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## Livestock Department Leads National Strategy to Prevent Foot-and-Mouth Disease



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# Livestock Department Leads National Strategy to Prevent Foot-and-Mouth Disease

By Lungile Maseela

The Department of Livestock has taken decisive steps to safeguard Lesotho's livestock sector by leading the establishment of a multi-sectoral task team aimed at preventing the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) in the country.

This proactive initiative was announced during a high-level consultative meeting convened by the department, which brought together stakeholders from the Ministry of Agriculture, various government ministries, security agencies, the private sector, veterinary professionals and farmers. The meeting marked a strategic shift from mere risk awareness to coordinated national action.

In his address, Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, Dr Khothatso Tssoana, emphasised that prevention is Lesotho's strongest defence against the disease, which is currently spreading in neighbouring South Africa.

"This meeting was convened to consult, deliberate and agree on the establishment of a multi-sectoral task team that will lead preparedness, coordination and strategic interventions to protect Lesotho's livestock," he stated, stressing that livestock, particularly cattle, sheep and goats form the backbone of rural livelihoods and national exports such as wool and mohair.

According to South Africa's Ministry of Agriculture, as of November 2025, KwaZulu-Natal remains the epicentre of FMD, with 180 of the 274 unresolved outbreaks reported nationally.

The ministry indicated that despite the vaccination of 931 200 animals with government-procured vaccine stocks over the last three months, uncontrolled animal movement continues to undermine containment efforts and prolongs the crisis.

PS Tssoana warned that an outbreak would have far-reaching economic consequences, including the loss of export markets and rural income, thereby underscoring the urgency of preventive action.

The meeting was officially opened by the Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Thabo Mofosi, who called for collective responsibility in implementing disease prevention measures.

"The threat of foot-and-mouth disease requires unity of purpose. Our geographic position and trade links with South Africa mean that we must act early, decisively and together," the minister remarked.

Mofosi commended veterinary services for maintaining Lesotho's disease-free status over the years and urged stakeholders to strengthen surveillance, biosecurity and compliance with animal movement



controls.

He emphasised that the resolutions from the meeting must be translated into action on the ground.

A detailed technical briefing by Dr Relebohile Lepheane, Livestock Director General, outlined the Department of Livestock's preparedness framework.

She identified high-risk districts including Quthing, Buthe-Buthe, Mokhotlong, Leribe, and Thaba-Tseka and emphasised the need for targeted surveillance and early-warning systems in these areas.

Dr Lepheane explained that foot-and-mouth disease is a highly contagious viral disease with multiple serotypes, making prevention and rapid response essential.

She highlighted that Lesotho's strategy focuses on early detection, strict movement control, border surveillance, farmer awareness and coordinated emergency response, rather than reactive containment.

"Maintaining Lesotho's foot-and-mouth disease-free status is critical to protecting market access, farmer livelihoods, and national economic stability," she asserted.

She further outlined the economic rationale behind prevention, noting that mass vaccination alone would cost approximately M180 million annually for cattle, making proactive prevention significantly more cost-effective than responding to an outbreak.

Drawing lessons from past emergencies, former NACOSEC CEO Thabo Ntoi underscored the importance of structured coordination, clear policies, and data-driven decision-making.

"Lesotho must respond with an informed and firm approach, guided by research, clear emergency frame-

works and lessons from previous national crises," he stated.

During open discussions, participants agreed on the composition of a national multi-sectoral task team, proposed to include agriculture, food security, and nutrition as chair, along with defence and national security agencies, border control authorities, disaster management, local government, chieftainship structures, farmers' associations and trade and finance institutions.

The Department of Livestock confirmed that the final task team and its terms of reference will be formally adopted and communicated, ensuring clarity of roles and accountability across sectors.

The meeting also reinforced farmer-level solutions, with veterinary experts outlining key signs of foot-and-mouth disease such as fever, drooling, vesicular lesions and difficulty eating and urging farmers to report suspected cases immediately.

Participants committed to supporting nationwide awareness campaigns, strengthening community surveillance and complying with biosecurity measures to prevent disease entry and spread.

With South Africa continuing to report multiple foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks, Lesotho's strategy, anchored by the Department of Livestock, positions prevention, coordination and preparedness as the country's strongest line of defence.

By mobilising institutions, communities, and expertise before an outbreak occurs, the Department of Livestock is reinforcing Lesotho's resolve to protect its livestock economy, rural livelihoods, and national food security.

# New Hope for Farmers as Lesotho Flour Mills Commits to Buying Grain in Any Quantity

By Lungile Maseela

Lesotho farmers are set to benefit from renewed hope as Lesotho Flour Mills (LFM) introduces a new grain procurement model that allows both large-scale and smallholder producers to sell maize and wheat in any quantity.

This initiative is expected to stimulate local production, ease market access challenges and integrate small-scale farmers into the formal grain economy.

The announcement was made during a joint meeting between the Southern Mountains Association for Rural Transformation and Development (SMARTD) and LFM to create sustainable market opportunities for Basotho farmers through guaranteed grain purchases.

This development comes at a critical time for the country's grain sector, which continues to face severe production challenges due to climate variability.

Recurring droughts and floods linked to El Niño and La Niña have significantly reduced yields. During the 2023/24 season, local maize production declined by 52 per cent, forcing Lesotho to rely heavily on imports from South Africa. However, regional drought conditions have also strained South African supply, driving up import and retail prices and threatening national food security.

Strengthening local grain production has therefore become a strategic priority. By sourcing grain domestically, Lesotho can reduce its dependence on volatile imports, retain value within local communities, and encourage farmers, particularly smallholders, to expand production beyond subsistence levels. LFM's commitment to buying directly from Basotho farmers is viewed as a key step toward building a resilient, self-sustaining food system capable of withstanding global supply shocks.

Speaking at the meeting, LFM Quality Assurance

Manager Dingaan Maan stated that the company is committed to quality control across the entire grain value chain, from planting and harvesting to processing.

"We want the best quality control of grain from all sides, which is why we follow the entire production chain to ensure the final product meets high standards," Maan said.

He added that LFM's approach goes beyond procurement, with the company collaborating with the Government of Lesotho, the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to provide farmer training on crop selection, planting schedules, and improved production practices.

LFM outlined several key objectives under the new model, including engaging farmers with clear quality standards, increasing participation in formal markets and supporting the transition from subsistence farming to commercial production. These measures aim to strengthen beneficiation along the grain value chain and generate broader economic impact.

"This initiative will create jobs, boost economic growth and open new opportunities. When farmers work with LFM, we buy their grain regardless of quantity, and we visit their farms to guide proper grain production," Maan said.

He noted that maize and wheat currently contribute only about 10 per cent of the local grain supply, urging farmers to scale up production not only for household consumption but also for sale. To ease market access, LFM announced a transport subsidy of M50 per tonne for Basotho farmers supplying grain.

Maize Grading Requirements

LFM also briefed farmers on maize grading standards, which include assessment of:

Moisture content

Hectolitre mass

Screenings

Foreign matter

Noxious seeds

Total damage

Kernels with other coloration

Picked kernels

Additional grading considerations include:

Field and storage fungi

Frost- and heat-damaged kernels

Other grains and unthreshed ears

Gravel, stones, turf, and glass

Combined deviations (D+E+G+I)

During the session, Nts'ekhe Tlaba trained farmers in food preservation techniques, from production through processing, emphasising the importance of ongoing farmer education.

He noted that regular workshops are held for youth aged 21–24 to improve nutrition outcomes and reduce malnutrition nationwide.

"Boriba calls on young people to take action, advocate for improved nutrition and ensure that no one, especially marginalised communities and youth, is left behind," he said.

Farmers welcomed the new procurement model with optimism.

Masenate Adoro, a farmer from Quthing, stated that the initiative marks a turning point for rural producers.

"LFM has given us a great opportunity. We used to farm mainly for consumption, but now, with a guaranteed market, we will produce more. Before, our biggest challenge was producing without a market. This initiative has changed that," she said.

She added that expert support on planting calendars and grading requirements would help farmers improve yields and meet quality standards.



# Declining Grazelands Threaten Rural Livelihoods as Farmers Turn to Fodder Production

By Tumelo Taole

Livestock remains central to the survival and identity of many households in Lesotho, yet in districts such as Mohale's Hoek and Leribe, farmers are increasingly struggling to feed both their animals and their families as deteriorating grazing lands and climate shocks take a growing toll.

Once known for its rich grasslands and high-quality meat, especially poultry, the districts are now grappling with widespread rangeland degradation caused by overgrazing, invasive species, land scarcity, and erratic weather patterns.

Across villages like Phamong, communal grazing areas have thinned dramatically, and farmers say the pastures no longer behave as they once did: "Rains arrive unpredictably, droughts linger, and sudden storms wash away valuable soil."

"Outside of the unpredictable weather, we do not have mechanised modes of farming or any enabling resources to ease farming activities. We currently use our animals, and that takes forever. We need tractors," said Thato Lechato, a farmer from Phamong, describing the challenges witnessed over recent years.

