

Lessons in supporting family farming

Stories from Swaziland



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Stories from Swaziland





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The editors have taken every care to ensure that the contents of this publication
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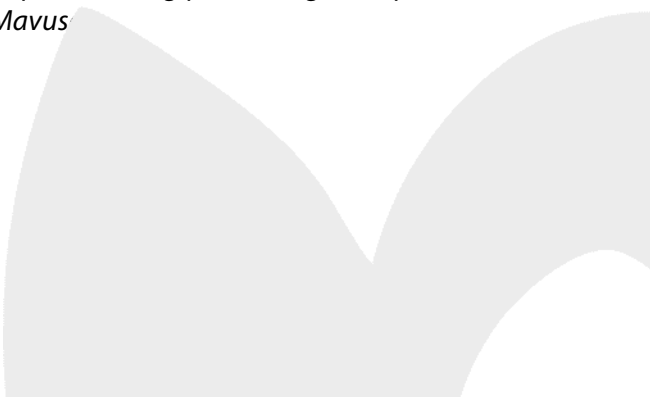
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Aiming to enhance national and regional knowledge building and sharing capacities, ILEIA (the Centre for Learning on Sustainable Agriculture) is working together with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to document lessons learnt in rural development work in three East African countries. This booklet presents the results from the documentation process in Swaziland and is accompanied by a series of short films. www.agriculturesnetwork.org/documentation/swaziland2014

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Preface

IFAD, as a UN agency specialised in smallholder agricultural development, is investing in rural people. We are supporting efforts to improve the lives of smallholder family farmers, to help them get out of poverty and to attain food security. Support focuses on helping rural people secure access to land, water and other natural resources, to services including finance and markets and, last but not least, to technology.

The IFAD country programme in Swaziland focuses its intervention on three thrusts:

- 1) Market led agricultural production.
- 2) Efficient use of irrigation and sustainable land use practices to boost agricultural production in a sustainable fashion.
- 3) Better access to financial and business development services for small and micro-entrepreneurs.

Technology and finance are important tools, but we have learned time and again that it is knowledge and the sharing of knowledge that boosts the impact on the lives of the rural people. Moreover, sharing knowledge and learning from successes and also failures in development interventions are an effective way to render the rural poor economically active and resilient to climate and economic shocks.

We are pleased to have the Centre for Learning on Sustainable Agriculture (ILEIA) as a strong partner in knowledge management. This partnership has enabled us to move on with the agenda of generating knowledge and enhancing learning on smallholder agriculture for poverty reduction in Swaziland. Under this partnership, project staff were trained to improve their skills to gather and analyse successful practices from development projects. Practices from various IFAD-funded interventions are presented in this booklet.

You will read about real cases; including, for example, one on sustainable land use management in areas menaced by erosion. The booklet tells you about the need for Chiefdom Development Planning as a tool for sustainable and community driven development. You will learn about technologies that are suitable for smallholder farmers such as the introduction of permaculture gardening and rain water harvesting technologies. Honey has become a symbol of success in smallholder farms in Swaziland. The story shows how honey makers turned beekeeping into a lucrative business that generated growing incomes and enabled farmers to send their kids to school.

Knowledge is key to informing government, policy makers, researchers and the wider public about the change which is urgently needed to improve the lives of the rural poor. This booklet aims exactly at that: to inform both practitioners and policy makers about recent developments on successful technologies and approaches in sustainable rural development. It is a first step towards a more consistent way of learning and sharing knowledge. IFAD stands ready to support government, civil society and research and to contribute to learning that leads to efficient interventions and finally impact on rural livelihoods.

Enjoy reading this interesting collection of experiences!

Périn Saint Ange, Regional Director

Louise McDonald, Former Country Programme Manager for Swaziland

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International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

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Introduction

In 2012 and 2013, a group of rural development practitioners, community members, journalism students, a film maker and an agricultural magazine journalist participated in two documentation workshops run by ILEIA. They described and analysed lessons learnt from two IFAD funded projects in Swaziland that aimed to support family farmers: the Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project (LUSIP) and the Lower Usuthu Sustainable Land Management Project (LUSLMP), also referred to as LUSIP-GEF. They are financed by IFAD and the Global Environment Facility, and implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Swaziland Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise.



The lessons learnt are the core of the four stories in this book. Renowned film maker Ray Magagula produced four compelling films on each, for release at the same time, and in the middle of the International Year of Family Farming.

