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Advancing Apiculture: RSDA's New Centre Aims to Export Organic Honey



By Lerato Matheka

Lesotho's beekeeping industry is experiencing a transformative phase, with the Rural Self-Help Development Association (RSDA) spearheading initiatives to harness its economic potential.

The recent inauguration of the Beekeeping Centre of Excellence in Shalane, Phamong, marks a significant mile-

RSDA, remarked, "We started with two boxes of beehives after the UNDP small grants department endorsed and approved our dream of trialing beekeeping. The interest and growth were exponentially fulfilling, and there was a need to expand and invite more farmers who would show interest," she said.

She further emphasised the significance of the Tache Foundation's involvement: "Unlike their

"The focus on organic honey production aligns with the community's commitment to organic farming methods," Thulo explained.

She indicated that the Centre also serves as a hub for innovation, inviting farmers nationwide to learn and adopt beekeeping practices.

Economic Potential

Beekeeping offers a viable income stream for Lesotho's farmers and studies have shown that with proper management, a farmer can derive a net income of approximately M600 per hive.

Scaling up to 20 hives could yield a net income of over M12,000 annually, significantly contributing to household incomes.

The establishment of the Beekeeping Centre of Excellence is poised to enhance these economic benefits by providing training, resources, and market access to local farmers.

By focusing on organic honey, the Centre taps into a growing international market, potentially increasing export revenues for Lesotho.

Community Impact

Local leaders and community members have expressed gratitude for the opportunities presented by the Centre. Keketso

Nkaki, Community Councilor of Shalane, stated, "We are very thankful to RSDA for considering our community for this great opportunity. Listening to the information of this project, everyone who lives here is directly going to benefit, and food production is going to improve solely for embracing beekeeping."

The initiative is expected to improve food production and self-sufficiency, particularly in regions like Shalane, where

farmers have traditionally engaged in sorghum cultivation.

The integration of beekeeping is anticipated to diversify income sources and promote agricultural innovation among the youth.

Letlamoreng Lehloenyane, a leader of the Ma-jantja Temong farmers association, expressed joy for being chosen as the base for RSDA's Centre of Excellence, indicating this would increase the agricultural appetite among the youth.

He revealed that farmers in Shalane specialise in ploughing sorghum after learning their community's geographic makeup and soil strength.

The Centre's launch included the presentation of apiculture equipment for beekeeping, bee-catching, honey harvesting, processing, and packaging, all donated by the Tache Foundation.

This support underscores the collaborative effort to empower local communities and promote sustainable agricultural practices.

Thulo emphasised that the RSDA's Beekeeping Centre of Excellence represents a significant step towards harnessing the economic potential of beekeeping in Lesotho.

"By providing training, resources, and market access, the Centre is

set to transform livelihoods, promote sustainable development, and position Lesotho as a notable player in the international organic honey



stone in this journey.

Background of Lesotho's Beekeeping Industry

Traditionally, beekeeping in Lesotho has been a small-scale activity, with farmers maintaining a few hives primarily for personal use.

The country's diverse flora and favorable climate provide an excellent environment for apiculture. Recognising this potential, initiatives have been launched to enhance honey production and empower local communities and these includes the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) focus on building the capacity of women in beekeeping, aiming to remove barriers and upscale the industry in Lesotho.

RSDA's Beekeeping Centre of Excellence
The RSDA's journey into

beekeeping began modestly with two boxes of bee hives supported by the UNDP's small grants department.

The success of this initiative spurred interest among local farmers, necessitating expansion.

With the backing of the Tache Foundation, a long-term partner, RSDA established the Beekeeping Centre of Excellence in Shalane, Phamong.

This region was chosen for its rich potential in beekeeping, attributed to its unique geographical characteristics.

Mampho Thulo, Managing Director of

previous involvement of just giving us money, they will be walking this journey with us."

Thulo explained that the Centre aims to aggregate, build, and export organic honey to international markets.

Over the past three years, she noted efforts have been directed

towards establishing production standards and securing markets.