These mounting pressures have made livestock production increasingly uncertain, threatening the primary economic pillar for rural families.

According to the Bureau of Statistics, between 2022 and 2023, 5,510 sheep died in Mohale's Hoek alone from Pulpy Kidney, a deadly bacterial disease that thrives when animals are suddenly fed rich, high-carbohydrate fodder. Goats also suffered massively, with about 55,141 dying across the district, with deaths classified from diarrhoea, Blue Tongue, Pulpy Kidney, and Black Quarter recorded.

Recognising the urgency of the situation, the Rural Self-Help Development Association (RSDA), with support from ReNOKA, launched training sessions in Mohale's Hoek and Leribe, intending to equip farmers with skills in fodder production and rangeland management.

The goal is to help communities supplement natural grazing, restore degraded land, and enhance resilience to climate change.

During a recent dialogue in Phamong, Mohale's Hoek District, RSDA Managing Director Mampho Thulo reminded farmers of the district's historic strength in livestock production.

"One thing you might not be aware of is that meat from this district, especially chicken, is the best meat there is. This is why thieves steal your livestock and sell it for a fortune in places like Vanderbijlpark in South Africa. This is all thanks to your fodder," Thulo said.

Farmers were invited to share pressing issues hindering their production, and most cited land scarcity as their imminent problem, noting that most arable plots are already used for food crops, leaving little space for fodder cultivation.

Thulo stressed that proper fodder management is key to prevention, alongside vaccination. "This means you will have to introduce new feeds gradually to your livestock. When changing diets, especially to high-energy feeds, farmers need to do so slowly to allow the animal's gut flora to adjust. Similarly, a diet should include adequate fibre to maintain proper gut movement, which helps prevent bacterial overgrowth," she explained.

Zenkane Motakabone, a representative of fodder producers in the district, stressed that their main challenge is limited ploughing space.

"...We therefore have to prioritise between feeding ourselves and our animals," he said.



He indicated that through fodder production, farmers can make better use of limited land by storing feed for future use, particularly during dry seasons when natural grazing is scarce.

"This practice reduces livestock losses caused by hunger and poor nutrition, while improving animal health and productivity. By securing a reliable feed supply, households are able to protect the value of their animals, which serve as a source of income, food, draught power, and social security. In this way, fodder production strengthens household resilience and ensures that livestock continue to support livelihoods even in times of land scarcity and climate stress," he advocated.

Climate change emerged as another primary concern, with participants pointing to unpredictable patterns that directly affect the quantity and quality of grazing land.

"We would like to know if there can be assistance for proper irrigation systems as we already have water scarcity. Our main source of water is rain," Lechato quizzed.

As part of the training, RSDA and ReNOKA demonstrated how different fodder crops can reduce the burden on communal pastures, highlighting lucerne and cereal crops such as maize, sorghum, and barley, as well as soybean, suitable for hay, silage, and feed meal.

These alternatives, as highlighted in the training, provide households with realistic, affordable methods to improve livestock nutrition while helping degraded grazing areas recover.

Lehlohonolo 'Mochoa, from the Research department, warned that the decline of rangelands poses a wider threat to national food security, citing poor pasture conditions that lead to weaker livestock, lower milk and meat production, and increased vulnerability during droughts, factors that directly undermine rural livelihoods.

"Our land is bare, and planting fodder can help take it back to its former state," 'Mochoa said.

Fodder crops, especially perennial grasses and trees, establish extensive and deep root systems that bind the soil together, preventing soil loss from wind and water erosion. The dense ground cover they provide also slows down surface water runoff.

"Also, many fodder species, particularly legumes like clover, vetch, and certain trees, are nitrogen fixers. They capture atmospheric nitro-

gen and convert it into a form plants can use, enriching the soil and reducing or eliminating the need for synthetic fertilisers. As fodder crops grow and shed leaves or decompose, they add significant amounts of organic matter to the soil. This organic material improves soil structure, increases water infiltration and retention, and feeds beneficial soil microbes, enhancing the overall soil food web," he explained.

He noted that by implementing these natural processes, planting fodder helps to reverse the degradation of barren land, making it more fertile, productive, and sustainable over the long term.

ReNOKA, an organisation stemming from a recognition of severe environmental challenges in Lesotho, including land degradation, soil erosion, which costs the country an estimated 2% of topsoil annually, and the impacts of climate change, such as increased flooding and droughts, emphasises that Lesotho, often called the "water tower" of Southern Africa, supplies about 40% of the Orange-Senqu River's annual runoff, making its ecological health crucial for the entire region, including South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia.

The core purpose of ReNOKA is to implement an integrated catchment management (ICM) approach to address these issues by protecting and conserving water resources, wetlands, and ecosystems, reducing soil erosion and desertification, rejuvenating agricultural lands, building climate resilience, ensuring a sustainable water supply for current and future generations, and improving urban and rural livelihoods while fostering economic development.

These core functions were shared by Makatleho Serobanyane, ReNOKA's Community Liaison Officer in Hlotse, at the second and final training session held by both the organisation and RSDA in Mphosong, Leribe.

It is in this district that a young farmer, Thora Mathibeli, shared his fodder production journey with farmers who had gathered there from all parts of Leribe. He mentioned that, as an emerging fodder farmer, he encourages Basotho to produce lucerne hay, among other fodder types.

"Lucerne can withstand harsh weather conditions and is usually an ideal crop to plant around March. One of the key benefits of lucerne hay is its high protein content, which is essential for

the growth and maintenance of muscle tissue. This makes it an ideal feed for growing animals, as well as for adult animals that are being used for work or competition.

"The high digestibility of lucerne hay also means that animals can extract more nutrients from their feed, which can help to reduce feed costs," Mathibeli shared.

He added that lucerne hay is also rich in minerals and vitamins, including calcium, phosphorus, and vitamins A and D, which are essential for animal health and well-being. Its high fibre content, which can range from 20 to 30 per cent, makes it an excellent choice for animals that need to maintain a healthy digestive system. The high fibre content helps to keep the gut functioning properly, which can help to prevent digestive problems such as colic.

It is in Leribe, Makhoaneng, Pitseng, where farmers were reminded that understanding how different animals graze is essential to managing and protecting their land.

Speaking during the workshop, Thee Motseri from the Department of Range Resources Management explained that animals do not feed the same way: "Horses pick grass, cows graze over it, while other animals nibble. These differences may seem small, but they shape how rangelands respond to pressure and how long they remain productive."

This knowledge formed a crucial part of the training on fodder production.

"When farmers understand how each animal interacts with the land, they can make better decisions about grazing patterns, resting periods, and the types of fodder to plant. It also helps ensure that both the natural rangelands and the cultivated fodder fields remain healthy, sustainable, and capable of supporting livestock throughout the year," Motseri said.

According to Farmkeep's research, different species have unique nutritional needs. Dairy cattle need energy-dense and protein-rich fodder like maize silage or alfalfa, while goats and sheep do better on fibrous legumes and mixed grasses. Poultry, on the other hand, benefit more from grain-based feed.

The research noted that the best fodder is one that is locally available, affordable, and sustainable. Using regionally grown crops or farm by-products helps reduce feeding costs and ensures a consistent supply year-round.



# The Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy Validated



By Lungile Maseela

Lesotho has taken a decisive step toward reforming its fisheries and aquaculture sector with the validation of the Lesotho Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy (2025-2035), the country's first integrated governance framework for the industry.

This policy aims to reposition fisheries and aquaculture as strategic contributors to food security, nutrition, employment and economic diversification, moving the sector beyond its historically fragmented and informal state.

Despite the country's extensive water resources, including the Senqu River system, high-altitude reservoirs such as Katse and Mohale Dams, and numerous small inland water bodies, fisheries and aquaculture have remained underdeveloped.

Capture fisheries largely operate informally under outdated regulatory frameworks, while aquaculture production is dominated by a small number of commercial trout farms serving export markets. As a result, national per-capita fish consumption remains below 5 kg, significantly lower than the SADC average

of 11 kg, highlighting the urgent need for a coherent production and governance strategy.

The validated policy seeks to address these structural gaps by introducing a coordinated, modern governance framework anchored in sustainability, inclusivity, and evidence-based planning. It prioritises food and nutrition security, ecosystem-based management, research and data systems, climate resilience, gender and youth inclusion and responsible investment. One of its key targets is to increase national fish production to 8,000 metric tonnes by 2035, with a stronger focus on

domestic supply.

At the heart of the policy is governance reform.

The framework proposes modernising outdated legislation, most notably the Freshwater Fish Proclamation of 1951 and strengthening institutional coordination, compliance, monitoring and enforcement systems. It also facilitates the formalisation of community-based fisheries and aquaculture, enabling small-scale producers to operate in a regulated and supportive environment.

The policy further introduces ecosystem-based management approaches to address environmental risks such as water pollution, habitat degradation and climate-related shocks. It promotes climate-smart aquaculture practices, biodiversity protection and pollution control measures to ensure the long-term sustainability of aquatic resources.

