

Changing weather patterns impact Thabo's crops in Mohale's Hoek, increasing his family's vulnerability to poverty

Just like any farmer, Thabo Leketanyane relies on favourable weather conditions and good water supply. As an unemployed 34-year-old single father of two, he is dependent on the crops he can grow in his backyard to put food on the table.



Thabo lives in Motse Mocha, a village in the Mohale's District of Lesotho, in the south of the country. With a degree in Development Studies, Drama & Theatre from the National University of Lesotho, he had hoped for a different career, but with high levels of youth unemployment in the Mountain Kingdom, since graduating in his twenties, he has struggled to find permanent employment. Instead, Thabo he has found various temporary jobs, working for the Bureau of Statistics during the 2016 census and occasionally at the Independent Electoral Commission as a voting station officer and data collector. While he has enjoyed these roles, and gained new skills, they have not been sources of sustainable income, and Thabo has consistently been dependent on his own small-scale farming to make ends meet. He grows spinach, cabbage, green pepper and other vegetables, providing food for his family and selling some of the produce to neighbours and local shops.

In recent years, however, Thabo has noticed that changes in the climate are making it harder to cultivate sufficient and healthy crops. He particularly cites the impact of changing rain patterns, which, he says, 'used to be moderate from September, the ploughing term, through to the festive season, but recently those times are dry, until late December when we experience excessively heavy rains, storms and flooding.' He also says increasing temperatures are affecting soil fertility and leading to soil degradation as 'most vegetation dries out leaving bare land vulnerable to erosion.'

Thabo says the growing unpredictability of the climate is increasing his family's vulnerability to poverty, noting that his children are aware of the situation. The seasons used to be consistent, but it is now difficult to know which crops to plant at different times of the year, with rainfall shortages also resulting in water supply often being cut off by the Water &

Sewage Company. This results, he says, in 'dropped production leaving very little vegetables to sell' and making it 'difficult to pay for other food and family bills and costs like clothing.'

Faced with these challenges, Thabo is adapting his farming practices, working longer hours and spending more money on fertilizers trying to regain soil quality. He has also been practicing Conservation Agriculture, a farming system that involves maintenance of a permanent soil cover, minimizing soil disturbance. It remains to be seen if these changes are successful.

Thabo has also attended a number of workshops to learn more about the climate crisis and to understand how he can respond to the challenges on his smallholding, including sessions delivered by the World Food Program, Lesotho Red Cross Society and the Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network. Thabo says he learned about Conservation Agriculture at these events, which he is now practicing, as well as other new and innovative adaptation and mitigation techniques which could help him in the future. This includes improved weather forecasting and climate smart agriculture, which would help him to know when best to plant his crops.

Reflecting on the challenges he is facing, Thabo says he is aware that climate change is a global crisis which affects people in different ways, in different parts of the world. For him and his family, and for others like him in Lesotho, the evidence and the impact are clear. And so is the need for climate action.