Supporting family farmers in Swaziland

The LUSIP-GEF project was largely conceived to mitigate the negative impacts of LUSIP. In the LUSIP project, grazing land and natural forests were converted into sugarcane plantations. While this generated economic benefits for the participating families, it also left them without land where they could collect firewood and graze their cattle. As a result, communities in the area were forced to share land, firewood and other resources.

Hence, LUSIP-GEF saw the light, with the objective to mitigate these impacts and to promote a harmonised, cross-sectoral approach to sustainable land management in the communities concerned. Project activities included the promotion of sustainable vegetable gardening, restoration of degraded land and income diversification such as through beekeeping. This not only provides communities with healthy food and farmland, it also contributes to their resilience, reduces land degradation and biodiversity loss, and better enables communities to adapt to climate change.

The four stories in this book each have their own tale to tell. One story explains how bees can bring about a fundamental transformation of the lives of family farmers. Another looks at the increased production of fresh, healthy vegetables by applying principles of permaculture and which proved especially successful with women. There is a story of land reclamation, how dedicated farmers managed to restore barren land into food producing areas. And finally, we look at the experience of the Nkonjwa community, and why they remained unwilling to participate in the project.

Learning to document

During the workshops, we learned the basic steps of a documentation process. These included deciding who needs to participate, making resources available, setting the boundaries of the experience (what, when, where) and describing the project activities, achievements and unexpected outcomes. Then we proceeded with the most difficult part – the analysis. This is a critical review of our experiences, looking at the practices employed and whether or not the objectives

were met, and most importantly, *why* (or why not)? More often than not, we focused on what has been achieved, without analysing the factors that helped or impeded us. In this way, we have tended to miss important lessons, especially what we can learn about crucial contributing factors. If we want to make full use of future opportunities, it is important to know what it was that led to our successes.

After the analysis, we went on to write down our experiences and lessons learnt in the form of an article. We found out that attractive writing is an art, and that storytelling is a powerful way to convey messages. The journalism students in our group were a great resource during this writing process.



The methods used during the training courses were very interactive and included small group discussions, elevator pitches and theatre plays, which were great tools to generate new insights. We also went to the field to visit family farmers and interview them on film. None of this would have been possible though, without having community members with us who were willing and open to share with us their experience.

Outcomes

We learned many lessons about supporting family farmers. Some highlights:

- We should let family farmers take the lead in development initiatives on their land.
- It is important to involve traditional authorities.
- Family farmers learn much better from each other than from outsiders.
- Women are crucial in the sustainability of any initiative.
- Communities have their own reasons for participating in a project, or not, no matter how often they are told it is beneficial for them.
- Unity in a community is paramount to any success.
- We sometimes learn much more from failure.

Indeed, one of the major outcomes of these documentation workshops, was the realisation that there is so much to learn from projects that have not had the success that we desired. This book presents one such experience, and it is our hope that others can also learn from it.

I must also add that these documentation workshops have had tremendous results in terms of our ability to document and disseminate stories from the field, and they have greatly increased our visibility. Thanks to the participation of the journalism students in our workshop, the LUSIP-GEF project enjoyed extra coverage of these stories from the field in local newspapers and in national agriculture-oriented magazines including *Agribusiness Magazine* and *Lima Ngwane* (Farm Swaziland). This has already resulted in requests from other communities to extend project activities to their areas.

I wish to use this opportunity to extend our gratitude to IFAD and to ILEIA for this invaluable experience.

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In the east of Swaziland, a community has been able to raise themselves out of poverty thanks to the ‘insect of hope’. Keeping bees has transformed their lives, giving them decent livelihoods and also teaching them quite a few lessons about unity and cooperation.

Sibonangabo Sikhondze, Aaron Phathi Dlamini, Sandile Mkhabela and Magman Mahlalela

If communities can fully unite in initiatives to bring about development, poverty can be a thing of the past. Unity, participation, love and commitment are keys to success, as one rural community in the eastern part of Swaziland teaches us.

As a local adage says: “if you cannot do great things, do small things in a great way.” The Vikizijula community took this to heart, realising that they cannot just sit down and do nothing while being hungry. A project that started small, aiming only to bring more food to the table, has grown to be the hope of the community in bringing about a new and sustainable means of income.

In the beekeeping business

The Vikizijula Chiefdom is a community that has for time immemorial faced a number of challenges, from poverty and unemployment to drought. For these reasons, many uneducated young people in Vikizijula abandoned their community and moved to towns in search of employment.

A beekeeping project tried to address this situation by motivating young farmers to take up a new income generating activity. It started in 2011 and currently involves about 220 beekeepers in the community. Through the help of the Lower Usuthu Small Holder Irrigation Project of the Global Environmental Facility (LUSIP-GEF), they learnt about the practical and theoretical aspects of beekeeping as a business.



