



The Makhabane smallholder farmers' group display a message of thanks.

PHOTO: ActionAid

Strengthening smallholder farmers' resilience to climate change and food crises in Mohale's Hoek, Lesotho

The Isle of Man: Final project report, October 2018

Context: MDG No.1 - Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Project summary

Through this project we have supported communities in Mohale's Hoek to achieve food security and be empowered to influence local and national government policies which have a direct impact on their lives and livelihoods. The project has had a significant impact on these communities and their resilience to climate change. Through measures including increasing their understanding of, and promoting the adoption of, improved farming techniques, and building their capacity to develop their businesses and manage their finances, we have helped these communities to better withstand the impacts of climate change for years to come.

Thanks to the generous support of the Isle of Man Government, we have transformed the lives of smallholder farmers. ActionAid, and the local communities we work with, are extremely grateful to you for enabling this change.

Key successes

- The training provided to a total of 1,900 farmers on conservation farming techniques has helped them to increase their crop production, enabling them to sell their produce and increase their household income.
- The irrigation schemes established in eight villages have benefitted 244 smallholder farmers in these communities, enabling them to water their crops and increase their production.
- The use of greenhouses and shade nets in this project has been observed by government researchers and incorporated as part of the development of their agricultural policies.
- As a result of the support to farmers to establish the Lehakoe Savings and Credit Cooperative, and the set up of a revolving fund for them to access loans to develop their businesses, they now have an accessible, sustainable means of managing their finances.
- The support provided to smallholder farmers to engage with government representatives and influence planning and budgeting processes has established relationships that will endure after the end of the project period and farmers have already engaged in discussions informing the development of two policies (the Climate Change Policy and the Agriculture Research and Extension Policy).

Progress against objectives

Objective 1: To increase crop production in Mohale's Hoek district through the implementation of improved farming techniques and increasing smallholder farmers' understanding and usage of new technologies.

Train 1,833 smallholder farmers in conservation farming techniques to improve crop production.

Following the training provided to 471 smallholder farmers in Year 1, and 213 farmers in Year 2, working with local authority extension officers we were able to provide training to 1,216 farmers in the final year of this project, reaching 1,900 farmers in total. These farmers have been trained in techniques such as potholing and keyhole gardening which have already helped them to significantly increase their crop production. This increase in crop production has meant that the farmers are now able to sell their produce to increase their household income.

Construct small-scale irrigation schemes to help provide a constant source of water to the farmers all year round.

As part of our work in Mohale's Hoek we have established irrigation schemes in eight villages (Phatlalla, Morifi, Sethaleng, Makhabane, Mok'hopha, Likhakeng, Mohlakana, and Moeaneng), benefitting 244 smallholder farmers in these communities. These systems use solar panels rather than fuel to pump the water, making them cost effective, and fencing has been put up to protect

them from theft. These irrigation schemes have helped to ensure that the smallholder farmers in these communities are now able to grow vegetables, and access water for pig and chicken farming, throughout the year, and mean that farmers no longer need to travel to the river to collect water in buckets.

“We used to grow vegetables from November when the early rains started to fall and stopped when the soil started to lose moisture in April. Since the establishment of the irrigation schemes we have not stopped planting. When we remove tomatoes we plant cabbages and the cycle does not stop.”

Mamoliehi Hlaoli

Establish community-based seed-banks: provide the initial stock of high-yielding, drought-resistant, early-maturing seed varieties to the community and train them on how to manage the multiplication and storage of these seeds.

In the last year of this project, we were able to procure and distribute high-yield seeds to 325 farmers (1,214 over the whole project period). Due to severe droughts and low rainfall over the project period, crop yield has not been high enough to produce seeds for the seed bank, we have however, provided training on techniques of seed multiplication, selection and storage so that farmers can exercise greater control over their seed planting in future.

Support six smallholder farmer groups to establish field based greenhouses, which can be used to grow vegetables during winter.

In order to support farmer groups in six communities to grow crops throughout the year, we have provided them with greenhouses and shade nets. We originally provided three groups (Makhabane, Mok’hopha, and Phatlalla) with greenhouses and three groups (Morifi, Sethaleng, and Likhakeng) with shade nets. We then covered the greenhouses in Mok’hopha and Phatlalla with shade nets to provide them with greater protection from the sun, and replaced the greenhouse at Makhabane with a shade net after it had been damaged. This will help to mitigate the impact of frost and drought and help the farmers to grow crops all year round.



