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FAO GLOBAL INFORMATION AND EARLY WARNING SYSTEM ON FOOD AND  
AGRICULTURE  
WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME

## SPECIAL REPORT

# FAO/WFP CROP AND FOOD SUPPLY ASSESSMENT MISSION TO LESOTHO

29 May 2002

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## MISSION HIGHLIGHTS

- Domestic cereal supply in 2002/03 is estimated at 74 000 tonnes, while total national consumption requirement is estimated at 412 000 tonnes. This results in an import requirement of 338 000 tonnes. Commercial imports are estimated at 191 000 tonnes and food aid at 147 000 tonnes which needs to be met by the Government and external assistance.
- The mission estimates that a total of 444 800 people throughout Lesotho will require emergency food assistance. The districts hardest hit by this year's poor harvest are Qacha's Nek, Quthing and Mohale's Hoek. Not all individuals will require food assistance for the whole year and, therefore, assistance needs to be carefully targeted and phased so as to avoid disruption of domestic markets. Overall, the Mission recommends targeted emergency assistance of approximately 68 955 tonnes of food, including maize, pulses, vegetable oil and iodised salt. The GOL has already allocated 5 400 tonnes of maize for distribution to the most vulnerable people.
- Emergency provision of agricultural inputs such as seeds is recommended to enable disaster-affected farming families to restart agricultural production during the next main planting season starting in October 2002. Promotion of seed multiplication and horticultural production are recommended measures to further improve food security at household level.
- Agriculture in Lesotho faces a catastrophic future. Crop production is declining and could cease altogether over large tracts of the country if steps are not taken to reverse soil erosion, degradation and the decline in soil fertility. Crop yields are generally very low and declining. In the mid 1970s average maize and sorghum yields were in the order of 1 400kg/ha, but today they average 450-550kg/ha.

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## 1. OVERVIEW

Lesotho faced severe weather variability for the second year in a row, characterized by heavy rainfalls, frost, hailstorms, and tornadoes. The erratic timings of rainfall and frost severely affected crops at planting time and during their critical development stages. Heavy rainfall in October and November delayed or prevented planting of crops in many areas and frost in March curtailed the end of the growing season. The Government of Lesotho, anticipating another poor harvest, declared a state of famine and requested FAO and WFP for assistance in reviewing the country's food situation and outlook for the 2002/03 marketing year. Consequently, an FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission was fielded from 25 April to 4 May 2002 to estimate the current season cereal production, assess the overall food supply situation and forecast import requirements for 2002/03 marketing year (April/March), including food assistance needs. A representative of Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Early Warning Unit (REWU) participated in the mission as an observer.

The Mission received full cooperation from the Ministry of Agriculture, Cooperatives, and Land Reclamation, Ministry of Economic Planning, Disaster Management Authority, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Marketing, and Bureau of Statistics. Discussions were also held with relevant UN agencies including UNICEF, WHO, UNDP, as well as donor representatives, NGOs, and grain importers. The Mission split into two groups and was able to cover all the ten districts of the

country. Interviews were conducted with each District's Principal Secretary and staff from crops, livestock, extension, disaster management, nutrition, and health divisions to get information and their assessment of the situation within their districts. Interviews were also conducted with Village Chiefs, households farmers, and traders. Overall, more than 120 interviews were conducted during the course of the mission.

The Mission forecasts 2001/02 cereal production at 53 800 tonnes. Maize production is estimated at 34 500 tonnes, wheat at 14 100 tonnes and sorghum at 5 200 tonnes. Other crops such as beans, potatoes and peas were also observed on most farmers' fields that contribute to the diet of families and cash incomes when grown in larger quantities. The Mission used last year's FAO/WFP assessment mission figures for comparison of cereal production levels. On this basis production for this year will be 33 percent lower than the already reduced production last year. The Mission estimated the total cropped area of 133 600 hectares, about 60 percent of the area in normal years. The drop was partly due to heavy and widespread rains during the land preparation and planting period. Large areas in the lowlands with impermeable clay sub-soils were water-logged and took considerable time to drain and dry for tractors and machinery to operate, coupled with a shortage of tractors and oxen for ploughing in many areas.

With an estimated total domestic cereal supply of 74 000 tonnes, and total utilization requirement of 412 000 tonnes (Table 5), the country faces a shortfall of 338 000 tonnes for 2002/03 marketing year. Commercial imports are estimated at 191 000 tonnes, and food aid at 147 000 tonnes, which needs to be met by the Government and external food assistance.

The mission has estimated that a total of 444 800 people throughout Lesotho, but particularly in the districts of Qacha's Nek, Quthing and Mohale's Hoek which have been the hardest hit by this year's poor harvest will require immediate emergency food assistance. Total emergency food assistance is estimated at approximately 68 955 tonnes of food, including such commodities as maize, pulses, vegetable oil and iodised salt.

Different approaches to food distributions need to be examined. In less affected areas, self-targeting through food-for-work may be more appropriate than free distribution. In the worst affected areas free distribution will be required.

Agriculture in Lesotho faces a catastrophic situation: crop production is declining and could cease altogether over large tracts of the country if steps are not taken to reverse soil erosion, degradation and the decline in soil fertility. The foothill and mountain areas are unsuitable for intensive cropping due to their fragile and poorly structured soils and should concentrate on livestock production. Crop yields are generally very low and declining; in the mid 1970s average maize and sorghum yields were in the order of 1 400kg/ha but today they average 450-550kg/ha.

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## 2. ECONOMY

The Kingdom of Lesotho is a landlocked mountainous country of 30 355 km<sup>2</sup> that is completely surrounded by South Africa. The entire country lies 1 000 meters above sea level with mountains reaching well over 3 000 meters. Only 406 500 ha (13 percent) of the total land area is arable, the remainder being mountainous. The country is divided into four agro-ecological zones and ten administrative districts. The Lowlands is the most populated and intensively cultivated zone, followed by the Foothills, the Mountains, and the Senqu River Valley which is the smallest zone. Climatic conditions also vary widely by region and altitude - 85 percent of rainfall occurs from October to April, while snow occurs in the mountains from May to September.