Farmers learnt about the theoretical and practical aspects of beekeeping, such as the preparation and use of smoke to calm down the bees

Practical and theoretical training covered aspects such as hive construction, harvesting and processing of honey and the by-products. The beekeepers also received material support including protective clothing and the raw materials needed to construct beehives.

After training, farmers continued the work themselves under regular supervision by project staff. Every three months, a refresher course provided a platform for beekeepers to raise any challenges they were facing and also to share their success stories with other beekeepers.

Family farmers were encouraged to plant exotic trees such as citrus and eucalyptus and others that produce flowers that are liked by honey bees. People in areas that don't have many trees are encouraged to place their hives in other places with a sufficient cover of indigenous trees, working together with the other community.

As beekeeping expanded, it led other communities to specialise in related activities and led to a growing local economy for carpenters and tailors. For instance, some families now construct and sell bee-hives while others stitch and sew protective clothing.

The results

After a few years, the community now talks about bees as the ‘insect of hope’. This refers to the way the bees have transformed their lives. Producing and selling honey has brought many benefits. Importantly, it generates income. Parents are now able to send their children to proper schools, and some have also been able to construct larger houses for their families. Bees have been driving poverty away from the community.

“Bees are not just a business to me, but they are my life. I have been able to process and sell honey by-products such as floor polish and candles from the bees wax. We share the experiences learnt from this business with other families around the community. This has improved the income of my family and my community”, says one beekeeper, Mrs Thandi Mkhabela.



No hard labour is required to feed and look after bees, and it does not require much start-up capital

This also means that beekeepers no longer have to cut down trees to sell as firewood as a source of income. Prior to the initiation of this project, some members of the Vikizijula community used to rely mostly on selling firewood to put bread on the table resulting in deforestation. But now they have found a better means of income by keeping bees. What also played a role is that the community realised that the bees depend on trees and their flowers so the more trees there are, the more honey is produced.

The impact is impressive. The protection of indigenous trees in the area has increased significantly. It even led to a policy change, as the chief of the area, a great supporter of beekeeping, decided to regulate the cutting of trees around the Vikizijula chiefdom in support of bees and beekeepers.

Key lessons from the bee way of life

What made this project so successful? Importantly, no hard labour is required to feed and look after bees as the insects work and produce on their own. This makes it a business that is easy to take up for both women and the elderly.

Beekeeping also does not require much start-up capital, minimising expenses and resulting in greater profits. It is a business that can be managed both by children as young as 12 and by elderly people of 80 years old. Another factor that farmers say makes beekeeping attractive are the benefits of working in the comfort of their own homes.

What nobody anticipated, but what proved to be very significant, were the life lessons that the bees taught people. Bees work together with a common purpose, producing honey for their survival. The lesson learnt from the 'bee way of life' is that if families are to prosper and realise meaningful development, unity with purpose is paramount. A divided family will fail and collapse at the face of poverty and hunger, but if families can have a common vision and common initiatives to fight poverty, countries such as Swaziland will surely develop.



Working together, bees can overcome large obstacles: this is a lesson farmers took to heart

Learning from the bees, farmers developed a strong sense of communal brotherhood. This has contributed greatly to the success of the bee project. We witnessed how beekeepers who were struggling with their business were assisted by others to rise to their feet, providing them with beehives and helping with any other challenges.

This willingness and commitment of community members made it into what it is today. The community has been able to learn and apply new skills such as constructing hives for the bees and good hive management, and they looked after each other. The hard work and commitment displayed by this community has really paid off. As extension workers, we can say that Vikizijula farmers are a model and an example to many other rural families affected by poverty.

Not an easy road

However, the road taken by this beekeeping project has not always been an easy one. Theft of beehives for example is still experienced



Honey and honey by-products offer many benefits for family farmers

in the community. Mrs Mkhabela told us: *“There was a time when my beehives were stolen that I almost gave up on this project. I thank the project staff for their encouragement, their regular visits and the material support that has enabled me to stay and succeed in this business”.*

Other challenges include threats to trees from deforestation and forest fires. The traditional belief that bees are used for witchcraft has also proved a great challenge and some people still hold on to such myths.

Bees taught the Vikizijula community about the importance of unity

In response to the challenges faced by the beekeepers, they formed a Honey Council. This is a council that seeks to provide solutions. A representative is elected from each community to form part of the council at national level where beekeepers are given a platform to share their views. In the fight against theft for example, farmers have asked for the intervention of community police to arrest all those found stealing the beehives and illegally selling honey.