Greenhouses like this one in Mok’hopha have enabled farmers to produce vegetables throughout the year.

Photo: ActionAid

Our work with greenhouses has attracted interest at government level, and a government researcher (Mr. Tebohoe Ramphahama) visited our greenhouse on Mok’hopha and said that ‘use of greenhouse technologies is one of the technologies that has attracted government attention and government is going to scale up these technologies’. The adoption of greenhouses has been included in the government policy on climate change (2017-2027). To ensure that the farmer groups are able to make the best use of the greenhouses and shade nets, we have provided training to each group on their use and maintenance.

Work with the National Meteorological Service to provide timely weather information that can help farmers prepare for droughts or other extreme weather phenomenon.

In order to increase the communities' preparedness and capacity to withstand the impacts of climate change, we have set up an SMS weather update service, providing updates twice a week direct to 210 community members, who then disseminate this information to other members of their communities. The service has also been used by radio stations, who have broadcast the information, increasing the reach of this service. As a result, the communities have been able to prepare for snowfall and have been able to target rainy periods for the planting of their crops, farmers have fed back that they are now more prepared and that their crop production has risen because of this service.

Foster strong linkages between farmer groups and the national Agricultural Research Department.

The on-farm training sessions and visits that we have provided over the course of this project (26 in total, reaching 508 farmers, 350 women and 158 men) have given farmers the opportunity to meet researchers from institutions including the National University of Lesotho and Roma Agribusiness College, and government extension workers. This meant that farmers were able to feed back to researchers on the techniques that they had adopted, as well as learning about new techniques.

In addition to on-farm training, we have supported farmers to take part in exposure visits to research stations and to the National University of Lesotho. Four of these visits took place during the project, with 152 farmers taking part. The farmers were given the opportunity to visit different laboratories and were given presentations by research technicians, including on the analysis of the performance of different seeds. Farmers have already begun to send soil samples for testing and analysis, making use of the services available. When farmers visited the research station in Machache, they were able to see the difference in performance of different types of seeds, such as maize and sorghum. These seeds are tested for the time that they take to reach maturity, their tolerance to drought, and how they are affected by different pH levels.

“My name is Hlokomelang Lekhoesa from Mekaling village. I received training sessions from the Ministry of Agriculture with the support of ActionAid. I also received vegetable seeds from ActionAid to plant. I put into practise the knowledge that I acquired from the trainings and there has been an increase in my crop yields. I am now able to produce surplus that I sell to the community.”

PHOTO: ActionAid



Objective 2: To increase household incomes of smallholder farmers in Mohale's Hoek by supplementing their livelihood activities and improving their access to credit.

Train 1,000 smallholder farmers in business skills focusing on enterprise development, management, marketing and collective bargaining.

In the final year of this project, we provided tailored 'training of trainers' sessions to 25 farmers, to equip them with the skills to deliver training to a further 138 farmers in their communities. Each farmer will pass on their learnings to a further five people to extend the reach of this work. Using this model, we estimate that a total of 1,500 farmers have benefited from this training over the course of the project. The training covered subjects such as generation of business ideas, business planning, marketing, pricing, and record keeping. The sessions have been developed specifically to meet the needs of the farmers' groups with whom we are working, and farmers have already established new businesses and strengthened existing businesses using the skills that they have learned.

Provide additional livelihood support to farmers through livestock rearing.

To enable the farmers to earn additional income, we provided communities with livestock to support farmers to sell products such as eggs and wool. Over the course of this project, we have provided farmers' groups with six Merino rams, who have bred with local sheep and five additional ewes, to produce 612 lambs to date. Farmers have already reported an increased quality and quantity of wool as a result of the Merino rams, which has led to increased income from the sale of wool.

Over the last three years, we have provided a total of 3,603 indigenous chicks and 944 laying chickens to 219 smallholder farmers in eight farmers' groups and one high school in the villages of Moeaneng, Ramatlalla, Ts'olo, Mekaling, Makhaola, Bereng Matsoho, Maphutsaneng, and Braakfontein. We have also supported the farmers' groups in Moeanang and Mekaling through the construction of two poultry sheds, each holding up to 300 chickens, and the provision of insulating curtains and solar lighting to mitigate against the effects of cold and darkness on egg production. The farmers are able to sell the eggs in their communities to increase their household income.