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Smallholder Agricultural Development Project (SADP II) Matching Grant Programme

Call for Applications

Background: The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security of Lesotho, with the support of the World Bank has established within the SADP II a Matching Grants Programme (MGP) to support investment by small and medium agriculture-related businesses, farmers, farmer groups and cooperatives and rural youth seeking to increase climate resilience, raise productivity, improve commercialization and increase production and consumption of high nutrition food products.

Priorities: The MGP invites applications for investment projects, with a maximum duration of one year and 4 months, which focus on the adoption and use of appropriate technologies and business initiatives by smallholder farmers and small and medium-scale private agri-business enterprises in Lesotho. These investments should: increase climate resilience, raise farm productivity and improve commercialization among smallholder farmers; increase competitiveness and profitability, increase value-added to local products among agri-business enterprises and increase market opportunities for smallholder farmers; and increase the production, consumption and availability of high nutrition food products. Eligible investments include: (i) improved seed and seedling varieties for crops, vegetables and fruit; (ii) improved livestock breeds; (iii) shade nets, tunnel houses, drip irrigation, water storage equipment, boreholes and pumps; (iv) equipment for cultivation, harvesting and weed and pest control; (iv) product collection, storage, post-harvest handling, processing, grading/sorting, marketing, packaging, labeling, brand development, presentation and promotion of agricultural products; (v) improvement of product quality and standards, food safety management practices and product certification; (vi) diversification and introduction of high value-added and niche products; (vii) better linkages and development of contractual arrangements among smallholder farmers, processors, traders and service providers; (viii) marketing intelligence including information, test marketing and studies when associated with concrete actions for specific products; and (ix) improvement of accessibility by small farmers to various services and input supply. Sectors could include meat production, poultry (broiler), fruits and vegetables, fish production, and products and activities such as mushrooms, aromatic and medicinal herbs and organic products. This list is not exhaustive and other innovative topics may be considered.

Grant financing: Two grants windows will be available to applicants: (i) grants for smallholder farmers and farmer groups to support investment in climate smart agricultural technology and other productivity enhancing technology up to a maximum of \$US 30,000; (ii) grants for small and medium size agri-businesses of \$US 30,000 to \$US 100,000, to support investment in value added activities including small-scale processing and marketing as well as provision of inputs and services.

Eligible Applicants: Applicants with farms and/or agri-business activities operating in all ten districts of Lesotho are eligible for grants. Eligible applicants include a) farmers or farm groups; b) registered cooperatives or associations; c) registered small and medium size agri-businesses; d) registered local, district and national associations and cooperatives; e) sub-groups of registered associations and cooperatives; rural youth; and f) partnerships between the above categories and registered processing/trading businesses in Lesotho. Smallholder farmers, members of farm households, rural youth and small and medium-scale

agri-business enterprises will receive priority for grant support but non-farm applicants with demonstrated farming experience and a strong knowledge of the proposed investment will also be considered. Eligible applicants may also submit joint proposals up to the maximum grant stipulated above. Youth under 35 and women are particularly encouraged to apply. Employees of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food security are not eligible.

Partnership with Service Providers: The potential applicants will be required to form partnerships with a qualified service provider(s). The service provider(s) will (i) provide technical and financial assistance and advice to the applicant to develop the business idea and prepare the application, (ii) work with the applicant to clarify different technical and financial aspects of the activity and prepare an activity implementation plan; (iii) provide technical and financial assistance to the applicant during project implementation and provide the products and services to be delivered according to an agreed schedule; (iv) support the applicant in managing grant funds, including keeping the necessary accounts and collecting contributions from beneficiaries; (v) supervise the inputs of beneficiaries/applicants and sub-contract technical assistance as necessary; (vi) monitor the progress of activities; (vii) support the applicant in the preparation and submission of the required financial and technical reports. Eligible service providers include a wide range of specialists engaged and already trained by SADP on development of the proposals and list available at SADP offices in each district. Employees of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security are not eligible to work as Service Providers. Service providers will be contracted directly by the applicants, with their responsibilities and rights clearly spelled out in the service contract, and their services would be funded through the grant.

Service Providers will need to show that they have successfully completed a training program on the preparation and technical and financial analysis of investment projects approved by the PMU or the MGC.

