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NOT FOR SALE

Cattle Racing Defies Ban Amid Foot-and-Mouth Crisis

Cattle Racing competition - **Picture Courtesy Lekope FM**

Page 2

Selibe Mochoboroane has been appointed Minister of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, moving from the Ministry of Health in a Cabinet reshuffle approved on the 29th March by King Letsie III

HORSE SICKNESS OUTBREAK KILLS 67

Page 4

HOW AI IS POWERING PREDICTIVE FARMING IN LESOTHO

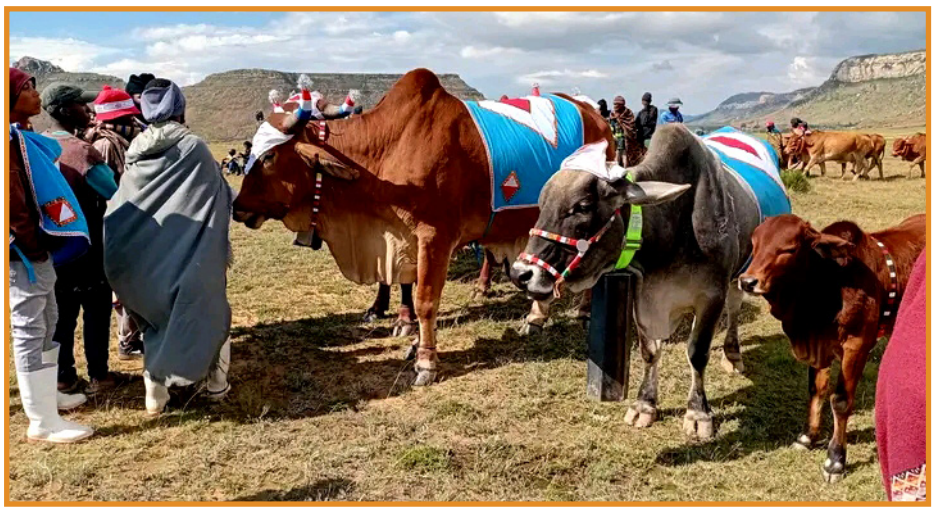
Page 7

YOUNG FARMERS TAKE CENTRE STAGE AT 5TH MZANSI YOUNG FARMERS INDABA

Page 12-13

Cattle Racing Defies Ban Amid Foot-and-Mouth Crisis

...Armed forces mum as politicians continue moving livestock



*Cattle Racing competition - **Picture Courtesy Lekope FM***

By Topollo Tlali

Lesotho's fight to contain foot-and-mouth disease is being undermined in plain sight.

Even as authorities impose strict bans on livestock movement and gatherings, cattle racing competitions continue across parts of the country, organised by popular politicians, raising alarm among officials, farmers and industry stakeholders.

The country recently lost its World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH)- designated foot-and-mouth disease-free status following confirmed outbreaks in multiple districts.

In response, the Department of Livestock Services under the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition issued a directive on 2 March 2026, enforcing strict controls within a 10-kilometre radius of affected areas.

The circular is clear: livestock gatherings, auctions, and informal trading of cloven-hoofed animals are prohibited without veterinary clearance. The movement of animal products, including raw milk, hides, skins, and manure, is also banned without permits. Non-compliance, the ministry warned, is an offence under the Stock Diseases Proclamation of 1896 and may lead to prosecution.

Yet, despite these measures, cattle races continue to bring animals into close contact, heightening the risk of further spread.

Dr Relebohile Lepheane from the Ministry of Agriculture acknowledged the growing concern, warning that such activities threaten both disease control efforts and the broader economy.

"The ministry's work involves teaching communities how to avoid the spread of the disease. If communities fail to abide by the rules established by the ministry, the Lesotho Mounted Police, National Security Services, and the Lesotho Defence Force are responsible for law enforcement in these communities," Lepheane noted.

"As the ministry, we have reported to the three bodies responsible for stopping animal gatherings in different communities; it is in their hands and power to ensure that everyone who gathers animals complies with the law," Lepheane concluded.

Following the livestock movement ban on 2 March 2026, on 6 April, more than 20 villages competed for a cash prize of 40,000 in a cattle-racing competition in Matelile, in Mafereng District, despite the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak, which had been declared a crisis. The event was sponsored by Moleboheng Mokobocho Sefali, a secretary in Prime Minister Sam Matekane's office.

A second cattle race competition was also held on 18 April at Ha Rasenkisi, sponsored by Yantai Concrete Bricks and Paving and managed by Motsamai John Tanlla, a prominent political figure in the country. The event featured 26 kraals from different villages.

For farmers' organisations, the situation is not only concerning but also very reckless.

Khotso Lepheana, Executive Director of the Lesotho National Farmers Union (LENAFU), condemned the ongoing races in strong terms.

"The racing competitions that occurred regardless of the movement ban are not just carelessness in communities, but a direct threat to our national livestock rearing industry and the livelihoods of thousands of households. It is sad that Basotho farmers are prioritising entertainment and quick money over biosecurity. My wish is for them to look beyond short-term earnings; if the disease spreads, all farmers will be impoverished, and the country will also suffer economically," he added.

He warned that the consequences extend beyond cattle farmers.

"Sheep and goat farmers are currently panicking about the future of their market. If Basotho continue this reckless behaviour of disregarding government regulations, farmers will face a lack of market, and as Lesotho wool and mohair are top foreign-exchange earners, major buyers require products from countries free of foot-and-mouth disease."

"Different stakeholders should align with the Ministry of Agriculture's regulations. We know money is tempting, but farmers should consider the economic risks that the spread of foot-and-mouth disease can bring to the country," Lepheana concluded.

On the ground, frustration is growing over what some describe as a disconnect between policy and behaviour.

Mohale Leloma, District Administration Officer for Mafeteng, said awareness campaigns are ongoing but not always effective.

"It is surprising to see that people are in ignorance and denial of the dangers the foot-and-mouth disease can pose to the country's economy if cases continue to increase. Shearing centres have implemented measures for goats and sheep farmers to follow when attending shearing sessions that align with issued regulations to decrease the spread of foot-and-mouth disease," Leloma noted.

"In races, cattle run closely together, and those cattle are in serious danger if the disease is detected," Leloma concluded.

Farmers themselves are also calling for stronger enforcement and clearer communication.

Tlohelang Aumane, former minister of development planning, now a farmer, stressed the importance of biosecurity and awareness; "After Lesotho and South Africa declared a foot-and-mouth outbreak, the ministry of agriculture implemented control measures that farmers and citizens should follow to control the disease."

"Farmers should engage in activities that are safe for their livestock during this outbreak to avoid further increases in the number of cases."

He urged authorities to improve communication nationwide, citing that relevant information on the foot-and-mouth disease should be available in every media house so that every Mosotho can understand the state of the disease and determine whether the number of cases is decreasing or increasing."

"Some farmers in rural areas have only heard about the disease once, and so far have no information. If the ministry remains quiet, the communities might end up organising gatherings."

Voices from the private sector are equally critical.

Lebohang Mosaola, a private extension officer at Leseli la lihoai, questioned the effectiveness of current awareness efforts.

"As Basotho, we are very ignorant to the extent that we often bring problems upon ourselves. I have noticed that even before Lesotho reported foot and mouth disease,

Continues in page 4...

Meraka e fana ka tšireletso lisoseng tse lateng tsa tahleho ea mehlape

...Continuation from page 2

Basotho were still buying animals from South Africa, which has high cases of the disease in the region."

"I was impressed at first after the ministry of agriculture issued the control measures, but now the ministry is relaxed as there are no awareness campaigns nationwide," Mosaola noted.

"Where are the awareness campaigns, educational sessions nationwide, posters, radio teachings, and newspaper updates?" he asked.

"At this point, I do not blame people who are organising cattle racing campaigns because the ministry is not fulfilling its role of educating the nation about the disease."

Tensions are also emerging within the livestock sector itself.

Khotsang Moshoeshoe of the Lesotho National Wool and Mohair Growers Association criticised what he described as uneven enforcement.

"It is as if sheep and goat farmers are the only ones stopped from gathering animals," he stated.

"Why are cattle farmers continuing to organise competitions while we have been stopped from holding shows? Why are prominent people in the community the ones sponsoring these events?"

He also questioned the transparency around the outbreak: "Is this disease truly present in the country? Why are farm owners found to have foot and mouth disease kept anonymous? What is really being hidden? The worst aspect of this entire issue is that Lesotho has been reported to have this disease, so for us, goat and sheep farmers, our market is severely affected as buyers require products from FMD-free states."

"We need fair rules that protect all farmers without hiding the truth. Our survival depends on transparent markets, not strange restrictions," he concluded.

When approached for comment on how the cattle shows were hosted, the ministry remained mum. Permanent Secretary Khothatso Tshoana referred this paper to Dr Relebohile Lepheane from the Department of Livestock in the Ministry of Agriculture.

According to global animal health authorities, foot-and-mouth disease spreads rapidly through direct contact, contaminated equipment, and, under certain conditions, airborne transmission. In a country where agriculture underpins rural livelihoods, the risks are significant.

"In many rural communities, cattle racing transcends mere sport, representing pride, status, and tradition. Winners often gain social recognition and, in some cases, financial rewards," Lepheana noted, "But in the midst of a national outbreak, those traditions are colliding with a harsh reality: every gathering carries risk. As livestock continue to mix and crowds gather, the question facing authorities is becoming more urgent: whether regulations on paper can translate into action on the ground before the outbreak deepens further."

Picture Courtesy ***World horse welfare***

Horse Sickness Outbreak Kills 67

By Thoboloko Ntšonyane

Lesotho's livestock sector is under renewed threat after an outbreak of African Horse Sickness (AHS) claimed the lives of 67 horses, raising urgent concerns over disease control, animal movement and the country's overall biosecurity readiness.

The outbreak, confirmed by Minister of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition Thabo Mofosi in Parliament this week, has already spread across key districts including Maseru, Mohale's Hoek, and Semonkong, signalling a fast-moving crisis affecting equine populations.

Mofosi said the disease was likely introduced through the movement of infected horses into the country, underscoring growing vulnerabilities in border control and animal monitoring systems.

AHS is a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes and affects horses, donkeys, mules and zebras. In severe cases, it can lead to sudden death. Common symptoms include difficulty breathing, swelling around the head and neck and rapid physical deterioration.

Farmers have been urged to immediately isolate infected animals to limit further spread.

The Ministry has moved to contain the outbreak, with Mofosi confirming that efforts are underway to secure vaccines and to work closely with affected farmers. However, uncertainty remains around the specific strain currently circulating.

He noted that investigations are ongoing to determine the exact type of virus involved, with samples expected to be analysed in South African laboratories to guide response measures.

According to the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), the sickness is an infectious but non-contagious viral disease that disrupts the respiratory and circulatory systems in affected animals. It is spread by Culicoides midges and exists in multiple forms, including pulmonary, cardiac, mixed and horse sickness fever, each carrying varying levels of severity.

The outbreak comes at a time when Lesotho is still grappling with other livestock health challenges, including the lingering threat of foot-and-mouth disease. The country has yet to fully stabilise its animal health status following outbreaks linked to regional transmission, particularly from neighbouring South Africa.

This overlap of diseases is intensifying pressure on an already fragile agricultural system.

While the Ministry has acknowledged the seriousness of the outbreak, Mofosi indicated that the full cost of containment efforts is still being assessed, with ongoing studies expected to inform the budget required for an effective response.

He added that plans are in motion to strengthen laboratory capacity and increase manpower, steps seen as critical to improving disease detection and response times.

The outbreak has also raised concerns around recent large-scale equine gatherings. Just weeks ago, the country hosted its annual horse race event in Peka to commemorate King Moshoeshoe I, sparking fears that such events could accelerate the spread of the disease if not tightly controlled.

Currently, Lesotho lacks a unified traceability framework for horses and other equids. While some monitoring mechanisms exist, there is no consistent national approach to registering animals, tracking movement, or enforcing biosecurity protocols.

WHO ARE WE

Post-Harvest Losses

Lesotho's agricultural sector continues to play a vital role in sustaining rural livelihoods; however, a significant portion of food produced never reaches the table. Post-harvest losses occurring between harvesting, storage, transportation, and marketing undermine national efforts to achieve food security and improve farmer incomes.

A recent situational analysis conducted across Maseru, Leribe, Mokhotlong, Mohale's Hoek, and Quthing highlights the scale of the problem. While 94–98% of farmers grow maize, the country's staple crop, a considerable share of this production is lost after harvest. On average, maize yields stand at 905.58 kg per hectare, with about 82% sold; yet, losses during handling and storage significantly reduce the final marketable volume.

Globally, post-harvest losses in developing countries range between 20–30%, and Lesotho reflects similar patterns, particularly in grains and horticultural produce. These losses not only reduce food availability but also weaken household incomes and increase reliance on food imports.

Where Losses Occur Most

The study shows that losses are highest at key stages of the value chain:

- Harvesting and threshing, where manual methods lead to grain breakage and contamination
- Drying and storage, often conducted under poor conditions that expose crops to pests, rodents, and moisture
- Transportation and handling, where inadequate packaging damages produce

Districts such as Leribe and Maseru reported high levels of insect infestation during storage, while Mohale's Hoek and Quthing face challenges linked to poor drying practices. In Mokhotlong, limited infrastructure and harsh climatic conditions further exacerbate losses.

Drivers Behind the Losses

Several underlying factors contribute to the problem:

- Unreliable rainfall, cited by 48.1% of farmers as a major constraint
- Limited access to inputs (16.1%) and financial resources (9.4%)

Postharvest losses are quietly eroding Lesotho s food supply cutting farmer incomes and deepening reliance on imports

- Inadequate storage facilities, with most farmers relying on ordinary rooms
- Lack of training, with 84% of farmers reporting no technical support in post-harvest handling

Additionally, the absence of cold storage facilities and aggregation centres limits farmers' ability to preserve and market perishable goods such as fruits and vegetables.

Impact on Farmers and the Economy

Post-harvest losses directly affect both livelihoods and national food systems. With maize production declining from 130,000 tonnes in 1961 to 70,000 tonnes in 2020, the country increasingly depends on imports to meet demand.

For smallholder farmers, these losses translate into reduced income, lower household food availability, and limited opportunities to participate in formal markets. Poor handling practices also affect food quality, raising concerns around food safety and nutrition.