Lesotho's economic performance over the last decade has been relatively mixed. The early to mid 1990s saw an economic boom that was driven by the construction of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and the expansion of the manufacturing sector. The GDP grew at an annual average rate of 6.3 percent. However, there was a severe contraction in GDP growth in 1998-99 resulting from

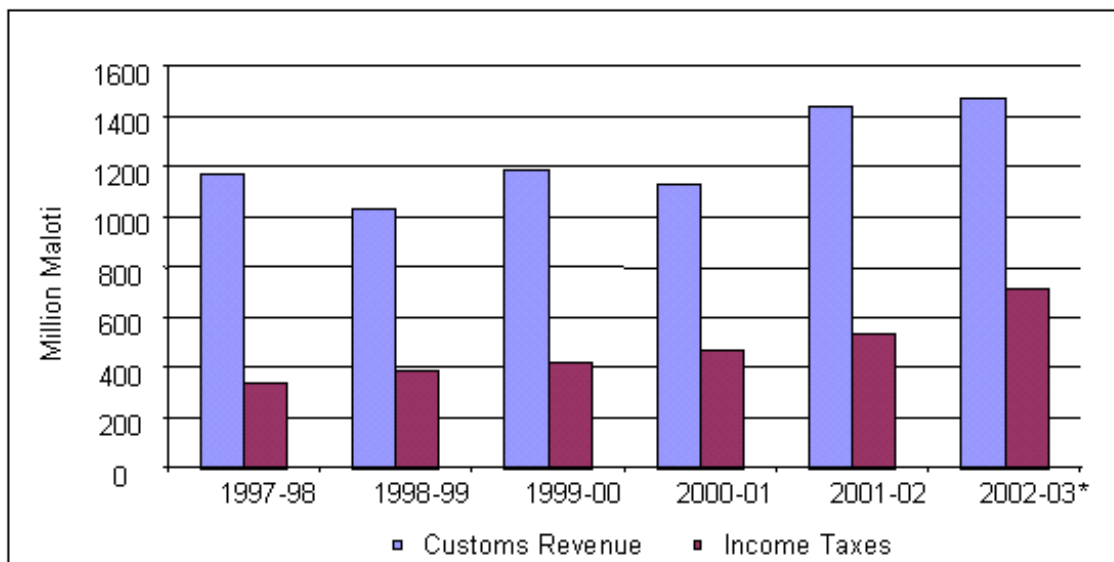
civil unrest. Growth resumed in 1999-00 and 2000/01, but at a slower pace of 2.4 percent and 3.2 percent, respectively. It is expected that the growth rate will remain around 3 percent for the current fiscal year. Major contributors to real GDP growth in 2000/01 were agriculture (15 percent), manufacturing and construction (40 percent) and services (36 percent).

The budget for fiscal year 2002/03 projects a deficit of M423.5 million before grants-5.5 percent of GDP. However, after grants the deficit drops to M28.1 million. Major budget allocations include 22 percent for education, 8.2 percent for health, and 4.8 percent for agriculture.

The latest IMF review of Lesotho's economic performance under the three-year Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) programme was generally favourable. Of the SDR24.5 million (US\$31 million) available under the programme, SDR 10.5 million has been released. IMF has acknowledged the Government's overall commitment to the programme and the fact that all quantitative performance criteria have been met.

Lesotho has been steadily improving its revenue collection, particularly of income tax, with relatively stable customs revenues (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Central Government Revenue Generated by Customs and Income Taxes**

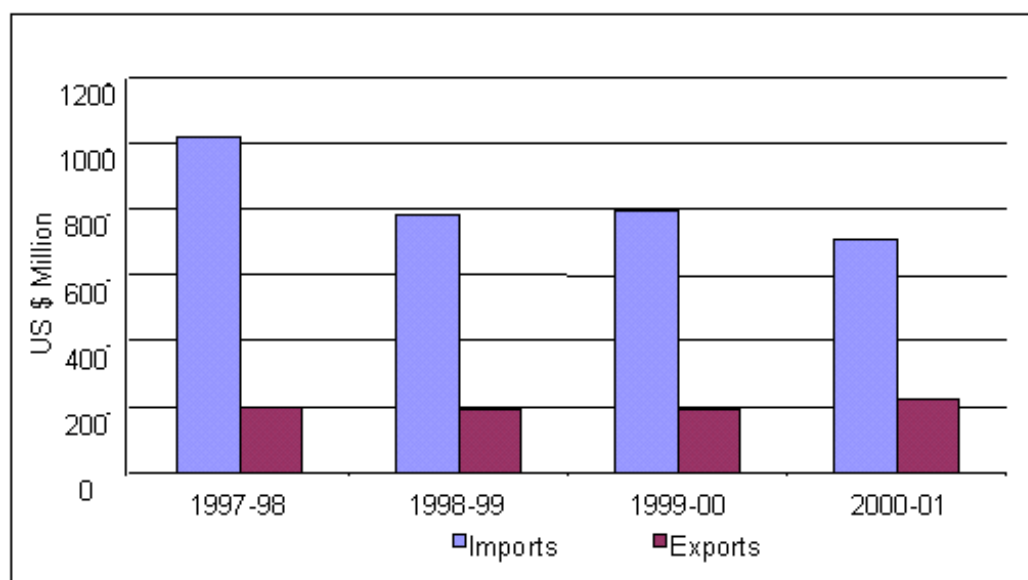


Source: Central Bank of Lesotho, Bureau of Statistics

Under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Free Trade Area Protocol signed in 1996, Lesotho is committed to gradually removing import restrictions and tariffs over a period of 8 years. The loss in customs revenues is projected to reach 17 percent by the time the Protocol is fully implemented. The recent trade agreement between the European Union and South Africa will further increase the fiscal deficit, as the country will lose its share of revenue from the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU).

Lesotho's current account deficit in 2000/01 improved by 30 percent and the capital and financial accounts together declined by 16 percent, resulting in a relatively better balance of payments position than in 1999-00. However, there still remains a significant trade deficit. The total export earnings average around 25 percent of total imports (Figure 2). The main exports are textiles, footwear, mohair and some live animals.

**Figure 2: Imports and Exports of Lesotho 1997-98 to 2000-01**



Source: Central Bank of Lesotho, IMF Country Report 2002

The external debt stood at US\$ 546.7 million at the end of fiscal year 2000/01. The multilateral component was 76 percent, bilateral 11 percent, and commercial 14 percent. The external debt to GDP ratio was 62.8 percent, and debt service as a percentage of total export revenue was 13.2 percent. Official foreign exchange reserves remain above the target floor set by the Central Bank, at 7.4 months of imports of goods and services.

Lesotho's currency, the Maloti, which is pegged at par with the South African Rand, has been declining against the dollar since 1998-1999. During the fiscal year 2001/02, the Maloti fell over 38 percent against the US dollar. Commercial bank lending interest rates during the fiscal year 2000/01 ranged between 16-25 percent.

The average unemployment rate for Lesotho is about 30 percent, but is higher in the rural areas. The economy has only been able to absorb about a third of individuals entering the work force every year. The unemployment situation is exacerbated by the continuing retrenchment of Basotho workers from South African mines (Table 1). Since 1991 the number of Basotho working in South Africa has declined by about 50 percent.

