

Background

In Lesotho, a series of dry spells, late rains and early frost has led to an alarmingly steep reduction in agricultural yields for 2011/12. The adverse weather prevented most farmers from cultivating their fields and those who decided to plant did so late, affecting the maturity and quality of the crop. This season's crop failure marks a significant decline in the country's food security situation for the second year in a row. With more than a 70 percent drop in domestic cereal production, about a third of Lesotho's population – over 725 000 people – are food insecure and in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

The cumulative effects of successive poor harvests, in addition to a reduction of remittances owing to the global economic crisis, have also made it more difficult for many rural households to cope with climate change-induced shocks. This includes farming families in the traditionally more productive areas of the country, like the lowlands, which have also experienced poor crop performances. Increased fallow land and poor production performance have reduced farmers' household income, and this coupled with the rise in food prices, make it even harder for farmers to meet their household food requirements.

Calling on the international community for assistance, an emergency food crisis was declared on 9 August 2012 by the Prime Minister to improve agricultural productivity and food security, scale up conservation and homestead farming, and promote nutrition services to women and mothers with infants and young children. Following the declaration of emergency, the Government of Lesotho launched an 'Appeal for Humanitarian Assistance' on 13 September 2012 with a total value of USD 170 million, requesting support from development partners and the international community for the period September 2012 to June 2013. In response, the United Nations and its partners have been engaged in designing a Flash Appeal, in close collaboration with Government counterparts, that includes emergency and early recovery approaches to address the immediate needs and root causes of the current food security situation.

Challenges facing food security and livelihoods

Acute reductions in arable land, lack of access to improved farming inputs and training, severe environmental degradation, soil erosion and persistent climate change-induced disasters, like erratic rain and temperature patterns, are some of the key factors that are dramatically worsening the agricultural performance in Lesotho. This has caused many farming families to resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as reducing the number of meals per day. Farming families are also having to face longer lean seasons.

Adequate calorie and nutrition intake is vital to improving the lives of the most vulnerable farming households in Lesotho, particularly as the country is experiencing high levels of chronic malnutrition (39 percent of children under five) and has one of the world's highest prevalence rates of HIV (23 percent). In many cases, farmers in Lesotho are not only experiencing low production, but their production has been of very poor quality. This is compounded by rising food prices, which makes it hard for farmers to buy the right types of food to enrich their diets. Livestock production, which can be a good source of protein, is also hampered by outbreaks of animal diseases and the lack of infrastructure to prevent and control these disease outbreaks.



With a majority of the country's total land area estimated to be rangeland, finding sustainable solutions to overgrazing is a key factor to rehabilitating pastures. Overgrazing also contributes to the significantly high proportion of soil erosion in the country, lessening the amount of land that farmers can cultivate. Almost all farmers in Lesotho practice rainfed subsistence agriculture, which is threatened by increasingly unfavourable climate conditions. The efficient use of water resources and climate-smart practices are needed for farming families to enhance their production and learn about the sustainable management of natural resources.



FAO response

FAO co-leads the Food Security Sector, along with the World Food Programme (WFP). The sector is seeking **USD 33.5 million** to support the most food-insecure households in Lesotho, while increasing their resilience to climate-induced shocks.

Of this total, **FAO is seeking USD 5.5 million** to restore sustainable crop production capacities, diversify food production, improve nutritional quality intake, prevent losses of livestock owing to animal diseases and improve natural resource management, through activities such as:

- providing farming families with time-critical inputs and sustainable agricultural skills to plant in time for the summer crop planting season (September – October), according to conservation agriculture technologies;
- promoting home gardening and nutritional training, coupled with the distribution of six different varieties of vegetable seeds;
- safeguarding livestock assets through strengthened veterinary support and animal health surveillance systems, with emphasis on integrating livestock production into sustainable agriculture; and
- providing technical support to the Government in order to improve and strengthen coordination of agriculture and natural resource management monitoring and evaluation systems.



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Project title: Support to farming households affected by drought and late rains in Lesotho (Phase 1: 2012-2013 summer cropping season)

Objectives: To restore crop production capacity through sustainable techniques (conservation agriculture), diversify food production and improve nutritional quality intake (home gardening/nutrition) of 21 000 households in the most food-insecure districts of Lesotho (2012-2013).

Beneficiaries: 21 000 households (105 000 people), with selection priority given to households headed by women, orphans or elderly, and households with members under the following categories: disabled, chronically ill, orphans, pregnant/lactating mothers and children under five.

Implementing partners: Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MoAFS) and Conservation Agriculture Task Force.

Project code: LSO-12/A/52036

Budget: USD 4 200 000 (of which, USD 1 106 595 has already been committed by CERF)

Project title: Support productive safety nets for vulnerable households and integrate into the broader social protection system

Objectives: To improve nutritional quality intake of 4 000 households among the poorest groups as per the national information system for social assistance through the provision of adapted food production means at the household level (i.e. home gardening production inputs), production of technical knowledge and through nutritional awareness.

Beneficiaries: 4 000 food-insecure households (20 000 people).

Implementing partners: Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), MoAFS and Ministry of Social Development.

Project code: LSO-12/A/52067

Budget: USD 500 000

Project title: Support animal disease control and manage crop livestock interactions to improve livestock productivity while reducing land degradation

Objectives: To prevent the loss of livestock from diseases exacerbated by reduction of access to forage and adequate complements; protect public health from the consumption of contaminated animals; and promote the use of integration techniques to improve efficiencies between agriculture, livestock production and preservation of natural resources.

Beneficiaries: 6 000 households.

Implementing partners: MoAFS and Ministry of Forestry and Land Reclamation (MFLR).

Project code: LSO-12/A/52069

Budget: USD 400 000

Project title: Technical support in disaster risk reduction mainstreaming and integration of natural resources management at policy and programmatic levels in Lesotho

Objectives: To integrate in agriculture and food security policy and programmes disaster risk reduction mainstreamed actions and natural resource-related aspects, including internal dissemination and awareness among extension staff.

Beneficiaries: National- and district-level staff of respective Ministries, with the Lesotho population indirectly benefiting.

Implementing partners: MoAFS, MFLR, NGOs and WFP.

Project code: LSO-12/A/52070

Budget: USD 200 000

Project title: Improvement and coordination of monitoring and evaluation systems of agriculture and natural resource management

Objectives: To improve quality, timely and harmonized availability of data generated by MoAFS and MFLR to ensure coordinated analysis, and enhance the monitoring and evaluation capacity in order to track the impact of Ministry policies in the field.

Beneficiaries: National- and district-level staff of respective Ministries, with the Lesotho population indirectly benefiting.

Implementing partners: MoAFS, MFLR, NGOs and WFP.

Project code: LSO-12/A/52071

Budget: USD 200 000

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