Opportunities to Reduce Losses

Despite the challenges, there is growing recognition of practical solutions that can significantly reduce losses:

- Adoption of low-cost storage technologies such as hermetic bags and metal silos
- Establishment of aggregation centres to improve market access and bulk handling
- Promotion of value addition and agro-processing to extend shelf life
- Strengthening farmer cooperatives for better coordination and bargaining power

Efforts by the government and development partners, including programmes supported by the World Food Programme (WFP), are already underway to improve infrastructure, training, and market access.

What Needs to Happen Next

Addressing post-harvest losses requires a coordinated, long-term approach. Key priorities include:

- Developing a national post-harvest management strategy
- Expanding farmer training and extension services
- Encouraging public-private partnerships to invest in storage and processing infrastructure
- Promoting climate-smart agricultural practices
- Strengthening research and data collection to guide interventions

Reducing post-harvest losses presents a clear opportunity for Lesotho to improve food security without necessarily increasing production. By preserving more of what is already grown, the country can enhance resilience, support farmers, and build a more sustainable agricultural sector.

Edited Grapevine DNA Boosts Resistance to Disease and Drought, Study Finds

By Thoboloko Ntšonyane

Researchers at Stellenbosch University have published new findings demonstrating that targeted DNA editing in grapevines can significantly improve their resistance to both disease and drought, marking a major step forward for plant biotechnology in Africa.

The study explored how grapevines respond to environmental stress and infection by using gene-editing tools to modify specific genes associated with these responses.

According to the researchers, the edited plants exhibited reduced disease symptoms and sustained growth under water scarcity.

This breakthrough represents the first successful DNA editing of a woody perennial crop in Africa, an important milestone, given the complexity of such plants and the long breeding cycles typically required for improvement.

At the centre of the research is the use of CRISPR technology, a precise gene-editing tool that allows scientists to alter DNA at specific points. In this case, researchers "switched off" a gene known as VvDMR6.1, which is linked to grapevines' response to disease.

"By editing a gene that makes grapevines more vulnerable to disease, we were able to reduce this vulnerability while also influencing how the plants respond to water shortages," explained Dr Manuela Campa from the Department of Genetics at Stellenbosch University.

The results showed that the modified plants were less susceptible to downy mildew, a major disease affecting vineyards globally. In addition, the plants demonstrated improved water-use efficiency, conserving moisture more effectively under dry conditions.

Dr Manuela Campa with in vitro grapevine plants.

An unexpected outcome of the study was the dual benefit of the genetic modification.

"These plants responded better to dry conditions. They were able to conserve water more effectively, suggesting they may be better suited to increasingly arid environments linked to climate change," Campa noted.

The findings highlight how a single targeted genetic change can influence multiple stress-response mechanisms in plants, a development that could significantly accelerate crop improvement strategies.

Grapevines are among the most economically valuable horticultural crops globally and are particularly important to South Africa's agricultural sector. However, they are highly sensitive to both disease and environmental stress, making them increasingly vulnerable as climate conditions shift.

The study, therefore, comes at a critical time, as both disease outbreaks and drought conditions are expected to intensify.

"Viticulture faces significant challenges as disease pressure increases following periods of environmental stress. We need to develop varieties that can tolerate multiple stresses simultaneously to ensure sustainable production," Campa said.

The research also reflects a broader shift towards integrating advanced genome editing technologies into African agriculture.

"While genome editing has been widely applied in model plants and several crops globally, its use in woody perennial species has remained limited due to complex regeneration systems," Campa explained.

"This work demonstrates that such technologies can be successfully applied in Africa."

Co-researcher Dr Justin Lashbrook described the study as a significant advancement for the continent's scientific and agricultural landscape.

"This research shows how modern gene-editing technologies can be used to improve crops so they are better able to cope with disease and drought, both of which are becoming more severe," he said.

Despite the promising results, the researchers caution that further work is needed.

"Field trials will be required to assess how the modified grapevines perform under real farming conditions before the technology can be adopted at scale," Lashbrook said.

Nonetheless, the study underscores the potential of genome editing as a powerful tool for developing more resilient crops in Africa.

Lashbrook further stresses that as climate change continues to reshape agricultural conditions, such innovations may become increasingly important, not only for maintaining productivity but for ensuring the long-term sustainability of high-value crops like grapevines.

Climate-Smart Innovation Puts Lesotho in the Spotlight Despite BRICS+ Setback

By Lungile Maseela

Lesotho's emerging innovation landscape received both a reality check and a moment of recognition at the 4th BRICS+ Innovation Summit, where youth-led solutions from across developing economies competed on a global stage.

Although the country did not rank among the top-performing nations, a local climate-smart agriculture initiative secured a place among the top three, highlighting both the promise and the persistent gaps shaping Lesotho's innovation ecosystem.

Held in Pretoria from 9 to 10 April, the summit brought together innovators, policymakers, and industry leaders from BRICS countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, alongside partners from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The platform focused on youth-driven innovation, digital transformation and sustainable development.

Lesotho's participation was facilitated through the Sebabatso initiative, which supports young innovators by creating opportunities for them to showcase their ideas on regional and international platforms.

Through this initiative, six Basotho youth presented solutions across sectors, including climate-smart agriculture and technology, gaining exposure to potential investors and collaborators while benchmarking their work against global standards.

The experience revealed both progress and limitations.

Pitso Lesaoana, Minister of Gender, Youth and Social Development, commended the participants while acknowledging the level of competition.

Lesotho's youth representatives at the BRICS+ Summit

"We will continue to conduct roadshows across the country to encourage young people to showcase their ideas. Opportunities like this can open doors for innovation and growth," he said.

He further emphasised the importance of strengthening both innovation and market readiness.

"Funding is not the problem. Partners such as UNDP and LNDC are available, but young people must refine their ideas and improve how they present them," he added.

This gap between innovation and readiness was echoed by the participants themselves.

Rets'elisitsoe Mapara, who competed in the AgriTech category, pointed to limited industry exposure as a key disadvantage.

"Our competitors had more experience and exposure. That highlighted where we need to improve," he said.

Mapara's innovation focuses on improving vegetable production through more efficient transplantation methods, an approach aimed at increasing yields and reducing reliance on food imports.

"Going forward, we need to better understand the sector, what it needs and how we can serve farmers more effectively," he added.

Despite the overall outcome, Lesotho made a significant mark through the success of Bashoeshoe Climate Smart Community Gardens, founded by Rererile Kamohi, which ranked among the top three innovations at the summit.

The initiative focuses on equipping smallholder farmers with climate-smart practices to address challenges such as drought, soil degradation, and unpredictable weather patterns. Through a community-based approach, it promotes water conservation, improved soil management, and diversified production systems.

Kamohi emphasised that the initiative is designed primarily for impact rather than profit.

"Bashoeshoe aims to address food insecurity. It is not a profit-driven project meant to benefit communities while generating data that helps improve how we support farmers," she said.

However, scaling such innovations remains a challenge.

"To expand this across the country, we will need stronger partnerships and sustained funding," she noted.

The summit ultimately underscored a critical reality for Lesotho: innovation exists, but scaling it into systems that reach farmers at a national level remains the missing link.

Participation in platforms such as BRICS+ offers valuable exposure and learning opportunities. However, without stronger support structures, ranging from access to funding and technical development to market integration, many promising ideas risk remaining small-scale.

As climate pressures intensify and food systems face increasing strain, the need to translate innovation into practical, scalable solutions becomes more urgent.

Lesotho's performance at the summit may not have met expectations, but the recognition of a climate-smart initiative signals a clear direction: the country's strength lies not in the absence of ideas, but in the need to better support, refine, and scale them.

01 May- 28 May 2026

How AI Is Powering Predictive Farming in Lesotho

By Thoboloko Ntšonyane

For many farmers, uncertainty has always been part of agriculture, be it about rainfall, soil conditions, pests, or ultimately whether a crop will survive. But a new wave of agri-tech innovation is beginning to change that.

In Lesotho, a growing number of farmers are using artificial intelligence (AI) to make more precise, data-driven decisions, aiming to transform farming from guesswork into a more predictable, controlled process.

At the centre of this shift is Harvest Bounty Enterprise, a local start-up using AI-powered tools to monitor crops, analyse soil conditions and optimise production.

According to Lehlohonolo Pondo, the company's approach represents a transition from traditional farming to a more technology-driven model.

"We are migrating from traditional farming to agri-tech farming," he said.

The system combines multispectral drones, soil detectors and intelligent sensors placed directly into the ground.

"These tools collect real-time data on soil moisture, nutrient levels and environmental conditions, which are then transmitted to a central dashboard for analysis. From this data, farmers receive precise recommendations ranging from fertiliser types and application rates to seed varieties, planting density, and irrigation needs, among other things.

"This technology gives us exact quantities. At a specific time of day, it can tell us how much water a plant needs," Pondo explained.

The result, he said, is a significant shift in how decisions are made on the farm.

"Instead of relying on estimates, farmers are now working with measurable, real-time insights."

Pondo further noted that the technology also plays a critical role in pest and disease management. By detecting

Drone used in agri-tech

early warning signs, farmers can intervene before infestations spread, reducing losses and improving overall crop health.

"In practical terms, the impact is already visible. Crops that would typically take months to mature are now reaching harvest faster under closely monitored conditions. For example, cabbage varieties that usually take up to four months to mature can now be harvested in as little as 50 to 75 days. This allows farmers to produce multiple cycles within a year, up to three or four harvests instead of one," he revealed.

He said this increase in productivity is not just a technical achievement, "...it has direct implications for food security and market supply."

Harvest Bounty Enterprise is currently producing up to 500 boxes of tomatoes, cabbage and pumpkins, supplying local markets while working to reduce reliance on imports from South Africa.

Nutrient Sensors

The company is also strengthening its position in formal markets. When engaging with retailers, the team presents not only produce samples but also detailed production reports outlining crop varieties, fertiliser use and projected harvest timelines.

"We can tell retailers exactly when the next produce will be ready for market," Pondo said.

This level of predictability is critical for building trust with buyers and integrating small-scale producers into formal supply chains.

The innovation, however, emerged out of necessity. Through participation in the Smallholder Agriculture Development Project (SADP II), the team received greenhouses and irrigation systems but continued to face challenges.

Crops were lost due to poor humidity control, pest infestations and disease outbreaks. What was missing was not infrastructure but precise information.

"Previously, we relied on assumptions. Now we have accurate measurements and can apply exactly what is needed," Pondo noted.

Despite the progress, constraints remain. The company does not own key equipment, such as drones, because it must hire them at high cost.

"Limited access to advanced tools continues to slow expansion."

Currently, the initiative has reached around ten farmers in Berea, with plans to scale through training and field-based support.

"Farmers can request our services, after which the team collects and analyses field data, and then provides tailored recommendations,"he explained.

Yet even with improved production, market dynamics remain a challenge. Pondo noted that cheaper imports from South Africa have forced local producers to lower prices, leading to losses in some cases.

This highlights a broader issue: while technology can improve production efficiency, farmers still operate in competitive, often uneven markets.

As AI continues to reshape farming practices, the experience of Harvest Bounty Enterprise demonstrates both its potential and its limits.

"Technology can improve yields, reduce risk, and enhance decision-making, but it must be supported by enabling systems, infrastructure, and market access," Pondo emphasised, saying even so, the shift is already underway.

AI-Powered FarmFlex Signals a New Era for Precision Farming in Lesotho

... Gets shortlisted for the 2026 Africa Prize for Engineering Innovation

By Topollo Tlali

In many parts of Lesotho, farming decisions are still shaped by experience, observation and often, uncertainty. Knowing when to irrigate, how much fertiliser to apply, or how crops will respond to changing weather conditions remains a challenge, particularly for smallholder farmers working with limited resources.

A new locally developed technology is beginning to change that. FarmFlex, an artificial intelligence-powered platform developed by Mochesane Mpali of Lema Agrivest Pty Ltd, is designed to help farmers make more precise, real-time decisions based on actual field conditions rather than assumptions.

The platform works by combining multiple data inputs, including crop type, growth stage, weather patterns, and field sensor readings, to generate immediate recommendations for irrigation, nutrient application and general crop management. Instead of waiting for periodic advice or reacting after problems arise, farmers can respond as conditions change.

"FarmFlex takes field data and turns it into simple, practical decisions that farmers can act on immediately. It removes the guesswork and replaces it with real-time guidance," Mpali explained.

What makes the platform particularly relevant in Lesotho, he said, is its adaptability; "FarmFlex is designed to work across a range of crops commonly grown in the country, from staples such as maize and sorghum to horticultural produce like cabbage, potatoes, onions, and tomatoes. Each crop is managed according to its specific growth requirements and environmental conditions, allowing the system to adjust recommendations accordingly."

"The system understands that different crops and farming systems need different responses. A rain-fed maize field and a hydroponic cabbage system cannot be treated the same, but both can be optimised," he said.

He added, "This flexibility means that the same technology can support both rain-fed and controlled farming systems. A maize field exposed to erratic rainfall, for example, will receive very different guidance from a hydroponic vegetable system, but both benefit from more accurate and timely decision-making."

Mpali indicated that the technology also addresses one

Lebamang Mpali founder and CEO OF Lema Agrivest

of the most pressing challenges facing farmers today: climate variability.

"By relying on real-time field data rather than seasonal assumptions, FarmFlex reduces dependence on unpredictable rainfall patterns. Farmers receive alerts when crops are at risk of water stress, allowing them to intervene before damage occurs. We are shifting farmers away from relying on assumptions about the weather to making decisions based on what is actually happening in the field," Mpali noted.

At the same time, the platform promotes more efficient use of inputs.

"Fertiliser application is based on actual plant needs rather than estimates, helping to reduce waste and lower production costs. Improved irrigation scheduling also means that water and energy are used more efficiently, with farmers running pumps only when necessary. Instead of applying fertiliser broadly, the system tells you exactly what the plant needs and when, this further reduces costs and improves productivity at the same time."

The idea for FarmFlex emerged from practical experience. Mpali recounted that while working with more than 168 farmers through Lema Agrivest, he observed that reliance on manual data collection and analysis was slowing down decision-making.

"Farmers would submit information and wait for feedback, often receiving responses too late to prevent crop stress or system failures. We were seeing delays in identifying problems like nutrient imbalances or system failures, and by the time we responded, the damage had already affected yields."