Recognising persistent inequality in the sector, the policy places a strong emphasis on gender and youth integration, calling for targeted capacity-building programmes, improved access to quality seed and feed, strengthened extension services and better market linkages for small-scale and rural producers. Food safety, aquatic animal health and value chain development are also central pillars aimed at improving consumer confidence and expanding market opportunities.

Presenting the policy roadmap, FAO Senior Aquaculture Officer Dr Ana Menezes outlined the evidence-driven process behind the framework, which included a national aquaculture baseline study, stakeholder consultations and multiple technical reviews. This process ensured the policy addressed governance weaknesses, ecological constraints and investment barriers identified across the sector.

FAO Assistant Representative Mokitinyana Nthimo stated that the policy represents a shift from fragmented interventions towards a unified development approach.

"FAO's role in this policy is capacity building and technical support. We are encouraged by the progress made and confident that this framework will strengthen the entire fisheries and aquaculture value chain," he said.

Minister of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, Hon. Thabo Mofosi, noted that the policy marks a transition from viewing fisheries as a recreational activity to recognising it as a productive economic and food system sector aligned with national development priorities.

Once adopted, the policy is expected to modernise fisheries governance, strengthen research and data systems, promote responsible public and private investment, and significantly expand production in both aquaculture and capture fisheries.

## SADC Parliaments Commit to Climate Justice for Women and Youth

By Ntsoaki Motaung

The Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) concluded its 58th Plenary Assembly in Durban with a strong commitment to accelerated parliamentary action on climate change, focusing on the protection of women and youth who are disproportionately affected by climate impacts across the region.

The Assembly, held from 30 November to 5 December 2025, convened under the theme: "The Impact of Climate Change on Women and Youth in the SADC Region and the Role of Parliaments in Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation."

Delegates included Speakers and Members of Parliament from 14 SADC member states, as well as civil society representatives, youth advocates and regional partners.

In her opening remarks, SADC PF Secretary-General Boemo Sekgoma underscored the increasing frequency and severity of climate-related events such as cyclones, floods, and droughts, which lead to water scarcity, food insecurity, and social disruption.

She emphasised that these crises require urgent legislative and oversight action from regional parliaments.

Acting President of South Africa, Paul Mashatile, highlighted the gendered nature of climate impacts, noting that women, as primary providers of food, water and fuel, are disproportionately affected.

He warned that climate-induced disruptions exacerbate maternal mortality, gender-based violence, exploitation, and child marriages. Furthermore, young people, who comprise over 60

per cent of the population, face diminishing economic, educational and social opportunities.

The Assembly included significant contributions from the Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus and the Southern Africa Youth Parliament (SAYP). The youth delegation, led by Princess Mojapelo, urged legislators to recognise young people as active leaders rather than future beneficiaries, advocating for the establishment of mechanisms for youth-led climate action.

They also celebrated the formation of the SADC PF Youth Caucus and called for its full operationalisation to enhance legislative engagement and regional coordination.

Host Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa, Angela Thokozile Didiza, reiterated that parliaments play a central role in developing and enforcing climate policies.

She urged delegates to move beyond mere rhetoric and deliver effective, accountable, and inclusive legislation to mitigate climate risks and encourage adaptation.

Key resolutions adopted during the Plenary include: mainstreaming climate change into national and regional legislative agendas, with a particular focus on gender and youth vulnerabilities, strengthening policy and oversight mechanisms to ensure effective mitigation and adaptation strategies, institutionalising youth participation through the SADC PF Youth Caucus and Southern Africa Youth Parliament as well as advancing the transformation of the SADC Parliamentary Forum into a fully-fledged SADC Regional Parliament, with enhanced powers to harmonise climate and development policies across member states.

# Reflections Of 2025



## Reflecting on 2025: A Year of Progress, Challenges, and Voices in Lesotho's Agriculture

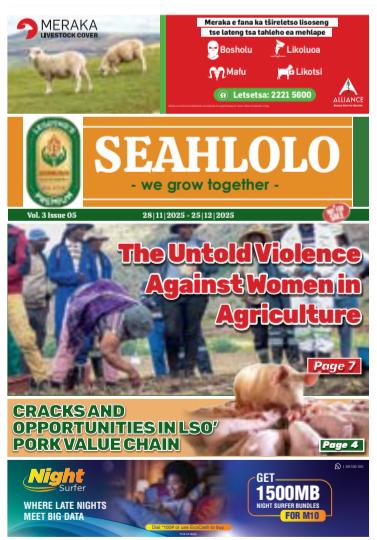
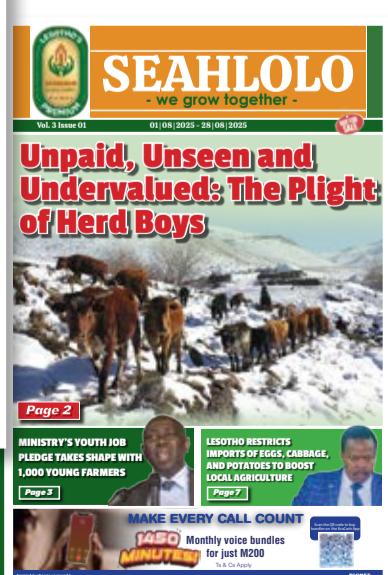
2025 has been a long and eventful year for Lesotho's agricultural

sector. As I reflect on the stories I have edited and those I have written, I feel a profound sense of pride. Seahlolo has successfully created a platform where agriculture is no longer background noise but a subject that is seen, discussed and appreciated as news.

This year, I navigated a wide range of stories that reflected

various facets of our agricultural sector, from the harsh realities of climate change

to the impact of the SADP II programme, which has led to tangible progress. I have edited stories of government interventions characterised by practical decisions and implementation. Among these, I was particularly struck by stories that revealed unspoken truths about core issues within the agriculture sector.





# Climate Change: Resilience in the Face of Crisis

## 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 Jeloa Makhetha from Tsolikie in the Qacha's Nek district, the storms destroyed livelihoods and imposed an invisible burden: mental and emotional strain.

Jeloa, 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," Jeloa 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 Jeloa 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," Jeloa 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," Jeloa 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. Jeloa 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 Jeloa 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.

Jeloa 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, Jeloa 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. Jeloa 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.

Jeloa 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 prevalent 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.

# Heavy Snowfall Leaves Young Farmer Counting Losses and Mental Strain

This story follows Jeloa Makhetha, a young farmer grappling with the aftermath of unusually heavy snowfall that devastated his small herd and crop fields. Beyond the material loss, the farmer describes the mental and emotional strain of facing climatic unpredictability while trying to sustain his family. The article highlights how extreme weather events are becoming more frequent in Lesotho, threatening food security and livelihoods, particularly for smallholder farmers who rely solely on seasonal patterns. It emphasises the need for climate resilience strategies, such as community-based early warning systems and insurance schemes. By focusing on the farmer's lived experience, the piece humanises climate statistics, showcasing the urgent, real-life consequences of environmental change.



# A Farmer's Struggle Against Climate Change-Induced Wind Damage

This piece profiles another smallholder farmer, Sejakhsosi Lefisa, whose fields and infrastructure were destroyed by severe windstorms. It explores the intersection of natural disaster and economic vulnerability, demonstrating how climate change exacerbates existing challenges for rural farmers. The article underscores the importance of government support, adaptation strategies, and innovative farming techniques, as the farmer shares his experience of rebuilding his farm. It highlights lessons on preparation, resilience and the need for policy interventions that prioritise climate-smart agriculture.

## Lesotho Faces Mounting Food Crisis as One in Five Households Go Hungry

**...Estimated 334,000 people to face more crisis by March 2026**  
**...2024/2025 Maize yield dropped by nearly 20 percent**



US\$2.7 million (M50 million), one-off cash transfer programme supported by the Disaster Management Authority (DMA) and African Risk Capacity (ARC) provided relief to households affected by crop failure.

**By Lerato Matheka**

More than a quarter of a million Basotho are currently facing hunger, with the situation expected to worsen as the lean season approaches.

According to the Lesotho Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, released in October 2025, about 334,000 people, 17 percent of the rural population, are in crisis struggling to access enough food for survival.

The report paints a sobering picture of a nation grappling with compounding challenges which include erratic rainfall, dry spells, high food prices and livestock disease outbreaks that have collectively weakened Lesotho's ability to feed its people.

By early next year, the situation is projected to deteriorate further, pushing an estimated 334,000 people, 22 percent of the population into crisis levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or higher).

This comes barely six months following Hunger Hotspots: FAO-WFP's Annual Food Insecurity Report released in June where Lesotho was officially removed from the list of countries experiencing acute food insecurity.

Lesotho now joined Angola, Kenya, Namibia and Uganda, which were described to be showing signs of improvement after previously being identified in warnings.

