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Matlanyane Touts Agricultural Resilience Amid Funding Crisis

By Lerato Matheka

In her Mid-Term Budget Review speech, Finance Minister Dr Retselisitsoe Matlanyane expressed cautious optimism for Lesotho's agricultural sector, highlighting a significant recovery from a recent downturn while simultaneously addressing major funding shortfalls that threaten long-term progress.

The Minister outlined a multi-faceted government strategy centred on climate resilience, youth empowerment, and environmental sustainability as cornerstones of inclusive growth.

The speech acknowledged the severe challenges of the previous year, during which the agricultural sector experienced a 19% decline in overall output, with staple crops like maize and sorghum falling by 19% and 43%, respectively. However, she reported that a modest recovery is anticipated for the 2025/26 period, supported by forecasts of normal to above-normal rainfall and the adoption of improved breeding practices.

This positive outlook is bolstered by significant government investment and targeted initiatives. Over 6,600 farmers have been trained in Climate Smart Agriculture, alongside the commissioning of major irrigation schemes at Tsikoane (250 hectares) and Seaka (200 hectares), enhancing water access and crop yields in drought-prone areas.

"We have prioritised growth-enhancing investments, job creation, and policy reforms aimed at unlocking inclusive and sustainable development. Significant investment has been made in agriculture," Dr Matlanyane stated, emphasising the government's commitment to transitioning to a private-sector-led economy.



Key progress includes the rollout of the LIAMIS system, which has registered thousands of farmers for smart subsidies and insurance, and the establishment of resource centres, such as the one in Teyateyaneng, providing training and tailored inputs.

Youth empowerment has been a central focus, with 300 farmers awarded SADP II grants and 80 young farmers receiving support. The government also signed a M200 million Credit Guarantee Facility to improve access to machinery, resulting in the acquisition of over 200 tractors and planters.

The strategy extends beyond traditional crops to encompass livestock and aquaculture, she said, noting the operational Sheep Start Centre in Quthing and a new nitrogen plant are enhancing wool and mohair genetics, while aquaculture ventures, such as the Katse Dam trout farms, are now producing up to 3,700 tons

annually for export.

In parallel to agricultural development, the government is promoting an environmental sustainability agenda. Initiatives include planting over 67,000 forest trees and 14,500 fruit trees, establishing 22 orchards, and strengthening rangeland management through reseedling and the issuance of 2,300 grazing permits. Efforts in wetland restoration and soil conservation have also been implemented, alongside enhancements to disaster management systems to improve national resilience.

However, the Minister was candid about the significant challenges facing these ambitions. A major funding shortfall, primarily due to the withdrawal of support from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and USAID, has severely constrained the capital budget. Grants, initially budgeted at M3.48 billion, are now projected to be only M1.38 billion.

"This shortfall has constrained our capital budget, delayed key infrastructure investments, and limited service delivery improvements in health and agriculture," Dr Matlanyane explained. The most significant contraction has been in capital spending, with only a fraction of the allocated funds disbursed, directly delaying infrastructure rollout in crucial sectors.

In her conclusion, the Minister affirmed that, despite these fiscal pressures and external shocks such as drought and global inflation, the government's strategic investments and reforms are yielding key achievements. The mid-term review underscores a nation in a state of resilience, actively working to build a more sustainable and inclusive agricultural economy while navigating a complex and challenging financial landscape.

GBV Casts a Long Shadow Over Lesotho's Agriculture Sector

By Topollo Tlali

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the least discussed yet most damaging barriers to agricultural productivity in Lesotho, subtly influencing ownership patterns, labour dynamics, and economic outcomes for thousands of women farmers. While women form the backbone of crop production, many continue to face discrimination, intimidation, and abuse, both at home and in agricultural settings, undermining their livelihoods and perpetuating a cycle of generational poverty.

Despite national laws guaranteeing equality, women farmers report that the reality on the ground still reflects entrenched patriarchy. Land is primarily registered under men's names, financial resources are more difficult for women to access, and those who speak out about discriminatory practices or domestic violence often encounter stigma, silence, or threats. GBV, often perceived solely as a social or domestic issue, has evolved into an economic crisis in agriculture, affecting production, land access, and women's confidence in fully participating in the sector.

According to community outreach reports from organisations working in rural districts, many women farmers still cannot utilise their family fields without seeking approval from male relatives. Others report experiencing verbal and emotional abuse when attempting to apply for agricultural grants, join cooperatives, or attend training sessions without their spouses' permission. Some indicate they endure physical violence directly linked to disputes over control of farming income. In a country where women contribute nearly 80% of farm labour yet own just 2% of agricultural land, this imbalance continues to widen.

Against this backdrop, the Transformative Resource Centre (TRC), in partnership with the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, recently hosted a two-day training for journalists to strengthen reporting on women's rights in agriculture. However, even the organisers acknowledge that training alone cannot rectify a system where GBV and discriminatory customs are deeply entrenched.

"We have observed a significant gap in the rights and protection of women in agriculture," said TRC programme manager Mabela Lehloenyane, who indicated that while laws have changed, implementation has not.

"Women continue to be denied access to land and

resources, not due to legal restrictions, but because of the social structures that operate within villages and households."

Lehloenyane noted that TRC's ongoing six-month project, covering Qacha's Nek, Leribe, Mokhotlong, and Maseru, found that in many areas they visited, official documents such as Form Cs and leases still defaulted to male names even where women were the primary users or inheritors of the land.

"This creates a ripple effect: women without proof of land ownership cannot access loans, government inputs, or Cooperative Bank financing. Those who attempt to challenge these exclusions often face emotional or physical abuse, particularly from family members who view such actions as threats to their authority," she explained.

Lehloenyane indicated that GBV within agriculture manifests in various forms: "Some women report being compelled to hand over all proceeds from crop sales to their spouses. Others say they are prevented from joining cooperatives because husbands believe collective organising will embolden women to become disrespectful."

She added that young female farmers describe harassment in marketplaces, where they negotiate prices under pressure from male traders who exploit their vulnerability.

"These behaviours, while normalised, contribute to a pattern of structural and interpersonal violence that undermines women's ability to thrive in agriculture."

TRC facilitators emphasised that GBV does not begin and end in the household but influences who receives extension services, who is allocated land, who controls harvest decisions, and who benefits financially from agriculture.

"Women work the land, plant, weed, apply pesticides, harvest, sort, and package," noted media and communication consultant Tsebo Mats'asa, who facilitated the workshop.

He added, "However, final decisions about pricing, distribution, and resource allocation still lie with men. When women attempt to claim space, they face backlash that can be violent."

Mats'asa pointed out that although literacy rates among women now surpass those of men, patriarchal decision-making still dominates the sector. He urged journalists to investigate the connection between GBV and agricultural inequality, arguing that GBV

should be reported not merely as a domestic issue but as a labour and economic one.

"If women are abused or denied land because of their gender, we must state that clearly. It's not a cultural matter, it's a violation of rights," he said.

Climate change has further complicated the issue with extreme weather destroying harvests and straining household finances.

"Women often face increased tension and violence, particularly where men perceive farming failures as a threat to their authority. The pressures of unpredictable climate patterns such as floods, heatwaves and hailstorms, frequently spill into homes, leaving women bearing both the economic and emotional burdens," Lehloenyane described.

Some initiatives have sought to empower women through climate-smart agriculture, livestock production, horticulture, aquaculture, and agribusiness training, and have encouraged women to pursue high-value crops such as mushrooms and asparagus, as well as integrated farming systems combining chicken and fish rearing. However, success remains limited if the structural violence surrounding them is not addressed.

"Women farmers cannot thrive when the social environment is hostile. We can teach them farming techniques, but if they are beaten, threatened, or silenced at home, that knowledge will not translate into progress," Lehloenyane said.

She stressed that Legal frameworks exist to protect women, from the 2010 Land Act to the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act of 2006, but implementation remains inconsistent.

"Tradition continues to dictate land inheritance, often excluding daughters and prioritising sons. Unmarried women farming on their parents' land still face uncertainty, as they are expected to eventually marry and leave. Married women under the community of property have more rights, but they remain vulnerable to coercion regarding land use and income decisions," she said.

Mats'asa encouraged journalists to elevate GBV issues, exposing not only discriminatory laws and customs but also the violence that perpetuates them. He stressed that investigative journalism must delve deeper than surface-level reporting.

"Behind every story of a woman denied land, there may be a story of intimidation, threats, or abuse. It is our responsibility to uncover these layers."



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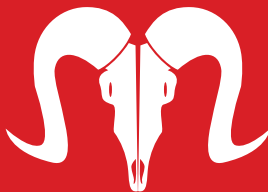
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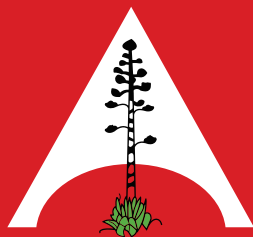
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Cracks and Opportunities in LSO Pork Value Chain

By Lungile Maseela

On 13 November 2025, farmers, butchers, and traders from across Lesotho gathered at Mojalefa Lephole Victory Hall to discuss ways to revive the country’s struggling pork value chain. Hosted by the Department of Marketing under the Ministry of Agriculture, the forum brought together producers and buyers who seldom meet in the same room, creating a unique opportunity for collective reflection on the scarcity of local pork and the actions needed to address it.

Marketing Manager, 'Malehlomlela Thakabana, opened the discussions by acknowledging the contradictions within the sector. “There is no pork in the markets, yet we have pork producers,” she stated, highlighting the need for a coordinated response to long-standing challenges. She expressed the ministry’s desire to see improved production and more consistent supplies, even if farmers can only contribute small volumes. “This forum aims to identify the challenges, determine the assistance farmers need, and bring that support closer to you so we can grow our local pork market together.”

The meeting emphasised the widening gap between the rising national demand for pork and the limited number of active participants in the value chain. Farmers were encouraged to consider the ministry’s 2024–2027 strategy, which promotes the commercialisation of pork enterprises. Presenting an overview of livestock production, 'Makutse Likopo from the livestock department urged farmers to expand their output, arguing that Lesotho’s high altitude provides a unique advantage, resulting in pork that is generally free of illnesses and considered safe for consumption. She stressed that meaningful growth would require cooperation among



producers, traders, and the government.

Officials from the Department of Marketing affirmed their commitment to ensuring that locally raised pork reaches the market. Nyane Thabana, assistant marketing officer, informed participants that the ministry plans to collaborate closely with the private sector to secure reliable buyers for farmers. “I encourage you to produce more—not only for consumption but also for sale—so you can create jobs, become traders, and grow Leso-

tho’s pork industry,” she said. She also highlighted ongoing challenges, including insufficient production, high selling prices that suppress demand, frequent disease outbreaks, limited access to finance, and a shortage of training workshops. She noted that market access remains one of the sector’s weakest links.

Representing the Project Development initiative, Vuka Tsabo, the Horizontal Alliance Officer with the SADP II introduced the Horizontal Alli-

ances Sub-Component, which aims to strengthen farmer groups and help them build economies of scale. The initiative, he said, supports pig farmers through matching grants, technical assistance, training on best practices, mentorship, value addition, and market linkage support. According to Tsabo, organised farmer groups have a better chance of accessing services and entering commercial partnerships that can sustain long-term profitability.

While the forum highlighted opportunities, it also revealed significant cracks within the value chain. Pork Chops Association chairperson Bokang Molelle expressed concern over low production levels in the sector. The association has set a target for every district to produce at least 10 pigs, creating a national pool of 100 pigs; however, Molelle admitted that this plan has not yet come to fruition. He urged farmers to join the association, emphasising that collective effort is essential for stabilising the industry.

The discussion also highlighted the frustrations of pig farmers. Speaking on behalf of producers, 'Malefa Makhobalo pointed out the lack of formalised and affordable breeding stock, unreliable buyers, and a growing preference among traders to import pork. “There are no buyers because they prefer to import pork, leaving us with no business,” she said. She urged fellow farmers to return home and resume production with urgency, arguing that noticeable progress in the next five months would strengthen their case when demanding better market access.

Participants agreed that progress will require more than just dialogue. The forum proposed several next steps, including implementing the ideas discussed, adopting production standards aligned with market requirements, expanding training opportunities, and introducing targeted subsidies to support farmers. The ministry also committed to hosting another forum within three months to assess whether any real improvements have been made.

Opportunity Rises as Women and Youth Drive Piggery Growth

By Lungile Maseela

The growing demand for pork, combined with low domestic production, is creating new opportunities for women and youth farmers who are steadily reshaping Lesotho’s piggery sector.

Across the country, pig farming is emerging as an unexpected yet promising source of income, particularly in rural communities where unemployment remains high. With Lesotho heavily reliant on imported pork, young entrepreneurs and women farmers are increasingly filling the supply gap, supporting families, creating jobs and strengthening local economies.

According to Nyane Thabana from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security, and Nutrition, the pork value chain is still in its infancy stages, with producers operating below capacity and facing persistent challenges.

“Farmers are dealing with high feed costs, inadequate housing, poor slaughter facilities, and limited access to markets,” she said.

Despite these challenges, she noted that the limited pork produced locally is supplying informal markets such as catering companies, mines, chesa nyama businesses, and large projects like Polihali.

Thabana explained that the ministry is working to professionalise the sector by offering training programmes, workshops on market standards, stakeholder roundtable discussions, and a market-day platform for farmers to showcase their

products. She added that the increasing participation of women and youth is a positive sign for the future.

She encouraged aspiring farmers to approach the ministry for guidance on breed selection, feeding, housing, disease management, and overall piggery production.

For 24-year-old farmer Nthathi Nchulo, founder of Nchulo and Spitz Piggery Farming, pig production began as a passion developed during high school agriculture classes. In February 2025, he used M2,500 to buy two pigs in Maseru and officially started his business.

Nchulo said his biggest challenges have been housing standards and rising feed prices. However, he has avoided disease outbreaks by following good management practices and ensuring timely vaccinations.

He sources most of his feed locally and maintains close relationships with suppliers, which



sometimes allows him to buy on credit. His customers include households, butcheries, and chesa nyamas in Maseru, and he markets his pigs mainly through Facebook and WhatsApp.

“I currently have two pigs. My goal is to breed them, raise them for six months, and sell both pork and piglets. My advice to young farmers is to maintain good standards, build proper housing, save for feed, and learn pig management,” he said.

For 'Mats’epo Khechane of Ha-Makhakhe Matelile, piggery became a livelihood in 2022 when unemployment pushed her to seek alternative ways to support her family. She chose pigs because they are relatively easy to manage and resilient.

Khechane said she has lost piglets due to poor pigsty conditions and still struggles with limited market access. As a woman farmer, she has also encountered buyers who refuse to pay on time or

fail to take her seriously.

Despite balancing household responsibilities with farming, she said piggery has brought her financial relief, helping her manage daily expenses and pay her child’s school fees. She has received support from pig farmers in Maseru, women-led farming networks, and skills from workshops conducted by NGOs.

“What I find most difficult is the need for proper housing and reliable markets,” she said. “My pigsty makes it hard to produce pigs of the quality I want, and without a ready market, it becomes discouraging.”

Currently raising two pigs, she hopes to expand to more than 20, adding that piggery has boosted her confidence. “Knowing that my pigs grow and thrive under my care makes me believe I can manage any plant or animal.”

Her message to other women is straightforward: “It is worth it. Pig farming is enjoyable. I started with one pig, which became six, then eight, then nothing. I started again—and now I’m working toward owning more than 20. Anyone can do it.”

Although the sector continues to grapple with high production costs, weak infrastructure, and market access hurdles, the determination of women and young farmers signals a growing shift. Their persistence is positioning piggery as a viable and expanding enterprise—and one of the brightest opportunities in Lesotho’s agricultural landscape.



WHO ARE WE

Understanding Lesotho's Pork Value Chain: A Guide for Farmers and Stakeholders

Pork remains one of the most widely consumed meats in Lesotho. It is a preferred choice for households, butcheries, restaurants, chesa nyamas, catering companies, mines, and large projects such as Polihali. Despite this high demand, local production continues to fall short, forcing the country to rely heavily on imported pork to fill the gap. This dependence on imports results in major financial losses for the country—money that could otherwise strengthen local farmers, create jobs, and grow rural economies.

Current Market Outlook

The piggery sector in Lesotho serves a diverse and growing market. Buyers include:

- Butcheries and meat shops
- Hotels, restaurants, and catering companies
- Mines and large-scale projects such as Polihali
- Individual households and small businesses

These buyers require steady supply, consistent quality, and properly handled products. The Department of Marketing continuously assesses these markets to understand what they need and how local producers can meet those expectations.

How the Department Supports Farmers

Once the Department identifies market needs, farmers are guided on:

- Required **production standards**
- **Quantity demands** and supply timelines
- Suitable **packaging and presentation**
- **Traceability**, hygiene, and compliance requirements

To help farmers meet these market demands, the Ministry provides:

- **Training workshops** on piggery man-

- agement and market standards
- **Bookkeeping and record-keeping lessons**
- **Marketing guidance** to help farmers sell effectively
- **Round-table meetings** where farmers can raise concerns and engage buyers
- **Market days**, giving producers a platform to showcase their pork and network

Importance of Joining Commodity Groups

The Ministry encourages farmers to join or form commodity groups because collective action strengthens the entire value chain. Through these groups, farmers can:

- Buy feed in bulk at lower cost
- Build stronger market connections
- Share information and technical expertise
- Access grants and funding more easily
- Improve the quality and consistency of supply

Workshops on the benefits of working together are held regularly, and the Ministry assists farmer groups with registration processes.

Key Challenges in the Sector

Although the piggery industry is growing, several constraints slow down progress:

- A shortage of accredited slaughter facilities, limiting farmers' ability to meet formal market requirements
- Buyer preference for imported pork, which is often cheaper due to economies of scale
- Limited youth participation, despite high demand for pork products
- Livestock diseases and gaps in veterinary support
- High feed costs and inadequate pig housing among small producers
- Limited market access, especially for farmers in remote areas

These challenges contribute to low production levels, making it difficult for the country to reduce its dependence on imports.

Opportunities for Growth

Despite the challenges, the piggery sector holds significant potential for expansion. Opportunities include:

- **SADP grants** for improving infrastructure, training, and purchasing breeding stock

- **Affordable loan initiatives** from Post Bank for organized and registered farmer groups
- Rising consumer demand for fresh, locally produced pork
- Increased participation of **women and youth**, bringing new energy into the sector
- Opportunities for farmers to supply large projects and institutional buyers

With proper structures and support, piggery farming can become a sustainable income source for rural households and a key contributor to the national economy.

