



Smallholder women farmers in Ramatlalla group receiving a Merino ram.

PHOTO: ActionAid

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

The Isle of Man: Year 2 progress report, July 2017

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

Project summary

This project aims to enable poor 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. In year two, some of the project activities were impacted by the extreme climate in Lesotho and the general election and as a result, these activities will now take place in year three. We have provided more information on these changes in an attached document. Aside from this, the project has progressed well against its objectives and planned activities. The team in Lesotho are excited to move into the final year of the project and have emphasised the significant impact which this work is having within local communities.

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

Key successes

- 35 smallholder farmers who were supported in layer poultry farming¹ were provided with 944 chickens and are now able to produce up to 25 trays of eggs per day. The eggs sold by the farmers are in huge demand and traders queue up daily to purchase the new stock.
- As a result of training farmers in keyhole gardening² techniques, the market in Mokhopha village is less monopolised by large scale vegetable producers as smallholder farmers are now increasingly able to produce their own vegetable supplies all year round.
- The food security training has made smallholder farmers more aware of government policy in this area. Farmers are increasingly engaged with the policy and now actively lobby for its full implementation, including identifying relevant gaps in its operation.
- The creation of a smallholder farmers' platform which aims to facilitate regular and open communication between farmers and agricultural extension officers³. The platform will meet annually and will provide a space for discussion around the food crisis in Mohale's Hoek and the challenges faced by the local community, as well as a platform to create and develop action plans.

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. To achieve this, we will:

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

In year two we delivered potholing training to 213 smallholder farmers and 658 farmers are now engaged in keyhole gardening. The training has had a significant impact in making the farmers more self-sufficient. Farmers told the ActionAid team that they no longer need to buy vegetables as they can produce their own and this has led to a reduction in household food expenses. In addition, farmers can sell surplus vegetables and use the money to buy essential items such as soap, paraffin and matches. Keyhole gardening training in particular has been very successful and 100% of participants are now growing their own produce.

¹ Layer poultry farming is the raising of egg laying poultry birds for the purpose of commercial egg production.

² Keyhole gardening originated in Lesotho and involves using a raised, contained soil bed and compost to retain moisture and nourish the soil, and potholing, which utilises manure rather than fertiliser and simple water pumps.

³ Agricultural extension officers are intermediaries between research officials and farmers. They operate as facilitators and communicators, helping farmers in their decision-making and ensuring that appropriate knowledge is implemented to obtain the best results in relation to sustainable production and rural development.

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

In year two, three irrigation schemes were installed in three villages in Mohale's Hoek: Phatlalla, Morifi and Sethaleng. The irrigation scheme at Phatlalla village is designed to irrigate the greenhouse and the systems at Morifi and Sethaleng will irrigate a shade net. The systems are not only effective but also extremely cost efficient and eco-friendly as they are powered by solar panels and therefore do not require fuel in order to pump water. Before these systems were put in place, community members collected water from the river in buckets which was time consuming and required considerable physical exertion. The new systems can pump water to a distance of 30 metres and this will enable farmers to irrigate a wider area and increase crop production.



Irrigation scheme at Morifi village pictured at the river, solar pump switch and the tap.
PHOTO: ActionAid

An additional success of the project during year two was the extension of the irrigation system to a piggery project at a local women's smallholder farmers' group. The extension means that women who used to draw water 60 metres from the river are now able to get water from a tap which is only 10 metres away from the project. This has helped to reduce the amount of time spent collecting water and has increased the effectiveness of the pig farm project.

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.

We provided 298 females and 179 males with high-yield crop seeds including 2kg of beans, 1kg of peas and grazing vetch and 70g of assorted vegetables. Although the seeds are drought-resistant, unfortunately the extended dry weather conditions in Mohale's Hoek were worse than anticipated. This led to a poor harvest and some farmers were unable to produce enough seeds for the seed bank. In year three, we will supply 300 smallholder farmers with more high-yield crop seeds in the hope that the weather will enable a good harvest and therefore deliver enough produce for seed banking.

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

In year two, the team constructed two shade nets at Morifi and Sethaleng villages and one greenhouse in Phatlalla village. The shade nets will be used by 60 farmers and 30 will use the greenhouse. At the end of July, the Makhabane Group in Morifi village will be harvesting the vegetables that they have grown in the new shade net. Training was also provided on how to use shade nets effectively and further training will be provided in year three.



Shade net at Morifi village which was constructed during the reporting period.
PHOTO: ActionAid

A number of severe wind storms unfortunately destroyed sections of the greenhouses which were constructed in year one and this had an impact on crop production. In light of this, the local team have adapted the strategy and will continue to construct more shade nets rather than greenhouses. Shade nets have a number of advantages over greenhouses; they protect crops from extreme heat and allow rainfall to irrigate plants more effectively. They also allow wind to pass through them and this makes them particularly useful for the climate in Lesotho. While the extreme wind affected crop production, a significant amount of produce was sold in local markets and the farmers' vegetables are in high demand.