**Table 1: Number of Basotho Working in the South African Mines (1991-2001)**

Year	Number of Workers	Year on Year Change (%)
1991	122 188	
1992	119 596	-2.1
1993	116 129	-2.9
1994	112 722	-2.9
1995	103 744	-8.0
1996	101 262	-2.4
1997	95 913	-5.3
1998	80 445	-16.1
1999	68 604	-14.7
2000	64 907	-5.4

2001	59 900	-7.7
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Source: IMF Country Report 2002

### 3. FOOD PRODUCTION IN 2001/02

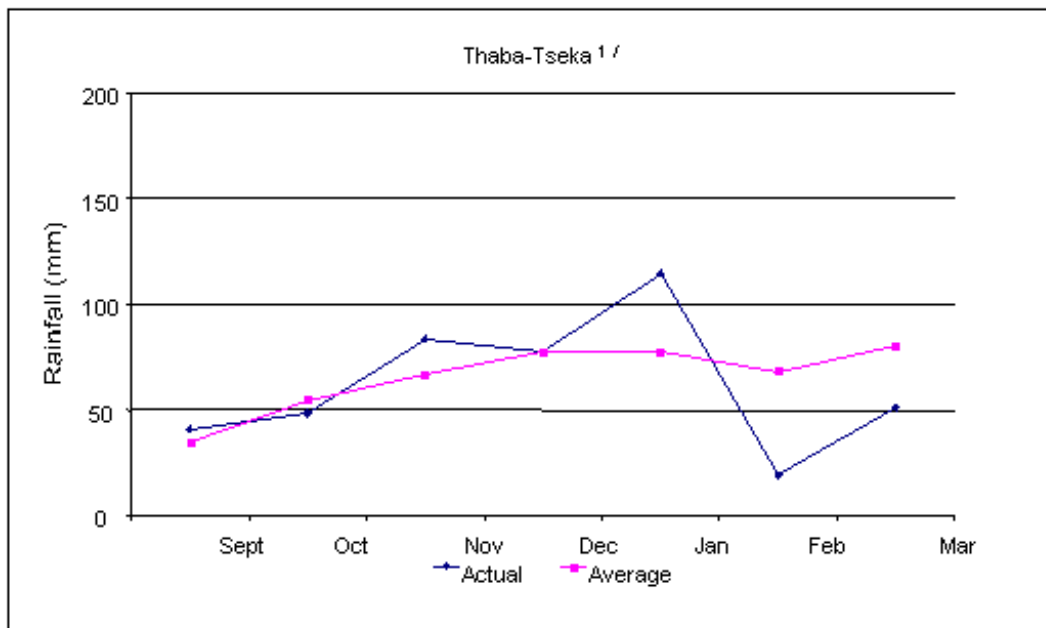
The agricultural sector in Lesotho is facing extremely serious structural problems. The key issues are severe soil and land degradation, lack of proper land and crop husbandry practices, limited use of improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, and almost non-existent extension services. Without serious long-term interventions, it is highly probable that crop production will completely cease on large tracts of agricultural land. Lesotho's last agricultural census (1999/00) highlighted the fact that the country's cultivated land has increased from 317 900 to 406 500 hectares between 1989 and 2000, with the increase attributed to extension of cultivation to marginal lands that were previously fallow/grazing land.

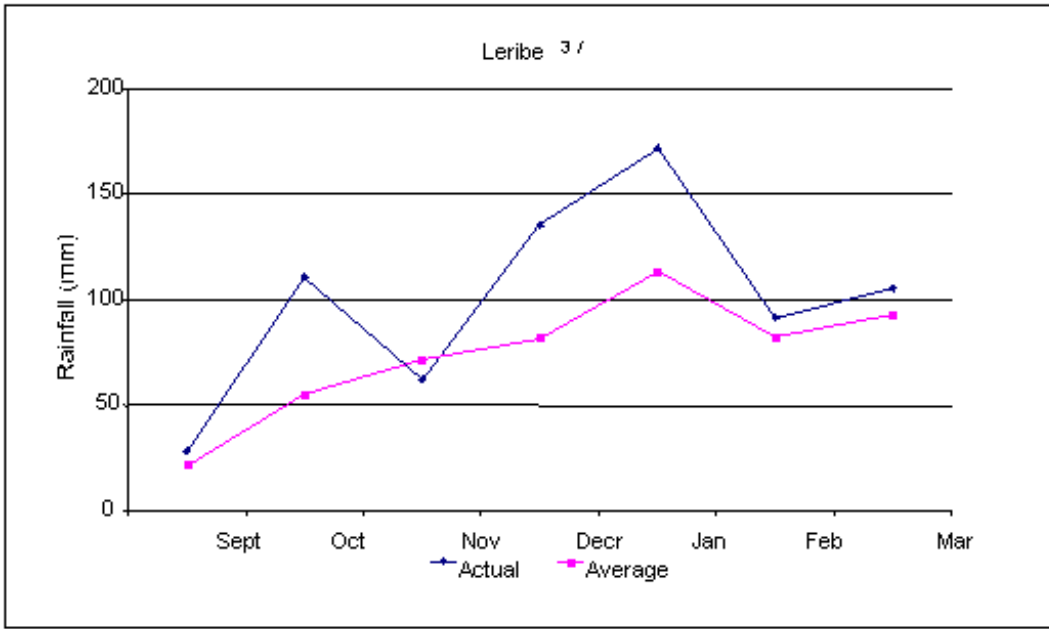
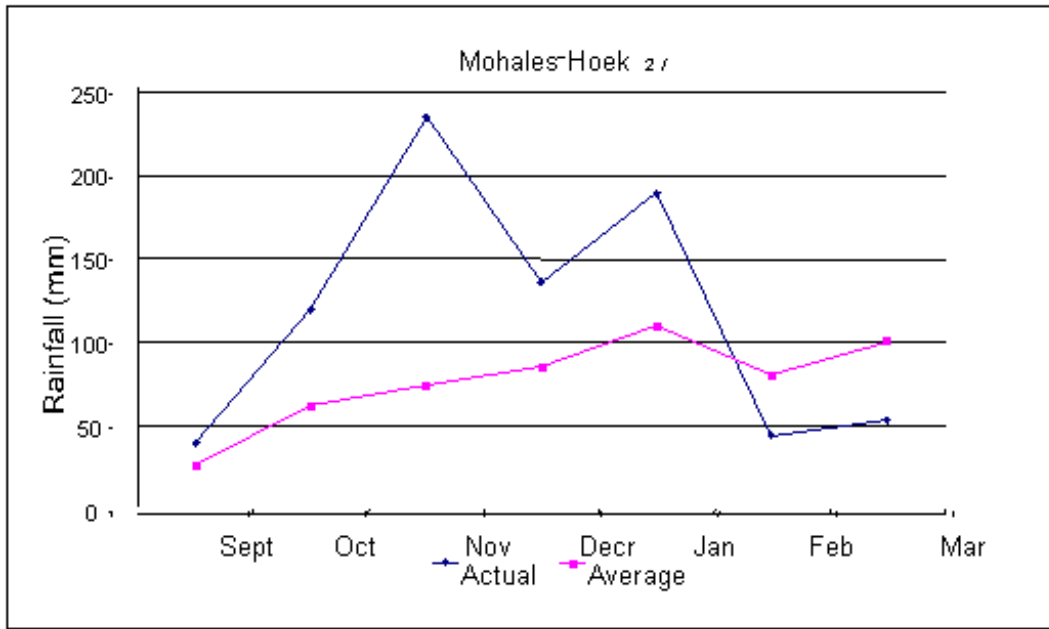
#### 3.1 Agro-meteorological conditions

