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The Tragedy of Tšolo Kou's 37 Sheep

Effects of Climate Change Devastates Lesotho's Farmers

By Staff Reporters



Another Farmer, Napo Rangoajane, also lost 72 sheep due to the hailstorm

A devastating hailstorm struck the mountainous region of Thaba Putsoa, leaving behind a trail of destruction that claimed the lives of 37 sheep from Tšolo Kou's flock.

The incident is a sobering reminder of the harsh realities faced by farmers in Lesotho as they battle the increasingly unpredictable and severe effects of climate change.

Rethabile Kou, daughter of Tšolo, emotionally recounted the fateful Monday afternoon.

"We had brought the sheep down for shearing, as we do every year, and only the wethers were left at the sheepfold."

"The pregnant sheep had been home during the winter months to escape the cold, and we were in the process of transporting them back to the sheepfold in Thaba Putsoa to join the rest of the flock when the storm hit," she shared, her voice tinged with sorrow.

As the hail came down in brutal waves, Rethabile describes that the sheep began to fall one by one, unable to withstand the harsh strokes of hail and the freezing conditions.

"After the storm, we tried to return those that survived back home with the hope of restoring the remaining life, but it was too late. Out of the 190 sheep we had, 37 died on the spot," Rethabile explained.

She added, "Among them were 20 pregnant ewes, many of whom were carrying twins, as well as lambs that would have been ready for shearing the following year."

For Tšolo Kou, the tragedy is more than just a financial loss—it's deeply personal.

"When the storm started, we tried to shelter some of the sheep under our truck, but it was futile, there was a lot of panic amongst them so much that some just couldn't fit. They just died right in front of my eyes," Kou said, his voice heavy with grief.

The loss of his flock, particularly the pregnant ones, amounts to more than M200,000 in potential earnings, a sum that is crucial for covering veterinary costs, shepherd wages, and other farm expenses.

"This is my livelihood. The profits I make from breeding sustain my family and my workers while the money I make from shearing can cover the farms' operations. Losing this many sheep, especially the pregnant ones, is devastating. But I am grateful that at least this happened after shearing. I will be able to pay my herders," Kou added, attempting to find a silver lining amid the heartbreak.

This is not the first time climate-related disasters struck Kou's farm.

Last year, another storm killed 76 of his sheep while they were already at the sheepfold post-shearing.

Yet, Kou remains determined, "Every business has its challenges, and this is mine. I have no choice

but to keep going," he said, embodying the resilience that defines many Basotho farmers.

A Growing Crisis for Lesotho's Farmers

The plight of Kou's flock is not an isolated incident.

As extreme weather events become more frequent due to climate change and farmers across Lesotho are finding themselves increasingly vulnerable.

Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition Minister Thabo Mofosi noted livestock loss happens a lot during devastating seasons.

"We urge farmers to look out for weather forecasts before engaging in any activities around their animals. There is a sense of vulnerability to animals post-shearing and they are prone to dying from extreme cold," he said.

He added, "I only heard of two farmers so far and true. What happened is devastating, not only to them but to the agriculture sector at large.

Mofosi advised farmers to look into insuring their livestock to safeguard them from such uneventful events.

He noted that his ministry is looking into an improved climate change policy which will be inclusive of livestock farmers as well.

"It is evident that some of the health shocks we experience against animals is due to climate change. We say this year with poultry and blue tongue attacking sheep. We have seen a dire need to be intentional about our policies as a ministry," the minister said.

The Minister of Forestry and Environment, Letsema Adonts'i, released a seasonal forecast for the period from October 2024 to March 2025 revealing an outlook predicting below-normal rainfall for most of the country, with the southwestern and extreme northern parts expected to receive normal to above-normal rains.

The forecast also warned of the increased likelihood of flash floods, thunderstorms, hailstorms, and strong winds, which could lead to widespread damage to crops and livestock.

"These severe weather events pose a significant threat to both property and the livelihoods of farmers," Adonts'i stated, urging Basotho to prepare for the unpredictable conditions ahead.

Adapting to a Changing Climate

Lebohlang Mosaola, an Agribusiness Development Specialist and Managing Director of Leseli la Lihloa, emphasised the urgent need for farmers to adapt to the changing climate.

"Due to severe droughts, farmers are losing pastureland, which in turn affects the health of their animals, leading to lower wool and mohair quality and increased susceptibility to disease and parasites," Mosaola explained.

To combat these challenges, Mosaola advises farmers to plant drought-tolerant pasture varieties

such as lucerne and kikuyu grass and practice rotational grazing to allow pastures to recover. He also recommends modern kraals with suspended floors to minimize losses during floods and provide shelter for livestock during storms.

"Winter lambing, in particular, comes with many challenges, including poor pasture quality and exposure to extreme cold. Farmers should consider adjusting their breeding schedules to align lambing with the warmer seasons when pastures are more abundant," Mosaola added.

Weather Forecasting: A Lifeline for Farmers

Mosaola also stressed the importance of farmers staying informed about upcoming weather conditions.

"Farmers should regularly check weather forecasts from the Department of Meteorology or follow media reports before moving their animals to cattle posts. This simple practice could prevent the loss of both livestock and herders' lives. And they need to also invest in modern kraals with shelter because things are not the same anymore," he said.

Support and Guidance for Farmers

The Wool and Mohair Growers Association Chairperson, Mokoenihi Thinyane, shared his deep concern over the rising number of livestock deaths caused by extreme weather.

"We are still gathering data from across the districts, but the reports so far indicate that many farmers have been affected. It is heartbreaking," Thinyane said.

To help farmers cope with these increasingly challenging conditions, the association is planning to hold a series of gatherings aimed at educating farmers on how to better protect their flocks.

"We always advise farmers to build proper sheepfolds to shelter their animals, especially after shearing when they are most vulnerable," Thinyane mentioned.

Thinyane said some farmers are reluctant to wait out the weather with an objection that delays in acting during sudden weather changes often lead to unnecessary losses.

"We have an incident of one farmer whose sheep had already returned to the sheepfold, but they got congested in an attempt to run away from the storm that was brewing, unfortunately, many died. Timing is crucial—shepherds need to act immediately when the weather shifts," he explained.

He highlighted that the death of pregnant sheep, in particular, represents a significant loss for both farmers and the country.

"Wool and mohair contribute greatly to Lesotho's economy, and when we lose sheep like this, it impacts not just the farmer but the entire sector," Thinyane pointed out.

A Regional Perspective

The effects of climate variability and change are not limited to Lesotho. At the Southern Africa Regional Climate Outlook Forum (SARCOF-29), held earlier this year, the Minister of Environment, Climate, and Wildlife, Dr. Sithembiso G. G. Nyoni, highlighted the devastating impacts of climate change on the region.

"We have witnessed first-hand the effects of extreme weather, erratic rainfall patterns, and prolonged droughts. These events threaten our ecosystems, food security, and socio-economic stability," Dr. Nyoni stated.

Ms. Mapolao Mokoena, SADC Director of Infrastructure, emphasised the importance of seasonal forecasts in helping governments and farmers make informed decisions.

"These forecasts are crucial for sectors such as health, energy, water, and food security, particularly in light of the humanitarian appeal for US\$5.5 billion made earlier this year to support over 61 million people affected by droughts and floods in the region," Mokoena said.

As climate change continues to disrupt traditional farming practices in Lesotho, farmers like Tšolo Kou face an uncertain future. But with the right tools, support, and adaptation strategies, Mosaola noted there is hope that Basotho farmers can rise to the challenge and continue to provide for their families and communities.