In a joint statement, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) said, "Angola, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia and Uganda are no longer among the hunger hotspots, thanks to a combination of seasonal improvements, above-average agricultural production and effective response measures."

Just over a month after Lesotho was removed from the list of countries identified as food insecurity hotspots by global agencies, a new regional assessment has revealed a concerning and contradictory reality: hunger in Southern Africa is worsening, and Lesotho remains far from immune.

Hardly a month after the removal from the Hunger Hotspot list, the SADC Regional Vulnerability Assessment and Analysis (RVAA) report, released in July 2025, estimated that 46.3 million people across seven countries — Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, South Africa and Tanzania — are projected to face acute food insecurity in the 2025/26 consumption year.

The SADC report noted that while Lesotho, alongside Tanzania and Eswatini, experienced above-average rainfall during the 2024/25 agricultural season, the country remains highly vulnerable to climate and economic shocks that continue to push many households into food insecurity.

For many Basotho, particularly in rural areas and peri-urban settlements, daily struggles to access affordable and nutritious food continue unabated and the IPC report confirms.

Nationally, the report finds that 44 percent of households are not yet engaging in negative coping strategies. But for the majority, survival now means borrowing food, reducing meal portions, selling productive assets, or taking on exploitative labor.

"The most vulnerable households are already resorting to measures that erode their future resilience and without timely intervention, the lean season could deepen hunger across all districts," the report warned.

"From October 2025 to March 2026, Lesotho's lean season is projected to bring deeper hardship. As household food stocks deplete, more out of ten districts are expected to slide into Phase 3 (Crisis). Only Leribe is forecasted to remain 'Stressed'" (Phase 2)."

"High food and fuel prices are likely to persist, worsen the purchasing power of already vulnerable families. Even though South Africa, Lesotho's main food supplier—is expected to record strong maize yields, imported food will still be too expensive for many," the report noted.

It added that there is also a risk that heavy rains associated with a possible La Niña event could cause waterlogging, damaging crops during the next planting season.

"The number of people facing food gaps is expected to rise from 258,000 to 334,000. Without assistance, these households will resort to negative coping mechanisms to survive."

In July 2024, the Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC) and Disaster Management Authority reported that approximately 699,000 Basotho, or one-third of the population, were food insecure for the 2024/25 cycle. Similarly, United Nations reports in September 2024 indicated that around 700,000 people would face hunger in the coming months.

Funding Initiatives to Address Food Insecurity in Lesotho:

- In September 2024, the UN allocated US\$2 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to support drought-affected communities.
- The European Union pledged €200,000 (approximately LSL 40,000) in June 2024 to assist over 2,500 vulnerable families.

According to LVAC, the government estimated a funding requirement of M1.149 billion to meet needs for 2024/25, an increase from M394 million the previous year.

Earlier in mid-2024, the Disaster Management Authority (DMA) appealed for approximately M2 billion to finance immediate humanitarian aid and resilience-building programs.

• In May and July 2025, a US\$2.7 million (M50 million), one-off cash transfer programme supported by the Disaster Management Authority (DMA) and African Risk Capacity (ARC) provided relief to households affected by crop failure.

While the DMA/ARC intervention covered an estimated 86 percent of eligible households for a portion of the affected population, analysts say it was too short-term to make a significant dent in the crisis.

Quicha's Neck received the highest coverage, 19 percent of its rural population.

The IPC analysis calls for immediate humanitarian assistance, particularly for households in IPC Phase 3 or worse. But beyond emergency aid, it urges the government to scale up long-term resilience programmes such as catchment management, rangeland rehabilitation and livestock vaccination.

The government must strengthen early warning systems and invest in community-based forecasting to prevent recurrent food crises," the report recommends.

Despite the grim statistics, not all is lost. There are signs that Lesotho's markets remain functional, ensuring food availability even when local production declines.

Water levels in major reservoirs are high, and winter cropping is expected to benefit from residual moisture and the government's 70-80 percent input subsidy on seeds and fertilisers.

## A Farmer's Struggle Against Climate Change-Induced Wind Damage

**By Topollo Tlali**

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

At 1,600 metres above sea level, Buthe-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 disease 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 Buthe-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 percent, 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 LGCE 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.

This article presents a national perspective, examining how climate change, including erratic rainfall and drought, is impacting food security across the country. Using data and farmer testimonies, it reveals that approximately 20% of households face hunger, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated action by government, NGOs, and communities. The piece links environmental stressors with socio-economic impacts, highlighting ongoing debates on sustainable agricultural practices, disaster relief programmes, and the role of youth and women in fostering climate resilience.

## Lesotho Faces Mounting Food Crisis as One in Five Households Go Hungry





# Government Interventions: Policy Meets Practice

This year also demonstrated the importance of connecting policy with practice. Initiatives such as equipment donations, tractor credit facilities for youth, and youth employment pledges highlighted how government action can significantly impact lives. Reporting these stories reinforced my belief that journalism plays a crucial role in holding systems accountable, ensuring promises lead to tangible benefits for farmers and communities alike.

# China Donates M36 Million in Farm Equipment to Boost Lesotho's Agricultural Productivity

This article highlights a major international collaboration where China donated M36 million worth of farm equipment to Lesotho. The equipment, including tractors and machinery for ploughing, irrigation, and harvesting, aims to increase productivity and mechanise small-

holder farming. The story features interviews with farmers who received training on the equipment, government officials emphasising the importance

of strategic partnerships, and policymakers outlining plans to integrate machinery use into national agricultural growth strategies. By connecting international support with local impact, the article demonstrates how targeted interventions can enhance food security, reduce labour intensity, and modernise agriculture in Lesotho.

# M200 Million Tractor Credit Facility Targets Youth in Agriculture

This piece explores the launch of a tractor credit facility worth M200 million, designed specifically to encourage youth participation in agriculture. The article profiles young farmers who are benefiting from easier access to mechanisation, allowing them to scale up production and experiment with new crops. It also examines the policy rationale: by supporting youth-led

agriculture, the government aims to reduce unemployment, enhance food security and drive rural economic growth. The story balances optimism with caution, highlighting potential challenges such as loan management and machinery maintenance, while underscoring the transformative potential of youth-focused interventions in Lesotho's agricultural landscape.

# Ministry Brings Farming Support Closer to Farmers

This article details a government initiative to decentralise agricultural support services, ensuring that farmers in remote areas receive timely inputs, extension services and training. Featuring field visits and interviews with beneficiaries, the story showcases how accessibility and proximity to support services directly influence productivity and farmer morale.

The article also examines government strategies to improve distribution channels, enhance monitoring and integrate community feedback, illustrating how policy implementation meets grassroots needs. Through this coverage, readers gain insight into the practical challenges and successes of translating policy into meaningful support for farmers across Lesotho.

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## M200 Million Tractor Credit Facility Targets Youth in Agriculture



From left, Finance Minister Dr Retselisitsoe Matlanyane, Agriculture Minister Thabo Mofosi and Lesotho PostBank MD Mokhachane Mopeki signing the MOU

### By Thoboloko Ntšonyane

In a bold move to put young Basotho at the forefront of agricultural transformation, the Government of Lesotho has committed that 40 percent of its new tractor subsidy scheme will go directly to youth farmers.

Out of the 500 tractors to be acquired under the Credit Guarantee Facility for Tractors and Farm Equipment, 200 will be reserved for young people eager to enter into commercial farming.

The landmark initiative was unveiled this month by Prime Minister Ntswaloane Matlanyane during the Memorandum of Understanding signing ceremony between the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition and the Lesotho PostBank.

The signing marked the extension of the Lesotho Post-Bank Credit Guarantee Facility, which will run for five years, offering accessible financing for tractors, farm machinery and equipment.

It was revealed that the Ministry of Finance would act as guarantor, ensuring that even smallholder and emerging farmers can access modern machinery to boost productivity.

Under the new agreement, government would inject M200 million into the scheme.

Of this amount, M175 million would fund the subsidy component, while M25 million, inclusive of taxes, would strengthen the Guarantee Fund that supports PostBank's on-lending to farmers.

"Farmers who qualify will receive a 30 percent subsidy on the cost of tractors and related equipment," Mokhachane Mopeki, the Managing Director of Lesotho PostBank explained, noting the subsidy applies to every eligible Basotho farmer who can repay their loan within a five-year period.

He noted that beneficiaries would not be required to pay a deposit, removing a major barrier to entry for many small-scale and youth farmers.

Mokhachane Mopeki, the Managing Director of Lesotho PostBank, hailed the scheme as a "forward-thinking initiative" that would empower farmers with modern agricultural machinery.

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# Unspoken Truths: Stories That Must Be Told

Beyond progress, 2025 also revealed challenges often left unspoken. Gender-based violence in farming, the unpaid labour of herd boys, and emerging threats to youth prosperity reminded us of the complex social realities behind agriculture. Editing these pieces was sobering but underscored the vital role of journalism in giving voice to those too often overlooked.