Lebamang showcasing farmflex ai tool

These delays had direct consequences on productivity and made it difficult to scale support across a growing number of farmers. The need for a system that could respond instantly became clear, he recalled.

"We realised we cannot scale impact through human-dependent analysis alone. The system needed to think and respond in real time," Mpali explained.

FarmFlex was developed to remove this bottleneck by automating both data collection and analysis. Instead of relying entirely on human interpretation, the system processes information in real time and delivers immediate recommendations, enabling a single platform to support multiple farmers simultaneously without compromising quality.

Introducing this kind of technology, however, has not been without challenges.

He noted that building trust in AI-driven recommendations has required careful validation, particularly among farmers accustomed to traditional methods. To address this, the system was tested alongside farmers in the field, with agronomists involved in the early stages to ensure accuracy and build confidence.

"At the beginning, farmers needed to see that the recommendations actually worked. We combined the technology with agronomist support to build that trust."

Access has also been a key consideration. Recognising the limitations of rural infrastructure, the platform has been designed to operate through multiple channels, including SMS and WhatsApp, as well as web-based access.

"We had to design the system around the realities of our farmers. Not everyone has access to advanced tools, so accessibility was critical."

The innovation has already begun to attract attention beyond Lesotho. Mpali has been shortlisted for the 2026 Africa Prize for Engineering Innovation, marking a first for the country. While the recognition highlights the strength of the technology, it also signals that locally developed solutions can compete on continental and global platforms.

"This recognition shows that solutions built in Lesotho can compete globally. It is not just about FarmFlex but about what is possible for Basotho innovation."

For Mpali, the long-term vision goes beyond a single product... "The aim is to move Basotho agriculture away from reactive, survival-based practices towards systems that are more data-driven, efficient and resilient to climate change."

He added that as pressures on agriculture continue to grow, technologies like FarmFlex offer a different way forward for food sustainability.

"I think platforms like this suggest that the future of farming in Lesotho may not depend solely on external solutions, but on the ability to develop and scale innovations that are rooted in local realities. In that shift, the role of a Mosotho farmer also begins to change, from managing uncertainty to working with information, and from reacting to conditions to anticipating them.

Middle East Conflict Sends Sh ockwaves Through Global Fertiliser Supply Chains

...Lesotho imported over US$9.5 million worth of fertilisers in 2024

Government fertaliser storage @Ha Foso

Strait of Hormuz

By Topollo Tlali

For farmers, the cost of war is not measured in headlines, but in inputs. It shows up in the price of fertiliser, in delayed shipments and in the growing uncertainty of whether the next planting season will be viable.

The ongoing conflict between Iran and Israel is now sending ripples through global agricultural systems, disrupting fertiliser supply chains, pushing up energy prices and threatening food production far beyond the Middle East.

At the centre of the disruption is the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global shipping route through which a significant portion of the world's fertiliser passes.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), about a quarter of global fertiliser trade moves through this corridor.

Early signs of pressure are already visible in international markets. Prices for key food commodities such as wheat, rice and vegetable oils have begun to rise.

While the FAO Food Price Index remains below the peak levels recorded during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it has started trending upward again in early 2026, reflecting renewed instability in global markets.

The FAO warns that the situation could worsen if the conflict persists.

"The current conflict in the Persian Gulf has already had a significant impact on the global energy, fertiliser and agricultural systems. Specifically, since nitrogen fertiliser production heavily relies on natural gas as a raw material, the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz has led to rising energy prices, further increasing production costs," FAO stated.

According to the food organisation's projections, fertiliser prices could rise by 15%-20% in the first half of the year, with energy costs driving increases across the agricultural value chain.

The interconnected nature of the global fertiliser market means that disruptions are rarely isolated.

The Fertiliser Institute (TFI) highlighted how quickly supply shocks can spread across regions.

"The disruption affects fertiliser availability and pricing in multiple regions, including countries that may not directly import products from the affected area."

In Southern Africa, the effects are already being felt.

The Southern African Agri Initiative (SAAI) reported that fertiliser prices rose sharply in early March following disruptions linked to the Gulf region.

"South Africa imports roughly 80% of its fertiliser needs, with a notable portion of nitrogen-based products like urea historically sourced from the Persian Gulf region, which plays a big role in the global supply of urea, ammonia and related inputs," said Francois Rossouw, CEO of SAAI.

Globally, production has also been affected. Major fertiliser plants have reduced or halted output due to disruptions in gas supply. In Qatar, operations at one of the world's largest urea plants have been affected, while in India and Bangladesh, several facilities have scaled back or shut down operations entirely.

Countries heavily dependent on imports are particularly exposed. India, which relies on the Middle East for a large share of its fertiliser supply, faces shipment delays. Brazil, almost entirely dependent on imported urea, remains vulnerable due to its reliance on shipping routes through the Strait of Hormuz.

Even in the United States, shortages are emerging, with fertiliser supplies estimated to be about 25% below expected levels for this time of year.

In South Africa, the risks are amplified by a structural dependence on imports. Wandile Sihlobo, Chief Economist of the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa, warns that the country remains highly exposed to global disruptions.

"If you are a grain farmer in South Africa, you are among the major users of fertiliser. The challenge is that we do not produce enough fertiliser domestically. South Africa imports roughly 80% of the fertiliser it uses, with annual consumption just over two million tonnes," Sihlobo said, adding that much of South Africa's fertiliser is sourced from regions such as the Black Sea and the Middle East; however, the ongoing conflict in the Middle East has raised concerns about fertiliser supply, logistics, and potential price increases.

"We are watching the worrying developments in the Middle East, which is important to South Africa both for exports and its influence on oil, fertiliser and gas prices. The conflict may disrupt exports of various products to the region. We are in a slow export period of the year; our fruit exports will gain momentum from May, while grain exports have been generally slow this year because of ample supplies in the world market. Meat markets are also facing challenges due to foot and mouth disease," Sihlobo expressed.

For Lesotho, the impact is both direct and indirect.

The country relies heavily on South Africa for fertiliser and other agricultural inputs. According to trade data, Lesotho imported over US$9.5 million worth of fertilisers in 2024, making it highly vulnerable to supply disruptions further up the chain.

"The entire world is uncertain about what the future of the Strait of Hormuz will be, with a large percentage of raw materials needed for fertiliser production passing through the Strait. We can expect a substantial increase in the price of fertiliser," said Tim Jandrell of Jandrell store.

Rising fuel prices are compounding the problem, increasing transport costs and pushing input prices even higher.

"Now, we must consider the effect the fuel price has had on transport costs and the expected sharp increase in fertiliser prices; a dismal picture appears for the planting season in 2026," Jandrell added.

Local suppliers are already anticipating the pressure.

"As stores that sell farming inputs and tools, we have yet to face high prices when buying inputs on a large scale from big companies, and our problems continue with customers facing high prices because we will be charging them accordingly."

Jandrell warned that Lesotho's limited position in global supply chains leaves it particularly exposed.

"Lesotho is not high on the list of any of the key energy suppliers; the future of the agricultural sector holds a lot of uncertainty."

This vulnerability has reignited calls for a shift in how the country approaches soil fertility and agricultural sustainability.

Khotso Lepheane, Executive Director of Lesotho National Farmers Union (LENAFU), stressed that reliance on imported fertilisers is no longer sustainable.

"The dependence on our neighbouring country should prompt farmers and policymakers to deeply rethink how Lesotho manages soil fertility and food production in an era of climate change."

"Lesotho has grown too reliant on external supply chains, which are at risk of global disruptions and can leave farmers without essential inputs."

He advocated for a gradual return to organic fertilisation methods: "We have moved away from using organic fertiliser, and now that the world is changing, it is time to look back and use what we have."

However, he cautioned that such a transition would not be immediate.

"Lesotho is far from using organic fertilisers, as a successful transition to such practices would require significant time, commitment and careful planning from farmers and agricultural stakeholders."

"It will take farmers time to zone land and maintain their soil fertility in the era of climate change."

Fertilisers remain essential to agricultural productivity, supporting crop growth, improving yields, and sustaining rural livelihoods. Without reliable access to these inputs, food systems become increasingly fragile.

Letsibolo's Rise Signals a New Era for Lesotho's Poultry Industry

Farmers gather to celebrate and learn from Letsibolo growing poultry enterprise

Letsibolo poultry farm

By Lungile Maseela

The rain arrived quietly, settling in a steady drizzle that might have discouraged a less determined crowd. Instead, farmers, officials and partners gathered under a white canvas tent, pulling their jackets tighter and leaning closer to one another, not out of discomfort, but out of shared purpose. There was a sense that what had brought them together at Letsibolo Enterprise's field day was larger than the weather: a growing belief that Lesotho can and must begin to feed itself.

"The journey has not been an easy one, but how far Letsibolo has come shows the effort that has been put into the work," said Sechaba Rakotsoana, a representative of the District Agricultural Office Maseru, setting the tone for a day that was as reflective as it was forward-looking.

Held on 24 April 2026 and hosted by the Smallholder Agriculture Development Project Phase II (SADP II) in partnership with the District Agricultural Office (DAO) Maseru and the Masianokeng Resource Centre, the field day gathering brought together a cross-section of the agricultural sector. Beneath the tent, conversations unfolded not in formal speeches alone, but in quiet exchanges among farmers, comparing notes, weighing possibilities, and imagining what scaling local production could look like in practice.

At the centre of it all was Letsibolo Poultry Farm & Hatchery, a Maseru-based agribusiness that has steadily carved out a place within Lesotho's poultry value chain.

Established in 2016, the enterprise supplies day-old chicks, feed equipment, vaccines and technical training to farmers across the country. Over time, through investment in hatchery technology and improved breeding systems, it has evolved from a small operation into a growing support system for both smallholder and emerging commercial farmers.

Beyond production, the enterprise promotes poultry farming as a pathway to job creation, improved household income and food security, particularly in rural communities where access to reliable markets, inputs and technical support remains limited.

Founder of Letsibolo Poultry farm

Poultry's relatively low start-up costs and quick turnaround cycles have made it an increasingly attractive option, especially for youth and women seeking entry into agribusiness.

Rakotsoana acknowledged that the partnership between SADP II and Letsibolo and the progress came with challenges, but stressed that the field day was as much about revisiting the journey as it was about celebrating milestones. He urged the enterprise to take the next step by investing in local production of fertile eggs, citing Lesotho's continued dependence on South African imports as a potential threat. Reducing this reliance, he said, would strengthen local value chains and protect farmers from external supply disruptions and rising costs.

Letsibolo Managing Director, Pitso Mokaeane, described the business as the product of persistence and gradual growth, shaped by both setbacks and strategic support. He acknowledged the role of founder Rethabile Mokaeane, who established the vision for the enterprise between 2015 and 2016 before handing over operations.

"It has been a long journey of hard work and learning. I had no understanding of this kind of business at first, but I had to continue building the vision as she did."

"That vision was initially shaped by our founder, Rethabile Mokaeane, between 2015 and 2016, before leadership transitioned. The early years were marked by uncertainty with limited funding, unreliable supply chains and a small, unpredictable market. But a turning point came in 2019 when strategic partnerships began to take root.

"We then sought support from the Ministry of Agriculture and SADP II, which granted us M1.5 million. That support helped us move forward," Mokaeane explained.

Since then, Letsibolo has expanded both its capacity and its reach. Through a project supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the enterprise supplied more than 27,000 chicks across Lesotho in just three months. In another intervention, SADP II procured approximately 70,000 chicks for distribution to youth entering poultry farming, an initiative that significantly extended Letsibolo's footprint while opening doors for new entrants into the sector.

Still, growth has not eliminated vulnerability; the business continues to rely on imported fertile eggs from KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, a process that introduces logistical challenges and biosecurity risks. Transporting eggs over long distances requires precision and care, reinforcing the urgency of building local capacity.

Mokaeane was candid about the broader pressures facing the enterprise. Policy shifts, dependence on imported inputs, seasonal production cycles, and the constant threat of disease all shape the operating environment.

These realities are not unique to Letsibolo but reflect structural challenges within Lesotho's agricultural system, however, they also highlight where opportunity lies.

Makara Mpako, representing SADP II management, pointed to Letsibolo as evidence that targeted investment can yield tangible results.

"Letsibolo is part of SADP II Phase II and a beneficiary of our large grant programme. They successfully completed their project implementation on time and received certification. We are extremely proud of their achievements," he said.

He expressed confidence that the enterprise could scale further, contributing to a more self-sufficient poultry sector and reducing the country's reliance on imports.

For farmers on the ground, that impact is already visible. Thabo Leoatle, a poultry farmer, described how his business has grown through his partnership with Letsibolo.

"I started with 3,000 chicks from Letsibolo, and my customers have only had good things to say about the quality. I will continue working with them because they provide reliable and high-quality stock," he said.

Consistency, he noted, has allowed him to build trust with customers, turning what began as a small operation into a more stable enterprise. He also emphasised the accessibility of Letsibolo's services beyond Maseru.

"Letsibolo is a nationwide business, it is not only for people in Maseru. Anyone interested in poultry farming can work with them. They have proven the quality of their work, and that gives farmers confidence to grow," he said.

As the programme drew to a close, the rain showed little sign of letting up. Yet few seemed eager to leave. Conversations stretched on, contacts were exchanged, and ideas began to take shape under the shelter of the tent.

What lingered was not just a sense of achievement, but of possibility.

Fuel Shock Hits the Heart of Farming

...Lesotho's Agriculture Sector Buckles Under Rising Costs

By Topollo Tlali

Lesotho's farmers are no longer just battling droughts and disease; their biggest fight is now at the fuel pump.

A steep rise in fuel prices, driven by global tensions in the Middle East, is sending shockwaves through the country's agricultural sector, raising production costs, squeezing profits, and threatening food supply chains.

Faku Faku, programme coordinator SMARTD

Despite government subsidies, the increases remain severe. Diesel, the backbone of farming operations, now costs over M30 per litre, sharply pushing up the costs of ploughing, planting, irrigation and transport.

For farmers, the impact is immediate and unavoidable.

"Farming is a continuous, extended cycle, which translates into heavy and constant fuel dependence," said Khotso Lepheane, Executive Director of the Lesotho National Farmers Union (LENAFU).

From the moment inputs are sourced, costs begin to climb.

