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**Title:** The predominance of food assistance over livestock and crop production in the livelihoods of rural Mabutsane communities in Botswana: A cause for concern

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Frequent droughts and over-reliance on livestock production and rain-fed crop production predispose rural communities to poverty. This fragile livelihood situation undermines access to adequate food and cash income. The contribution of livelihoods factors to energy intake was examined using a sample of 245 households and 8 focused groups. The uptake and contribution of social protection services was also examined. Using livestock to define wealth, 87% of households were categorized as poor, while 11% and 2% were in the middle and high wealth categories respectively. Fewer households (13%) were above the poverty-threshold of US 1.25 per day. Household accessed food through market-purchase, food assistance, payment-in-kind, gifts and livestock and crop production. The middle and better-off households met their energy needs through these access options, but the very-poor and the poor had a 6% and 2% energy deficit respectively. Food assistance provided 20-30% of the food needs for the poor and very poor and 10-15% for the better-off and middle households respectively. Crop production and livestock contributed only 2% and 7% of the very-poor and the poor's food energy needs, while the middle and the better-off obtained 14% and 19% of energy needs respectively. Livestock products contributed under 1% of energy needs for the very poor, and 4%, 20% and 42% for the poor, middle and better-off households respectively. Purchases and payments-in-kind contributed 40-70% and 7-20% to very poor and the poor's energy intake. Considering seasonal dips food aid contribution to energy is the most significant and reliable factor across wealth groups.