## Climate Change and Agriculture: An Emerging Threat to Health, Gender Equity and Youth Prosperity

This article explores how climate change in Lesotho is not only affecting agricultural productivity but also creating cascading social challenges. It highlights the dispropor-

tionate impact on women and youth, who face increased workloads, reduced income opportunities and heightened vulnerability to poverty. By linking environmental stressors with social in-

equities, the story emphasises the need for integrated policies that address both climate resilience and social protection. Through interviews with farmers, youth leaders and gender advocates, the article

underscores the importance of including marginalised voices in planning and decision-making, showing that sustainable agricultural development is inseparable from social equity.

## Climate Change and Agriculture: An Emerging Threat to Health, Gender Equity and Youth Prosperity

By Thoboloko Ntšonyane

In the face of escalating climate shifts, Lesotho's rural and farming communities are experiencing far more than erratic weather patterns and poor harvests.

Climate change is now deeply entangled with the country's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), particularly impacting women, youth, and smallholder farmers.

This link between climate and SRHR was the focus of a multi-stakeholder dialogue held recently, convened by the SADC Parliamentary Forum under the SRHR, HIV and AIDS Governance Project.

Participants explored how environmental crises, from prolonged droughts to flash floods, are worsening food insecurity, overburdening fragile health systems, and deepening gender inequalities, particularly in agriculture-reliant communities.

Weather forecaster Maqhanole Tsekoe from the Lesotho Meteorological Services highlighted that what used to be "normal climate patterns" have shifted dangerously, with extreme rainfall and prolonged dry spells becoming frequent.

"Climate has always been taken for granted but now it's like wearing three blankets instead of one; heat is trapped, rain falls irregularly, and our farming cycles are in disarray," he explained.

This unpredictability directly disrupts access to clinics and maternal health services, especially in Lesotho's rugged farming zones.

He narrated that flooded roads, snow-blocked passes, and drought-damaged infrastructure prevent pregnant women and the elderly from reaching facilities in time, threatening lives in already vulnerable populations.

Yet despite the looming dangers, Lesotho's National Climate Change Policy, which calls for strengthened health systems and climate resilience,



remains under-implemented, with insufficient integration of SRHR into climate finance and planning.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Gender Officer Matšeliso Mokone noted that these disruptions ripple far beyond clinics.

"In climate-affected rural areas, women are often forced to give birth at home due to lack of water or skilled birth attendants," she said.

She recounted a case of a woman who was at a health facility, maternal waiting homes and ready to give birth, but was met with a challenge of lack of water and to be helped, she had to pay strangers to fetch water, as the facility had none.

The meeting indicated that women in agriculture are often the first to suffer during droughts and last to recover from floods. The situation is dire.

"Loss of crops means not only lost income but reduced autonomy, pushing some into vulnerable situations where sexual and gender-based violence rises, and unintended pregnancies follow," Mokone said.

She further noted that these conditions also erode young women's ability to participate meaningfully in agricultural production or rural development.

"We must understand that gender inequality increases when resources shrink, and immediately, climate change turns poverty into a gender issue."

The Chair of the Parliamentary Women's Caucus, Hon 'Makatleho Motsaole, emphasised that although Lesotho's greenhouse gas emissions are minimal, the country's suffering is disproportionate.

She called for prioritising mitigation efforts, particularly in farming districts where the climate shocks hit hardest and the recovery is slowest.

Lesotho's agricultural vulnerability was reinforced in the 2021 World Bank Climate Risk Country Profile, which links extreme weather with increasing soil erosion, desertification and a loss of arable land, all critical concerns for a country whose economy and nutrition are deeply tied to the land.

The conversation also surfaced structural inequalities. Tampose Mothopeng of the People's Matrix decried how the LGBTQI+ community is sidelined during disaster responses, often blamed when disease or floods hit. This, he warned, isolates groups from planning and recovery conversations, a dangerous exclusion in a country that needs all hands on deck.

The Lesotho Network of AIDS Services Organisations (LENASO) Executive Director, Mamello Makoae, made a strong appeal for integrating SRHR into agriculture and climate budgeting.

"Family planning tools are lacking at rural clinics, and the biggest challenge remains a lack of funding. Our policies are there, but our pockets are empty," she said.

Hon Itumeleng Rantšo, MP and Chair of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Committee, also called out the gap between government budget speeches and implementation. "Our ministries present good promises, but data and accountability are weak. How can Parliament hold them to account if we don't know what's working?" she charged.

She also pointed to taboo issues such as access to safe abortion, stressing that cultural and religious beliefs must not silence the reality of gendered suffering worsened by poverty, climate and poor public health infrastructure.

"Climate change is the starter to poverty," she argued.

"...And poverty places an unbearable burden on women," she said.



# The Untold Violence Against Women in Agriculture

**T**his story brings to light the often-overlooked gender-based violence faced by women working in the agricultural sector. From harassment in labour settings to exclusion from land and resources, the article exposes systemic barriers that limit women's participation and productivity. Through personal testimonies,

it emphasises both the emotional and economic toll of such violence. The piece calls for policy reforms, community awareness campaigns and targeted support programmes, highlighting the urgent need to protect women and ensure that their contributions to Lesotho's agriculture are recognised, valued and safe.

## The Untold Violence Against Women in Agriculture

By Topollo Tlali

**G**ender-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 that is not only by fits but by culture, custom and the systemic 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 granted as heirs while girls are deprived of inheritance. In communities where inheritance is an absolute, 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 Rankalaka, Qacha's Neck, 34-year-old Mpilo Lemera 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 trailling behind him in the fields, carrying the seed bag, learning how to prepare stalls, recognising the signs of a sick cow and understanding the changing needs 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 teaching she received vanished under the weight of tradition. Suddenly, the same brothers who never set foot in the kraal became the "rightful heirs," while Mpilo, 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 seed and fertiliser. But during harvesting, there is no call, no 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 Mpilo's brothers jokingly remark every productive female cow after her. To them, it is light humour; to her, it is a painful metaphor; she is denied 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 fertiliser but never on land title deeds or livestock sale agreements.

This pattern is repeated 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 courthouses, yet they



"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 while fully understanding its limits: "Many women have the 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 for 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 60 and 70 per cent 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 have 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 Afriometer 2022 survey, customary norms continue to subordinate women, overshadowing legal reforms and leaving women trapped in cycles of dependence and exploitation.

Domestic violence is one of the most widely unreported, because communities do not know how to identify abuse or do not trust institutions meant to handle cases. Some families choose silence to "minimise peace," while others fear realisation, 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 Makalatho. "If gender-based violence continues, we will forget about our children as the main stakeholders."

Her fear echoes across rural Lesotho. Women like Mpilo and Makalatho 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, Makalatho 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 households, 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."



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 Ha Rankalaka, Qacha's Neck, Makalatho Rakabuleo carries a different, hopefully devastating story. When her husband died, she found herself grieving not only his loss, but the sudden collapse of the life they built together.

Her relatives arrived within days, claiming all

relatives, equipment, livestock and the family fields, leaving her with no means to feed her children.

"Gender specialists Dr Mamoketsi Ntsho, who has studied patterns of violence within agricultural settings, warn 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 sexism, especially in agriculture, cannot be confined to policies and courtrooms. It must reach the kraals, the fields, the chiefs' gatherings, the family households, 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."

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# Anticipating 2026



As **2025** draws to a close, it leaves a clear picture of both progress and the work that remains. Agriculture is at the heart of Lesotho's economy, resilience, and future. However, pressing challenges persist, including climate change, social inequities and gaps in policy implementation and support.

Looking ahead to 2026, the sector is attracting more attention, innovation and investment. For us, this is a call to diversify, deepen, and innovate. To not only report on events but also analyse trends, amplify marginalised voices and shape the conversation around sustainable agricultural growth.

We anticipate greater opportunities for youth, women and smallholder farmers, alongside a continued focus on climate-smart agriculture, mechanisation and rural development initiatives.

Ultimately, 2026 presents a chance to build on the foundation laid this year – to continue telling the stories that matter, highlighting progress, confronting challenges, and inspiring action. For us, it is a year to report with purpose, amplify change, and celebrate resilience, ensuring Lesotho's agriculture sector remains both visible and valued.

We urge you to look forward with excitement to our new projects and products, which are designed solely to make agriculture more fashionable.

Let's meet again in 2026.

**Happy Holidays.**

**Lerato Matheka**  
Managing Editor,



Ministry of Trade, Industry & Business Development  
COMPETITIVENESS AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION (CAFI) PROJECT

INVITATION FOR BIDS

**SUPPLY, DELIVERY AND INSTALLATION OF HAIL NETTING FOR SEVEN (7) FARMS FOR LESOTHO HORTICULTURAL INCUBATION AND TRAINING CENTRE**

1. The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho has received financing from the World Bank toward the cost of the Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion (CAFI) Project. The Government intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments under the contract for the **Supply, Delivery and Installation of Hail Netting for seven (7) farms for Lesotho Horticultural Incubation and training Centre (CAFI-WB-G-06)**.

