

Effects of Conservation Agriculture and Home Gardening in Mafeteng District

The sun is out in the district of Mafeteng, Masemousu. Yet, a cool breeze can be felt sweeping through the air. 'M'e 'Malerato Makoae, at 64 years of age has an indefatigable love for Conservation Agriculture (CA), and the evidence can be seen in her maize fields and three key hole gardens where a variety of vegetables are thriving.

'M'e 'Malerato is one of the 24, 500 participating beneficiaries of the Protection and Restoration of Livelihoods programme, a collaboration between FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS). Beneficiaries under this programme across the country were assisted with agricultural inputs such as: 10kg of Open Pollinated Seed Varieties (OPV) maize seeds, 5Kg of OVP bean seeds, 5kg of grazing vetch seeds, fertilizer/peas seeds and 300g of 6 varieties of vegetable seeds, Home Gardening and Nutrition handouts and a 4 x 4m shade net to protect crops against extreme weather conditions.

The inputs were distributed by The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) together with MAFS staff with funding from the Netherlands Government.



“I love CA, I will never let it go because it has made life easy for me as it is a type of farming that allows me to do everything with my own hands”, she beams. Conservation Agriculture is a farming technology guided by three basic principles; continuous minimum soil disturbance, permanent soil cover and crop rotation and intercropping.

“From the last harvesting season, I could get two bags of 50kg maize because of CA, the yields are much higher as I got only got one bag of 25kg when I used traditional farming methods.”

'M'e 'Malerato Makoae beside her keyhole gardens

'M'e 'Malerato explains that the training materials which were a part of the agricultural inputs, have helped her immeasurably as those materials have a wealth of information on the farming of CA. “The training booklets have great tips on how to prepare the planting basins and how much fertilizer to add, I find them very useful.”



'M'e 'Malerato's maize fields, after harvesting, stalks are left standing, some are spread between rows

She is a single mother, a sole provider for her children, with farming as her only source of income. “All my four children help me out when farming, I am glad about this because I know children nowadays do not enjoy farming,” she says. The eldest of her two sons are both herd boys, aged 22 and 17 respectively, followed by a daughter who is in high school, and the last member of the family is her 4-year-old granddaughter.

“In my keyhole gardens, I decided to plant cabbage, my children are able to eat, and I can provide other household needs for my family as I manage to sell some of the cabbage.” Home gardening techniques such as key hole and trench gardening allow optimizing scarce water resources, including water used for dish washing and other household uses.

Business is looking good lately as she is now selling large numbers of cabbage to the neighbouring 'Masemousu Primary School. “So far, I have made about \$80, I sometimes also dry the vegetables, and people then buy to make soup”.

The effects of CA can indeed be seen and the impact will go a long way. FAO remains committed to strengthening the livelihoods of vulnerable people across Lesotho. FAO has supplied 223,645 people (44,729 households) with home gardening and nutrition complementary packages and will continue the distributions to reach around 280,000 people.