Message from the FAO Representative

If there is anything that 2020 has taught us so far it is what Robert Burns once put it, “The best-laid plans o’ mice and men go oft awry”. The first quarter of 2020 certainly started on a high note for the FAO-Namibia team: we had our review and planning meeting at the end of January – after returning from the Christmas/New Year vacation.

After the two days of planning, we all felt reinvigorated to start a new year, having taken stock of the previous one: we commenced a new emergency programme to support drought-affected livestock farmers. In addition, much was happening on the programme development side – youth in agribusiness, GEF and GCF programmes and the support to the development of the National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP) were all ticking over nicely!

The second quarter however was nothing like we had expected – thanks to the global COVID-19 hitting our shores! Nonetheless, we settled down to a new way of working with most of the 17-person team all teleworking from home for a six-week period. With the recent relaxation of State of Emergency measures, the FAO Namibia team is largely back in office and hard at work. Building resilience to shocks continues to feature strongly in our programme focus as the number of shocks seems to be increasing – droughts, now COVID-19 and lately – an outbreak of locusts.

On a sad note, we said goodbye to our Communications Officer, Nelao Haimbodi who left for a position with a Regional programme; and said hello to two new colleagues – Gebhardt Tjiho, who is coordinating one of our drought emergency projects, and Phillipus Tobias, who replaced Nelao as Communications Associate. We are happy to have them aboard our mission to end poverty and hunger. With that, I wish you safety throughout this pandemic. Happy reading!

Ms. Farayi Zimudzi, FAO Representative in Namibia

HIGHLIGHTS

• CERF funded hydroponic fodder production project launched.
• Korea funded project improves provision of water to drought hit communities.
FAO Kick starts the “Emergency Livelihood Support to Drought-affected Communities in Namibia” Project

In a bid to avert the devastating effects of the critical drought situation in Namibia, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), with financial support from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), has availed N$10 million to assist 3250 drought-stricken farming households in seven drought-affected regions of Namibia.

With this support, FAO is working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform (MAWLR), Namibia National Farmers Union (NNFU), and Namibia Commercial Farmers Union (NECFU). FAO and its partners’ aims to avail supplementary livestock feed through the installation of hydroponic fodder production systems as well as veterinary supplies to restore and sustain the livelihoods of targeted beneficiaries. According to MAWLR, over 59 000 livestock have died due to the ongoing drought situation in Namibia, disrupting the livelihoods of those dependent on livestock and related farming enterprises.

Speaking at the launch of the project held in Okahandja, FAO Namibia Representative, Ms. Farayi Zimudzi, highlighted that the project seeks to benefit 3250 households, which equates to approximately 14 300 people, that have been hardest hit by recurrent droughts which worsened over the 2018/2019 farming seasons.

Ms. Zimudzi explained that the formulation of the project titled “Emergency livelihood support to drought-affected communities in Namibia” occurred in late December 2019, targeting five regions namely: Ohangwena, Omusati, Hardap, Kunene, and Omaheke. However, that number increased to seven regions after //Kharas and Erongo regions were later included, as they were experiencing an equally severe grazing and food security situation. All the aforementioned regions have seen a drastic reduction in yields and a mass death of livestock, negatively affecting the livelihoods of thousands of inhabitants.

“The project focuses on providing life-saving support for livestock owned by the project beneficiaries – aiming to provide feed produced from the non-mechanised hydroponic fodder production systems, and provide essential veterinary support to the same targeted households. The project will also make a deliberate effort to reach women-headed households, people living with disabilities, and the youth,” said Ms. Zimudzi.

According to her, the support will be availed over a period of six-months, specifically between the months of January until June 2020 respectively. This crucial assistance comes on the heels of an N$9 million project funding availed by FAO in 2019 to provide hay, multi-nutrient blocks and the rehabilitation of boreholes and traditional wells in the Omusati, Kunene, Erongo and Omaheke regions. The FAO country representative went on further to call on for the creation of more initiatives to assist farmers to adapt their farming practices to the ever-changing climate.