2. The Ministry of Trade, Industry & Business Development through the CAFI Project Implementing Unit now invites sealed Bids from eligible Bidders for the **Supply, Delivery and Installation of Hail Netting for seven (7) farms for Lesotho Horticultural Incubation and Training Centre**.

3. Table 1

Ref	Farms	Delivery and Installation Sites	Estimated Completion Period (Weeks)
1.	Majaheng Farm	Mapoteng Majaheng, Berea District	4-6
2.	Peka Fresh Produce	Peka, Leribe District	4-6
3.	Botle Farms	Sehlabeng sa Thuathe, Berea District	4-6
4.	Nala farmlands	Sehlabeng sa Thuathe, Berea District	4-6
5.	Healthwise Farm	Thaba Khupa, Thaba Bosiu, Maseru District	4-6
6.	Ts'akholo Farm	Ts'akholo, Mafeteng District	4-6
7.	Mountain Fruit Growers	Ha Ntsi (Nazareta), Maseru District	4-6

4. Bidding will be conducted through national competitive

procurement using a Request for Bids (RFB) as specified in the World Bank's "Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers" Sixth Edition, February 2025 ("Procurement Regulations") and is open to all eligible Bidders as defined in the Procurement Regulations.

5. Interested eligible Bidders may obtain further information from *Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion (CAFI) Project Management Unit* from following email Address: [tmohejane@cafi.org.ls](mailto:tmohejane@cafi.org.ls) and copy [nleutsa@cafi.org.ls](mailto:nleutsa@cafi.org.ls) and [ltsoinyane@cafi.org.ls](mailto:ltsoinyane@cafi.org.ls) and inspect the bidding document during office hours *Procurement Unit from 09h00 to 16h00 hours* at the address given below.

6. A complete set of bidding documents in English may be purchased by interested eligible bidders upon payment of a nonrefundable fee of LSL1,000.00. The method of payment will be direct deposit to the *Nedbank Account Name is: Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion Project Maloti Account (Ministry of Trade and Industry), Account Number is: 11990167259 and Branch Name is: Maseru Branch*.

7. A mandatory site visit will be conducted on the dates below to allow suppliers to familiarize themselves with the scope of work.

Farms	Sites	Site Visit Date
Peka Fresh Produce	Peka, Leribe District	11/12/2025 at 09h00
Majaheng Farm	Mapoteng Majaheng, Berea District	11/12/2025 at 11h00
Botle Farms	Sehlabeng sa Thuathe, Berea District	11/12/2025 at 14h00
Nala farmlands	Sehlabeng sa Thuathe, Berea District	11/12/2025 at 15h00
Ts'akholo Farm	Ts'akholo, Mafeteng District	12/12/2025 at 10h00
Mountain Fruit Growers	Ha Ntsi (Nazareta), Maseru District	12/12/2025 at 12h00

Healthwise Farm	Thaba Khupa, Thaba Bosiu, Maseru District	12/12/2025 at 14h00
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8. Bids must be delivered to *Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion Project, 1st Floor 'Matanki House, Corner Balfour and Kingsway Road on or before January 15, 2026, at 10h00*. Electronic Bidding will not be permitted. Late Bids will be rejected. Bids will be publicly opened in the presence of the Bidders designated representatives and anyone who chooses to attend at the address below on **January 15, 2026, at 10h15**.

9. All Bids must be accompanied by Bid Securities as follows

Ref	Farms	Amount (LSL)
1	Majaheng Farm	10,000.00
2	Peka Fresh Produce	10,000.00
3	Botle Farms	10,000.00
4	Nala farmlands	10,000.00
5	Healthwise Farm	10,000.00
6	Ts'akholo Farm	10,000.00
7	Mountain Fruit Growers	10,000.00

10. Attention is drawn to the Procurement Regulations requiring the Borrower to disclose information on the successful bidder's beneficial ownership, as part of the Contract Award Notice, using the Beneficial Ownership Disclosure Form as included in the bidding document.

11. The Ministry of Trade, Industry & Business Development through CAFI Project reserves the right to cancel the procurement process at any stage before the bid opening, during the bidding process, or prior to awarding the contract without incurring liability or obligation to any bidder. Cancellation may occur due to changes in project requirements, budget constraints, administrative or technical challenges, irregularities, non-compliance with regulations, or if the process no longer aligns with project objectives or funding availability.

**Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion Project**  
1st Floor 'Matanki House, Corner Balfour and Kingsway Road  
P.O. Box 747, Maseru 100, Lesotho  
Tel: 22 315 100



**Vacancy**

**Farm Operator**

Maluti Fresh Produce is a dynamic and growing agricultural enterprise based in Lesotho, dedicated to cultivating high-quality, sustainably grown fresh produce for local markets and beyond. Our commitment extends from healthy soil to healthy communities, ensuring that every product we deliver meets the highest standards of freshness and nutritional value. We pride ourselves on employing innovative farming techniques, fostering a supportive work environment, and contributing positively to the economic development of the region. As a cornerstone of agricultural advancement in Lesotho, Maluti Fresh Produce is passionate about empowering our team members, providing continuous learning opportunities, and embracing practices that protect our environment. Join us in our mission to nurture the land and feed the nation with pride and excellence.

**Job Description**

Are you an experienced and dedicated individual with a passion for agriculture and a keen eye for operational efficiency? Maluti Fresh Produce, a leading agricultural enterprise committed to sustainable farming practices and delivering high-quality produce across Lesotho, is urgently seeking a skilled Farm Operator to join our dynamic team in Maseru. This is a critical hands-on role that requires a proactive approach, technical proficiency, and a strong work ethic. As a Farm Operator, you will be instrumental in the daily activities that ensure the health and productivity of our crops, from planting to harvest. You will operate and maintain a variety of farm machinery, assist with irrigation systems, monitor crop health, and contribute to general farm maintenance. This role is ideal for someone who thrives in an outdoor environment, enjoys problem-solving, and is committed to contributing to the success of a vital agricultural operation. We are looking for someone who can hit the ground running, apply their expertise, and grow with us as we continue to expand our reach and impact within the local food system. If you are ready to make a significant contribution and are eager to work in a supportive team environment where your efforts directly impact food security and quality, we encourage you to apply today! Your role will

involve ensuring all farm operations run smoothly and efficiently, adhering to strict safety protocols and environmental guidelines, and collaborating with farm management to achieve production targets. This is more than just a job; it's an opportunity to cultivate a career in a sector that truly matters.

**Key Responsibilities**

- Operate and maintain a range of farm machinery and equipment, including tractors, cultivators, planters, sprayers, and harvesting equipment.
- Perform daily pre-operation checks, routine maintenance, and minor repairs on machinery.
- Assist with planting, cultivating, irrigating, and harvesting various crops according to established schedules and procedures.
- Monitor crop health, identify signs of disease or pest infestation, and report findings to farm management.
- Apply fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides safely and accurately under supervision.
- Participate in the installation, maintenance, and repair of irrigation systems.
- Conduct general farm duties, including fencing, weeding, land preparation, and facility upkeep.
- Adhere strictly to all health, safety, and environmental regulations and company policies.
- Maintain accurate records of daily activities, equipment usage, and crop treatments.
- Collaborate effectively with other farm staff and management to ensure efficient farm operations.

**Required Skills**

- Proven experience in operating agricultural machinery and equipment.
- Basic knowledge of crop production cycles and farming techniques.
- Ability to perform manual labor and lift heavy objects (up

to 25 kg).

- Strong mechanical aptitude for equipment maintenance and troubleshooting.
- Excellent observational skills for monitoring crop health.
- Ability to work independently and as part of a team.
- Valid driver's license, preferably with experience driving farm vehicles.
- Physical stamina and ability to work outdoors in various weather conditions.
- Good communication skills and a positive attitude.

**Preferred Qualifications**

- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Certificate or vocational training in agriculture or a related field.
- Experience with specific crops cultivated by Maluti Fresh Produce (e.g., vegetables, grains).
- Knowledge of sustainable farming practices or organic agriculture.
- First Aid certification.

**Perks & Benefits**

- Competitive monthly salary.
- Opportunity for career growth and professional development.
- Training in modern agricultural techniques and equipment operation.
- Supportive and collaborative team environment.
- Contribution to local food security and community development.
- Potential for performance-based incentives.

**How to Apply**

Interested candidates are encouraged to click on the application link below to submit their resume and a brief cover letter outlining their experience and suitability for the Farm Operator role. Please highlight your experience with farm machinery and any specific agricultural skills you possess. We are reviewing applications immediately and encourage early submissions.



# Science Journalism Key to Informed Societies

By Thoboloko Ntšonyane

**P**RETORIA- Science journalists from around the world recently gathered in Africa for the 13th World Conference of Science Journalists (WCSJ), where experts called for accurate, accessible, and responsible reporting of science to empower societies to make informed decisions and foster resilience.

