at both Mafutseni than Dvokodvweni who were funded by stakeholders such as ADRA and FAO. Very few (11.1%) at Dvokodvweni and 13.6% at Mafutseni were funded by other sources such as MP's donations.

Table 1. Sources of funding for the rural women projects

Sources of funding	Dvokodvweni		Mafutseni	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
NGO	24	29.6	15	18.5
Government	33	40.7	40	49.4
Stakeholders	15	18.5	15	18.5
Other	9	11.1	11	13.6
Total	81	100.0	81	100.0

### Development intervention – Training

An analysis of the skills acquired by the community members in both projects is summarised in table 2. A majority (53.1%) of women from Mafutseni stated that they had received training on financial skills, while Dvokodvweni had a slightly lower figure (40.7%). The women in both areas indicated that they had received the least training in terms of communication. At Mafutseni

there were 4.9% compared to 2.5% at Dvokodvweni. This is a deficient as communication is key in the success of any project. Fundraising skills were also deficient at Mafutseni (6.2%) compared to Dvokodvweni with 30.9%. Mafutseni had more respondents who had received other skills training (35.8%) compared to Dvokodvweni (25.9%).

*Table 2. Skills acquired by project members on training at Dvokodvweni and Mafutseni*

Skills learnt	Dvokodvweni		Mafutseni	
	frequency	%	frequency	%
Financial skills	33	40.7	43	53.1
Communication skills	2	2.5	4	4.9
Fundraising skills	25	30.9	5	6.2
Other Skills training	21	25.9	29	35.8
Total	78	100	81	100

### Profit received per month from project

The profit received from each project per month is shown in table 3. The results showed that 13.8% of the women projects from Mafutseni made a profit above E2,000 per month compared to only 4.9% at Dvokodvweni. Most of the projects (35.8%) at

Dvokodvweni and 28.8% at Mafutseni made profits ranging between E200 to E 500 per month. A majority of the Dvokodvweni projects (44.4) made the lowest profit per month of less than E200 (US\$11.40). Since profit is shared amongst members of each group, this means that these projects are as good as none existent.

*Table 3. Profit received from each project per month (E).*

profit	Dvokodvweni		Mafutseni	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
< E200	36	44.4	5	6.3
E201-E500	29	35.8	23	28.8
E501-E1,000	5	6.2	19	23.8
E1,001-E2,000	7	8.6	22	27.5
E2,000 +	4	4.9	11	13.8
Total	81	100.0	80	100.0

Note: 1 US\$ = E17.50

### Application of skills on the projects

A majority (75.3%) of the women interviewed at Mafutseni (table 1) agreed that they were able to use (applied) the acquired skills on day to day running of their

projects compared to 64.9% at Dvokodvweni. There were more women who had not applied the skills at Dvokodvweni (35.1%) than at Mafutseni (24.7%).

Table 4. Application of acquired skills in the running of the project by members

Training Received	Dvokodvweni		Mafutseni	
	frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	50	64.9	61	75.3
No	27	35.1	20	24.7
total	77	100	81	100

The results indicated that the majority of the women in these projects did received training on their various project. However, there was no explanation as to why some of them were they not able to utilize the acquired skills on the projects.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

It was concluded that development interventions of finance/funding and business skills training were given to both rural women income generating projects. These interventions were used by different stakeholders including the government as strategies to create- self – employment, alleviate poverty and improve food security for rural the women households. However there were negative impacts on the women livelihood strategies despite these interventions. Funding and training are known to be key drivers in promoting economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs.

A majority of the women projects were not able to make profit and therefore not sustainable. Furthermore, no savings were made by the women in the projects which made it impossible for them to get the extra income to feed their household. This was revealed by the lived poverty index scores that had similar findings for both constituencies. The lived poverty index measured the level of poverty before and after the women embarked on income generating projects. The results indicated high index scores which showed that they had not improved their standard of living. The women income generating activities are therefore not sustainable. The sustainable livelihood outcome states that in order for projects to be sustainable there must more income and increased well-being.

Training and skills development is still lacking among women. Women need training on financial management skills which are very low. An observation from the researcher is that rural women do not separate business and social activities.

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