To address the problem of allergies and fear of bee stings, the project established the Lower Usuthu Honey Producers Company. There,

beekeepers can bring their honey for both selling and processing. As processing honey does not pose any risk of being stung, this provided those who are allergic to bee stings with an opportunity to participate safely.

Grab the opportunities

The Vikizijula Chiefdom is a community that has recognised the importance of unity and of building on available opportunities. As was once heard, 'tomorrow is not the time to come but a process to follow.' If Africa could do away with dependency and be counted amongst the developed regions in the world, opportunities should be not allowed to pass us by, such as the use of our abundance of natural resources.

Are you poor? Do you see bees around you? Why not build beehives and be like Mrs Mkhabela of the Vikizijula chiefdom who has been able to bring about significant development through the insect of hope. Our destinies lie in our own hands. Rise Africa!



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From gaping gullies to fertile farmland

With the support of traditional authorities, the poverty-stricken community of Luhlanyeni has successfully rehabilitated 16 hectares of heavily degraded land. Before, it was being eroded by ever-deepening gullies, but now family farmers are benefiting from the extra yields after transforming it into productive agricultural land.

Lynn Kota, Prince Mngoma, Clement Gamedze, Debra Khumalo, Lwazi Dlamini and Msutfu Fakudze

In Swaziland's Mamba Chiefdom lies the village of Luhlanyeni. This community made up of 153 homesteads is located in one of the driest regions in the country. When rain does fall, however, it comes in torrents. With little vegetation and unmanaged drainage, the water is channeled into gulleys that become deeper year after year. Gullies a dozen metres wide and several metres deep had been worrying the community for years, until they helped to set up the Sihlangwini Sustainable Land Management project. Initiated in 2010, this was part of the larger Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project supported by the Global Environment Facility (LUSIP-GEF).

A need for change

Decades of overgrazing and poor road drainage had caused serious erosion of large areas of arable land in and around Luhlanyeni village, which could no longer be used for cultivation. This land degradation on a massive scale directly threatened a number of family farms, and some homesteads were just a few metres away from collapsing into the large gullies that had formed. One of the residents Sikelela Magagula said, *"The gullies were so big that in some places they were more than ten metres wide."* Without serious rehabilitation of the land, these families would eventually be forced to relocate. Areas suitable for cultivation and grazing were decreasing, endangering the livelihoods and food security of the community.

Land degradation in Swaziland

Only 15-20% of land in the Kingdom of Swaziland is suitable for cultivation, while the amount of potentially arable land that is no longer used is increasing. Reasons for abandonment include a higher frequency of drought, declining soil fertility, as well as increasing pest and disease problems. Land use planning is generally performed in an ad hoc and uncoordinated manner, leading in some cases to inappropriate land use in relation to its environmental suitability.



In addition, as a result of population pressure, overgrazing, burning and lack of sustainable natural resource management, almost a third of the country and more than half of all communal grazing land is seriously or very seriously eroded. This has contributed to significant land degradation, a widely recognised problem in Swaziland. The most common form of land degradation results from soil erosion, which is most frequently encountered in the rangelands.

The community decided something needed to happen. Magagula noted: *"As a community we stood up after we realised what happens when the rich top soil is washed away. We started to fill the gullies with stones, even before technical people from outside became involved."*

It all started in the Royal Kraal, the Chief's residence, where a meeting was held for community members to discuss the problems with the gullies. In Swaziland, the Chief (or King) is the custodian of the land, and any activities carried out on the land requires his permission. At this meeting, the traditional authorities granted the community permission to rehabilitate and use the land for farming. They appointed a representative from the Chief's inner council in Parliament who connected the community with the Ministry of Agriculture. A formal project was designed that included the participation of the Ministry's Land Use and Development Unit and seven other stakeholders. This is how the Sihlangwini Sustainable Land Management project started early 2011, very much driven by the community.

Participation

"The community had already started collecting stones, but more was needed," said Msutfu Fakudze of the Conserve Swaziland, and this



Recognising the problem of erosion, local farmers had started collecting and using stones – but it was not enough

NGO became engaged because of their technical expertise on land rehabilitation. In workshops with the community they looked at the causes, possible prevention and control measures and sustainable land management practices. The Ministry of Agriculture, the Swaziland Environment Authority (SEA) and GEF provided assistance in training, monitoring, evaluation and the supply of fields tools and materials such as gabion cages (metre-square wire baskets filled with stones used to stop erosion) and trucks for transportation. Financial support was provided through the National Environment Fund.