The five-day conference, held in Pretoria, was the first global gathering of science journalists to take place on African soil. It brought together scientists, academics, researchers, and science and environmental journalists to reflect on the increasing importance of science journalism in a world shaped by climate change, health crises, technology, and misinformation.

Under the theme "Science Journalism and Social Justice: Journalism that Builds Understanding and Resilience," the conference featured keynote addresses and 58 parallel sessions, including seminars, workshops, and lectures. A total of 196 speakers participated, alongside 21 field trips designed to enhance participants' engagement with science in practical contexts.

In his opening address, South Africa's Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Professor Blade Nzimande, emphasised the vital role of science journalism in society, stating that science journalism is essential not only for fostering an appreciation of science but also for ensuring that scientific knowledge contributes to a just and humane world.

"Science journalism must actively challenge discrimination, stereotypes and bias while promoting human rights and the dignity of all people, especially marginalised groups, in its reporting," said Prof Nzimande.

He warned that fake news and misinformation pose a serious threat to public trust in science and called on journalists to take a proactive role in countering false narratives.

The Minister also urged the responsible integration of emerging technologies, including artificial



intelligence, without compromising journalistic integrity.

Prof Nzimande further highlighted the capacity gaps in science journalism across Africa and between the Global South and the Global North, calling for concerted efforts to bridge these divides. He suggested that science journalism could serve as a bridge for science diplomacy and help strengthen global solidarity in the face of shared challenges.

Throughout the conference, discussions underscored the importance of building trust between journalists and scientists and the need for clear, simple explanations of science to enable public understanding and action. Participants from various regions shared experiences in navigating political pressures, limited access to data and public scepticism towards science.

The conference also provided opportunities for journalists to establish new professional networks, while strongly emphasising ethical journalism and data literacy. Panellists repeatedly cautioned that misinformation and disinformation undermine responsible journalism and erode public confidence in both the media and science.

Dr Ebrahim Samodien from the South African Medical Research Council warned that health journalists, in particular, must remain vigilant to avoid sensationalism that could incite unnecessary panic.

"The public can only make informed decisions if

they access credible scientific information from trusted sources," he said, challenging journalists to critically assess and verify the authenticity of information before disseminating it to the public.

Cross-border challenges and innovative methods for debunking misinformation and disinformation were also explored, with journalists encouraged to collaborate beyond national boundaries and adopt evidence-based strategies to counter false narratives in their respective countries.

One participant, Barbra Sehlule Muzata, highlighted the devastating impact of climate change on smallholder farmers in Africa. She explained that these farmers rely heavily on rainfall but are now facing prolonged droughts, extreme heat, and increasingly unpredictable weather patterns.

"This threatens livelihoods and exacerbates food insecurity and poverty," she said, noting that many smallholder farmers lack the resources to recover from climate shocks. She stressed that climate-smart agriculture and adaptation strategies are becoming more urgent than ever.

Muzata emphasised that supporting smallholder farmers is not only an African issue but a global one, linked to fairness, sustainable development, and global food security. Calling for greater media attention, she said: "This is a science story that demands immediate attention."

Duncan Mboyah, chairperson of the Kenya En-

vironment and Science Journalists Association, reflected on the unique nature of science journalism compared to other areas of reporting. He explained that while politics, business, and sport are driven by fast-moving breaking news, science journalism operates on a different timeline.

"A climate study that takes five years cannot be rushed, and a medical breakthrough cannot be condensed into a few characters without losing its essence," he said.

Mboyah advised young and emerging journalists to read widely, learn from experienced science reporters, and cultivate genuine relationships with scientists. He encouraged journalists to view scientists not merely as sources of quotes but as partners in the storytelling process.

"For me, the strongest science stories are built on trust, allowing scientists to convey the detail and complexity that truly matter," he said.

The conference also celebrated excellence in African science reporting through the African Science Journalism Awards, highlighting the growing quality and impact of science journalism on the continent.

Kenyan journalist Scovian Lillian was recognised for her investigation into climate-driven disease patterns in Turkana, while South Africa's Leonie Joubert was honoured for her long-term documentation of environmental injustice and what she described as "slow violence" unfolding over decades.

Ghanaian journalist Ibrahim Khalilulah Usman received an award for his work on verification challenges in the age of artificial intelligence, a story that involved four months of rigorous fact-checking.

The judging panel, which included seasoned science journalist Joseph Joslaine Mbeng Boum alongside Roselyne Sachiti and Dr Paul Adepoju, noted that selecting the winners was particularly challenging due to the exceptionally high standard of entries. They described spending many sleepless nights deliberating before reaching their final decisions.

The next World Conference of Science Journalists is scheduled to take place in 2027 in the United Kingdom and the People's Republic of China.

# Safeguarding Soils, Vegetation and Wildlife for a Sustainable Future

By Thoboloko Ntšonyane

**P**RETORIA – Healthy ecosystems are essential for the survival of both humans and animals. Soils, vegetation, and wildlife form an interconnected system that sustains life by providing food, clean water, shelter, and environmental stability. When one element is damaged, the entire system begins to unravel, leading to serious consequences for biodiversity and livelihoods.

Fertile soils underpin food production and support rangelands on which animals depend for grazing, while vegetation protects the land from erosion and improves air quality. Wildlife, in turn, plays a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance and supporting tourism-based economies. When these systems are compromised, both plant and animal ecosystems suffer, often with long-lasting effects.

Professor GP Nortjé of the University of South Africa's School of Ecological and Human Sustainability has warned that unsustainable land-use practices, particularly off-road driving, pose a serious threat to fragile ecosystems.

He stated that the uncontrolled use of off-road vehicles is not ecologically sustainable and should be permitted only under strict regulation.

"If it is to be allowed, it should be according to rigorously enforced rules, underpinned by sound scientific evidence," Prof Nortjé said.

He explained that soils, vegetation and wildlife are not only ecological assets but also the backbone of the tourism industry. Wildlife attracts tourists through guided tours, photography, conservation-focused travel, and accommodation, while entrance fees and tourism-related services contribute significantly to economic growth in protected areas.

However, Prof Nortjé cautioned that tourism activities can place immense pressure on sensitive eco-

systems. He pointed out that soil compaction and crusting are common problems in game farms, national parks, and protected conservation areas.

"Soil compaction and crusting are caused by physical forces applied to the soil surface, such as raindrop impact, vehicles driving across the soil, and animal traffic," he explained.

While both wet and dry soils can be affected, he noted that moist soils are particularly vulnerable to damage from vehicles. He added that the impact of off-road driving extends far beyond the narrow wheel tracks visible on the ground.

"The effects are not confined to a strip under the wheel tracks; they extend much wider due to a significant lateral effect on both sides of the vehicle tracks," he said.

Prof Nortjé added, "This lateral effect, both outside the vehicle tracks and between them, increases the total area of compacted soil."

Animal movement also contributes significantly to soil crusting, especially in areas with high stocking rates or concentrated grazing. The combined impact of human and animal activity accelerates soil erosion, reducing land productivity and damaging vegetation cover.

He explained that soil sensitivity determines how easily land can be damaged by activities such as off-road driving. "In general, sandy soils are very sensitive but also quite resilient — damage occurs easily, but recovery is relatively quick. However, soils such as sodic soils are sensitive and have low resilience," he said.

Prof Nortjé noted that countries in the world's third major soil region are particularly vulnerable to soil degradation, citing that the soils of this region are old and found in semi-arid areas. These soils are inherently extremely vulnerable to soil crusting, com-

paction, and erosion," he said.

"This region is located in the mid-latitudes of the Southern Hemisphere. The dominant soils here differ significantly from those of the high-latitude continents in the Northern Hemisphere and the soils of the humid tropics."

He further explained that sub-surface soil compaction has severe consequences for plant growth. When the soil beneath the surface becomes compacted, roots are unable to penetrate deeper layers to access water.

"When roots are confined to the shallow soil layer above the compacted layer, they cannot reach the water stored in the subsoil," he said. "As a result, plants can suffer drought stress even when there is more than enough plant-available water below. This subsoil is often referred to as the 'water trough' for plants."

According to Prof Nortjé, sub-surface soil compaction does not recover naturally. He stated that research has shown that the damage can persist for 42 to 200 years, thereby inducing long-term drought conditions and permanently reducing land productivity if left unaddressed.

To rehabilitate degraded land, Prof. Nortjé outlined three key approaches: chemical, physical, and biological.

The chemical approach focuses on rebuilding soil structure so that the soil can bind together and remain healthy. Physical methods aim to slow down water flow to prevent soil erosion, while biological methods rely on living organisms to restore the land.

"These include replanting grass, using compost tea to nourish the soil, and placing palm-leaf mats and sisal in deep erosion channels, known as dongas, to protect the soil," he explained.

Additional rehabilitation measures include packing dry branches in eroded areas, constructing small grass

barriers to slow water movement, laying stone bunds to stabilise slopes, and building durable structures such as gabions to control erosion in dongas.

"These methods help keep the soil in place and allow vegetation to re-establish," he said.