Beneficiary contribution: In all cases successful applicants will be required to make a co-finance contribution in cash to engender ownership and demonstrate commitment. The larger grants for agri-business enterprises will also be conditional on their willingness and ability to generate employment and build effective supply agreements with smallholder producers. Co-finance cash contributions will vary according to the grant sub-program as follows: (i) grants for smallholder farmers and farmer groups to support investment in climate smart agricultural technology and other productivity and post-harvest enhancing technologies to a maximum of \$US 30,000 will require a 20% co-finance contribution; (ii) Agri-business grants for registered agriculture-oriented and privately-owned enterprises, associations and cooperatives will receive a grant of \$30 000 to \$100 000 : grants in this program will require a 30% co-finance contribution.

Service providers may also contribute to the co-finance. The participation and contribution from different partners should be confirmed by written agreement reached between the principal applicant, the service provider and/or other partners.

Eligible Expenditures under Grant: Of the grant amount, the indicative types of financial support are: a) Provision of technical assistance by the service providers: This category may not be more than 20% of the grant amount up to a maximum of US\$ 3,000 equivalent, to be spent as an honorarium to cover

the costs of staff, travel, allowances and overheads of the service provider(s). Although not a requirement, co-financing proposals from the service providers (especially in the case of NGOs and other projects and various development programs serving as service providers and wanting to co-finance the project) could be sought, provided they are made in cash.

b) Investment Acquisition, Installation and Operation: This category must comprise at least 60% of the grant amount and may include costs associated with the purchase of improved seedling and livestock varieties; the purchase and installation of equipment for cultivation, harvesting, post-harvest handling, processing, preservation, storage, grading, packaging etc; the construction of necessary buildings for livestock production, storage, processing, marketing; the purchase and installation of tunnel houses, shade nets, irrigation equipment, pumps, boreholes, tanks etc; product development; alignment with national and international food and safety standards; and marketing campaigns. Where the investor is making substantial physical investments, the costs of land surveys will be covered for smallholder farmers in order to ensure that they have secure land ownership as a means to secure the benefits of investment. Agri-businesses will not be eligible for support for land surveys. Land survey costs may not be more than 10% of the grant amount, up to a maximum of \$US 2000 equivalent. The costs of land purchase, land lease or land rental will not be covered for any grants.

Furthermore, the project will consider applications which show that the applicant has part of infrastructure and needs to have a full package. As such, a grant window will start from a minimum M200 000.00 to up to the highest value of M1 500 000.00.

Non-Eligible Expenditures under Grant: The following items would not be covered out of the grant amount: (a) Salaries or payment for works and services provided to the project by the grant applicants or its members; b) any expenditures made prior to the date of signature of the Grant Agreement or after closure date of the project; c) purchase, rent or leasing of land and existing buildings; d) any expenditure related to operating costs, which are expected to be the direct responsibility of the applicant; e) any expenditure made in territories of any country that is not a member of the World Bank for goods produced in or services supplied from such countries; f) any expenditure with a hazardous impact on the environment.

Deadline and Place for Submission of Applications: The deadline for submission of applications is not later than **30th December 2024 at 4:30 p.m. Applications should be submitted in four copies (one original plus three photocopies) and delivered by hand at the office of the SADP II located in Districts Agricultural Offices in all the ten districts. Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered.**

Evaluation of the Applications: All applications received within the deadline will be screened by the MGP Secretariat for compliance with the above rules. The successful applications will then be evaluated by specialized Technical and Financial Reviewers and submitted to the MGC for approval. The list of successful applicants will be widely published in newspapers and through public posting at the MGP Secretariat's office. Unsuccessful applicants will be informed by letter and their original project documents could be returned to them on request.

Application Documentation: The official application forms and further necessary information on drawing up the application may be obtained from the Service Providers who will lead the development of the proposals in each district.

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Humanitarian Agencies Need to Reassess Strategies for Tackling Food Insecurity - DA Thaba-Tseka

By Kabelo Masoabi

The old adage “Don’t give a man a fish; teach him how to fish” highlights an important principle: providing short-term solutions, such as handing out food, is less effective than teaching sustainable skills for long-term self-sufficiency.

In Lesotho, many humanitarian organisations, including the Disaster Management Authority (DMA) and Catholic Relief Services, have worked to apply this principle in their efforts to combat hunger, particularly in regions affected by the ongoing El Niño-induced droughts.