"Rural farmers face long journeys, and any fuel price hike directly inflates the cost of essential items like seed and fertiliser. The entire production cycle's cost base increases significantly before planting even starts."

Once in the field, the pressure intensifies. Machinery, irrigation systems and crop protection all depend on fuel, all costs that farmers cannot escape.

"Any increase in fuel prices instantly raises the costs of tillage, planting and weeding, further eroding farmers' profit margins," Lepheane warned.

In rural Lesotho, where electricity is often unavailable, the situation is even more difficult.

"Fuel powers not only machinery but also essential household functions like lighting, cooking and water pumping," he said, noting that rural farmers are hit hardest.

The consequences are already unfolding.

"From planting to irrigation and transportation, nearly every stage depends on fuel. As prices climb, these essential activities are being scaled down or abandoned altogether."

The timing could not be worse. With the winter planting season approaching, farmers are being forced to rethink production plans.

"The winter planting season is going to be more expensive than ever," said Fako Fako of the SMARTD programme. "Smallholder farmers may not be able to afford it."

He warned that higher costs will translate directly into lower yields.

"The higher the fuel prices, the lower the production."

Transport is emerging as another breaking point. Farmers moving produce from remote areas to markets like Maseru now face sharply increased costs.

"The big question is: are Basotho ready to buy expensive products?" Fako asked.

Across the sector, the strain is deepening.

Livestock farmers are paying more for feed and transport. Poultry producers are struggling to maintain operations.

"Delivering meat to the market is going to cost more," said Mpati Makotoko of Sunshine Poultry Farm.

"I am wondering if my customers will even understand when I increase prices."

She warned that production itself is at risk.

"Poultry sheds need constant power, and now it is going to be very hard. All these shocks are going to affect the value chain of rearing chickens."

Rising input costs are also forcing difficult tradeoffs.

"The combined input costs will lead to layoffs and reduced flocks," she said.

Hatcheries are under similar pressure.

"Hatcheries need nonstop electricity, with diesel backups, which will be very costly," said Rethabile Mokaeana of Letsiboho Poultry Farm, adding, "We have to make new arrangements."

The ripple effects extend far beyond individual farms.

Global institutions have warned that rising fuel costs are driving up food production expenses worldwide. In import-dependent economies like Lesotho, the impact is sharper, tightening supply chains and pushing food prices higher.

For many farmers, the margins are already too thin to absorb the shock.

"Each litre of fuel that becomes harder to afford translates into less land cultivated, fewer crops harvested, and reduced income," Lepheane said.

What began as a global energy crisis is now a local agricultural emergency.

"The fuel price shock is no longer limited to the forecourt," Lepheane concluded. "It has reached the heart of agriculture."

Big Investments, Dry Taps: Can Lesotho's Water Projects Close the Rural Gap?

EU Ambassador H.E. Mette Sunnergren addresses stakeholders during the World Water Day commemoration highlighting gender and rural water access challenges

By Lungile Maseela

Despite Lesotho's position as the "Water Tower of Southern Africa" and ongoing investment in major water infrastructure, thousands of rural households still wake up to dry taps.

This tension between national capacity and local access took centre stage at the World Water Day commemoration held in Mafeteng on 10 April 2026, where government officials and development partners acknowledged both progress and persistent inequality in the sector.

Although World Water Day is globally observed on 22 March, the Mafeteng gathering created space for a sharper local focus on a reality that continues to define rural life: unequal access to clean water.

It was noted during the discussions that 22% of the national population still lacks access to clean water, and this figure is disproportionately higher in rural areas.

That single statistic set the tone for the day, exposing the gap between Lesotho's role as a regional water exporter and the lived experience of communities still waiting for a reliable supply.

Honourable Mohlomi Moleko, Minister of Natural Resources, described the celebration as a turning point in the country's approach to water delivery.

"This is a big step in Lesotho's journey toward fair water distribution," he said.

He pointed to large-scale infrastructure investments as a foundation for change, but stressed that impact will ultimately be measured at the community level.

"Major infrastructure projects are building a future where everyone from Mafeteng to Mokhotlong has reliable access to clean water," he said.

While projects such as the Lesotho Lowlands Water Development Project (LLWDP) continue to expand national supply systems, officials acknowledged that distribution and last-mile delivery remain critical weaknesses.

Dr Rets'elisitsoe Matlanyane, Minister of Finance and MP for Qalabane, said financing frameworks are central to closing these gaps. She highlighted the expansion of the Metsi a Lesotho Financing Agreement into rural Mafeteng.

"This programme is intended to improve WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) services in rural areas of Mafeteng," she said.

Her remarks reflected a growing recognition that infrastructure without sustained financing risks leaving rural systems under-maintained and inconsistent.

From the development partner side, H.E. Mette Sunnergren, European Union Ambassador to Lesotho, framed water access as a matter of equity and dignity rather than infrastructure alone.

"Water is not just a resource; it is a responsibility that falls disproportionately on the shoulders of women and girls," she said, stressing that water scarcity continues to deepen gender inequality, particularly in rural areas.

"When water is scarce, women and girls pay the highest price," she said.

Reinforcing the scale of the challenge, she repeated that, "...22% of the national population still does not have access to clean water, and the figure is disproportionately higher in rural areas."

"If we are to achieve SDG 6, we cannot leave half our population behind," she emphasised.

UNICEF also stressed the human cost of unequal access.

Dr Bob Muchabaiwa, Acting UNICEF Deputy Representative in Lesotho, said: "Water is fundamental to dignity, opportunity and equality."

"Limited access affects health, education and livelihoods, with women and girls again bearing the heaviest burden. Persistent disparities in access continue to disproportionately affect women and girls," he said.

The European Union reaffirmed its ongoing investment in Lesotho's water systems, including support for major infrastructure programmes.

Ambassador Sunnergren noted recent progress: "Two years ago, we signed the Metolong Financing Agreement, and in 2025, we observed results."

She added that expanded coverage is now reaching new districts:

"Now Mafeteng and Mokhotlong have been included, and we will see improved access to WASH services, especially in rural areas of Mafeteng."

But beneath the progress narrative, structural challenges remain. Ageing infrastructure, limited maintenance capacity, and weak distribution networks continue to disrupt supply in rural districts.

Climate change is further tightening pressure on the system, with increasing rainfall variability and prolonged dry periods affecting water reliability across Southern Africa.

For communities in districts like Mafeteng, this means that even where infrastructure exists, access is not always guaranteed.

The Mafeteng commemoration ultimately exposed a central contradiction: Lesotho continues to expand water systems at the national scale, but rural households still experience inconsistent access.

INDABA

Why Insurance Must Start Speaking the Language of Farmers

By Topollo Tlali

Risk is a one component that makes agriculture what it is, a constant headache that is often ignored.

A single afternoon of heavy snowfall, drought or pest outbreak can erase years of investment, yet for many farmers, agricultural insurance remains out of reach, often viewed not as a necessity but as a luxury.

This tension came into sharp focus at the Mzansi Young Farmers Indaba in Pretoria, where a panel on agricultural insurance, moderated by Newsday Media Co-owner and Managing Editor, Lerato Matheka, examined the growing disconnect between insurance providers and the realities of farming.

Opening the discussion, Matheka challenged the panel to confront a critical question: 'why do farmers continue to perceive insurance as unaffordable, despite increasing climate risks?'

For Dr. Dalene Louw, CEO of AgriCulture Gauteng, the answer lies in both cost and perception, but also in systemic failure.

"Insurance is expensive, yes, but farmers must look at the broader picture. Climate change is already impacting production, and without protection, food systems themselves are at risk," she said.

Louw noted that for many young farmers, insurance remains low on the priority list, often overshadowed by immediate operational costs. However, she argued that this mind-set cannot shift without structural intervention.

"If government provides assets like tractors, those assets should be insured by default. Insurance must be embedded into the system, not treated as optional."

The panel also highlighted a deeper issue: many insurance models are poorly aligned with African agricultural realities. Products are often designed without sufficient understanding of local risks, cash flow cycles and farmer behaviour.

"It is time for African solutions to African problems," Louw added, emphasising the need for context-driven innovation in agricultural insurance.

"Let us speak to farmers and hear what they need, it is very important to work closely with people we serve so that we understand each other."

Louw further requested farmers to come to the party by participating fully to get their voices heard.

"Today you get good yields, tomorrow fire or hail comes and the entire yields get destroyed, those are motivational risks enough to encourage farmers to get insurance."

From an industry perspective, Eloff van der Spuy, a Broker Development Manager with Santam, pointed to the critical role of brokers in bridging the gap between insurers and farmers.

He argued that the modern broker must go beyond selling policies to becoming a strategic partner for farmers.

"It is advisable that farmers have a broker, because brokers work with agricultural experts and put the needs of the farmers in front of everything, farmers cannot do everything alone if they want farming success.

"We fight for farmers because we know their importance in food production, knowing what they need and how they need it is very important," he said.

He added that the most effective brokers work closely with agricultural specialists, understand environmental trends and advocate strongly for farmers during claims processes.

Trust, however, remains a major barrier. Concerns around delayed payouts and lack of transparency continue to shape negative perceptions of insurance.

Addressing this, Andreas Mahlase, Executive Manager, Operations at the land bank highlighted the importance of improving collaboration between financial institutions and insurers.

"It is through collaborations that we will be able to deal with myths and misinformation, such as insurance companies not responding on time, because responding also differs."

"Faster response systems, including rapid farm assessments, are critical to ensuring that farmers can recover quickly and keep their operations running," he noted.

Mahlase stressed that what is important to understand is the assessment requirements to be done, noting those can only be done through farm visits and other means before claims are approved.

At its core, the discussion reframed insurance not as an expense but as a survival tool in an increasingly volatile agricultural environment.

"Farming is a business and like any business operating under high risk, protection mechanisms are essential. Beyond risk mitigation, insurance also plays a catalytic role in unlocking finance," Mahlase revealed, noting that insured farmers are more likely to access credit, expand operations, and withstand shocks.

"This makes insurance a critical enabler of growth rather than just a safety net," he concluded.

As climate pressures intensify, the cost of remaining uninsured continues to rise. The panel's message was clear: the most expensive policy a farmer can have is no policy at all.

"For this shift to happen, however, insurance providers must move beyond rigid models and begin to understand the lived realities of farmers and start designing solutions that are accessible, relevant and responsive to the environments in which they operate," Dr Louw noted, citing only then can agricultural insurance move from the margins to the mainstream of farming systems.

Young Farmers Take Centre Stage at 5th Mzansi Young Farmers Indaba

By Topollo Tlali

The 5th annual Mzansi Young Farmers Indaba, hosted by Food for Mzansi in Pretoria, brought together hundreds of young farmers from across South Africa and the continent in a powerful show of ambition, resilience and growing influence in the agricultural sector.

Held at Choose Life Church, the two-day gathering attracted nearly 2,000 participants, with young producers, agro-processors and industry stakeholders converging to engage on some of the most pressing issues shaping agriculture today. Key discussions focused on access to land and finance, climate resilience, agricultural insurance, agro-processing, market access, export readiness and the impact of global conflicts on farming systems.

This year's Indaba was held under the banner of the United Nations' International Year of the Woman Farmer, a theme that was not only symbolic but visibly reflected throughout the event. Women took centre stage as moderators, speakers, and participants, setting the tone with confidence and authority across panel discussions and engagements.

According to Ivor Price, the co-founder of Food For Mzansi, the strength of the Indaba lies in its ability to bring together diverse players in agriculture to shape a shared future.

"This event is a space where energy meets experience, where collaboration replaces competition, and where the next generation of African agriculture finds both its voice and its confidence.

"For long time, top players have told us that mzanzi young farmers indaba is Africa's biggest event for young farmers and agro processors and for the first time, I believe it," he said.

Speakers throughout the event emphasised the urgency of action within the sector. Sydney (Land Bank Chief Strategy Officer) encouraged young farmers to move forward despite uncertainty.

"Farmers should not wait for perfect conditions because agriculture has never operated under perfect conditions," he noted.

South Africa's Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuisen, highlighted both the progress and persistent challenges within the sector.

"While there is much to celebrate, issues such as access to finance, climate change, and building resilient agri-food systems remain critical if we are to grow the economy and create jobs," he said.

He further pointed to global disruptions affecting fertilizer supply and export markets, stressing that collaboration would be key to overcoming these barriers.

The conversation around structural reform was further deepened by Thoko Didiza, Speaker of the National Assembly, who called for bold changes to improve land access for women and youth.

"We must rethink land tenure systems, funding models, and support structures if we are serious about empowering young farmers," she said, noting that many young people lack inherited assets, limiting their access to finance.

"We have moved from the days when women only acquired land through marriage or male figures in families."

Young farmers walking around stalls and exhibitions learning and building relationships

"In farming, women now can approach traditional leaderships in their own right to be given land", Didiza further requested the government to work towards customary systems to ensure access of land by women and youth.

"I want to believe that there have been major achievements that have been made in past years, Government and civil societies can do more to ensure that land reforms in South Africa is realised without failure."

Beyond policy discussions, the Indaba created space for practical engagement, networking, and business development. Farmers and entrepreneurs showcased a wide range of products and services, including livestock, agro-processing goods, flowers, farming equipment, and agricultural services. The exhibition area became a hub of interaction, learning, and collaboration.

Participants from across the continent shared their experiences and aspirations. A young farmer from Kenya described the event as a valuable learning platform:

"I believe there is a lot we can learn from South Africa. This conference is a breakthrough for knowledge exchange."

Local farmers echoed similar sentiments. Pretoria-based crop farmer Dineo Mphahlele highlighted the importance of connection and collaboration:

"This platform allows farmers at my level to engage, share ideas, and grow together."

Entrepreneurs also reported tangible business benefits. Tsegofatso Mputle, founder of Tsegom Creations, described the Indaba as a game-changer:

"I sold all my products on the first day and secured new customers for future business."

Lesotho was also represented at the event, with farmers gaining new insights and perspectives. Mopeli Molapo, founder of Greenland Agric Farm, reflected on the broader impact:

"This experience is about more than attendance—it changes how you see farming and what is possible."

The Indaba also featured smaller breakout sessions, allowing participants to engage deeply on specific topics and exchange practical solutions to shared challenges.

Closing the event, Price expressed appreciation for the strong turnout and commitment shown by young farmers across the region.

