

Agriculture Support Initiative [Lower Olifants]

PROJECT SUMMARY



Project partners

Mahlathini Development Foundation (MDF) is a small public benefit non-profit organization consisting of rural development practitioners who specialize in participatory learning and action processes, sustainable natural resource management and low external input farming systems, including a focus on rain water harvesting, conservation agriculture, intensive homestead food production, food security, climate change adaptation, micro finance and enterprise development.

MDF aims to work at the cutting edge of development methodology and processes-integrating learning (training), research and implementation into new models and processes emphasizing synergy and integration.

The vision of MDF is to support the harmonious living of people in their natural, social and economic environments in a way that supports and strengthens both the people and their environment.



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Introduction

This project works with households involved in agriculture in eight village communities of the Lower Olifants River Catchment. Small-scale farming is widely evident throughout communal lands ranging in scale from small, so-called ‘backyard’ gardens to larger plots of between 0.5 and 2 ha. All these are individually farmed. They form an important component of livelihood security and in particular, offer important safety-nets in times of crises.

Poor farming practices in the Lower Olifants River Catchment expose farmers to unnecessary risks through loss of ecological health and these risks are likely to be exacerbated with climate change. Practices within many of the small farms often do little to manage water movement and retention, soil health and loss and offer little resilience in terms of crop choices. From a social and institutional perspective there is little evidence of farmers working together to learn from each other or others or to plan for the future. Collective action and the ability to self-organize are regarded as critical components of adaptive capacity. Furthermore, although farmers had heard of climate change, they articulated almost no sense of agency nor any ideas of how they might respond. While individuals voiced some ideas and there was a sense of potential responsiveness, none of these above factors suggested that people were collectively resilient in a way that the magnitude of climate change might demand.

Thus building adaptive capacity for food security within a changing world is seen to be a key priority for RESILIM-O.



Project Purpose

To provide support for increased adaptive capacity and resilience to the effects of climate change for households involved in agriculture in eight village communities of the Lower Olifants River Catchment through:



- Improved soil and water conservation and agro-ecological practices for increased food security,
- Livelihood diversification and supplementation through alternative climate resistant production, and
- Increased community empowerment as a result of self-organization and collective action.





Activities



Climate change and adaptive strategy development workshops and individual baselines



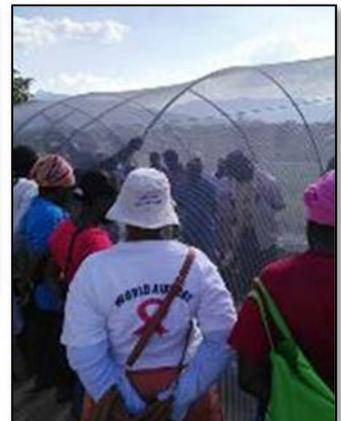
Learning workshops: organic mango production, cropping calendars & trench beds



