# Innovations in Agriculture

## Growing gardens in urban and peri-urban areas of Lesotho

Gardens can be sustainable solutions to chronic food insecurity in densely populated urban and peri-urban areas. *CRS staff*

### Food insecurity

Lesotho faces chronic food insecurity because of widespread livelihood failure, income shortfalls due to chronic illnesses and limited access to productive assets. An estimated 39,000 households, or approximately 195,000 people, face chronic food insecurity. The situation is worse in urban and peri-urban areas; reports estimate that poor and very poor households are unable to meet 50 percent of their food needs.

### The CRS response

Catholic Relief Services, in partnership with the Lesotho Catholic Bishops' Conference and Caritas Internationalis, implemented an urban homestead gardening project, targeting 5,000 poor households in urban and peri-urban areas around the capital city Maseru and in commercial and industrial areas in the Maputsoe and Leribe districts. Of the total registered participants, 2,600 were textile workers and 2,400 were economically poor community members. Women constituted 77 percent of the registered participants.

Participants learned to make trench gardens, container plots, sack plots, hanging plots and keyhole gardens. *CRS staff*

The project aimed to increase participants' skills and assets to enable the production of vegetable crops for household consumption and local sales. About 64 percent of targeted beneficiaries obtain their main grains from the market. This indicates that food expenses are high for this vulnerable population.

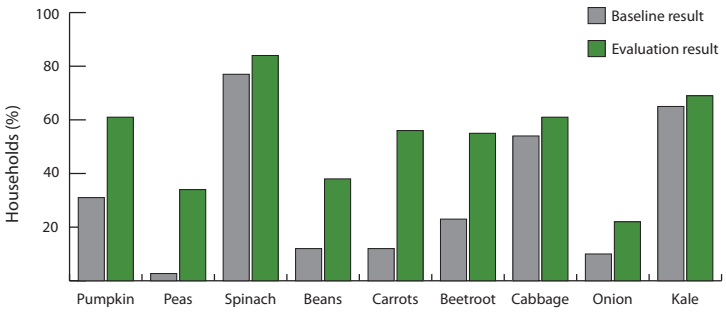
Utilizing a series of Sesotho- and English-language training materials, CRS conducted demonstrations on how to create trench gardens, container plots, sack plots and hanging plots for 17 villages in Lesotho. Participants were also encouraged to construct keyhole gardens, which utilize organic technologies, absorb and retain wastewater and produce high yields of vegetables, even during dry weather and cold winter months.

These sessions were complemented by demonstrations on pest control, compost-manure making and seedling production. Additionally, CRS conducted formal training sessions for field teams and people living with HIV. Sessions included

Community members received starter packs that included garden hand forks and six types of vegetable seed. *CRS staff*

Trainers demonstrated techniques for pest control, compost-manure making and seedling production. *CRS staff*

**Figure 1. Percentage of households that grow certain vegetables**




nutrition basics and market practices. The field teams then trained participants in target communities.

The project also provided participants with agriculture starter packs, including garden hand forks and six types of vegetable seed (20 grams of each type).

## Results

All 5,000 targeted households constructed at least three trench gardens, one or more container plots and one sack plot. They used either compost pits or compost heaps.

Participants formed self-help groups. Leaders who were elected by project participants guided each group. Reports from the field revealed that 200 groups were established and are functional, 60 in Leribe and 140 in Maseru. About 1,060 people have participated. To date, the groups have raised more than 21,000 maloti in contributions from their members to purchase vegetable seed.

Participants significantly increased their vegetable production during the course of this project (see Figure 1). The percentage of participants who consumed plant protein increased from 12.6 percent to 14 percent. In addition, the percentage of people who consumed fats or oils increased significantly, from 48 percent to 77 percent, possibly indicating that their incomes increased.

## Looking Ahead

**Program officers learned a number of lessons by implementing the project. Since the primary participants were factory workers who were free only during evenings and weekends, project teams scheduled their working hours to accommodate participants' needs. Household registration processes were slower than anticipated, so some activities were rescheduled. The activities were difficult for elderly people who were unhealthy or ill, but these participants were able to handle most tasks by working in groups. The project demonstrated that urban and peri-urban gardens are a viable option for chronically food-insecure areas.**