FAO LESOTHO

MEDIA COVERAGE/COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

July 2013 – September 2013

This report compiles all information and communication activities undertaken by FAO Lesotho from July 2013 until September 2013.

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I. Press articles

→ 4th July 2013 – Public Eye

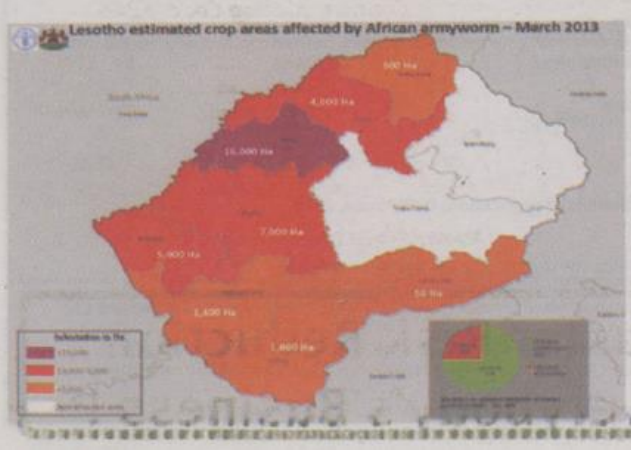
CEREAL SUPPLY SITUATION

The crop forecasting exercise of 2012/13 by the Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and food Security and the DMA predicts a better harvest this year compared to last year. Total production of grain is estimated at 105,541 metric tones, an increase of ...% 2011/12 production at .... of that of last year. This year's harvest is expected to satisfy 45% of the total national food needs compared to only 20% last year. Maize has contributed the largest portion at 86,190mt followed by 12,774mt for wheat and 6,577mt for sorghum. The increase is attributed to the following:

- An increase in Government's involvement in Agricultural production in the form of subsidies and sharecropping with farmers.
- High yield per hectare in maize and wheat crops.
-An increase in the area planted to grain which had increased by ...% from144,278ha last year to 173,793ha this cropping season.
-Improved distribution of agricultural inputs throughout the country, close monitoring and strict controls on access to inputs.
- Humanitarian assistance from UN Agencies, ECHO, Government of America and Non Governmental Organizations comprising of among others, World Vision International, CARE Lesotho, Red Cross Societies, CARITAS/ CRS and

However, the cropping season also faced challenges associated with insufficient rain especially during the months of January and February which occurred concurrently with armyworm invasion, both of which extended into March, 2013.

It is important for the government at this time to strategize on how the 70% of harvest which the government will collect from the farmers will be transferred back to the consumes either in the form of social transfers of sales. Which ever will be the case, it should take into consideration, the current low purchasing power of the population. Consideration must also be done to facilitate purchase of grain from farmers who have produced more food than they can consume to acquire other essential services such as agricultural inputs, education and health.



Urgent Response needed

The Government of Lesotho requested financial and technical assistance from Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to manage the outbreak to complement their efforts. A joint mission of Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and FAO conducted field assessments in March 2013 and confirmed the extent of damage to the maize crop. In addition the mission identified large breeding areas in rangelands which pose immediate threats of secondary outbreaks and future infestations

Moving From Emergency to Recovery

The country is currently in the recovery mode from the emergency mode which ended in May, 2013. The recovery mode is expected to continue for a period of another year into May, 2014.The recovery period is characterized by building or developing people's livelihoods so that the country can gradually move back to development levels pre– emergency. The recovery period is characterized by Food/Cash for Assets projects targeting the most vulnerable people. Some of the projects started as early as March, 2013 and they are expected to peak towards the end of this year. Most of the projects will be implemented in the lowlands districts which received very little humanitarian assistance during the emergency. Programs which are aimed at reducing the level of malnutrition and school feeding are also expected to continue into 2014. The programs are aimed at assisting children under the age of five, pregnant and breastfeeding women and patients on ART at health centers.

Response to the Food Security Emergency by donors/cooperating Partners has generally been low at only …% compared to the previous emergencies despite the fact that the affected population was substantially high this time 725,419 people. A list of countries/ organizations which provided assistance is attached.