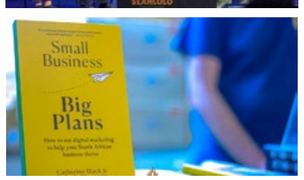
"This year, we worked across not one but two exhibition centres each packed with opportunities; we had turned away wonderful exhibitors simple because we ran out of space."

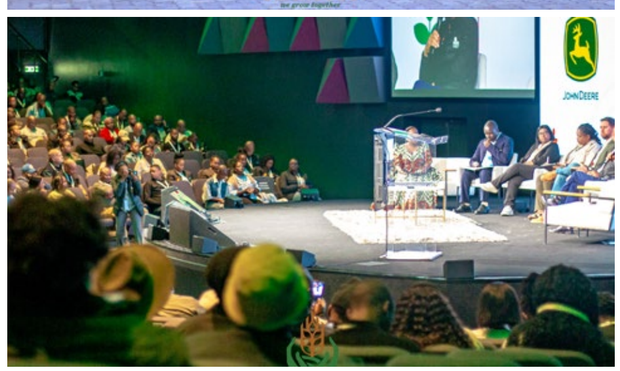
"It was a good problem to have, but next year we must build wider, think bigger and make room for everyone who wants it."

Ivor further expressed his gratefulness to sponsors, exhibitors, partners and all. "We are grateful to land and agricultural development bank of South Africa, Kagiso trust and FirstRand empowerment foundation, John deere and Johnson work wear for making the indaba in to a living.

"We see you, we honour you, and we champion you," he concluded.

As the Mzansi Young Farmers Indaba continues to grow, it is increasingly positioning itself as a key platform for shaping the future of agriculture—driven by a new generation that is not only ready to farm, but ready to lead.





Chef Ska Moteane Brings Sesotho Cuisine and Cultural Value to the Agricultural Conversation

By Topollo Tlali

Chef ska Moteane at food for mzanzi stage

At a gathering dominated by discussions on finance, production, and market access, an unexpected voice shifted the conversation, providing a clarifying reminder that the agricultural sector is not just about supply chains but also about the identity of the food produced.

At the Mzansi Young Farmers Indaba in Pretoria, Chef Ska Moteane took to the stage during a panel on agro-processing, ownership, and value creation, offering a perspective that transcended economics and delved into culture.

An award-winning cookbook author and culinary consultant, Moteane is known for her book Cuisine of the Mountain Kingdom, which has been recognised as one of Africa's best cookbooks. However, at the Indaba, her message was not focused on accolades.

She reclaimed the value of indigenous food systems.

"We need more platforms like this where we talk about our food and connect directly with farmers to give meaning to the hard work and efforts put into producing the very products we use in our kitchens," she said.

Moderated by Patricia Tembo, a journalist from Food For Mzansi, the panel explored topics ranging from snail farming to the wine industry. Yet it was Moteane's contribution that reframed the discussion, shifting agro-processing from a technical concept into a cultural one nurtured in kitchens.

When asked about her raw material sourcing practices, she was clear: "I prioritise products with cultural significance from local farmers because I abide by the notion: tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are."

At the centre of her preferred product is sorghum—mabele—a crop deeply rooted in Southern African history yet increasingly overlooked in modern food systems.

"In my kitchen, I always use sorghum, so much so that it has become a part of who I am," she said.

Despite its resilience and nutritional value, sorghum has been gradually replaced by imported foods and changing consumption patterns. For Moteane, this shift represents more than a dietary change.

"This significant shift signals a loss of identity in a product that embodies who we are as a nation, and this is a threat to many other African products."

"As Africans, we already have what we need. We have always eaten complete, balanced meals, and most of our cuisines have been focused on preserving food," she said.

She describes her work as a bridge connecting farmers to consumers not just through products but through stories.

"In my kitchen, ingredients are not anonymous commodities; they carry names, origins, and histories."

This perspective challenges a dominant trend in global food systems, where efficiency and uniformity often overshadow heritage and meaning.

As indigenous foods struggle to compete with heavily marketed imports, both nutritional diversity and cultural knowledge are at risk.

"If traditional foods disappear from our kitchens, they disappear from our memory, hence the need for a renewed focus on integrating indigenous crops into modern cuisine, not only to preserve culture but to create sustainable demand for local farmers," the chef said.

Her message resonated beyond the panel. It positioned agro-processing not merely as value addition but as value restoration, where culture, identity, and storytelling become integral to the agricultural economy.

At an Indaba designed to shape the future of farming, Moteane's contribution served as a reminder that progress does not have to come at the expense of heritage.

By championing Sesotho cuisine on a continental platform, she was not simply promoting a grain—she was advocating for a system that values local production, supports farmers, and preserves cultural identity.

"Agriculture is not just about feeding people. From what we farm, it is about affirming who we are," she said.

Foot-and-Mouth Disease Pushes South Africa's Livestock Sector to the Brink

By Topollo Tlali

South Africa's livestock sector is facing mounting uncertainty as the continued spread of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) disrupts markets, halts trade and leaves farmers unable to plan for the future.

At the Mzansi Young Farmers Indaba in Pretoria, livestock producers, veterinarians and industry leaders painted a sobering picture: for many farmers, the crisis is no longer just about animal health but a thin string of survival.

According to Dr Frikkie Maré, CEO of the Red Meat Producers Organisation (RPO), the most immediate and damaging impact of the outbreak is the loss of market access.

"The biggest problem is when, as a farmer, you cannot access the market. Once you are unable to sell, your options are severely restricted," he said.

"Once foot and mouth disease is detected on different farms and rules and regulations are implemented to control the spread of the disease, abattoirs reduce their intake, and export markets shut down, leaving farmers with their livestock without gains," Maré noted.

"People also reduced their purchasing of red meat, some because of fear or high prices and the market the red meat producers depend on simply disappeared."

Movement restrictions imposed to control the spread of the disease have effectively cut many farmers off from formal markets, leaving them with rising costs and no income streams. As a result, farmers continue to invest in feed, treatment, and maintenance without being able to generate returns.

Beyond the economic strain, the disease itself is devastating to livestock.

Infected animals often develop painful blisters in the mouth and around the hooves, making it difficult for them to eat, drink, or even move.

Stefan Steyn, a veterinary specialist from Agrivet Training Services, pointed out the critical importance of detecting foot and mouth disease symptoms early to manage the disease.

"Severe swelling and hoof damage can leave animals in extreme pain, further compounding losses for farmers."

Steyn further explained that an animal with foot-and-mouth disease presents with lesions in the mouth and on its feet. "Animals may be reluctant to eat and may gather around water troughs, struggling to swallow."

Steyn noted that when the animal is very sick, the hoof may loosen and detach, exposing the tissues and causing severe pain.

"The first 60 minutes are crucial for a farmer. After noticing symptoms, isolate the animals quickly, contact the veterinarians and get help."

Steyn urged farmers to act immediately, as delays in intervention can worsen outcomes.

However, controlling the disease is far more complex in practice, particularly in communal farming systems.

Thabiso Sithole, National FMD Project Manager at the African Farmers' Association of South Africa (AFASA), highlighted the structural challenges facing rural farmers.

"In communal areas, many farmers lack knowledge about the disease's spread and how to manage animals after infection," Sithole noted.

"In rural areas, the absence of fencing makes it extremely difficult to isolate infected animals, as they share grazing land, allowing the virus to spread rapidly.

"Once animals share the grazing land and one is infected, the disease spreads quickly to neighbouring herds and across different farms without farmers noticing."

"In order to reduce the risk, we need better community-level biosecurity; temporary fencing around sick herds to mark and separate infected animals from healthy ones," Sithole emphasised the need for strong coordination between farmers, herders and veterinarians.

Limited access to infrastructure and knowledge further complicates containment efforts, exposing entire communities to risk.

The dairy sector faces its own vulnerabilities, with Fanie Ferreira, CEO of the Milk Producers' Organisation (MPO), stating that strict biosecurity is important but difficult to maintain.

"Biosecurity is critical, but on a dairy farm, it is difficult to rely on it alone as trucks are in and out of the farm, and milk has to be collected and delivered by tankers that often arrive at different farms."

Feed trucks, service vehicles, and staff move in and out of farms; a farmer can disinfect boots and wheels, but when the farm requires a high level of external contact, the risks of foot-and-mouth disease virus are significant."

Agricultural experts on panel discussion of foot and mouth disease effects different industries at 2026 young farmers indaba

Ferreira concluded that strict rules help, but farmers cannot eliminate exposure entirely.

In response to the escalating crisis, industry players are increasingly stepping in to fill gaps traditionally managed by the government.

Dewald Olivier, CEO of Red Meat Industry Services (RMIS), confirmed that the private sector is now actively supporting vaccination and field operations.

"We have trained animal health technicians who are assisting with vaccinations driven by the industry in support of government efforts," he said.

"Livestock producers, feed producers, and agribusiness firms have stepped in by implementing their own teams of vetted experts in high-risk areas."

Despite these interventions, the scale of the outbreak remains alarming. The South African government declared a national state of disaster for FMD in February 2026, as cases surged beyond previous records.

Data from the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP) indicates that more than 24,000 cases had been recorded in domestic livestock by mid-February—far exceeding the previous 20-year high.

With infections confirmed in eight out of nine provinces, the disease has become a nationwide threat, affecting both commercial and emerging farmers.

Yet amid the crisis, signs of collaboration within the sector are emerging. Biandri Joubert, a consultant on international trade and agricultural regulations, pointed to a growing willingness among farmers to work together.

"There is a strong sense of shared responsibility. Farmers understand that protecting the industry requires collective action, vaccinations, biosecurity, and movement controls from all sides."

"So far, the way the agriculture industry has worked towards addressing foot-and-mouth disease has been a positive outcome."

From Social Work to Sustainability: Rerereile Kamohi's Green Revolution for Lesotho

By Ntsoaki Motaung and Refiloe Molise

Lesotho is a country where many young people are searching for opportunities, while some are beginning to create them, starting from the ground up.

In Pitsing, Leribe, Rerereile Kamohi saw a lack of opportunities as a stepping stone to craft a story of success from a simple idea rooted in community care. An idea that would grow into a model for sustainable agriculture and rural transformation.

Not a trained agriculturalist but a social worker, Kamohi chose to confront poverty not only through the support systems available in her community but through production, dignity and self-reliance, using the very people she sees on a daily basis.

Her simple, innovative idea recently took her to the global stage at the BRICS Youth Innovation Summit in Pretoria, South Africa, where her project, Bashoeshoe Climate Smart Community Gardens, secured third place in the Sustainable Development and Green Innovation category.

For Kamohi, the recognition is not just an award but a validation of a deeply personal mission shaped by lived experience.

Kamohi's path into climate-smart agriculture was anything but conventional.

"Bashoeshoe was an unexpected win because I am a social work person," she said.

She added, "Many people did not think this idea would grow into something like this because I did not come from an agriculture or even climate change background."

Her turning point came while volunteering in Motseki, in Leribe's Pitsing area, where she worked closely with families struggling to make ends meet. What she encountered was not just poverty but the dependency of households that relied almost entirely on social grants, with little opportunity to generate their own income.

"As I was interacting with parents who were trying to make ends meet for their families, I realised they had no real means of living. They were relying completely on social grants," she explained

"That is when I saw that I could become a bridge to help them create income for themselves instead of depending entirely on support."

Determined to find solutions, Kamohi began building her knowledge from the ground up. She enrolled in online courses, attended leadership programmes and immersed herself in climate conversations wherever she could.

"Anywhere people were talking about climate change. I made sure I was there to learn, and that is what built my passion for this project," she says.

She describes Bashoeshoe Climate Smart Community Gardens as an initiative designed to empower youth and women to produce food, generate income and build resilience against climate shocks.

Unlike traditional backyard gardening, the model is structured around shared community production.

"Bashoeshoe is designed as a centralised community land initiative where people come together to work one plot. We are targeting 100 participants, 50 youth and 50 other community members."

The project is based in Leribe, often regarded as Lesotho's agricultural hub due to its fertile soils and available land. It incorporates irrigated gardens, polytunnels, and greenhouses to ensure year-round production, even in unpredictable weather.

These controlled environments are critical in protecting crops from heavy rains and climate variability, allowing communities to move from subsistence to more stable, market-oriented production.

A key feature of the initiative she describes is the Lefupu model, a structured system that governs both production and participation.

"This model ensures that we can produce throughout the year, especially through our tunnels and greenhouses.

"Labour is organised deliberately. Youth participants are responsible for maintaining the gardens, harvesting crops and ensuring productivity. In return, access to produce is directly linked to contribution.

"If you do not work, you do not get anything," Kamohi explained, noting that it encourages responsibility, but also ownership.

Beyond production, the initiative plays a critical role in linking farmers to markets, acting as an intermediary to ensure that produce does not go to waste and that participants can generate income from their work.

Rerereile Kamohi, founder of Bashoeshoe Climate Smart Community Gardens, proudly displays her award and certificate after securing third place in the Sustainable Development & Green Innovation category at the 4t

Kamohi's breakthrough came when Bashoeshoe was selected as part of a six-member Lesotho delegation under the Sebabatso Youth Empowerment Initiative to represent the country at the BRICS+ summit.

Competing against innovators from across the Global South, she finished third, underscoring the competitiveness of locally developed solutions.

"Working with Team Lesotho made me realise that we have real potential as Basotho, and seeing other projects also showed me that we can go far; we just need to keep pushing and working towards our goals."

Despite the recognition, the road ahead remains challenging.

"Access to funding is one of the biggest challenges we are facing to ensure sustainability," Kamohi admits.

Rather than waiting for government intervention, she is actively pursuing partnerships to advance the project.

"We cannot wait for others. We need to use the resources we already have and build from there."

She has already begun working with youth-led organisations, including climate-focused groups involved in tree planting and irrigation, to bring the project to life.

Beyond its immediate impact, Bashoeshoe is closely aligned with global development priorities, particularly poverty reduction, food security and climate action.

"We are not going to use anything that is harmful to the environment," Kamohi emphasised, highlighting the project's commitment to organic and sustainable production.

Her work has also drawn recognition from Pitso Lesaoana, Minister of Gender, Youth and Social Development, who praised youth-led innovation as a driver of national progress.

"Youth are not just our greatest asset, they are the driving force of innovation and progress," he said.