“Climate change is taking a toll on agriculture in the country – especially smallholder agriculture that is heavily dependent on rainfall. In light of this, there is a need to step up resilience building measures to buttress farmers shock-absorbing capacity through a whole suit of measures: be they improved water harvesting, in-field water harvesting techniques to improve soil moisture retention, use of drought-tolerant crop varieties, fodder production, to name a few,” she suggested.

Lastly, Mr. Percy Misika, the Executive Director of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform, appealed to development partners to come on board and play a vital role in the rescue of Namibian farmers through impactful projects such as those seeking to provide the latest farming techniques and resources required to avert the effects of climate change and drought.
On 26 February of this year, a small delegation from FAO Namibia engaged Ms. Daisry Mathias, Presidential Advisor on Youth Matters and Enterprise Development in the State House, on matters pertaining to Namibian youth and their involvement in the food and agricultural sector.

During the meeting, Ms. Daisry provided FAO Namibia with updates on youth empowerment projects that her office is steering and the state of the small and medium enterprise (SME) development at industry and sector level. Ms. Daisry highlighted that the food and agriculture sector employs most of the youth after services sector but due to the prolonged drought situation in the country, most of them have lost their jobs and other sources of income derived from the sector. She noted that close to 48,000 jobs have been lost in 2018 which has worsened the already high unemployment situation in the country, which severely affects the youth.

Pointing out the challenges that are hampering progress in allowing the youth to reap the benefits from the agriculture sector, Ms. Daisry mentioned the lack of enabling resources that capacitate the youth to venture out into agricultural business projects as one of the serious factors limiting the youth from viewing agriculture as a viable means of survival. She went on to call for more intra-government coordination to take place and the need to loosen the tight focus on policy and regulation and concentrate more on actions. Additionally, she also went on to suggest the inclusion of technological innovations (agri-tech) to transform the sector.

In contrast, FAO Representative Ms. Farayi Zimudzi gave updates on the Hand-in-Hand initiative, which represents a bold step by FAO towards the eradication of poverty and ending hunger and all forms of malnutrition by accelerating agricultural transformation and sustainable rural development. Ms. Farayi also highlighted the economic potential of aquaculture in Namibia, especially in complementing sectors such as trade, food security, employment and rural development. Furthermore, she went on to provide updates on the performance of the food and agriculture sector in Namibia.

Other issues discussed in the meeting included the challenge of access to land to enable the implementation of youth-led agricultural related projects, countering the adverse effects of climate change and the serious need to move young people away from the primary sector of production to the secondary sector, which enhances value addition. Both parties agreed upon strengthening partnerships between them in order to improve youth participation in agriculture.

Korea Funded Project Improves Access to Water in Drought-affected Regions in Namibia

Following the declaration of the State of Emergency in June 2016 due to the critical drought situation in the country, FAO has worked diligently to secure funding for various projects meant to benefit farmers and communities severely affected by the disaster situation.

In light of the critical water shortage accompanied by the long dry spells experienced in the country, a FAO initiated project called “Improving water access in the drought-affected regions of Namibia”, which aims to support the rehabilitation of boreholes and hand-dug wells along strategic drought-induced livestock and pastoral migration routes in Erongo, Kunene and Omusati regions. The project has been mainly funded by the Government of Korea which availed US$200,000 and in part by FAO which provided funding for travel and subsistence allowances for officials implementing the project and the purchase of additional
construction materials and solar systems for two boreholes.

The bulk of the funding provided by the Government of Korea went into enabling the rehabilitation of eight boreholes (four each in Erongo and Kunene) and upgrading four hand-dug wells in Omusati. Progress on the project has been going very well, with FAO’s in-country implementing partner the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform (MAWLR) through its Directorate of Water Supply and Sanitation Coordination (DWSSC), reporting that all four boreholes and associated water points, including solar-powered water pumping systems in Erongo region, were fully rehabilitated by early April.

Additionally, four boreholes and associated water points, including elephant protection walls as well as solar pumping systems, in Kunene region were rehabilitated. Meanwhile, various factors hampered progress in the Omusati region, which included flash floods, which rendered some areas inaccessible, and lockdowns related to the ongoing COVID19 pandemic, eventually rehabilitation of the boreholes and installation of the solar systems resumed immediately after the relaxation of lockdown measures and by end of June all work was completed.