"We cannot control the weather, but we can control how we respond to it," Thinyane said, offering a message of resilience for the farmers of Lesotho.



Component 2

Improving Agricultural Commercialization and Nutrition

Sub-component 2.1. Support for Horizontal Alliances

Planned activities.

- Training of farmers in Agri-business management and group formation & dynamics
- Round table meetings
- Trade fairs
- Market information disseminations

Key Achievements

- 4279 (2031M, 2248F) farmers trained on agri-business and marketing skills
- 664(291M, 373F) farmers trained in group formation and dynamics in all districts.
- 36 buyer seller meetings for farmers and traders (off-takers and input suppliers) were conducted in all districts with intention of forming alliances between buyers and sellers.
- 13 market information sessions were held in all districts except Berea for sharing of market trends information in terms of imports to inform production decisions.
- Two National Market Day was held in Maseru with aim of promoting sustainable agri-business and more than 1070 people participated. Producers generated sales of more than M128,000.



Sub-component 2.2: Support for Vertical Alliances



Planned activities.

- Training of service providers
- Matching grants for improving smallholder productivity.
- Matching grants for Agri-businesses
- Youth Call
- Engagement of Youth Mentorship Consultant.
- Lead firms' engagement

Key achievements

- 30 Service providers were trained on proposal writing for Lead Firms.
- A total of M49 229 175.16 disbursed to matching grants beneficiaries for milestone two and three under round one and two
- Under Youth Call, 39 beneficiaries have received milestone one amounting to M3,120,000.00
- Recruited 7 lead firms which have already signed the contracts and ready for the first milestone disbursement.



Sub-component 2.3. Improved Nutrition



Planned activities.

- Advocacy campaigns on nutrition diets
- Community based dietary knowledge.
- Nutrition Sensitive Grants- Disbursement to 59 Nutrition Clubs consisting of 970 households.

Key achievements

- In partnership with WFP disseminated Nutrition messages through public gatherings to 34 612 households and translating to 138 448 people reached.
- Construction of shade-nets is complete as well as procurement and delivery of dual purposes and fruit trees for 736 households in Thaba-Tseka, Leribe, Berea, Maseru and Mafeteng.

Farmers Pitso Awards, A Testament to Lesotho's Growing Agricultural Landscape

By Libuseng Molato



On September 7, 2024, the Manthabiseng Convention Centre in Maseru was abuzz with celebration as Farmers Pitso hosted their prestigious annual awards ceremony, honouring the outstanding contributions of farmers and stakeholders across the agricultural value chain.

This event, marking another milestone in the evolution of Lesotho's agriculture sector, highlighted the commitment and dedication of farmers, who are steadily transforming the nation's approach to food security and rural development, a direct response to the government's policy direction.

Farmers Pitso: A Legacy of Growth and Innovation

Thabiso Mats'oele, co-founder of Farmers Pitso Awards, reflected on the organisation's inspiring journey recounting its foundation in 2012.

"Farmers Pitso initially started with training sessions aimed at equipping farmers with basic skills. Over the years, the initiative grew into a comprehensive platform for benchmarking, networking, and showcasing farming innovations.

"We began as a small group of farmers committed to learning and sharing knowledge, but today, Farmers Pitso has evolved into a movement that brings farmers together not only to share ideas but to celebrate each other's achievements. Our growth led us to establish exhibitions, and this year we are proud to honour those who have excelled in agriculture in their respective areas."

Mats'oele emphasised that Farmers Pitso has always been about more than just farming.

"It's a community that fosters growth, innovation, and collaboration," he said noting the introduction of awards in 2018, was out of a desire to celebrate excellence in farming.

"Our awards are not just about produce. They are about recognising the individual farmer, the journey they've taken, and the publicity their success brings to the country's agricultural industry."

He also used the platform to urge the government to support and prioritise the work of Farmers Pitso participants in addressing poverty and unemployment.

"These farmers already have the potential to fight poverty, and we believe that with the right support, they can become the driving force behind Lesotho's economic recovery," Mats'oele said.

A Spotlight on Excellence: Honoring Farmers and Stakeholders

Farmers Pitso aims to elevate the entire agricultural value chain, including suppliers, journalists, law enforcement, and educators. The awards ceremony recognised excellence in every category, from farming innovation to advocacy and stock theft prevention.

One of the event's most notable moments came when the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) was honoured for its exceptional efforts in preventing stock theft in different regions of the country, a persistent issue affecting rural farmers.

Three officers—Inspector Toeba Mots'oane, Woman Constable Thato Zulu, and Woman Constable Mafusi Mathathe—were awarded for their

dedication to fighting stock theft.

Woman Constable Mafusi Mathathe, who received the Honorary Award for Excellent Workmanship in Livestock Theft Prevention, shared her thoughts on the challenges of the job.

"There's no set time for us in stock theft. We respond whenever we receive reports, which sometimes means spending days in the field. The lack of resources often makes our job difficult, but being recognised for our efforts motivates us to continue protecting our farmers."

The Role of Media in Agricultural Advocacy

The media's crucial role in promoting agriculture was also celebrated, with Mo-Africa FM owner, Ratabane Ramainoane, receiving an Honorary Award for Excellence in Media and Agricultural Advocacy.

In his speech, Ramainoane passionately called on the government to establish markets for local produce to prevent post-harvest losses and encourage more farmers to enter the industry.

"Basotho love farming, but without structured markets, their efforts go to waste," Ramainoane said.

"In 2013, a policy was introduced to source school meals from local farmers, but it has yet to be implemented. If we could ensure that every school and institution source locally, we would see a significant increase in food production."

Ramainoane also highlighted the importance of addressing land allocation issues.

"Farmers need land to expand their operations, but the Land Act of 2010, which mandates the Minister of Agriculture to allocate farmland, has not been enforced. Without land, farmers are limited in what they can achieve."

Empowering Youth in Agriculture

This year's awards underscored the critical role that young people play in the future of Lesotho's agriculture.

Siyabonga Ndlovu, a 21-year-old from Ha Mants'ebou, took home the top prize in the Youth in Agriculture category for his work at Ndlovu Farm, a thriving vegetable enterprise.

"I started farming during the COVID-19 lockdown, and it quickly became clear that agriculture was the only industry still moving forward."

Ndlovu shared that farming became his passion, "...I realised that it was not just a job but a way to sustain myself and my community and I never looked back."

The inclusion of young farmers in the awards demonstrates Farmers Pitso's commitment to nurturing the next generation of agricultural leaders.

Ndlovu's story is a testament to the potential that exists when youth are empowered to engage in farming as a viable and rewarding career.

Similarly, 14-year-old Mohano Manyanye won first prize in the Breeding category for his work in dog breeding, making him the event's youngest winner of all categories.

"I started breeding dogs to protect my family's livestock, and now it's become a business," Manyanye explained.

His success highlights the diverse opportunities available in agriculture, extending beyond tra-

ditional crop and livestock farming.

Women Leading the Way in Agriculture

The awards ceremony also paid tribute to the contributions of women in agriculture.

Limakatso Mothunya, owner of Motsotse AgriBusiness, won second prize in the Women in Agriculture category.

Mothunya, who recently resigned from her job

to focus on farming full-time, spoke passionately about the impact farming has had on her life.

"There is life in agriculture. I'm not just feeding my family—I'm feeding my community and creating jobs. Farming has given me a sense of purpose, and I encourage more Basotho to use the resources we have in this country to create sustainable livelihoods."

