

**Review & Support Visit on Sustainable Agriculture and
Natural Resource Management in Lesotho**



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Executive Summary and Main Recommendations

Send a Cow Lesotho has been in operation in some form since 2000 when it began in Morija. It was formalised in 2004 as StockAid Lesotho and staff were recruited to run small animal, vegetable and medicinal plant programmes using a stepped approach in which farmers could receive inputs and training and complete various stages, and move on through vegetable growing, water harvesting, and eventually to receive livestock– chickens and goats.

In January 2006 the SACUK SOA Coordinator visited the programme to look at the components and to help design ways of documenting the methods that were being used. There was no syllabus other than the list of steps and some notes on how to make Keyhole gardens.

SACL has moved onwards: it is now based in the capital, Maseru and has staff members to cover small livestock, natural resources and agriculture, social development, a Country Director, two Community Facilitators covering new project Districts, and support staff.

Due to the long time frame and significant changes between the Coordinator's visits, the list of Objectives of the trip was quite wide ranging and the programme was conducted mostly in the field. This allowed for a good overall view of issues that were common to groups and members, but it was hard to look into many specific technical issues.

The report is structured around the eight main objectives given. Under Objective 1 it is noted that the Keyhole Garden design does not always line up to the principles behind some of the design features, although it is still a major success story – in its spread, visibility for SACL and year round productivity which is an improvement from 2006. Some specific points are noted on mulching and composting, and a trial method for composting kraal and kitchen waste together is proposed.

'Away from home' SACL has been trialling Conservation Agriculture. The Director of Crops in the Ministry of Agriculture is supportive of NGOs promoting this, and she and other Ministry staff invited SACL to visit their research plots. SACL has been debating whether to support farmers with training relevant to their larger food crop fields: the SOA methods for fields follow the same principles of management as for vegetables: soil and water conservation, soil fertility enhancement, rotations, integrated organic pest management. The knowledge gained in the project on vegetable growing can be extended into the fields with some different methods such as trench composting, sunken basket composts, and others.

SACL has started to move into other new methods too – the tip-tap was noticed in a staff visit to Kenya and Uganda and when introduced in Lesotho has now spread into all the project groups. Other new innovations are also considered in the report which might be relevant to SACL

The use of local materials to keep down costs and enhance replicability is a key discussion in SACL. There are minimum safety and design standards especially for animal housing, but the general principle is to make all structures as easy as possible for farmers to do with what is available to them, nearby and at low cost.

Objective 4 is concerned with follow up and visits by the Peer farmers, staff and community facilitators. The Peer extension system is also discussed as follow up is only part of an extension scheme. The role of the Peer farmers is a big one; they are currently the holders of

much of the institutional memory and train on many different aspects of the project. Follow up seems to be slightly lacking compared to doing training with the groups and yet it is an important part of the dialogue necessary to hear what the farmers' challenges, innovations, successes and future training needs are. More programmed time for the Peer farmers and staff to do follow up would be helpful.

SACL identified its 'stories' or its character in one of the exercises in the closing workshop. The identity given: a development organisation concentrating on social issues' is indeed the way that from interviews with groups, staff and analysis of the structure, SACL appears. Social development is the framework of this county programme, and other methods are nested within this. This identity is an aspect that SACL can review as they make strategies for the future: more food security focus would change the flavour of the programme, but could add balance between production/food security and social issues.

The methods SACL uses to address the needs of farmers in Lesotho should ideally be replicable by other interested community members so that an informal spread of useful ideas happens. Some of the vegetable gardens could easily be copied, such as the trenches, and Keyhole Gardens are straightforward if the person constructing understands the key features that enable it to work well. Other issues surrounding the spread of SACL's values and methods, and the potential expansion of the project show that SACL is well placed to move into new techniques and new geographical areas, but should keep methods appropriate to each community it works with. The staff and Peer farmers came together for a workshop at which the observations and lessons learned from the field were shared. Reflective learning, asset mapping were also introduced and then used to design forms for data collection. Some practical solutions for compost making, keyhole garden structure, animal housing and 'A' frames were suggested.

Recommendations are made of practical changes, principles that should be promoted and the resources and support that the programme staff might need to move the programme on to a new phase.