The minister lauded Kamohi's journey, saying her project reflects a broader shift taking place across Lesotho, where young people are not only identifying problems but building solutions rooted in their communities.

When the Classroom Ended, the Land Began to Teach

By Thoboloko Ntšonyane

When you arrive at Thabana-Mokhele in Botha-Bothe in the late afternoon, the farm does not announce itself loudly. It unfolds gradually, green rows of vegetables, the steady movement of chickens and a quiet rhythm of work that seems to run on instinct rather than instruction.

In the middle of it all is 'Maatlehang Matjelo, moving from one task to another with the familiarity of someone who no longer separates life from land.

On this particular Monday after five o'clock, the light is soft but still strong enough to reveal every detail of her routine. She is bent over her crops, checking leaves one by one, testing soil with her fingers and shifting between vegetables and poultry without pause. There is no sense of performance in her movements, only practice.

At first glance, it is hard to reconcile this scene with the profession she once trained for. Matjelo is a diploma holder in Secondary Education from the Lesotho College of Education. She stood in front of classrooms, taught learners and once measured her life through timetables and syllabi. That chapter, however, has not defined her present.

After five years in farming, she speaks about the land not as a replacement for teaching but as a continuation of learning in a different form. The discipline remains, but the classroom has changed.

"Farming has taught me patience, planning and hard work; skills I first learned at college but now apply in a different way," she says.

"For me, learning never stops, whether in a classroom or on the land, I keep learning."

Her yard is a layered space of production; spinach, cabbage, onions, potatoes, and other vegetables grow in carefully managed sections, while a corrugated-iron poultry structure hums with activity nearby. The chickens are not passive assets; they are part of a system that demands daily attention, adjustment and care.

Women from the surrounding community move through the space on harvesting days, helping with slaughtering, cleaning and preparing chickens for sale. The arrangement is both practical and social. The work is distributed, and outcomes are shared in small, informal ways that sustain both livelihood and cooperation.

"Through this arrangement, the women in my community show strong support for my farm," Matjelo says.

Her poultry work has not been without disruption. At one point, Newcastle disease swept through her flock during the festive season, wiping out about 64 chickens. It was a moment that forced her to confront the fragility of livestock farming in a very direct way.

"I had only heard of such stories, but when it happened to me, the reality of risks in agriculture was given life. It was very painful," she narrates.

Even the surviving birds were weakened, and the farm briefly lost its rhythm. But the setback did not translate into withdrawal. Instead, it pushed her toward more structured, preventive practices, especially around vaccination and early response.

Matjelo tending the land, feeding the community

"You have to prevent the disease from happening. Once I notice something unusual with the chickens, I act quickly and go to the agricultural chemist to consult professionals."

Despite the loss, she still managed to generate income during that period from vegetables and the few surviving chickens, which she sold. It was not a full recovery, but it was enough to reinforce her confidence in the farm's long-term potential.

Support from agricultural programmes has also helped stabilise her work. She is a beneficiary of the Smallholder Agriculture Development Project (SADP), which has provided shade nets to protect crops from the weather and birds. More recently, she constructed a borehole to secure access to water, a decision driven by repeated droughts and unreliable water sources challenges.

These interventions have not eliminated difficulties, but they have reduced vulnerability. For Matjelo, that difference is important. Still, expansion remains a priority.

She is currently seeking additional funding to scale her farming activities and has already taken steps to increase production by hiring two additional field workers. Growth, for her, is not conceptual. It is physical, measured in land, inputs and labour.

Her confidence in farming today contrasts sharply with her early hesitation. Like many women entering agribusiness, she initially struggled with visibility and confidence in selling her produce directly.

"Women are sometimes shy to sell their produce, and that was me when I first started. I was afraid to go out and meet people. I felt like giving someone else the produce to sell on my behalf. With time, however, I gained confidence and managed to do it myself."

That shift has since changed the trajectory of her work. Customers now come directly to her farm.

"Word of mouth has helped me expand my small but steady market. I also sell to local hawkers who collect vegetables directly from my yard."

Her ambitions, however, extend beyond what she currently produces. Matjelo speaks about integrating piggery and even developing a fish pond as part of her long-term plans.

"These ideas are not detached dreams; they are extensions of a growing understanding of farming as a system rather than a single activity. My husband, who is an agriculture teacher, has also influenced my different approaches in how I work, reinforcing the idea that farming can be both practical and structured," she said.

There is a moment in her conversation where her position becomes clear, not as someone experimenting with agriculture, but as someone committed to it as a life direction.

"I feel satisfied. Even if they say, 'Here is the grant to be a teacher again,' I will not return to teaching," she says.

The statement is not framed as a rejection of her past profession, but as an acceptance of her present reality: "Teaching gave me structure, but farming is giving me my ownership."

01 May- 28 May 2026

El Niño Watch Raised as Lesotho Prepares for Possible Dry Season

By Ntsoaki Motaung

Lesotho's next farming season may arrive under drier and hotter conditions, as weather experts warn of a possible El Niño developing later this year.

The Lesotho Meteorological Services (LMS) has issued an official El Niño Watch for the 2026–2027 summer rainfall season, urging farmers and households to begin preparing early, even as current conditions remain stable.

El Niño, a natural climate pattern caused by warming sea surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean, can disrupt weather systems across the globe. Though distant, its effects are often felt strongly in Southern Africa, where it has historically been linked to reduced rainfall and lower crop yields.

According to a report signed by LMS Director, Dr Teke Ramotubei, temperatures are currently neutral and are expected to remain so through mid-2026. However, several climate models indicate a possible shift toward a weak El Niño later in the year.

For Lesotho, this could mean a challenging summer rainfall season, which runs from October 2026 to April 2027.

"No extreme drought is indicated at this stage," the report notes, "but vigilance is advised given the models' spread."

The warning is echoed globally. The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) has also signalled a likely return of El Niño conditions between May and July 2026, with projections pointing to rising global temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns.

For farmers on the ground, the message is clear: preparation cannot wait.

Lesotho National Farmers' Union (LENAFU) Executive Director Khotso Lepheana said farmers must take early warnings seriously.

"It is also important for farmers to take warnings like this seriously so that they can make the necessary preparations," he said.

He cautioned that the impact of changing weather patterns goes beyond rainfall alone.

"Farmers should be prepared for improved production and, on the other hand, increased potential diseases affecting both livestock and crops."

Lepheana stressed the need for both prevention and adaptation.

"We should also expect effects that we cannot prevent, and in that regard, we should have adaptive capability," he said.

He added that farmers must begin adjusting their practices now, rather than waiting for conditions to worsen.

"When it comes to crops, we have to adopt new planting patterns and avoid doing things as if everything is normal," he said.

He also called for stronger collaboration across the sector, urging farmers to rely on technical guidance.

This image shows some of the effects of El Nino

This image shows some of the effects of El Nino

From the government side, the Ministry of Agriculture says that while no specific interventions have been introduced in response to the El Niño Watch, broader seasonal preparedness efforts remain in place.

Public Relations Officer Lereko Masupha said farmers should continue to focus on resilience measures already being promoted.

He warned that farmers should also prepare for winter conditions, particularly in protecting livestock.

"As for crops, we advise farmers to practice protected agriculture to mitigate the effects of extreme weather patterns, as well as to use seeds that can withstand harsh weather. We have projects, nutrition clubs, and Extension officers who are always disseminating information to our farmers; they just have to listen to the messages for sustainable production," he said.

Drought Crisis Deepens as Lesotho Turns to Climate-Smart Farming

By Ntsoaki Motaung

A new report from the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) paints a stark picture of the impact of an El Niño-induced drought that has gripped the country since 2024, so severe that the government declared a National State of Food Insecurity Disaster from July 2024 through March 2025.

For a country heavily dependent on rain-fed agriculture, the consequences have been immediate and far-reaching. An estimated 700,000 people, nearly a third of the population, faced hunger as crops failed and water sources dried up.

The scale of the crisis extends beyond Lesotho's borders.

"Lesotho and the wider Southern African region experienced one of the most severe climate-related food crises in recent history," the report states.

Across the region, nearly 27 million people were left without enough food as prolonged dry spells disrupted agricultural production on a massive scale.

Lesotho's vulnerability is compounded by structural limitations. With only 10 per cent of its land suitable for farming, the country has little margin for climate shocks. When rainfall fails, food systems quickly come under pressure.

Yet even as the crisis exposes deep vulnerabilities, it is also accelerating change.

The report shows that Lesotho is continuing to pursue its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a current index score of 55.64. While progress remains gradual, there is a clear shift toward building climate-resilient food systems.

Crop failures across Lesotho reflect a wider Southern African climate emergency that has left nearly 27 million people food insecure during the 2024-2025 season.

Efforts are now focused on helping farmers produce under increasingly unpredictable conditions. In Berea and Maseru, eight greenhouse structures and eight water harvesting tanks have been established, allowing households to grow vegetables with less dependence on rainfall.

Support for farmers has also expanded, with more than 700 faarmers receiving input packages that included seeds for maize and beans, fertilisers, and automatic insurance coverage—designed to cushion them against future climate shocks.

At the same time, the government is diversifying food production systems. Policies for aquaculture and potato production are being finalised as part of a broader strategy to strengthen food security.

Recognising the growing unpredictability of weather patterns, the country is also investing in early warning systems.

"With help from the UN, the Lesotho Meteorological Services are now better at predicting the weather with precision. This allows the government to take anticipatory action, meaning they can act before a disaster hits rather than just responding afterwards," the report says.

Technology is increasingly playing a role in managing climate risks. Drone mapping is being used to assess flood risks, while wetlands are being restored to protect critical water sources.

Beyond production, efforts are also being made to strengthen farmers' ability to respond to changing markets. Market Information Days held across four districts have reached more than 1,600 people, many of them women and youth, equipping them with knowledge to navigate shifting agricultural conditions.

Despite the severity of the drought, the report highlights a broader story of resilience.

As United Nations Resident Coordinator Taija Kontinen-Sharp noted, Lesotho is responding by blending traditional knowledge with modern innovation to ensure long-term food security in a changing climate.

The crisis may have exposed the fragility of the country's food systems, but it has also accelerated a transition in which survival increasingly depends on how quickly agriculture can adapt.

WORLD BANK GROUP IFAD Investing in rural people JICA SADPII

21st April 2026

To whom it may concern,

NOTICE FOR CANCELLATION OF EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI) FOR SEAKA AND TSIKOANE

This letter serves to inform all bidders who have **expressed their interest (EOI) for Seaka and Tsikoane** irrigation scheme which was advertised on 6th February 2026 that the procurement has been cancelled. Bidders who have submitted are kindly requested collect their documents at the SADP II offices **starting from Wednesday, 22 April 2026, up until Thursday, 30 April 2026**.

Please note that the **collection will strictly be from 2:00pm** until **4:00pm** on all the stated days.

Bidders are advised to adhere to the mentioned dates and times, as no documents will be issued outside this schedule.

We want to thank you for expressing your interest and we humbly request you to compete in the upcoming/next procurement.

For any further clarification, please contact the SADP II Procurement Office.
Telephone- 22312578
Thank you.

DIRECTORATE ON CORRUPTION AND ECONOMIC OFFENCES

Invitation for Bids (IFB): PROVISION OF SECURITY SERVICES

Tender No.: DCEO/PROC/2026/2027-1

1. Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) has received financing from the Government of Lesotho and intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments under the contract for the **Provision of Security Services**. The **Directorate** now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders clearly marked **"Bid for Provision of Security Services."**

2. Bidding will be conducted through Open National Competitive Tendering procedures as specified in the Public Procurement Act 2023 and is open to all eligible bidders as defined in the Act mentioned.

3. The services to be procured are as follows:

Item	Description	Quantity	Specifications
1	Security Guard	3	Unarmed security guards at DCEO Headquarters during the day
2	Security Guard	2	Armed with firearm security guards at DCEO Headquarters during the night
3	Security Guard	2	Unarmed security guards at Maseru Tourist Information and Crafts Centre (DCEO Offices) during the day
4	Security Guard	1	Armed with firearm security guard at Maseru Tourist Information and Crafts Centre (DCEO Offices) during the night
5	Security Guard	1	Armed with firearm security guard at DCEO Post Office Building
6	Security Guard	1	Unarmed security guard at DCEO North Regional office Butha-Buthe during the day
7	Security Guard	1	Armed security guard at DCEO North Regional office Butha-Buthe during the night
8	Security Guard	1	Unarmed security guard at DCEO South Regional office Mohale's Hoek during the day
9	Security Guard	1	Armed security guard at DCEO South Regional office Mohale's Hoek during the night
10	Security Guard	1	Unarmed security guard at DCEO house (Masowe 1) during the day
11	Security Guard	1	Armed security guard at DCEO house (Masowe 1) during the night
12	Security Guard	1	Unarmed security guard at DCEO house (Motheo) during the day
13	Security Guard	1	Armed security guard at DCEO house (Motheo) during the night

4. Interested eligible bidders may obtain further information from the **DCEO Procurement Unit** during office hours: 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday and 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. on Friday at the address given under paragraph 6 below.

5. A complete set of bidding document in **English** may be purchased by interested bidders upon payment of a non-refundable fee of **LSL2, 000.00 (Two Thousand Maloti only).** The method of payment **shall be cash, payable to the DCEO Finance Office**.
Bids must be delivered to the address indicated under paragraph 6 below on or before **26th May 2026 at 10:00 a.m.** Electronic bidding **will not** be permitted. Late bids will be rejected. Bids will be publicly opened in the presence of bidders' designated representatives who may choose to attend at the address indicated below on the same date **(26th May 2026)** at **10:05 a.m.**

6. All bids must be deposited in the tender box situated at the address below:

Ground Floor,
Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences,
Old Parliament Road,
Opposite Police Headquarters,
P.O. Box 16060,
Maseru, 100,
Lesotho.

For enquiries:
Tel: (+266) 2221 9200
Email: tmathias@dceo.org.ls
Attention: Tsele Mathias (Mr.)