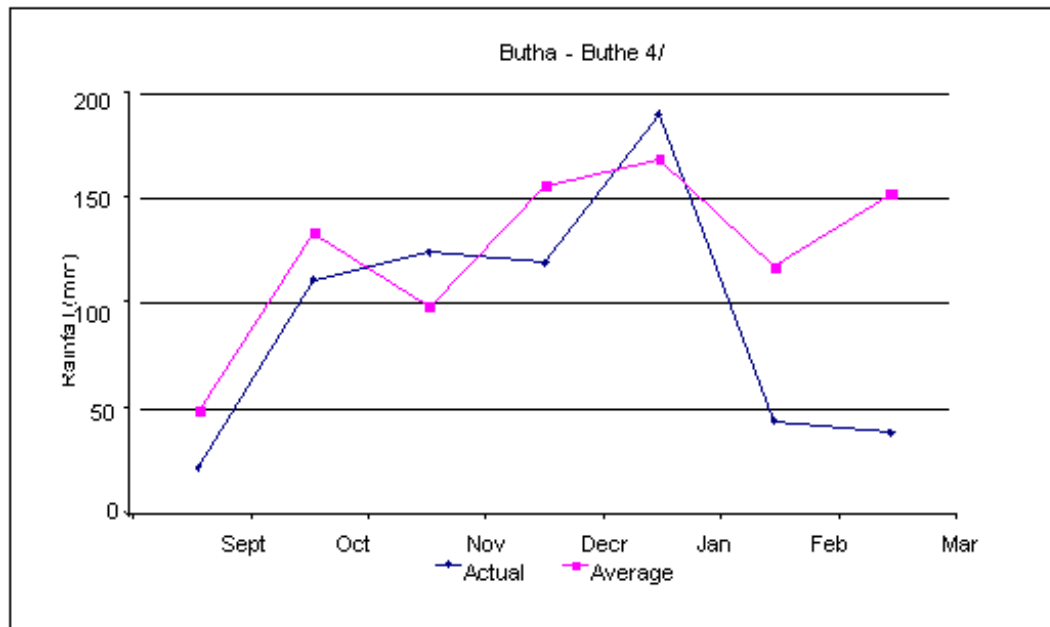
Unexpected heavy rain fell in late August over most areas of the country, which benefited some early land preparation for the summer cropping season. October was characterized by very wet conditions, particularly during the last ten days, which restricted land preparation and planting activities.

November rainfall was normal to above normal in most areas, but was particularly heavy during the first two dekads, further delaying crop establishment, especially in southern districts. Rainfall remained above normal in December and this trend continued through January. However, February was generally dry throughout the country with erratic rainfall (Figure 3). On a cumulative basis, rainfall was above normal for the 2001/02 season, but quantities and distribution were erratic and delayed planting of crops. A widespread frost in March severely affected crops in most districts, and localised hailstorms exacerbated the problem.

Figure 3: Actual vs. Normal Monthly Rainfall, September 2001-March 2002







Source: Department of Agro meteorology 1/Northern Lowland, 2/ Foothills, 3/ Southern Lowland, 4/ Mountains

### 3.2 Supply of agricultural inputs

The demand for fertilizer is heavily dependent on rainfall and consequently varies from year to year. Fertilizer use for food crop production has ranged between 5 835 tonnes and 9 460 tonnes during the period 1996/97 to 2000/01. This translates into a national average of about 43kg of fertilizers per hectare, which is low by regional standards. Statistics for 2001/02 were not available to the mission, but it is believed that fertilizer usage decreased, largely because of the reduced purchasing power of farmers and excessively wet conditions. The low levels of fertilizer use are despite the fact that farmers of Lesotho have enjoyed highly subsidized fertilizer since the 1980s. The subsidies have ranged from 5 to 30 percent for the period 1994-95 up to the present. The marketing of fertilizers is in transition towards market liberalisation; both the private sector and cooperatives are currently distributing fertilizers that are imported from South Africa.

Seeds have been equally subsidised. However, from discussions with farmers, most of the maize varieties used are local or recycled hybrid seed and only 21 percent of wheat seed used by farmers are improved varieties. For sorghum, a negligible amount of improved seeds is used.

### 3.3 Areas planted

It was very obvious from the amount of land lying fallow in all districts that large areas of arable land had not been planted during the 2001/02 cropping season, as reflected in Table 2, which compares the estimates of the Mission with last year's Mission estimates. Except in Mohale's Hoek, cereal areas in 2001/02 were lower than in 2000/01, with the national total declining by 22.4 percent. This was due to the heavy and widespread rains from the second half of October to the middle of November, which delayed land preparation and planting. Large lowland areas have an impermeable clay subsoil, which when waterlogged takes considerable time to drain and dry sufficiently for tractors and machinery to work the land. The area planted was further reduced because the optimum planting date of the main food crops (maize and sorghum) was missed, and farmers decided not to plant at all. Another reason was a shortage of tractors and oxen, once conditions permitted land preparation and planting.

The area planted to each of the major summer crops in each district is given in Table 3. The total national maize area is estimated at 91 300 ha, while the area under sorghum and wheat is

estimated at 13 400 ha and 28 900 ha respectively.

**Table 2: Total Summer Cereal Area (Hectares) in 2001/02 compared to 2000/01  
FAO/WFP Mission Estimates**

District	2000/01	2001/02	Percent of Average
Butha-Buthe	8.3	4.4	53.0
Leribe	33.7	21.2	63.1
Berea	28.6	20.1	70.3
Maseru	30.7	22.9	74.6
Mafeteng	20.2	18.0	89.1
Mohale's Hoek	11.8	13.5	114.4
Quthing	12.3	10.7	87.1
Qacha's Nek	5.6	5.1	91.1
Mokhotlong	6.7	6.2	92.5
Thaba-Tseka	14.3	11.5	80.4
<b>Lesotho</b>	<b>172.2</b>	<b>133.6</b>	<b>77.6</b>

Source: Estimates by the Dept. of Crops and the 2002 Mission

### 3.4 Crop yields

The Mission's estimates of crop yields for the year 2001/02 are based on data provided by the Department of Crops, adjusted on the basis of field assessments. The adjusted yield figures are given in Table 3. Yields per hectare are universally poor but highly variable between districts, with southern and central districts (Mafeteng, Mohale's Hoek, Quthing, Qacha's Nek and Thaba-Tseka) showing the lowest. In many areas of these districts the crops produced no grain at all and were being harvested as fodder for livestock. Northern districts (Berea, Leribe, Butha-Buthe and Mokhotlong) were relatively less affected by the disasters and yields were slightly better.