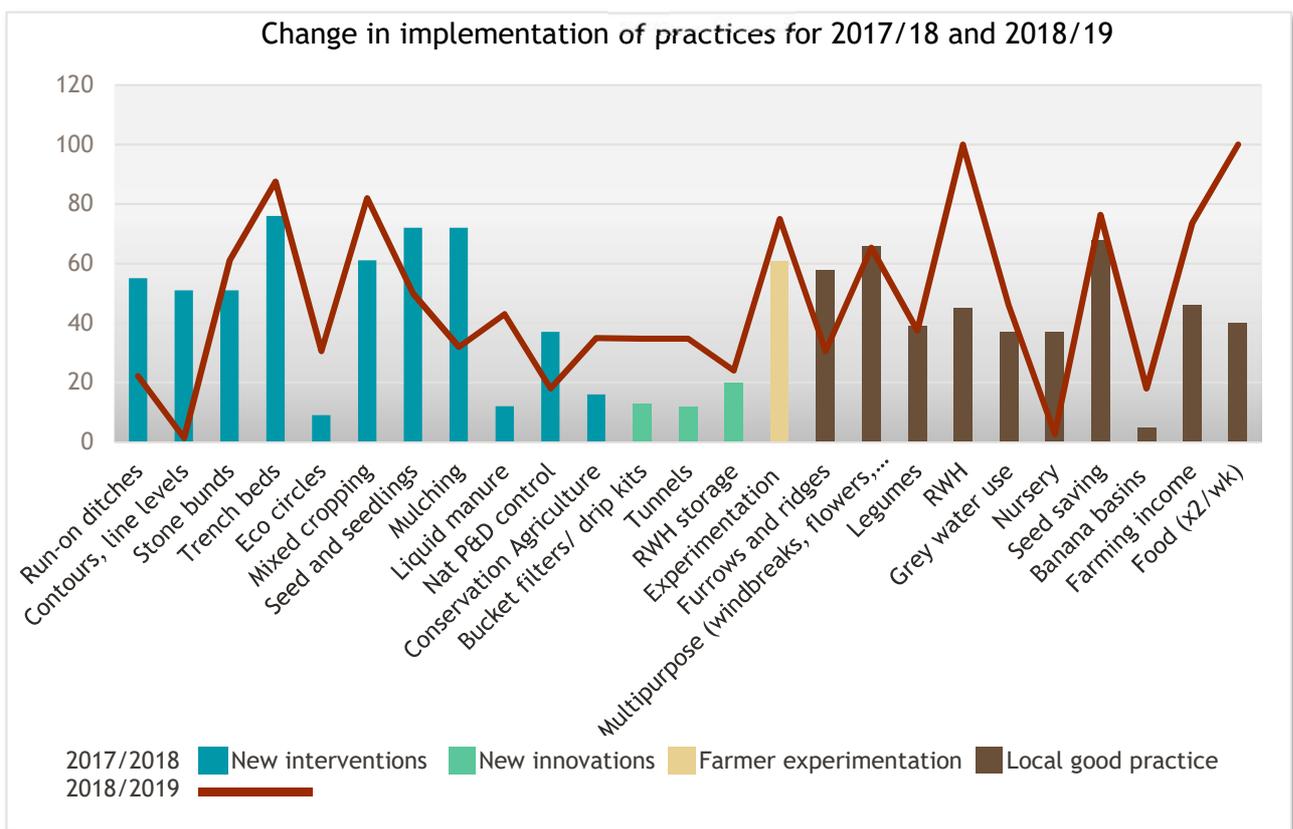
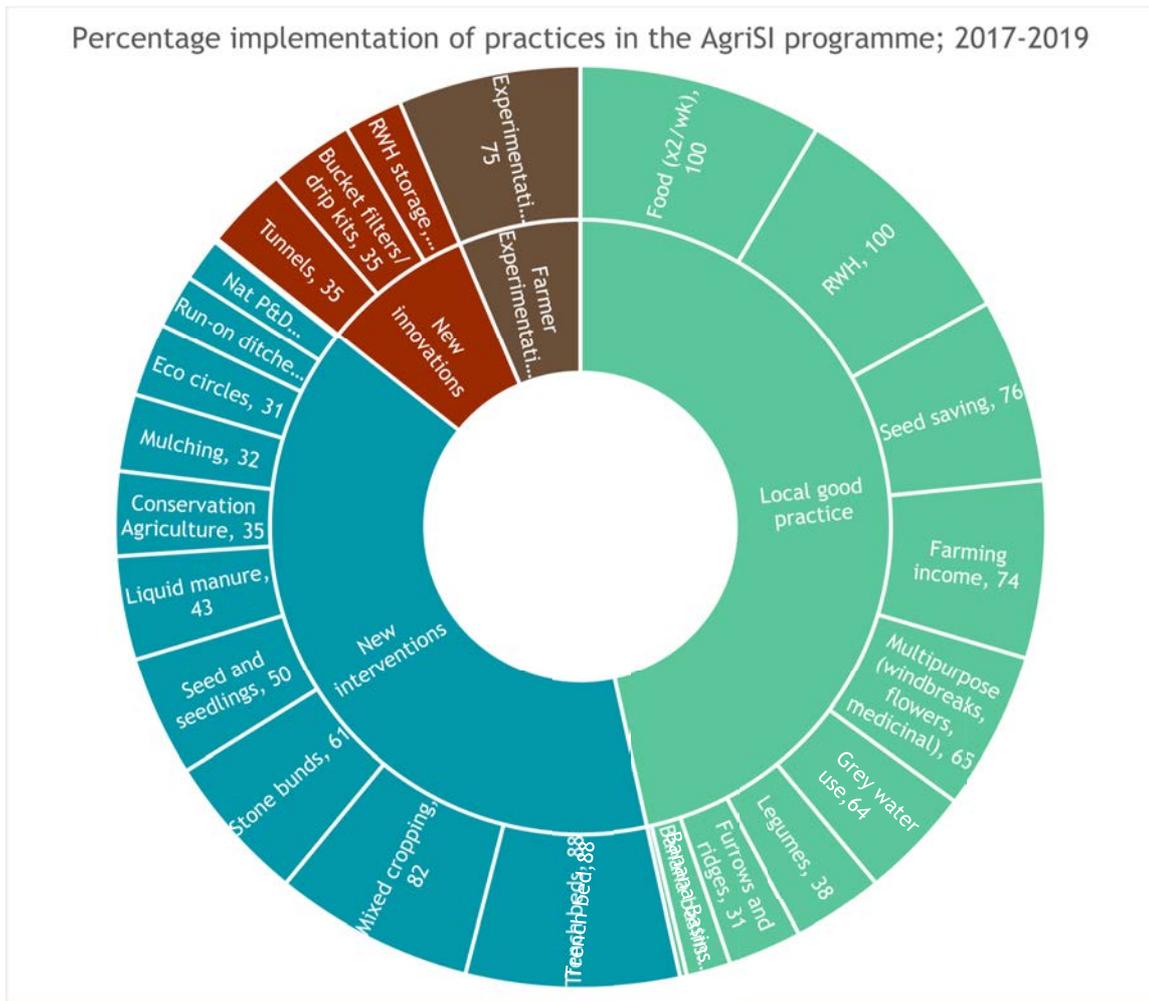
Collaborative activities & individual farmer level experimentation: tunnel construction, underground water tank construction & organic marketing