These droughts have had a devastating impact on crops, food security, and livelihoods, forcing many families into survival mode. Humanitarian efforts have focused on equipping communities with

skills like sustainable farming techniques and financial management to help them produce their own food and become more self-reliant. However, the effectiveness of these programs has been questioned, particularly in Thaba-Tseka district, where many residents prioritise their immediate survival over long-term benefits.

The Struggle for Immediate Solutions

In Thaba-Tseka, many residents, faced with dire hunger and limited resources, are often more focused on solving their immediate needs rather than investing in long-term solutions. For example, when given vegetable seeds as part of aid programs, some residents choose to sell them for cash rather than plant them, as their need for food is urgent. This reaction points to a disconnect between what humanitarian agencies offer and the immediate realities of the people they aim to support.

Thaba-Tseka District Administrator, Tlali Mphafi, discussed these issues urging humanitarian agencies to reassess their strategies.

According to Mphafi, while sustainable agricultural practices are essential for long-term food security, understanding the immediate needs of the population is just as crucial. He explained that humanitarian efforts should aim for a balance, combining both short-term relief and long-term



solutions.

A Need for a Balanced Approach

Mphafi emphasised that humanitarian agencies must rethink their approach to aid distribution by considering the specific needs of each community. He stressed that a more effective aid model would focus on both the urgent needs of the people and the future goals of self-sufficiency. “Having both short-term and long-term goals helps maintain a balance between immediate needs and future aspirations,” he said.

He pointed out that despite the DMA’s efforts to provide vegetable seeds through the Anticipatory Action (AA) program, the seeds were often sold rather than planted.

“This illustrates a significant challenge and without addressing the immediate pressures of hunger, residents may not see the long-term value of agricultural resources provided to them,” the DA said.

Addressing the Dependency Syndrome

Another concern raised by Mphafi is the growing trend of dependency within the community, which he believes is partly caused by the over-reliance on cash assistance and other temporary aid strategies.

“While humanitarian agencies often provide monthly cash transfers, these efforts, although well-meaning, have inadvertently fostered a sense of dependency, undermining efforts to cultivate long-term self-sufficiency,” he said.

Historically, Mphafi noted, the people of Thaba-Tseka have demonstrated resilience and only

require targeted support to improve their food production capabilities.

He however, asserted that a shift towards more permanent, skill-based support is essential to avoid deepening dependency and to encourage local communities to take charge of their food security.

The Importance of Coordinated Aid Efforts

Mphafi also highlighted the need for improved coordination between humanitarian organisations to avoid the duplication of efforts.

“In some cases, the overlap of aid, such as an overabundance of maize seeds without complementary resources like vegetables creates imbalances in nutrition, leaving certain dietary needs unmet.

“For aid efforts to be more effective, NGOs must work closely with community leaders to assess and understand the specific needs of the population at any given time and they have to tailor aid to meet the diverse needs of the community. This will stop the practice of recipients selling donated items to cover other basic needs, as is the case with seeds.”

“When all organisations provide only bean seeds, individuals may have to sell some of these seeds to buy essential household items. This approach fails to meet the community’s diverse needs,” Mphafi explained.

He stressed the importance of a more holistic approach, ensuring that humanitarian aid provides a well-rounded support system for commu-



nity well-being.

Collaboration for Greater Impact

In response to these concerns, DMA District Manager, Nthomeng Majara, acknowledged the importance of collaboration and agreed that it would enhance the impact of aid programs.

Majara revealed that last year, the DMA provided vegetable seeds to Thaba-Tseka households as part of the AA program, but the seeds were not always utilised effectively.

Some fields were left unploughed, likely because the seeds arrived too late for the planting season, while others were held onto for the next cropping cycle.

“Some farmers did not utilise the donated seeds properly, and we have observed unploughed fields, likely because the seeds arrived too late for the planting season. Additionally, some recipients are holding onto them for the next cropping season.” This highlights the need for better timing and coordination in delivering aid.