→ 9th July 2013 – Informative Newspaper

Farmers heap conservation agriculture with praise

Group of CA farmers in Marakabei village, Butha-Buthe district

By Staff reporter

BUTHA - BUTHE – A group of about 16 farmers from Ha Marakabei in the Butha Buthe district scathe about conservation agriculture as a sacrosanct initiative adopted by Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) to eradicate poverty through crop production.

"We are very happy with conservation agriculture and we try to convince other farmers to join the tea," said Teboho Mokhele, one of the beneficiaries of Conservation Agriculture (CA).

Speaking on behalf of the beneficiaries in the area, Mokhele said the 2012 emergency programme of FAO has been implemented by FAOL has yielded massive harvests for them.

He said together with his fellow farmers, they had heard of CA from a previous FAO project conducted in a neighbouring village and decided to adopt its techniques before they became part of the current emergency programme.

Together with his colleagues, Mokhele said it is cheaper to do CA than traditional techniques saying they have heard that it helps protecting the land from erosion.

According to him, they became motivated after observing how vigorous the crops planted respecting CA principles looked adding that their yields seemed much better so they immediately wanted to know more about the method.

Adopting CA is not easy in the beginning, he continued, as there is a lot of weeds which is our major concern saying extension staff recommend weeding regularly to avoid underperforming crops.

Over time, Mokhele said, the mulch and cover crops would limit the growth of weeds in CA fields. Another challenge is the preparation of their lands for planting.

He said to cope with the additional work – digging basins for seeds and fertilizers, they take advantage of the team and help each other.

Mokhele explained that they all have livestock or poultry and home gardens, as it is part of the FAO programme.

Asked how they do their agricultural activities, he said some of them use a tractor while others use animals and the rest do everything by hand.

"We want to produce more for feeding our families and even start selling the excess. This is our target," they said altogether," farmers burst in chorus.

The programme implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security with financial support from the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), Belgium and the UN Central Emergency Trust Fund (CERF). The programme will continue in 2013 thanks to ECHO continued support and the British Department for International Development funding (DFID).

CA is based on three pillars: minimum soil disturbance, crop rotations and permanent soil cover. But there are different possibilities in the practice of CA. It can be manual or mechanical, small or large scale.

None of the farmers in the team are able to produce enough to feed their family for the whole year. They have to buy food as they are preparing for harvesting. CA is their hope for the future.

II. Press releases

The following press releases were produced by FAO Lesotho and sent to all media in Lesotho, in September 2013.

→ Armyworm situation

Maseru, 10th Sept. 2013 – In response to the armyworm outbreak which affected Lesotho in January and February 2013, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) worked hand-in-hand to strengthen control and preparedness capacities to manage more effectively this emerging risk for Lesotho. The Government and FAO's response plan received financial support from the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Directorate General (ECHO).

Eight districts of Lesotho including lowlands and Senqu Valley areas registered nearly 35,000 Ha affected in different degrees with Maseru, Berea, Leribe and Mafeteng concentrating around 90% of the affected areas.

ECHO generous support amounts to 330,000 USD and will allow MAFS and FAO to conduct training for extension staff and communities in the functioning of an Early Warning System (EWS) to detect the presence of armyworms before they multiply reaching devastating numbers limiting their impact and the amount of chemicals needed to control them in any future potential outbreak.

Trainings for 250 participants will be conducted by technical staff from MAFS during the months of September and October 2013 and have started on the 10th of September.

Lesotho Meteorological Services (LMS) collaborates in the implementation of the EWS since rain patterns are a major factor allowing the reproduction of armyworm.

ECHO funding will also allow to provide the extension network with quality equipment including over 300 sprayers, 400 personal protective equipment kits, 1000 liters of chemicals, 100 pheromone traps and 100 rain gauges, complementing both control and EWS activities. – FAO

→ Distribution of inputs for summer cropping season 2013-2014

Maseru, 20th Sept. 2013 – 18,500 families benefit from 2013/2014 FAO Emergency and Recovery programme.

Following the food security crisis declared by the Government of Lesotho in August 2012, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS) designed a three year cycle programme to assist urgently Basotho families in all ten districts of the country.

