



NEWS RELEASE

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
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Maseru, 7 August 2017- Lesotho establishes new Soil Information System (LEGIS)

The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in collaboration with The Government of Lesotho is providing technical support for the establishment of the Lesotho Soils Information System (LEGIS). This system is intended to collect, store and provide easy access to baseline soil information to address a broad range of agro-environmental, land use and management issues.

Lesotho is a landlocked country, surrounded entirely by South Africa. More than 76% of the country's population lives in rural areas, where the main source of income comes from subsistence, rain-fed agriculture. Land use patterns in Lesotho have largely been determined by historical circumstances and agro-ecological conditions.

During territorial wars of the 19th century, hilltops and mountain slides were used as fortresses hence many settlements were confined to these strategic locations while flat plains and fertile valleys were used for crop farming and the remote mountains for grazing. This has largely remained the pattern of land-use in the country, although population pressure and urbanization have forced widespread encroachment of settlements onto areas that were traditionally reserved for agriculture. The shortage of arable land has also led to cultivation of marginal lands including mountain slopes, with devastating effects on soil stability, erosion and fertility, and the resultant decrease in agricultural productivity and the quality of rangelands.

The country's soils are under severe pressure as a result of natural conditions and human activities, triggering soil erosion, land degradation and depletion of the soil organic matter. There is limited soil data in Lesotho, to date, the country has no national soil information system to guide evidence based decision making on various applications underpinning key policy requirements. The establishment of this information system will go a long way in supporting Lesotho's efforts towards sustainable management of her land and water resources.

Training is underway by FAO to national staff from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Ministry of Mining, Ministry of Forestry Range and Soil Conservation, Lesotho Meteorological Services and the National University of Lesotho. They will be trained on digital soil mapping techniques, producing soil property maps, and other Geographical Information System layers.

A fully functional and well maintained national Soil Information System will directly impact on the agriculture and natural resource sectors of Lesotho by providing technical information on how to

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sustainably manage different soils as determined by the analysis of their properties. This initiative is therefore an important step towards achieving sustainable food production. It will help stakeholders such as government institutions, academia and farming communities to:

- Identify threats and pressures on soil
- Develop and implement of appropriate measures for combating soil degradation
- Mitigate the negative effects of climate change
- Improve soil management at farm level by improving water and fertilizer use efficiency and by helping design appropriate irrigation systems

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