Farmgirls Lesotho co-founder, Matumane Matela, also received an Appreciation Award for her work in empowering women farmers.

"This award represents the strength and resilience of women in agriculture. It's a call to action for more women to join us in this journey of growth and empowerment."

Sponsorship and the Future of Farming

Farmers Pitso's success is built on the support of sponsors who share the vision of advancing agriculture in Lesotho. Companies like Sentinel Farms and Foso Hardware contributed generously to the event, providing farming implements, cash prizes, and resources to support the growth of local farmers.

"Our goal is to offer products that make farm-

Ambitious Farmer Transforms Agriculture Stereotypes

By Kabelo Masoabi

At just 26 years old, Thato Emyl Ts'enki from Ha Pita, Maseru, is shattering stereotypes and redefining what it means to be a modern farmer in Lesotho.

Nicknamed the "Slay Queen" by her friends for her stylish appearance—meticulously maintained nails, eyebrows, and makeup—Ts'enki is far more than just a pretty face. She is a passionate and driven farmer who gets her hands dirty and works tirelessly in the fields when duty calls.

Ts'enki's efforts have not gone unnoticed. She recently claimed the prestigious 2024 Botle Young Female Farmer Award at the Farmers Pitso Awards, a testament to her hard work and the significant impact she has made in agriculture.

While many attribute her success to her beauty, Ts'enki is quick to correct that assumption: her achievements are rooted in her dedication and passion for farming.

"Being a farmer doesn't mean you always have to be dirty. When you look good, you feel good. And nothing gives a woman more confidence than earning and spending her own money."

As the founder of Tay Mixed Farming, Ts'enki has garnered a strong following on social media, where she is affectionately called "Miss Farmer" due to her exceptional crop yields.

Her journey into agriculture started at a young age, nurtured by her mother's love for the soil and her family's reliance on farming for sustenance.

It was also her high school agriculture teacher who encouraged her love for farming and made her realise that she could turn her passion into a career.

"I always loved being outdoors and working with plants. Back in high school, my vegetables were often the best among my classmates. That's when I knew I was meant to do this."

After finishing her studies at Thabeng High School, Ts'enki embarked on her agricultural journey by raising free-range chickens and growing spinach and garlic seedlings.

In 2023, she expanded her operations to include chilli cultivation, a venture that has since become her main focus due to its overwhelming success.

Ts'enki's determination and drive pushed her to save money from various odd jobs, which she used to kickstart her farming endeavours. Her initial profits helped her transition into commercial agriculture, paving the way for her to become one of Lesotho's most promising young female farmers.

"Young people should really consider starting their own farming projects. There is a lot of money to be made from the land. Taking care of crops isn't difficult if you have the right skills, and farming can help reduce the high unemployment rates we're seeing in Lesotho."

Ts'enki's operation has since diversified into mixed farming.

In addition to cultivating a variety of seedlings—including onion, tomato, green pepper, beetroot, and chilies—she also rears rabbits and ducks. Her day-to-day schedule is a delicate bal-



Award-winner Thato Ts'enki

ancing act, with early mornings and evenings dedicated to her animals and the rest of her time focused on crop cultivation.

One of the ways Ts'enki has amplified her farming success is by embracing technology. She frequently uses social media platforms like Facebook to promote her products, and online tools like YouTube to learn new techniques.

Ts'enki is also an advocate for learning from

others, often seeking advice from more experienced farmers to continually improve her farming methods.

Her ambitions, however, extend far beyond Lesotho's borders. Ts'enki dreams of becoming an exporter, with her eyes set on international markets. While she currently sells to local communities and secondary processors who use her chillies to create sauces, her ultimate goal is to

expand globally.

Yet, her path has not been without obstacles. She recalls a difficult winter when cold temperatures destroyed a significant portion of her chilli crop, as she farms on open land. To mitigate such challenges, Ts'enki is a strong advocate for climate-adaptive techniques such as greenhouse or shade net cultivation, which can protect crops and boost productivity.

"I don't have problems with irrigation, but I really need more land and a greenhouse to make sure my crops are protected from the weather." Looking to the future, Ts'enki has her sights set on furthering her education in agriculture.

She aims to equip herself with the scientific knowledge needed to help tackle food scarcity in Lesotho, aspiring to transform the country into a nation that can feed not only its own people but contribute to global food security.

"My ultimate goal is to see Lesotho being able to produce enough food not just for our own needs, but to be able to export and feed others too. Agriculture is the key to that vision," she emphasised.

A devout believer, Ts'enki credits much of her success to her faith.

"I believe in the power of prayer. With God, all things are possible," she said with conviction.

Thato Ts'enki represents a new generation of farmers in Lesotho—innovative, tech-savvy, and passionate.

She has become a role model for young people across the country, showing that agriculture is not only a viable career but a lucrative one.

Her determination to improve not just her own life but to contribute to Lesotho's food security makes her a trailblazer in the industry.

In a country where agriculture has traditionally been dominated by older generations, Ts'enki is part of a growing movement of young farmers who are reinvigorating the sector.

With access to better technology, education, and markets, these young farmers are making agriculture more attractive and accessible to their peers. By embracing modern practices and marketing their products effectively, they are changing the face of farming in Lesotho.

For Ts'enki, the journey is just beginning. Her drive, ambition, and vision for the future are paving the way for a new era of agriculture in Lesotho—one that is more knowledgeable, sustainable, and profitable.

"There's so much potential in farming," she said. "With the right support, Lesotho can become a global player in agriculture. But we need more young people to get involved, learn the skills, and work together to achieve that."

Thato Ts'enki's story is not just about personal success; it's about how the face of agriculture in Lesotho is changing—becoming more attractive, modern, and driven by knowledgeable and passionate individuals. As she continues to build her farming empire, she serves as an inspiration to young people everywhere that with hard work, determination, and a love for the land, anything is possible.



ing easier and more productive," said Retseitsoe Moabi, founder of Sentinel Farms. "Sponsoring events like Farmers Pitso is part of our commitment to seeing the farming industry in Lesotho thrive. We're not just selling equipment—we're investing in the future of agriculture."

Newsday Media which publishes Lesotho's only agriculture publications contributed M10 000 towards the schools in the agriculture category. The amount will be shared among the three winning schools.

The Managing Editor of the company, Lerato Matheka indicated that for Lesotho to full achieve food sufficiency and sustainability, children need to be encouraged at a young age.

"Schools are better institutions to support in making agriculture fashionable and popular. Gone are the days when farmers were viewed as old and uneducated. We at Newsday want to be part of progress," she said.

The Minister of Agriculture's Call to Action

Minister of Agriculture, Food Security, and Nutrition, Thabo Mofosi praised Farmers Pitso for its vital role in motivating and empowering farmers across the country.

Mofosi, who has personally received recognition from Farmers Pitso Awards in the past, emphasised the importance of agriculture as Lesotho's economic backbone.

"Farmers Pitso is doing an incredible job in bringing our farmers together, recognising their efforts, and motivating them to continue producing for our country. As Prime Minister Matekane has declared, agriculture is the backbone of our economy, and we must all work together to support its growth."

Mofosi stressed the need for the government to take decisive action in supporting farmers and ensuring that the agricultural sector receives the

attention it deserves.

He pointed to the upcoming World Food Day celebration planned in Quthing in October as an opportunity for farmers to showcase their produce.