Looking Ahead

As humanitarian agencies continue to support communities in Lesotho, the DA indicated that the lessons from Thaba-Tseka, which reflects to other districts should sound a change alarm for humanitarian agencies to build effective aid strategies which considers both the immediate and long-term needs of vulnerable populations, ensuring that interventions are well-timed, well-coordinated, and designed to build self-sufficiency.

“The success of these efforts will depend on a more nuanced understanding of local realities, closer collaboration between agencies and community leaders, and a shift from short-term fixes to sustainable solutions that empower communities to feed themselves for years to come,” the DA emphasised.

Malnutrition ravages Maputsoe as hunger deepens

By Kabelo Masoabi

It is 10 a.m., and already lines are beginning to form outside the chief’s residence in the tight-knit village of Chonapase, located just behind the bustling town of Maputsoe.

A police van arrives, bringing much-needed food containers.

The ushers quickly unload the provisions, offering a glimmer of hope to those waiting. As the young and old line up with their basins, excitement and anticipation fill the air. The distribution begins, and each villager receives a warm portion of soft porridge.

“It is delicious! It’s probably mixed with butter,” exclaims Mamoshoti Sehale, her face lighting up with joy as she savours the meal.

However, not everyone is as fortunate.

The food supply runs out too quickly, leaving some, including four small toddlers, empty-handed. They wait patiently as the ushers gather the empty containers and prepare to leave.

“My boss told me to let you all know that today is the last day we’ll be bringing food here,” an usher calls out from the van, which roars to life and speeds away.

Later, it becomes clear that the ‘boss’ refers to a generous donor: a manufacturing company that has been providing breakfast meals to underprivileged families in the Maputsoe urban area for months.

Among the beneficiaries is Pusetso, a 13-year-old boy who is unable to attend school.

He lives in a small, rented room with his older brother, aged 21. Tragically, their parents have passed away, leaving the siblings to fend for themselves in a harsh environment.

Pusetso shared that they are originally from

Mantšonyane in Thaba-Tseka. After their parents’ deaths, they moved to Maputsoe in search of a better life and more opportunities. Despite his brother securing a small job at a local shop, their living situation has not improved significantly.

He expressed his frustration, stating that his brother rarely provides food for him due to his struggle with alcoholism. This ongoing issue leaves Pusetso feeling neglected and hungry, lacking the essentials for a better life.

Rethabile Mothake from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Nutrition confirmed the distressing malnutrition situation in Maputsoe, especially among children.

Mothake explained that through nutrition clubs created for communities, they educate people on producing their own food on small plots and engage them in handcraft projects that generate income for the poor.

“Currently, I’m not in possession of famine statistics in this area, but the situation is frustrating. Malnutrition negatively affects their growth. Some donors are extending a helping hand,” she said.

Tefo Tefo, the chief’s handyman in Chonapase, shared that the donor feeding program had become a daily lifeline for many in the village, providing nourishment to jobless individuals and hungry children alike.

However, Tefo voiced concerns about the program’s lack of regulation, noting that even those who could afford food lined up for the donated provisions.

“Poverty, worsened by unemployment, has led to an increase in crime here,” he explained with a heavy heart. “House break-ins have become all too common, with thieves often steal-



Multitudes line up to receive maize porridge

ing food and small items they can trade for a meal.”

The closure of several textile factories in the area has worsened the starvation crisis, as thousands of community members were sent home over the past two years.

On July 12, 2024, Prime Minister Ntsokoane Matekane declared a state of National Food Insecurity Disaster after a historic drought, triggered by El Niño, led to the lowest crop yields since the 2018/19 agricultural season.

According to the government, about a third of the population, approximately 700,000 people, will face hunger in the coming months. In rural areas, more than 400,000 people are expected to experience crisis levels of acute hunger through March 2025.

Vulnerability assessments predict that an additional 296,049 people in urban areas will become food insecure. The drought has also led to severe water shortages, with wells running dry.

USAID reported this week that climatic shocks, diseases, and socioeconomic conditions continue to drive high levels of acute

food insecurity in Lesotho.

In particular, El Niño-induced conditions, including erratic rainfall patterns and prolonged dry spells, have resulted in the lowest crop yields since 2018/19, increasing reliance on markets and depleting household food stocks prematurely.