In continuation with 2012 activities, FAO received support for 2013 emergency and recovery programme from the British Department For International Development (DFID) and the European Commission Humanitarian Office

(ECHO) for a respective amount of USD 1,600,000 and USD 1,000,000. This funding allows FAO and MAFS to enhance the promotion of Conservation Agriculture and Home Gardening in Lesotho.

As a result 18,500 households are given agricultural inputs and know-how on agricultural technologies, building communities' resilience to better withstand future shocks.
Currently, FAO and MAFS are finishing distributing the package for the newly enrolled 7,500 beneficiaries who are receiving the inputs on time for the cropping season.
The package is made of a 20-kg bag of maize seeds, a 50-kg bag of fertilizer and a 600g vegetable seeds kit comprising of 100g of 6 different vegetable varieties. Beneficiaries are also trained on conservation agriculture and improved home gardening and nutrition prior to the beginning of the summer cropping season.

CA entails sustainable agricultural methods based on three principles: minimum disturbance of the soil, permanent soil cover and crop rotations/intercropping. Soil erosion is a major problem in Lesotho, affecting both quality and quantity of harvests. By adopting CA, farmers not only ensure better harvests, but also contribute to the improvement of soil quality and its preservation.

Home gardening activities include training on improved production techniques (keyhole and double digging), diversifying the diet of beneficiary families and increasing the intake of micro-nutrients. Home gardening is complemented with nutrition awareness and food use improved practices.

FAO collaborates closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS) through extension officers operating in each district to provide training and technical support to beneficiaries. In order to facilitate this task, FAO and the National Task Force of Conservation Agriculture in Lesotho (NTFCA) have developed visual training materials which are used by extension staff of the MAFS to train farmers on CA and are being distributed to all Resource Centres in Lesotho. These partnerships share the ambition to scale the promotion of Conservation Agriculture nationwide.

FAO Lesotho remains committed in supporting Basotho communities and continuing the promotion of diversified agricultural production, protecting our environment and our children's capacity to produce nutritious food.

Beneficiaries receiving agricultural inputs for summer cropping season 2013-2014
together with a CA t-shirt

III. Publication in the RAF Booklet (July 2013)

CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE

Agriculture in developing countries must undergo a significant transformation in order to meet the related challenges of achieving food security and responding to climate change. FAO is promoting Climate-Smart Agriculture to achieve the triple-win of food security, adaptation to and mitigation of climate change. Viewed as one of the major solutions to food insecurity and as a mechanism to adapt to climate change in Africa, Conservation Agriculture (CA) is giving smallholder farmers an opportunity to combine profitable agricultural production with environmental concerns and sustainability through the application of three main principles: minimal soil disturbance, permanent soil cover and crop rotations. It has been proven to work in a variety of agro-ecological zones and farming systems. It is being perceived by practitioners as a valid tool for Sustainable Land Management (SLM).

CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE, A NEW TECHNOLOGY LINKING GENERATIONS IN LESOTHO

With more than 70 percent of the population depending on less than 10 percent of arable land, finding ways for farmers in Lesotho to halt environmental degradation, for instance severe soil erosion, is key to improving agricultural production. Through the Emergency and Recovery Programme jointly implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS), funded by the United Kingdom Department For International Development (DFID) and the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), 11,000 beneficiaries have received inputs – maize and bean seeds, fertilizers and a vegetable seeds kit – in 2012 and, more importantly, training on conservation agriculture (CA) and home gardening (HG).

'Me Maphoka is 71 years old from Mahobong in the Leribe district and she is still an active farmer feeding three orphans living with her. *"I have always been anxious because I cannot produce enough food to feed my family for a whole year." 'Me Maphoka says. "The neighbours help me when I run short of food."*

Seeing the long, healthy looking maize crops next to which we are standing as she talks, this is hard to believe. Me Maphoka explains: *"I decided for the first time in my life to change my agricultural practices and plant maize and beans following conservation agriculture (CA) principles: minimum soil disturbance, crop rotations and soil cover. I saw CA being practiced in the neighbouring village of Naleli and was very impressed by the harvest coming from the CA fields. I enquired at Mahobong resource centre about CA and was encouraged by the extension officers to do it."*

However, it was no easy feat to convince her 17-year grandson, Poello, to adopt this new agricultural technique.

CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE

"I didn't know what CA was; I could not understand how the seeds would germinate when they were put in the basins." he says.

Deep inside, Me Maphoka also believes that her son was concerned about her health given the amount of work he thought digging basins would require. *"He asked the neighbours to talk to me, to convince me to stop thinking of CA. He didn't want me to get sick after working too hard on the field, as he would not be able to help me because he needed to attend school."*

Although faced with Poello's resistance, Me Maphoka was not discouraged. She decided to give her son part of her 0.4Ha-land, letting him plant the conventional way while she would go ahead with CA. Me Maphoka and other farmers benefitting from the FAO-MAFS programme worked in a team and helped each other preparing the land, thereby strengthening the social linkages in the community. The group of farmers is guided by the MAFS extension staff and the lead farmer Ntate Motseki who advise them on CA practices whenever the need arises.

And the results of Me Maphoka's determination and solomonic decision to split her land into two are more than evident now. After lines and lines of healthy maize, we get to Poello's piece of land which looks fallow. Looking carefully, we notice that it is actually a field of scattered poor looking stalks of corn!

He confirms *"My crops look poor, whereas my mother's crops look good". He adds "Now that I know more about CA, I am willing to improve my knowledge and I want to help my mother to practice CA on 100% of the land."* The young man wants to support the family to produce more and be able to sell some of the production.

"We have three cows; I would like to learn about practicing CA with animals, and also about the way I can do CA in the home garden." Poello says. Poello's dream is to be able to live thanks to both farming and carpentry. *"I will go to the resource centre to get the training and learn about CA",* he continues enthusiastically. Me Maphoka is extremely happy with the way she managed her field this year. *"My children helped me a lot, especially for applying the fertilizer during the post-planting period,"* she says. Me Maphoka explains that she used to harvest around 60kg of maize using conventional farming but this year she expects over 400 kg.

Also Paul Motseki from Maseru in the Leribe district tells us about his success with CA: *"I saw how well the farmers in a neighbouring area were doing – they had strong, quality plants and good yield – so I copied their method of farming and started using CA methods on 0.2ha of my land. In conventional farming, I can harvest 960 kgs of maize on 1.6ha of land. With only 0.2ha of land in conservation agriculture, I get the same yield!" he said, enthusiastically. "I also noticed that the quality of the crops is better in CA than in conventional agriculture."*

IV. Human interest stories

→ CERF/ECHO/Belgium stories

Wind of change in Lesotho

MASERU – "We are very happy with conservation agriculture and we try to convince other farmers to join the team!"

In the village of Marakabei, in the Butha-Buthe district of Lesotho, five farmers talk about Conservation Agriculture (CA).

Masekoele Motaung, Mamphamele Rantso, Leseli Mosikili, Mamothambo Maqomele and Teboho Mokhele are members of a CA team made of 16 farmers, 12 women and four men.

They are all beneficiaries of the 2012 emergency programme of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security with financial support from the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), Belgium and the UN Central Emergency Trust Fund (CERF). The programme will continue in 2013 thanks to ECHO continued support and the British Department For International Development funding (DFID).

These farmers had heard of CA from a previous FAO project conducted in a neighbouring village. They decided to adopt CA techniques before they became part of the current emergency programme.

They explain that they became motivated after observing how vigorous the crops planted respecting CA principles looked. The yields seemed much better so they immediately wanted to know more about the method.

“We realized it is cheaper to do CA than traditional techniques, and we heard that it helps protecting the land from erosion.”

Some of them use a tractor, some use animals, some do everything by hand. They simply adapt what they used to do to the new agricultural method.

CA is based on three pillars: minimum soil disturbance, crop rotations and permanent soil cover. But there are different possibilities in the practice of CA. It can be manual or mechanical, small or large scale.

“We were picked to be beneficiaries because we were already practicing CA!” they said, happy.

