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# Post-Development Theory and Food Security: A Case Study in Swaziland

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**Post-Development Theory and Food Security:  
A Case Study in Swaziland**

POL 495

A Capstone Research Paper

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## **Introduction:**

Post-development theory argues that development theory and the practice of Post-World War II development projects have failed because the entire concept of development is a Western, non-universal measure of progress. Indeed, examples of failed development interventions abound from around the world. While development experts argue amongst themselves about how best to deliver development interventions in order to minimize the failures of development, post-development theorists believe that no amount of tweaking will make the development agenda a success. They argue that the problem with development is not about how it is implemented, but rather that development itself is a flawed concept which should be eliminated from the discourse on human progress.

The term development encompasses a broad range of ideas, services, and goals. One such development goal is food security. From a post-development perspective, problems of food security are not properly addressed by the current development discourse and practice. Post-development theorists have argued that studies of famine and poverty are incorrectly depoliticized by development organizations. They argue instead that food security is inherently political and that there is a distinct disarticulation between agencies delivering food aid and food security services and the politics of food in recipient countries. A post-development analysis of food security interventions can identify problems with the development agenda as well as offer alternatives to development as potential solutions to food insecurity. This paper will use a post-development perspective to answer the question; do development practices adequately address issues of food security in Swaziland?

After the theoretical framework and the case-study country background are established, a post-development analysis of food security in Swaziland will demonstrate the usefulness of post-development theory in critiquing the development agenda in Swaziland. Furthermore, it will demonstrate that the premise on which many food security and food aid interventions in Swaziland are based, is in fact constructed and incorrectly de-politicized by development organizations. Post-development theory is successful as a critical theory at exposing the flaws with the mainstream development discourse, but often fails to offer many compelling alternative solutions or 'alternatives to development.' This caused Pieterse Nederveen (2000)

to write that the post-development idea of 'alternatives to development' is "a misnomer because no such alternatives are offered" (Nederveen 2000). This paper will seek to address that gap by offering several 'alternatives to development' solutions to food security problems in the case-study country of Swaziland.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Post-development theory developed in the 1980s as a critique of development theory and practices which post-development theorists viewed as extensions of Western "first world" hegemonic ideology. The first major post-development critique is that the entire concept of development is a constructed reality in that "development" is a Western standard whereby the West is labeled as "developed" and the rest of the world is perceived as "underdeveloped" (Ziai 2007). Development is defined by post-development theorists as practices and ideas beginning post-World War II attempting to change the "third world" to better match the so-called developed countries (Kippler 2010). It is important to note here that when post-development theorists refer to the word development, they are referring to a very narrow definition of development referring to the post-WWII attempts to engineer particular changes in the so-called 'Third World.' Post-development theorists do not call for a return to earlier ways of life or eschew the desirability of change for those who suffer in poverty. Rather, development is "understood as the invention of aid structures and practices that would lead to rising living standards, manifested in an increase in income, which in turn would render better health and nutrition" (Ahorro 2013). This asserts Western societies as the ideal norm (Parfitt 2002) and measures the comparative success of all other countries against this norm. Post-development theorists argue that these values of progress/development are not universal and are actually "modeled upon the European experience of progress" (Kippler 2010).

According to post-development theory, the construct of development first arose in the post-WWII era to meet the hopes of new independence leaders, former colonial masters, and the recently liberated masses (Rahnema 1997). The desire for development, while attractive to all categories of actors, soon took on various meanings for the different actors. For some, economic development was important, whereas others focused on social and cultural issues to be improved upon. Development became an all-encompassing term and policy-driver to define

progress in areas of health, wealth, education, and infrastructure. Quickly, development ideology was called into question for its managerial schisms, with some development theorists arguing for capitalist interventions and others arguing for Marxist interventions. Still others argued for top-down and some argued for grassroots development (Rahnema 1997). For post-development theorists, however, the problem with development is not how it is delivered, but rather that the very concept of development itself is flawed (McGregor 2007). Thus, attempts to reform post-WWII development projects to eliminate their negative effects are seen as irrelevant because the development solution for the supposed problems of the so-called 'target population' was an incorrect assumption in the first place.

The second major argument of post-development theorists is that the traditional concept of development is authoritarian in nature and technocratic in execution (Kippler 2010). Whoever decides what development is and how to achieve it is typically in a position of power. Development "relies on universal standards for classifying and evaluating societies...and in fact subordinates countless different perceptions and values of other people" (Ziai 2007). For instance, if the measure of development used was literacy and each country was ranked according to literacy rates, this potentially undermines and de-values the importance of oral tradition in some societies which may thus be considered less "developed" than societies with higher literacy rates.

There are two waves of post-development theory. Some authors refer to them as the first and second waves, whereas other authors refer to them as the anti-development school and the skeptical post-development school (Kippler 2010). Early post-development theorists focused on rejecting development for its reductionism, universalism, and ethnocentricity (Ahorro 2013). These authors, writing mostly in the late 1980s-1990s, have often been critiqued for their rejection of development without qualifying why development is bad. For instance, child mortality rates have dropped and literacy rates have increased due to the development agenda (Ahorro 2013) and post-development theorists failed to critique why such universally accepted improvements in quality of life were negatively impacting developing countries. These anti-development theorists have been heftily critiqued for romanticizing traditional subsistence culture and portraying culture as static (Ziai 2007). This paper will not

focus on this anti-development critique, but rather on the skeptical post-development critiques which arose later.

The second wave of post-development theory is the focus of this paper. This school of skeptical post-development theorists focuses more on critiquing the “de-politicizing effects” of the post-WWII development agenda (Kippler 2010). Skeptical post-development scholars argue that the development discourse has incorrectly removed the topic of poverty from the political sphere and placed it in a scientific, apolitical one;

“‘Development’ has contributed to the understanding of social life as technical issue, as a matter of rational decisions and management to be entrusted to those whose specialized knowledge makes them qualified- the development professionals in international organizations, national governments and specific development programs.” (Kippler 2010).

By removing development issues from the political sphere and putting them into the hands of the technocrat or development expert, one is ignoring the root cause of inequalities and is instead treating merely a symptom of an inequitable power distribution. The modern state as the main agent of development (due to its concern with managing social change and economic growth) is thus subject to much critique from the skeptical post-development theorists.

Furthermore, development projects are seen as the implementation of a modernization ideology which presupposes that western structures and societies are the only acceptable model for progress. Post-development theorists view development projects as detrimental in the countries where they are implemented and authoritarian in form “as directed by intrusive state mechanisms and international development agencies” (Escobar 1995). Escobar (1995) deconstructs the development discourse by showing how Western countries established a norm (standard of development) and norm deviance (underdevelopment) through institutionalizing development in international organizations. These organizations include the IMF, the World Bank, the UN, national planning agencies, NGOs, and local development agencies. These institutions:

“...all together constitute an apparatus that organizes the production of knowledge and the deployment of forms of power. This “development apparatus” overlaps with the process of professionalization of development...” (Kippler 2010).

Post-development critics argue that the institutionalization of the development ideology and discourse inevitably led to a professionalization of practitioners of development. This took the power to change one’s community out of the hands of the people and into the hands of the technical “development expert” who had the apparent development expertise to decide what to change and how to enact this change. Post-development critics then point to the failure of such technocrats to reach their intended goals and demonstrate that, in some cases, development projects have actually been detrimental to their intended recipients. For instance, Ferguson (1990) found that almost all development projects in Lesotho failed. Due to the massive numbers of such failed projects implemented by Western experts in the name of development, Sachs (1992) calls development a “ruin in the intellectual landscape” (Sachs 1992).

One region of the world which post-development scholars often casually highlight as a failure of development is Africa. Because an African country is the case-study used in this paper, it is important to examine the post-development literature on Africa. However, very little has been written by post-development scholars on various African societies’ experience with the development discourse and implementation. Matthews (2004) argues that post-development theory is relevant to Africa and that more attention to post-development theories should be paid by African scholars. Furthermore, post-development theory’s roots in critical theory also decry the painting of “Africa” as a homogenous entity (Matthews 2004). Post-development critiques of development in Africa therefore are productive on an individual case-study basis. Ferguson’s (1990) critique of the development agenda in Lesotho shows first that the World Bank constructed a myth of subsistence living (when in actuality 70% of rural homesteads had wage-earners in South Africa) and secondly, that attempts to commercialize livestock there in the name of development failed due to an incompatibility with cultural values



placed on cattle ownership and local power relations (Ferguson 1990). Post-development theorists are highly critical of the development agenda precisely in such situations when local cultural values are undermined or eliminated in the name of the Western values of development. Development theorist Eutounga-Manguelle (2000) examines the failure of development in Africa and blames African cultural values for the failure, citing their resistance to change. Post-development theorists argue that instead of Eutounga-Manguelle's insistence that African values be eliminated so as to fit the development agenda, the development agenda itself is the problem which must be eliminated in African societies (Matthews 2004).