The Korea funded project could not have come at the right time for many farmers across the three regions who were in desperate need of assistance to ensure the survival of their livestock through the provision of adequate water supply. Scenes of goats and herds of cattle rushing their way to the water points to drink brought relief to the faces of farmers who could not withhold their excitement in seeing their livestock finally rescued from the harsh effects of the unforgiving drought.

FAO Conducts Presentation on VGGT document to NUST students

FAO Land Experts in early June gave a virtual presentation on the role of the Organization in land administration to a group of around 50 students from the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). The presentation formed part of a lecture series that focused on international cooperation and its role in promoting good land governance and improving land administration in developing countries.

The presentation mainly paid focus on unpacking the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT) of Land, Fisheries and Forestry in the Context of National Food Security document that forms part of the study course materials for the students. FAO’s Land Tenure Officers, Rigava Mackay and Wordsworth Larbi, both compiled and facilitated the presentation virtually to the group of students who were eager to learn about the practicality and applicability of the VGGT document.

The main purpose of the VGGT document is to serve as a reference and to provide guidance to improve the governance of tenure of land, fisheries, and forests with the overarching goal of achieving food security for all and to support the progressive realisation of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security.

The two experts focused on explaining the purpose, principles and actions required in knowing how to use the document effectively while providing a practical overview
to the current theoretical work that the students engage in. Students who witnessed the presentation hailed from three academic disciplines namely: Property Studies, Land Administration, and Regional and Rural Development who all benefited immensely from the virtual presentation/lecture.

In Namibia, FAO has supported the land reform process since 1998 working directly with the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform, then Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation to support capacity building in land administration with a focus on valuation and taxation of freehold commercial agricultural land. Late last year 2019, FAO also facilitated training on the VGGT document to Members of Parliament in a bid to enhance their capacity to deliver law-making, budgetary allocation and oversight roles.

Ministry of Agriculture officials receive training on AMIS

A group of around 15 officials from the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform (MAWLR) this May recently received training on the Agricultural Management Information System (AMIS).

AMIS is an intra-net system endorsed in 2003 by the Ministry with the intention of enhancing the availability of quality agricultural statistical data and information in Namibia in order to expedite informed decision making within MAWLR. AMIS is accessible in all 14 regions of the country, with assigned Focal Persons and Information Officers able to upload data onto the system.

The general objective of the workshop was to train Focal Points and Information Officers on the AMIS Intranet system that will allow efficient and effective reporting of information. The training focus areas included organizing of data in excel and use of pivot tables, creating of libraries and re-arranging of files and folders of different directorates, introduction to core indicators and assigning of technical assistants to each directorate.

The training workshop looked at exposing participants to the AMIS portal through an orientation. Participants were reoriented on the URL of AMIS system, including how to log on to the system and how to navigate through the AMIS portal and the level of rights that one has over different pages of the system. A hands-on approach was adapted to achieve this and most of the participants were able to execute these tasks by themselves at the end of the session.

Although AMIS was initially meant to create high quality statistical products and services to meet international standards that satisfy certain requirements such as accessibility, relevance and consistency, in subsequent years the use of the system deteriorated due to technical and financial support challenges. Capacity building was required to revive the system and reorient relevant staff on how best to make use of it.

Statisticians from the Directorate of Planning and Business Development (DPBD) and Analyst Programmers from Directorate of General Services (DGS) facilitated the training workshop. Funding support is availed by the European Union’s EDF 11 funding programme through the SADC Secretariat and the FAO Regional project “Support towards Operationalization of the SADC Regional Policy (GCP/SFS/004/EC)” termed STOSAR.

The main objective of the STOSAR project is to support the implementation of the SADC Regional Agricultural Policy for improved production, productivity, competitiveness, food and nutrition security and agro-industry development. Furthermore, the objective is in alignment with the Namibian Government’s fifth National Development Plan (NDP5), which recognizes agriculture as central to the poverty reduction, economic growth, and food security efforts in the country.
FAO Namibia’s Project Team undertook field mission visits to the southern parts of Namibia in the Hardap and //Kharas regions in late May to revitalize the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) funded “Emergency Livelihood Support to Drought-Affected Communities in Namibia” project.