In order to further support the communities of Mohale's Hoek we have, over the life of this project, provided 100 piglets, with food and medication, to three schools and 11 farmers' associations. These pig farms are now generating incomes through the sale of pork and piglets.

To ensure that farmers are able to care for their livestock, we established links with the district veterinary department, who farmers consult when there have been signs of illness and are recommended appropriate treatment.



Mr Ramollo, from Ipopeng Lihoai Tsa Mok'hopha Farmers' Association holds their registration document. Photo: ActionAid

Organise farmers into farmers' associations and build their capacity on management and governance to ensure the associations remain sustainable and are able to function as a unified force.

We have now supported ten farmers' groups to register as farmers' associations with the Law Office, which is mandated to register all organisations and community-based associations. These farmers' associations are now able to access funding from government programmes.

Train the farmers' associations on community credit and saving schemes and provide the initial capital for setting up a revolving fund within the community.

Practical training was provided to two members of each of the ten smallholder farmers' groups, equipping participants with the necessary skills to set up and run a savings and credit cooperative (SCC). Through this scheme, members are able to save and borrow money to start and manage their own projects and businesses. These savings and credit cooperatives mean that farmers, who may not meet banks' criteria for receiving loans and credit, are able to invest to grow their businesses and manage their income.

In order to ensure that the groups can access funds, we provided initial capital for a revolving fund, which was launched by the Minister of Small Businesses and Cooperatives. Community members can now borrow from this revolving fund and pay a much lower rate of interest than commercial banks (which can charge 20% interest on loans). The Lehakoe (formerly named Khoelenya) savings and credit cooperative has now been registered and set up a bank account with the Standard Lesotho Bank for the transfer of these funds. Community members are now able to access affordable loans to develop their businesses and boost their household incomes.

Objective 3: To empower smallholder farmers to engage their district and national level government structures in dialogue and ensure the farmers' voices are accounted for in decisions that impact on their livelihoods.

Empower and train 1,200 smallholder farmers to participate in local government planning processes, to ensure that their priorities are included in local government plans and budgets

The training provided to smallholder farmers and community members has helped to raise their awareness of how a lack of participation in government planning processes impacts on their lives, and has empowered them to engage in these processes. Members of the communities are now empowered to demand plans from the local council, question any costs, make suggestions for changes, and follow up and review the implementation of these plans, in particular, agricultural plans and policies. Since this training was delivered, members of the community have actively participated in meetings to develop local council plans, and taken an active role in elections. The training received has covered articles of legislation including the Local Government Act 1997, to ensure that participants are aware of their rights and entitlements.

Organise four meetings between smallholder farmer groups and the Ministry of Agriculture and other relevant political leaders.

In the final two years of this project, we have organised four meetings with representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, where smallholder farmers were able to raise issues relating to food insecurity in Mohale's Hoek. The farmers' efforts in these meetings have helped to influence the development and adoption of two national-level government policies, the Climate Change Policy and the Agriculture Research and Extension Policy. A total of 82 farmers took part in these meetings (including 68 female farmers), and they used this access to Ministry staff to advocate for increased funding to mitigate the impact of climate change and food crises.

Raise farmers' awareness about government programs and policies that are in place to protect their livelihoods and tackle issues such as climate change.

In order to raise farmers' awareness of existing government programmes and policies to protect their livelihoods and tackle issues such as climate change, we held training for 30 farmers at Mekaling Resource Centre. This training was the first time that many of the farmers had heard about the government's food security policy, and they learned about food security from the household level to the national level and the crucial role played by smallholder farmers in the implementation of the food security policy. Participants were then able to raise awareness among their farmers' groups regarding the types of support that they can access from the government.

Conduct a study to look at the implementation of the National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA) to Climate Change so far, train farmer groups to monitor the implementation of NAPA and the Agriculture Development Sector Investment Plan and develop an advocacy strategy and plan of action to support farmer groups to attend and participate in meetings with the Ministry of Agriculture and other officials and ensure they are taken into account by the government.

A consultant was contracted to carry out a study into the implementation of the National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA), which took place in the final project year and the report was distributed to key stakeholders including farmers' groups and officials from the Ministry of Agriculture. Among the findings of the study was the fact that, while NAPA was dependent on many implementing stakeholders, including farmers' groups, for its success, many were not aware of it and more needed to be done to raise awareness of the programme.