**Table 3: Area and Yield of Summer Crops in 2001/02, by District**

DISTRICT	Wheat			Maize			Sorghum		
	Area ('000 ha)	Yield (kg/ha)	Prod. ('000 tonnes)	Area ('000 ha)	Yield (kg/ha)	Prod. ('000 tonnes)	Area ('000 ha)	Yield (kg/ha)	Prod. ('000 tonnes)
Butha-Buthe	1.1	440	0.5	3.0	450	1.4	0.3	400	0.1
Leribe	2.6	750	2.0	16.4	500	8.2	2.2	450	1.0
Berea	2.2	700	1.5	15.6	500	7.8	2.3	450	1.0
Maseru	4.2	500	2.1	16.3	400	6.5	2.4	400	1.0
Mafeteng	2.5	470	1.2	13.6	300	4.1	1.9	350	0.7
Mohale's Hoek	3.0	400	1.2	9.0	250	2.3	1.5	350	0.5
Quthing	2.2	400	0.9	7.2	250	1.8	1.3	300	0.4
Qacha's Nek	1.4	350	0.5	3.5	200	0.7	0.2	300	0.06

Mokhotlong	4.9	500	2.5	1.2	250	0.3	0.1	200	0.02
Thaba-Tseka	4.8	350	1.7	5.5	250	1.4	1.2	300	0.4
<b>LESOTHO</b>	<b>28.9</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>91.3</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>5.2</b>

Source: Department of Crops and Mission estimates 2002

During discussions with farmers, District Agricultural Officials, the Ministry of Agriculture at Headquarters, and the Disaster Management Authority Officials, it was established that late planting because of waterlogged fields, widespread early frost and hail were the main causes of the poor crop yields. The most important factor was the late planting of the maize and sorghum crops, for which any delay after the optimum planting date considerably reduces yield. The length of the growing season was further reduced by a widespread early frost, which curtailed crop growth at the grain filling stage. Localised hailstorms also caused serious damage in some districts, and cutworms and stalk borers caused further damage to the crops, particularly those planted late.

It was also reported that inputs arrived late in some areas. While private traders market some inputs, these were expensive and largely inaccessible to many farmers who have no source of credit. The overall result was that the majority of farmers used farm-saved, low yielding seeds including recycled hybrid seeds.

National average yields of maize and sorghum are estimated at 378 kg/ha and 388 kg/ha, respectively. Combined summer and winter wheat average yields are estimated at around 488 kg/ha.

### 3.5 Estimated cereal production in 2001/02

Table 4 compares this year's estimated total cereal production with the estimates made by last year's FAO/WFP Mission.

At the time of the visit, some farmers were busy sowing winter wheat that will be harvested in December/January 2002/03. Planting of winter wheat normally starts mid April making use of the residual moisture and small amounts of rainfall. The late rains experienced in April and May should bode well for the winter crop, with soil moisture levels high. It is expected that there will be an increased area planted to winter wheat after the poor summer cropping season.

Aggregate cereal production in 2001/02 is estimated at 53 800 tonnes compared to 80 300 tonnes estimated by last year's Mission, a decline of 33 percent on an already poor harvest.

**Table 4: Total Cereal Production (tonnes) in 2001/02 compared to 2000/01 Mission Estimates**

	2000/01	2001/02	Percent of 2001/02 or 2000/01
Butha-Buthe	3.3	2.0	61.0
Leribe	19.7	11.2	56.8
Berea	11.9	10.3	86.5
Maseru	14.8	9.6	64.9
Mafeteng	8.0	6.0	75.0
Mohale's Hoek	3.7	4.0	108.1
Quthing	5.6	3.1	55.4

Qacha's Nek	1.8	1.3	72.2
Mokhotlong	2.2	2.8	127.3
Thaba-Tseka	3.3	3.5	106.1
<b>LESOTHO</b>	<b>80.3</b>	<b>53.8</b>	<b>67.1</b>

Source: Estimates by the Dept. of Crops adjusted by the Mission for year 2001/02

### 3.6 Other crops

Beans and peas are extensively grown, largely for home consumption, but also for cash when grown in larger quantities. Most households grow beans during the summer in rotation with cereals while peas are grown during the winter using residual moisture and any rain. Bean yields during the last cropping season were extremely low and will considerably reduce the dietary protein available to households. Other crops observed were potatoes, pumpkins, sunflower, fruit trees and vegetables, which will supplement the reduced supplies of maize in household diets.

### 3.7 Livestock situation

The majority of rural households, (perhaps over 80 percent) own livestock, mainly cattle, sheep and goats. Many also have a horse, two or more donkeys and chickens. Large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep were noted in the mountain areas in particular, where pastures were excellent after the heavy rainy season. However, theft has become a major problem in the country. Thefts occur in and between villages, between districts, and across borders. The situation is getting worse and becoming increasingly dangerous, and is having a serious negative impact on household food security. Livestock are a vital source of cash to purchase food when agricultural production is low, as it is this year; and supply draught power for cultivation.