The call for an "end to development" does not mean we should stop searching for new possibilities, but rather that a transformation must occur at the populace level that enhances "inborn and cultural capacities" according to culturally defined aspirations (Rahnema 1997). Post-development theorists call for an end to development so that we can "leave it behind in pursuit of radically alternative visions of social life" (Kippler 2010). Post-development theorists argue instead for "alternatives to development," such as grassroots movements (Rahnema 1997). Because the present development ideology is viewed as authoritarian and ethnocentric, a new definition for progress could only be reached through a democratic consensus by the people concerned (Kippler 2010). Key to this prescription is the idea that people must feel a sense of ownership, power, and importance in any community undertaking or the project is doomed to failure. Thus, the goal of post-development theorists is a transfer of power to define a society's goals and problems from development experts into the hands of the people (Ziai 2004). Post-development theorists point towards grassroots movements and the so-called New Social Movements as successful and democratic steps towards progress. Isolated examples of societies rejecting the development agenda entirely have also been examined by post-development theorists. N'Dione (1994) points out that the exchange of goods promoted by the development agenda failed in a Senegalese community because the Senegalese placed value on the giving of goods rather than on the free-market exchange promoted by development. By insisting on maintaining their own values of goods, the community was able to successfully reject the demands placed on them by development (N'Dione 1994).

As development became a technical and scientific profession, all aspects of development were subsequently de-politicized, including issues of poverty, famine, and food security. This de-politicization into the technical field can be seen in the weak language used by development organizations when faced with famine in recipient countries. Even In the case of Zimbabwe, food aid organizations are not overly critical of policy as the root cause of famine, and instead vaguely blame “corruption” and “weak institutions” for food insecurity (Smith 2003).

Post-development theorists argue that the current practice of development, particularly in regards to food aid and food security, is incorrectly depoliticized by development practitioners. Smith (2003) argues:

“...one of the reasons development often fails to meet the challenges of problems like food security is the fact that politics and political concerns are systematically removed from the issue...It is palpably false to ignore the politics of food security, both in terms of the causes and the solutions to famine...” (Smith 2003).

And:

“(Food security) is ultimately about one’s position in society...Food security is the ultimate manifestation of who wields power, and who does not” (Smith 2003).

To a post-development theorist, poverty, famine and food security are issues of power in southern Africa. Access to productive assets, land, labor, water, and capital is controlled by complex systems of tribal and local law, state intervention, and development institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Smith 2003). At times, these systems may be at odds with each other, such as land allocation under tribal versus local law or obligations of the state versus obligations of development institutions. Due to these implicit and explicit contradictions, famine can be seen as the result of an inequitable political process. Post-development theorists call for an end to the de-politicization of food security and food aid programs, and instead argue that they are and should be issues that are dealt with in a democratic

political arena. Post-development theorists are also concerned that this de-politicization of food security has muddled the clarity of which institutions have a duty to ensure food security:

“In many ways, food security and the risk of famine epitomize the disarticulation between the State in a less developed country and the development provider, such as the United Nations. If famine is about power and politics broadly understood, ultimately famine itself can become a backdrop to arguments over responsibility and power.” (Smith 2003).

With complex national and international networks of food aid and food security development programs in place, the duty to prevent famine and hunger rests on everyone and no one. “The result is often a fragmented, inefficient and inadequate capacity to deal with food security issues when they arise...Within this context, the ability of southern African states to deal with food insecurity is severely compromised and inherently politicized” (Smith 2003).

### **Methodology**

This capstone paper will analyze food security issues from a post-development perspective through the case study of the Kingdom of Swaziland. Swaziland offers itself as a compelling country to conduct a post-development case study of food security in for several reasons. First, Swaziland is almost entirely ethnically, linguistically, and culturally homogenous. Post-development theory insists that differences in cultural values affect the society’s relationship to development in different ways, and so Swaziland presents a rare opportunity to study a single country with unified cultural values in relation to development. Second, Swaziland has suffered from chronic food insecurity for decades according to development experts, and has been subject to development interventions such as food aid and agricultural reforms since the beginning of development practice. Therefore, an examination of food aid and food security development initiatives is warranted and information on Swazi food security issues is readily available from the development industry.

The case study methodology has several advantages and disadvantages. One clear advantage of the case-study methodology lies in its ability to dissect a specific case thoroughly

without the danger of over-generalizing a concept. This paper will allow for in-depth analysis of a variety of food security issues and illustrate the merits of post-development theory as a framework from which to view food security and development practice issues. However, this level of detail also renders a case study weaker when attempting to apply the theory elsewhere. The Kingdom of Swaziland has unique political, cultural, and agricultural traditions which prevent this paper's post-development analysis of food security issues and their potential solutions to be applied in other cases.

Post-development theorists use a variety of methods for gathering evidence to support their arguments, and this paper will also use a post-development framework for gathering data on the case of Swaziland. Post-development theorists use a human-centered approach, meaning that they;

“...represent a perception of reality from the perspective of the human beings involved in the processes of change... It is rather to find out whom these serve or exclude, and how they affect the human condition and the relational fabric of the society into which they are introduced” (Rahnema 1997).

Post-development scholars are interested in hearing the voices of people who are directly affected by and involved in the development discourse in order to learn solutions for ‘alternatives-to-development’;

“People directly affected and studied by post-development scholarship need to be heard without preconceptions and prejudice, to allow them the same opportunity to share their thoughts and concerns and therefore offer a genuine contribution towards prescriptions through alternatives-to-development’.” (Escobar 1995).

This paper will utilize interviews with individuals who work on food aid and food security issues in Swaziland to determine what the challenges to food security in Swaziland are. Furthermore, the interviewees will provide their own perspectives on post-development solutions to food

security issues in Swaziland. Interviews were conducted with the following individuals; two Ministry of Agriculture extension officers who work on issues of food aid and food security, two directors of independent, grassroots food security non-governmental organizations (NGOs), two with employees of the two largest food aid donors in Swaziland, and one with a university professor working on food security issues in Swaziland (see Appendix A). All individuals interviewed had extensive experience working both with food aid and food security. Five of the interviewees were native Swazis, and two were foreign-born but living in Swaziland long-term.

In addition to first-person interviews, this capstone project will utilize a mixture of data-gathering tools to generate qualitative information analysis. Through newspaper articles, academic publications, government publications, and organizational publications on the topics of food aid and food security in Swaziland, an image of the country's food security situation can be formed broadly.

### **Limitations**

Post-development theory has received extensive critique for its rejection of development theory. For instance, a large proportion of development projects have arisen from the developing world itself, which could negate the post-development idea that development theory is Western dominated and hegemonic (Edelman 1999). The United Nations' Human Development Index has demonstrated a rise in human "development" since large-scale development projects began post-World War II (Roesling 2006), indicating that the post-development argument that the development agenda is detrimental is incorrect. The aforementioned critiques of post-development theory are noteworthy in that they illustrate the potential limitations and contradictions of post-development theory which may arise in this capstone research paper.

However, post-development theory is still a useful theory to use to examine food security issues, as it allows the populations subjected to the development agenda to have a voice which identifies their own culturally perceived problems and indigenous solutions to be heard. Additionally, many post-development scholars have addressed the aforementioned critiques. Edelman's (1999) critique that development projects were initiated by development recipient countries themselves does not take into consideration the national power dynamics

acknowledged by post-development scholars. Rahnema (1997) points out that support for the development agenda in recipient countries was in no way unanimous and that those participating in the development agenda were authoritarian and undemocratic:

“This almost unanimous support for development was somehow significant of the very gap it had started to produce in societies in which it had been introduced. For now it appears clearly that such unanimity was far from being shared at the grassroots level, where it was supposed to reach the suffering populations. Only the ‘authorities’ who were speaking on behalf of their ‘target populations’ claimed that such was the case. The voices that, here and there, were heard across the barriers separating the rulers from the ruled, showed that the latter had never been seriously consulted.” (Rahnema 1997).

Additional concerns raised by scholars who cite that ever-decreasing poverty levels are a sign of the development agenda working are also addressed by post-development scholars. To them, the entire development discourse is based on Western ideas of progress, and if authoritarian and ethnocentric elements of development are to be avoided, then it would be impossible to define development normatively (Kippler 2010).