"I call on all farmers to participate in the World Food Day celebration in October. This is our chance to show the world what Lesotho's farmers can achieve. We are committed to providing the necessary resources, including transportation, to ensure that farmers from across the country can attend."

Mofosi reaffirmed the government's commitment to agriculture and called on all stakeholders to play their part.

"We cannot underestimate the power of farming in solving our country's problems. It is only through farming that we can truly conquer the challenges we face. The government, private sector, and civil society must unite to support initiatives like Farmers Pitso that are changing the landscape of agriculture in Lesotho."

A Vision for the Future

Farmers Pitso's 2024 awards ceremony not only celebrated the achievements of individual farmers but also underscored the collective vision of a thriving, resilient agricultural sector in Lesotho. As the country looks to the future, it is clear that agriculture will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping Lesotho's economic and social development.

With the unwavering support of the government, private sector, and dedicated organisations like Farmers Pitso, the future of farming in Lesotho shines bright.

This year's event was a powerful reminder that through collaboration, innovation, and recognition, Lesotho's farmers can lead the country to a future of food security, economic growth, and sustainability.



Drone Technology, Revolutionising Precision Farming in Lesotho

By Kabelo Masoabi

Lesotho's agricultural sector is on the verge of a technological revolution, spearheaded by innovative individuals like Lemohang Letsoela.

The 26-year-old pilot from Ha Seoli, Maseru, is leveraging his aviation expertise to introduce drone technology as a game-changer in precision farming. Through his company, Letsoela Agro-Aviation, he aims to transform the way local farmers approach agriculture, making it more efficient, sustainable, and attractive to the younger generation.

Letsoela's journey into agricultural aviation began after completing his pilot training in Barcelona, Spain.

Upon returning home, he identified a gap in the agricultural sector, where outdated farming methods continue to hinder productivity. His passion for aviation, combined with his desire to uplift Lesotho's agricultural industry, led him to explore drone technology and its potential in precision farming.

At the 2024 Farmers Pitso Awards, Letsoela won first prize in the Innovation and Technology category, a recognition of his pioneering efforts to bring cutting-edge technology to the agricultural landscape of Lesotho.

According to Letsoela, drone technology has the potential to revolutionise farming practices, improve efficiency, and promote sustainable food production—a crucial need in a country that is still grappling with food insecurity.

The Role of Drone Technology in Agriculture

Letsoela emphasises that drones are essential tools in precision farming, which involves using technology to monitor crops, apply inputs like fertiliser and pesticides, and manage irrigation more effectively.

"In countries like Zimbabwe and South Africa, drones have already proven their worth," he explained.

He indicated, "They offer farmers real-time data on crop health, allowing them to identify problem areas and make informed decisions to optimise yields."

He stressed that one of the standout benefits of drone technology is its ability to conserve water, a critical concern in Lesotho.

"By using drones, farmers can accurately target irrigation, ensuring water goes where it's needed and reducing waste. This targeted application also extends to fertilisers and pesticides, minimising runoff and preventing contamination of soil and water resources."

The technology is not only about efficiency, but also about attracting a new generation to

Lemohanag Isaaka Letsoela and Thabiso Mats'oele Farmers Pitso founder

agriculture and Letsoela believes drones could help make farming more appealing to young people, particularly unemployed graduates who may not see traditional agriculture as a viable or exciting career path.

"Flying a drone is inherently exciting and by introducing this technology, we can change the perception of agriculture and encourage more young people to get involved."

Precision and Efficiency

One of the most significant advantages of drones in agriculture is their ability to enhance precision. Traditional farming methods often involve broad applications of fertilisers and pesticides, which can lead to wastage and environmental harm. Drones, on the other hand, can apply these inputs with pinpoint accuracy, reducing resource use while increasing productivity.

"Our drones cover 22 hectares in just 60 minutes. This is compared to traditional methods where a farmer might need 50 staffers working for two weeks to cover 40 hectares. We can do the same job in just two hours."

"This level of efficiency is not just about saving time; it's also about reducing costs and minimising exposure to harmful chemicals for farmers. Drones can reach hard-to-access areas like steep tea fields at high elevations, which are often difficult and dangerous for workers using backpack sprayers," Letsoela added.

Overcoming Challenges

Despite the clear benefits, Letsoela acknowledges that the adoption of drone technology in agriculture is not without challenges. One of the most significant barriers is the steep learning curve associated with flying drones and interpreting the data they collect.

"Understanding flight operations, data analysis, and software integration can be daunting, especially for those without aviation experience," he said, however, Letsoela Agro-Aviation is stepping in to bridge that gap.

"We are working with other companies to offer affordable drone technology services and training to Basotho farmers and we will be renting drones from a company in Limpopo, South Africa, and conducting district tours starting in November to demonstrate the technology's effectiveness."

Letsoela's company plans to hold expos across the country to raise awareness of how drones can boost productivity, increase yields, and reduce water and pesticide usage.



"These expos will also showcase other advanced technologies that can help farmers access more arable land and create employment opportunities in the agricultural sector," he explained.

The Future of Drones in Lesotho's Agriculture

While Letsoela is optimistic about the future of drone technology in Lesotho, he is also realistic about the challenges that lie ahead. One of the key issues is the regulatory framework for drone operations. In South Africa, for example, the Civil Aviation Authority regulates the use of agricultural drones, ensuring that only trained professionals operate them. In Lesotho, however, there is no such regulatory body, which could pose a challenge to widespread adoption.

Additionally, obtaining a remote operating certificate (ROC) to legally operate drones can take up to two years, and the licensing and training requirements are stringent. Letsoela is hopeful that the government will take steps to streamline these processes to make it easier for farmers to adopt the technology.

Despite these obstacles, the potential benefits of drones in agriculture are too significant to ignore.

Research suggests that drones can increase food productivity by 20%, reduce pesticide use by 70%, save 97% of water, and improve farming efficiency by 30 times compared to traditional methods. These statistics are particularly relevant in a country like Lesotho, where agricultural productivity has struggled to keep pace with population growth and food demand.

Local Farmer Reactions

While the benefits of drone technology are clear, some local farmers remain hesitant. Veteran farmer Raphallo Lekena from Mohale's Hoek expressed concerns that traditional farming practices, deeply rooted in generational knowledge, may lead to resistance among some farmers.

"The initial investment required for drones, along with

maintenance and training costs, can be a barrier for smaller or resource-constrained farmers," he noted, however, acknowledged that the local farming community is open to change, provided the technology is cost-effective and delivers tangible benefits.

He commended Letsoela Agro-Aviation for its outreach efforts, which aim to make the technology more accessible to all farmers, regardless of their resources.

Climate Change and the Need for Innovation

In the face of climate change, which is increasingly affecting agriculture in Lesotho, innovative solutions like drones are more important than ever. Vuca Ts'abo, a researcher at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Nutrition, highlighted the urgent need for change.

"The use of drones in agriculture has the potential to be a game-changer."

"Although the initial cost is high, the long-term benefits in terms of productivity and sustainability make it a worthwhile investment."

Ts'abo emphasised the need for intensive promotion and marketing efforts to ensure that farmers are aware of the benefits and are willing to invest in the technology.

"The success of this initiative will depend on how well the technology is introduced and integrated into existing farming practices," he noted, stressing that drone technology has the potential to revolutionise agriculture in Lesotho, making farming more efficient, sustainable, and attractive to the younger generation.

While there are challenges to overcome, the efforts of innovators like Lemohang Letsoela and his company, Letsoela Agro-Aviation, are paving the way for a brighter future in agriculture.