“Drought conditions have also reduced water levels in reservoirs and rivers, resulting in widespread livestock losses as of October,” said USAID. “An estimated 80 percent of Lesotho’s population depends on the agricultural sector for food and income, making households more vulnerable to climatic shocks.”

In response to these challenges, USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA) supports World Vision Lesotho in providing unconditional food assistance through cash-based transfers to vulnerable individuals across nine community councils in Mafeteng, Mohale’s Hoek, and Quthing.

These transfers help increase access to local markets, supporting the local economy and improving food security for drought-affected populations.

A Unified Vision for Agricultural Progress: Lesotho's Research Policy Under Review

By Kabelo Masoabi

Lesotho's agricultural sector is on the cusp of transformation with the development of the National Agricultural Research Policy.

Spearheaded by the Department of Agricultural Research (DAR), under the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Nutrition, this policy represents a pivotal step toward establishing a coordinated and accountable research system. The ultimate goal is to ensure agricultural innovation that drives food security, economic growth, and poverty alleviation.

The Significance of a Research Policy for Lesotho

For decades, the agricultural sector in Lesotho has grappled with fragmented research efforts and a lack of cohesive policies and this has hampered the ability to address critical challenges such as food insecurity, climate resilience, and sustainable farming practices.

Dr. Lefulesele Lebesa, Director of DAR, explained the importance of this policy in creating a unified vision for agricultural research.

"A comprehensive research policy enables the alignment of agricultural priorities with national development goals and provides the structure needed to ensure that research findings are translated into actionable solutions for farming communities."

She indicated that agricultural research is globally acknowledged as a cornerstone of sectoral modernisation.

"Countries that have invested in robust research and development frameworks have successfully achieved not only food security but also broader community development and economic stability. For Lesotho, such a framework offers the potential to unlock untapped opportunities, enhancing agricultural productivity and commercialisation."

Bridging Gaps with a Coordinated System

Currently, Lesotho's National Agricultural Research System (NARS) is comprised of public research institutions, academic entities, and extension services. However, the lack of coordination has resulted in inefficiencies, limiting the sector's capacity to deliver impactful solutions.



Dr. Lefulesele Lebesa, Director of MAFSN

Dr. Lebesa emphasised that the policy will address the ministry's challenges by streamlining research activities to avoid duplication, establishing cohesive teams focused on shared objectives and aligning institutional efforts to address key sectoral challenges, such as climate change adaptation and poverty eradication.

The proposed policy, Dr. Lebesa said would also integrate indigenous knowledge systems with modern agricultural technologies.

Stakeholders such as Professor Toyong Peter Abegunrin, a researcher at the National University of Lesotho, underscored the value of local knowledge.

He pointed to the success of indigenous practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting their sustainability and relevance for rural farming communities.

"Local farmers possess critical expertise

about their environment and practices therefore recognising and incorporating this knowledge into formal research can enhance resilience and innovation," he noted.

Policy Objectives and Thematic Focus

The National Agricultural Research Policy is built on eight thematic areas aimed at transforming the sector:

- 1. Policy and Regulatory Environment:** Creating a robust framework for research governance.
- 2. Institutional Arrangements:** Strengthening coordination among stakeholders.
- 3. Research Management:** Enhancing efficiency and accountability.
- 4. Knowledge Generation:** Driving innovation through cutting-edge research.
- 5. Technology Commercialisation:** Scaling innovations for broader adoption.

- 6. Capacity Building:** Investing in human resources and infrastructure.
- 7. Information Systems:** Developing platforms for knowledge sharing and collaboration.
- 8. Sustainable Funding:** Securing financial resources for long-term research sustainability.

Dr. Lebesa also revealed plans for a national agricultural research bill to institutionalise the policy and provide legal backing for its implementation.

Stakeholder Engagement: A Collaborative Path Forward

The policy development process has been inclusive, with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds contributing their insights.

Farmers like Kutloano Jonathan Molapo highlighted the critical role of grassroots participation:

"We must ensure that farmers' voices are central in shaping this policy. Agriculture directly impacts food security and livelihoods, and policies should reflect the realities faced by those on the ground," he said adding that workshops and consultations, such as the recent validation meeting in Maseru, have provided a platform for stakeholders to align their expectations and propose actionable strategies.