A further limitation of this study is the limited pool of interviewees and their own unwillingness to disclose information which might have appeared critical of their respective employers, be they government or development organizations. There are high levels of self-censorship as well as official censorship in the Kingdom of Swaziland, so the qualitative data from the interviews may have been limited. Along those same lines, the politicization of food aid and food security in Swaziland is a narrow case study which should not be used to draw conclusions about food security issues in other African countries. This is due to the fact that Swaziland is the last remaining absolute monarchy in Africa, and no other African government shares its same legal, cultural, and political framework.

## **Literature Review**

### *On Food Security*

According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the definition of food security has evolved over the years (FAO 2006). The term "food security" arose in the 1970s during a period of food crisis. Originally, food security definitions focused primarily on food supply issues related to availability, but the definition has grown over time to be more inclusive of all issues surrounding the food system (Webb et al. 2009). One commonly used definition of food security was established by the 1996 World Food Summit. This definition states that food security:

"...exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO 2006).

A later definition by the FAO adds an emphasis to the social aspect of food security that was missing in the 1996 one. According to this definition, food security:

"...exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (FAO 2006).

In a later document, the FAO (2006) describes 4 key aspects of food security: Food must be available in sufficient quantities and quality. Food must be accessible. Food must be utilized properly through adequate diets to meet all physiological needs. This proper utilization of food includes important non-food inputs such as clean water and sanitation to ensure health. Finally, food must be stable, meaning that all individuals must have access to adequate food at all times. Stable food systems can sustain sudden shocks such as economic or climatic crises (FAO 2006). Availability and access are the food security indicators utilized in the most minimal definitions of food security and are therefore the frame of reference for "food security" in this paper. Furthermore, most measurement tools of food insecurity focus on these two aspects of food insecurity.

There is no universally accepted measurement of food insecurity (Webb et al. 2009). Furthermore, agencies attempting to record food insecurity often have difficulty differentiating between varying community, household, and individual levels of food insecurity (Webb et al. 2006). Proxy measures of food security typically used include; agricultural production, food storage levels, caloric intake, per capita income, or nutritional status (Coates et al. 2003). Webb et al. (2009) find these measures unsatisfactory, and prefer to measure food insecurity through subjective measures such as working through anthropologists, focus groups, and surveys. One such subjective measurement tool was developed by Swindale and Bilinsky (2009), and their *Household Food Insecurity Access Scale* was found to be a sensitive indicator of changes in household food security (Swindale and Bilinsky 2009).

For the purposes of this paper, food security will be measured based on the perception of the source discussing food security since post-development theory is interested in individual values. For instance, if a World Food Program document measures the food security situation in Swaziland to be highly food insecure, but an interviewee does not see the food security situation as being dire, a post-development argument could glean that there is a disconnect between the development agenda and cultural values. For instance, Ferguson (1990) used a post-development analysis of agricultural development programs in Lesotho and found that the development literature over-emphasized reliance on subsistence agriculture in order to appear successful and necessary. Similarly, measures of food security in Swaziland may also indicate disconnect between what development practitioners publish in order to justify their work and the perceived reality on the ground. Therefore, interviewees will be allowed to subjectively measure the level of food security in Swaziland.

#### *On Food Aid*

Post-development theory critiques development practice's complex international and national development delivery system through which issues of poverty and famine are removed from the political sphere and placed into a technocratic one. One of the most direct forms of development assistance is the delivery of food aid. In Swaziland, non-emergency food aid consists of a generous portion of official development assistance, and it is therefore necessary



to understand as the most significant development ideology response to food security issues in Swaziland.

This paper will define food aid as direct donations of food from one donor country or organization to a recipient country. Typically, food aid varies from other types of “development aid” in that it is seen as a short-term disaster relief measure (Berazneva and Lee 2011). The main agents of food aid organization and donation are typically under the United Nations (UN), government donors, or non-governmental voluntary organizations. Within the UN framework, the three agencies dealing with food emergencies are the World Food Program (WFP), the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). A typical food aid supply chain is as follows;

Government donor→international agency→international NGOs→local NGOs in aid-recipient countries→community-based organizations→individual aid recipients (Oloruntoba and Gray 2006).

Government donors are made up almost exclusively of Canada, the United States, and European countries, and these donors are responsible for most of the food and financial resources in food aid delivery. Furthermore, strict rules from the United States (the largest donor by far) demand that most of the donated food be grown in the United States (Loyn 2013). This practice is highly controversial due to its apparent protectionism of US agricultural products, and recently USAID director Rajiv Shah stated that more than four million additional people could be fed every year if this rule did not exist (Loyn 2013). This is due to the comparative cost of US agricultural products, whereas locally sourced food has lower purchasing and shipping costs. Post-development theorists would here point to such protectionist trade policies as being an exertion of Western hegemonic power over the countries receiving food aid.

The evolution of food aid programs reflects a long-term shift in outlook on the part of donor countries and organizations. Large scale food aid from the United States was established in 1954 through Public Law 480 (“Food for Peace Program”) and was primarily used as a vehicle for exporting surplus government food supplies. Commodity sales through loans to governments and grants to government for food aid sale (known as food aid monetization)

accounted for half of food aid until being largely phased out in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Seventy-three percent of food aid today is used for emergencies, including protracted relief operations, refugee programs, and natural and manmade disasters (IRIN 2012). The food aid industry today consists of a complex, international network of stakeholders with a broad variety of interests and expertise.

Over the years, methods of assessing hunger and distributing food aid have drastically changed. Food aid programs today are carefully monitored for specific outcomes and are often supposed to address underlying causes of hunger. For instance, targeted food aid interventions have become increasingly common in recent years as donors prefer to target the most vulnerable populations. One example of “targeted food rations” is the delivery of food aid to households affected by HIV/AIDS. Targeted food rations for people living with HIV/AIDS may increase labor supply and productivity of subsistence food production, thereby increasing household food security. Another development in the distribution of food aid is “food for work” or “food for knowledge” models, in which recipients receive food aid in exchange for physical labor on community projects, life skills/health classes, or school attendance. These types of food aid programs are common in Swaziland and account for large amounts of food aid there.

A common and controversial practice in the food aid industry is its monetization. The monetization of food aid occurs when donated food aid supplies are sold (typically by agents of the recipient country) and the proceeds of these sales are then used to support general budget or developmental activities such as trainings or technology purchases (US Food Aid and Security 2012). In 2010, 14% of US food aid was officially monetized through approval by the USDA. Proponents of monetization argue that recipient countries can allocate the money generated through monetization in more effective, lasting programs to combat food insecurity causes (US Food Aid and Security 2012). This practice is significant when examining food security practice in Swaziland, as it is often used and is highly controversial among Swazis.

Critics of food aid abound and include the post-development theorists. Food aid has been criticized for a lack of industry regulation, slow crisis response rate, poor inter-agency coordination, and technical incompetence (Rinehart and Geffen 2002). Food aid has also been

used or perceived as a political tool used by donors to assert their political will or power on a nation or region (Knack 2001), a view which is shared by post-development theorists due to the hegemonic power relationship between the donor and recipient.

Post-development theorists often claim that development has failed in practice. In the case of food aid, many scholars have examined if this claim holds true. Economists often examine the effects of food aid on local production and market prices. Many studies focus on the apparent disincentive effects of food aid on domestic agriculture. Donovan et al. (2006) found that food aid can have strong negative effects when it is distributed during harvest, when very large quantities are released into countries that have markets that operate with similar locally produced products, and when the food aid is likely to be sold to a local market. Mabuza et al. (2009) examined the impact of food aid on maize prices and production in Swaziland. They found that food aid in Swaziland does not lower prices and has no significant negative effect on the quantity of maize produced in the following seasons (Mabuza et al. 2009).

### **Country Profile**

Seventy percent of Swazis are subsistence farmers, and two-thirds of Swaziland's 1.1 million people live in chronic poverty (IRIN 2012). Swaziland has a Gini coefficient of over .60, meaning that wealth is extremely unequally distributed. In terms of physical characteristics, Swaziland has a diverse topography and climate despite its small size, with tropical and near temperate temperatures, mountains, hills, and sloping plains (Southern African Development Community 2007). Principle exports are sugarcane (representing 60% of the total GDP) and wood pulp (SADC 2007). Medium and large scale farms employ workers, accounting for 20% of the country's formal employment. Most agricultural commodities are produced on Swazi Nation Land and Title Deed Land (SADC 2007). Title Deed Land is land owned primarily by wealthy Swazis and is used for commercial farming and cattle grazing. Title Deed Land produces mostly sugar, and accounts for 26% of all cultivated land, whereas Swazi Nation Land, granted to communities from the king via chieftainships, accounts for the remaining 74% of cultivated land (Panin and Hlope 2013). The bulk of Swaziland's economy depends on the agricultural sector, and the processing and manufacturing sectors also depend on agricultural inputs.