Adopting CA is not easy in the beginning. “There are too many weeds!” they said, “This is our main concern.” Extension staff recommends weeding regularly to avoid underperforming crops. Over time the mulch and cover crops will limit the growth of weeds in CA fields. Another challenge is the preparation of their lands for planting. To cope with the additional work – digging basins for seeds and fertilizers – they take advantage of the team and help each other.

The motivation among them is obvious, and some lament about lost opportunity. Maqomele confesses “I received the inputs for doing CA. But at the time of planting, I was away from home. When I came back, my kids had already planted the land, using conventional methods. I wish to do CA next season to also benefit from its good results.”

The group explains that they all have livestock or poultry. They also have home gardens, as it is part of the FAO programme. They are planting maize and beans on their lands.

When they look back and remember how their conventional fields were compare to CA now, some already see differences.

Mokhele, a 30 years old farmer using CA for the third consecutive season, said that he noticed a sharp increase in the yields. Mamphamele affirmed “I see an improvement in the fertility of the soil. It also looks more stable.” Confirming the words of her companions, Masekoele said that she can clearly see an improvement of the drainage: the soil does not keep the water so much as it used to do.

These encouraging remarks enhance the motivation of the other farmers, listening carefully while shaking their heads.

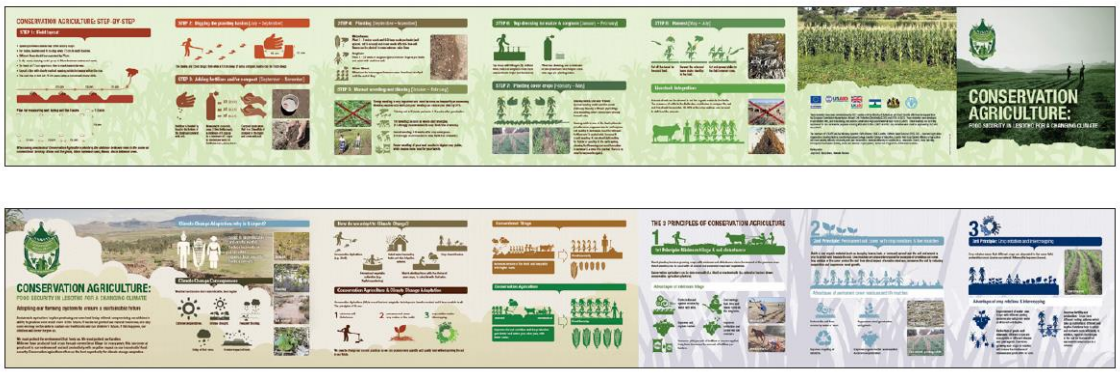
None of the farmers in the team are able to produce enough to feed their family for the whole year. They have to buy food as they are preparing for harvesting. CA is their hope for the future.

“We want to produce more for feeding our families and even start selling the excess. This is our target,” they said altogether. – FAO

Group of CA farmers in Marakabei village, Butha-Buthe district

V. Training material

The conservation agriculture training material which has been designed during the past months with the Lesotho National Conservation Agriculture Task Force and finalized in March 2013 is currently being printed. 25,000 leaflets both in English and Sesotho are already being distributed nationwide.



Conservation Agriculture Leaflet – English version

VI. Promotion of Human Security Concept

The 12min-documentary "Basotho voices: Human Security" launched in March 2013 has been registered for the festival FESDOB (Documentary Festival in Blitta), organized by the association ATAC whose focus is to develop art and culture in Togo.

The festival aims at promoting movies/documentary work in Togo and in Africa while focusing on human rights.

This year's festival is taking place from the 1st to the 9th of November 2013.

The documentary is also available on YouTube and Vimeo websites.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4EWt2wkX7IU
http://vimeo.com/64863129

VII. Awareness raising and advocacy

Together with the distribution of inputs for the summer cropping season 2013-2014, beneficiaries received a conservation agriculture t-shirt.

Pic.1 Beneficiaries wearing CA t-shirts during inputs distribution – Mohale's Hoek district – August 2013

Pic.2 Beneficiaries wearing CA t-shirts during inputs distribution – Berea district – September 2013

Pic.3 Beneficiaries wearing CA t-shirts during inputs distribution – Berea district – September 2013