Social agency: group review session, water source exploration & village cross visit



Results



Recommendations

The key to the success of this process has been the use of a social learning approach (learning groups, local facilitators and individual experimentation) for promotion and implementation of a range of climate change adaptation (CCA) responses. Participants have learnt to analyse climate change impacts and the impact of their activities and have improved their decision-making capacity, both individually and jointly.

The key challenges have been:

- Lack of positive engagement of the authorities and government officials,
- Local drought linked to lack of water provision in these communities,
- Lack of funding support for the smallholder farmers, and
- Internal conflicts related to competition for resource and local political instabilities.

In general, however, these communities have shown considerable fortitude in the face of their almost overwhelming problems and this, more than anything, has led to them embracing and working with the concepts and approaches introduced.

This has been an extremely valuable learning exercise and lessons learnt are considered widely adaptable to other rural situations and for scaling up interventions in community based Climate Change Adaptions. We now have a successful working model for how implementation can go forward. We believe this process is applicable for national implementation and can be used as a basis of implementation by the relevant institutional role players.





award

The Association for Water and Rural Development

AWARD is a non-profit organisation specialising in participatory, research-based project implementation. Their work addresses issues of sustainability, inequity and poverty by building natural-resource management competence and supporting sustainable livelihoods. One of their current projects, supported by USAID, focuses on the Olifants River and the way in which people living in South Africa and Mozambique depend on the Olifants and its contributing waterways. It aims to improve water security and resource management in support of the healthy ecosystems to sustain livelihoods and resilient economic development in the catchment.