The community implemented the project themselves. They came out in large numbers to participate, even those who live far away. Community member Sikelela Magagula commented: *"I have realised that it is indeed possible to rehabilitate degraded land and to use it again."*

"It isn't so hard"

One of the project's objectives was to build the community's understanding of land degradation, including its causes and practical resolutions to the most common problems. One of the solutions they learnt about was the proper installation of gabion cages to prevent soil from washing away. The training was both practical and theoretical, and included farming practices that conserve water, hay bailing, and building fencing. This was complemented by additional workshops on group dynamics and on HIV/AIDS, an integral part of any development intervention in Swaziland. Finally, gender equality training encouraged men and women to work together.

The initiative came from the community

The community used a combination of both biological and mechanical approaches to rehabilitate degraded areas. Biodiversity and natural resources were restored through conservation agriculture and the planting of trees. They planted leguminous and drought tolerant crops to increase soil nitrogen and improve vegetation cover. This increases organic matter in the soil which is then less susceptible to erosion and able to hold more water and nutrients, making the



Local people built stone walls using gabion cages, which help to stop erosion

soil more fertile. They used plants with a strong rooting systems, and preferred edible crops because of the additional nutritional benefits.

There were a few challenges in the process, such as the slow adoption of the new practices by some community members. These farmers were invited to attend a few additional training sessions which in some cases brought them back in. At some point, many trees were attacked by termites. The solution once again came from the community, who applied indigenous permaculture principles to combat these pests.

Potatoes, groundnuts and fruit

Although the land was heavily degraded, the community can now use it again for farming. About 21 hectares of land have been rehabilitated, which over 150 farming families are using to produce food for themselves and to generate additional income. Especially women are using the recovered land. Nomsa Tfwala, Vice Chairperson of the project said: *"We are now able to grow sweet potatoes, groundnuts and*



The community planted specific crops to improve vegetation cover and make the soil more fertile

fruit trees. We have also been able to sell the peanuts we produced to the community. We no longer need to go and buy food since there is now enough from our own land!"

The project ended in 2013 and was lauded as a successful land rehabilitation story by the Minister of Tourism and Environmental Affairs.

More importantly, the experience in Luhlanyeni has inspired a nearby community, Sithobelweni, to rehabilitate a large area of their own. Together with representatives of several other communities, they came to visit Luhlanyeni to learn about the steps they took to revive their land. Nomsa Tfwala explained: *"My advice to other communities is that they should start conserving the soil, which is our greatest asset. We always believed that it is hard to rehabilitate land, but in fact it isn't so hard."*

Most importantly, the local farmers themselves were committed

What is needed?

Involving traditional authorities to enhance widespread support for family farmer initiatives proved to be one of the successes of the project. The community and the traditional authorities mobilised different stakeholders that all became committed to the success of the initiative. Most importantly, the community itself was committed, as they initiated the project themselves as a direct result of their daily struggle for survival. We found that the strong participation of women farmers was especially important for ensuring the sustainability of such projects.

Sikelela Magagula summed up: *"What I have learnt is that all these development projects in our communities become much easier and more successful if they come from and are led by the people."*



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Our land is not for sale

A community says 'no' to development

Photo: Jessica Eriksson

Unlike the other ten chiefdoms in the lowveld region of Swaziland, the Nkonjwa community refuses to get involved in the Lower Usuthu Sustainable Land Management project. They fear their land will be taken for large plantations and they will suffer as a result. Where does this anxiety and resistance come from and what can we learn from it? Here we present the story of Nkonjwa.

Winnie Ncongwane, Sindi Mkoko, Vusi Dalmini, Mxolisi Lukhele and Malungisa Gina

A large sugarcane project that was implemented in the area earlier, the Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project (LUSIP), had negative impacts on family farmers in the eleven communities nearby. For this project, grazing land was turned into sugarcane plantations and natural forests were cut down. This forced people to have to travel further to gather firewood, increasing the pressure on woodlands in Nkonjwa and neighbouring communities. Also, cattle had to walk further and started to graze on the lands of other families. This caused conflicts between communities who were involved in the project and benefitted from it, and others who were not but were still faced with the negative impacts.

In response, a new project was designed to help to resolve the new problems in the impacted communities. This was to promote food production and income generating activities such as beekeeping and vegetable gardening in order to mitigate the negative impacts of the sugarcane plantation.