The Department's Long-Term Vision

The Ministry of Agriculture aims to transform Lesotho's pork value chain from an import-dominated market into a vibrant, locally driven industry. Over the coming years, the Department plans to:

- Expand access to **accredited slaughterhouses** across districts
- Strengthen and decentralize **veterinary services**
- Support farmers to scale up production to meet local demand
- Reduce national dependence on imported pork
- Build market systems that enable Lesotho to eventually **export pork** regionally

The long-term goal is to ensure a reliable supply of safe, quality pork, create employment, improve livelihoods, and retain revenue within the country.

A Call to Farmers and Aspiring Producers

The Ministry urges farmers—especially youth and women—to take advantage of available support. Piggery is a promising sector with real opportunities for growth, and every farmer who enters or expands production contributes to reducing imports and strengthening food security.

For support, guidance, or registration into commodity groups, farmers are encouraged to visit their nearest District Agricultural Office.





Mpati Makotoko, Sunshine Poultry Farm owner

Mpati’s Rise From Desperation to Determination



By Topollo Tlali

At 46, Mpati Makotoko could have succumbed to the challenges life presented and allowed them to define her. Instead, she transformed despair into opportunity, and today, Sunshine Poultry Farm stands as a thriving business in Sebothoane Ha Monki in the Leribe district.

She describes her business as a symbol of hope, resilience and an empowerment hub for women and youth from parts of rural Lesotho.

Mpati’s journey into poultry farming began out of necessity.

After enduring long years of unemployment, she realised she needed to create a future for herself and her family.

“I started raising chickens in 2018, but Sunshine Poultry Farm was officially registered in 2021 as a result of progress,” she recalls, her voice trembling at the memory.

“Initially, it was incredibly difficult. My first fifty chicks, my entire initial investment, died. I had invested my time, money and dreams into those birds. Watching them perish was heart-wrenching. I questioned myself, ‘Am I even capable of this?’”

In those dark moments, Mpati nearly gave up; however, it was her mother’s quiet wisdom that provided the strength to persevere.

“My mother was my shoulder to cry on. She taught me how to care for chickens properly and equipped me with the skills to carry on. She would say, ‘My child, setbacks happen, but one loss cannot define you. You must keep going.’ Her words anchored me, and her traditional wisdom in being a farmer helped a great deal.”

With encouragement and determination, Mpati returned to the farm with renewed focus. She sought advice from experienced small-scale farmers in her community and received vital guidance from TKM Agricultural Solutions.

“Those lessons formed the foundation of my progress,” she admits.

Through trial and error and mentorship, Mpati learned the science of poultry care, nutrition and breeding. Gradually, her flock began to thrive.

By 2022, Sunshine Poultry Farm had risen from the ashes of that initial failed batch to producing between 500 and 700 chickens.

Mpati’s pride in her work was evident. “I now see myself as a commercial farmer. I supply large shops, restaurants, and individual customers. It is no longer just a hobby; it is my livelihood.”

The growth of Sunshine Poultry Farm was measured not just in numbers but also in the diversity and quality of products Mpati offered.

“We wanted options that cater to everyone,” she says, noting today, the farm produces drumsticks, chicken soup packs, chicken jerky, and more.

“I chose drumsticks because they guarantee moist, flavourful bites that everyone enjoys,” she explains, her eyes lighting up.

She adds, “Our soup pack is rich, nourishing and warming, more like a hug in a bowl. And our chicken jerky is carefully marinated and slowly dried to perfection.”

Beyond selling meat and exploring agribusiness with her chickens, Mpati invested in a small slaughterhouse, allowing her to oversee the entire process from raising the birds to delivering them ready for cooking.

“We ensure every chicken is handled with care. This builds trust with our clients and guarantees quality. However, challenges remain. We need vehicles with fridges to keep products fresh during delivery. Transportation continues to be an ongoing issue that is harming our operations.”

Despite these hurdles, Mpati’s vision extends beyond her farm. She views her success as a responsibility to her community, noting that Sunshine Poultry Farm mentors young individuals interested in poultry farming, purchases chickens from them, and assists them in building their own flocks.

“This is not just about me. It is about creating opportunities and strengthening the local poultry supply chain to meet the market demand. We grow together,” she says.

Her hard work and dedication have earned her recognition across Maputsoe and Hlotse. Sunshine Poultry Farm is now a trusted name, known for reliability, quality and consistency.

“I am proud to supply shops, restaurants, guest

houses and families. People know that when they see Sunshine Poultry Farm, they are getting high-value products.”

Mpati’s embrace of technology has also been pivotal to her success.

She also uses social media to market her products, reaching clients beyond her local area and fostering direct customer connections. This strategy, she says, has helped her brand grow and strengthen customer loyalty.

Yet, the path has not been smooth. Mpati faces an unreliable market, a common challenge for small-scale farmers in Lesotho.

“Sometimes I raise many chickens, but I cannot sell them as quickly as I want. This leads to losses and wasted resources. I have to constantly reorganise, deciding how many chicks to buy and how much to supply.”

“Running the farm is a constant balancing act,” she admits.

Competition from South African imports, she says, adds another layer of difficulty in market penetration.

“Many competitors operate large-scale farms in South Africa with lower operational budgets, which influences their lower selling prices. Competing against those requires strategic planning, high-quality products and building trust with our clients.”

Mpati also reveals the struggles she faces with interruptions in the supply of day-old chicks from South Africa.

“Without a steady supply, my farm cannot grow, and I risk losing clients. It is worrying because I cannot control external problems,” she says, indicating that seasons such as winter bring additional challenges.

“Chicks require heat and protection, which

in winter raises costs and creates risks for their well-being. Winter is the hardest time for my farm. It sometimes feels like the cold is fighting against all my hard work,” she says.

Yet, regardless of all these challenges, Mpati has grown stronger.

“Sunshine Poultry Farm is my dream come true. It was not easy. I faced setbacks, I felt like giving up, but I learned from my mistakes and persevered. I built my brand, developed strong relationships with buyers and created a business that contributes to food security in our community,” she reflects on her journey with pride.

Her vision for the future is ambitious. She hopes to establish a board of directors to guide Sunshine Poultry Farm’s growth and build proper housing for her chickens, emphasising care and patience.

“I want to motivate women to engage in farming activities that can support their families,” she says passionately.

She adds, “Farming is not just a man’s job. Women can succeed because we are naturally caring and dedicated. Love for farming, dedication and patience are essential.”

Sunshine Poultry Farm is more than a business—it is a movement towards empowerment, sustainability, and community resilience. Mpati embodies the spirit of a new generation of Mosotho women, rewriting the narrative of rural livelihoods, transforming challenges into opportunities, and realising dreams.

Currently, women comprise 40 per cent of farmers in Lesotho, according to the Lesotho National Farmers Union (LENAFU). They play prominent roles in poultry farming, as seen with TKM Agricultural Solutions.

Historically, women were constrained by cultural norms, domestic roles and limited access to land and resources. But women like Mpati are breaking barriers, claiming their place in commercial farming and achieving economic independence.

“Women have always been silent, but now we are working hard on the land, and it is time to step up. Believe in yourself, and do not let traditional roles hold us back. Farming is for everyone, and it can transform communities,” she says.

Poultry farming remains a critical sector in Lesotho, with the country importing around M2.1 billion worth of chicken annually.

Mpati indicates that local producers like herself are vital for strengthening the country’s food security, creating jobs in rural areas and building self-sufficient communities.

The Untold Violence Against Women in Agriculture

By Topollo Tlali

Gender-based violence in Lesotho is often discussed in the context of homes, romantic partnerships and public safety. Yet in rural agricultural communities where land, livestock, and labour define survival, another form of violence unfolds quietly, remains unrecorded and unchallenged. It is a violence perpetuated not only by fists but by culture, custom and the systematic dispossession of women who feed the nation.

Across villages and fields, women plant, weed, harvest, and tend animals. They bear the burden of sustaining households, contributing up to 80 per cent of family farm labour, according to a 2025 World Bank review. Yet they own a mere 15 per cent of the land. Their labour feeds Lesotho, but the benefits—ownership, inheritance, decision-making—flow elsewhere. This structural imbalance operates as a daily, unspoken violence that heightens women's vulnerability and strips them of economic agency.

For many women, this begins in childhood, where boys are groomed as heirs while girls are prepared for caregiving. It continues into adulthood, where widows lose land overnight, daughters are denied inheritance, and sisters are excluded from family decisions—despite laws designed to protect them. In a country where 86 per cent of women report experiencing some form of violence in their lifetime, according to Gender Links (2015), agricultural spaces remain one of the least examined sites of this harm.

In Ha Rankakala, Qacha's Nek, 34-year-old Mpho Lemena lives this paradox. The youngest daughter in a subsistence farming family, she grew up in her father's shadow; his helper, his student and his pride. She remembers trailing behind him in the fields, carrying the seed bag, learning how to prune maize stalks, recognising the signs of a sick cow and understanding the changing moods of the land.

"My father used to show me that the seeds a person plants today may feed him or her in the future," she recalls, her voice tightening as memories resurface. "He enabled me to see how animals and crops can make a living."

However, when her father died, the affection and teachings she received vanished under the weight of tradition. Suddenly, the same brothers who never set foot in the kraal became the "rightful heirs," while Mpho, who manages expenses, buys fodder, plants crops, and maintains the homestead, was reduced to a mere helper.

"I always receive a call from home when animals need fodder or when fields require seeds and fertiliser. But during harvesting, there is no call," she says.

"When the question arises, 'Who will sell the fields and cattle?' my brothers' voices echo loudest. Their hands do not feed the cattle, but they reap the fruits."

The imbalance is so normalised that Mpho's brothers jokingly rename every productive female cow after her. To them, it is light humour; to her, it is a painful metaphor; she is deemed useful enough to labour and produce, but not worthy enough to own.

Her experience mirrors that of thousands of rural women whose names appear on receipts for seeds and fertilisers but never on land title deeds or livestock sale agreements.

This pattern is replicated across districts, where traditional systems override modern laws, leaving women at the mercy of male relatives in decisions that shape the future of farms and family economies.

These forms of discrimination rarely make their way into police stations or courtrooms, yet they



contribute directly to women's vulnerability.

Experts warn that such injustices breed resentment, helplessness and emotional wounds that are as damaging as physical violence.

In Berea's Ha Patrick, Makatleho Rakabaele carries a different but equally devastating story. When her husband died, she found herself grieving not only his loss but the sudden collapse of the life they build together.

His relatives arrived within days, claiming all farming equipment, livestock and the family fields, leaving her with no means to feed her children.

"They said I was just a woman for their brother, not the heir of the family," she recalls, her voice trembling.

"I was trying to heal and think of how to care for my children, but they took everything."

With the equipment gone and the fields seized, Makatleho had no choice but to abandon farming even though she had managed the farm while her husband was alive. Losing land meant losing economic autonomy, family stability and the ability to keep her children food-secure.

It is a fate experienced by many widows across Lesotho, despite the Land Act of 2010, which promises equal rights to land ownership.

Women like Makatleho retreat from agriculture not out of choice but out of fear and exhaustion.

Every lost field is a lost food source. Every taken plough is a stolen opportunity. Every silenced woman is a silenced farm.

Gender specialist Dr Mamoeketsi Ntho, who has studied patterns of violence within agricultural settings, warns that many programmes designed to support farming overlook gender realities.

Mechanisation, she says, often ends up strengthening male control rather than empowering women.

"Women farmers may be happy that there are machines in farming that decrease labour, but the truth is that those machines will be under the control of men. That grants men another level of economic power over women," she explained.

The danger, she argues, lies in the deep-rooted patriarchy driving rural life. Even when women possess the skills, knowledge, and labour capacity, decision-making still defaults to men.

"Farming itself is driven by patriarchy and that increases cases of women's violations,"

Dr. Ntho adds that while laws exist to protect women, implementation remains weak, charging that many community leaders continue to apply customary norms over statutory law.

"A woman seeking land is often asked about her husband even if she is widowed, single or the primary caretaker."

"Most people lack knowledge, and there is a significant gap in advocacy regarding gender-based violence in communities," she noted.

She warned that women celebrated the Land Act of 2010 without fully understanding its limits: "Many registered their residential land but forgot agricultural land is also valuable."

She stressed that community structures, from village councils to chiefs, often reinforce outdated systems that deprive women of their economic rights, noting that chiefs may resist issuing land to women, relatives may seize property from widows, and young women working family fields are excluded from the benefits they help create.

"The consequences ripple far beyond individual families. When women lose land, agricultural output drops. When daughters are discouraged from farming, rural labour shrinks. When widows are dispossessed, entire households become food-insecure," she pointed out.

In a country where women produce between 60 and 80 percent of the food, according to the FAO, their exclusion is not only a gender crisis but a national food security threat.

Lesotho has ratified several regional and international frameworks meant to protect women, including the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which aimed to halve levels of violence by 2015, and the Sexual Offences Act of 2003. But despite policy advancements, violence persists, often unreported, unresolved, or ignored.

According to the Afrobarometer 2022 survey, customary norms continue to subordinate women, overshadowing legal reforms and leaving women trapped in cycles of dependence and exploitation.

Domestic violence remains rampant yet widely unreported, partly because communities do not know how to identify abuse or do not trust institutions meant to handle cases. Some families choose silence to "maintain peace," while others fear retaliation, stigma or community shame.

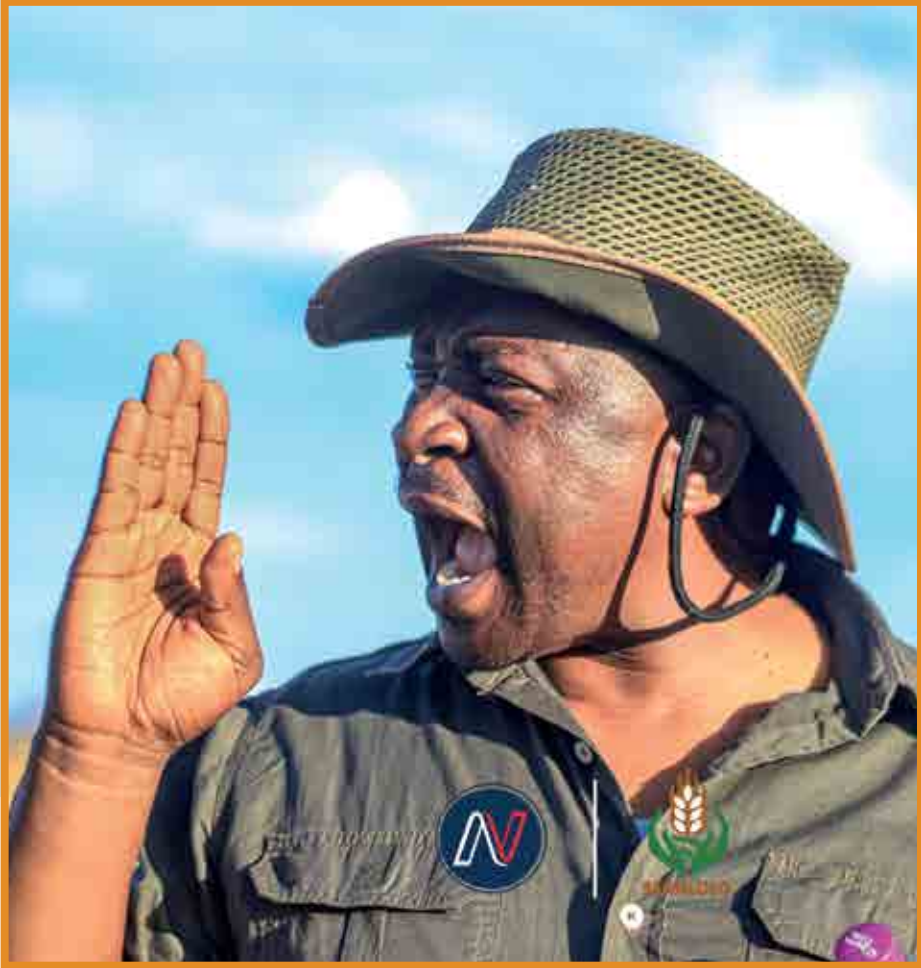
In agricultural households, violence is not always physical; it may involve withholding land, confiscating tools, denying women's labour, taking credit for their work, or excluding them from decisions affecting their livelihoods. This makes agricultural gender-based violence harder to quantify, yet its impact is deeply felt.

"Farming is not just about soil and livestock but our future," says Makatleho. "If gender-based violence continues, I fear the land will forget about women as the main caretakers."

Her fear echoes across rural Lesotho. Women like Mpho and Makatleho are the backbone of agricultural production, yet they remain invisible when wealth, ownership, and recognition are distributed. Their hands plant the seeds, but their names disappear at harvest.

As the 16 Days of Activism campaign draws attention to gender-based violence across sectors, Makatleho challenges that Lesotho must confront a quieter crisis taking root in its fields. "The nation cannot achieve food security while its primary producers suffer silent violence. It cannot modernise agriculture while excluding the women who sustain it, and it cannot hope for development while leaving half its citizens vulnerable to economic and emotional harm."

She added, "The fight against gender-based violence, especially in agriculture, cannot be confined to policies and courtrooms. It must reach the kraals, the fields, the chiefs' gatherings, the family homesteads, and the agricultural projects that shape rural life. It must demand not only protection but recognition. Recognition that the land belongs to women as much as men, and that no society can progress while its food producers remain oppressed."



Hon. Selibe Mochoboroane

By Topollo Tlali

The cool morning air of Thabana Morena held a subtle promise as young farmers stepped off their vehicles and onto the expansive lands of Hon. Selibe Mochoboroane's farm in Mafeteng.

What awaited them was not just a tour, but an immersion into a narrative of resilience, transformation and a deep commitment to agriculture that has turned previously idle land into one of the district's finest examples of block and commercial production.

This visit, organised by Farmers Pitso as part of its mission to expose emerging farmers to excellence, followed Mochoboroane's recent honour from His Majesty King Letsie III at the September Farmers Gala. While attendees anticipated fields and livestock, few expected the powerful story behind them.

From the moment he welcomed the visitors, the Minister of Health, who is also a dedicated commercial farmer, spoke not as a politician but as a farmer who understands the sting of failure, the patience required to rebuild, and the satisfaction of witnessing crops thrive. His story began with a simple truth: nothing about his farming journey came easily.