Kingdom of Lesotho

Specific Procurement Notice

Request for Bids
Small Works
(Two-Envelope Bidding Process)

Employer: **Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition (MAFSN)**
Project: **Smallholder Agriculture Development Project II (SADP II)**
Contract title: **Design and Build for Seaka (Lot 1) and Tsikoane (Lot 2) Irrigation Scheme**
Country: **Kingdom of Lesotho**
Loan No. /Credit No. / Grant No.: **P165228**
RFB No: ***LS-MAFS-547907-CW-RFB***
Issued on: *21st April 2026*

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition (MAFSN) under Smallholder Agriculture Development Project II (SADP II) has received financing from the World Bank toward the cost of the (SADP II) and intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments under the contract for *Design and Build for Seaka (Lot 1) and Tsikoane (Lot 2) Irrigation Scheme* . "For this contract, the Borrower shall process the payments using the Direct Payment disbursement method, as defined in the World Bank's Disbursement Guidelines for Investment Project Financing,"

1. The *Smallholder Agriculture Development Project II (SADP II)* now invites sealed Bids from eligible Bidders for Design and Build for Seaka Irrigation Scheme (Lot 1) construction period- 6months, location: Quthing and Tsikoane Irrigation Scheme construction (Lot 2) period- 6months, location: Leribe.

2. Bidding will be conducted through national competitive procurement using Request for Bids (RFB) as specified in the World Bank's "Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers *6th Edition February 2025* ("Procurement Regulations"), and is open to all eligible Bidders as defined in the Procurement Regulations.

3. Bids will be evaluated in accordance with the evaluation process set out in the bidding documents. The following weightings shall apply for Rated Criteria (including technical and non-price factors): *60%* and for Bid cost: *40%. The weightings are applicable for each lot*.

4. Interested eligible Bidders may obtain further information from *SADP II, e-mail: procurement@sadpii.org.ls* and inspect the bidding document during office hours 0900 to *1600 hours* at the address given *at the end of this RFB* .

5. Bidders are eligible to bid for both lots but only one (1) bidder can be allocated/ awarded one (1) irrigation scheme (lot) at a time.

6. Bids must be delivered to *the address at the end of this RFB* on or before ***1400 hours on* 26th May 2026**. Electronic bidding *will not* be permitted. Late Bids will be rejected. The outer Bid envelopes marked "ORIGINAL BID", and the inner envelopes marked "TECHNICAL PART" will be publicly opened in the presence of the Bidders' designated representatives and anyone who chooses to attend, at the address below at SADP II boardroom, ***1430 hours on 26th May 2026***. All envelopes marked "FINANCIAL PART" shall remain unopened and will be held in safe custody of the Employer until the second public Bid opening.
Additionally, the outer envelope should be marked "do not open" and should clearly indicate the Lot being submitted as follows:
   - Design and Build for Seaka Irrigation Scheme - Lot 1
   - Design and Build for Tsikoane Irrigation Scheme- Lot 2

7. All Bids must be accompanied by the following:
(i) ***Bid Security of LSL 300,000.00 for Seaka (Lot 1) and / Bid Security of LSL 260,000.00 for Tsikoane (Lot 2)*** and
(ii) Local Labor Method Statement for both lots.

8. 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.

9. The address(es) referred to above is (are):
   Procurement Office
   Moshoeshoe II Livestock
   P.O Box 24
   Maseru 100
   Lesotho

telephone number: +266 22312578
email address: procurement@sadpii.org.ls
web site address: Procurement – SADP II or https://www.sadpii.org.ls/procurement/

1. Substitute "contracts" where Bids are called concurrently for multiple contracts. Add a new para. 3 and renumber paras 3 - 8 as follows: "Bidders may Bid for one or several contracts, as further defined in the Bidding Document. Bidders wishing to offer discounts in case they are awarded more than one contract will be allowed to do so, provided those discounts are included in the Letter of Bid."
2. Insert if applicable: "This contract will be jointly financed by [insert name of cofinancing agency]. Bidding process will be governed by the World Bank's Procurement Regulations"
3. A brief description of the type(s) of works should be provided, including, location, quantities, construction period, application of margin of preference and other information necessary to enable potential Bidders to decide whether or not to respond to the Request for Bids. Bidding Document may require Bidders to have specific experience or capabilities; such qualification requirements should also be included in this paragraph.
4. If electronic procurement will be used, insert link or web site address and any additional relevant information, as appropriate
5. The office for inquiry and issuance of Bidding document and that for Bid submission may or may not be the same.
6. Substitute the address for Bid submission if it is different from address for inquiry and issuance of Bidding document.

Kingdom of Lesotho

PETROLEUM FUND

Request for Expression of Interest (EOI) for the Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Maintenance (DBFOM) of a Strategic Fuel Storage Facility

Date: **27th March 2026**

EOI Number/Ref number: [PF/EOI/2025/2026-02]

1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Government of Lesotho is seeking expression of interest from accomplished construction companies to undertake the Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Maintenance, Testing and Commissioning responsibilities for a 30-day strategic fuel storage facility at Maqhaka in Berea, Lesotho. This project is critical to ensuring security of fuel supply.

The facility encompasses eleven bulk storage tanks, along with loading and offloading pumps, valve chambers, fire systems, control systems, effluent handling systems, truck loading and offloading gantries, administrative, security, MCC building complexes and access road.

The eleven (11) bulk storage tanks are of the following capacities:

i) Four (4) 2730m3 tanks for the storage of petrol (ULP 93&95)

ii) Four (4) 3650m3 tanks for the storage of diesel (50ppm)

iii) Three (3) 930m3 tanks for the storage of illuminated paraffin (IP)

Complete the Engineering, Procurement, Construction and Commission for the Strategic Fuel Storage Facility in accordance with internationally accepted standards (e.g. SANS) as well as relevant international standards (ISO, API, IEC etc.) to ensure sufficient operation;

2. SCOPE OF SERVICES

The services required under this assignment include:

i. Complete the Strategic Fuel Storage Facility, testing and commissioning in accordance with internationally accepted and relevant standards to ensure sufficient operation;

ii. Detail the ownership representation ensuring involvement of the State

iii. iii) Provide a detailed financing structure including the funding sources, a clear risk sharing plan and allocation among project stakeholders

iv. Demonstrate expertise on procurement of petroleum products for the state

v. Elaborate how petroleum products will be procured without alienating existing players and avoiding the creation of monopolies

vi. Propose how other interested groups may participate

vii. Propose how products will be procured from the international market

viii. Propose the operating and maintenance model

The Ministry of Energy invites suitably qualified construction companies to submit an expression of interest. The companies may form joint ventures to enhance their chances of qualification.

3. EOI SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The following should be included in the submission:

i. Company Overview or Company Profile;

ii. A track record of the company demonstrating experience in large-scale DBFOM projects, ideally within the energy sector (e.g contract);

iii. A client reference list of at least three (3) clients that similar work has been implemented for;

iv. Project organogram illustrating the roles of each team member,

v. CV and qualifications of each proposed team member;

vi. Demonstrate financial stability and ability to secure project financing;

vii. Past 5 year's audited financial statements;

viii. Company registration documents, Valid Tax Clearance Certificate (TCC) and a comfort letter from a reputable bank.

ix. Description of the Company's quality assurance policies and procedures.

x. Additional Certifications/procedures applicable to perform the services

4. SUBMISSION DETAILS

Expression of interest must be submitted by email to the address below by Monday, the 8th June 2026, at 12:00 hrs Central African Time (CAT) and clearly titled "EOI for DBFOM for Maqhaka Strategic Fuel Storage facility".

Attention:

Mr. Teboho Moloantoa
Petroleum Fund
LCCI Building
Orpen Road
Maseru, Lesotho

Submission Address: supplier@petroleum.org.ls

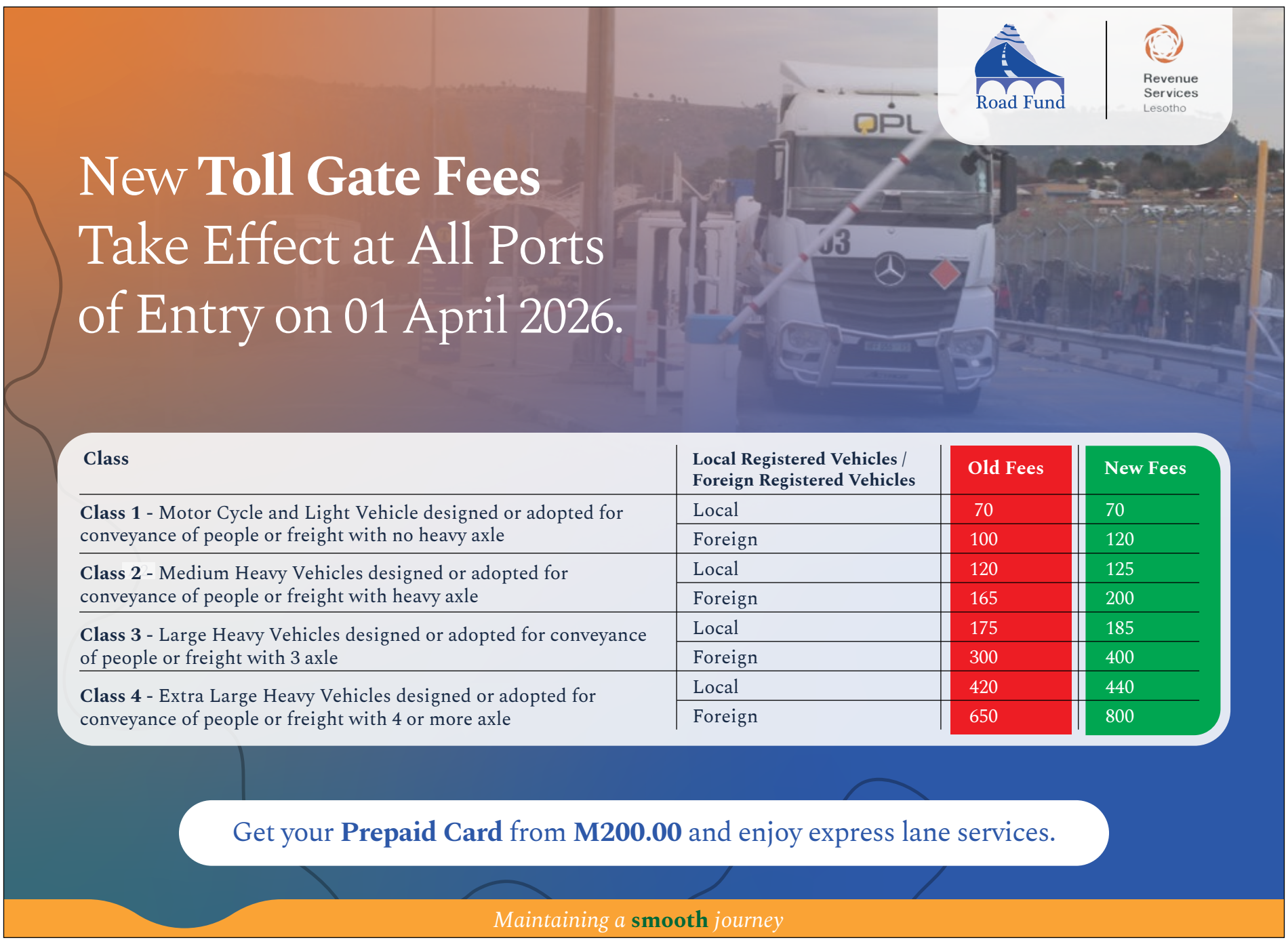
Attention: **Late submissions will not be considered.**

5. EOI EVALUATION CRITERIA

	Expression of Interest Evaluation Criteria	Points
A.	**Relevant DBFOM Experience**	15
B.	**Technical Qualification and Personnel**	20
C.	**Ownership Model and financing structure**	10
D.	**Quality assurance, HSSE Systems and compliance with standards**	10
E.	**Financial Capacity**	20
F.	**Local Participation & Capacity Building**	10
G.	**Procurement and sales/trading model**	15

6. DISCLAIMER

This EOI is issued for information-gathering and shortlisting purposes only and does not constitute an invitation to tender. The Government of Lesotho reserves the right to accept or reject any EOI, to annul the process, or to amend the scope without incurring any liability.



FARMERS PITSO AWARDS

GALA DINNER

MPILO BOUTIQUE HOTEL

12th SEPTEMBER 2026 | 6:00PM

THEME | BLACK TIE

TICKETS

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SCHOOLS EXHIBITIONS & COMPETITIONS | PRIZES TO BE WON

SATURDAY
FARMERS AWARD CEREMONY | PRIZES TO BE WON

SATURDAY
GALA DINNER (BLACK TIE EVENT) | FOOD, MUSIC, AWARDS

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Can Maseru Feed Itself? Inside the Rise of Urban Farming

By Lungile Maseela

As food prices climb and household budgets tighten, more families are finding themselves buying less, stretching meals further and rethinking how they access food.

For some, the answer has been surprisingly simple: grow it themselves.

Across the capital, small patches of land, often overlooked are being turned into productive spaces.

Tomatoes grow in buckets and balanced with sticks, spinach fills narrow backyard plots, and herbs line fences and walls. What began as a practical response to rising costs is steadily becoming a quiet shift in how urban households survive food security.

With food prices increasing by nearly 20 percent in the past year and more than 60 percent of residents living in densely populated areas, the pressure on Maseru's food system is intensifying.

According to the Lesotho Bureau of Statistics (2016 Census), about 25 percent of the population lives in urban areas, with Maseru accounting for the largest share. This continued urban growth has increased pressure on land, reducing space available for agriculture as settlements expand.

Rapid urban growth has reduced access to land, while many low-income households still travel long distances to find affordable produce.

In this environment, urban farming is no longer just an option but a growing necessity.

Driven by ongoing rural-to-urban migration the city continues to expand, often at the expense of land once used for cultivation. The World Bank estimates that rural-to-urban migration the city has since risen to around 29 percent, reflecting steady urban growth. As space shrinks, so does the ability of households to produce their own food, deepening reliance on markets that are becoming increasingly expensive.

Yet across high-density neighbourhoods, residents are finding ways to adapt, and Mamello Khama is among a growing number of urban farmers reshaping what agriculture looks like in the city.

Raised in a farming household in Mokhotlong, she once saw farming purely as a means of feeding a family. That changed after studying Professional Business Management at Limkokwing University.

"Back then, when I saw my parents till the land and farm, I only looked at it as a way of producing food for consumption, but now I am able to view farming in an entrepreneurial way to not only feed me, but financially sustain me."

Faced with limited opportunities and high unemployment, Khama began planting vegetables wherever she could find space. Despite the constraints, her efforts quickly paid off.