All but one community decided to accept the new project. Listening to the negative stories from neighbouring communities, some of whom are running profitable commercial sugarcane farms and others who said they suffered from the sugarcane project, the Nkonjwa community, however, decided to reject the new project. They did not want to experience the same problems. What can we learn from the persistent rejection by people in Nkonjwa?



The negative effects of a sugarcane project in neighbouring communities made Nkonjwa farmers unwilling to accept another intervention by SWADE

An unwelcome project

Through a so called ‘Chiefdom Development Planning’ process in 2011, the communities were informed about the aim of the new project. During initial meetings, project staff told the Chiefs, Princes and traditional authorities about the planned activities and how it would run. After the introductory meetings, the project was introduced to the community at the royal kraal (or *umphakatsi*) of the village, the place where community gatherings are held.

The first project (LUSIP) as well as the second project (LUSIP-GEF) are led by the Swaziland Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise (SWADE). During these meetings, the negative view of SWADE became apparent. One community member lamented that “*people are suffering because of the SWADE project*”.

The fact that the very agency (SWADE) that implemented the sugarcane plantation was the same one that came to offer another project

helped to create more apprehension. It was difficult for the Nkonjwa people to believe that the same people who had brought sorrow to their relatives in neighbouring communities could now bring a solution.

As one community member explains, "as much as they say that the projects is aimed at mitigating the effects of LUSIP, we know that there are hidden agendas. Once we accept what they are saying, they will turn around and force us to grow sugarcane which will leave us and our children perpetually indebted. We cannot allow such a thing to happen."

The Nkonjwa community refused to participate in the proposed census and socio-economic surveys that intended to assess the number of people and livestock in the area and determine the financial status of the homesteads. The enumerators who came to the village to carry out the surveys were denied access to the homesteads. Some community members went door to door to discourage participation in the surveys when they saw the enumerator approaching.

A year later in 2012, another attempt was made to undertake the surveys with the hope that the people had changed their minds, but this attempt also proved futile.

Trust and leadership

Why do people in Nkonjkwa continue to reject the project? It is our assessment that a combination of factors contribute. One is that the traditional authorities seem to lack a thorough understanding of the project, and subsequently, the motivation to influence the community to embrace it. Perhaps the chief himself instinctively focused more on the negative impacts rather than looking at potential benefits.

They could not believe that the same people would now bring a solution

Some members of the traditional authorities and the chieftdom development committee did accept the invitation to join a 'training for transformation' on communication, group dynamics, leadership,

sustainable development, decision making, conflict management, gender equality, and socio-economic rights. However, project officers in the region say that the leaders sound convinced and even agree with resolutions while in the training, but that they change their tune when they talk again to community members.

Project staff also conducted follow-up meetings with community leaders in an attempt to find a solution to the stand-off, but a way forward was not found. Local leaders revealed that they were not in full support of the project, suspecting there were hidden agendas such as promoting sugarcane plantations and stealing their land.

The chieftdom development committee, supposedly the driver of development, played a similar role. The stories about previous failures made the committee members afraid to be associated with a development agency that was seen as wanting to bring poverty to their community. The chairperson of the committee, Mr Matsenjwa, asked *"How are we supposed to promote the project? We do not want to associate ourselves with it!"* In fear of being seen as traitors, local leaders did not fight the community's evident rejection of the project. So whereas they pretended they understood and supported the project when they spoke with trainers, in reality they did not. This truth was revealed in the comments from the community. In an interview, someone who preferred anonymity stated, *"We believe in the committee, their opinions matter to us. Right now they are saying this project has come to take away our land and livestock. If they would support the project, it would flow."*

Local leaders were not in full support of the project

At some point, a rumour went around that the chief had signed an agreement giving away the community's land to the project. *"Project people and the traditional authorities marked our community boundaries. And we heard that agreements were signed about which we have no information. They should have brought those papers to us as a community so that we know what is in them. How can we trust these people?"* said another community member who also wished to stay anonymous.



When grazing land was converted to sugarcane, cattle started to browse on neighbouring land, causing conflicts between communities

What really had happened was that as part of the previous sugarcane project, people in another community had voluntarily signed land renunciation papers to their chief. However, in Nkonjwa, no papers were signed.

Donor dependence and patriarchy

Donor dependency also influences the acceptance of development projects especially at the planning stage. Traditional authorities have a preference for certain organisations and influence their community with their preference. World Vision Swaziland for example, is preferred by the community mostly because of the incentives that

the organisation brings to the community such as the 'food for work' approach and the provision of materials. In contrast to this, LUSIP-GEF meetings are held without the offer of food or materials. *"World Vision gave us material for building toilets and also provided us with food parcels in return for completing them,"* says Mr Matsenjwa. He and his fellow villagers also feel the LUSIP-GEF project's gains are too long term, which they have no patience in or interest for.