As they walked through the fields, he shared how most of the land they admired had been

abandoned grazing areas for years. For years, he narrated that the fields were parched from neglect, demanding back-breaking effort to restore their agricultural viability. "Most of these fields had been left uncultivated for years and had lost their health to produce anything fruitful," he stated, gesturing towards the now-lush wheat.

"I had to start from scratch with testing and getting the soil ready. It was challenging, but I knew revitalising it for farming was essential for both myself and the landowners."

Mochoboroane primarily farms wheat and also raises sheep, cattle, and pigs, emphasising that crop and livestock farming are interdependent.

Today, over a thousand people rely on his farm for income year-round, allowing him to balance his responsibilities as both minister and farmer. When he describes his routine of walking the fields, checking for pests, monitoring rainfall, and inspecting animals, he speaks with quiet pride, his heart rooted in the soil.

He currently cultivates a total of 410 hectares through block farming, noting that he secured some land through agreements with chiefs and individual owners across Thabana Morena. He began this approach five years ago,

Young Farmers Draw Inspiration from Mochoboroane's Farming Path

and as he recounted his journey, applause erupted periodically from the young visitors, awed that someone who started with such challenging conditions now cultivates wheat at a scale many believed impossible in Mafeteng, long labelled "a desert district."

However, the tour was not merely a celebration of success. Mochoboroane insisted on sharing his failures with equal candour.

He recounted the year he planted beans in mid-February, a risky decision that yielded no harvest and cost him income.

"That was my biggest failure," he confessed to the group.

"I tell people that crop choice and timing matter the most when one is looking for yield. When you plant at the wrong time, you plant failure and a guaranteed loss. I only got confirmation of this philosophy after that devastating loss."

His openness resonated deeply with the young farmers, many of whom have faced their own discouraging seasons.

For them, witnessing a national figure candidly discuss losing entire fields made the journey of farming feel communal rather than isolating.

As they ventured deeper into the wheat blocks, differences in crop density and colour became apparent. He explained how soil type,

fertiliser placement, and management decisions impact output.

In Samaria, where he had applied fertiliser twice, the wheat stood taller and greener than in other areas.

"This is the place I worked hardest. I expect a better yield here than anywhere else I have ploughed," he remarked, hope glimmering in his eyes.

The group frequently paused to ask questions about subsidies, climate change, and the reasons behind the low wheat production in



tential in both input acquisition and market positioning.

He criticised the lack of agricultural knowledge, noting that many farmers grow wheat solely to maintain soil health, unaware of the crop's full economic potential. He noted wheat remains Lesotho's second staple food, yet the country imports most of what it consumes.

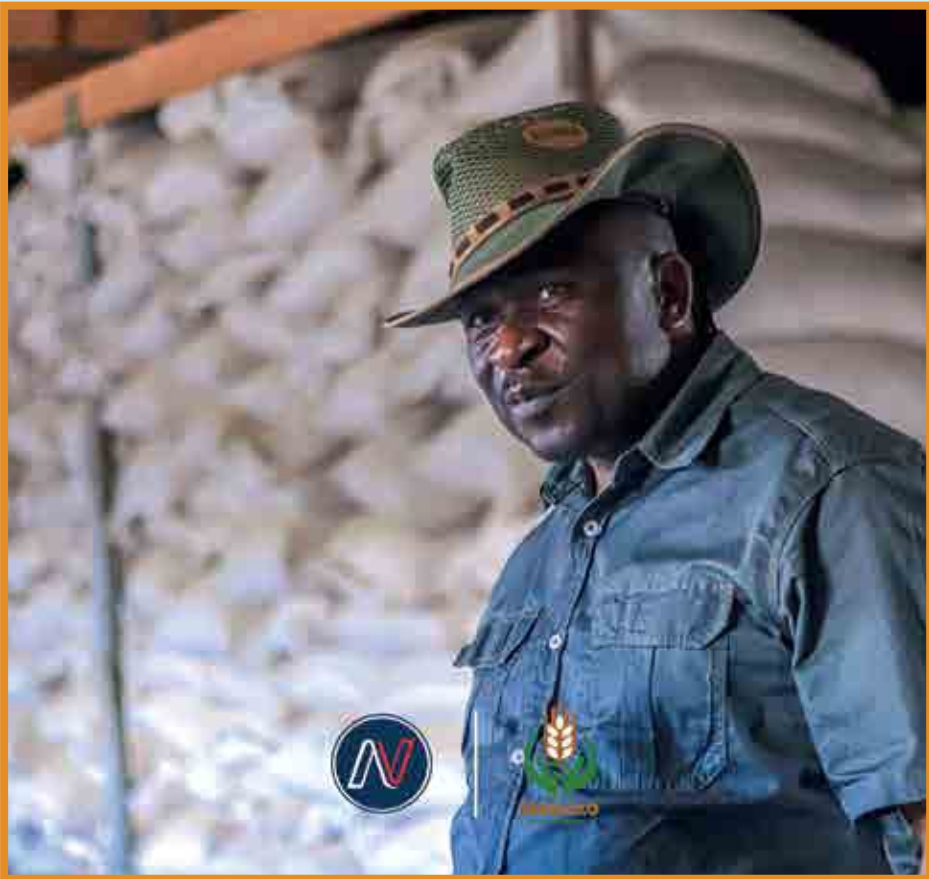
He challenged the Farmers Pitso organisers to persuade at least ten commercial farmers to produce wheat in the next season to help move the country towards sustainability. "Watch how quickly we stop relying on South Africa," he asserted.

A moment of reflection came when he addressed climate change as a major threat to Lesotho's agricultural yields. Despite producing at a commercial scale, he relies entirely on dryland methods, relying on

rainfall rather than irrigation.

"Climate change is our biggest enemy, and its unpredictability continues to make things worse. Sometimes, rain is delayed, and the quantity and quality of the crop suffer. When wheat does not meet the market's required quality, protein, moisture, and weight, it becomes ungraded. Sometimes it comes excessively and still affects the quality."

Still, he encouraged the farmers to adapt. "We live in a new climate era, and you must



learn to adapt, innovate and use mitigation to achieve major production yield. You don't need a degree to learn. You can visit farms, watch videos, or read. Information is everywhere."

The tour extended well into the day, leaving participants both fatigued and invigorated. They walked through field after field until the wheat, changing colour with the shifting light, seemed to dance before them. It was here that several farmers paused in quiet awe, realising that the land they had long considered infertile could, in the hands of dedicated individuals, realise its potential.

Sitting beneath the trees for a simple lunch of pap, vegetables, and meat, one farmer remarked softly, "Eating here with you, Honourable, made everything real. This moment will stay with me forever." Another added, "I never imagined wheat farming in Mafeteng could be this successful." The group laughed, reflecting on how their assumptions had crumbled throughout the day.

The tour continued through the livestock section.

Mochoboroane's pigs filled multiple sheds, organised by size and purpose. The farmers were astonished by their condition.

He explained how he grinds his own pig feed, mixing maize, pig grower concentrate, and premix to avoid the high costs of purchased feed. He also grows maize specifically

for his pigs.

The sheep and cattle areas were equally impressive. He plans to increase his rams for wool production and is preparing to enter high-quality beef production, he shared.

He demonstrated how he uses peas, beans, and crop residues to create nutrient-rich feed for cattle. He even owns a milling machine for grinding feed components.

However, he also shared a humbling chapter, his failed dairy project. He once kept several dairy cows but lost significant money because the milk spoiled during transport to Maseru. "I lost a lot of money, but because I love agriculture, I keep going." Today, he maintains only one dairy cow to provide milk for the workers residing on the farm.

Before concluding the visit, he urged the farmers to collaborate.

"Lesotho can be self-sufficient in food production if we work hand in hand," he said. He encouraged them to apply for tractors to expand their operations and embrace large-scale production.

As the sun began to set behind the wheat fields, the farmers gathered to express their gratitude. Some were exhausted, some emotional, but all were inspired. They shook his hand, conveyed their thanks, and prepared to return home not just with new knowledge, but with renewed hope.



King Letsie III Demands Global Action to Close Africa’s \$34 Billion Nutrition Gap

By Ntsoaki Motaung

His Majesty King Letsie III, the African Union, and African Leaders for Nutrition (ALN) Champion have issued a strong call for the world to address Africa’s worsening nutrition crisis.

He urged global partners to view nutrition financing as an urgent investment in stability and prosperity rather than a mere optional expense.

Speaking at the High-Level Side Event on “Nutrition as the Smartest Investment – Africa’s Call for Catalytic Financing” during the Doha Summit on 4 November 2025, King Letsie III underscored that Sub-Saharan Africa requires USD 34 billion over the next decade to fund essential, life-saving nutrition programmes.

He warned that failing to close this gap puts millions of children at risk and threatens the continent’s economic future.

“Every dollar invested in nutrition yields up to USD 23 in returns through better health, education, and productivity,” His Majesty told delegates, stressing that Africa’s development is intrinsically linked to the nourishment of its people. He reminded global leaders that adequate nutrition in the first 1,000 days of a child’s life can prevent nearly half of all child deaths worldwide, a fact he described as “a moral and economic imperative that cannot be ignored.”

King Letsie III called on African governments to redirect resources towards high-impact, low-cost interventions such as micronutrient supplementation, iodised salt, balanced complementary feeding, and improved maternal nutrition. He criticised the fact that most African nations allocate less than one per cent of their national budgets to nutrition, labelling this situation as “wholly inadequate and in need of urgent correction.”

He also cautioned that international financing for nutrition has declined at a time when Africa needs it most. However, he welcomed the African Development Bank’s USD 9.5 billion commitment to nutrition-sensitive agriculture as a significant step forward.

Inviting Gulf partners, global philanthropies, and private investors to join the financing effort, the King stated, “True prosperity begins with well-nourished people.”

His remarks resonated deeply as Lesotho continues to grapple with persistently high levels of child malnutrition. The latest Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC) report reveals a troubling reality: 32.9 per cent of children under five are affected by stunting—well above the World Health Organisation (WHO) emergency threshold of 20 per cent. Every district in the country exceeds this limit, with the highest rates reported in Qacha’s Nek at 43.7 per cent and Thaba-Tseka at 40 per cent. Stunting is particularly prevalent among boys and in rural areas.

While acute malnutrition (wasting) rates are low, the prevalence of underweight children stands at 10.3 per cent nationally, disproportionately affecting girls and urban children. The report attributes these outcomes to declining household purchasing power, persistent food insecurity, and climate-related shocks that continue to disrupt agricultural production.

The agricultural sector, which remains the backbone of food production for most households, is also under pressure. Yields per hectare have decreased, leading to a national maize production forecast that is 19 per cent lower than the previous season. Unequal access to land further complicates production: 58 per cent of male-headed households have access to land, compared to 52 per cent of female-headed households, despite women being crucial to small-scale farming and household food supply.

However, the LVAC report identifies areas of progress. Nutrition Clubs, more prevalent in rural areas, have proven effective in improving household dietary diversity. The report recommends scaling up these clubs to promote small-scale farming, home gardens, and nutrition education—particularly targeting vulnerable groups such as pregnant and breastfeeding women and women of childbearing age.

King Champions Nutrition Education at Initiation Schools



His Majesty King Letsie III at the World Food Day commemoration in Berea

By Thoboloko Ntšonyane

B EREA - His Majesty King Letsie III has advocated for the inclusion of nutrition education in the curriculum of initiation schools.

As the African Union’s Champion for Nutrition and a Special Ambassador for Nutrition for the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the King expressed these views during the World Food Day 2025 commemoration at Ha Moshati, Teyateyaneng, Berea.

World Food Day is celebrated annually on October 16, but in Lesotho, it was observed on November 14. This global event aims to raise awareness about food security, nutrition, and sustainable farming practices.

World Food Day also commemorates the founding of FAO, which is celebrating its 80th anniversary this year. The theme for this year’s observance was ‘Hand in Hand for Better Foods and a Better Future’.

The King emphasised the importance of healthy eating for initiates, stressing the need for them to care for and provide for their families after completing their rite of passage into manhood.

His remarks coincide with the ongoing initiation school season, during which boys who undergo this rite are regarded as men.

Nutrition education will teach them about balanced diets and the benefits of making good food choices.

He urged initiates across the country to cultivate their fields and grow enough food to sustain their families and communities upon completing their traditional teachings, noting that this would contribute to the nation’s overall health and nutrition.

Despite progress made by the government and stakeholders to combat food insecurity, a recently published report raises significant concerns about the issue. The 2025 Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis report warns that many families in the country should prepare for challenging conditions.

According to this report, a family of four now

faces a monthly cost of living that has risen to M1,320 from M1,220. The findings indicate that the current year’s Food Consumption Score reflects poor consumption levels, with 25% of households compared to 19% in 2024.

“Food and Nutrition Insecurity in Lesotho is driven by climate-related shocks such as storms, heavy rains, high temperatures, dry spells, and drought, which have adversely affected crops. Diseases affecting pets and livestock have further exacerbated food and nutrition insecurity in the country,” the report states.

In July 2024, Prime Minister Samuel Matekane declared a national food insecurity emergency. Last year, approximately 700,000 people in Lesotho—nearly one in three—were reported to be struggling with severe food shortages, an increase from 582,000 the previous year. The funds required to alleviate this crisis were estimated to exceed M3 billion.

More than half of the respondents, 60%, reside in rural areas, while the remaining 40% live in urban settings. All wealth groups were represented in the interviews, including very poor, poor, middle, and better-off households. Poor households accounted for 44%, very poor 25%, middle 25%, and better-off 6%.

The report also highlights that 27% of households demonstrated poor food consumption, 37% were borderline, and 36% had acceptable food consumption. “The five-year food consumption score trends indicate persistent challenges in both rural and urban areas, with households consistently falling into the borderline and poor consumption categories. In urban areas, food consumption patterns also reflect increasing vulnerability.”

On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, Thabo Mofosi, Tšelislo Mokhosi emphasised that hunger knows no

borders and called for collaboration among stakeholders within the food ecosystem to ensure food security in the country.

“We must all recognise that food is a fundamental human right for everyone, including those in Lesotho,” he stated.

The newly appointed Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Dr Khothatso Tšooana, reiterated that World Food Day serves as a reminder of the importance of food security and that food is a human right.

He announced that next year, this day will be celebrated in Leribe.





Heavy Snowfall Leaves Young Farmer Counting Losses and Mental Strain



Heavy snowfall on veros farm PTY LTD affecting shade nets and cabbages

By Topollo Tlali

Behind Lesotho’s fertile fields lies a silent yet urgent crisis: farmers’ mental health. Natural hazards, climate change, financial strain, livestock theft, and crop failures take a psychological toll on farmers, yet few forums exist to address their struggles.

During the winter season, a heavy snowfall in the country’s highlands left farmers grappling with more than just financial losses.

For many, including 34-year-old vegetable farmer Jelo Makhetha from Tsoelike in the Qacha’s Nek district, the storms destroyed livelihoods and imposed an invisible burden: mental and emotional strain.

Jelo, who operates Veros Pty Ltd, witnessed the collapse of his 40 by 20 shade net structures and the loss of 700 cabbage crops, a devastating blow after months of hard work.

“Winter is not my season,” Jelo reflected, recalling the morning he discovered the damage.

“I didn’t know what to do or feel, seeing my hard-earned crops buried in snow and shade nets torn down after hours of labour, sacrificing everything while looking forward to the market for returns.”

The emotional toll of such losses can be as heavy as the financial ones. Farmers like Jelo experience immense stress, anxiety, depression and even post-traumatic responses when unpredictable weather devastates months of preparation.

In Lesotho, where agriculture is the backbone of the economy, the mental health of farmers remains largely unaddressed. Cultural norms often compel them to conceal their pain, leaving many to suffer in isolation.

“I grew up in subsistence farming, but I never imagined I would become a farmer,” Jelo shared however, after graduating, he found himself unemployed and turned to farming as a means of survival.

The snowfall made him realise that while farming is critical for food security, those who toil tirelessly are often overlooked.

“After the snowfall crisis, people told me to be strong and start over and that reflects how Basotho cope with distress, silently, without support,” he said.

The pressure is intensified by cultural perceptions that overlook emotional well-being.

“Farmers are generally perceived as illiterate in Lesotho and some of their challenges, including mental health issues are rarely discussed in our communities,” Jelo explained, noting that men, in particular, face societal expectations to suppress their emotions.

“We are told that monna ke nku ha lle—‘a man is a sheep he doesn’t cry,’” he said. Even after significant loss, farmers are taught to endure hardships silently.

Climate change adds another layer of uncertainty. Jelo pointed out the difficulty of planning farming activities amid floods, droughts, and snowfall. “As a farmer, I’m constantly worried about the next season, the next harvest, and what it will bring,” he said, adding that while many Basotho have adopted climate-smart techniques, such as shade nets and improved irrigation, extreme weather events can still wipe out months of labour in a single morning.

Compounding this crisis Jelo said is the near-total absence of mental health services for farmers.

He noted has never heard of initiatives aimed at providing emotional or psychological support for farmers. “We are expected to be tough, even when situations are harsh and we have nowhere to go. It would seem awkward for a farmer to cry out after a loss,” he said.

According to the government’s 2024 Mental Health Policy and Strategic Plan, nearly 431,000 people in Lesotho suffer from mental illness, yet the number of farmers included in this figure remains unknown. Farmers are considered high-risk due to financial pressures, isolation, crop

failures, climate shocks, and exposure to trauma, according to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG).

Global studies illustrate the widespread nature of this challenge. In South Africa, 61 per cent of farmers experience depression and 54 per cent anxiety. In Australia, one in five farmers reports high psychological distress, while in the United Kingdom, 27 per cent report depressive symptoms and 45 per cent anxiety. These figures suggest that mental health struggles are common in farming communities worldwide, yet stigma and traditional norms often prevent open discussion.

Jelo worries about older farmers who have endured decades of climatic fluctuations. “They might be deeply affected, and there is little support or guidance on how to cope with losses caused by weather,” he said. He advocates mental health awareness, peer support, and frequent engagement with specialists to help farmers navigate these challenges.

Despite his recent setbacks, Jelo is determined to rebuild.

“After losing over 600 heads of cabbage planted in May, I am now managing 70 heads of green coronet to start again,” he said.

Bouncing back from financial and emotional losses is arduous, but purpose and resilience drive him forward.

“Every step feels like a battle. The pressure to produce again is immense, but I will never quit because winners never quit, and quitters never win,” he said.

The stigma surrounding mental health in Lesotho leaves many farmers bottling up their emotions, which can exacerbate the effects of climate-induced losses. Jelo believes it is crucial for farmers to have safe spaces to express themselves and seek guidance. “Reflecting on what the snowfall did to my crops makes me sad, but I understand it was beyond my control,” he noted.