Prof Nortjé also warned that tourism, while economically beneficial, can exert increasing pressure on protected areas. He noted that this pressure is often reflected in rising visitor numbers, increased intensity of game drives, expansion of off-road driving, and hidden but cumulative ecological impacts.

Despite these risks, he emphasised that tourism remains a vital source of funding for conservation. He stated that the challenge lies in managing tourism activities responsibly to balance economic benefits with environmental protection.

"Tourism has measurable ecological impacts, but it also finances conservation. With proper management, these impacts can be controlled or reversed," he said.

He emphasised that decisions by park and reserve managers should be guided by scientific research and long-term ecological sustainability rather than short-term profit.

"Sustainability depends on science-led decision-making," he said.

Prof Nortjé also highlighted the critical role of science journalists in protecting ecosystems. He stated that journalists are essential for improving the accuracy of ecological reporting, translating complex research into accessible public narratives, and building public support for sustainable tourism and conservation policies.

By responsibly telling these stories, he said, journalists can help ensure that soils, vegetation, and wildlife are safeguarded not only for tourism and economic gain but also for the survival of future generations.



# The Misfortune of Hoko's 197 Sheep

By Topollo Tlali

For Lekoko Salemane Hoko, a wool and mohair farmer with a flock of over 900 sheep, farming has always been an act of faith. Last month, that faith was brutally tested on a cold afternoon in Semonkong's Ha Elia, when a sudden hailstorm killed 197 sheep within minutes as they were being driven home from a wool shearing centre.

"The day started normally, like any other shearing day, filled with satisfaction and a job well done. We collected clean wool and hoped for a handsome income," Hoko recalled, noting that the morning passed smoothly.

On that day, he worked closely with his herd boys, guiding them through the shearing process. By early afternoon, the freshly shorn sheep were being driven home, accompanied by dogs that protected both the flock and the herd boys.

"The sheep were healthy, the wool was good, and the shearing was fast," he said.

But the weather changed without warning.

"There were a few clouds in the sky, and I thought we would be home before anything serious happened," Hoko said.

Within minutes, the wind intensified, he said.

Light rain began to fall, making the sheep restless and difficult to control. Suddenly, the rain turned into violent hail, pounding the exposed, freshly shorn animals.

"The sheep panicked. The hail became too heavy. They were cold, confused and collapsing," he said.

The herd boys attempted to move the flock to the nearest cattle post, but the storm was relentless. The hailstones battered both people and animals, forcing the herd boys to retreat and leaving the sheep exposed.

"There was nowhere to hide for the sheep or for us," Hoko said.

When the storm finally eased, the devastation became clear.

"We found 197 sheep affected. The dogs tried to gather the flock, but the sheep kept falling," he recalled.

The ground was slippery with hail. When Hoko tried to lift one sheep, he slipped and fell.

"After the storm, it was too quiet. I was surrounded by bodies lying motionless. Some were still breathing, but struggling."

The loss was overwhelming, not just emotionally, but also economically. Among the dead were breeding ewes that an association had already ordered.

"Those sheep were not just animals. They represented years of struggle, family wealth, and the savings my father and I built together," he said.

Hoko estimates his financial loss at

M591,000, with individual sheep valued at M3,000 and above.

"To calculate how much money disappears in a few minutes, it feels unreal," he said.

Unable to salvage the carcasses, Hoko distributed meat to villagers and buried the remaining parts.

Beyond the immediate loss, the disaster exposed deeper systemic challenges. Hoko explained that livestock insurance remains largely inaccessible to farmers like him.

"Most insurance schemes only cover animals kept in confinement. My sheep must go out daily to pasture. I cannot afford to lock them up and buy feed," he said.

While climate-related challenges are not new to Hoko, he stated they have become harsher and more unpredictable.

"In the past, we worried about drought and frost. But now storms come without warning," he said.

He reflected on how elders once relied on natural signs to predict the seasons, a knowledge that has grown unreliable amid changing climatic conditions.

"Climate change, for me, is watching healthy sheep in the morning and seeing them dead in the afternoon while I am completely helpless," he said.

Hoko has called on responsible authorities to invest in covered sheep and goat shelters at shearing centres, arguing that freshly shorn animals should not be forced to travel long distances exposed to harsh weather.

"Shearing centres must be designed with safety in mind. This would prevent losses like mine," he said.

Although he has not received compensation, Hoko mentioned that the Disaster Management Authority visited his home in his absence.

Despite the loss, his resolve remains unbroken.

"The storm killed my sheep, but it did not take away my will to continue farming. This is a journey I inherited from my father, and I will continue working it for those coming after me," he said.

Climate change is increasingly recognised as a major threat to livestock systems worldwide. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and extreme weather events undermine animal welfare, pasture availability, and productivity.

In Lesotho, climate variability is placing immense pressure on farmers who depend on natural grazing systems. While the National Climate Change Strategy promotes coordination, community participation, and adaptation, implementation remains constrained by limited funding and economic vulnerabilities.

# 15 Sheep Slaughtered Overnight by Unknown Wild Predator

By Topollo Tlali

A Berea farmer has been left devastated after an unknown wild predator slaughtered 15 sheep in a single night, sending shockwaves through the Ha Tebeli community and raising concerns about the growing human-wildlife conflict in rural Lesotho.

In September, Mokhethi Molefi, a small-scale livestock farmer, woke up to a scene of horror when he went to check his kraal in the early hours of the morning. He found blood-soaked ground, injured animals and lifeless sheep scattered across what he believed was a secure, fenced enclosure.

"I wake up every morning to check my animals as usual. That morning, when I entered the kraal, I could not believe what I saw. My sheep were lying down, some dead, some badly injured," Molefi recalled.

Of the 15 sheep attacked, seven were killed instantly, while eight were left severely injured. Unable to save them, Molefi made the painful decision to slaughter the injured sheep to prevent further suffering.

The incident has instilled fear across Ha Tebeli village, an area surrounded by thick vegetation, where residents say they have never experienced attacks of this nature before. Villagers were particularly alarmed by the silence of the night during which the attack occurred.

"There were no dogs barking, no strange sounds. It was completely silent. We only discovered the damage in the morning," Molefi said, puzzled by the predator's stealth.

The identity of the animal responsible remains unknown, heightening anxiety among farmers, who now fear they could be next.

"If we knew what animal this was, we could at least prepare ourselves. But because it is unknown, fear continues to grow," Molefi said.

The loss has dealt a heavy financial and emotional blow.

Molefi estimates his losses at M18,000, as he usually sells sheep at M1,200 each. For him, livestock is not just an asset but his sole source of income.

"Marino rearing is how I support my family with education, health and everything. Losing them like this weakens my ability to provide," he said.

Reflecting on the incident, Molefi highlighted the importance of livestock insurance, admitting that although he was aware of such services, he had delayed taking action.

"I always planned to insure my animals, but I kept postponing it. Now I regret it," he said.

The village chief, Sekoai Tebeli, confirmed that livestock attacks have been reported recently in the area.

"This is not an isolated incident. Another farmer recently reported that her ducks were killed by unknown animals. As a community,

we must remain alert," the chief said.

He added that villagers are considering organising a coordinated search to identify possible predator habitats and signs of wildlife movement near homesteads.

Molefi said he felt helpless after the attack, unsure where to formally report the case, although an agricultural extension officer later visited to offer support.

"I wish Lesotho had a dedicated office or response team to assist farmers during threats to crops and livestock," he said.

The incident has left Molefi battling fear and uncertainty. He has since relocated his remaining sheep to the highlands under the care of herd boys, yet the anxiety persists.

"Even after moving them, every night I still fear that the predator will finish the few I have left," he said.

He has called on the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security to assist farmers with practical solutions rather than financial handouts.

"Our livelihoods are at risk. Farmers support the economy. We are not asking for handouts; just guidance on how to protect our animals," he appealed.

Molefi's case reflects a broader challenge facing rural communities as human-wildlife conflict intensifies. According to the Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation (LTDC), wildlife conservation remains critical to tourism development, but incidents involving stray wildlife must be properly managed.

LTDC has urged the public to report stray wild animals to the Department of Environment, which is responsible for wildlife conservation and conflict management.

FAO reports note that the expansion of human settlements, overgrazing, climate change, and habitat loss are pushing wild animals closer to farming communities. They indicate that declining natural prey due to drought and ecological disruption forces carnivores to turn to domestic animals to survive.

Similar challenges are observed globally. In parts of the United States and Canada, coyotes prey on sheep and goats; in Europe, wolves and bears attack livestock; while in parts of Africa and the Middle East, jackals and wild dogs pose persistent threats to farmers.

The Ha Tebeli incident may signal a localised ecological imbalance, where disrupted natural food systems are driving predators into villages. For farmers like Molefi, the situation underscores the urgent need for coordinated government response, farmer education, improved livestock protection infrastructure and wildlife management strategies.

"Wild animals are not just a threat to our livestock; they are becoming a threat to us," Molefi warned.

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