Another point hindering acceptance of the project in Nkonjwa is the fact that male voices dominate in decision making. Women in general and Nkonjwa women in particular have a better understanding of issues of food security based on their practical needs as providers of the family. Some of them saw the benefits of the food production activities proposed in the new project. Yet, their perspectives were drowned out by their male counterparts. This is the result of the patriarchy in the region, in which women are perceived as socio-politically inferior in terms of decisions on land use.

What have we learnt about supporting family farmers?

Instead of focusing on success stories, looking at failures such as the failed implementation of the Chiefdom Development Programme in Nkonjwa can provide us with many lessons on how best to support family farmers.

Development projects do not exist in a vacuum

Nkonjwa shows that the traditional authorities hold great power over the community's perspectives. So it is important to start by including them in decision making, even if this takes a lot of time. It is important to make sure that they understand and support the initiative because when they do, they will independently push the agenda. Similarly, the chiefdom development committee is highly influential in motivating people to participate in development initiatives. Selection of its members should be based on a demonstration of who will support development initiatives. Furthermore, direct contact with community members is vital. Each time we go into the

community, it pays to be detailed and explain all aspects of the project, as if they do not know anything about development initiatives.

We also learnt that new projects should not bear the same name as earlier projects with negative impacts to avoid confusion and misinformation.

Above all, Nkonwja has taught us that development projects do not exist in a vacuum. All family farming communities have a history and pre-formed ideas about development projects, and it is essential that development workers take these seriously.



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New gardens with healthy vegetables

Swaziland's lowveld is an often drought-stricken area of undulating land at elevations of 150 to 300 metres. Due to low rainfall, crops failed in the Makhundlu section in the lowveld's Vikizijula Chiefdom, making many family farmers dependent on external food aid. They reclaimed some of their autonomy and food security by using new farming methods based on principles of permaculture and rainwater harvesting.

Priscilla P. Mkhathswa, Siphumelele Ngqwane, Tengetile Mpila, Dumsani Hlanze and Norman Mavuso

The family farmers of Makhundlu learnt about permaculture gardening. Permaculture technologies improve soil fertility and prevent soil erosion with the addition of organic material, and no synthetic chemicals are used to control pests. This method was relevant to the local situation because it uses less water compared to conventional farming. Most families in the area used to walk six kilometres to access the nearest water source. The communal water taps provided enough for domestic use, but that water could not be used for watering backyard gardens or for their poultry and pigs.

Various institutions collaborated to assist the farmers, including the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Tinkhundla and Regional Development, and the Lower Usuthu Sustainable Land Management Project.

Learning about permaculture

Family farmers in various communities, most of them women, learned about the principles of permaculture (see box), witnessed demonstrations, and practiced for themselves, which helped the farmers to learn by doing. A total of 44 farmers were trained of which 41 of them committed themselves to establishing their own permaculture garden, which they did in groups in order to provide each other with support and advice.

To start the permaculture gardens in the individual households, the families were provided with a variety of vegetable seedlings as

The steps to a permaculture garden

When establishing a permaculture garden, a farmer starts by tilling the soil less using locally available tools such as hoes and forks. The farmer then increases organic matter in the soil. Spreading wood ash reduces soil acidity and infestations of termite and other harmful insects. A layer of manure 3-5 cm thick from the farm's livestock distributed evenly on top of the ash (improves the organic matter content and water-holding capacity of the soil. On top of the kraal manure, farmers again apply ash and more compost. Finally a 5-10 cm thick layer of mulch (dried grass or leaves) is applied (keeping moisture in the soil, regulating temperatures, suppressing weeds and increasing the activity of soil organisms. The mulch then decomposes to add more organic matter to the soil and reduces soil erosion during rains.

Following this, compost is mixed with top soil and added into holes into which the farmer plants a variety of seedlings, spaced according to the crop type. In one plot, the farmer mixes different types of leaf and root vegetables, which helps to reduce the spread of pests and diseases. For example, onions that acts as insect repellents are mixed with, tomatoes and green pepper that are vulnerable to attack. To protect seedlings from cutworms, four small wooden sticks are inserted around the plant stem.



Crops are watered three times a week around the plant base only to conserve water as much as possible. Two weeks after planting, the farmer can start applying liquid fertilizer (a mixture of manure and water) instead of pure water. Botanical sprays are used to control pests. These are made from a mixture of herbs such as aloe, wild garlic, pepper and lemon grass, a handful of each put into a five litre bucket and kept for two days before applying.