Mental health challenges in farming are often overlooked, despite agriculture being critical for national food security. The long hours, financial pressures, and isolation farmers face can have profound psychological consequences. Addressing these issues should be a priority alongside discussions on climate resilience and sustainable agricultural practices.

Ross Blanch, an Australian crisis counsellor and dairy farmer, highlights similar struggles internationally. “Farming is demanding both emotionally and financially, and farmers often remain silent about their struggles,” he said. Blanch emphasised that having someone to talk to, who understands the agricultural context, helps farmers process loss and grief—a support system currently lacking in Lesotho.

Jelo strongly indicated that farming is not just a livelihood but a way of life; “Crop failure or livestock loss carries not only economic consequences but also emotional trauma. Providing farmers with access to counselling and mental health services, along with training for farm leaders on recognising distress, could help build resilience in the sector.

“What is most prevalence in our country, the government and agricultural institutions focus on production data rather than farmers’ well-being. Questions about emotional strain, setbacks, and psychological impacts remain largely unasked. I strongly believe that prioritising farmers’ mental health, establishing helplines and creating forums for sharing experiences could transform the sector, ensuring that those who feed the nation are themselves supported,” he said, adding that annually, climate change disasters and mental health are inextricably linked for Lesotho’s farmers and poor production.

“As extreme weather events increase in frequency and intensity, our psychological burden as farmers grows and recognising and addressing this silent crisis is crucial not only for the individuals affected but for national food security and sustainable agricultural development,” he said.

A Farmer’s Struggle Against Climate Change-Induced Wind Damage

By Topollo Tlali

Sejakhosi Lefisa, a young and determined farmer from Mabita Finest Farm in Thabana Mokhele, Butha-Buthe, recently confronted the harsh reality of climate change when strong winds tore down the shade nets protecting his tomato crops.

At 1,600 metres above sea level, Butha-Buthe’s northern district is no stranger to weather extremes, but this incident left Lefisa grappling with both financial and emotional losses.

Mabita Finest Farm had planted 2,350 tomato plants, carefully shielded under 50 by 40-metre shade nets designed to protect against the sun, pests, and diseases; however, a sudden wind brought all those protective measures crashing down, leaving the crops exposed and vulnerable.

“That afternoon after returning home and resting, I was woken up by my neighbour calling me to see the damage,” Lefisa recounted.

Upon arriving at his farm, Lefisa felt a mix of worry, disbelief and exhaustion.

“Finding the shade nets I worked so hard to set up lying over my tomatoes was devastating. The energy required to salvage the situation felt overwhelming, and the potential losses weighed heavily,” he described, noting that while he had experienced wind damage before, this incident brought a new level of personal and financial strain.

“It was the hardest day in my four years of farming journey,” he admitted.

Lefisa believes the increasing severity of weather events is a direct consequence of climate change, saying, “The weather patterns show our climate is shifting before our eyes. We need to adapt, but some forces remain beyond our control,” he said, reflecting on humanity’s relationship with nature, noting that environmental degradation might be contributing to these extreme events.

“It is our duty to care for nature so it can sustain us in return,” he stated.

Following the loss, he noted he had to plan quickly to replace the shade nets and protect the remaining tomatoes, a costly and labour-intensive task.

“I lost about 70 boxes of tomatoes and 35 seedlings, which is a serious blow to my business,” he said.

Beyond the immediate damage, Lefisa said the winds carried diseases and pests that threatened the crops further, forcing him to spend additional hours pruning and safeguarding the plants.

He stressed the importance of insurance for small-scale farmers, who often face financial constraints that limit their ability to implement adaptive measures, such as strong windbreaks.

“Farmers are at risk because we lack the resources to combat the effects of climate change, and it is important we start having conversations about insurance access for small-scale farmers,” he explained.

He recalled that farming in the past was more predictable with ancestral knowledge guiding planting, harvesting and coping with seasonal winds. Today, unpredictable rainfall, stronger winds and extreme heat have made farming feel like a gamble.

Lefisa comments on the current La Niña, which has brought excessive rainfall, calling it an added challenge.

He explained that continuous rain can waterlog soils, stunt tomato growth, and increase the likelihood of plant diseases such as leaf mould.

“These weather disruptions affect supply and market prices, particularly during the dry season when vegetable demand rises. Our goal at Mabita Finest Farm is to produce enough vegetables throughout the year to keep prices affordable for local customers, but we still need to find a



solution for such disasters,” he said.

Lefisa also highlighted the need for targeted support; “Government assistance should be directed toward farmers who are truly passionate and actively producing if indeed they want to achieve a win in food sustainability,” he insisted.

The district administrator of Butha-Buthe, Tsepa Chaba, confirmed that climate change has affected many local crop farmers.

“Unpredictable rainfall, strong winds and floods threaten harvesting seasons, making it difficult for farmers to maintain consistent yields for crops and vegetable farmers, while livestock farmers have been relatively unaffected due to abundant grazing,” Chaba said.

The impact of climate change on agriculture is not unique to Lesotho. Global shifts, such as rising temperatures, altered rainfall patterns and more frequent extreme weather events, including heatwaves, floods, and droughts, are challenging farmers to maintain predictable yields.

Studies suggest crop yields could fall by up to 20 per cent, and water shortages are projected to worsen as rainfall declines and evaporation rates increase. Maize and mohair production in Lesotho have already been affected.

Experts advocate for sustainable farming practices to mitigate these effects. Strategies such as improving soil health, efficient water use, promoting agroforestry, and cultivating climate-resilient crop varieties can help farmers adapt to changing conditions. Investments in water-efficient irrigation systems, native crops, and innovative technologies can maximise productivity while reducing environmental impacts.

Lefisa’s journey into farming began after completing his IGCSE in 2020. His passion for agriculture led him to establish Mabita Finest Farm in 2022, which he later registered as a commercial entity in November 2023. Initially focused on vegetables, melons, roots, and tubers, the farm has expanded to include poultry, maize, and sorghum. By adopting smart agricultural practices, Lefisa has grown from planting a small 15 by 10-metre plot with M20 seeds to producing thousands of cabbages and potatoes on 3–5 acres, with plans for larger shade net structures in the future.

Mabita Finest Farm supplies vegetables to local markets, street vendors, shops, and supermarkets in Thabana Mokhele and surrounding areas. Despite having boreholes for irrigation, water scarcity during dry seasons still affects production.

He noted that competition comes from both local smallholders and larger South African vegetable suppliers, highlighting the need for efficiency and innovation in local farming.

Lefisa remains realistic about the uncertainties ahead.


“Farming is a gamble. Even after following all proper procedures, weather events can undo months of work,” he said.

The wind damage continues to weigh on him, but his determination to face challenges remains unwavering. “The torn shade nets haunt me every time I see clouds, but I refuse to sit back. I will confront every obstacle and continue producing food for our communities,” he concluded.



Sejakhosi Lefisa _ founder of Mabita finest farm

PETROLEUM FUND.



INVITATION

INVITATION TO REGISTER AS AN APPROVED SUPPLIER ON THE PETROLEUM FUND'S PREQUALIFIED SUPPLIER DATABASE

The Petroleum Fund is a statutory organisation under the Ministry of Finance, which was established through the Legal Notice No. 96 of 1997 under the Finance Order of 1988. The organisation is further delegated, under the Fuel and Services Control (Delegation Notice) Number 32 of 2021, the powers to set the price and time at which Petroleum Products may be adjusted. It is managed by the Board of Directors, while day-to-day activities are administered by the Secretariat, which is headed by the Chief Executive Officer, and its operations are guided by the Lesotho (Petroleum Fund) Regulations of 2021.

Petroleum Fund invites legally registered suppliers interested in doing business with the organisation to register on its database. The Fund specifically request service providers in the following categories:

No.	Category	No.	Category
1.	Accommodation	13.	Events Management
2.	Asset Valuers and Auctioneers	14.	Furniture and Fixtures
3.	Billboards and Outdoor Advertising	15.	General Supply
4.	Corporate Branding	16.	Graphic Design
5.	Catering	17.	Office Equipment and Stationery
6.	Clearing Agents	18.	Printing and Photocopy
7.	Computer Equipment and Electronics	19.	Print Media and Advertising Agencies
8.	Conferencing Facilities	20.	Photography and Videography

9.	Corporate Gifts	21.	Radio Stations
10.	Corporate Wear	22.	Transport hire
11.	Courier Services	23.	Travel Agencies
12.	Editing and Publishing		

1. **Mandatory Documents for submission**

Interested vendors must submit the following mandatory documents:

- Company Profile;
- A valid Tax Clearance certificate;
- A valid Traders' Licence or equivalent;
- Evidence of physical location (depending on the nature of the company);
- Three Reference letters for services recently provided;
- Three Copies of client Purchase Orders or Service Agreements not older than three years

2. **Submission Instruction:**

Step 1

Interested vendors must first register their company details and select categories on the following link: <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/wgGYN4PTaM>


Step 2

Mandatory documents must be sent by e-mail to supplier@petroleum.org.ls and the e-mail subject should be **PF Database 2025/26_*Name of the Company***.

The deadline for registration and submission of mandatory documents is **Thursday, January 8th, 2026, at 12:00 noon**.

For further clarification, please contact the Human Capital and Administration Specialist at +266 22312137.

PETROLEUM FUND.



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

HEADQUARTERS INTERIOR DECORATOR PF/RFP/2025/2026-07

The Petroleum Fund (referred herein as the Fund) is a statutory organisation under the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, which was established through Legal Notice No. 96 of 1997 under the Finance Order of 1988. Under the Fuel and Services Control (Delegation Notice) Number 32 of 2021, the organisation is further delegated the powers to set the price and time at which Petroleum Products may be adjusted. The Board of Directors manages it, while day-to-day activities are administered by the Secretariat, headed by the Chief Executive Officer, and its operations are guided by the Lesotho (Petroleum Fund) Regulations of 2021.


The Petroleum Fund is in the final stages of constructing its new five-story headquarters located at Lower Prison Gardens, Old Europa, Maseru, Lesotho. To ensure the building's interior environment reflects the organisation's professionalism, national identity, and modern energy sector values, the Fund seeks to engage a qualified and experienced Interior Decorator to enhance the aesthetics and functionality of interior spaces by selecting and arranging decorative elements in an appealing, professional and cost-effective manner.

Interested, eligible bidders may obtain the Terms of Reference from the Petroleum Fund Website (<https://petroleum.org.ls/procurement/>) from **Monday, the 17th November 2025**. Interested Service Providers are required to attend a compulsory pre-bid meeting on **3rd of December 2025** at 10:00 hrs at the Petroleum Fund Headquarters Construction site offices at Lower Prison Gardens, Old Europa, Maseru. Requests for clarifications should be made in writing on or before **17:00hrs on Friday the 5th of December 2025**, to the following e-mail address: supplier@petroleum.org.ls.

The Proposals must be submitted to Petroleum Fund offices in sealed packages clearly marked '**PF/RFP/2025/2026-07 INTERIOR DECORATION SERVICES**', containing Technical Proposals and Financial Proposals sealed in separate envelopes. The deadline for submission of proposals is **12:00hrs on Tuesday, the 6th of January 2026**, with a public opening of Technical Proposals at **12:15hrs** on the same day, the **6th of January 2026**.

Online submissions may be made by sending encrypted Technical and Financial proposals to supplier@petroleum.org.ls by the set deadline.

PETROLEUM FUND.



EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI):

IMPLEMENTATION OF USED OIL MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING PROGRAMME IN LESOTHO PF/EOI/2025/2026-01

Background

The Petroleum Fund (referred to herein as the Fund) is a statutory organisation under the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, which was established through Legal Notice No. 96 of 1997 under the Finance Order of 1988. The organisation is further delegated, under the Fuel and Services Control (Delegation Notice) Number 32 of 2021, the powers to set the price and time at which Petroleum Products may be adjusted. It is managed by the Board of Directors, while day-to-day activities are administered by the Secretariat, headed by the Chief Executive Officer, and its operations are guided by the Lesotho (Petroleum Fund) Regulations of 2021.

Guided by its 2025 - 2030 Strategic Plan, Petroleum Fund actively implements initiatives that drive economic growth, foster job creation, and advance environmental sustainability.

In 2023, the Fund commissioned a Feasibility Study on the Management and Recycling of Used Oil in Lesotho, which estimated that over 1.1 million litres of used oil are generated annually across the country. The study identified significant environmental hazards associated with improper disposal and presented an investment case for a nationally coordinated used oil collection, recycling, and re-refining system based on Vacuum Distillation Technology. The proposed system demonstrated strong economic viability, with a Net Present Value (NPV) of LSL 42 million and an Internal Rate of Return (IRR) of 24.8% over a 25-year horizon.

Objective of the EOI

The Fund seeks Expressions of Interest from qualified and experienced organisations, companies or consortia to implement the Used Oil Management and Recycling Programme recommended in the Feasibility Study. The objective is to establish an environmentally sound, financially sustainable, and circular system for used oil management in Lesotho.

Scope of Work

The selected partner(s) will be expected to:

a. Design and operationalise a national used oil collection and transportation network across all regions to ensure efficient and environmentally sound handling;

b. Establish a used oil re-refining facility, preferably employing Vacuum Distillation Technology as recommended in the feasibility study;

c. Develop and implement an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework in collaboration with relevant ministries and industry stakeholders, and communities to promote producer accountability and sustainable practices;

d. Support policy, regulatory, and institutional strengthening, including the domestication of Basel Convention principles;

e. Implement awareness, monitoring, and reporting programmes to ensure compliance and environmental protection.

Eligibility Criteria

Interested organisations should demonstrate:

a. Proven experience in hazardous waste management, petroleum recycling, or environmental infrastructure projects;

b. Technical expertise in used oil re-refining technologies (e.g., distillation, solvent extraction, or similar);

c. Financial capacity to mobilise capital and sustain project operations;

d. Strong partnerships with local entities, government institutions, or international development partners;

e. Commitment to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles.

f. Proven track record of successful project management and execution;

Submission Requirements

Interested applicants must submit:

1. A cover letter indicating interest and understanding of the assignment;

2. A company profile detailing relevant experience and track record;

3. Project concept outlining the approach and technology;

4. Preliminary financial model or investment concept;

5. Details of key experts and consortium partners (if applicable);

6. Valid business registration and tax clearance certificates.

Submission Instructions

Proposals must be submitted in sealed packages clearly marked: **"PF/EOI/2025/2026-01 – USED OIL MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION"** to the following address:

Petroleum Fund of Lesotho
LCCI Building
Orpen Road, Old Europa
Maseru 100, Lesotho

Online submissions may be made by sending password-protected PDF documents to supplier@petroleum.org.ls by the set deadline. The e-mail subject must be **"PF/EOI/2025/2026-01 – USED OIL MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION"**

Deadline for submission: Friday, 16th January 2026 at 12:00 hrs (Lesotho time).
Late submissions will not be considered.

DISCLAIMER

Only shortlisted applicants will be invited to participate in the subsequent Request for Proposals (RFP) stage. The Petroleum Fund reserves the right to accept or reject any submission without assigning reasons.



CALL FOR APPLICATIONS: 5th Incubation Cycle – Lesotho Entrepreneurship Hub & Seed Financing Facility

Are you an innovative entrepreneur ready to scale your business and create a lasting impact? The future of business in Lesotho is YOU! If you plan to and have potential, or are a high-growth, high-impact innovative SME or startup, this is your chance to take your enterprise to the next level.

The Government of Lesotho has received a loan from the International Development Association (IDA) of the World Bank to implement the **Lesotho Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion (CAFI) Project**. The Project Development Objective (PDO) is to “increase access to business support services and financial products targeted at MSMEs and entrepreneurs, especially women and youth”.

The **Lesotho Entrepreneurship Hub and Seed Financing Facility (LEHSFF)** under the CAFI Project invites innovative **SMEs and startups** to apply for the **5th Incubation Cycle**, running from **February 2026 to August 2026**.

This program, a key component of the **CAFI Project**, is designed to empower high-growth, high-impact enterprises, particularly in **agriculture, tourism and hospitality, construction, manufacturing and green energy, creative industries and technology & innovation**, in alignment with the **Second National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP II)**.

- Why Apply?**
- This six months incubation program will benefit selected enterprises as they will receive:
- ◆ Needs assessment for **tailored mentorship, coaching, and industry expertise**
 - ◆ **Product or service refinement** for market readiness
 - ◆ **Business model refinement** and technical assistance
 - ◆ **Networking opportunities** with investors and market stakeholders
 - ◆ **Digitization support** for enhanced efficiency
 - ◆ Training on **financial management, marketing, HR, and operations**
 - ◆ Facilitation of **access to finance and investment opportunities** for the enterprises by linking them with investors and other sources of financing
 - ◆ Assistance in developing a **scalable two-year business plan**

- Who Can Apply?**
- ✓ **Enterprises with high growth potential and are innovative**
 - ✓ **Operational businesses with market-ready products**
 - ✓ **Full-time entrepreneurs committed to the six-month incubation**
 - ✓ Businesses demonstrating **scalability and job creation potential**
 - ✓ Enterprises addressing **developmental challenges through technology, science, or innovation**
 - ✓ You are **not a one-person (permanent staff) company**.
 - ✓ Enterprises ready to abide by **environmental and social safeguards**

How to Apply

Visit www.cafi.org.ls to complete your application and select your preferred **Enterprise Support Organization (ESO)**.

Deadline: December 12, 2025

Women- and youth-led enterprises are strongly encouraged to apply!

Please note: As an enterprise you are not allowed to apply to more than one ESO

Need More Info? Join our virtual information sessions every **Monday, Wednesday, and Friday** from **November 24 to December 12, 2025** (details on the CAFI website). Call the Hub at 22315800 or email entreprhub@cafi.org.ls

(INFORMATION SESSION LINK) TEAMS <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/34108454834516?p=X3aSa8iRJRQFY0aSeEt>,
Meeting ID: 341 084 548 345 16
Passcode: XD68Vn6h

Prime Cubate	-	09:00am - 09:45am
Sky Business Inc (SBI)	-	09:45am - 10:30am
Development Solutions	-	10:30am - 11:15am
Relationships Inspiring Social Enterprise (rise)	-	11:15am - 12:00pm
Girls Coding Academy	-	12:00pm - 12:45pm
Impact School	-	12:45pm - 13:30pm

Meet Your Incubators!