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

In the first year of the project, we established a SMS weather update service which provides regular updates, alerts for extreme weather and early warning indicators of drought which allows smallholder farmers to make preparations for extreme weather and plan their farming activities accordingly. The farmers told us that they are more prepared for the weather than ever before and crop production is increasing as a result. During the reporting period, we developed this service and text messages are now sent out eight times a month to 200 community members in Mohale's Hoek. We regularly receive positive feedback about the service from members of the community.

"I prepare my potholes for sowing maize when I get the message that it is going to rain some time during the week. The seeds germinate fast even with small amounts of moisture because of my ability to target the rain. Thanks to ActionAid weather update."

Mrs Maseneke Senti

"I clean tanks and place drums and buckets for harvesting water under the roof. I was able to survive the El Nino drought last year because I was able to target the rain following the predictions from the ActionAid weather updates.

Thapelo Patose

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

We delivered three classroom based sessions on conservation techniques for farmer groups in collaboration with the Agricultural Research Department. We worked directly with Siloe Research Station and the sessions were attended by one of their research technicians. The farmers engaged well with the research staff; farmers in Mohlakana for example, requested training on layers project management. A recent development has been the addition of monthly on-farm training sessions for 213 smallholder farmers (142 female and 71 male). The practical nature of these sessions has been particularly effective and has helped to improve farm productivity. The on-farm training sessions covered topics including soil preparation, pruning, livestock feeding, pest control and disease identification. The sessions took place in four villages: Makhabane, Mokhopha, Likhakeng and Mohlakana.

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

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

Refresher training on business skills including record keeping and costing was delivered to 20 smallholder farmers (13 female and 7 male) from all 10 groups supported by the project. Each

farmer will share what they have learned with at least five other smallholder farmers to increase the impact of the training within the community. As part of the training, participants and staff members visited two randomly selected groups that received training in the first year of the project to examine how the training was being used in practice. The visit showed that the two groups were using their new record keeping and costing skills to run their poultry and vegetable enterprises more efficiently. The visit also gave the facilitator an opportunity to examine the practical application of the learning and address any gaps which were identified in future training.

Provide additional livelihood support to farmers through livestock rearing.

To enable the farmers to earn additional income, we provided communities with a range of animals with the aim of supporting farmers to sell materials such as eggs and wool.

In year two, ActionAid procured five Merino rams for five local villages: Makhabane, Braakfontein, Mokhophu, Ramatlalla and Mohlakana. These rams are extremely useful within the local community and are popular for the quality of wool which they produce. The rams will breed with local sheep in the second mating season of the year in November.

Two poultry sheds were constructed with the help of the community in Moeaneng and Mekaling villages which are each capable of housing 300 chickens. We provided 3,153 chicks to eight smallholder farmer groups and a local high school. These groups will be responsible for raising this stock and selling the eggs which are produced. We also added a brooder curtain and solar lighting system in one of the poultry sheds constructed in year one to reduce the impact of cold and darkness on egg production. This was complemented by the construction of a borehole to provide easy access to water. The farmers in Mohlakana who were equipped with 1,000 chickens in year one have been selling the eggs produced; this has been a huge success and the farmers sell out on a regular basis.

We provided a total of 26 piglets to Mekaling primary school, Morifi high school, Utloanang Majantja Farmers Group, Mekaling farmers association and Likopane Lihoai group. All groups were also equipped with bags of pig feed. The piglets will help to generate income within the community and will be sold for pork meat or for breeding purposes.



Piglets at Mekaling farmers association.
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.

Following training on the establishment and management of savings and credit cooperatives (see below), ten smallholder farmer groups were supported to organise themselves into a savings credit cooperative (SCC). The elected committee members of the Khoelenya SCC consist of three females and four males and the development of a constitution and registration for members will take place in July. Ongoing support will be provided.



Elected members of Khoelenya SCC.
PHOTO: ActionAid

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

Training was provided to two members of each of the ten smallholder farmer groups on the establishment and management of savings and credit cooperatives (SCCs). The practical training equipped participants with the necessary skills to set up and run a savings and credit cooperative.

Accessing credit is a significant challenge for smallholder farmers in Mohale's Hoek as often they do not meet the high threshold criteria of the bank and other money lending institutions. Having access to credit is hugely important to enable food security in Lesotho and the SCCs will enable members to borrow money to start their own agricultural and farming projects.

In year three, Khoelenya SCC will open the bank account which ActionAid will release funds into. Members will then be able to access these funds in the form of a loan to enable them to establish and grow their projects. They can access a maximum of 3,000 Maloti (171 GBP) and the money can be used for a range of projects such as rearing chickens, sewing and knitting, catering and street vendors.

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. To achieve this, we will:

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

A three day refresher training session facilitated by the Council Secretary was delivered to 30 smallholder farmers (16 female and 14 male) on the Local Government Act 1997 and other key pieces of legislation. The training focused on the government's planning process and how the farmers could become involved in this process. Crucially, the training provided an opportunity for the farmers to critically engage and scrutinise the government's planning processes and implementation of various agricultural policies. It also provided a valuable opportunity to raise the profile of smallholder farmers and how they are impacted by the government's policies.