Farmers increased their knowledge by exchanging experiences during farmer learning exchange visits

a starter package. Once they received these, farmers started their permaculture gardens on their own in their communities. Project staff made visits to mentor and coach the farmers. They also organised farmer learning exchange visits where farmers shared experiences, skills and discussed the challenges they faced and the solutions to those challenges. This helped farmers understand and correct any mistakes, and perfect their permaculture practices. Farmers were also provided with materials and training so that they could construct their own rainwater harvesting tanks.

More health, less water

This initiative resulted in many benefits for the farmers. All 41 farmers established permaculture backyard gardens and constructed rainwater harvesting tanks. They cooperated with each other throughout and so improving relationships with their neighbours. They now have clean water from the tanks which they can use to water the

vegetables in their permaculture gardens. These farmers now consume fresh, healthy vegetables, free from synthetic chemicals.

Ever since they established their permaculture gardens, they have reduced the costs of vegetable production and reduced water usage. During the rainy season, these farmers also no longer have to fetch water from the communal water taps. These family farmers have developed new skills and have become resource persons to help others start their own permaculture gardens and construct rain water harvesting tanks. Throughout the process, there was great team spirit amongst all of the participating farmers.



Farmers and their families now consume fresh, healthy vegetables

Some challenges remained

When introducing the initiative, project staff faced some issues related to non-adoption of permaculture farming methods by some farmers. These farmers were used to conventional farming with fertilizer and pesticides and did not easily accept the new methods proposed. Some farmers took the starter pack but did not continue providing their own seedlings, while others did not make an effort to maintain their permaculture gardens.

In addition, it was also not so easy for farmers to work in groups at first due to differences in character. Also, since the men in most families were not directly involved, there were some challenges in getting them to participate. For some elderly farmers, despite their willingness, it was difficult to take part because of their deteriorating health. Permaculture gardening is comparatively labour intensive, especially at the initial stage of establishing the gardens. Alcohol also brought about some challenges, as some farmers spent most of their time in drinking spots and neglected their gardens. Finally, in summer, when there is a lot of work in the maize fields, most farmers neglect their gardens and prioritise their work on the fields instead.

We learned that in most cases, the initiatives were led by women

Improved livelihoods

Agnes Mangwe, a farmer from Vikizijula in Makhundlu Section, now has a permaculture garden. She works there with her grandchildren, teaching them how to grow vegetables and manage the garden. The vegetables help her to feed her family and she makes money from the surplus she sells: *"I am a widow, but this is not an issue for me because the permaculture garden means I can provide food for my family. I have customers from local restaurants that buy my lettuce twice a week. I will even need to enlarge my garden. And this helps me to pay school fees for my children."*

Mrs Mangwe also advises other farmers and encourages them to use permaculture principles as they cuts costs while bringing extra



In most families, women involve their children in farming, passing on skills and knowledge and creating unity among family members

income and nutrition. "I advise farmers to start a permaculture garden so that in five years' time the poverty rate in the country might be decreased and there will be no one struggling in the country. Farmers should move from being dependent on food aid towards being self-reliant."

Lessons in supporting farmer families

During the course of this initiative we have learnt that the self-esteem of farmers improves as they obtain skills and share information with other farmers. We also learned that in most cases the initiatives were led by women. Most of them were widowed women who took charge to fight poverty and hunger in their families by adopting this technology.

We also learned that the combination of theory and practice in transferring knowledge enhanced farmers' ability to directly apply the acquired skills, while understanding the methods they were practicing. The starter packages given to the farmers were a great motivation to start. In most families, the women involve their children and grandchildren in the work, passing on skills and knowledge they acquire from their training. This also creates added unity among family members.

Finally, we realised that farmer families learn much better from each other than from outsiders. Farmers told us they appreciated the continued collaboration with the project staff, but were now able to stand on their own. Using their newly acquired knowledge, the farmers are able to help each other as they share skills and information. Farmers, when well mobilised, are able to work together and share experiences harmoniously with respect for each other.



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Many rural development initiatives attempt to improve the lives of family farmers. Some succeed, some fail – but all of them can offer valuable lessons for the future. In a two-phased documentation workshop, farmers, field workers and other experts working in IFAD-funded projects in Swaziland described, analysed and wrote down some of their most promising experiences. This book presents the results of their work. Published in the International Year of Family Farming, it offers various lessons and challenges relevant for professionals who are working to support family farmers.