The incubation will be delivered by **6 Enterprise Support Organizations (ESOs)**:



- 1) **Apply to Sky Business Inc (SBI) if**
- You are the owner of an early-stage, small business that has been **operating for at least six (6) months under Tourism Sector (including Accommodation, Parks, Tour Operators, Destination Management Companies, Arts and Crafts, Health and Wellness, etc)**.

For inquiries, please contact: admin@skybusinessinc.com or call: +266 59311874 / +266 22 323 777
<https://www.facebook.com/skybusinessinc>



- 2) **Apply to Impact School if**
- Your business operates within these tech categories:
 - **FinTech:** Mobile payments, digital banking, and blockchain applications
 - **AgriTech:** IoT, precision farming, agri-marketplaces, and mobile extension services
 - **HealthTech:** Telemedicine, AI diagnostics, and digital health solutions
 - **E-commerce:** Digital retail and online marketplace platforms
 - **EdTech:** E-learning platforms, education digitization, and on-line training tools

Note: We encourage applications from innovators across all technology-driven sectors with scalable and impactful solutions.

For inquiries, please contact: incubation@impactschool.org.ls or call +266 5836 4611 / +266 5048 9097
<https://web.facebook.com/ImpactSchoolLSO>
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/impact-school-ls>



- 3) **Apply to Girls Coding Academy if**
- Your enterprise focuses: on two primary specialization tracks designed to strengthen and scale ICT-driven enterprises:
- 3.1 Robotics and Coding**
- This track supports enterprises or startups engaged in:
- Developing robotics-based educational tools,
 - Running coding academies or digital literacy initiatives,
 - Designing software or automation solutions that promote innovative ecosystems
- 3.2 Tech Hardware and IoT Solutions**
- This track targets MSMEs involved in hardware manufacturing and smart technology integration, such as: Tech Hardware and IoT Solutions MSME specializing in locally assembled USB cables, smart IoT devices, and digital electronics repairs.”
- Eligible businesses include those engaged in:
- Manufacturing or assembling ICT devices and accessories (e.g., USB cables, chargers, sensors)
 - Developing smart IoT solutions (e.g., trackers, monitoring systems, scanners)
 - Repairing and maintaining digital hardware such as cell

phones, laptops, or computers

For inquiries, please contact: info@girlscodingacademy.org or call +266 59076504/ +266 6229 6071
<https://www.girlscodingacademy.co.ls/>
<https://www.facebook.com/girlscodingacademy.ls/>
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/girlscodingacademy/>



- 4) **Apply to Prime Cubate if:**
- Your business has been in existence for at least 1 year and it must be addressing a developmental challenge under manufacturing, namely Renewable Energy & Green Manufacturing, Agro-Processing & Food Manufacturing, and Recycling & Circular Economy.
- For inquiries, please contact: tlalosompopo@gmail.com and rose@tekaneledimo.com in copy or contact +266 56649013.
<https://www.facebook.com/61569311407568/>
<https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/prime-cubate-pty/>



- 5) **Apply to Development Solutions if:**
- Your business is in horticulture, and this covers the cultivation and commercialization of fruits, vegetables, herbs and ornamental plants, including all activities from production to market.
- Examples include:**
- **Production:** Tomatoes, spinach, onions, cabbage, lettuce, herbs, flowers, apples, or strawberries.
 - **Value Addition:** Drying, packaging, juicing, or making sauces.
 - **Input Supply:** Seeds, seedlings, irrigation systems, compost, or organic fertilizers.
 - **Marketing & Logistics:** Cold storage, transport, and distribution to shops, hotels, or markets.
 - **Integrated Ventures:** Beekeeping (pollination & honey), fish farming (aquaponics), or organic waste recycling supporting horticulture systems.

For inquiries, please contact: developmentsolutions10@gmail.com or call +266 6279 5317 /+266 5788 8186 / +266 5911 5974/ +266 22316948
<https://developmentsolutionsltd.org/>
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61583232640212>



- 6) **Apply to Rise:**
- rise is looking for 10 innovative and hungry to learn entrepreneurs in the following sectors:**
1. Built Environment (architecture, construction and design)
 2. Sustainable Energy
 3. Circular Economy Solutions
- For inquiries, please contact: projects@riseint.org or call (+266) 5092 4084 / 5848 8060
<https://riseint.org/>
<https://web.facebook.com/riseint>
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/rise-int/>

Don't miss this opportunity to take your business to the next level! #Innovate #Grow #Lead

Need More Info? Join our virtual information sessions every **Monday, Wednesday, and Friday** from **November 24 to December 12, 2025** (details on the CAFI website). Call the Hub at 22315800 or email entreprhub@cafi.org.ls

56 Graduates From SADP II Project

By Topollo Tlali

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and Nutrition's Smallholder Agriculture Development Project (SADP II) celebrated a significant milestone with the graduation of 56 farmers from the country for completing an intensive capacity-building programme designed to transform smallholder agriculture into a commercially viable sector.

The event, held at Blue Mountain Inn, brought together farmers, government officials, financial institutions, development partners, and private-sector representatives, reflecting a united commitment to strengthening Lesotho's agricultural economy.

During the ceremony, Minister of Agriculture and Food Security and Nutrition Thabo Mofosi remarked that the graduation symbolised not only the successful completion of training but also the dawn of a new era of resilience, innovation, and inclusive growth in Lesotho's food production landscape. "I wish to extend my appreciation to all farmers; you are the backbone of our nation's economy. Your dedication, resilience, and innovation are vital for food production," he stated.

Mofosi emphasised that SADP II was specifically designed to empower smallholder farmers by enhancing productivity and improving livelihoods. He noted that the programme has already led to visible transformations, including the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices, the strengthening of farmer organisations, improved market access, increased commercialisation, job creation, better nutrition, and significant empowerment of women.

Farmers from various value chains shared their experiences, successes, and challenges.

Representatives from piggery, broiler production, vegetable farming, meat processing, milling, dairy, layers, and ram breeding recounted the evolution of their enterprises with the support of SADP II. Many urged the government to consider extending the project to benefit more farmers.

From the broiler category, Mpati Makotoko of Sunshine Poultry Farm expressed deep gratitude to SADP II for enabling them to expand their operations. "We managed to increase the number of chickens we rear, and we have been mentoring youth on proper slaughtering techniques," she said. She added that the support allowed their farm to diversify into crop production to supply local schools under the school-feeding programme.

A representative from River Site Farm, speaking on behalf of piggery farmers, highlighted that the project has significantly alleviated poverty and hunger within communities. "The farm now employs 32 workers, all paid according to labour laws. As the farm continues to grow, it will employ even more," the representative stated.

Following this, a panel discussion featured



representatives from First National Bank, Nedbank, Standard Lesotho Bank, PostBank, and LNIG-Holland, focusing on financial inclusion, credit access, and banking requirements for farmers. First National Bank's Mateboho Makara stressed the importance of record-keeping and legal registra-

tion. "Farmers should adopt a saving mentality to protect their farms. A registered farm with well-organised records gives banks the confidence to extend support," she explained. Private sector companies, including Econo Foods, Shoprite, Foso Hardware, and Farm

Fresh, discussed their involvement in agricultural commercialisation and reiterated their interest in sourcing quality produce from local farmers. Representatives emphasised the need for farmers to meet strict quality, safety, and packaging standards to compete effectively.

The ceremony also featured remarks from development partners, including the World Bank and IFAD. Daniel Gerber from the World Bank encouraged the graduates to view this moment as the beginning of their business journey. "You are graduating from the project as business owners fully equipped for the future. I hope to see your enterprises thriving in the next two years," he said.

IFAD's Emerson Zhou commended the farmers for their perseverance and urged them to become ambassadors of climate-smart agriculture. "You are the new generation of farmers supported to produce amidst the realities of climate change. The knowledge you have gained should be shared with others to enhance food production in Lesotho," he remarked.

During the certificate presentation, Minister Mofosi announced that the owner of Blue Mountain Inn expressed interest in purchasing products from the graduates for the remainder of the year — a gesture welcomed as immediate market access for the new graduates. The minister also addressed farmers' concerns raised during the event, including the necessity for milling companies to enter contractual agreements with farmers to stabilise production and market supply. He further assured farmers that the electricity challenges affecting agricultural enterprises would be addressed.



Farmers Unite Behind a Growing Call for Better Fodder Production

By Lungile Maseela

Farmers in the Leribe and Mohale's Hoek districts are transforming a shared agricultural challenge into a collective mission after a series of Fodder Dialogue and Demonstration events underscored the urgent need to enhance fodder production across Lesotho.

The first event took place in Phamong Bethel, Mohale's Hoek, on 6 November 2025, followed by another in Mphosong, Makhooaneng, Leribe, on 13 November 2025. Both gatherings were organised by the Rural Self-Help Development Association (RSDA) and the ReNOKA Integrated Catchment Management Programme. Though hosted separately, the events conveyed a unified message: restoring land, improving livestock feed, and increasing income, all of which are enabled by the intentional planting and management of fodder.

Addressing farmers in both districts, RSDA's Mampho Thulo urged communities to take ownership of land rehabilitation efforts under ReNOKA. She reminded farmers that the condition of their land directly affects the productivity of their animals and the economic stability of their households.

"Healthy land produces healthy animals, and healthy animals produce stronger communities," Thulo stated, emphasising that Basotho livestock already has an advantage in regional markets. She highlighted the growing demand for Lesotho's naturally raised, free-range livestock.

"Our farmers produce genuine grass-fed meat that is already sought after as far as Vanderbijl," she noted.

With agricultural specialists now stationed closer to farming communities, Thulo emphasised that farmers have more support than ever to improve fodder production and revitalise productivity on degraded lands.

While speaking in Leribe, she delivered a pointed message about work ethic and community responsibility, criticising the culture of "ho-huutsa"—a term she described as behaving "like a mule that refuses to work." She urged farmers to abandon such attitudes and join efforts to strengthen key rural industries such as wool, mohair, and pelts, which she stated remain "the backbone of rural income."

In Leribe, Thee Motseri of the Department of Range Resources Management, echoed this sentiment, urging farmers to move away from costly commercial feeds and instead cultivate their own fodder. "Feeding livestock poorly is akin to feeding your own children poorly. Animals cannot grow, reproduce, or produce quality wool, meat, or milk without nutritious fodder," he told the farmers.

Motseri highlighted that planting fodder has multiple benefits, including improved soil health. Many fodder crops, he explained, enrich the soil by fixing nutrients and enhancing structure, an advantage that is crucial in Lesotho's degraded landscapes. Farmers were encouraged to explore improved fodder varieties, including high-quality maize.

Representing ReNOKA, Lephatsoe Tsiane briefed community leaders and council members on the management of development funds. He explained that ReNOKA is primarily funded by Germany and aims to transform water, soil, and rangeland management through community-driven processes. Tsiane emphasised transparency and accountability.

"All funds are deposited directly into council accounts for community benefit. Any activity that does not align with community needs is halted immediately."

He added that ReNOKA collaborates closely with partners such as RSDA to empower local leaders and strengthen food security.

In Mohale's Hoek, Department of Crops officer Mojalefa Mohapi encouraged farmers to make better use of their fields and adopt soil conservation practices to prevent erosion. He emphasised the importance of planting high-value fodder varieties such as Lucerne or Alfalfa and, in the future, soya.

"Improved fodder offers significantly higher nutritional value than traditional grasses," he explained, emphasising its role in animal health, disease resistance, and wool production.

Motseri also identified key challenges farmers face when attempting to plant fodder, including limited land access, water shortages, outdated ploughing methods that rely heavily on animal traction, and insufficient knowledge of fertilisers and modern field management.

These constraints, he said, often lead farmers to prioritise food crops over fodder. However, with new training from ReNOKA, Motseri believes these practices will gradually improve.

One of the youngest voices at the events, fodder farmer Thora Mothibeli, encouraged young people to engage in fodder production, describing it as both sustainable and profitable. He shared how fodder has enabled him to feed his own animals and supply other farmers, despite facing equipment shortages. "Fodder improves animal nutrition and prevents many illnesses," he said, noting its growing importance in resilient livestock farming.



...40 young farmers receives inputs as Government Pushes to Empower 1,000 Young Farmers

SADC Warned to Act as 55 Million Face Hunger

...40 young farmers receives inputs as Government Pushes to Empower 1,000 Young Farmers

By Topollo Tlali

A stark warning has been issued to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) amid new evidence that the region is sliding deeper into a food and nutrition crisis.

Speaking at the launch of the SADC Indigenous Food Study Report, Former Lesotho's Ambassador to Italy, Rome Thesele Maseribane, stated that the region can no longer ignore the alarming figures revealing worsening hunger, stunting, and overdependence on food imports.

"The revelation that more than 55 million people face food insecurity, surviving on less than one US dollar, and that more than 25 per cent of children under five experience stunting, is of grave concern as it speaks to the state and quality of our human capital."

The new SADC study, conducted across 15 countries using literature reviews, in-country interviews, and expert validation, echoed his sentiments, recording that 42.2 million people in the region cannot afford a healthy diet, while droughts, cyclones, heatwaves and disrupted supply chains continue to erode food access. Yet, despite the decline of conventional food systems, the region's indigenous crops, livestock and traditional knowledge remain overlooked, underdeveloped, and poorly commercialised.

Former Ambassador Maseribane remarked that the region is now paying the price for its heavy reliance on imported staples.

"With 80 per cent of SADC member states depending on imported wheat and wheat products, this situation is untenable. It has a huge negative impact on overall development. This is a rude awakening for us and must compel us to urgently focus our attention on the production, processing, and consumption of our own indigenous traditional foods."

According to the study, indigenous foods such as sorghum, amaranth, breadfruit, cowpea, village chick-

en, cassava and local fish species offer some of the most climate-resilient solutions available today. They can withstand harsh conditions, tolerate drought and poor soils and provide richer nutrients than most imported staples.

"These foods are resistant to climatic changes and adapt to weather patterns, assuring sustainable food security," Maseribane emphasised.

He added that science now confirms their superior nutritional value.

"Indigenous plant-based foods are high in fibre and whole grains, and foods such as mopani worms provide essential protein and vitamins."

The study found that although millions rely on these foods informally, indigenous value chains remain weak, dominated by smallholders who lack access to seed, irrigation, post-harvest storage, processing technology, and formal markets. Supply is seasonal and unreliable, with middlemen benefitting more than producers. Private sector participation remains minimal due to perceptions of risk and a lack of supportive policy frameworks.

Maseribane stated that this gap cannot continue, noting that to ensure sustainable good human health, particularly in rural areas, there is a great need to implement regenerative agriculture and organic farming.

The study supports this, showing that over 70 per cent of rural soils in SADC are poor, sandy, or acidic, damaged by chemical inputs and erosion.

"Poor soils cannot provide healthy food. We must feed the soil with organic matter so that the soil can feed the crops and livestock."

He linked degraded soils and poor diets to the dramatic rise in lifestyle diseases, citing that by consuming healthy indigenous foods, "we can automatically reduce the risk of diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, cancers, hypertension, chronic stress, and dementia."

Maseribane insisted that indigenous foods must return to the centre of diets and public institutions, urging a push where indigenous foods are part of school meals, hospital meals, sports nutrition and even military rations."

The study expands on this vision, recommending that governments introduce indigenous foods into school feeding programmes, prisons, hospitals and public procurement systems. It proposes branding these foods in local languages to reclaim cultural identity and improve consumer trust, a point Maseribane emphasised, saying "the time has come for our children to be encouraged to consume and identify with our healthy traditional foods rather than being fed junk."

The report also highlights significant infrastructure gaps across the region. Farmers lack packhouses, cold storage, processing machinery, and rural roads—shortcomings that lead to high post-harvest losses. It calls for investment in processing plants, rural electrification, solar-powered technologies, water management, and value-addition enterprises. Maseribane echoed this, urging the protection of indigenous water sources—rivers, wetlands, and underground aquifers—as food safety begins with water quality. "Our water must remain non-chemical and healthy," he said.

To enhance market opportunities, the report identifies a "huge and growing opportunity" for private-sector involvement, noting that the SADC region's market size exceeds 300 million people, making indigenous value chains commercially viable. Maseribane agreed that business incentives, policy reforms, and support for entrepreneurship are urgently needed, emphasising that private investment must align with community needs and cultural preservation.

Universities and research institutes were also encouraged to play a central role. The report highlights the need for action-based research, seed system devel-

opment, and innovation in food processing, storage, and product diversification. Ambassador Maseribane called on higher education institutions to deliver solutions that matter to communities, stressing that a multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral approach would accelerate rural industrialisation and societal transformation.

Throughout his address, he frequently acknowledged the leadership that has prioritised nutrition across Africa.

"I would like to recognise and appreciate the tremendous work being carried out by His Majesty King Letsie III, as he continues to drive the nutrition agenda for the African continent," he said. He also honoured Zimbabwe's First Lady, Dr Auxillia Mnangagwa, "for promoting the empowerment of women, youth, and people with disabilities through Agric4SHE and gastronomy."

He further expressed appreciation to the researchers and partners behind the study, affirming Lesotho's commitment to implementing the study's recommendations. "We are fully committed to implementation and have already begun exploring the establishment of a SADC Regional Hub Initiative," he said.

The study concludes with a simple yet powerful message that frames indigenous foods not as relics of the past but as the continent's most strategic resource for the future. "Indigenous foods are SADC's hidden gold," the report states, "nutrient-dense, climate-resilient, and economically empowering."

Ambassador Maseribane's closing words reinforced the responsibility now placed on governments, communities, and institutions across the region. "We must be food secure and food sovereign," he said. "We cannot continue depending on imported food for our livelihoods. Our future lies in our own foods, our own seeds, our own knowledge, and the wisdom of our ancestors."

SADP II Youth Inputs Programme Gains Momentum



By Lungile Maseela

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition has intensified its youth empowerment agenda by distributing agricultural inputs to 40 young representatives in Maseru.

This initiative is part of a national programme aiming to support 1,000 youth across the country.

Under the Smallholder Agriculture Development Project II (SADP II), this effort seeks to tackle Lesotho’s rising youth unemployment while enhancing agricultural productivity.

At the handover ceremony, Minister Thabo Mofosi expressed the government’s keen awareness of the pressing challenges faced by young Basotho in securing meaningful employment. He noted the concerns raised by Prime Minister Samuel Ntsokoane Matekane regarding the socio-economic risks associated with increasing youth joblessness, which have driven the introduction and expansion of SADP II to foster youth-led agricultural development.

Minister Mofosi explained that SADP II is designed not only to provide young people with farming tools and inputs but also to offer them

a pathway into entrepreneurship.

