

‘Mabokang switches crops to feed her family in Mokhotlong, but the impacts of climate change continue

When ‘Mabokang Khesa was a child, in the 1970s, her parents grew many different crops in the fields around their home in Mokhotlong, a remote district in the east of Lesotho, which has a subtropical highland climate, with warm summers and extremely cold winters. She remembers beans, peas, lentils and other grains which were cultivated to feed the family.



Now 54, ‘Mabokang is a widowed mother of four boys and two girls ranging between 16 and 31 years of age. She lives, in the village of Molika-Liko, with her three youngest children and two of her five grandchildren, and has been a single parent for sixteen years, since her husband succumbed to an illness, brought on by the cold weather conditions in Mokhotlong. During that time, with the help of her children in the fields, she has been a sole provider for her family, reliant, like her own parents, on farming, but, she says, facing increasingly difficult conditions as a result of climate change.

On comparing climate patterns of the past to the present, ‘Mabokang notes that, back in the day, the climate was predictable, stating that ‘when it rained, it would rain fairly and sufficiently, but these days, the rain is too little or just too much.’ When the earth becomes dry through lack of rain, she says that weeds take over, hindering proper growth of their crops. As a result of these challenges, ‘Mabokang moved away from the crops that her parents cultivated, and now focuses on potatoes and maize which are more resilient in the unfavourable conditions. Despite missing out on valuable nutrients offered by green

vegetables and pulses, shifting focus to these new crops has enabled her to feed the family and to sell produce to fast food outlets, helping her to pay household bills and to cover school fees and costs for her younger children and grandchildren. With no free secondary education in Lesotho, she hopes this investment in their academics will help them to pursue career options outside of agriculture, with her older children already struggling to sustain themselves through farming.

The challenges, however, remain acute, and for the last two years 'Mabokang's potato crops have largely failed due to heavy rain and flooding, increasing both her reliance on maize, and her and her family's vulnerability to extreme poverty, with dire consequences if this single crop fails. She says, 'being dependent on agriculture is a huge challenge on its own, and climate change is making it even more difficult, leading to low or no harvest and hunger in my family. When food is insufficient, I always become stressed...my children and grandchildren look to me to provide food for them, and I always compromise so that they at least get something to eat.'