Charting the Future of Agricultural Research

DAR, with support from the World Bank-funded Agricultural Productivity Programme for Southern Africa (APPSA), is poised to drive agricultural innovation.

"By prioritising research and technology transfer, the department of research aims to elevate both subsistence and commercial farming practices, ensuring sustainable development and natural resource preservation," Dr. Lebesa said.

She stressed that the National Agricultural Research Policy is not just a regulatory document but a transformative vision for Lesotho's agriculture.

"With its focus on coordination, innovation, and inclusivity, the policy is going to set the stage for an agricultural renaissance through bridging research gaps, empowering local farmers, and fostering collaboration."

Climate Change Increases the Risk of Violence Against Women and Girls

By Matsilo Nkabane

Recently, the global community commemorated 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence and Human Rights Day—key moments to amplify the voices of vulnerable communities.

Lesotho joined these commemorations, grappling with the dual crises of climate change and gender-based violence, which disproportionately affect women and girls.

In a country already burdened by high rates of gender-based violence, the impacts of climate change exacerbate vulnerabilities, increasing susceptibility to violence, exploitation, and displacement.

Climate-related stresses magnify social inequalities, particularly for rural women, who represent the majority of Lesotho's population.

These women and girls face systemic marginalisation, with limited access to education and healthcare. As the climate crisis erodes food and water security, traditional gender roles often resurface, with men becoming primary breadwinners.

This shift, coupled with economic hardships, escalates tensions within households, often leading to domestic violence. Trapped in abusive relationships, many women lack the resources to escape. The

stress of environmental pressures—including erratic weather patterns, food insecurity, and economic instability—further fuels family conflicts, placing women and girls in greater danger.

The far-reaching effects of climate change in Lesotho include heightened drought, hunger, and food insecurity, forcing some families

to resort to early marriages as a survival mechanism. This coping strategy removes "extra mouths

to feed" but often exposes young girls to abuse and exploitation within their marriages. Additionally, climate-related challenges compel families to pull girls out of school, perpetuating cycles of vulnerability and exploitation. These girls are at risk of human trafficking, labor exploitation, and persistent abuse, making climate change not just an environmental crisis but also a profound human rights issue.

To address these intertwined crises, women must be actively involved in decision-making processes. Their participation in policymaking can lead to more effective and inclusive climate action. Raising awareness about the connections between climate change and gender-based violence is vital to fostering

community-driven solutions.

In Lesotho, legal protections for women and girls need urgent strengthening. This includes establishing safe spaces for

survivors of abuse, particularly in rural areas where access to support services is scarce. These spaces must provide physical, emotional, and economic security to help women and girls rebuild their lives.

Tackling gender-based violence requires a concerted, inclusive effort that prioritises the voices and needs of women. Integrating gender considerations into policies and ensuring economic and physical security for women

and girls can significantly reduce vulnerabilities. By addressing these challenges holistically, Lesotho can protect its most vulnerable citizens and build a resilient, equitable future for all.

Farm Girls Build Local Agricultural Value Chain

By Kabelo Masoabi



Across the nation, local female farmers are joining forces to establish a thriving agricultural value chain that expands their market access and strengthens their collective presence in Lesotho's agricultural sector.

This ground-breaking initiative is spearheaded by the organisation Farm Girls, which aims to empower women farmers through collaboration, skill-sharing, and strategic partnerships. By uniting their efforts, these women are not only enhancing their individual enterprises but also fostering a sense of community and purpose among female agriculturalists.

With over 280 members from all ten districts of Lesotho, Farm Girls has become a beacon of hope for women farmers seeking to break away from subsistence farming practices and embrace sustainable agricultural models.

"Robust value chains and enhanced access to markets enable small producers to sell larger quantities of high-quality produce at more competitive prices," says Maseeng Motaung, a dedicated piggery and poultry farmer who also serves as Farm Girls Administrator.

"By integrating into structured value chains, we are creating opportunities for better incomes and improved livelihoods for us as female farmers and position ourselves in the business of food production," she said.