The COVID-19 pandemic nationwide lockdown measures effected by the Namibian Government in March, which included travel restrictions, to curb infections of the deadly COVID-19 virus, gave rise to a delay in the implementation of the project. Despite the unfortunate interruption however, the FAO team was on hand to engage with various stakeholders in the regions in order to fast track the implementation of the project.

Led by the National Project Coordinator, Mr. Ghebardt Tjih, FAO held two separate stakeholders meetings in the towns of Mariental in the Hardap region and in Keetmanshoop in the //Kharas region respectively. Officials attended the meetings from various implementing partner agencies and organizations such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform (MAWLR), Namibia National Farmers Union (NNFU), and the Southern Namibia Farmers Union (SNAFU).

Hardap and //Kharas are two of the seven regions in Namibia set to benefit from the drought relief project which will see the setting up of 11 hydroponic fodder production structures in various locations across the regions. This is a welcomed relief to the hundreds of farmers in these two regions who have suffered immensely from the ongoing drought situation that has significantly reduced their livestock numbers.

Grim sightings of carcasses spread across the semi-rocky terrains in various communities in the regions were indicative of the immense importance of the implementation of the project which will provide farmers’ livestock with supplementary feed. The fodder production structures will each produce around 250 kilograms of barley each day, which farmers who are selected beneficiaries will then collect.

The stakeholders conveyed their commitment to implement the project as soon as possible to assist the drought hit communities by rescuing their remaining livestock. Mr Christiaan Abraham, Chief Extension Technician within MAWLR in the Hardap region, was particularly pleased by the much needed intervention by the CERF funded project and thanked FAO for its commitment to rescue farmers from further despair by safeguarding their remaining livestock. The project will also see the provision of veterinary supplies to vaccinate the core breeding herds for the targeted beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries will completely comprise of drought-affected agro-pastoral communities, which is to say the most vulnerable and hardest hit communities, and will seek to be inclusive by ensuring that 40% of the beneficiaries are women and at least 5% of those are people living with disabilities. Preference will equally so be extended to the youth who will also stand to benefit from this project.

Selected lead farmers express their relief

One of the selected lead farmers on whose farm the hydroponic structure is to be set-up, Mr Jack Emeld Kopper (65), spoke to the team of officials from FAO and MAWLR and told the sad tale of how he lost more than half of his...
livestock to the prolonged drought, with only 26 of his goats now remaining. He said that he had almost completely lost all hope of being able to save his last remaining livestock but that that hope has now been renewed due to the hydroponics project which promises to save not only his goats but also livestock of other farmers in his area.

Kopper resides within the Tses Ward, in a small rural area called Vergenoeg in the //Karas region. He is a fulltime farmer who supports a household that consists of 10 people. “I am happy to be selected as a lead farmer as it gives me the opportunity to be of assistance to other farmers in my community who are unable to have this structure on their properties,” he said. Kopper thanked FAO for coming at the right time to rescue his livestock. “I am sure I speak for everyone in my community when I say that we are extremely grateful for the assistance,” he concluded.

Another lead farmer Mr Jakobas Hanse could not contain his joy when the FAO team visited him. Hanse lives in Daweb, a small farming village within the Maltahohe constituency in the Hardap region. He is married and has a family of eight children. “We have been living in this area for the last seven years and I can tell you that the situation has been tough for the last three of those years,” he began. “The drought has really hit us hard with most our livestock now gone due to lack of water and grazing,” said Hanse.

Hanse says his farm now only has 13 pigs, 30 goats and 14 sheep left from the drought. “Compared to my fellow farmers in this area I am far better off with the animals that I have as some farmers lost all their livestock,” he said sadly. “But I am glad that you have brought us this initiative [the hydroponic fodder production project] to save our animals as we rely solely on them to survive,” said a now visibly happy Hanse.