“Agriculture may not directly employ every young person, but it can equip many of you with the skills and resources to create your own opportunities and eventually employ others,” he stated.

He urged beneficiaries to utilise the inputs effectively, viewing this support as the foundation for long-term livelihoods that can contribute to reducing Lesotho’s unemployment rate.

Mofosi challenged the youth to move away from what he described as a growing culture of hopelessness. Referencing derogatory comments once attributed to former U.S. President Donald Trump about African people being lazy. He urged young Basotho to dispel such stereotypes; “Let’s work hard so that we do not earn disdain from other nations by taking care of what sustains us,” he said.

The Minister reminded recipients that the success or failure of this programme will directly reflect on the Prime Minister’s broader vision for youth-driven economic transformation. “Do not disappoint the Prime Minister,” he urged. “Use these inputs to stimulate job creation and become part of Lesotho’s economic renewal.”

The 40 youth who received inputs represent

the initial group in this district rollout. Each participant received materials tailored to their production focus: feed and chicks for broiler and layer producers; seeds, fertiliser, and crop treatments for horticulture and potato farmers; and tools and technical support for nursery and vegetable growers. This initiative is part of the Ministry’s larger commitment to equip at least 1,000 young farmers with inputs, mentorship, and access to extension services.

Mofosi emphasised that the Ministry will continue to support the youth after the distribution. “We will ensure that the inputs are used effectively throughout the project,” he assured the group, stating that extension workers, SADP II officers, and district mentors will monitor progress and provide technical guidance.

He also addressed ongoing challenges that have previously hindered development projects, strongly condemning the illegal resale of donated tools and machinery. “We cannot continue to lose resources intended to uplift our communities,” the Minister said, urging both youth and adults to safeguard government investments.

The inputs programme is closely linked to the Ministry’s broader regional vision. Mofosi revealed that Lesotho is enhancing collaboration

with Botswana and eSwatini to create a shared agricultural market that could benefit Basotho exports. “Our aim is to unify these three countries and work together. This initiative will help Basotho export to these nations with products we excel in producing,” he said.

The Youth-to-1,000 pledge, announced earlier this year, has become one of the Ministry’s most ambitious initiatives. It is focused not only on input distribution but also on the SADP II Mentorship Programme, which pairs young farmers with experienced producers who guide them in climate-smart agriculture, business planning, and commercialisation. The Ministry believes that equipping youth with both resources and knowledge is essential for transforming subsistence farming into profitable agribusiness.

As the distribution continues across other districts, the Minister has pledged to prioritise follow-up support, ensure proper use of equipment, and strengthen market linkages for youth-led enterprises. Mofosi reiterated that the government views agriculture as central to national development. “This programme will not only enhance youth livelihoods,” he said, “but also transform agricultural output and the economic prospects of our country.”





GROWTH

ISSUE 1 November 2025



Shared prosperity



Apart from creating an enabling legislative and regulatory framework for businesses to thrive, it also seeks to nurture businesses by supporting both start-ups and existing enterprises with skills development, funding and equipment acquisition.

Minister's Note

LESOTHO's economy is at a crossroads, facing both perennial and emerging challenges. Unemployment, particularly among the youth and women, has worsened in recent years. Climate change, inadequate farming practices, insufficient funding, and a lack of skills have left our agriculture in doldrums.

Manufacturing, particularly in textiles, is struggling due to tariffs in the United States and competition from other markets.

Our micro, small and medium enterprises have to contend with limited access to finance, red tape, poor support structures and a lack of management capacity.

Large companies face similar challenges. Bureaucratic hurdles in both the setting up and running of businesses have frustrated domestic and foreign investors.

Meanwhile, emerging technological trends sweeping across the globe have shaken our fragile economy to the core.

Yet it's not all doom and gloom. I am proud to say that our government has been taking these challenges head-on.

The Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion (CAFI) project, funded by the World Bank and led by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Business Development, bears testimony to the government's commitment and drive to resolve those challenges.

Based on the main pillars of the National Strategic Development Plans (I and II), the project comprehensively addresses the structural issues hindering economic growth.

Apart from creating an enabling legislative and regulatory framework for businesses to thrive, it also seeks to nurture businesses by supporting both start-ups and existing enterprises with skills development, funding and equipment acquisition.

It also sets the foundational legislative and institutional pillars to unlock access to finance.

At the time of this edition, dozens of companies have been supported to acquire modern equipment to boost their production capacity.

Some 150 enterprises, primarily owned by young people and women, have received incubation and funding. The majority are thriving, with periodic reports showing exponential growth in production, employment numbers and market penetration.

Over 100 farmers nationwide have participated in an intensive pre-incubation program to enhance their skills.

As we share this edition, we celebrate the progress of seven fruit farmers who, through the support of the Lesotho Horticultural Incubation and Training Center and with continued training, assessment and funding, are thriving and shaping a brighter future for horticulture in Lesotho.

The project's efforts to build strong value chains have put the textile sector on the path to recovery.

Critically, all these initiatives are being implemented with a strong focus on environmental sustainability.

This newsletter features inspiring stories of Basotho seizing opportunities offered by CAFI to enhance their businesses and contribute to the economy.

The success of their businesses will create jobs and business opportunities for others.

You will read about start-ups launched with nothing but dreams and passion.

Some businesses rose from proverbial deathbeds to holding their own in the economy. We have stories of backyard and rudimentary operations transformed into sustainable businesses with strong management, financial, production, quality control and human resources systems.

Plots once considered merely sources of basic sustenance have been turned into commercial fruit and horticulture farms employing dozens of permanent and seasonal workers.

Textile companies that had outdated and unreliable machines have acquired modern equipment, enabling them to supply regional retailers more efficiently. These stories not only demonstrate CAFI's impact but also inspire others to relentlessly pursue their dreams.

They show that Basotho are capable of building their own businesses to compete both locally and globally.

I hope these stories inspire everyone to take their destiny into their hands as we strive to build a future of shared prosperity.

As you read these stories, let's remember to acknowledge the dedication of the CAFI team, funders, ministry officials, Project beneficiaries and implementing Agencies who make this project a success.

I appreciate their support and urge them to continue working on initiatives that transform our economy.

Mokhethi Shelile

The Honourable Minister of Trade, Industry and Business Development

For greater good

Principal Secretary's Memo

THE milestones of the Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion (CAFI) project over the past three years are a vivid illustration of the great things we can achieve through commitment, hard work and collaboration.

They are a clear indication of the great strides we can make when projects are in sync with the government's national development agenda. Funded by the World Bank, the CAFI project speaks to the mandate of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Business Development.

At the core is the drive to stimulate economic growth that creates sustainable jobs and achieves shared prosperity.

The government understands that it cannot continue to dominate the economy and should focus on its role of creating an enabling environment for the private sector to thrive.

The government is implementing reforms to eliminate barriers to private sector growth.

I am proud to say the regulatory

reforms implemented over the past few years have improved Lesotho's environment. We have cut both red tape and the time it takes for businesses to comply with regulations.

The Lesotho Enterprise Hub and Seed Financing Facility has so far funded and incubated 150 enterprises, which include a significant number led by women and youth. The fourth cohort has been successfully onboarded and is progressing well, while ESOs for the fifth cohort have been identified and enterprise selection is currently underway.

The Lesotho Horticultural Incubation and Training Centre, which is set to transform our agriculture, is incubating seven fruit farmers and has capacitated 190 farmers.

The Lesotho Enterprise Support Programme (LEAP) has been revamped to provide equipment support to enterprises.

At the same time, we are building mechanisms to support Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises to withstand climatic shocks and disasters.

And more importantly, all these interventions are being implemented

with a strong commitment to Environmental and social sustainability.

It gives me great pleasure to announce that the CAFI project remains unwavering in its commitment to transparency and accountability.

The World Bank has praised the project's work.

The Auditor General has also consistently issued unqualified audit opinions since the project started in 2022. CAFI is thus a shining example of good governance and astute financial management.

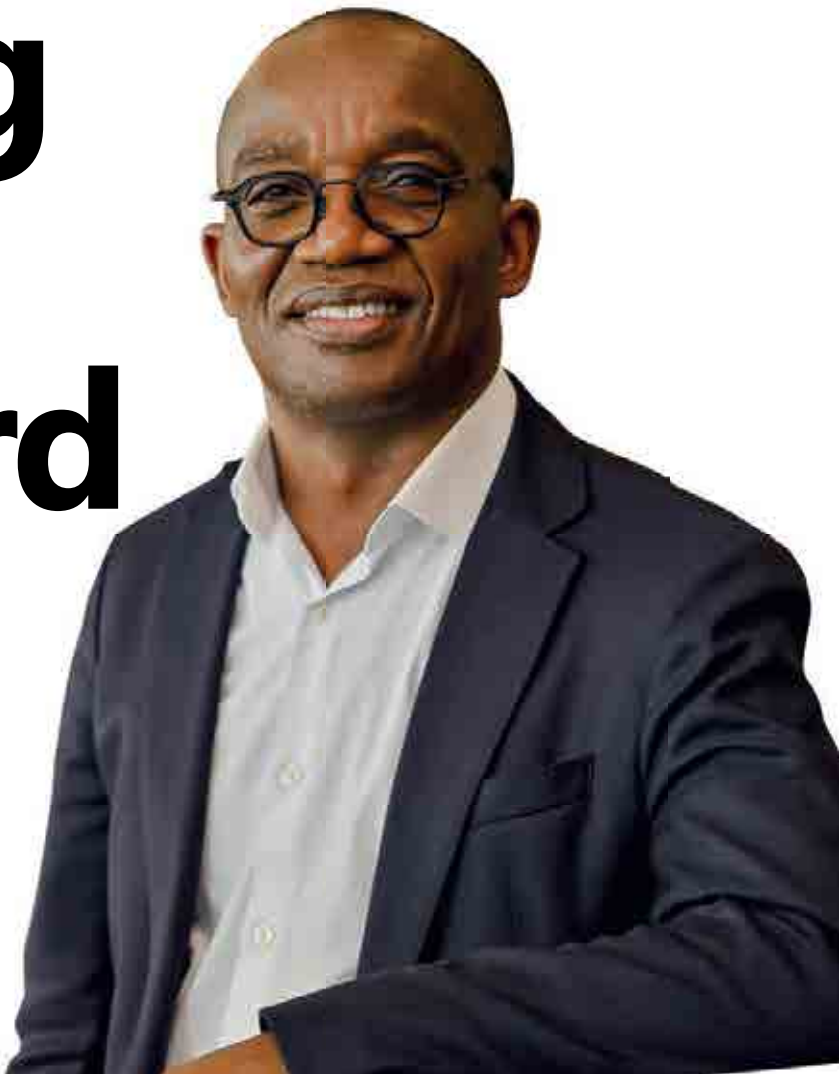
It is a reputation earned through hard work and discipline.

Palesa Matobako

Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Business Development



Sowing the mustard seed



Managing Director's message

As we reach the midterm milestone of the Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion (CAFI) Project, I am proud to reflect on the significant strides we have made in strengthening Lesotho's business environment and private sector.

Funded by the World Bank and led by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Business Development, the CAFI Project remains a cornerstone of private sector development. The project is driving transformative change and laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and competitive economy.

Our goal is to increase access to business support services and financial products for MSMEs and entrepreneurs, especially women and youth. We pursue this by improving the overall business environment, strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem and MSME competitiveness, and enhancing SME participation in high-potential value chains.

The focus of the project in levelling the playing field is to improve Government-to-Business (G2B) digital services, making processes such as business registration, licensing, and trade facilitation more efficient and transparent.

By utilising technology, we not only reduce business time and costs but also promote an ecosystem of trust and accountability.

The successful deployment of the Lesotho Single Window for Business Facilitation and the Lesotho National Single Window (LNSW) for Trade Facilitation, both to be fully operational by early 2026, exemplifies our dedication to this goal.

In addition to streamlining G2B services, the CAFI project recognises the critical importance of financial access for individuals and enterprises. By enhancing our credit infrastructure, including improvements in credit reporting, the secured transactions regime and the insolvency landscape, we are paving the way for greater financial inclusion.

Our focus on supporting youth and women

entrepreneurs through the establishment of an entrepreneurship hub, a seed financing facility, and a matching grant scheme has already yielded positive outcomes, empowering many to pursue and realise their business aspirations. These achievements are reflected in the inspiring, down-to-earth stories of entrepreneurs featured in this newsletter.

Moreover, as we navigate the challenges posed by climate change, our commitment to building resilience among Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) is unwavering. The development of a Disaster Risk Financing Strategy, and a resilience fund, is a vital step toward safeguarding our businesses against climate-related shocks and disasters.

In parallel, we are intensifying efforts to unlock opportunities in high-potential value chains. We aim to enhance the participation of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in commercial horticulture, specifically focusing on high-value crops like deciduous fruits.

Our targeted support is designed to boost competitiveness, increase export potential, and create sustainable livelihoods in rural areas.

This includes investments in agribusiness capacity building, value addition, and improved market access.

Additionally, the CAFI project is responding proactively to global market shifts that have adversely affected Lesotho's textiles and apparel sector, particularly the impact of the new US tariffs.

In collaboration with industry stakeholders, we are pursuing a revitalisation strategy that supports product diversification, promotes regional market integration, and upgrades skills and technology within the sector to preserve jobs and drive future growth.

The CAFI project also emphasises the importance of collaboration between the public

and private sectors.

Through our Public-Private Dialogue initiatives, we are actively identifying and removing obstacles to investment, ensuring a conducive environment for growth.

The investment climate action plan is a testament to our proactive approach in fostering a supportive business landscape.

Our achievements to date would not have been possible without the strong collaboration with implementing agencies and beneficiaries, whose partnership and dedication have been central to the project's success.

We are equally proud of our consistent compliance with the World Bank and Government of Lesotho fiduciary rules and regulations, as well as our adherence to social and environmental safeguards.

Above all, the CAFI project maintains a zero-tolerance policy towards corruption and all forms of malpractice, reinforcing our commitment to transparency, integrity, and responsible project implementation.

As we reflect on our accomplishments at this midpoint, I would like to express my gratitude to all stakeholders involved in this transformative journey.

Your dedication and support have been instrumental in advancing the CAFI project.

We are on a promising path, and I am excited to see what we will achieve together in the coming months. Thank you to all our stakeholders for your unwavering dedication to driving Lesotho's economic growth forward!

Chaba Mokuku

Managing Director



DIRECTOR Implementation, 'Makali Nathane



MONITORING and Evaluation Specialist, Lehlohonolo Mpholle



ACCESS to Finance Specialist, Thabo Monyane



PROCUREMENT Specialist, Tanki Mohejane



FINANCIAL Management, Thato Mokhutšoane



ENVIRONMENTAL and Social Safeguards Specialist, Mathoka Khaile



MSME RESILIENCE Coordinator, Molehe Mokone



LHITC Manager, Nthako Supu



LEHSFF Acting Manager, 'Mamoriti Phangoa



LEAP Manager, Lehlohonolo Chefa



MAMORITI Phangoa

Hub of hope

THE Lesotho Entrepreneurship Hub and Seed Financing Facility (LEHSFF) has funded and incubated 150 enterprises under three cohorts. The fourth cohort has been successfully onboarded and is progressing well, while ESOs for the fifth cohort have been identified and enterprise selection is currently underway. Twenty-seven Enterprise Support Organisations (ESOs) were engaged. Mamoriti Phangoa, the hub's Acting Manager, says the first three cohorts have created 1250 permanent and temporary jobs. Phangoa says 59 percent of the enterprises incubated so far are women-led, while 20 percent are youth-led. She says most of the incubated enterprises have significantly improved their revenues.

"Fourteen percent of those incubated have increased their revenues and 32 percent have increased their employment numbers," Phangoa says, adding that some enterprises are still "work in progress, but they are on course to increase their revenues". "Some of the benefits of the incubation are yet to kick in because some were start-ups while others are still in recovery mode." "What is, however, clear is that the enterprises have immensely benefited from the incubation in terms of skills and capital." Phangoa says the past three cohorts have resulted in critical lessons for both the hub and the ESOs. "We keep refining the system as we gain more insights from the incubation."

CAFI Project	
Performance Data by Component 2	
Lesotho Entrepreneurship Hub & Seed Financing Facility (LEHSFF)	
LEHSFF	
Number of Enterprises completed incubation	150
Number of Enterprises on current incubation	46
Of which are woman-led enterprises	54%
Of which are youth-led enterprises	43%
Of which have increased revenue in real-terms	56%
Of which have increased employment in real-terms	45%
Value of Investment to these enterprises (LSL)	19,375,012
Number of sustainable jobs created (month-to-month)	1,250
Number of Enterprise Support Organizations capacitated	27
Number of ESOs Engaged to date	18
Value of Funding to the ESOs	7,362,507

Table 1: General Statistics on the LEHSFF

Counting beads

Maseru

STARTING a business was the last thing on Paballo Tlhaole's mind when she completed her Tourism Management degree at Limkokwing University of Creative Technology. Tlhaole wanted a job, and she set out to find one. But after a few freelancing jobs, she realised she was fighting a tough battle. "Companies were just not hiring permanent staff. I could not make ends meet from what I earned as a freelancer," Tlhaole says. "I started looking for something to keep myself busy while I waited for another freelancing opportunity." So when she wasn't working, Tlhaole would help her sister make earrings, bracelets and necklaces as a hobby. It wasn't long before she realised that her sister's past time had the potential to be transformed into a business. "I had always believed that you start with the little you have and grow it. And here I was, doing something that I really enjoyed and could be turned into a business." Over the next few months, Tlhaole and her sister registered I Do Beads and opened a studio-cum-shop in Maseru West. "The start wasn't great, but we were getting some orders that kept the lights on." But when I Do Beads was only two years old, disaster struck. One morning in 2017, the sisters woke up to find their shop empty.