"By embracing technology, Lesotho can address the pressing issues of food security, water conservation, and unemployment," Ts'abo said.

Crop Diagnosing System, A Game Changer for Lesotho Agriculture

By Libuseng Molato

In a remarkable leap toward modernising agriculture, two final-year students from the National University of Lesotho, Khotso Phali and Tšepang Nkoe, have developed the Lesotho AI Agriculture Virtual Assistant (LAAVA).

This groundbreaking system, which integrates artificial intelligence (AI) into crop farming, aims to revolutionise the country's agricultural sector by enhancing productivity, improving sustainability, and addressing food insecurity.

Driving Innovation with AI

During an interview, Phali and Nkoe discussed the inspiration behind their innovation, pointing out the persistent food insecurity in Southern Africa despite the abundance of fertile land.

"We were deeply concerned that many Southern African countries, including Lesotho, still struggle with food security despite having the natural resources to combat it," explained Nkoe.

They highlighted the escalating prices of staple foods such as maize meal and beans as further motivation to create a system that could alleviate some of the challenges farmers face.

"We realised that by incorporating technology and agricultural intelligence into farming practices, we could help farmers make better decisions, reduce crop damage, and improve their harvests," Nkoe added.

LAAVA: A Comprehensive Farming Solution

LAAVA is designed as an all-in-one assistant for farmers, offering features that address various aspects of the farming cycle, from soil analysis to market integration.

Phali and Nkoe emphasised that the system is specifically tailored for Basotho farmers, with features aimed at promoting collaboration, education, and practical, data-driven decision-making.

"LAAVA is rich with functionalities that support farmers at every stage of crop production. It's more than just a tool—it's a platform that empowers farmers to connect, learn, and grow."

Key Features of LAAVA

Social Integration and Community Support

LAAVA's social integration feature allows farmers to interact with one another, much like on social media. Farmers can share posts, images, and updates about their crop

production, offering each other inspiration and advice. The system also integrates with WhatsApp, sending notifications to keep farmers connected and informed.

"One of the things we wanted to ensure is that farmers have a platform where they can learn from each other. The integration with WhatsApp allows them to stay updated with notifications about their crops and get quick tips from other users," Nkoe said.

Language Accessibility

Understanding the importance of accessibility, Phali and Nkoe designed LAAVA with language in mind.

"The system is being trained to understand and communicate in Sesotho," Phali explained, stressing that Basotho farmers, regardless of their educational background, can easily use the system in their native language, making it more accessible and practical for everyday use.

Real-Time Monitoring Through Sensors

One of LAAVA's most impressive features is its use of sensors to monitor soil conditions.

"Sensors placed in the fields gather critical data on soil humidity, fertility, and temperature, which is then sent to the system. Farmers can access this data through their phones, allowing them to monitor and adjust their farming practices in real time."

"LAAVA is already trained to identify and classify different soil types commonly found in Lesotho, such as alluvial soil, black soil, clay, and red soil," Phali elaborated. This ensures that farmers can receive tailored advice based on the specific conditions of their land.

Disease Prediction and Management

Phali and Nkoe have equipped LAAVA with AI-driven disease prediction capabilities, allowing farmers to upload images of their crops and receive diagnoses on potential diseases.

"For example, LAAVA can predict common diseases in tomatoes and offer remedies for issues like bacterial spots, early blight, and late blight," explained the developers.

This feature helps farmers catch diseases early, preventing widespread crop damage and ensuring better harvests.

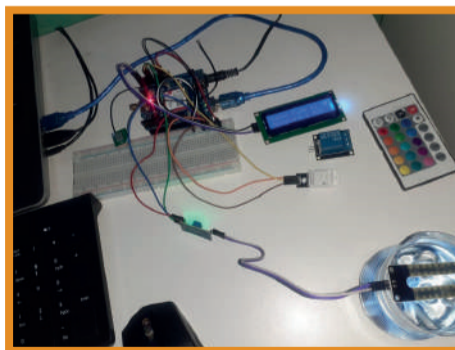
"Over time, the AI system continues to learn and improve its diagnostic accuracy, providing increasingly effective solutions to farmers," they said.

Data Analytics and Dashboards

"Farmers using LAAVA have access to a comprehen-



sive dashboard that displays real-time data collected from sensors in the fields. This feature helps farmers manage critical factors such as



soil moisture, ensuring they do not overwater their crops. LAAVA also provides detailed data management and report analytics, which are crucial for agribusinesses to track their progress and optimise productivity," Nkoe explained.

"With LAAVA, farmers can see what's happening on their farm at any given time. It allows them to make informed decisions based on real data, which is key to improving crop yields."

Community Forum for Farmer Collaboration

LAAVA's community forum is another unique feature designed to foster collaboration and mentorship among farmers. Expert farmers are marked with green badges, while new or less experienced farmers have red badges. This system encourages experienced farmers to guide and support those who are just starting out, creating a culture of learning and growth within the farming community.

"Farming is not just about working the land—it's also about learning and sharing knowledge," Phali emphasised, pointing out that the community forum makes it easy for farmers to connect, ask questions, and get advice from experts.

Market Price Integration

Recognising the importance of market access, LAAVA provides real-time updates on crop prices. The developers are currently in talks with the Ministry of Agriculture's marketing department to ensure that the pricing data is accurate and up to date.

"This feature will enable farmers to make better decisions about when and where to sell their produce, maximizing their profits."

The Road Ahead: Future Plans for LAAVA

Phali and Nkoe have ambitious plans for the future of LAAVA. They are actively working to collaborate with laboratories and soil scientists to enhance the system's capabilities further.

"We want to gather soil samples from different regions to improve the accuracy of our models. By refining the system, we can offer farmers even more precise and useful insights about their crops," they asserted.

In addition to refining the technical aspects of LAAVA, the developers plan to expand its reach by conducting workshops and training sessions for farmers across Lesotho. They believe that educating farmers about the benefits of AI and technology in agriculture is key to ensuring widespread adoption and success.

"We see LAAVA as a game-changer for Basotho farmers," said Nkoe. "We encourage everyone to explore the system and see how it can benefit their farms. It's a tool that's designed to help, and we believe it will make a big difference."

A Brighter Future for Lesotho's Agriculture

The introduction of LAAVA marks a significant step forward in Lesotho's efforts to modernise its agricultural sector. By integrating artificial intelligence, real-time data analytics, and community-driven support, LAAVA is poised to empower farmers across the country, boost productivity, and contribute to food security.

"With LAAVA, we are not just addressing immediate challenges in farming. We are building a foundation for a more sustainable and resilient agricultural future in Lesotho," Phali concluded.

As food security becomes an increasingly urgent global concern, innovations like LAAVA offer hope for countries like Lesotho, where agriculture plays a critical role in the economy and the well-being of its citizens. By harnessing the power of technology, Phali and Nkoe are helping to pave the way for a brighter, more sustainable future for Basotho farmers.

A Taste of Agriculture at Mazenod High School

By Kabelo Masoabi

At Mazenod High School, the agriculture program is more than just a subject—it's a gateway to understanding Lesotho's most vital industry and an introduction to the numerous career possibilities within agriculture.

The program offers students a blend of theoretical knowledge and practical skills in livestock management, gardening, food production, and even branding and marketing their agricultural products.

Maleshoane Mary Makepa, the agriculture teacher at the school, emphasises that agriculture is not only about working the land but opens doors to diverse career paths ranging from environmental conservation and agribusiness to sustainable food production.

