

## **Nearly half of all children under five years in Lesotho are stunted, an indicator of chronic malnutrition**

Stunting is common in southern Africa. It is estimated that in Lesotho about 40% of children under the age of five are stunted.

To improve the nutritional status of the Basotho people, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – with support from the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) – decided to help 2,560 families to start their own home-based gardens and to grow a selection of vegetables.

“Vegetable production diversifies food sources and improves the diets of rural families” said Bokang Mantutle, FAO project coordinator in Lesotho. “Most of Basotho families have access to small plot of land near their houses where they can grow vegetables. With the right techniques, we can increase the production and extend the availability of vegetables all year long.”



Manyefouo Ralefu in her backyard garden, in Mafeteng District

Manyefouo Ralefu is one of the participants in the backyard garden production project in Mafeteng District. She is a widow and heads a household of five.

Ralefu received seeds from the FAO and underwent five days of intensive training. Last year she had her first harvest.

“I started the project in 2011 because my family needs to eat vegetables and we don’t have enough money to buy them from the market. Now we have rakes and spades and we grow rape, spinach, beetroot, carrots and onions all over our backyard and we are so happy.”

FAO also collaborated with World Food Programme (WFP) in school feeding programmes in Lesotho. The aim was to bring home gardens to schools.



Makhotso Lephutha at Mokhalimetso Primary School, in Mohale's Hoek District

For Makhotso Lephutha, the backyard garden project not only means sufficient food to eat, but also brings hope for the future. Lephutha is a teacher at the Mokhalimetso Primary School, where she has worked for five years.

Mokhalimetso Primary School has 215 pupils, but only seven teachers. The school has no running water or electricity.

“Before we started the project, our kids here could eat only one kind of vegetable every week, which is not good for their health. We worried about it so much. In 2011, we received peas, potatoes, tomatoes and cabbage seeds from the FAO. Now pupils get more nutrition, so they grow faster and study better.”

By helping people to achieve food security, FAO does not only help farmers to get enough food to eat, but it also spurs them on to plan and dream for the future.

Lephutha has a dream for her pupils at Mokhalimetso Primary School: “FAO helps me to dream about something that I could never think about before. I want all of my pupils to eat well and go to secondary school and even university in the future.”

“Chronic malnutrition levels in Lesotho are unacceptably high. Malnutrition is often the result of a combination of social aspects and deserves multi-sector responses,” said Borja Miguelez, FAO Emergency and Rehabilitation Coordinator. “Home gardens are an excellent complement for Basotho families’ livelihoods. Communities are increasingly interested in new techniques, such as key holes and double trenches. We start seeing families replicating these techniques on their own and this is a great encouragement for the future.” – FAO