It had been robbed the previous night. "They (thieves) stole everything. The little cash we had, the stock and our tools were all gone." After years of toiling, Tlhaole and her sister were back to square one. "We had been struggling to build the business, and that robbery knocked us out." "We knew resuscitating the business would be a long and painful journey." Indeed, the next five years were tough. Without capital, they could not make enough accessories to keep the business going. Desperate, they shifted back to hobby mode. "We were getting occasional orders, but truly speaking, we could not call it a business. I Do Beads existed only in name." They, however, kept on the corporate doors for orders. They were also trying to convince shops to take their products. Their perseverance

eventually paid off in 2022 when they landed a huge order for awareness ribbons from two local companies. "Those orders were so big that we opened our shop and studio," Tlhaole says. Then, in February 2024, they saw an advert inviting businesses to pitch for a grant and incubation under the Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion (CAFI) project. Tlhaole says once they were accepted, she knew this was the breakthrough they needed. She says while the financial grant helped the business buy raw materials to boost their stock, it is the training, mentorship, technical and psychosocial support during the six-month incubation that transformed their business. Over the next six months, I Do Beads implemented financial, administration and quality control systems. "We now had clear systems to manage the business and operations. We had a financial structure, as well as policies to guide us." She says that these systems and policies simplified tracking growth, making financial projections, and meeting tax obligations on time. The result, Tlhaole adds, has been a 100 percent growth in business over the past year.



Their staff complement has also increased from four to eight. They have a new payment system which includes a Point of Sale machine. Tlhaole and her sister are now giving back to communities and dreaming big. They now have an art and entrepreneurship mentorship and training project in Lithabaneng. The main target is young people and small businesses. When resources permit, they make donations to local charities. I do Beads is also farming out the manufacturing of its products to small groups in the districts. "We are training them to make our products but the main goal is to equip them with the skills to make a living from art and crafts." "So far, we have done training in Sehlabethebe and Polihali". Their

products are now in Semonkong Lodge, Milco, Curio Shop, Lifestyle Books and Shipa. I Do Beads is now making forays into the regional and international markets. "We aim to establish shops in the districts before expanding regionally and globally." With their best-selling culturally-inspired earrings performing well, the sisters are now designing new products such as travel souvenirs and trivia games. In May this year, they started an event where parents bring their children to make their own earrings and other crafts. Tlhaole says the events, which happen on weekends, are "always fully booked".

and Seed Financing Facility

Sea Point

GIFTED Hand is a customised furniture manufacturing company owned by twin sisters Lerato Mampiti Thamae and Thato Matlotla Morojele.

Having both studied Political Science and Administration at the University of Lesotho, none of the sisters ever dreamt of owning a furniture business.

None of them has ever made any wood product.

Morojele worked at a telecommunications company while Thamae spent her free time making small crafts that she sold to friends and relatives who fancied them.

One day, Thamae came across a YouTube video of someone making furniture. She showed it to Morojele, who was also intrigued. A seed had been planted.

Over the next few months, the sisters bought used wood pallets and started experimenting with different furniture designs.

When they got stuck, they watched YouTube videos for knowledge and inspiration. Then, in 2019, someone asked them to make a study desk for him.

"We were not really sure if we could pull it off but we said we could do it," Thamae says.

"We delivered the desk a few days later and the customer was thrilled. And from there the word spread."

Within a few months they had made ten study desks.

"That might sound small, yet for people coming from zero production like us, that was huge."

"Each time we made a desk, we would post it on Facebook and there would be more orders."

Thamae says the fact that people worked from home during the Covid pandemic increased the demand for their desks.

They operated from a garage for four years before being selected for incubation through CAFI's Entrepreneurship Hub and Seed Financing Facility.

Thamae says the biggest lesson from the six-month incubation was marketing and brand positioning.

"After interacting with our coach and technical experts, we began to understand that our business model was geared for the top end of the fur-



Gifted Hands

niture market," Thamae says.

"It's one thing to say what your business is and quite another to write it down and articulate it."

"Our Enterprise Support Organisation (ESO), Iggle Consulting, helped us refine and better understand our business models."

"They took us through the entire process of building a successful furniture business."

Gifted Hands has used the grant from CAFI to move from the garage into a spacious building in Sea Point, where they have offices, a workshop and a display room.

Morojele, however, says there are already signs that the building could soon be too small for them.

"We have been here for a few months, but we are realising that we need a bigger workshop and display room because we are getting some big orders," says Morojele, who quit her job to work full-time at Gifted Hands. They also bought machines and hired marketing staff. Gifted

Hand employs 15 people.

Only two of the nine in the workshop are trained carpenters.

"The rest were hired because of their passion and willingness to learn. Because we started with no experience, we believe we should give people without training or experience a chance to prove themselves," Thamae explains.

The company is targeting a monthly turnover of about M350 000 within the next six months. "So far, we are doing between M150 000 and M300 000. We can, however, see the potential to reach M350 000 soon."

"Because of help from CAFI, the brand is growing while our marketing team is making some headway in the market."

Thamae says their success so far should inspire young people to be brave enough to start their own businesses.

"Learn the skill and perfect it. Teach yourself every day. And don't be afraid of failure."



The park in Ramabanta

Ramabanta

On the banks of the Makhaleng River lies Ramabanta Park, a resort that is still a work in progress.

Bosiu Lehlohonolo, the 50-year-old owner, has been slowly growing the resort since he started it in 2012 after selling his taxis.

Today, Ramabanta Park has six rooms. In addition to camping and picnic facilities, the park offers horse riding and hiking.

The pristine stream just beneath the park is excellent for swimming.

Ask Lehlohonolo what else he wants to do with the park and he will tell you of water sports, a water fun park, a huge braai area and Quad bikes. His immediate ambition is, however, modest.

He wants to add more rooms and build a modern kitchen. He says he realised the possibilities of what more he could do at the park when he participated in CAFI's Entrepreneurship Hub and Seed Financing Facility in 2024.

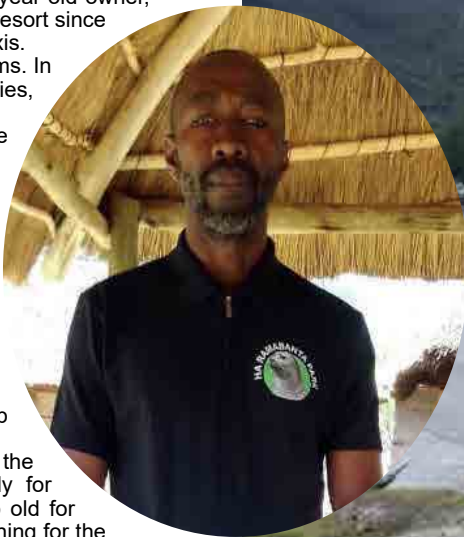
"At first, I was doubtful when I saw the advert inviting entrepreneurs to apply for incubation. At 50, I thought I was too old for incubation. My business had been running for the past 12 years," Lehlohonolo say.

"I now realise I was wrong because the incubation is just what I needed to open my eyes to the kind of legacy I can build for my family".

For years, he managed the facility primarily as a park, focusing on day visitors who wanted to have picnics and attend events.

"The incubation showed me that this could grow from being just a park to a full-fledged resort. I now understand what it means to be in the hospitality sector."

With the grant, he started building six more rooms which he expects to complete by December, just in time for the influx



of visitors.

The rooms, which will accommodate 12 people, have been roofed and work is about to start on the bathrooms. Beds and other fittings have been ordered.

He says because the park is off the grid, he has acquired solar lights and geysers. The incubation, he adds, has helped him gain a better understanding of hospitality, landscaping, marketing and financial management. They have spruced up their Facebook page with fresh content.

Last year, he launched the Bona Lesotho Festival after his Enterprise Support Organisation (ESO) encouraged him to organise events beyond just the festive season.

"It was a good start and we are hoping to keep the festival going," Lehlohonolo says, adding that business has been growing steadily since the incubation.

He has added three more people to his staff and five temporary employees who come in when the park is busy.

The star from Mt Moorosi

Maseru

“BEFORE the incubation business was tough,” says Thomello Pokola, the owner of Simpok Suppliers, a textile company.

“We were running the business like a spaza shop. We could not track our revenue growth.” Pokola is a typical example of a man who started from humble beginnings.

Between 2007 and 2009, he was selling clothes in Mt Moorosi.

He would travel to Johannesburg every three days to get new stock.

“I was making enough to sustain myself, but it was a tough business. There was also competition from other traders who were slashing their prices to get ahead.”

In 2009, Pokola enrolled for a Fashion and Apparel Design degree at Limkokwing University of Creative Technology.

He graduated in 2012 and immediately partnered with friends to start a textile manufacturing business.

“When things did not work out, I decided to start my own.”

Today, Simpok Suppliers manufactures workwear, Personal Protective Equipment and uniforms for schools and churches.

Pokola, 39, credits the six months he spent under CAFI’s incubation for helping him understand marketing and financial management.

“I can now trace profitability in the business and have a clear executable business strategy.”

After completing the incubation, he increased his staff from two to five. The business has also increased the number of its sewing machines from three to ten.

“There is a market difference in sales,” he says.

Simpok Suppliers has also opened a retail shop. The business is now getting bigger orders from corporates. Pokola says participating in the incubation has enhanced his business goodwill and credibility.

Companies are now listening to our story and looking at our product. It has improved our reputation and we are getting good orders

“Apart from teaching us new skills and giving seed funding, the incubation has also marketed our business.”

“Companies are now listening to our story and looking at our product. It has improved our reputation and we are getting good orders.” Pokolo says his dream is to get a factory shell to start a Cut, Make and Trim business before going into design.

He is now saving to buy more apparel printing machines.

As for what the business has done for his life, Pokola says it has given him a career and



financial stability.

“It’s a legitimate business that attracts legitimate customers.”

He says it’s a business that can inspire other young people in Mount Moorosi.

“I want them to know that if I could make it, so can they. I am not running a conglomerate but Simpok Suppliers is something that should inspire them to start their own businesses.”



Back with a bang

Maseru

KHOBOSO Matsoakeletse, 45, thought the Covid-19 pandemic would last a few weeks and she would soon be back in business. Bozo Design, a textile company she had started after completing her Fashion Design degree at the Natal Technikon in 2008, was her source of pride and livelihood.

“I just could not believe a business I had built over more than ten years would just collapse because of a pandemic,” Matsoakeletse says.

“I thought we had survived bigger crises”. But as weeks turned into months, she realised that her business was going under. She re-trenched her three employees, closed the shop and started working from her home.

“Things kept getting worse until I stopped working because I was not getting any orders.”

For the next two years, Matsoakeletse didn’t do much work. She also sold some of her sewing machines to raise money for food.

“The pressure was terrible. My mental health suffered.” When the lockdown eased, Matsoakeletse started picking the pieces.

The recovery was slow. The economy had suffered during the lockdown, and her customers were struggling.

“The customers were focused on buying food instead of fashion. Clothes were not on their list of priorities.”

“At 45, the future looked bleak. Fashion design was the only business I knew and it didn’t look like I would be able to revive it.”

Matsoakeletse says she struggled for the next two years until she was selected for the incubation.

The incubation, she says, taught her to manoeuvre through crises.

“I understood that the only way to deal with a business crisis is to be prepared.”

Since completing the incubation, Bozo has recalled the three employees she had re-



trenched.

The studio has reopened and orders are trickling in.

Matsoakeletse says apart from the technical knowledge and the grant, the incubation also came with the psychological support she desperately needed to cope with the challenges of running a business that has just survived a crisis “

The session with the psychologist under the incubation helped me through the most difficult time in my business.”

Bozo Design is also rejigging its business model to include ready-to-wear fashion because relying on orders is not sustainable. Although business has been picking up, Matsoakeletse is cautious about hiring more staff.

“Before going through the incubation, I would have simply hired more people. I now understand that you have to be strategic.”

“You have to watch if the growth is sustainable and justify more hands before you bring in more people. We will hire more people as the orders increase.”

For now, Matsoakeletse is hiring on short-term contracts. She has developed Bozo Home Lux, a high-end brand of kitchen aprons.

With CAFI’s help, she had been attending international expos to open new markets and find opportunities to collaborate with other brands.

“I want us to understand that fashion is not just about dressmaking but telling stories. I would like our fashion designs to tell our stories locally and internationally”.

From boardroom to the farm

Korokoro

FIVE years ago, Mohau Mofoka was an officer at a business consultancy firm in Maseru.

“I was happy using the knowledge acquired during my B.Com Marketing degree at the National University of Lesotho to help businesses,” Mofoka says.

Yet every time he asked some of his clients what business they would rather be doing, he kept getting the same answer.

“Most of them would say go into agriculture because the start-up costs are low and it’s easy to learn.” So in 2019, Mofoka left his job and started a small horticulture business in Korokoro.

Mofoka Agri Projects is now a thriving eight-acre farm supplying cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli to Pick ‘n Pay, Maluti Fresh Produce, Stadium Food Court, and Galittos. He was selected for CAFI’s incubation programme in March this year. “The most important lesson from the past six months of incubation is financial management,” Mofoka says.

The grant that came with the incubation has been used to drill a borehole, fence the farm and acquire a shed net for a seed nursery.

Mofoka Agri Projects has 13 employees, five permanent employees and nine temporary. Mofoka believes many young people don’t consider agriculture a business because “it doesn’t have the glamour they thought they would have after completing their studies”.

Most of them would say go into agriculture because the start-up costs are low and it’s easy to learn

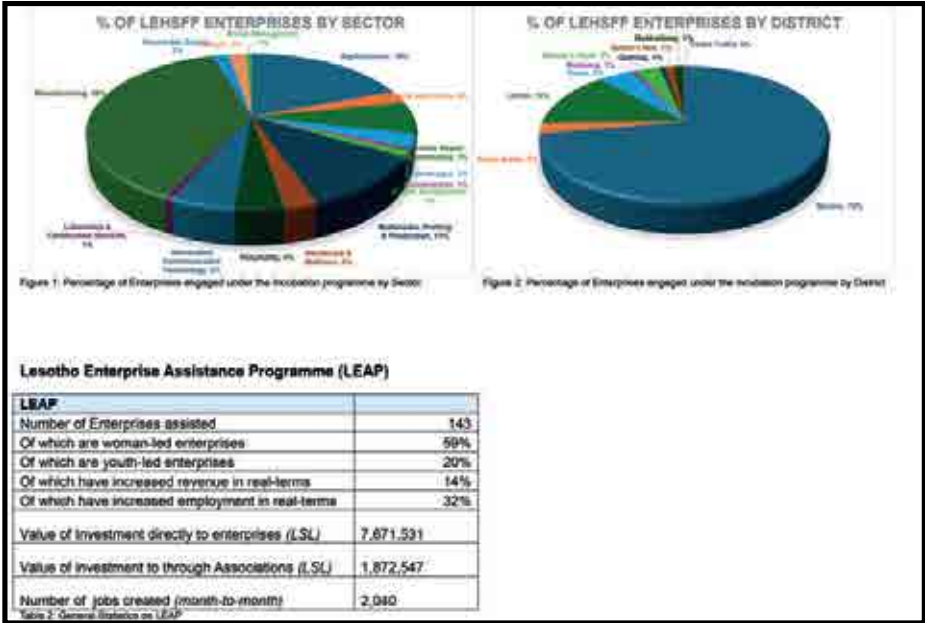
“They don’t want to get their hands dirty and I would say that is unfortunate because there is so much potential in agriculture.”

He says he used his savings to start the farm.

“You don’t have to buy land because you can lease it.

“Although the returns are not exceptional, you can earn a decent living from the land.”

“If it were up to me, agriculture would be a compulsory subject in high school,” he says.



Maseru

THE Lesotho Enterprise Assistance Programme (LEAP) has been transformed to broaden its scope beyond support for marketing and capacity building for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). In addition to skills development, access to markets, technology adaptation and standards, the revamped LEAP now supports equipment acquisition.

Lehlohonolo Chefa, the LEAP Manager, says the pilot for equipment acquisition support began with the textile sector last year.

This, Chefa says, is a direct response to the challenges faced by locals who wanted to break into the textile sector dominated by foreign investors.

The few locally owned textile companies are struggling to compete for large orders that drive the production levels necessary for survival.

Chefa states that the intervention was critical because most medium and large textile companies are owned by foreign investors.

Chefa explains that the success of the pilot program laid the foundation for LEAP to expand its support to MSMEs in manufacturing, agriculture, and the tourism and creative industries, which are all priority areas under the National Strategic Development Plan II.

The main goal, Chefa says, is for the companies to improve their productivity or growth while also building their resilience to climatic shocks. The impact of LEAP support is already visible among the beneficiaries. So far, LEAP has supported 143 enterprises, of which 59 percent are women-led and 20 percent are youth-led.

At least 14 percent of beneficiaries have increased their revenues, while 32 percent have expanded their workforce.

Just over M5.1 million has been invested directly in enterprises and M1.1 million has been channelled through associations. The support has sustained over 200 jobs. Chefa believes this is just the beginning of what MSMEs could achieve if they are assisted with equipment.

"Most of them have big ambitions and plans but lack the tools to move to the next level that could enable them to contribute to the economy and create jobs," Chefa says.

LEAP is also assisting local training providers to develop short courses to prepare for entrepreneurs to compete in the ever-changing business environment. The plan is to support 10 train programmes by 2028.

Chefa says LEAP is currently working with training providers to develop content and train instructors. This started with a beneficiary, which is implementing an ICT Training Programme focusing on Artificial Intelligence, Fin-Tech and Cyber Security.

The second beneficiary is being assisted to implement specialised welding. The institute already has six instructors being trained in South Africa.

Chefa says Lesotho companies are spending millions to hire



LEAP Manager Lehlohonolo Chefa

foreign companies for specialised welding jobs.

"Trained instructors will help the country bridge the skills gap and keep the money within the local industry," Chefa says.

LEAP is finalising an assessment with the third beneficiary to develop tourism training programmes focusing on hospitality, events management, tour guiding, and tour operating.

He says the training programme will help enterprises develop their products so that the country reaps maximum benefits from the sector.

"If we want to build a strong foundation for our economy to grow, we have to get the training and skills right," he adds.



Most of them have big ambitions and plans but lack the tools to move to the next level that could enable them to contribute to the economy and create jobs

LEAP Beneficiaries

Skills for the future

THE Principal Katleho Technical Training Institute was started in 2016 when practical courses seemed to be going out of fashion.

Makhoana Qhotsokoane, the Principal says the mission was to "give those who are not academically gifted a chance to earn a living with practical courses".

The institute offers automotive, electrical installation, carpentry and joinery, welding and metal-work courses.

It also has bricklaying, panel beating and spray painting courses. Graphic and signwriting, plumbing, catering and leather works courses will be offered once accredited in the next year.

Earlier this year, the institute successfully applied for LEAP to implement specialised welding courses specifically for MSMEs in Lesotho.

"We are the few institutes offering welding courses in Lesotho. Now we are upgrading to specialised welding," says Qhotsokoane.

Supported by LEAP, the institute's six instructors are currently attending specialised welding courses in South Africa.

Two are studying boiler making, two are doing arc welding, and two are in Nick and Tuck.