"Agriculture offers a multitude of career options, thanks to its ever-evolving nature and continuous introduction of new technologies. By exposing students to agricultural concepts early on, they gain a deeper appreciation of its significant role in their lives and its potential to ensure food security for the future," she explained.

Makepa added that the skills gained in the agriculture program equip students with practical knowledge for self-sustenance, even if they do not pursue higher education.

"We want students to see agriculture as more than just farming—it's a survival skill and a viable career option in a world where food and resource sustainability are becoming more important," she said.

Excellence in Agriculture Education

Mazenod High School recently celebrated its achievement as the second-place winner in the schools in agriculture category at the 2024 Farmers Pitso Awards, held at the Manthabiseng Convention Centre.

The event showcased the school's agriculture group, who presented an impressive array of fresh produce that left attendees, including local farmers and agriculture enthusiasts, in awe.

The produce, meticulously cleaned and labelled under the school's Department of Agriculture, demonstrated the high standards of quality and presentation instilled in the students.

Makepa credits the students' success to their hands-on involvement in mixed farming.

The program includes crop cultivation and livestock rearing, such as chick-

ens and turkeys, as well as orchard management.

In the past year, the students produced various types of maize, including morado, which was used for making soft porridge, and panapolph, a variety used for toasted maize (lipabi).

The school also had a successful harvest of peas, which were sold locally.

"Many of our crops are processed, branded, and sold within the community, this way our students learn every aspect of the agricultural value chain—from growing the crops to packaging and selling them as final products like dried apples (mangangajane), ginger drinks, and packaged vegetables."

Learning Beyond the Classroom

The agriculture program at Mazenod High School starts in grade 8 as part of the school's science and technology curriculum.

By grade 9, students can choose to focus on agriculture, nutrition, or dressmaking. The school is also planning to expand its program to include the production and packaging of rabbit and free-range



chicken meat, though it remains on a small scale due to the educational nature of the initiative.

While the program has been successful, Makepa acknowledged some challenges. Climate change and limited class time pose hurdles to achieving full productivity, and she pointed out that certain parental expectations regarding how students should spend their time can also affect their en-



agement in the agriculture projects.

"There are times when students want to get more involved, but their schedules or other commitments may limit their participation. It's something we are working to balance," she said.

Students See a Bright Future in Agriculture

For students like Palesa Moloi, a grade 11 student, the agriculture program has opened her eyes to the possibilities in farming.

"I've always been fascinated by how much agriculture affects our daily lives. In Lesotho, agriculture is a big part of our culture, and I see great opportunities for improvement," she said.

Moloi shared her hopes of learning more about modern farming technologies and business practices that could transform how Lesotho farms.

"In the future, I want to learn about new farming technologies and business methods that could change how we farm. It's not just about growing crops; it's about creating sustainable,

profitable farming solutions that can benefit entire communities," she explained.

Her excitement reflects the school's goal of teaching students that farming is not merely about subsistence but can also be a strategic and innovative way to tackle larger economic and environmental challenges.

Agriculture as a Lifelong Skill

Agriculture is more than an academic subject at Mazenod High School—it's a practical education that can prepare students for lifelong success. 'Maliopelo Letuma, a crop farmer and attendee of the Farmers Pitso Awards, expressed her joy at seeing youth so engaged in agriculture.

"Agricultural education equips students with critical survival skills. They not only learn how to differentiate between poisonous and non-poisonous plants but also

understand the importance of soil health, food safety, and sustainable farming," said Letuma, a graduate in Soil Science from the National University of Lesotho.

Letuma emphasised that these skills are critical for students to become self-sufficient.

"This practical knowledge is a tool for their independence and can also inspire them to pursue careers in farming, helping to secure the future of food production in Lesotho," she added.

Diverse Opportunities in Agriculture

Lesotho's agriculture industry offers a wide range of career paths, from traditional farming to more specialised roles in conservation, horticulture, and agricultural economics. Makepa notes that the program at Mazenod High School prepares students not just for life on the farm but for roles in food processing, marketing, and even environmental conservation.

"Agriculture is a significant source of employment in Lesotho, and the skills our students learn here can take them far. They can work in everything from crop production and agribusiness to food safety and environmental management," Makepa said.

Inspiring the Next Generation of Farmers

Mazenod High School's agriculture program is planting the seeds of a brighter future for Lesotho's agricultural sector. By offering students hands-on experience and a comprehensive understanding of the entire farming process, the school is helping shape the next generation of innovators, conservationists, and business leaders who will carry Lesotho's agricultural industry into the future.

"The work we are doing here is about more than just growing crops. It's about growing minds, skills, and opportunities. We want our students to see that agriculture is not only a way to sustain themselves but a way to build successful and fulfilling careers."

With students like Moloi dreaming of sustainable farming solutions and teachers like Makepa guiding them toward success, Mazenod High School is proving that agriculture is more than just an academic subject—it's the foundation for a brighter, more prosperous future in Lesotho.



AMR Crisis Threatens African Agriculture and Nutrition Security

By Lerato Matheka

The growing threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is not only a public health crisis but also a severe challenge to Africa's agriculture and nutrition security.

A recent report from the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) underscores that AMR is now a leading cause of death in Africa, surpassing fatalities from malaria, HIV, and tuberculosis. However, what is less recognised is the devastating impact AMR could have on the continent's agricultural systems and nutrition.

As AMR continues to rise, driven by the overuse and misuse of antimicrobials in both human health and food production, it directly affects food security and agricultural productivity.

Major drivers of AMR in Africa include indiscriminate antimicrobial use in livestock and aquaculture, poor waste management, and environmental contamination from pharmaceutical residues and hospital effluents. This poses a particular risk to Africa's food systems, which are heavily dependent on livestock and smallholder farming.

According to the report, "AMR's impact extends beyond morbidity and mortality, threatening the achievement of Agenda 2030 goals, including poverty elimination, health for all, economic prosperity, gen-

der equality, and Universal Health Coverage (UHC)."

In a region where agriculture is the backbone of many economies and a critical pillar for nutrition, AMR could compromise food security by making bacterial infections in livestock harder to treat, leading to lower yields and increased costs for farmers.

Impact on Agriculture and Food Systems

"Agriculture in Lesotho and the rest of the African continent is largely driven by smallholder farmers who rely on livestock as both a source of food and income, therefore, the overuse of antimicrobials in animals, particularly antibiotics to promote growth and prevent disease in livestock, has played a huge role in the accelerated spread of AMR," an agriculture expert Lebohlang Mosaola warned.

"As bacteria become resistant to antibiotics, it becomes harder for farmers to manage animal health, leading to a loss of livestock, reduced production, and higher costs for veterinary care," Mosaola said.

The report highlights that "the overuse and misuse of antimicrobials in human and food systems" are major contributors to the AMR crisis.

In the context of agriculture, Mosaola noted this translates into a weakened ability to control animal diseases, which could devastate both the food supply and the income of millions of smallholder farmers across the continent.

"This is a directly impact on nutrition moreso because livestock provides a significant source of protein and essential nutrients for African communities," he said.

He noted that AMR poses risks to food safety, as resistant bacteria can be transmitted through the food chain, from farm to fork.

"Consumers of animal products may face increased exposure to resistant pathogens, making common foodborne illnesses more difficult to treat. This compounds the region's already fragile food security, where about 200 million people are facing food insecurity and malnutrition," Mosaola asserted.

WASH and Nutrition: Key to Fighting AMR in Agriculture

One of the key findings of the report is the critical role that Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) programs play in mitigating AMR.

