



## Overcoming low agricultural productivity in Swaziland

Although the Kingdom of Swaziland is a small, landlocked country, it boasts great diversity in landscape, geology and climate. Landforms range from plateaus, hills and mountains, to foot slopes and plains.

Swaziland is ranked as a lower middle-income country, but wealth distribution is extremely unequal. About 84 per cent of the country's poor people live in rural areas, where per capita income is about four times lower than in urban areas, and food consumption is two times lower. A large proportion of rural households survive on subsistence agriculture. About 66 per cent of the population is unable to meet basic food needs, while 43 per cent live in chronic poverty.

When drought hit Swaziland in 2004 and 2005, more than one quarter of the country's population required emergency food aid. In 2007 Swaziland experienced one of its worst droughts,

which led to severe food shortages and widespread hunger.

## Agriculture, forests and biodiversity in decline

Smallholder farmers face a number of obstacles that prevent them from breaking out of poverty. The low agricultural productivity of the land is the result of a number of factors, including difficult road access, poor links to markets, limited availability of irrigation water and vulnerability to climate change.

Agricultural activity has been accepted as the prime cause of the decline in biodiversity. Conversion of biodiversity-rich grasslands, savannah and forests to plantations has resulted in dysfunctional 'moonscapes' unfavourable to most indigenous flora and fauna. Rangelands have been overstocked and overgrazed, contributing to soil depletion.

Deforestation is a result of agricultural encroachment, urban expansion and selective cutting of trees for fuelwood, timber and thatch. Up to 90 per cent of

the population depends on locally gathered fuelwood for energy. Total wood consumption in rural communities exceeds the total sustainable wood supply in areas where no management systems exist.

## Partnership – the key to success

The GEF-funded project, which will reduce land degradation and biodiversity loss as well as mitigate climate change, will be implemented at the national level and in the south-eastern lowveld of Swaziland – a land degradation hotspot with high levels of poverty and food insecurity. Through the engine of sustainable land management, the project will catalyse rural development to bring local, national and global environmental benefits. It will exploit the well-known synergies between land degradation and the two other main global environmental change components – biodiversity and climate change. This provides a stronger, more ecologically sound way of addressing the complex links between issues growing in global importance.



## GEF PROJECT INFORMATION

### Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project – GEF

**Executing partners:** Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives; Swaziland Water and Agricultural Development Enterprise

**GEF financing:** US\$ 1,972,280

**Cofinancing:** US\$ 8,671,080

IFAD: US\$ 6,166,680

Government: US\$ 2,321,500

Beneficiaries: US\$ 182,900

**Total financing:** US\$10,643,900

## GEF PROJECT COMPONENTS

Taking a sustainable land management approach at the national level through

- organizing steering committee
- reviewing policies
- developing laws, regulations and guidelines for sustainable land management

Planning and managing land resources sustainably through

- preparing sustainable land management plans
- improving local community management of rangelands and livestock systems
- adopting sustainable land management approaches in smallholder cropping areas
- promoting fuelwood efficiency
- introducing alien species control
- setting up conservation areas to promote locally important species and ecosystems

Promoting alternative livelihoods through

- making community livestock production more efficient and sustainable
- ensuring that commercial benefits of sustainable land management reach local people

Disseminating results appropriately:

- disseminating project information and results through various media

Transition to sustainable land management in Swaziland requires partnership among land users, technical experts and policymakers at all levels.

To address the lack of a comprehensive and integrated national land policy, the project will set up a steering committee to help develop enabling policies and prepare a coordinated action plan to promote sustainable land management across the entire nation. These activities will build upon the progress in reform of land tenure arrangements achieved by the IFAD-funded Lower Usuthu Smallholder Irrigation Project.

At farm and community levels, the project will address unsustainable land use practices and the concurrent loss of biodiversity by developing and implementing sustainable land

management approaches in project areas. It will raise the 'ecological literacy' of land users, develop and implement community land use management plans, and empower land users to carry out activities to restore ecosystem services by sustainably managing crop, range and forest lands. These activities include measures to mitigate climate change and reduce biodiversity losses. They will also raise awareness of the 'win-win' benefits of better-adapted agricultural practices that contribute to increasing adaptation to the predicted effects of climate change.

To address the root causes of biodiversity loss and the implications for climate change, the project will establish two conservation areas and promote the use of fuel-efficient stoves and solar power for cooking and lighting in households.



## Global benefits

The project will result in improved ecosystem resilience and productivity in an important dryland savanna ecosystem of southern Africa.

It will reduce and reverse land degradation by increasing the percentage of land area under sustainable management. The promotion of agroforestry, conservation agriculture and rangeland management approaches will lead to the restoration and protection of vital ecosystem functions in rangelands, croplands and woodlands. This will result in increased carbon sequestration, vegetation cover and land productivity.

Two conservation areas will be established through the project to serve as important corridors connecting areas of high biodiversity – the Songivelo-Kruger National Transfrontier Park (South Africa), Goba-Tembe Transfrontier Park (Mozambique) and the Pongola-Nsubane Transfrontier Park (South Africa).

## Innovative features

If farmers across Swaziland are to adopt sustainable land management approaches, experiences must be transferred beyond the project area.

- The project's replication strategy will encourage other chiefdoms to adopt best practices by scaling up successful strategies to combat land degradation.
- The project will set up demonstration sites linked to farmer field school approaches so land users from other chiefdoms can experience the 'learning by doing' approach.
- To encourage replication, results of project activities will be widely distributed through farmer field visits, newsletters, an information centre, notice boards, a website, radio, newspapers and television, scientific conferences and articles in academic publications.



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