The vestiges of colonial land policy and traditional land laws impact Swaziland's food security. Swaziland was a low priority for the British upon its formal acquisition in 1902. Swazis were immediately granted rights to 1/3 of all Swazi land from which they could grow their own crops, which was seen as extremely generous in the eyes of the British (Potholm 1972), but created a system by which Swazis did not have access to the most arable land. The other 2/3 of Swazi land was divided between Crown Land (for the profit of the British Empire) and private land for white settlers (Blauer and Laure 1996). Only 15% of the land granted to Swazis was suitable for farming whereas 75% of white settler land could be farmed (Blauer and Laure 1996). The Crown Land and white settler land shares became increasingly commercialized. Loss of arable land coupled with a rise in commercial food production served to essentially deplete Swazis of their subsistence livelihoods, permanently re-orienting the food system away from the communal and towards the commercial. When conditions in Swazi territory worsened and as the British needed funds for WWII, the British allowed Swaziland to re-purchase land held by white settlers in 1940. The British also returned some of the Crown Land. King Sobhuza II soon imposed a cattle tax scheme to buy back the land, and by 1946, 350,000 acres of land were returned to the Swazis via the Native Land Settlement Scheme (Blauer and Laure 1996). Despite these returns, more than 30% of Swaziland remained in white hands or was sold to wealthy Swazis (Blauer and Laure 1996). Following independence, many Swazis pushed to re-claim white land, but King Sobhuza II resisted (Kuper 1986). Thus, some of the most commercially profitable land (specifically the sugar cane plantations) does not contribute significantly to Swaziland's food security, as the vast majority of these crops are exported.

Food security in Swaziland is historically linked to the success of maize crops (MOAC 2005). Maize is grown by most subsistence farmers, as it is the staple food of Swaziland. It represents 80% of crop production on Swazi Nation Land (SADC 2007). By 2001, Swaziland was almost 96% self-sufficient in maize production (Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network 2003). However, this deteriorated rapidly in the following years, to the point where it now produces only 40% of Swaziland's maize consumption. Up until 2000, Swaziland produced over 100,000 tons of maize, but this has steadily decreased since then, with average yearly yields being around 70,000 tons (World Food Programme 2012).

During the lean season each year from October-March, the number of food insecure people increases dramatically (World Food Programme 2012). Emergency assessments of food security in Swaziland by NGOs have reported that 40% of Swazi children are stunted due to chronic malnutrition, a further 11% are undernourished, and 2% are wasted due to acute malnutrition (MOAC 2005). In a study on the role of subsistence agriculture's contribution to food security in Swaziland, Panin and Hlope (2013) found that 63% of households surveyed experienced food shortages and found that "subsistence agriculture is capable of ensuring food security to only 37% of the sampled households" (Panin and Hlope 2013). However, Panin and Hlope (2013) also found that "on average, the estimated net available food for consumption per household was more than the average estimated minimum household's food requirement" (Panin and Hlope 2013). This implies that subsistence agriculture is not the only source of food for most households. A study conducted by the African Food Security Urban Network found that Swaziland's largest town, Manzini, is the most food insecure urban area in all of southern Africa (Crush et al. 2012).

Food aid came to Swaziland on a large scale around the time Swaziland gained its independence and has been a constant presence in many poor communities in Swaziland ever since. The World Food Programme (WFP) was the first large international food aid presence in Swaziland starting in the late 1960s. The WFP country operation was terminated in 1996, but the WFP re-entered Swaziland in 2002 in response to the 2001/2002 regional drought (World Food Programme 2012). Since then, the WFP has shifted its food aid program to target beneficiaries of particularly vulnerable populations; people living with HIV/AIDS and TB, orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs), women, and schoolchildren.

Currently, WFP and World Vision are the largest providers of food aid in Swaziland. Donor countries between 1990 and 2003 include the USA (42% of food aid), the European Commission (21%), Switzerland (13%) and other countries including Sweden, Libya, Italy, Japan, Finland, and Germany (WFP 2009). The number of food aid recipients varies drastically from year to year due to both climatic changes and donor shortfalls. Food aid peaked in 2007 when over two-thirds of the population received food aid, but in 2013 only about one-tenth of the

population received food aid (IRIN 2013). Commodities received as food aid include maize, rice, beans, corn soya blend, skim milk, and vegetable oil (Mabuza et al. 2009).

Distribution of food aid in Swaziland is geographically uneven, and the most food insecure areas are targeted by the annual National Vulnerability Assessment Committee and the Government's Early Warning System. The traditionally food-insecure areas of the Lowveld and Lubombo are the only areas where targeted households and schoolchildren currently receive food rations from the WFP, although the WFP's Food by Prescription program operates at government hospitals throughout the country (World Food Programme 2012).

Food aid to Swaziland continues at a high rate, but with many donors de-prioritizing Swaziland, some attempts have been made to hand over food aid distribution to local authorities. In 2008, WFP began a three-year Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO 106020) aimed at improving food security and productive capacity in the most vulnerable households impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and natural disasters (World Food Programme 2012). In May 2010, WFP and the Swazi government prioritized three areas of the PRRO due to resource shortfalls; support orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) at neighborhood care points, support OVCs undergoing farming and life skills training, and support to patients in anti-retroviral, tuberculosis and prevention of mother-to-child transmission programs under the Food by Prescription program (World Food Programme 2012).

## **Analysis**

### *Subjective Measures of Food Security and Food Security Challenges*

Post-development theory emphasizes that the aspirations of development practice do not necessarily reflect the needs and aspirations of the populations they target. Past studies have shown that issues relevant to development practitioners were not perceived as important by the recipients of those specific development interventions. For this reason, the interviewees were asked to describe food security and the challenges to food security in their own words. Their responses indicated that the perception of food insecurity in Swaziland is seen as less urgent on the ground than in the eyes of high-level development institutions. When asked to describe the food security situation in Swaziland, all but Interviewee 7 (a high-level employee of a major food aid distributor) indicated that the situation was manageable.

Excerpts from Interviewees 1 through 6 show that there is a distinct disconnect between the perception of the level of food security between development institutions and the population in question. Interviewees 1 through 6 made statements about Swaziland's level of food insecurity which weakened this defense:

- "I think it's not so bad. People have land and can work the land." (Interviewee 1).
- "I don't know. They (development organizations) tell us it's a problem, so I guess it is..." (Interviewee 2).
- "These people aren't starving. It's a question of what story you believe. A starving African child is compelling, but how many of them are actually starving? None. Last time we had real starvation challenges was 1992 and that was because it didn't rain that year." (Interviewee 3).
- "The food-for-learning programs are only there because the donors are too lazy to come up with a creative response to food security problems." (Interviewee 4).
- "I think that it is something we are told. But go out into the communities and see how the people support each other. The only time we're food insecure is during drought and when they plant maize in the lowveld." (Interviewee 5).
- "Swaziland is food insecure, but starvation is not an imminent threat. Balanced diets are key to proper food security, and that is what is lacking." (Interviewee 6).

Interviews revealed that development organizations operating in Swaziland view the food security situation as urgent and dire, whereas the local practitioners working on food security issues on the ground clearly did not perceive food security issues with the same urgency. This re-enforces the emphasis made by post-development theorists that local communities must be allowed to determine priority areas for improvement without the influence of donor aspirations.

After defining food security and rating it in their own terms, the interviewees were asked to list what they perceived to be challenges to Swaziland's food security. Once again, a strong disconnect was found between what the development literature had written about food

security and what the practitioners found to be challenges. While the literature overwhelmingly emphasized the HIV/AIDS epidemic, only two Interviewees (2 and 5) agreed when prompted by the interviewer that HIV affects food security. Instead, Interviewees focused overwhelmingly on challenges which are absent or barely mentioned in the literature of development organizations (specifically the use of outdated agricultural practices and land allocation policies). Large-scale food aid and food security interventions in Swaziland typically do not address these challenges described by food security practitioners. This shows the lack of democratic involvement by the target populations in decisions made by development agencies regarding food security interventions. For post-development theorists, this is one of the main flaws of development ideology and contributes to the high failure rate of development projects.