The institute is now a full member of the Southern African Institute of Welding, which opens opportunities for training and collaboration.

Qhotsokoane says the instructors will receive instructors' courses to equip them to train other practitioners upon their return. This will eliminate any need for specialised welding practitioners to go to other countries.

The institute is also working on its full membership in the International Institute of Welding which will broaden the horizons of their specialised welding graduates to world in over 53 countries in the world.

The support from LEAP has given the institution the urgency to build its own campus at Ha Bua Sono, Berea which will be ready to house students when the instructors return home.



ahead



Stitched for success

Ha Tikoe

TSEPO Johane's journey in the textile industry began at the gates of a textile firm where he worked as a security guard.

Sensing a business opportunity, his aunt in Thaba Tseka would send him seshoeshoe dresses to sell to factory workers.

"People were bringing their own styles for me to give instructions to my aunt. It was difficult to communicate their specifications to my aunt. Sometimes I would get in trouble with the customers when she gets their designs wrong," Johane recalls.

One weekend, in 2007, he travelled to Thaba Tseka to deliver cash to his aunt.

"As I watched my aunty sewing those dresses, I instantly knew I could do it. I asked my aunty to teach me," Johane recalled.

And so for the next three days, Johane learned how to make the dresses.

He returned to his security job in Maseru and started saving to buy his own sewing machines. Soon, he had three machines and was operating as a sole trader working from his kitchen table.

Within a few months, Johane left his job and employed three people.

"Within three years, I was making dresses for weddings and funerals."

Although business was good, he felt he needed to enhance his skills.

He enrolled for a Fashion and Apparel Design degree at Limkokwing University of Creative Technology.

"I had two grand ideas in my mind: to start a factory or open a vocational fashion design school".

While in college, he reduced his business to one sewing machine that he would use after classes.

"One person would take the orders and I would make the dresses at night."

Johane says getting back to full production after graduating was difficult "because there were now so many people making seshoeshoe dresses".

Struggling to make rent, he moved his business from the main station to his house in Thetane.

Yet those difficult times did not dim his passion.

While working from home, he registered Johane Garments as a full-fledged corporation.

Things would start looking up when he won the contract to make 200 graduation gowns for Limkokwing University of Creative Technology. "That order gave me the push I needed to get back to business. In 2018, he moved into a Lesotho National Development Corporation factory shell to launch his own FOB business.

However, everything collapsed when Covid-19 hit.

"By 2023, there was no market. Everything had collapsed and I had hit rock bottom."

To save jobs and still generate some income, he partnered with a Taiwanese businessman who agreed to bring orders and use his machines.

"I wanted to understand the business and learn about the FOB market."

A business disagreement would end that relationship for just over a year. Johane was disappointed but felt he could now stand on his own. The trouble was that he didn't have enough sewing machines.

"That is when LEAP came in. They helped me acquire the first 16 machines."

His application for a grant to acquire a boiler, ironing tables, irons and motors for the machines and the cutting machines was approved a few months later.

"That is when I was able to start this Cut, Make and Trim business."

He makes garments for the South African market.

"Things are looking up for us. It is all because of the machinery from LEAP. Buyers would not be even listening to me if I didn't have this equipment."

Johane is also an Enterprise Support Organisation under CAFI's Lesotho Enterprise Hub and Seed Financing Facility.

His cohort started in June 2024 and ended in December.

"The training as an ESO also shaped me as a businessman. I was being trained to incubate textile enterprises, but I was also acquiring critical skills that I am applying to my business."

"Most of those in my cohort are doing well. In fact, some of them are doing much better than I am."



As I watched my aunty sewing those dresses, I instantly knew I could do it. I asked my aunty to teach me

New beginnings



Mafeteng

NEW Era Pharmacy is owned by Masontaha Dlamini, a trained nurse.

After working as a nurse for 15 years, Dlamini became frustrated by having to re-new her contract at a nongovernmental organisation every two years.

“There was so much uncertainty every time the contracts were due for renewal,” Dlamini says.

“At some point, I just could not handle the anxiety.”

She had two options: to start a clinic or a pharmacy.

“A pharmacy looked easier because I didn’t need much space”.

She started New Era Pharmacy in 2021 in Mafeteng.

The business was good, but she didn’t have a billing system to file medical aid claims. “We had spent everything we had to start the business and we were not making enough to acquire the point of sale and the billing system.”

LEAP assisted the pharmacy acquire a computer and a billing system.

Dlamini says there is significant revenue growth since entering the medical aid market.

“We could service our retail customers and also submit our claims on time.”

“We are now able to track our inventory in real time and make new orders from suppliers.” Dlamini has quit his nursing job to concentrate on the pharmacy. She is now working on starting her own medicines and supplements business.

“The long-term goal is to go into the whole-sale market because.”

We are now able to track our inventory in real time and make new orders from suppliers

Dreaming big

Mafeteng

MOJAKI Noosi says she started his textile business, Garments Dealer, with a rudimentary screen printer she bought from a friend for M200 in September 2004.

Garments Dealer was the first company that benefited from LEAP’s equipment acquisition programme.

LEAP assisted him in buying nine sewing machines.

Now with seventeen machines, Garments Dealer has increased its production from 300 pieces per week to 1200.

He has also increased his staff from eight to 14. Located in Mafeteng, the company specialises in school uniforms, freezer suits and security uniforms.

Since acquiring the new machines, the company has moved into a bigger space at Mafeteng’s BEDCO centre.

Noosi says the focus now is quality assurance and reducing turnaround times.

“Once we get the quality and efficiency right, we can then start going after big orders,” Noosi says.

Noosi says the machines have transformed his business.

“We are still a small player compared to other textile companies yet we can hold our own.”

He says LEAP’s assistance came when the company was struggling to recover from the impact of the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Some of his machines were long overdue for services, while others had completely broken down. “Our old machines were becoming too expensive to run. Sometimes they would break down during the peak of production.”





Shining in Maputsoe

Maputsoe

IT'S a Friday afternoon at M&N Enterprise's factory in Maputsoe, and sewing machines are singing.

Neo Fekefeke, the 34-year-old owner, is making rounds on the factory floor that has 95 employees.

Garments are piled in one corner, ready for ironing before they get price tags and are packaged.

"You would not believe it if I told you that all this was not there a few weeks ago," Fekefeke says as he points at the factory floor. "There was no business to talk about." Earlier this year, Fekefeke was forced to close the business due to cash flow problems.

He surrendered some of his orders to another company while he tried to revive the business.

In addition to cash flow challenges, Fekefeke lacked sufficient machines to handle large orders.

The machines were old and cranky, he says.

A strike had also brought his already patchy production to a standstill. Frustrated but undeterred, Fekefeke, who holds a Master's Degree in Mechanical Engineering, began searching for new machines.

The cost of buying new machines, he says, was prohibitive.

Banks were reluctant to fund a struggling business in a sector already wobbling due to tariffs that had just been imposed. In May, Fekefeke applied for a LEAP grant to

buy 30 machines.

Those machines arrived in June and he set out hunting for orders.

In the past three months, Fekefeke has landed sizable orders with four South African retail outlets.

As orders increased, he moved into a bigger building to accommodate more production lines.

He now has day and night shifts to meet deadlines. Yet, even then, so huge are some of the orders that he has subcontracted other factories to meet deadlines.

Fekefeke's journey with CAFI didn't start with the recent assistance from LEAP.

Last year, he was incubated under the Lesotho Enterprise Hub and Seed Financing Facility. His Enterprise Support Organisation was Johane Garments. Fekefeke says the past three months have been so good that he has farmed out parts of his orders to Johane Garments. Tšepo Johane, the owner of Johane Garments, says Fekefeke is a shining example of what young enterprises can achieve with ample support. "I have watched his trajectory, his fall and his rise, and I can say he has a fighting spirit that will take him far in this industry," Johane says.

Fekefeke says he is not allowing the recent influx of orders to get to his head. "The focus remains on building a sustainable business that can survive shocks in both the sector and the economy."



Breaking barriers



Maseru

THE Access to Finance department is at the heart of CAFI's objectives. For the past three years, the Project has been working to improve access to financial services for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises as well as businesses owned by women and youth.

The main initiatives in this regard include strengthening the credit infrastructure system, facilitating the development of innovative business financing products that are responsive to the financing needs of MSMEs and women owned businesses, financial literacy and linking MSMEs with financiers outside of the CAFI project.

Stakeholder mobilization and collaboration with financial sector (including regulators), and the entrepreneurship ecosystem players has been central to the realization of these initiatives. Thabo Monyane, Access to Finance Specialist says there has been tremendous progress over the past three years.

The department is working with the Lesotho National Development Corporation (LNDC) to create a supply chain financing product, centred around a digital transaction tracking platform, for the textile industry. The platform is a response to the perennial cash flow problems that bog down textile companies.

"Banks are reluctant to fund the local textile sector because, in its current form, its transactions are highly exposed to external factors and the margins are low," says Monyane.

The platform, he says, promotes access to transaction information for all participants, including built-in collateral, thereby providing assurance that textile companies that borrow will repay their loans. With this platform, a bank can monitor a customer's process from the acquisition of raw materials after an order to the final payment.

Monyane states that a digital lending platform, which addresses the information gap faced by banks when lending to MSMEs, is currently undergoing product approval processes.

The platform will form an information depository where MSMEs can submit voluntarily, allowing banks and other financial institutions to access their information more readily and easily when assessing loan applications.

The department is also supporting the development and implementation of a formal group lending product for small and informal businesses. Monyane says the product leverages on stokvels in which individuals lend to each other.

"Banks generally don't lend to informal and small businesses that lack track records, reference points and collat-

THABO Monyane

We are looking at creating a financial product tailored for the agriculture sector's challenges and opportunities. It'll facilitate an end to end link with all players involved in the value chain and/or transaction, thereby collateralizing the transaction

eral." "But it has been found that in the group models, people lend to each other small amounts without much default in this relationship based and collateralized model". So a member of a group can get a loan from a bank if the group vouches for them and also acts as a guarantor, as it holds their savings, which can be used to settle the debt in case of a default. Monyane explains that the product leverages these features of the informal group lending system designed to reduce risk for formal lenders.

The department is currently also facilitating the development of an Agriculture Value Chain Financing product.

"We are looking at creating a financial product tailored for the agriculture sector's challenges and opportunities. It'll facilitate an end to end link with all players involved in the value chain and/or transaction, thereby collateralizing the transaction," Monyane says.

The department is also providing financial literacy training to businesses incubated by both the Entrepreneurship Hub and Seed Financing Facility (LEHSFF) and the Lesotho Horticulture and Training Centre (LHITC).

He says this training is "particularly urgent because there is a general lack of financial literacy". To date, financial literacy workshops have been conducted for all the ten fruit farms and the two vegetable farms under the LHITC, and the 150 enterprises under the LEHSFF.

Monyane, however, says the department is also going beyond teaching financial literacy to helping the business se-





cure loans with banks.
“As a pilot, we have taken three horticulture and two other businesses to banks after conducting baseline and fundability assessments.
“Two have been approved for loans, one cancelled the approval, one withdrew the application, one was declined while the one is still in progress,” Monyane says.



Steeled for the future

Maseru

THE Covid-19 pandemic might be over, but its economic lessons remain fresh.

Governments are seeking ways to strengthen their economies against potential global disasters similar to Covid-19.

The designers of CAFI created a component to enhance MS-MEs' resilience against the adverse effects of climate change and other natural disasters.

Molehe Mokone, the MSME Resilience Coordinator, says a diagnostic study conducted by the World Bank found that MS-MEs are extremely vulnerable to climatic shocks.

He says the study also found that there were little or no support mechanisms to help enterprises withstand the shocks.

In response to that void, CAFI provided technical support to the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MoFDP) for development of the Disaster Risk Financing (DRF) Strategy which helps the Government to better manage the costs of response, ensuring predictable and timely access to needed resources, and ultimately mitigating long-term human, economic and fiscal impacts. The strategy has since been finalised and approved by the Cabinet. Mokone says the strategy is already being implemented.

For instance, there is a grant under CAFI that is meant to build resilience of climate affected MSMEs. To guide disbursement of this fund, a handbook that outlines step by step processes and selection criteria has been developed.

All MSMEs affected by climatic shocks and disasters such as drought, hailstorm, snow, frost, heavy rains and strong winds are eligible to apply for a grant. CAFI will embark on a nationwide campaign to raise awareness on the disaster risk financing and on how the grants application system works.



MOLEHE Mokone



Table 2: Project Ratings		
Project Ratings	Previous	Current
Progress towards achievement of PDO	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Overall Implementation Progress (IP)	Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory
Overall Risk Rating	Substantial	Substantial
Component 1	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Component 2	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Component 3	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Financial Management	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Project Management	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Procurement	Moderately Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Monitoring and Evaluation	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Environment	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Social	Satisfactory	Satisfactory



Mahobong

THE Lesotho Horticultural Incubation and Training Centre has an ambitious plan to scale up Lesotho's commercial farming.

Based at the former Mahobong Campus of the Institute of Extra Mural Studies (EIMS), the centre is building on the success of the three pilot deciduous fruit farms now in full production.

The programme seeks to address gaps in the horticulture value chain in access to suitable land, infrastructure, extension services, skills, finance, and markets while promoting climate-smart agricultural practices. Over the past two years, the centre has trained 190 farmers across the country in a pre-incubation programme to build their capacity in the agriculture sector.

The farm's establishment is nearing completion, with irrigation systems being installed and preparations in progress for the erection of netting structures.

Most had installed irrigation systems. Weeding and deflowering were in progress.

Each farm has an average 9500 apple trees on five hectares.

Nthako Supu, the centre's manager, says the farms are now implementing their work plans under close supervision from the centre's experts. Supu says the farmers expect to have their "first small harvest in the next season".

"Our assessment this month shows that almost all the 60 800 trees on the seven farms have survived," Supu says. The numbers illustrate the impact of the incubation programme in their communities.

Hundred and seventy jobs were created during land preparation and planting of trees, and at least 7 permanent jobs per farm are created for daily running of the farms.

Of the 190 farmers who participated in the pre-incubation programme, 24 percent are women and 28 percent are youth.

Some 43 percent of the seven farms in incubation are led by women.

Over M14.4 million has been invested in the seven farms. The impact, however, goes beyond the seven farms because the 183 farmers who did not make it to the final incubation are using the skills acquired during pre-incubation to start their own farming projects.

Scaling up

Supu says the centre is providing ongoing training and technical support to the seven fruit farms and two vegetable farms.

Mountain Fruit Grower, in Machache, is one of the seven farms under incubation. Mothiba Thamae, the owner, says his father started the farm in 1999. Thamae says before incubation, the farm already had 6000 apple trees and 5000 peach trees.

He says the incubation has been critical in enhancing his skills in orchard management and financial management. "Although I have been in this business for years, there was a lot I did not know about the business side of fruit farming," Thamae says, adding that his record-keeping had improved since he started the incubation.

The farm has hired nine people from local villages and plans to employ more during the harvest season. Mathabiso Tlelai, who owns Healthwise Farm in Thaba Bosiu, says she applied for the incubation because she was already dehydrating fruits.

"We were dehydrating peaches but we could not get enough fruits," Tlelai says. She says the centre helped with the initial assessment, orchard design, soil testing, ploughing, the trees and planting.

"The visits to fruit farmers really opened my eyes. The ongoing technical support from the centre keeps up on track in terms of managing the farm." The farm has six permanent employees.

Before incubation, Botle Farm, in Thuathe, used a large portion of its land for maize production. Five hectares are now under 9500 apple trees, and the number of employees has increased from nine to 16.

Tsepang Masenyetse, the farm manager, says the orchard has the potential to transform the farm's fortunes.

"We are still producing cabbages, potatoes, maize, butternuts, milk and eggs. But we can see that there will be an exponential growth in our revenues when we start har-

vesting the apples."

Nala Farmlands, just four kilometres from Botle Farms, has 9200 apple trees. Masekonyela Tsekana, the farm supervisor, is also upbeat about the orchard's future. "This means more people from local communities would be hired and there are also opportunities to start selling the fruits," Masekonyela says.

NTHAKO Supu



Growing sustainably

THE Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion Project ensures that growth must be inclusive, responsible and sustainable. Thus, CAFI fully adheres to the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework, which directs the implementation of all World Bank-funded projects to ensure compliance with environmental and social standards.

Mathoka Khaile, CAFI's Environmental and Social Safeguards Specialist, says the first step was to develop the Environmental and Social Commitment Plan, which then guides the design, adoption and implementation of various environmental and social instruments. The plan also guides the adoption of environmental and social standards in the project context.

"The goal is to ensure that every CAFI activity is environmentally and socially sound, thereby promoting sustainable development," says Khaile. "This is important because previously, some projects left the environment and communities negatively impacted. There have been grievances and disputes that could have been avoided".

To achieve this goal, the CAFI Project has developed and is implementing the following key environmental and social safeguards tools:

- Environmental and Social Commitment Plan which sets the foundation for all safeguards actions.
- Environmental and Social Management Framework (It has integrated Labour Management Procedures, Integrated Pest Management Plan, Waste Management Plan and Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Action Plan) guides how environmental and social risks and impacts are identified, assessed and managed when the specific project sites are not yet fully known.
- Stakeholder Engagement Plan ensures that project-affected parties, including vulnerable and marginalised groups and other



MATHOKA Khaile

interested parties are meaningfully involved in the project to foster sense of ownership of the project by stakeholders.

- Grievance Redress Mechanism enables stakeholders to provide feedback, lodge grievances and the Project to resolve grievances timely.
- Specific Environmental and Social Management Plans for the Lesotho Horticultural Incubation and Training Centre and seven newly-established commercial de-

ciduous fruit farms have been prepared to ensure compliance with environmental and social standards in horticulture. The CAFI Project has trained and sensitised project stakehold-

ers, including implementing agencies and project beneficiaries under the Lesotho Entrepreneurship Hub and Seed Financing Facility and Lesotho Horticultural Incubation and Training Centre about environmental and social safeguards, including the CAFI Grievance Redress Mechanism. As a standard, contractors and consultants implementing various aspects of the projects are also sensitised about the environmental and social compliance to promote a shared culture

of environmental stewardship and social accountability. Moreover, Grievance Redress Committees have been established and trained to resolve grievances linked to newly established commercial deciduous fruit farms at the village, community and district levels. Khaile says, "To date, 21 grievances have been received and successfully resolved, thus, ensuring that stakeholders voices are heard and acted upon."





CAFI
GRIEVANCE REDRESS MECHANISM (GRM)