"One in three hospitals in the region lacks clean, safe running water, and one in eight people defecate openly due to inadequate sanitation," the report states, inadequate WASH facilities in rural farming communities also exacerbate the spread of resistant bacteria.

For African agriculture to thrive and continue providing essential nutrition to millions of people, investments in WASH infrastructure are needed. Safe water and proper sanitation can reduce the need for

antimicrobials in both human and livestock health by preventing infections before they start. The report suggested.

Mosaola advised that improved hygiene practices on farms, particularly in animal husbandry, can significantly reduce the transmission of AMR between animals and humans.

Sustainable Farming and Reduced Antimicrobial Use

The report emphasises that addressing AMR requires a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach, particularly in food and agriculture, suggesting sustainable farming practices that reduce the need for antimicrobials, such as improved biosecurity, better vaccination programs for livestock, and rotational grazing, as essential in mitigating the AMR crisis.

Mosaola stressed that farmers should be encouraged and supported to adopt the suggested practices, alongside access to quality-assured diagnostics and veterinary care.

"By ensuring sustainable access to antibiotics for only necessary use, the agriculture sector can reduce the development of resistance while maintaining animal health and food production."

The Africa CDC's call for action is clear: "Support for the region should focus on preventing infections, strengthening health and food systems, developing human resources, ensuring sustainable access to diagnostics and therapeutics, and investing in laboratory infrastructure to support surveillance and data generation."

For agriculture, this means prioritising biosecurity, infection prevention, and alternative farming methods that promote long-term food security and nutrition without the over-reliance on antimicrobials.

A glance into the US\$39.7 million WAMPP's impact

By Lerato Matheka

Lesotho's wool and mohair industry has long played a pivotal role in the country's economy, offering a vital source of income for thousands of smallholder farmers.

For generations, wool from sheep and mohair from goats have not only been key agricultural exports but have also supported the livelihoods of the Basotho people, particularly those in rural and mountainous regions.

Despite this, the sector has faced significant challenges, such as climate change, land degradation, and limited market access, which have hindered its potential and recognising these obstacles, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) launched the Wool and Mohair Promotion Project (WAMPP) in 2015.

The project, which concluded in 2023, aimed to enhance the resilience, productivity, and income of smallholder wool and mohair farmers, particularly in Lesotho's highland areas.

The initiative sought to mitigate the effects of climate change, improve land management practices, and bolster the sector's marketability, making wool and mohair a reliable and sustainable source of income for Lesotho's rural population.

A recent Project Performance Evaluation (PPE) report conducted by IFAD has provided valuable insights into the successes and challenges of WAMPP.

The evaluation assesses the project's outcomes and offers recommendations for the future.

With a total project cost of US\$39.7 million, the report indicated that WAMPP had left a lasting impact on Lesotho's agricultural landscape, and its lessons could inform future initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable and inclusive growth in the wool and mohair industry.

The Wool and Mohair Industry: A Vital Economic Driver

The wool and mohair industry holds significant importance in Lesotho, not only as a major export commodity but also as a critical source of livelihood for rural farmers.

Lesotho is one of the world's largest producers of mohair, a highly sought-after luxury fibre used in the textile industry. In 2014, wool and mohair collectively contributed approximately 6.3% to the country's total exports, making it a vital contributor to the national economy. The industry provides raw materials for Lesotho's thriving textile sector, representing 43.4% of exports.

However, the industry has faced several challenges over the years, including overgrazing, rangeland degradation, limited access to markets, and the impact of climate change.

These issues have been compounded by weak rangeland management and an inefficient value chain, leading to suboptimal production and lower market returns for farmers.

In response, WAMPP was designed to address these systemic issues by focusing on three core components:

- climate-smart rangeland management,
- improved livestock production and management,
- and wool and mohair processing and marketing.

These components were critical in helping smallholder farmers improve their production quality, access new markets, and build resilience against climate-related shocks.

A Three-Pronged Approach to Boosting Wool and Mohair Production

1. Climate-Smart Rangeland Management

One of the most pressing issues affecting the wool and mohair industry in Lesotho is the degradation of rangelands due to overgrazing and poor land management practices. "The resulting soil erosion and land degradation directly impacted livestock health, reducing the quality and quantity of wool and mohair produced. To address this, WAMPP focused on promoting sustainable, climate-smart rangeland management practices," the report noted.

It added that the project established community-based grazing management systems to ensure that communal grazing lands were used sustainably.

"By involving local communities in the management of these lands, WAMPP promoted a sense of ownership and responsibility among farmers, while the introduction of rotational grazing systems and the rehabilitation of degraded lands helped to improve livestock nutrition, which, in turn, led to better wool and mohair yields," the report evaluated.

In addition to these efforts, the project provided training to farmers on the importance of sustainable rangeland management. This included educating them on the dangers of overgrazing and the benefits of maintaining healthy rangelands.

"The use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to monitor rangeland health also provided valuable data to help farmers make informed decisions about grazing practices."

2. Improved Livestock Production and Management

Another key component of WAMPP was improving the productivity of livestock through better nutrition, breeding practices, and veterinary services.

Wool and mohair yields in Lesotho have historically been low due to inadequate animal nutrition, poor access to improved genetic material, and a lack of veterinary care but, to address these challenges, WAMPP introduced several initiatives to raise the standard of livestock production.



Focusing on three main areas: improved livestock nutrition, better breeding practices, and enhanced animal health, farmers were trained in best practices for feeding and caring for their livestock, and they were given access to improved feed and veterinary medicines.

Additionally, the project facilitated the introduction of high-quality breeding stock, which helped improve the genetic makeup of sheep and goats, resulting in better wool and mohair quality.

The project also placed a strong emphasis on animal health, recognising that healthy livestock are essential for improved productivity.

"Veterinary services were expanded to provide farmers with access to vaccines and medicines that could prevent common livestock diseases, and this contributed to higher survival rates among animals, ensuring that farmers could sustain their herds and increase wool and mohair production."

3. Wool and Mohair Processing and Marketing

While improving livestock production was a key focus, WAMPP also recognised the importance of enhancing the value chain for wool and mohair. The project sought to improve the processing, handling, and marketing of wool and mohair, with the goal to increase market returns for smallholder farmers.

"One of the major interventions under this component was upgrades of shearing sheds across Lesotho."

These sheds serve as collection points where wool and mohair are processed and graded before being sold on the market. By improving the infrastructure and equipment at these sheds, WAMPP helped to ensure that wool and mohair were handled more efficiently, resulting in higher-quality



ity fibre that could fetch better prices.

Proving to be gender inclusive, the project also promoted the development of niche cottage industries, particularly for women, to add value to wool and mohair through spinning, weaving, and garment production. This not only provided additional income opportunities for rural women but also helped diversify the wool and mohair value chain.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Despite its successes, the report revealed that WAMPP faced several challenges during its implementation.

"One of the most significant threats was the issue of land degradation, which persisted in some areas despite the project's efforts to promote sustainable grazing practices. In some cases, farmers, encouraged by the improved productivity of their livestock, increased their herd sizes, leading to further strain on already degraded rangelands. This highlights the need for continued education and enforcement of sustainable grazing practices," the report said.

Another challenge the report pointed out was the coordination among government ministries, farmer organisations, and individual farmers.

"While WAMPP was successful in bringing together various stakeholders, there were instances where delays in communication and decision-making slowed the implementation of certain project activities."