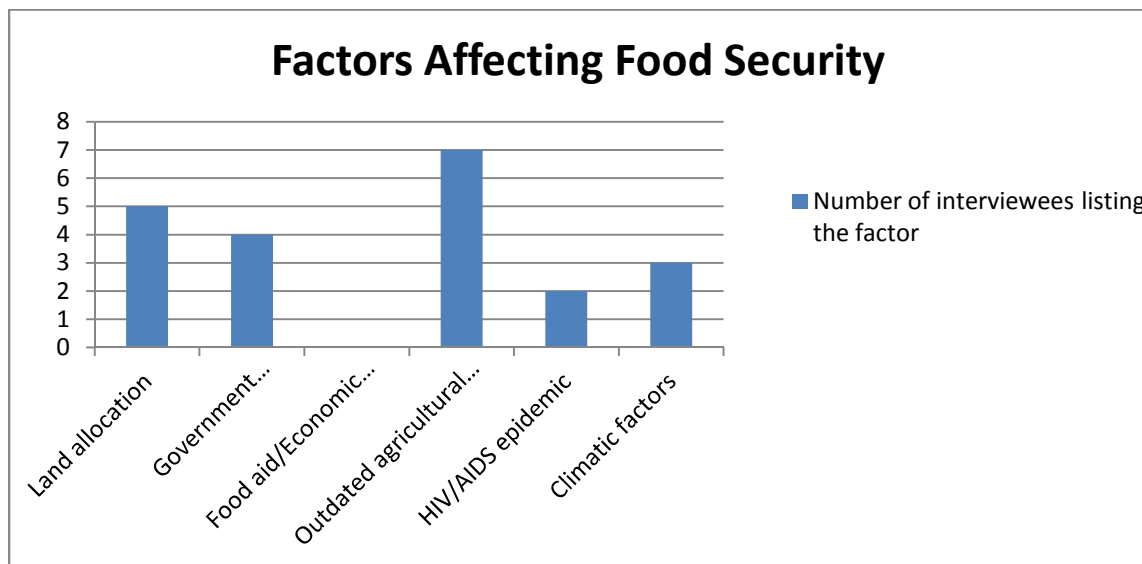


Figure 1: Important factors affecting food security according to 7 food security practitioners

The areas affecting food security in Swaziland as described by the development literature or the interviewees are analyzed from a post-development framework below.

*Land allocation affects long-term food security*

Development experts are found to de-politicize issues of food security. However, post-development theorists argue that food security issues are inherently political and should be dealt with in the political sphere. In subsistence agricultural societies like rural Swaziland, more



land means more food security. Thus, the allocation of land is vital to determining who has food security. According to Smith (2003), “food security is the ultimate manifestation of who wields power, and who does not.” Therefore, if land is allocated in a politically inequitable way by those in power, then food security should be lower than in cases where it is distributed equitably. Both the literature and the interviewees indicated that land allocation is an important aspect to food security, and that land allocation is highly political. Thus, land allocation is an important factor affecting food security in Swaziland according to post-development theory.

In the case of Swaziland, there are two different types of land allocation affecting food security. The first discussed below is the inequitable distribution of Swazi Nation Land by traditional authorities (chiefs) to their subjects. The second type of allocation affecting food security is the capitulation of chiefs to give agricultural lands for non-agricultural developments. In the first type of allocation, if a rural farmer in Swaziland is out of favor with the local traditional authorities, he or she may not be granted more land or may even legally be removed from their holdings. One’s success or failure as a subsistence farmer is largely dependent upon one’s relationship to those in power and one’s willingness to provide tribute labor to the king or the chief (Russell 1992). Furthermore, the distribution of Swazi Nation Land “undoubtedly inhibits the crystallization of some inequalities as clearly as they create others” (Russell 1988). The traditional authorities through whom Swazi Nation Land is allocated have often been accused of marginalizing the poor, particularly women and orphans. Furthermore, traditional land inheritance practices dictate that the inheritor shall be male, which in some instances forces the widows from the land (Russell 1988). This in turn increases food insecurity among women and children. Some critics have argued that the system of Swazi Nation Land (currently about 75% of Swaziland is Swazi Nation Land) contributes to food insecurity because the essential “squatting” system of farming conducted on Swazi Nation Land leaves farmers without legal recourse or land to claim as collateral when applying for bank loans (IRIN 2011). Interviewees 1 and 3 mentioned that the inability to apply for a loan using their land as collateral was detrimental to small-holder farmers.

The average landholding size on Swazi Nation Land is 1.7 hectares, and this continues to fragment into smaller units with population growth (Mabuza et al. 2009) and the use of Swazi Nation Land for non-agricultural development (FANRPAN 2003). With an outwardly expanding population in the cities, the amount of available land to use for subsistence or commercial agriculture is diminishing. Five of the food security practitioners interviewed mentioned that the practice of developing land for non-agricultural purposes along with population growth are worrying trends that they believe have the potential to derail food security in the next ten years. According to Interviewee 1:

“The Malkerns Valley area is seeing a lot of residential construction. This is very arable land that could be used for production purposes. The Land Use Department is not doing its job.”

This quote makes it clear that the development agenda does not match local goals and needs in terms of food security. While the development of the wealthy Malkerns valley area may be seen as development by the modernization agenda, it is in fact permanently altering the most fertile part of the country away from agricultural production and food security to the long-term detriment of locals. Along a similar vein, Interviewee 4 pointed out that Manzini is the most food insecure city in southern Africa and said that the dismantling of Swazi Nation Land was at least partially to blame: “Give me landed poor over landless poor any day. If you have land, you can feed yourself.”

The interviewees quoted above clearly saw the importance of sound land policy and also discussed political corruption in the traditional land allocation scheme. For example, King Mswati III’s semi-private business and agricultural enterprise Tibiyo Takangwane is apparently notorious for forcing rural areas into giving up fertile lands with threats of political retribution if they encounter resistance. In this case, the national political elites use their political might to force the traditional authorities to comply. Additionally, Interviewee 1 specifically blamed the Land Use Department for not doing its job properly, meaning that bureaucratic government agencies are perceived to have an important role to play in terms of food security. Given the

power of authorities granting land in Swaziland, the process of land allocation is detrimental to food security due to the inequitable power relations seen in the process of allocation.

### *The Role of Government Agricultural Programs in Food Aid and Food Security*

In a country as food insecure as Swaziland supposedly is, it stands to reason that the government would devote vast amounts of resources to programs promoting food security and agricultural development. However, agricultural spending represents 4% of the national budget and much of that spending goes to semi-public commercial farming enterprises owned by the King (IRIN 2013). Four of the interviewees indicated that meager government spending on agricultural programs negatively impact food security. Interviewees and the literature revealed a multitude of ways in which government spending influences food security; not enough extension officers, a lack of input and equipment assistance to farmers, and the presence of development organizations taking on the role of government.

Post-development theorists view institutions modeled off of Western ideals as inappropriate for their framework of “alternatives to development.” In Swaziland, the decentralization of the agricultural ministry into a series of regional offices with agricultural extension officers was modeled off of the American system of agricultural extension workers. Furthermore, the formation of farming cooperatives working with the extension offices is also modeled off of the American system. Mainstream post-development theorists would view this practice as the hegemonic political will of the Western donors who helped shape agricultural policy around the independence era. Nevertheless, extension offices are now recognized by Swazis as legitimate actors in both food aid and food security interventions. According to post-development theory, their role in providing food security is political because political elites chose the amount of resources they allocated to agricultural programs which promote food security or provide food aid.

The government of the Kingdom of Swaziland provides free research and extension services to all farmers as well as renting farming equipment at highly subsidized rates (Mabuza et al. 2009). Extension officers tend to be overstretched, however, with one extension officer being held responsible for anywhere from 800-1,000 smallholder farmers. One extension officer (Interviewee 2) put it this way: “Our RDA has over 800 farmers. That area is supposed to

be served by 24 officers, but we are only 2.” The extension workers interviewed stated that they could help farmers achieve better food security if they weren’t stretched so thin with limited resources. For instance, travel costs were not compensated for one extension worker who worked with roughly 1,000 farmers, making site visits impossible. Furthermore, farming equipment rentals were often backed up. Agricultural experts in specific fields such as livestock, chicken breeding, and fruit tree propagation are in such short supply that there are only one or two specialists in each field in the entire country, making it impossible for farmers wishing to diversify their crops to get the training that they need. The extension officers interviewed argued that government didn’t budget enough for agricultural services, and should instead re-allocate money from the bloated Swaziland United Defense Forces, which represent 17% of the national budget despite Swaziland never having been to war in modern history (IRIN 2013). The International Monetary Fund and other development organizations have also often echoed this sentiment (IRIN 2011).