All selected Lead farmers such as Kopper and Hanse are vulnerable farmers who will handle the daily management of the hydroponics structures in collaboration with other beneficiary farmers who, depending on the population of each community, are on average close to 50 of them within each community. The farmers will make suitable arrangements, with assistance from an Agriculture Extension Technician in their area, on how best to distribute the daily 250 kilograms of barley fodder produced by the hydroponic structure amongst them.

The Emergency Livelihood Support to Drought-Affected Communities in Namibia project was launched in late March of this year and is expected to end in October.

A hope inspiring field trip to !Aemas Bank in Uis

The severe drought that caused the declaration of a State of Emergency by the Government of the Republic of Namibia in 2019 due to poor sporadic, erratic and delayed rainfall over the 2018/2019 agricultural season has severely affected farmers in the Erongo region. As the FAO team took a drive around the region that is home to Namibia’s most notable coastal towns, its occasionally lush green landscape revealed a bare, dry land with little to no vegetation owing mostly to the prolonged lack of rainfall.

To get a better sense of what is transpiring on the ground, the FAO team paid a visit to Rudolf Alibe and Gustafine Garises, both residents of !Aemas Bank in Uis and beneficiaries of the Micro-Finance project, under the Erongo Regional Council. Rudolf and Gustafine are crop and small stock farmers and took out some time from their
demanding schedules to walk the team through their gardens while explaining the adaptation measures that they have had to resort to in the recent years in order to ensure the continued productivity of their farms to sustain their livelihoods.

Rudolf narrated to the team the story of how six years ago at the ripe age of 55, he decided to retire from his job and venture into fulltime farming. With assistance from the Micro-Financing Project, which helped fence his garden and provided seeds, Rudolf started the garden planting maize and beans, while at the same time raising goats and cattle.

Rudolf’s lush green garden is proving to be a profitable venture.

During good years, Rudolf’s farming initiative allowed him to sustain his family, supplementing their diet with the nutritious crop produce as well as earning some money from the surplus that he sells. However, the devastating drought affected his farm and nearly ruined everything, to such an extent that they occasionally experience food deficits. “It is heart-breaking for me at this point because the drought has really affected my capacity to feed both my family and the community members I used to help out,” he said with a profound sadness in his eyes.

On her part, Gustafine explained how she has immensely benefited from her farming activities, particularly the successful establishment of her poultry farm. Expressing her joy, she said: “I enjoy farming because it has really helped me especially with my health since I am always active – feeding, vaccinating, and tending (in general) to my chickens”. However, she expressed concern over the prolonged drought, indicating that: “Right now what worries me is that the rains have taken too long to come, but at least the poultry farming keeps me occupied for now,” she added.

Despite the tough situation however, both Rudolf and Gustafine and their diversified farming systems and livelihoods have proved to be resilient as they have managed to mitigate the worsening drought conditions by resorting to fodder crop growing for their animals and venturing out into poultry. The fodder crops they are growing in their gardens have notably been helpful as they have given variety to the diet of their animals and a steady supply of feed as both farmers have managed to create a two-week cycle of harvest for their fodder crops.

In complementing government efforts, FAO has played a critical role in helping smallholder farmers in Erongo region during such tough times by availing bales of hay and multi-nutrient blocks to the most vulnerable members of the community. Through our various funding and intervention programmes, specifically drought assistance initiatives, we have immensely contributed to ensuring the food security of thousands of households across Namibia. This bodes well with our mission of achieving a world with zero hunger and helps us make the world a better place to live in as part of the Strategic Development Goals (SDGs).
Youth gardening project persists amidst covid-19 challenges

A group of close to 10 rural youth in the Groot Aub area in the Khomas region recently expressed their appreciation to FAO Namibia for the valuable assistance rendered by the agency in providing them with the means to set up a community gardening project. The group, which is mainly comprised of previously disadvantaged young people, said if it were not for the technical support and contributions made by the agency and its implementing partner, the Ministry of Sports, Youth and National Service (MSYNS), attaining a source of income would have remained a distant dream for them.