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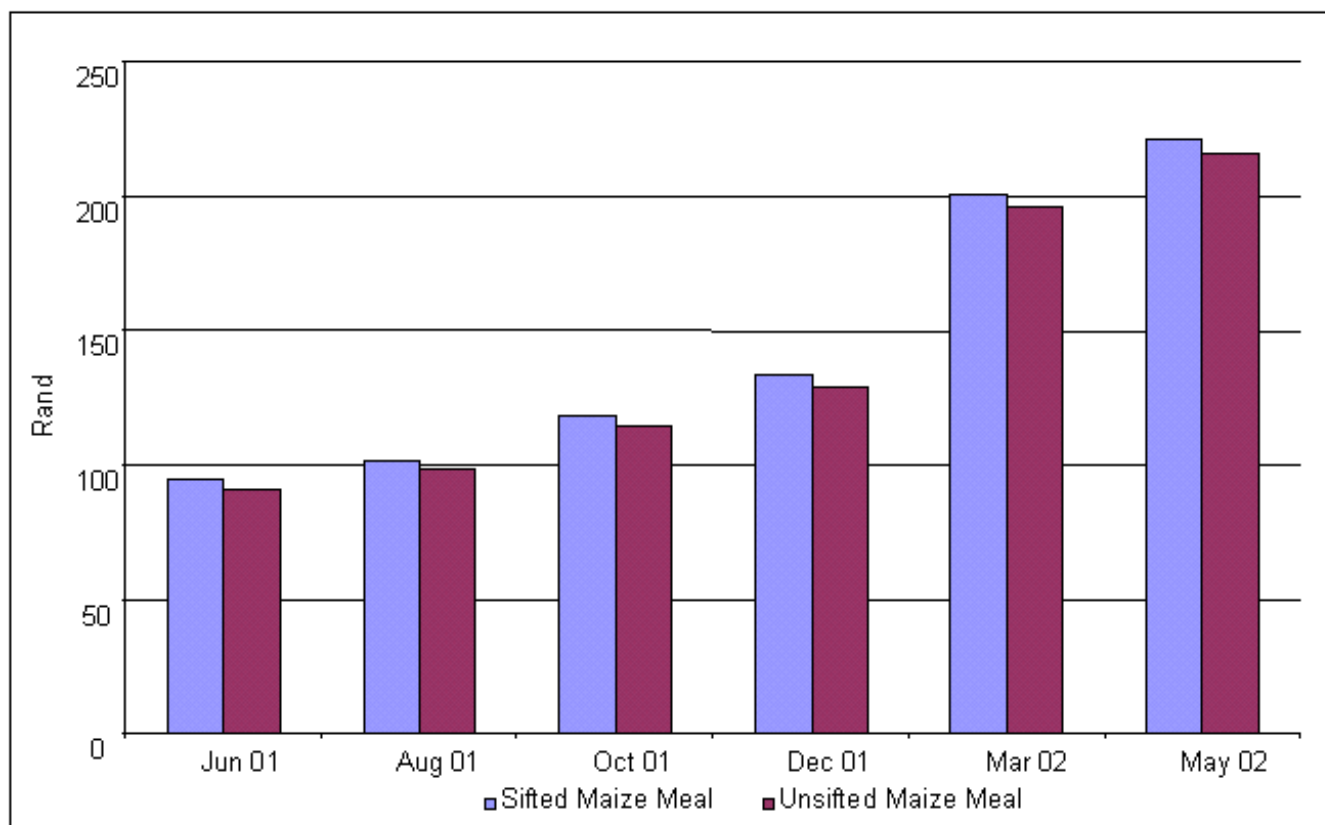
## 4. FOOD SUPPLY AND DEMAND SITUATION

### 4.1 Access to food and prices

Lesotho is a net importer of maize, wheat, pulses, dairy products and other food commodities. In a typical year, roughly half of the food consumed in the country is imported. For maize, the main staple food, imports represent 60-65 percent of national requirements. Other than for wheat, virtually all imports come from the Republic of South Africa (RSA). In accordance with the SACU agreement, Lesotho does not impose duties on imports from RSA. Thus, food prices in Lesotho are closely linked to those in RSA.

The annual inflation rate in February 2002 was 12.9 percent compared with 7.6 percent in October 2001. This increase is largely attributable to higher food prices as a result of domestic and regional food shortages, increasing oil prices, and the depreciation of the South African Rand. Consumer prices for bread and cereal groups rose by over 14 percent between January and February 2002. The price of an 80 kg bag of sifted and un-sifted maize has almost doubled since June 2001 (Figure 4).

#### **Figure 4: Prices of 80 Kg Bags of Sifted and Un-sifted Maize (June 2001/May 2002)**



Source: Marketing Section of Ministry of Agriculture

The mission observed that there was no shortage of food products in the markets of all districts. Given the high rate of unemployment in the rural areas, extremely limited income generating opportunities, and high incidence of poverty, the purchasing power of most households is extremely low. People, particularly in the foothills and mountain areas are surviving through bartering, home brewing, selling livestock, reducing consumption, and taking children out of school. Individuals infected with HIV/AIDS are also forced to reduce consumption, when in fact they should be increasing their intake of carbohydrates and proteins by 15 and 50 percent above normal levels.

The serious decline in domestic cereal production, combined with decreased cereal production in the region as a whole and hence increased cereal import needs in several countries, is exerting an upward pressure on maize prices, restricting access to food for large segments of the population in Lesotho (and elsewhere in the region).

The Government of Lesotho has declared a state of famine, highlighting the seriousness of the current food situation, and introduced a short term plan to assist the most vulnerable groups. Some M14 million (for 5 400 tonnes of un-sifted maize meal) have already been allocated for immediate intervention.

The Government has also commissioned Lesotho Flour Mills Ltd. and Lesotho Milling Company to produce 50 kg bags of un-sifted maize meal clearly marked for immediate free distribution to the most vulnerable groups of the population. A 20 percent subsidy on un-sifted maize meal for the general population is being effected through normal market channels.

## 4.2 Cereal supply/demand balance, 2002/03

The forecast of the cereal supply-demand situation for the marketing year 2002/03 (April/March) is based on the following assumptions and Mission observations (Table 5):

- Farmers interviewed by the Mission stated that they had no stocks due to the poor harvest last year. Therefore, it has been assumed that the opening on-farm stocks are zero. Government and millers' opening stock figures (1/04/02) were provided by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Marketing.
- The mid-marketing year 2002/03 population is estimated at 2 209 743 and per capita consumption at 127 kg for maize, 42 kg for wheat and 16 kg for sorghum. The per capita consumption figures are based on the average of a linear trend of consumption over the last ten years.
- "Other uses" cover essentially post harvest losses and seed use. They are estimated at 6 percent for maize and sorghum and 5 percent for wheat.

**Table 5: Lesotho: Cereal Balance Sheet for 2002/03 ('000 tonnes)**

	Maize	Wheat	Sorghum	Total
<b>Domestic availability</b>	<b>41.5</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>73.8</b>
Opening stock	7.0	13.0	0.0	20.0
Domestic production	34.5	14.1	5.2	53.8
<b>Total utilisation</b>	<b>283.0</b>	<b>93.5</b>	<b>35.7</b>	<b>412.2</b>
Food use	281.0	92.8	35.4	409.2
Feed and seed use and losses	2.0	0.7	0.3	3.0
<b>Import requirements</b>	<b>241.5</b>	<b>66.4</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>338.4</b>
Anticipated commercial imports	125.0	66.4	0.0	191.4
Food aid	116.5	0.0	30.5 <sup>1/</sup>	147.0

<sup>1/</sup> Sorghum shortfall to be met by maize imports.

Table 5 shows a cereal import requirement of 338 000 tonnes. Commercial cereal imports are estimated at 191 000 tonnes and food aid at 147 000 tonnes which will need to be covered by the Government and external assistance.

## 5. EMERGENCY FOOD REQUIREMENTS

### 5.1 Food insecurity

Food security in Lesotho depends on the availability of employment opportunities in addition to the availability of adequate supplies. The most food insecure households in Lesotho are those that have the most difficulty generating sufficient income to meet food needs. Even in years of reasonable harvest and stable prices, some two thirds of Lesotho households are estimated to live below the poverty line (based on income needed to meet basic needs) and nearly half are classified as destitute. The recent dramatic increases in food prices have helped to push a greater proportion of the population below the poverty line, and worsened the situation of those who were already struggling.