The role of government versus the role of development agency is often unclear in the Swazi agricultural sector, which potentially leads to lower government spending on food security programs. Government and aid agencies often work together and both feel they have the same duties to provide food security. For instance, government extension officers monitor the food security situation on the ground, and when they see crops failing and an impending food crisis, they contact the food aid agencies working in their area to respond. Government extension workers then become food aid workers, distributing aid and recording aid delivery for the donor. This creates a blurry distinction between the role of government and the role of the food aid organizations in terms of who has the duty to provide food to the people. Furthermore, World Vision, the second largest distributor of food aid in Swaziland, also has many agricultural officers who work in the same communities and even on the same projects as many extension officers. In such instances, the role of the government officers versus the development agency officers is not clearly delineated and creates bureaucratic redundancies. Even members of Parliament seem unclear on the role of government in improving food security. When it comes time to create the budget, members of Parliament from largely agricultural districts do not push for larger budgetary allocations to agriculture, but rather are

often found lobbying the donor community for food aid and projects. This demonstrates that development ideology has become so engrained in the minds of the political elite in Swaziland that issues of food security are incorrectly removed from the political agenda in Parliament.

Despite the purported ideal of development organizations to “work themselves out of a job,” aid organizations in Swaziland seem reluctant to relinquish any of their responsibility to government. The two largest food aid organizations in Swaziland have not presented a political strategy for their government counterparts and remain apolitical in their work with low-level Ministry of Agriculture employees (extension workers). The only joint food security framework between the WFP and the Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland are recommendations for shifting responsibility of food aid over to government (PRRO 2008), and the plan has yet to be initiated or discussed in Parliament. This lack of a political framework between development organizations and the Swazi government suggests that development organizations in Swaziland prefer to remain apolitical. According to post-development theory, the development organizations are, as an extension of the Western modernization agenda, therefore exerting power over Swaziland by not taking issue with and politicizing the lack of government spending on food security programs. Post-development theory argues that the development organizations’ insistence on remaining apolitical is an incorrect stance, as the lack of government resource allocation to food security issues reinforces the perceived necessity of development organizations. The de-politicizing of food security by development agencies represents an extension of Western hegemonic ideology in that it closes off local alternatives from democratically arising. As long as the development agencies are in place, their solutions to the challenges to food security will be addressed entirely in the technocratic development sphere and will not be addressed adequately in a legal or political framework. Interviews revealed that many food security issues (including government spending on agriculture) are ones that necessitate a political solution. In terms of resource allocation to agriculture, the interviews revealed that the development industry fails to adequately recognize or reconcile this challenge to food security in Swaziland.

### *Economic Performance*

A weak economy is also a potential contributor to food insecurity in Swaziland, according to the development literature. The 2011 financial crisis in Swaziland worsened the nation's already crisis-level food insecurity. According to a United Nations (UN) Country Team Rapid Assessment report released in March of 2012, "...food security seems to have deteriorated as households have been coping with the consequences of the fiscal crisis combined with the rising food price" (UN Swaziland 2012). According to the report, the financial crisis beginning in 2011 has caused half of rural households and one third of urban households to cut their number of meals or meal portions. In more than one fourth of rural households, meals were skipped for an entire day (UN Swaziland 2012). With Swaziland's GDP still in decline, the IMF has predicted that by 2014, Swaziland's economic performance will fall below Somalia's and thereby become the worst performing economy in the world (IRIN 2013). This prediction does not bode well for the food security situation of the country.

None of the food aid or food security experts interviewed noted economic performance or job loss as a cause of food insecurity in Swaziland. This indicates that development ideology's perception that there is a strong correlation between food security and market performance in Swaziland may not actually be the case. This is potentially due to the perception among educated Swazis that subsistence farmers in the rural areas can produce their own food irrespective of the national economic performance. Furthermore, the mythos that the majority of the population is subsistence farmers may not accurately reflect the reality, as remittances sent by homestead wage-earners who work in town or in South Africa account for a significant amount of rural income. Or, as Interviewee 4 put it: "You have to work pretty hard to starve in Swaziland."

#### *Agricultural practices and customs*

All seven of the food security experts interviewed emphasized that at least some of Swaziland's food insecurity is caused by inefficient and outdated agricultural practices and customs. Soil erosion is one major cause for concern, with vast canyons of previously arable land collapsing in and expanding across large territories seemingly overnight. It is estimated that 75% of Swazi Nation Land suffers from degradation due to soil erosion. Soil erosion damages soil structure and reduces soil nutrients, thereby decreasing crop yields. There are

several causes of soil erosion in Swaziland. Although some soil erosion is due to weather (extended periods of drought), the vast majority of soil erosion is man-made. A common practice in the rural areas is to burn fields and grasslands during the dry season, and this greatly deteriorates the quality of soil over time. Furthermore, overgrazing by cattle and monocropping maize are significant causes of soil erosion.

Additionally, over-reliance on maize as a staple crop even in environments where it is unsuited is a major cause of food insecurity in Swaziland. Maize is a crop requiring high input costs, constant care, crop rotation, and plenty of moisture. None of those things are prevalent in abundance in the Shiselweni or Lubombo regions of Swaziland, yet most subsistence farmers in these areas continue to grow maize, as it is their staple food of choice. This preference for maize developed during the colonial era when maize was introduced, despite the fact that the crop sorghum grows better in Swaziland and was previously the staple food of choice. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the World Food Programme, World Vision, and the government of the Kingdom of Swaziland all list the Shiselweni and Lubombo regions as being the most food-insecure in Swaziland (UNICEF 2009). Shiselweni and Lubombo disproportionately receive vast quantities of both emergency and programmatic food aid due to the failure of maize crops and extended drought periods there. Extension officers and food security NGOs in those regions work to reduce maize dependence and introduce water harvesting techniques, but all interviewees expressed frustrations with a cultural preference for the tried and true maize crop. Furthermore, all school-going children are taught about good agricultural practices in school, so the issue of using poor agricultural practices is not related to information access but rather behavior change.

In addition to agricultural practices, certain cultural customs surrounding food have the potential to affect food security. Food insecurity in Swaziland is often referred to as an issue of food quality, not food quantity (UNICEF 2009). As Interviewee 3 explained:

“The problem in Swaziland is a micronutrient one. The children are stunted due to early childhood malnutrition. They are fed a massive portion of (maize) pap, but a single tomato or onion is put in a sauce and divided amongst 10 family members. This causes

cognitive delay and stunting. And it's not that there's not education out there on balanced diets. It's a food preference thing. Not knowing how to flavor their vegetables to make them palatable keeps people from eating them with anything other than massive amounts of salt" (Interviewee 3).

As shown above, food security is affected by dietary preference as well as food availability. Maize is prevalent in abundance in the rural areas, but vegetable gardens are far less common and more labor-intensive to produce, which leads to a dearth in vegetable availability. Over time, this led to a preference for the readily available maize crop. While filling, the nutritional content of maize is not sufficient to provide the quality of healthy food needed to be food secure. Post-development theorists argue that solutions must be grass-root and come from the people, but when the vast majority of Swazis have a palate for nutrient-poor food; it is unlikely that a grassroots movement to change the national food preference would occur.

#### *HIV/AIDS epidemic*

Swaziland has the highest HIV rate in the world with 26% of the population between 15 and 49 infected and 54% of pregnant women testing positive (Terry and Ryder 2007). In 2002, AIDS accounted for 64% of deaths in Swaziland (WHO World Health Statistics 2006). At the epidemic's pique in 2004, life expectancy was the lowest in the world at just 32 (IRIN 2009). In 2004, HIV was declared a national emergency and since then, enrollment on anti-retroviral therapy for people living with HIV has steadily risen the life expectancy to 49 (CIA World Factbook 2013). The World Food Programme lists HIV/AIDS as one of the leading causes of hunger in Swaziland (WFP 2012). Himmelgreen et al. (2009) have traced the complex relationship between food insecurity and the HIV/AIDS epidemic in southern Africa using syndemic theory. Syndemic theory refers to the interaction among diseases under conditions of poverty "which results in an amplification of negative health outcomes" (Himmelgreen et al. 2009). Similarly, the new variant famine theory posits that in places where HIV/AIDS morbidity and mortality rates have created household labor shortages and a loss of relevant skills, there is reduced food production and loss of income (De Waal and Whiteside 2003), resulting in greater food insecurity. The interaction between labor shortages and skills loss is noted as a leading



cause of decreased crop yield and food insecurity in Swaziland (WFP 2012), according to the literature of food aid organizations. Child-headed households are particularly food insecure, and these represent 15% of all Swazi households (Terry and Ryder 2007). T

While much has been published on the effects of HIV on food security, only two of those interviewed mentioned it as a leading cause of food insecurity in Swaziland and only did so when prompted by the interviewer. The rest agreed that it certainly contributed to food insecurity when prompted by the interviewer, but did not believe that it was the most significant factor related to food insecurity in Swaziland. The gap between the literature and the food security practitioners on the ground may be due to a difference in variables taken into account. Researchers interested in the relationship between food security and HIV typically used the presence of HIV as the only variable effecting food security in their studies, making HIV the most significant variable by default. For the food security practitioners interviewed, a broad range of human and environmental causes of food insecurity had to be considered, making HIV a significant (but not the most significant) cause of food insecurity. This once again highlights the discrepancy between development ideology priorities and those of the local population.