"I have been consuming tomatoes that I grew myself for a long time," she said, adding that she once harvested enough to pack a full box, she sells through her business.

Today, her garden does more than just supplement her meals, it reduces her expenses and gives her a sense of control in an uncertain economy.

"Everywhere I find space, I plant something," she said.

"That really limits how much I can plant, but I try to make the most of what I have."

Her experience reflects a broader reality across Maseru, where small-scale gardens are quietly transforming how families access food. Even limited harvests can supply households with vegetables for weeks, reducing dependence on purchased produce and improving diet quality.

Urban farming is reshaping how Maseru's residents respond to rising food prices and shrinking urban space one backyard garden at a time

Fako Fako, coordinator of the SMARTD programme, sees urban farming as more than a short-term coping strategy.

"Urban farming is very effective in improving food security at household level. We encourage farmers to grow a variety of crops so that they can move from farming for consumption to producing enough to sell."

He noted that many urban farmers are already adopting sustainable methods, including the use of indigenous seeds and organic manure, making the practice both affordable and environmentally resilient.

"These practices make urban farming more sustainable and affordable," he said.

Despite its growing role, urban farming in Maseru still faces clear limitations.

Space remains the biggest constraint, with most farmers relying on small backyards, containers, or improvised plots. Water shortages during dry periods, pest outbreaks, and limited access to training further restrict productivity.

There is also little formal policy support to help scale these efforts.

Monyane Rasebonang of the Rural Self-Help Development Association (RSDA) believes urban farming has far greater potential if properly supported.

"Backyard farming is easy to manage because it does not require large land. Everyone can access it and we advise people to use keyhole and drip plots for maximised production."

However, he argues that mind-set remains a major barrier.

"Many people think healthy eating means spending more rather than growing food themselves. Farming is often seen as something from the past."

He called for stronger policy direction, including encouraging households to actively use available land.

"There should be no exposure of soil. Land should be planted," he said.

The bigger question, however, still lingers: can urban farming grow beyond household survival to meaningfully contribute to feeding the city?

For now, its impact is most visible at the household level, where it is reducing costs, improving nutrition, and offering a measure of resilience.

Maseru may not yet be able to feed itself. But in backyards, containers, and narrow strips of land across the city, something important is already taking root, a shift toward self-reliance, one small garden at a time.

Sawing Seeds

Njonguo is Turning Beekeeping into a Data-Driven Solution

...Puts youth and women central to her work

By Topollo Tlali

On a continent searching for sustainable solutions to food security, climate change, and youth unemployment, some answers are quietly emerging, rooted not just in soil but in purpose.

From Cameroon, Njonguo Sindy Nguegim is one such solution.

As a bee-farming expert, youth leader, and agri-food policy advocate, Njonguo has not had a journey of privilege or easy support; rather, it has been defined by conviction, persistence and a belief in agriculture as a transformative force.

Her path has been shaped by both academic pursuits and lived experiences. Currently working towards an MSc in Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, with a background in Animal Sciences, Njonguo's foundation is strong, but it is her mindset that sets her apart.

"My path has developed through agriculture, youth leadership, climate action and community work," she explains. However, beyond her studies, she says what has truly shaped her journey is a deep belief that agriculture can change lives.

For Njonguo, agriculture is not merely about production but the possibilities folded from within.

"For me, agriculture is not only about farming for survival; it is also about dignity, innovation, resilience and creating a better future for our communities."

Finding Purpose in the Hive

While many young people remain hesitant to engage in agriculture, Njonguo discovered her calling in one of its most overlooked areas: beekeeping.

"One part of agriculture that has become especially close to my heart is beekeeping," she narrates, saying her fascination quickly evolved into a sense of purpose.

"What draws me to beekeeping is that it encompasses much more than just honey. Bees are vital for pollination, biodiversity, food systems and environmental balance. When I began to understand this more deeply, I started to see beekeeping as something incredibly powerful."

"Bees also teach us important lessons. They demonstrate the value of order, purpose, consistency and collaboration. In many ways, I feel that these same values have shaped my own journey," she says, stressing that beyond the science, she found valuable lessons in the behaviour of bees themselves.

Turning Challenges into Innovation

As she immersed herself in the field, Njonguo began to notice a gap: farmers lacked the tools and timely information needed to manage their hives effectively.

Rather than accepting this as a limitation, she recognised an opportunity to be seized.

"As I learned more about beekeeping, I also began to observe some of the challenges that farmers face, particularly the absence of tools and timely information that could assist them in managing their hives more effectively. I wanted to consider how innovation could address a genuine need."

Her line of thinking led to the creation of SwarmDec, a solar-powered early-warning device designed to predict bee swarms.

"That is what inspired me to develop SwarmDec, a solar-powered early warning device aimed at aiding swarm prediction in beekeeping."

This innovation, she explains, employs acoustic sensors to detect hive activity, providing farmers with critical insights before swarming occurs.

"This idea stemmed from a desire to resolve a practical issue in Cameroon's beekeeping sector. I wanted to contribute something that could make beekeeping feel more modern, data-informed and responsive to climate and environmental realities."

However, for Njonguo, the technology is only part of the story.

"For me, SwarmDec is not solely about technology. It also involves helping to protect biodiversity, strengthen food systems and create more opportunities for women and young people in agriculture."

I am the founder of Africa Humanitarian Development Peace Organization (AHDPO), which is active in many African countries, and I also founded Potential Youth, an initiative that helps inspire and empower young people.

Growing Impact Beyond the Hive

Njonguo's work extends far beyond beekeeping.

She is the founder of the Africa Humanitarian Development Peace Organization (AHDPO), which operates across several African countries, and also leads Potential Youth, an initiative focused on inspiring and empowering young people.

"I have had the opportunity to train, mentor and support many young people in sustainable agriculture, including beekeeping, insect farming and climate-smart practices. I have also collaborated with various organisations and contributed to discussions surrounding agriculture, climate action and policy. These experiences have helped me realise that real change occurs when local actions and larger systems begin to connect."

Changing the Narrative for Young People

At the core of her mission is a simple yet powerful idea: agriculture must be reimagined for the next generation.

"One thing I care deeply about is changing the way young people perceive agriculture. Too often, agriculture is viewed only as hard work with limited opportunities. "But I believe agriculture is also a space for innovation, entrepreneurship, leadership, and impact," she says, explaining that her approach is practical: "Young people are not merely trained; they are given responsibility."

"Young people are encouraged to lead by managing apiaries, conducting hive inspections, producing and harvesting honey, and taking responsibility for small beekeeping enterprises. They are also given opportunities to lead training sessions, share knowledge with their peers, and participate in decision-making, allowing them to build confidence, skills and ownership."

A Journey Without Shortcuts

Njonguo's story is crafted around challenges and hardships, with no support at the beginning.

"No one provided me with support. I faced criticism for choosing agriculture and was told I was overdoing it by pursuing beekeeping," but her strength came from within.

"I learned everything on my own. Just a young girl in love with and passionate about agriculture and the environment."

That resilience now shapes how she advises others.

"Don't start for money. Begin with passion and the desire to solve a problem in the field. Advocate for people, not for yourself, especially our grassroots communities. Avoid greed and self-centredness. Be patient, and you will see results. Above all, be authentic and true to yourself."

A Bigger Vision for Africa

Njonguo views beekeeping not merely as a livelihood but as part of a broader solution to some of Africa's most pressing challenges.

"This matters because we are facing significant questions in our time. How do we feed people sustainably? How do we protect the environment while still creating livelihoods? And how do we ensure that young people are not left behind but are involved in building the future?"

Her answer is unequivocal.

"For me, beekeeping is one of the beautiful solutions to these questions. To invest in beekeeping is to invest in pollination, biodiversity, food security and life itself, and what keeps me going is the conviction that Africa does not need to wait for change. We can create it."

As her journey continues, she stays grounded in purpose and possibility.

"My journey is still unfolding, and I am learning every day. But I remain hopeful. I believe that when young people are empowered, when women are given the opportunity to lead, and when innovation is rooted in genuine community needs, agriculture can become a powerful force for change."

Sawing seeds

LHDA Turns Displacement into Opportunity with Mokhotlong Innovation Hub Push

By Seabata Mahao

The Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA) is intensifying efforts to turn infrastructure-driven disruption into long-term economic opportunity, rolling out a series of livelihood programmes in Mokhotlong anchored by the Ha-Ramonakalali Innovation Hub under the Phase II Polihali Dam project.

At the centre of this approach is a deliberate shift: moving affected communities from dependency on compensation-based support towards practical, skills-driven agricultural livelihoods that can generate income long after construction work is completed.

Speaking in an interview, LHDA Senior Administration Officer Limpho Moeko said the intervention is designed to rebuild and strengthen household economies in areas affected by the dam development.

"The Phase II project has affected many people directly and indirectly. As LHDA, we are working to improve livelihoods at the household level. We encourage communities to participate in agricultural activities, starting from small crop plots to larger-scale farming, including greenhouse and commercial production," Moeko said.

The Ha-Ramonakalali Innovation Hub has become one of the key delivery platforms for this strategy, focusing on hands-on agricultural training spanning crop production, poultry farming, livestock improvement and agri-commercialisation. Beneficiaries are trained not only to produce food but also to treat farming as a structured, income-generating activity.

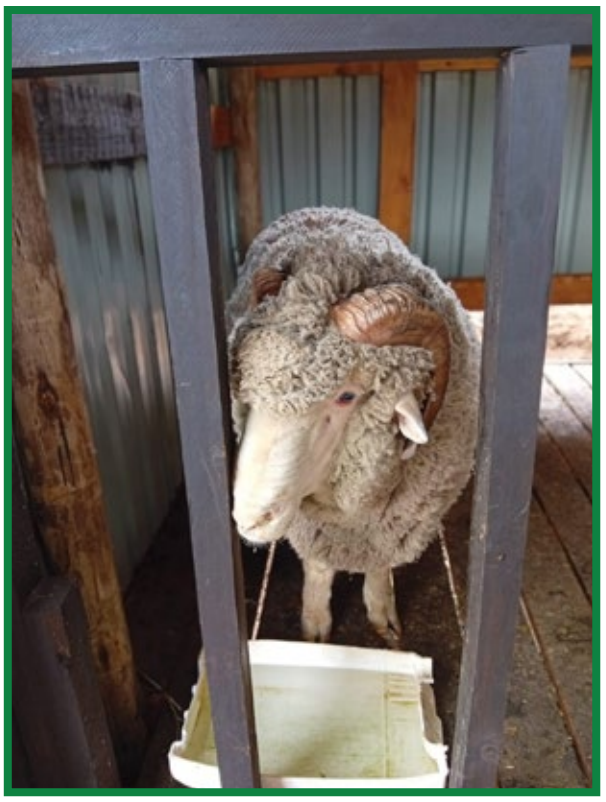
"We are encouraging farmers to improve their livestock through quality breeding. This includes wool and mohair production, meat, eggs and vegetable farming," Moeko said, adding that productivity improvement sits at the core of the programme.

A major focus area has been livestock genetics and productivity. LHDA has introduced improved breeding systems, including artificial insemination, to strengthen the quality of cattle, sheep and poultry in the district.

"We are implementing artificial insemination to ensure access to pure breeds, and this applies to cattle, sheep and poultry, with the goal of improving quality output in meat, wool and mohair," Moeko explained.

LHDA Innovation Hub at Ha-Ramonakalali, a community based program for local people to improve their livelihoods.

While poultry farming is already common in Mokhotlong, LHDA says productivity has often remained low due to reliance on unimproved breeds and traditional methods. The hub is therefore introducing improved chicken breeds that are more efficient in both meat and egg production.



LHDA Nutritionist Atlehang Makakola said the programme is designed not only to transfer skills but to ensure continuity beyond institutional support structures.

"We work with area technical assistance officers who are stationed within communities. They provide continuous training and support, ensuring that beneficiaries can apply what they learn effectively," Makakola said.

She noted that extension officers from the Ministry of Agriculture are embedded in the programme to strengthen long-term sustainability and ensure that knowledge is retained within communities rather than remaining project-bound.

Beyond livestock, the programme is also diversifying rural livelihoods through piggery, beekeeping and fruit tree cultivation, activities selected for their relatively low space requirements and potential for steady income generation.

"We are introducing improved ram breeds to enhance wool and mohair production. For those interested in meat production, better breeds will result in higher quality outputs," Makakola said, adding that piggery is increasingly being recognised as a viable alternative for households with limited land.

"Piggery was not initially popular, but communities are beginning to see its benefits. It requires less space and can be highly productive," she explained.

One of the most visible outcomes of the programme has been the emergence of nutrition clubs, which have evolved into small but structured agricultural enterprises. According to Makakola, these groups are now actively participating in local supply chains.

"These clubs are doing exceptionally well. They supply eggs to Letšeng Diamond Mine and other businesses in Mokhotlong and beyond. Each club consists of about 30 members, and each member manages their own poultry operation," she said.

For some beneficiaries, the impact has already shifted from training to sustained livelihoods.

'Makabelo Polihali, one of the early participants in the programme, said the intervention has fundamentally changed her household economy.

"I can honestly say that there is a huge change because this has become my main source of livelihood. The vegetables we were taught to grow, produce and work with have helped me greatly. I have sold a lot of produce, and I have seen that if a person continues working hard without giving up, they will never go to bed hungry. I am very grateful for the support because it has empowered us with farming skills and helped us continue working and producing for ourselves," she said.

She added that prior to the programme, she had little involvement in commercial vegetable farming, but now relies on it as a consistent source of income through local sales in Ha-Ramonakalali.

"Before this, I was not really involved in vegetable farming, but now we are successfully growing vegetables, and I have been able to sell to people in Ha-Ramonakalali. Our farming is very strong, and if a person has interest and commitment, they can truly sustain themselves for a long time and never struggle to find a way to survive, as long as they are willing to work with their own hands," Polihali explained.

The Ha-Ramonakalali Innovation Hub is increasingly being positioned as more than a project site but a model for linking large-scale infrastructure development to grassroots economic rebuilding. By combining skills development, improved agricultural systems, and market access, LHDA is attempting to shift the narrative of dam-affected communities from vulnerability to productive resilience.

While challenges around scale and long-term sustainability remain, Moeko noted the direction is clear, turning displacement zones into production zones and transforming impact-affected communities into active participants in Lesotho's agricultural economy.