The Power of Value Chains

A report by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa underscores the significance of smallholder farmers in Africa, revealing that 64% of the food consumed on the continent comes from smallholder producers, often facilitated by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

These SMEs, the report indicates they play an essential role as value chain actors, bridging the gap between producers and consumers through sourcing, processing, packaging, and distributing food.

Further, research indicates that farmers participating in organised value chains enjoy higher incomes, accumulate more assets, and achieve greater productivity and profitability.

"Two primary mechanisms for integrating smallholder farmers into these value chains are contractual agreements with value chain actors and stronger market linkages, and Farm Girls exemplifies this model by focusing on creating a supportive ecosystem where women farmers can thrive," Motaung noted, adding that through strategic initiatives and collaboration, the organisation is transforming agriculture into a viable livelihood option for women across Lesotho.

Farm Girls: A Model of Collaboration

Since its official registration in March 2023, Motaung said Farm Girls has attracted a diverse membership that represents various agricultural sectors, including poultry, piggery, and crop farming.

One of its standout achievements is the establishment of poultry value chain companies, which have significantly improved members' incomes, farm yields, and food security.

Under this initiative, a systematic process has been developed:



- Women farmers produce eggs through their parent stock programs.
- These eggs are sold to the Farm Girls Hatchery, which transforms them into chicks.
- The Farm Girls Broilers division raises the chicks into mature chickens, which are then sold directly to consumers as meat.

To further streamline operations, Motaung revealed that Farm Girls is setting up a slaughtering and packaging facility.

"This facility will complete the poultry value chain, ensuring quality control and efficiency while meeting market demands."

Unity in Action

The spirit of collaboration extends beyond poultry farming, she said noting that members often come together to address supply shortages.

"For instance, when a client places a large or-

der for 100 chickens and one farmer cannot meet the demand, others pool their resources to fulfil the order. This unity not only helps meet market demands but also builds trust and reliability within the group," the administrator shared.

Ntsoaki Mofao, popularly known as 'Mamotsoho,' is a proud member known for her refreshing soft wheat porridge.

She highlights the importance of unity; "When

we come together, we achieve more. Farming as a group has taught us the value of collaboration in overcoming individual limitations."

Challenging Gender Norms

The decision to create a women-focused initiative stems from the societal perception that farming is a male-dominated field.

"We grew up believing farming was primarily for men, yet there are many women who are passionate about farming and simply lack access to support or the necessary skills to thrive. We welcome any woman in agriculture to collaborate with us, as we aim to challenge and change this outdated perception and stereotypes."

"Farm Girls provides a platform for women to defy stereotypes, showcasing their capabilities and leadership in agriculture. By empowering women to take charge of their agricultural ventures, the organisation is fostering a new narrative where women play an integral role in shaping Lesotho's agricultural future," Mofao asserted.

Capacity Building and Skill Development

Recognising that skills and resources are critical to success, Motaung revealed that Farm Girls has established a funding scheme to assist members in purchasing essential tools such as shade nets for crop cultivation.

"Additionally, we organise regular training and skill-sharing sessions to enhance members' agricultural expertise."

"Beyond individual farming ventures, members engage in block farming activities, which promote dietary diversity and ensure food security. This collective approach allows members to share knowledge, pool resources, and achieve economies of scale, benefiting both their businesses and their communities," she said.

Annual Gathering: A Celebration of Achievements

On November 8, Farm Girls members gathered at Durham Link in Maseru for their annual celebration.

"This event was a moment of reflection, learning, and motivation, as members shared their successes and discussed strategies for future growth. The gathering served as a powerful reminder of the strength and resilience of us women farmers working together to build a sustainable agricultural value chain and a confirmation that unity is indeed power," Motaung noted.

Looking Ahead

She emphasised that Farm Girls is not just a farming initiative but a movement that seeks to transform Lesotho's agricultural landscape by empowering women, enhancing market access, and fostering sustainable practices.

With plans to expand their operations and establish more value chain facilities, the organisation is paving the way for a brighter future for women in agriculture.

"As we continue to grow, I strongly believe we are a testament to the power of collaboration and are showcasing the potential of women to lead the charge in building a resilient and inclusive agricultural sector, and through our determination and innovation, we are not only transforming our personal lives but are directly contributing to the broader development of Lesotho's economy," Motaung said.