The great majority of rural Lesotho households must depend on cash income in order to survive. For the average rural household, agriculture of all types accounts for less than ten percent of income. For most households, crop production is only one of many survival strategies. However, livelihood strategies, especially of the poor, give more emphasis to agriculture than appears to be

warranted by the economic facts alone. Thus even though agricultural production is never sufficient to meet all food needs, it does provide a vital supplement to other sources of food, as well as employment opportunities (through odd jobs during harvest and other peak demands for agricultural labour) for people who have few other employment options. Hence a crisis in agricultural production reduces employment (and cash) opportunities, while simultaneously forcing people to turn to the market for an increased proportion of their food needs. In the current situation, most rural people are being forced to obtain a higher proportion of food from the market, at the same time as market prices have reached very high levels.

Although wage labour is seen as the key to overcoming food insecurity in Lesotho, the unemployment rate - estimated at more than 30 percent nationally - is a major barrier. Employment in the mines of South Africa has traditionally been the prime source of income for male workers. But restructuring of the mining industry towards less labour-intensive production, combined with the depressed prices for gold in the late 1990s and South Africa's preferential employment policy for its nationals, have restricted employment opportunities, and the flow of remittances back to Lesotho, plummeted over the past decade. Thus traditional coping strategies based upon seeking wage employment in South Africa are no longer viable for most of the rural poor.

Livestock ownership, including cattle, sheep and goats, is seen as a major safety net for rural households. Livestock are used as a "savings bank", and are a vital source of income to purchase cereals when agricultural production is low. However poor households usually have few, if any, livestock resources on which to rely. The situation has been exacerbated by rampant and increasing livestock theft, which has become a serious threat to rural livelihoods.

Even in relatively normal periods, carbohydrates (of which, roughly 80 percent is maize) account for on average three quarters of total calorie intake, and vegetable sources provide most protein. The dramatic increases in food prices has resulted in increased cereal food purchases by poor households, with a corresponding decline in purchases of other foodstuffs. Thus, there has been a decline in both total energy consumption and consumption of micro-nutrients. As a result, nutritional deficiencies have become a growing concern. Intake of animal protein is negligible in most rural areas. Vegetable intake depends on whatever is harvested from small kitchen gardens, or can be gathered wild. The increased reliance on maize to meet most energy needs has resulted in an increase in Pellagra. Intake of iodised salt has also fallen.

The extremely high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho affects all districts, and has serious repercussions for household food security, including:

- Loss of adult males, the primary income earners
- Potential loss of secondary income earners, if spouses catch the disease.
- Additional household expenses to care for HIV positive individuals, particularly children
- Increased nutritional requirements (up to 15 percent more calories and 50 percent more protein) of HIV/AIDS affected individuals
- Increased burden of child support by single mothers or grandparents, already among the most food insecure groups.

In other words, households affected by HIV/AIDS have fewer income-earning opportunities, but simultaneously face higher food and non-food costs.

## **5.2 Vulnerability**

In early 2002 WFP undertook a Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) of food security and vulnerability in Lesotho, based on secondary data sources. On the basis of 13 indicators, the VAM analysis identified the mountain areas of Lesotho as having the greatest food insecurity and highest levels of vulnerability.

Mohale's Hoek, Qacha's Nek and Quthing Districts were identified as being the most vulnerable to food insecurity. These are the districts that have been most affected by the 2002 food crisis and are particularly vulnerable to climatic shocks. Most of the population is poor by income and asset measures, and coping strategies are largely based on agriculture. The remoteness from urban centres restricts market access and employment opportunities. Thus the reduced agricultural production of 2002 has severely exacerbated the situation in an already food insecure region.

The VAM analysis further identified the mountain districts of Thaba Tseka and Mokhotlong as having severe levels of income poverty, but less vulnerable to shocks to agricultural production caused by abnormal weather. These districts have been less affected by the 2002 food crisis.

Of the lowlands and foothills areas, only those of Quthing were identified by the VAM analysis as being vulnerable to food insecurity. In the current crisis, the foothills and lowlands of Qacha's Nek, Mohale's Hoek, Mafeting and Maseru Districts have also been severely affected.

The VAM analysis also noted that even in wealthier districts, such as Maseru, Leribe and Berea, mountain areas tended to contain vulnerable and food insecure populations. Of these areas, the Maseru mountain areas have been most affected by the current crisis.

The VAM analysis identified the most food insecure households in Lesotho as having the following characteristics:

- Multiple income-earning strategies
- High reliance on farming, herding, informal business or casual labour for most of their income
- Households headed by widows
- Households headed by older household heads (above 60 years)
- Households with a high age dependency ratio.

In other words, the households that suffer the deepest poverty and food insecurity in Lesotho are those headed by individuals who have few employment opportunities and few assets.

### **5.3 Required food assistance**

Market interventions (price subsidies, monetization of donated food aid) could help improve the overall food security situation, by lowering prices and thus increasing accessibility. However, for a significant proportion of the population, the severity of the food and poverty situation this year, along with the reduced availability and effectiveness of usual coping strategies, means that market interventions are unlikely to be sufficient to bring food prices within their reach. For these people, some sort of targeted food assistance will be required.

On the basis of the characteristics of the most vulnerable households, as determined by the WFP VAM analysis, and the level of expected harvest in 2002, it is estimated that some 444 800 people will require targeted food aid in 2002/03 (Table 6). Not all these people will require external food assistance for the whole year.

**Table 6: Estimated Number of Rural People Requiring Food Aid (2002/03)**

District	Total Rural Population (estimated 2002)	Estimated Number of Rural People Requiring Food Assistance, 2002/03
Buthe Buthe	92 752	2 800
Leribe	195 006	
Berea	176 622	

Maseru	225 086	79 500
Mafeteng	172 236	101 300
Moahale's Hoek	150 510	76 900
Quthing	101 733	46 400
Qacha's Nek	64 550	34 000
Thaba Tseka	112 909	56 600
Mokhotlong	80 739	47 300
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1 372 140</b>	<b>444 800</b>

Major parts of Qacha's Nek, Quthing and Mohale's Hoek have been the areas hardest hit by this year's agricultural crisis. This is the second year that these districts have suffered from a poor harvest. Vulnerable people in these districts will require full food rations with immediate effect, up until the next harvest period (April-May 2003).

Although the harvest has also been poor in Thaba Tseka, Mafeteng and part of Mohale's Hoek, households are likely to obtain some production from their fields, which should support them for some months. Thus targeted food assistance to meet full food requirements is likely to be required for nine months.

Mokhotlong has achieved a better harvest than the other mountain districts, and the mountain areas of Butha Buthe and Maseru have a greater range of coping strategies. Consequently these areas are likely to require targeted food assistance for a shorter period - six months. (Alternatively, half rations could be provided for 12 months). It may also be expected that, even in the worst affected areas, most households will have some, even if limited, options to obtain food through various coping strategies. Thus it is expected that direct food assistance would be required as follows:

	<b>Assistance for 12 months</b>	<b>Assistance for 9 months</b>	<b>Assistance for 6 months</b>
Number of people	80 400	234 800	129 600

Food rations supplied through direct distribution should meet overall calorie needs, taking into account the extra calorie needs of people living in cold areas (at least during winter), and requiring additional energy to meet the physically demanding way of rural life in Lesotho. Rations should also be sufficient to meet the additional calorie requirements of people affected by HIV/AIDS (which can be assumed to affect at least one third of all beneficiaries). Insofar as possible, the rations should also meet the basic micro-nutrient requirements of a population whose diet has consisted almost entirely of maize meal.