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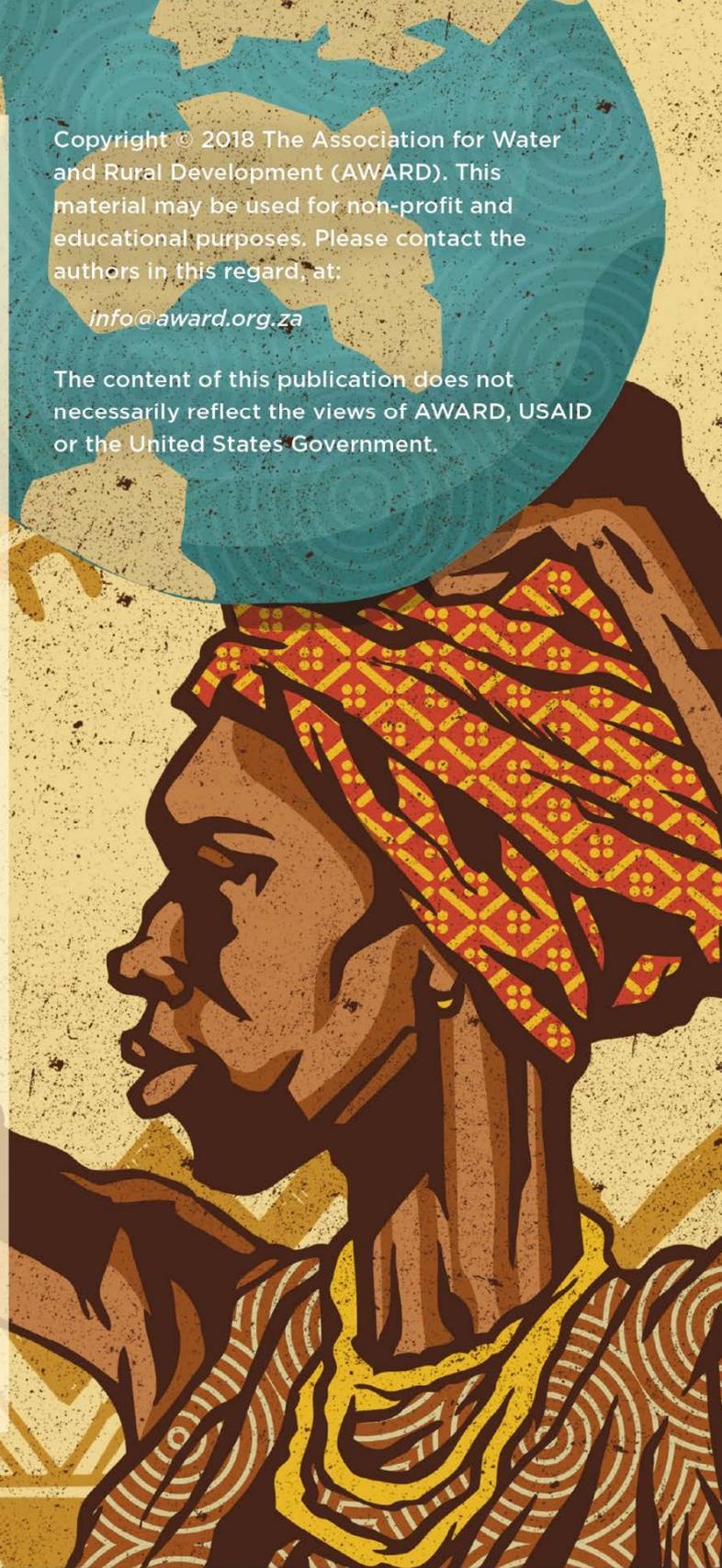
About USAID: RESILIM-O

USAID: RESILIM-O focuses on the Olifants River Basin and the way in which people living in South Africa and Mozambique depend on the Olifants and its contributing waterways. It aims to improve water security and resource management in support of the healthy ecosystems that support livelihoods and resilient economic development in the catchment. The 5-year programme, involving the South African and Mozambican portions of the Olifants catchment, is being implemented by the Association for Water and Rural Development (AWARD) and is funded by USAID Southern Africa.

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