The evaluation looked to the COVID-19 pandemic as having posed a significant threat to the project noting lockdowns and restrictions on movement disrupted market access for farmers and slowed the procurement of materials and services needed for project activities.

The pandemic then resulted in WAMPP extending its timeline by one year to complete all planned activities.

The Road Ahead: Building on WAMPP's Success

While WAMPP officially concluded in 2023, its impact on Lesotho's wool and mohair industry is likely to be felt for years to come.

The project successfully laid the groundwork for a more resilient, productive, and sustainable wool and mohair sector, benefiting thousands of smallholder farmers and their families.

In 2023, IFAD approved a new project, the Wool and Mohair Value Chain Competitiveness Project (WamCoP), which is expected to build on the successes of WAMPP.

WamCoP aims to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the wool and mohair sector, with a focus on private sector-led job creation.

The project will continue to support smallholder farmers by improving their access to markets, enhancing value chain efficiency, and fostering climate resilience.

The evaluation report recommended a need for continued investment in sustainable rangeland management, and a need to empower farmers with tools, knowledge, and incentives to adopt long-term sustainable grazing practices, saying this would be critical to the future success of the wool and mohair industry.

"Additionally, there is a need to strengthen the governance of the value chain, particularly by ensuring that the Lesotho National Wool and Mohair Growers Association (LNWMGA) continues to represent the interests of smallholder farmers while promoting inclusivity and equitable access to resources.

WAMPP demonstrated that with the right support, Lesotho's wool and mohair industry has the potential to thrive and provide a sustainable livelihood for rural communities. By addressing the challenges of climate change, land degradation, and market access, the project has helped to create a more resilient and productive sector.

As the wool and mohair industry continues to evolve, the lessons learned from WAMPP will be invaluable in shaping future policies and initiatives to promote sustainable agricultural growth in Lesotho.

IFAD Commits to Transform Africa's Agriculture

By Lerato Matheka

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) headed into the G7 Agriculture Ministers' meeting in Syracuse, Italy with a clear mandate that their first line of action against climate change, hunger and poverty is prosperous rural communities.

"Investing in small-scale farmers and rural entrepreneurs is the most effective way to unlock the immense potential of Africa's agriculture and food systems for all," said Alvaro Lario, President of the UN's International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The G7 Agriculture Ministers meeting took place in Syracuse on September 26.

With the objection of IFAD announced, Lesotho stands as a testament to the impact of targeted agricultural investments in rural communities.

Lesotho, a small mountainous kingdom, has long been reliant on small-scale farming as a backbone of its rural economy.

In recent years, IFAD has played a pivotal role in helping Lesotho address its agricultural challenges, ranging from food insecurity to the effects of climate change.

IFAD's investments in Lesotho have not only improved the livelihoods of farmers but also strengthened the country's resilience to external shocks such as droughts and floods, which have increasingly affected the region due to climate change.

The kicked off with a G7 Agriculture Forum for Africa - an innovation of the G7 Italian presidency - to continue to foster a dialogue between G7 and African nations on the opportunities and challenges in Africa's agriculture sector.

"In Africa, food insecurity and climate change are damaging opportunities for the millions of young people en-

tering the job market. Developing thriving rural economies that provide good food and decent jobs has a stabilising power. Now is the time to invest at scale in Africa's small-scale food producers - the backbone of Africa's food security and development," President Lario said.

IFAD in a press statement indicated that Small-scale farming supplies up to 70% of the food in Africa and provides livelihood opportunities to hundreds of millions of people, playing a pivotal role in the continent's food security.

The statement continued noting that food and agriculture are also a vital part of African economies, a sector expected to be worth a trillion dollars by 2030.

"Estimates show that economic growth in agriculture is two to three times more effective at reducing poverty and food insecurity than growth generated in other sectors," it said.

IFAD's Impact in Lesotho

Over the years, IFAD has funded several critical projects in Lesotho that aim to support small-scale farmers, promote rural development, and combat hunger. These include:

1. **The Wool and Mohair Promotion Project (WAMPP):** This project, launched in 2015, aimed to improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers who rely on wool and mohair production. By enhancing the quality of livestock, improving marketing channels, and providing farmers with better access to veterinary services, the project significantly increased incomes for many rural households.
2. **The Smallholder Agriculture Development Project (SADP):** This project focused on strengthening the capacity of smallholder farm-

ers in Lesotho to improve agricultural productivity and diversify their crops. By providing access to improved seeds, tools, and training, SADP has boosted food security and helped farmers adapt to changing climatic conditions.

3. **The Rural Financial Intermediation Programme (RUFIP):** In partnership with IFAD, RUFIP worked to improve access to financial services for rural populations. This initiative empowered farmers to obtain the necessary capital to invest in their farms, purchase new technologies, and grow their businesses.

These projects are part of IFAD's broader strategy to transform agriculture across Africa by investing in sustainable practices and building rural economies.

President Lario advocated for more investment and in small-scale farmers and policies that prioritise sustainable agriculture practices, support farmers to adapt to climate change and build resilience, stressing that they are the key to food security and rural development.

The Challenges Ahead: Climate Change and Food Security

Lesotho, like many other African nations, faces a critical challenge in adapting to the changing climate. According to IFAD, crop yields in Africa are expected to decrease by up to 25% by the end of the century due to the impact of climate change.

For a country like Lesotho, where many people rely on subsistence farming, this could lead to severe food shortages and increased poverty if left unaddressed.

"Food insecurity and climate change are damaging opportunities for the millions of young people entering the job market," said President Lario.

In Lesotho, rural youth often migrate to urban areas or neighbouring countries in search of employment, leaving behind an ageing farming population. However, with targeted investments in agriculture, including access to digital technologies, climate-smart farming methods, and financial services, rural areas can become more attractive for

young entrepreneurs, IFAD President said.

A Vision for the Future: Digital Technologies and Youth Empowerment

One of the key areas of focus for IFAD at the G7 Agriculture Ministers' meeting is the role of digital technologies in transforming rural economies.

In Lesotho, access to digital tools could be a game changer, helping farmers receive timely information about weather patterns, market prices, and agricultural advice.

Through projects such as SADP and WAMPP, IFAD has already laid the groundwork for digitisation in Lesotho's agricultural sector. The introduction of mobile platforms, e-wallets, and financial services is helping farmers access markets, receive pest alerts, and tap into global agricultural knowledge.

With millions of young people entering the job market every year in Africa, President Lario emphasised that digitisation and "green skills" can help attract the youth back to agriculture.

Lesotho's government and IFAD have already started piloting youth-focused agricultural programs, offering training and support to create small businesses along the food value chain.

Scaling Investment in Lesotho's Agriculture

Despite the success of past projects, much more needs to be done to secure Lesotho's agricultural future.

"Now is the time to invest at scale in Africa's small-scale food producers who are the backbone of Africa's food security and development," the president said and this means increasing investment in infrastructure, water conservation, and technology to help farmers cope with the worsening effects of climate change.

With donor countries' support to agricultural development stagnant at just 4-6% of total official development assistance over the last decade, and many African countries facing financial constraints, IFAD highlighted a need to innovate, and further develop and strengthen de-risking mechanisms to attract investments from the private sector.

"IFAD has committed to investing in rural people in Africa to transform the agriculture sector and promote rural development and in its 2025-2027 project cycle up to 60% of IFAD's core financing will be invested in the continent," the organisation said citing that in Africa, 20% of the population is undernourished or suffers from hunger, affecting a total of approximately 300 million people.