Consequently, it is expected that approximately 68 955 tonnes of food, including such commodities as maize, pulses, vegetable oil and iodised salt will be required for direct food assistance.

Different approaches to food distributions should be examined. In less affected areas, self-targeting through food-for-work may be more appropriate than free distribution. In the worst affected areas (Qacha's Nek, Quthing and Mohale's Hoek), free distribution will be required. However the implementation of a broad programme of free distribution should be based on a strict registration system to ensure that food aid is targeted to those most in need.

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## **6. LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Agriculture in Lesotho, which has struggled for many years, is currently facing a catastrophic situation. Crop production could cease altogether over large tracts of the country unless steps are taken to reverse soil erosion, soil degradation and the decline in soil fertility. The foothill and mountain areas are unsuitable for intensive cropping on the fragile and poorly structured soils and should concentrate on livestock production.

The physical soil conservation structures throughout the country originally designed and established when the soils were stable and of good quality, have deteriorated alarmingly and erosion has escalated as soils have become more leached, less structured and unable to hold moisture and support crop production. These terrace ridges/contours in use with the degraded soils now commonplace throughout Lesotho need to be constructed much closer together in order to deal with the increased runoff and erosion. However, this is a monumental task which would require massive funding. In addition, such physical runoff control measures can only be used safely and effectively in support of optimum soil management, together with better crop and livestock husbandry practices.

Declining cereal and other crop yields are the result of a combination of factors including the continued, unsustainable use of land resources in the country, unfavourable climatic factors and worsening crop husbandry practices. Crop yields are in general very low because most of the cultivated soils have low levels of fertility, high acidity, low organic matter content and poor moisture retention capacities. As soil fertility has declined, yield levels have also decreased. In the mid 1970s average maize and sorghum yields were in the order of 1 400kg/ha. Today the average is 450-550kg/ha.

Maize and sorghum cannot continue to be mono-cropped year after year. Rotations, fallows and mixed, relay and inter-cropping practices with leguminous (particularly) and other crops must become part of the farming system. In Berea District, this technique was noted by the Mission on a visit to an area of land (15 hectares), originally earmarked for an irrigation scheme. The scheme did not materialise, but the land had been under lucerne/fallow for five years; it was planted to maize and sorghum this season by a number of individual small farmers. The resultant crops were infinitely better than anywhere else in the country. Estimated yield of maize was 6.5-7 tonnes/ha and for sorghum 4-5 tonnes/ha. This also compared with maize variety trials conducted under good management nearby, with estimated yields of only 2-2.5 tonnes/ha (one third of the yield), and local farmer yields of 0.4-0.5 tonnes/ha (one fifteenth of the yield). The concept of an enriched fallow (containing legumes) in the crop rotation cannot be overemphasised. Farmers should be encouraged to produce only one good grain crop a year on their land, utilising the best crop husbandry techniques available. After harvest, a suitable fallow crop should be established to help improve soil fertility, soil structure and soil moisture retention capacity for the next food grain crop.

As recommended in the Soil Fertility Initiative Document, prepared for Lesotho by FAO (1999), what is needed is a comprehensive participatory approach that takes advantage of synergies of practices at field level, offering production, economic and conservation benefits. This approach would emphasise building of soil organic matter levels through proper use of inorganic fertilizers, manure and ash, coupled with intercropping of improved cereals and legumes, conservation farming and agro-forestry practices. The overall benefits are the improvement of soil structure and fertility, food security, cash incomes, dietary diversity and protection of the environment. The improved soil structure and fertility result in increased efficiency in plant nutrients uptake and water storage, thus enhancing the profitability of crop production as well as enabling crops to withstand dry periods and drought.

Another major issue is that the majority of farmers around the country are unable to follow any of these initiatives or improve their crop husbandry practices, because they are isolated and marginalised within the system. The agricultural extension service in the villages and field areas is totally inadequate - very understaffed, lacking in motivation and short of transport.

## 6.1 Possible future FAO technical assistance to develop agriculture in Lesotho

1. Land Tenure: A study of the present land tenure situation in Lesotho, together with a strategy to promote secure access to land for farmers throughout the country should be carried out. In addition to expanding access to credit and limiting existing disputes, the development of an effective tenure system will have a profound impact on the ability of communities to enter into productive partnership arrangements and to intensify production. Some aspects of the traditional land tenure system work against the adoption of soil restorative practices. Land that has not been cultivated for three successive years can be reallocated to another household, thus mitigating against the use of fallows in crop rotations. Furthermore farm households only have exclusive centers to their crop fields up until the time the crop has been harvested. Thereafter the land and any remaining crop residues becomes an open access grazing resource until the next cropping season, so it would be going against the social norms of the community for an individual household to fence its crop fields. Such free grazing can also lead to the destruction of grassed waterways and conservation banks within the arable lands.

2. Watershed Management: An FAO/TCP project undertaken in 1988/89 was instrumental in introducing to Lesotho the concepts and principles of a broader more holistic approach to soil and water conservation known as "better land husbandry". Within this approach, the technical focus for soil conservation is on combating soil productivity decline, which is a result not only of soil erosion but also of changes in a soil's biological, chemical and physical properties. Following on from this work, there is now a need for a broader study of complete watersheds in order to improve their management and long-term sustainability, and to benefit downstream farmers and the country as a whole.

3. Conservation Agriculture Technology: This technology has proved to be extremely successful in many countries in Africa and around the world. It conserves, improves and makes more efficient use of natural resources through integrated management of available soil, water and biological resources. It leads to environmental conservation as well as enhanced and sustained agricultural production. It is a no tillage system involving the maintenance of crop cover (live or dead) on the soil surface, and direct seeding or planting of crops through this cover using specialised equipment. Besides protecting the soil and the crop against erosion and water loss by run-off or evaporation, the soil cover also inhibits the germination of many weed seeds. A programme should be devised under a TCP project to provide a national level conceptual and policy framework for the formulation and implementation of a series of area based and farmer centred field projects, with complementary institutional strengthening and in-service training programmes at national and district level.

4. Improved seed production and promotion at community level, and assistance to enhance the performance of the livestock sector.

*This report is prepared on the responsibility of the FAO and WFP Secretariats with information from official and unofficial sources. Since conditions may change rapidly, please contact the undersigned for further information if required.*

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**1 Lesotho Agricultural Census 1999/2000. Volume 1: Rural Households and Crop Statistics. Bureau of Statistics (BOS), Lesotho.**