



# Lesotho and FAO

## *Building resilience and sustainable food and nutrition security*

Lesotho joined the Organization in 1966 and has enjoyed close cooperation with FAO since the establishment of the country office in 1983. The main thrust of assistance has been on the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes and projects aimed at improving agricultural output, natural resources management and food and nutrition security. More recently, important features of cooperation have included response to agricultural emergencies, climate change adaptation and promotion of sustainable land management principles and practices.

### Responding to recurrent agricultural emergencies

Owing to the increasing frequency of climate-induced agricultural emergencies, FAO has designed an emergency and resilience programme to promote climate-smart agricultural technologies throughout Lesotho. Between 2012 and 2015, the programme reached 18 500 vulnerable farming households, promoting key technologies and practices such as conservation agriculture and innovative home gardening techniques as well as training on good nutrition. Agricultural inputs in the form of seeds and fertilizers were also distributed to help restore the productive potential of households in need. To ensure a wider adoption of climate-smart agricultural technologies, the programme trained over 400 extension workers, 700 school teachers and 200 traditional leaders.

The completion of this programme in 2015 coincided with the worst drought in Southern Africa's recorded history. Given the severity of this year's drought and the astronomical increases in food prices, the number of people in need of food assistance by the end of the cropping season is likely to surpass that of 2012 (725 000). In response to this emergency, FAO is mobilizing resources from several donors to bolster the agriculture sector and support recovery.

### Matching FAO's expertise to Lesotho's needs

In line with the National Strategic Development Plan, the FAO assistance in Lesotho is shaped by the **2013 – 2017 Country Programming Framework (CPF)**, which is in turn focusing on the following four strategic priorities:

- **Sustainable food and nutrition security**, with a focus on strengthening national institutions and farmer organizations to effectively respond to the food and nutrition security challenges. Special emphasis is placed on improving knowledge and skills of farmers and extension services on the use of productivity and resilience enhancing technologies.
- **Enabling environment for sustainable agri-business development** through strengthened the capacity of key government institutions and other relevant stakeholders to formulate, facilitate and execute agricultural investment plans.
- **Sustainable management of natural resources**, a priority which recognises land degradation and unsustainable utilization of natural resources as the leading sources of food insecurity and declining agricultural productivity. This challenge will be addressed by increasing communities' engagement in initiatives aiming to protect the environment and conserve the natural resource base.
- **Strengthen capacity for better agricultural service delivery**, with a view to improve farming communities' access to agricultural advisory services. The process involves establishing policy and programme frameworks for agricultural research and extension, strengthening capacity for M&E, agricultural research and extension and strengthening closer links between the two, and Knowledge Management.

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## Combining social protection with agriculture

Despite the fact that the Government invests around 9 percent of its budget on social protection schemes, including old-age pensions, cash grants for orphans and vulnerable children, agricultural subsidies and partial grants for tertiary education, Lesotho is not receiving a commensurate return on this investment. Poverty and food insecurity continue to plague the population, while education and health outcomes have not improved. Through its emergency and resilience programme, FAO has demonstrated that a combination of social protection and agriculture leads to better results in terms of poverty and food insecurity reduction than single interventions. Within this framework, FAO provided a small package of vegetable seeds to labour-constrained social protection beneficiaries as well as training on appropriate labour-saving home gardening technologies. Families receiving this support managed to achieve major increases in vegetable production in and around their homesteads, thus increasing their access to fresh vegetable produce and dispelling the notion that social protection beneficiaries and labour-constrained families have no productive potential.

## Promoting natural resources management

Climate change programming and natural resource management are of crucial importance for increasing the productivity and general well-being of the broader agriculture sector. With this in mind, over the last 12 months a number of complementary projects have been developed with a focus on the environment, natural resource management and climate change adaptation. One of these initiatives has been instrumental in bringing users and generators of spatial data on one platform and facilitating the land cover change assessment work including the accompanying interpretation processes under the technical guidance of FAO experts. As a result, major progress has been achieved in developing Lesotho's land cover maps. This information will provide an important baseline for planning sustainable land management interventions and broader natural resource management activities. Launched in December 2015, a GEF-funded intervention is to strengthen capacity for climate change adaptation in the agriculture sector. Three districts representing three major agro-ecological zones have been targeted. With a budget of US\$3.59 million, this four-year project is receiving technical assistance from the Climate, Energy and Tenure Division, particularly the Climate Impact, Adaptation and Environmental Sustainability unit, and is coordinated through the Ministry of Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation.

## Strengthening extension services and farmer organizations

Recognizing the importance of non-state actors in the provision of extension services and the increasing demand for farmer organizations to provide advisory services to their membership, over the last two years FAO has helped the Lesotho National Farmers Union (LENAFU) to develop the technical and operational capacities necessary for effective service delivery. The main thrust of this support was strengthening the capacity of LENAFU and its affiliate organizations in agribusiness development and marketing.

Another key area of work is agricultural research and extension. Despite its crucial role in driving agricultural innovation, very little investment has

been made in this area in Lesotho. Consequently, both operational and technical capacities of the key research and extension institutions have been seriously eroded. Persistent underinvestment and neglect of such expertise has been compounded by a lack of coordination and collaboration among different actors in the sector, and this has had negative effects on the performance of the agriculture sector.

To help address these issues, in collaboration with the Department of Agricultural Research, FAO is implementing a project to improve the capacities of the national agricultural research and extension system to undertake relevant, effective and efficient agricultural research for development. Other institutions engaged in this process include the Department of Field Services, the National University of Lesotho (NUL), Lesotho Agricultural College, agriculture-based NGOs and the apex body for the farmer organizations (LENAFU).

*"We need comprehensive and sustainable food security programmes, with interventions ranging from social protection to productive support."*

**José Graziano da Silva**  
FAO Director-General

