

Fighting Food Insecurity, a way forward

An estimated 70% of Lesotho's population is dependent on rain-fed agriculture for their livelihoods, meaning that most people are vulnerable to climate change. This is made because only 9% of the land is arable.



Thabang Motsomi, in his maize field in the village of Maphuts'eng, Mohale's Hoek

Thabang Motsomi's family is one of those who have suffered the effects of climate change. Because of the severe drought early last year, he could plant only half of the land – 0.4ha - that he owns.

“We don't really know what to do about the drought and soon we will not have enough to eat.” Motsomi said: “You see, we have four people in the household, only my son and I can work, and I am already 60.”

In the 2004 National Household Survey, more than 55% of people lived below the poverty line.

“Lesotho experienced the worst drought in 30 years between 2006 and 2007, which resulted in a major drop in the production of maize and sorghum crops. Then we had floods in 2011 and now again in 2012. The impact of late rains affects the capacity of thousands of vulnerable families to recover. If we don't help, a lot of people will not be able to get enough food to eat,” said Bokang Mantule, FAO project coordinator in Lesotho. “Food security is important because it relates to many other issues, such as the maternal mortality rate and nutrition issues. Sexual and gender-based violence is also high and is likely to escalate as women tend to bear the brunt of poverty and food unavailability.”

FAO Lesotho realizes the necessity of strengthening the livelihoods of this vulnerable group to ensure that they are able to reach their economic and social potential through food security, empowerment and protection.

With support from the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, FAO Lesotho has been coordinating the implementation of the project “Strengthening Rural Livelihoods Severely Affected by Climate Change-induced Drought in Lesotho” since 2010. The funds are being used to protect and empower the people who have been the most severely affected by climate-change induced drought in 13 communities in three of the most vulnerable agro-ecological zones of Lesotho - Maseru, Mafeteng and Mohale's Hoek.

Working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, the Ministry of Energy, Meteorology and Water Affairs, and the Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office, FAO has identified and trained 500 households in Conservation Agriculture (CA) and will continue providing supplies and technical assistance this year.



Shoaepana Rori in her maize field in Hloahloeng, Mohale's Hoek

The aim of CA is to give farmers improved and sustainable livelihoods through the application of the three CA principles: minimum soil disturbance, permanent soil cover and crop rotations. CA provides an adequate adaptation technique for climate change in Lesotho and is affordable to all farmers. CA protects the soil from erosion by water and wind, improves the soil's organic matter and conserves the infiltration of soil water, while reducing farmers' production costs.

“I planted maize in my field last November and I am able to produce more this year than last year by using the CA method,” said Rori, who is the head of a family of 11. “With the help of FAO, my whole family has enough to eat and we are giving some of the maize to our poor neighbours.” Rori received support for the planting season from FAO in September 2012 in the second and last year of the project.

But not all families have been successful yet. Adopting CA requires a continued effort during several agricultural seasons, improving soil quality and moisture progressively.

Tati Pekingche’s family has struggled. Because of the severe drought, he was able to plant on only half of his land. Late rains during the planting season have affected crop production negatively nationwide.



Public gathering in Mekaling, Mphahle's Hoek District

“I know CA is good and I followed every step that I learned from the training, then I just waited for the rain, but the rain never came. When it finally came, it was too late to plant the whole land,” Pekingche said.

Although the situation is challenging, he is optimistic about the future and is expecting to improve his harvest.

When asked about this year, he said: “I will definitely continue doing CA, because I think the seeds that FAO distributed were the best we have had access to and these training sessions were very useful. I just hope that we will get more rain next season.”

“The last harvest season was one of the lowest in the past decade in Lesotho. The impact of erratic weather patterns and climate change can be strongly felt by the communities in rural areas,” said Borja Miguelez, FAO Emergency and Rehabilitation Coordinator, “but there are solutions to these problems. Conservation Agriculture gives us hope for the future, we need to continue working.”

The Commission on Human Security (CHS) defines human security as the protection of “the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and fulfillment” (UN Trust Fund official website). FAO Lesotho has closely followed this definition to design its projects according to different groups’ needs and helping them feel more secure about their lives.