Furthermore, much of the food aid in Swaziland is justified by development agencies due to the high rate of HIV. Food-by-prescription programs are in place in every regional health center, with homesteads receiving food rations when one or more members have HIV. Regular programmatic food aid is also justified as being necessary due to the high HIV rate. However, interviewees did not perceive HIV to effect food security as drastically as it is portrayed in the development literature. Interviewee 3 even pointed out the harmful effects that food aid has on their target populations when discussing food aid designed specifically for individual homesteads with HIV/AIDS:

“On the one hand, food-by-prescription programs stigmatize the recipient homestead and also cause jealousy in the community. In the communities, people cannot see if HIV really makes you to have less food. And what about the hungry ones who are negative? There are cultural systems in place which are supposed to protect homesteads that have

sick members. The children of other homesteads should be sent to help harvest and a neighbor is supposed to ask the bandla lomcane (chief's inner council) to help them. I've seen this way work and I don't know how the extra maize might change this...Also, how is this (food-by-prescription) sustainable?" (Interviewee 3).

Based on the above, post-development theorists would argue that development expert attempts to provide food security to homesteads affected by HIV have failed and actually had negative consequences. Post-development theory illustrates here that the local cultural traditions and cultural values of community service and equitable division of assets were ignored in favor of a blanket one-size-fits-all development ideology practice. Instead, post-development theorists call for a democratic and people-driven solution to food security issues, rather than a technocratic development solution.

#### *Climatic factors (drought)*

Climate plays an important role in food security. If poor climatic conditions exist, a food system must be stable enough to absorb the shocks caused on the food system by bad weather. In Swaziland, the food system is not capable of absorbing shocks caused by bad weather, typically in the form of hail storms or drought. Three of the interviewees listed drought as a cause of food insecurity in Swaziland, and most food aid organizations in Swaziland monitor the drought situation from year to year and give large amounts of emergency food aid to respond to conditions of drought (WFP 2012). Swaziland also occasionally suffers from damaging hailstorms caused by typhoons off of the coast of Mozambique. The question of whether or not development can adequately solve this challenge to food security is a moot point, as development practice has no power over weather and climatic conditions. Instead, one must examine their response to this challenge in the form of food aid (see next section).

#### *Role of food aid in food security*

Post-development theorists view development organizations as a kind of neo-colonial exertion of power on "developing" countries to fit into the Western ideal of progress without regard for indigenous movements or preferences. Given this, it is important to examine the role that food aid plays in promoting food security. If food aid is significant, then the presence

of food aid in Swaziland is justified from a humanitarian perspective. However, none of the interviewees listed food aid as a practice which contributes to food security. Furthermore, most of the interviewees referred to food aid as ineffective or a “short-term” solution to a larger problem. Interviewee 3 referred to food aid as a “Band-aid on a bullet wound.”

Interviewee 5 described it as:

“...cosmetic. The impact is almost insignificant. It’s like the story of teaching someone how to fish. Once it is finished, so what? As much as I appreciate it, but the impact is nothing” (Interviewee 5).

There was a distinct difference in opinion about the positive effects of food aid on food security between the two interviewees who worked for organizations distributing food aid and the five interviewees who did not work for those organizations. The five that did not work for food aid organizations all commented that food aid was not a long-term solution to food insecurity, and that it is over-used in Swaziland. Three of the five who had been contracted as individuals or through the government to help with aid distribution all saw imminent starvation due to crop failure as the only acceptable time to roll out food aid. Interviewee 3 described their experience with food aid distribution as follows:

“Food aid should be run with military precision and rationing. Any more than a year and you start to see disincentive effects. During the 1992 drought, I was contacted by WFP to distribute in 11 chiefdoms. I was always careful to do it in neutral areas. I refused to do it at Umphakatsis (the community meeting place). I fought with local chiefs on that. It ensures that the right people feel safe to come and get it. I also insisted on unloading from the trucks into the warehouse so that it didn’t get hectic. You have to do it militarily. You also have to do it tough. If a family claims 10 kids, you have the man come over and name his children. Whatever name he starts hesitating on, stop giving rations at that point. Any other kids do not exist....Would they have starved without the food aid? In that year of the drought-yes. Now? No. Just go a year and see what

happens. I bet you anything they're still alive. Those people aren't dying if you don't give them food" (Interviewee 3).

The interviewee quoted above brought up the political nature of food aid without being prompted by the interviewer. In order to counteract the influence of local political elites effecting which families got access to the food aid, this individual arranged for food aid to be delivered at sports grounds and schools, which are known in Swaziland for being "neutral" zones where local traditional authorities have little influence. Interviewee 2 also described an instance of corruption at the Umphakatsis:

"There was this NERCHA (National Emergency Response Council for HIV/AIDS) project to give farm inputs to Umphakatsi to feed the OVCs (orphans and vulnerable children). In some of the Umphakatsi I saw, the food ended up being eaten by the powerful guys and did not benefit the children" (Interviewee 2).

Both of the above examples describe instances where local political elites attempted to exploit the food aid system. Historically, food aid to Swaziland has been fraught with controversies surrounding its distribution. There is, on the one hand, the situation of inequitable distribution as arranged by the chiefs to those who are in their favor, as mentioned by the interviewees. At the national level, there are also problems surrounding its large-scale distribution. A national scandal erupted in 2013 when the Times of Swaziland published several articles revealing that over \$3 million US dollars' worth of food aid donated by Japan had been sold and the money deposited to the Central Bank of Swaziland (IRIN 2013). While the monetization of food aid in Swaziland is a common practice, it is not widely known by the populace that this goes on, and donors seldom demand accountability from the Swazi government to prove that the donated food was sold to supplement farming inputs and farming programs. In the case of the Japanese food aid in 2013, the money was deposited to the Central Bank of Swaziland, which clearly violated the monetization agreement that the money should be spent on farming inputs. Later in 2013, a parliamentarian inspected a

government warehouse of food aid, only to discover the vast majority of it rotting and unfit for human consumption (IRIN 2013). Both national scandals point to the lack of government accountability with food aid. Post-development theorists would argue that such failures and instances of corruption clearly demonstrate a failure of development ideology to live up to its noble and paternalistic intentions.

Furthermore, the use of “food for work” or “food for education” model commonly utilized by almost every NGO operating in Swaziland was criticized by Interviewee 4 for creating dependencies:

“They drain the NGOs and have created dependency where people expect food where before they would have expected nothing. The biggest problem is that they aren’t working within existing frameworks. Corruption is also rife and problematic when they just go to Umphakatsi and start something new without seeing that there are already existing community structures providing the service.”

The interviewee points out an interesting problem faced by communities which have development organizations working in them. Many times, the community has indigenous structures in place for providing services. For instance, the communal fields at Umphakatsi are traditionally planted and harvested communally and used to feed hungry constituents within the chieftaincy. With the introduction of Western food aid, some chieftaincies abandoned this practice or scaled it back dramatically, thus decreasing the food security of their entire communities. In other chieftaincies, there have been cases of individuals burning entire fields in order to get their community to qualify for food aid. Thus, the introduction of the Western development ideology practice of food aid undermined local traditions, with devastating consequences. From a post-development perspective, food aid was the priority of the development experts and not of the community which already had existing structures in place to address food insecurity. Had these so-called experts consulted with the local populations and democratically involved them in the process of increasing their own food security, there

might be a sustainable, culturally appropriate solution to food security in place today instead of an aid-dependent one.

Another example of food aid hurting traditional structures was through the introduction of Neighborhood Care Points (NCPs) which distribute food aid to orphans and vulnerable children. The WFP describes the NCP feeding program as follows:

“The NCP feeding programme is one of the only social safety nets for OVC under the age of five that covers children on a national scale, and is an important component in mitigating the impact of HIV and AIDS on children in Swaziland.” (WFP 2013).

This statement contrasts drastically from what interviewees said about the NCP program, which they did not even acknowledge as being a provider of food security. According to one food security expert interviewed, the introduction of the NCPs into the community caused many pre-existing preschools to dissolve and the preschool teachers to lose their jobs once free food was available elsewhere in the community. Furthermore, these structures negatively impacted family structures. As Interviewee 4 described:

“I had a man come to me complaining about (the local NCP). His brother died and he had assumed care over his orphan nephew. But the nephew wouldn’t listen to his rules or accept his uncle as his new caretaker because he got all his meals for free from the NCP. Since most homesteads care for orphans, they’ve really fractured the family when the orphans don’t get their meals from the same authority figure. It’s destroying close-knit communities and turned them into those receiving handouts and those who aren’t” (Interviewee 4).