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

In year two, a meeting took place between 30 smallholder farmers (19 females and 11 males) from 10 different farmer groups and officials from the ministry of Agriculture and Food Security. The meeting took place at Mekaling Resource Centre, and was attended by officials from a range of departments including irrigation, livestock, crops and nutrition. The district planner also attended the meeting to provide an overview of the Ministry's planning process. Together, participants identified some of the major causes of food insecurity in Mohale's Hoek and a number of factors were cited including top down planning which excludes farmers and a lack of budget to implement activities. A follow up meeting will be organised in year three to put together an action plan on how to address the challenges identified. The impact of the advocacy work which is currently being carried out by smallholder farmers was recognised; they were encouraged to continue to hold duty bearers to account as this would lead to improvements in service delivery in the long run.

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

We held awareness training for 30 smallholder farmers (19 female and 11 male) and agricultural extension officers at Mekaling Resource Centre. The session was a great success, particularly as this was the first time many of the smallholder farmers had heard about the food security policy and its significance. The session was also beneficial for the extension officers as many of them were unclear on the contents of the food security policy. The session covered the different levels of 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 also provided with a simple brochure outlining the main provisions of the policy.

Conduct a study to look at the implementation of the National Adaption 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.

The activities above did not take place in year two, primarily as there was a delay in identifying an appropriate consultant to carry out a study on the implementation of NAPA. This delay had an impact on activities connected to the study such as the development of an advocacy strategy and plan of action. We have now identified a consultant who will be responsible for conducting a study on the implementation of the NAPA; this will begin at the end of July 2017 and will be the focus of the project in year three. The results of the study will inform the content and format of the training sessions for smallholder farmers. The training will enable farmers to be at the forefront of the advocacy process and lobby for the implementation of the study recommendations. The NAPA study will also feed into the development of an advocacy strategy and plan of action to ensure that implementation of NAPA is well managed and that smallholder farmers are taken into account by the government. The study conducted on the NAPA will be used to develop a robust advocacy strategy that will link local level issues on climate change and agricultural financing to national and regional platforms.

The impact of the activities above will extend beyond the project itself. The findings from the study will provide critical information that will support civil society leadership to bring the voice and authority of smallholder farmers into these regional forums and policy spaces.

Stories of change

Mr Mapeshoane Toka, Sethaleng village

“My name is Mapeshoane Toka and I live at Sethaleng village. I am a subsistence farmer who has been affected by drought for a very long time. I was using the traditional farming methods which have been failing since the climate change drought.

ActionAid is doing all its best to help us to improve our production. I was trained on conservation farming and had on-farm training. I was supported with seeds which tolerate drought and I also receive weather messages. I was able to sow the seeds before it rained. I planted half hectare with 10kg of sorghum and after two years of failing with the traditional farming methods, I managed to produce 250kg of sorghum.”

PHOTO: ActionAid



Likopane Lihoai Mokhopha Group



ActionAid provided the Likopane Lihoai Mokhopha Group with a greenhouse in the first year of the project. The secretary of the group, Masechaba Mpiti, said:

“We were supported by the extension officers to prepare the soil. We then planted 40 tomato seedlings. We supported the seedlings and pruned them with the support of the extension officer. The produce was sold locally and also transported to town shops. We managed to get M6,000 from the tomato sales. We will plan the use of this money soon. We are very grateful to ActionAid for this support.”

PHOTO: ActionAid

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. This project involves beneficiary participation at all levels and the Project Committee, comprising of community representatives, increases their involvement in the project. Close working with community members is essential to ensure local ownership of the project as well as its continuation long into the future. For example, in year two the Project Committee carried out a range of actions including lobbying the Rural Water Supply (RWS) to play a key role in monitoring the project and ensuring that progress is made against objectives. Additionally, the Committee engages and mobilises community members to provide water to the local community. In year two, the beneficiaries contributed locally available materials such as sand as well as unskilled labour. Throughout this project, we have also worked closely with the local government to ensure continued support. The farmer groups are linked to the relevant government departments throughout the project to ensure support even after external funding has come to an end.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is the means by which we fulfil our accountabilities 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. The project is being monitored by ActionAid and the community based Project Committee. In line with ActionAid’s Accountability, Learning Planning Systems (ALPS) requirements for downward accountability and monitoring and evaluation, ActionAid is holding biannual Participatory Review and Reflection Processes (PRRPs), through which the project beneficiaries and other stakeholders

will actively be involved in providing feedback on project implementation and impact. The ActionAid project team also meets quarterly for planning and reflection meetings.

Budget

The budget can be found in Annex 1. Please note that it reflects only 11 months of expenditure due to the reporting deadline and the start date of year two of the project in August 2016. The extreme weather and the general election had an impact on some of the activities which were due to be carried out in year two of the project and this has had an impact on expenditure. In addition, some of the advocacy-based activities are now scheduled to take place in year three to better align the activities and the impact which we are able to make.

Thank you for your support. In partnership with Isle of Man International Development Committee, we are changing the lives of smallholder farmers in Lesotho, for good.