Kornelius Shoombe (32), one of the first members of the Nauassport Youth Gardening Project, expressed how he was proud of being a part of something worthwhile and constructive such as gardening. “Through this gardening project I have managed not only to gain skills on how to garden but I have also been able to obtain some income to sustain myself,” he said, adding that the project has so far managed to earn sales of close to N$3000. Kornelius however noted that the group is struggling to increase its sales due to challenges brought forth by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

“Since the implementation of lockdown measures to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, business has been somewhat slow, which has negatively affected our income stream.” Kornelius said that due to travel restrictions, the group was unable to sell its produce in nearby urban areas such as Windhoek, where most of their customer base resides. Despite that, Kornelius was hopeful that the situation would get back to normal with the relaxation of restriction measures.

Echoing Kornelius’ sentiments, Petrus Shilongo, the MSYNS Rural Youth Officer in the Khomas region who oversees the project, conveyed his hope that rural youth projects such as Nauassport will see improvement as state measures that impeded them from carrying out their normal activities finally end. “We have had issues with availing the necessary support to such projects due to the pandemic but right now we are actively trying to solve the challenges faced by such projects,” he said. Petrus also hopes that the project will eventually incorporate other agricultural activities such as poultry farming.

Meanwhile, Julia Haipinge (28), also a beneficiary of the gardening project, was happy to reveal the positive impact that the garden has had on her life. "The garden has given us a sense of purpose to do something worthwhile with our time." “Despite the various challenges we face such as access to adequate water for the garden, I am still very happy that such a project was created to benefit us,” she added. The group of youth have so far managed to produce various types of vegetables such as spinach, tomatoes, onions, carrots and beetroots and are looking to add more crop variety to their current harvest.

The Nauassport Youth Gardening Project, initiated by MSYSN, came into existence in July 2019. FAO through its micro grant funding, Telefood, which is targeted at community level, availed close to N$64 000 to purchase seeds, gardening tools and necessary materials for the erection of the project’s greenhouse. FAO’s support to the project is part of the Organization’s efforts in encouraging youth participation in agriculture and alleviating poverty through food security and employment creation.
Meet New FAO Staff

The Food and Agriculture Organization in Namibia has a new National Project Coordinator.

Mr. Gebhardt Tjiho’s resume includes experiences in; the banking industry as the Agricultural Commercial Manager with Standard Bank Gobabis Branch and as a Sustainable Development Coordinator responsible for External Stakeholder Engagement and the implementation of CSR Projects at Skorpion Zinc Mine and Refinery. Additionally, Mr Tjiho also served as a lecturer at the University of Namibia (UNAM)’s Animal Science Department and also as a consultant for the University’s Centre for Consultancy Bureau conducting studies and implementing projects aimed at strengthening agribusinesses in the Northern Communal Areas (NCAs) of Namibia.

Gebhardt relishes the opportunities to share information and experiences with farmers, as he has been involved in the training and mentoring of farmers on various platforms across most parts of Namibia. Being an animal scientist by training his first love is livestock production with special interest in rangeland management and fodder production. “I feel privileged to be in a position to use my skills in furthering the advancement of Smart Agriculture Practices to build resilience amongst our farmers to better cope with climate induced shocks. At the same time I am excited to be playing a role in assisting vulnerable farmers hard hit by drought to safeguard their livelihoods,” Gebhardt said of his new assignment at FAO as National Project Coordinator.

FAO Namibia has a new Communications Associate – Mr Phillipus Tobias. Phillipus holds a Bachelor of Arts honours degree in Media Studies from the University of Namibia (UNAM) and has worked previously for UNFPA Namibia as a Communications Assistant. He also served as a Communications Intern within UNAM’s Industry and Cooperative Education Unit and as a contributing writer for NAMS Promag, and served as a Social Media Intern at NawaZone Namibia.

Phillipus says he prides himself on tackling new challenges and views his new role at FAO Namibia as an opportunity for him to learn and grow not only within the communications realm, but also within the United Nations (UN) organisation as a whole. "FAO, and the UN as a whole, does incredible work in Namibia and around the world, which is something I have desired to be apart of," he said.