NAPA was developed to respond to climate change by developing the capacities of affected communities to adapt and respond. To raise awareness among the project communities of how this programme could benefit them, a training session was organised and attended by 30 smallholder farmers (including 21 women). In addition to NAPA, the participants learned about the Agriculture Development Sector Investment Plan (ADSIP) and they were equipped with the knowledge to monitor the implementation of these programmes as well as how to constructively input into the development of future programmes and policies. They were also supported to develop a plan to share the lessons learned with their communities to broaden the reach of this intervention.

While it was originally planned for ActionAid Lesotho to develop an advocacy strategy to continue to engage with the Ministry of Agriculture, the closure of ActionAid's office in Lesotho after the implementation of this project meant that this was no longer possible. To mitigate the impact of this, we have worked to ensure that the support provided to the farmers' groups will equip them with the skills and understanding to advocate for their rights long after the end of this project.



Mamatsitsi Mokoma, aged 53, told us about why the support of the project was so important for her. "I am a mother of a child who is doing the first year at the National University of Lesotho. I am a street vendor since February 2017. Before, I did not have enough money to establish my business. It was very difficult. The worst part was that my son failed one course and could not be supported by government for supplementing his studies. He depends on me for costs at the University. Thanks to ActionAid for supporting us to establish our community bank."

PHOTO: ActionAid

Impact and Sustainability

ActionAid's work is designed to bring about sustainable change by developing long-lasting solutions to poverty in partnership with local organisations and people living in poverty. We address basic needs whilst also lobbying governments to take responsibility for delivering those basic needs. We have a track record in advocating for disadvantaged communities and building their capacity so they are the agents of change.

We have engaged community members in all stages of planning and implementation, helping to ensure their engagement and local ownership of the project. The support provided to community members to engage with government, monitor the implementation of government programmes, as well as the increased awareness of such programmes, will help to ensure that farmers can continue to access available support. Community members have already shown their increased capacity to engage with government officials, and their awareness of government programmes and processes, combined with the links with government agencies established through this project, mean that they are well equipped to maintain this engagement and that the benefits of this project will continue to be felt long after the project ends.

The improved farming techniques that are being implemented in Mohale's Hoek, mean that farmers are now able to grow crops all year round and increase their production. This means that not only are they able to sell produce to increase their household income, but they are able to feed their families. Of the farmers that were supported with training on keyhole gardening, all of those surveyed reported that they are now able to provide at least two meals a day for their families. The establishment and registration of the Lehakoe Savings and Credit Cooperative means that farmers now also have a long-term, sustainable means of accessing credit and managing their finances.

Challenges

As previously reported, due to severe drought during the project period, it was challenging to set up the community-based seed banks for the smallholder farmers' groups as crop yield was not high enough. In order to mitigate the impact of this, we provided training on techniques of seed multiplication, selection and storage so that farmers can exercise greater control over their seed planting in future.

The decision to bring ActionAid's presence in Lesotho to an end has meant that we will not be able to continue supporting the communities with whom we have been working as part of this project. In order to mitigate the impact of this, we have endeavoured to ensure that we have equipped the communities of Mohale's Hoek with the skills and resources to improve their livelihoods and engage constructively with government offices long after the end of the project period. The project was designed to have a long term, sustainable impact on these communities so that they would not be dependent on continued support from ActionAid.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is the means by which we fulfil our accountability to poor and excluded people as well as other stakeholders that have supported our work. We monitor collaboratively with the people we work with, for both accountability and learning purposes, to ensure that we can demonstrate the value of our efforts and continuously improve our work. In every country we work in, we regularly collect and analyse information on the progress of our projects and programmes, including data, stories and testimonies, in order to assess achievements and change on an ongoing basis. This project was monitored by ActionAid and the community-based Project Committee. In line with ActionAid's Accountability Learning & Planning System's requirement for downward accountability and monitoring, ActionAid held biannual Participatory Review and Reflection Processes (PRRPs), through which the project beneficiaries and other stakeholders were actively involved in providing feedback on project implementation and impact. The ActionAid project team also met quarterly for planning and reflection meetings.

Financial report

The final financial report can be found in Annex 1.

**Thank you so much for your support.
In partnership with Isle of Man International Development Committee, we have
changed the lives of smallholder farmers in Lesotho, for good.**