Outline of recommendations

1. Strategic Direction

- SACL needs to make a strategic decision on how it identifies and promotes itself as a development organisation and where the balance lies between focusing on social issues and food security
- To review the existing organisational structure around line management of Community Facilitators and peer farmers so as to reflect the organisational objectives and priorities
- To work with SAC's 5 SOA 'principles' as set out in the SOA manual (conserve soil, water and other environmental resources; sustainable health of soil, plants, animals and humans; working with natural systems; sustainable management of soil fertility; proper management of available renewable energy sources) and to adapt these as appropriate to the local environment and available resources so as to offer farmers choices
- Continue to consolidate and maximise networking opportunities and build SACL's profile so as to link to other programmes and benefit from good relationships with more than one government ministry and other agencies

2. Field Crops

To consider providing more support to farmers in production of field crops/ staples for increased food security; this could include:

- training on soil and water conservation (ditches, terraces, water control, contour digging, tree planting), complementing and reinforcing that given by the Ministry of Land Reclamation
- training on soil fertility (compost making from kraal and household waste, sunken basket and trench composts in cereal fields, planting maize in composted holes)
- researching opportunities for animal traction: both ploughing and carrying manure
- learn from government and other NGO work on conservation agriculture and try further field trials – including hole and trench planting

3. Home vegetables and gardens

- A wider range of gardens can be offered to farmers who identify particular constraints, and to those who have done well with keyhole and trench gardens and wish to expand
- Liquid manures, plant teas, pit composting of kraal waste and other soil fertilisers can be made

- Mulching should be encouraged and farmers assisted to use locally available materials that work
- Tin cans can go into the base of the basket or garden though iron is probably not limiting in most of Lesotho; they can help with drainage by allowing air and water movement, and also this contributes to reducing litter in the compounds
- Medicinal plants for humans and animals have a place in the garden, as well as plants for making botanical pesticides
- Companion and inter-planting for pest control; plant rotations even on small vegetable areas should continue to be taught
- Keyhole garden: entrance for watering and low enough height and size are features to enable older members of the community to use them. Try and incorporate these so that group members pass this information on and others are not discouraged that KG are 'not for them'
- Local materials for building gardens, fencing, and animal housing should make each person's garden the most appropriate for them – the right balance of what can be obtained and the purposes of the structures
- Reintroduce fuel saving stoves after researching impact of previously implemented designs and most appropriate types

4. Extension and follow up

- To programme more time for follow up on training both within groups and between groups (including those who have "graduated") by both staff and peer farmers
- To ensure there is a peer farmer link in every group for each aspect of the programme (SD, small stock, SOA/NRM) as the first point of contact on a day to day basis
- To encourage good dialogue (including listening to farmers) with groups so as to engage at a strategic level and facilitate them to tailor plans to their own needs (not just a standard package)
- To further promote peer networking at all levels: between cells, groups in a district, peer farmers, para-vets, staff with other NGOs/ other countries
- To encourage all group members to keep "passing on" training in order to promote sustainability, replicability and expansion

5. Other interventions

- Continue to emphasise all the values of the Cornerstones and the integrated nature of home livelihoods: production of food, cash income, harmony at home
- For animal housing, use local materials, but for the fencing and roof, wire and iron sheets are probably minimum needs for security and weather protection
- Link groups to water providers and donors and emphasise group work on water conservation programmes
- Encourage groups to expand vegetables and market together for more negotiating power on prices and transport
- Encourage all groups to adopt the cell model

6. Further learning & motivation

SACL should encourage more learning and documentation, including use of new tools such as reflective learning and asset mapping

SACL should consider further support to peer farmers, including:

- exposure visits to animal farms, e.g. dairy goats, Koete farm and Henra tech
- visits to other peer farmers in other countries
- training on crop diseases
- being used more regularly in active groups
- accreditation system with certificates of competency for areas of training

SACL should consider further support to staff in the areas of:

- skills enhancement (computer training, workshop attendance, study tours, participatory tools for monitoring, follow up and evaluation)
- motivation (bonuses, competitive salaries, benefits, incentives)
- visits and meetings with other SAC country programmes and NGOs
- sharing of training materials between SAC countries
- use of a mentoring and sharing model in agriculture as well as SD
- formalised induction programme including spending time at PF's home
- building a library of periodicals and relevant books
- holding an annual staff retreat including practical sessions and interactive learning