Post-development theorists would view these effects of food aid as deeply problematic, as they harm or undermine indigenous knowledge and community “alternatives to development” for the sake of increased dependence on the benevolence of western donors. In its literature on the NCP program, the WFP does not acknowledge indigenous solutions to food

security recognized by the interviewees, but rather states that the NCPs are “one of the only” means to food security in the communities. Furthermore, Swaziland is a communal society with strict rules governing the egalitarian distribution of food (hence the division of Umphakatsi crops among needy constituents). Even the act of eating in front of another person without sharing what one has is offensive. Given this, the selection of very specific fragment “targets” of the population by food aid donors (OVCs, school-going children, and homesteads with HIV/AIDS) has the potential to negatively impact social life and actually erode food security at the community level. Some indigenous ‘alternatives to development’ solutions to food security issues in Swaziland are discussed in the recommendation section below.

## **Conclusions**

This paper sought to answer the question; do development practices adequately address issues of food security in Swaziland? Interviews with practitioners of food security and food aid programs in Swaziland revealed that food security interventions in Swaziland do not adequately address issues of food security. While development experts over-emphasized the role of HIV in food security issues and commonly used food aid as a food security intervention, practitioners found that other issues not addressed by the development industry more profoundly affect food security. The biggest challenges to food security, as perceived by food security practitioners, were the use of poor farming practices, land allocation policies, and a lack of government resources. None of these challenges is addressed by development interventions in Swaziland. This disconnect between what the development industry identified as problematic and what local food security practitioners believe emphasizes the undemocratic and “scientific” nature of development criticized by post-development theorists. Outside “experts” are responsible for addressing the problems that they identify without local involvement, and these experts then create interventions targeted at the Swazi population without regard for culturally appropriate solutions. Furthermore, development interventions were found to harm local, indigenous solutions to food security problems, which is another problematic aspect of development.

The role of food aid in food security was found to be insignificant or even detrimental by all but one of the food security practitioners who had worked on food aid distribution in the

past. Furthermore, post-development theory is less concerned with who has the duty to provide food security and more concerned with how communities rise up from the grassroots to solve issues of food insecurity indigenously. For this reason, Western food aid organizations which provide food aid are seen as an impediment or a distraction from grassroots progress. The data revealed that this belief was also held by most food security practitioners interviewed.

These findings reinforce the validity of post-development's rejection of development as an ideology and as a practice. Post-development theory argues that development is concerned with implementing programs at "target" populations without their involvement in deciding what aspects of their lives need "developing" and how to best go about that. Indeed, food insecurity was perceived more benignly than the development literature suggests. Furthermore, the challenges to food security as identified by the technocratic, so-called development experts varied significantly from the causes identified by field workers. These findings show the importance of community involvement in creating solutions to food security problems.

These findings also suggest that other countries which receive food security/food aid development assistance re-examine the development framework as a whole and instead look towards local, democratic food security solutions as a means to addressing food insecurity. One avenue for further research would be to conduct a closer examination of how the power dynamics between rural Swazis on Swazi Nation Land, local chiefs, and national political figures affect food security. Another area that needs further research is a thorough investigation focusing exclusively on the social effects of food aid programs in Swaziland by interviewing and surveying recipient communities.

### **Recommendations**

Post-development theorists argue for an 'alternatives to development' agenda to address issues of poverty and progress. 'Alternatives to development' are democratic in nature and solve the problems which the local community perceives to be important without the influence of development interventions. Interviewees provided a wealth of suggestions for improving food security in Swaziland (see Appendix B for their complete list of suggestions).



Their suggestions discussed below answer the question; what are some 'alternatives to development' solutions to food security issues in Swaziland?

The first task to making Swaziland more food-secure is to place issues of food security back into the political sphere, because some of the key causes of food insecurity in Swaziland are inherently political issues. As such, food security issues are incorrectly depoliticized by both food aid organizations and by the government of the Kingdom of Swaziland. The second most common challenge to food security mentioned by the interviewees (5 of the 7) related to better land allocation. One of the most pressing political issues that must be dealt with urgently by Parliament is the expansion of non-agricultural development into Swazi Nation Land. The present laws regarding the use of Swazi Nation Land for non-agricultural purposes by private individuals are unclear and unknown to many local chiefs. Furthermore, the displacement of Swazi Nation Land dwellers from these lands must also be dealt with. A call for clearer agricultural policies in general could help with this. Suggestions for improving land tenure laws included giving subsistence farmers legal holding rights to their land, thereby allowing them to use their farms as collateral when applying for bank loans. This could also prevent the rightful family residing on disputed land from being forcibly removed from their holdings for political reasons, as this would grant them legal rights to stay.

The next most common challenge mentioned by interviewees was to improve government agricultural programs (4 of the 7). Most advocated for more agriculturally friendly land and pricing policies as well as greater government spending in the agricultural sector. During policy-making, lawmakers must acknowledge that government funding of agricultural programs play an important role in food security and prioritize funding for agricultural programs. Additionally, food aid organizations must participate in political policy-making decisions with the government and work jointly with the Ministry of Agriculture to develop and implement these plans with an eye towards sustainable programming and dependency reduction. Furthermore, development organizations which at the present time spend a great deal of time and resources on food aid can instead divert their energies towards partnering with the Ministry of Agriculture to professionalize and expand the scope of extension officers.

Additionally, interviewees suggested that government control the prices of agricultural inputs to ensure that subsistence farmers have access to the inputs they need to produce high yields.

The next task after re-politicizing food security and addressing agricultural policy issues politically is to work with local communities to adapt new and indigenous technologies for better farming practices in general. The most common suggestions by the interviewees (7 of 7) related to the adaptation of appropriate technologies and better farming practices. These recommendations reinforce the finding that better agricultural practices produce higher yields and make Swaziland more food secure. A culturally appropriate solution (derived from grassroots food security workers) might be to rekindle the rich and sustainable Swazi agricultural traditions of the past. For instance, legume crops and pumpkins used to be planted underneath maize in a double-cropping method. These crops put nitrogen back into the soil and help to mitigate the mineral drain of the maize crop. In addition, they help with dietary diversity. The use of positive indigenous practices such as this (which have only very recently been abandoned by some farmers) could revitalize the soil and lead to higher maize yields. Many potential Swazi ‘alternatives to development’ solutions to food security issues already exist at the community level. These solutions include the use of the fields at Umphakatsi to be donated to hungry constituents. Additionally, backyard gardens and crop diversification could reduce food security problems in the rural areas, which tend to be overly reliant on maize. In the past, Swazis ate a rich diet of wild plants, berries, and even many insects to give them the nutrients they needed. These practices are receiving revitalization in some rural areas, but could be helped by a national movement calling for the return of preference for these traditional Swazi dietary staples. Furthermore, the use of sorghum as the staple crop in areas where maize is unfit is also a traditional Swazi practice which could increase food security. Other solutions suggested which are not necessarily “Swazi” in origin but could help to improve food security include the use of conservation agriculture techniques, better irrigation infrastructure, and the increased use of biotechnology. These practices could potentially increase food security if the desire for them arises democratically among the people.

Finally, it is important to note the discord between the focus of scholars studying food security and the focus of food security practitioners on the ground. The practitioners

interviewed in this study all witnessed practices on the ground that they saw as detrimental to food security which could be easily remedied through political change and improved farming practices. Scholars and development experts studying the food security situation in any country should therefore make a concerted effort to engage grassroots-level food security agents in order gain a realistic understanding of barriers to community-level food security.

## **Appendix A**

### Index of Interviewees

Interviewee 1: Ministry of Agriculture Extension Officer

Interviewee 2: Ministry of Agriculture Extension Officer

Interviewee 3: Grassroots food security organization (local)-Director

Interviewee 4: Grassroots food security organization (local)- Training Manager

Interviewee 5: University professor who researches indigenous agriculture

Interviewee 6: Food aid organization employee

Interviewee 7: Food aid organization employee

## Appendix B

### 'Alternatives to Development'

Suggestions made by food security practitioners to improving food security in Swaziland:

- irrigation infrastructure
- modern farming techniques
- permaculture techniques and the use of conservation agriculture
- farmer-friendly land tenure laws
- the promotion of legume crops
- increased use of biotechnology and GMO crops
- using positive indigenous practices (such as double-cropping)
- crop diversification and specialty crops
- greater innovation diffusion directed to small scale farmers
- greater professionalization of extension officers
- increased use of backyard gardens
- investment in small-holder farms and loans to small-holder farms
- clearer agricultural policies in general
- identify champions of research and technological innovations
- government allocate more money to agriculture
- controlled input prices

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