

SCORE Project Supports Smallholder Farmers in Northern Namibia



Caption: Naemi Natanael (left) sharing her knowledge with neighbouring farmers from her training during the SCORE project in the Ohangwena region.

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At 65, Naemi Natanael is a communal smallholder farmer living in the Onangama village in the Ohangwena region. Highly dependent on her 3.5 hectares of land for her livelihood, Natanael was one of the first respondents within her community to a call for training to use new cultivation technologies and make use of climate-smart agricultural methods in order to improve productivity and provide for her family of 12.

In a joint effort to counter the negative effects of climate change in the agricultural sector, the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) implemented a Global Environmental Fund/ United Nations Development Programme (GEF/UNDP) funded project known as the Scaling Up Community Resilience to Climate Variability and Change (SCORE). The project empowers smallholder farmers through the implementation of a number of adaptation measures, including climate-smart agricultural methods in the seven northern regions of Namibia most impacted by climate change.

SCORE is designed to transform the knowledge of smallholder farmers to engage in agricultural practices that safeguard and maintain good soil structure. This is done through the enhancement and maintenance of permanent crop cover, the minimization of soil disturbance and practising crop rotation methods. Additionally, the programme also improves crop yield and food availability at the household level, while allowing communities to become resilient and adaptive to the changing climate. The project goal is to ensure improved food security, while contributing directly to the socioeconomic well-being of the rural poor communities thereby enhancing prospects for surplus production.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF), through the Directorate of Agricultural Production, Extension and Engineering Services (DAPEES), recently adopted the Comprehensive Conservation Agriculture Programme. Since the SCORE project is directly designed to complement government efforts, it has procured six tractors and ripper harrows, as well as grains and legume seeds towards the implementation of conservation agriculture. With these inputs, the project has provided ripping services and seeds to over 1,000 households across the seven regions. The accompanying training and farmers information days are designed to build capacity, and facilitate the farmer's appreciation of the principles of conservation agriculture and good agricultural practices (GAPs) and ensure sustainable crop production.

In mid-2014, Natanael and a few farmers from her community, through the encouragement of their regional councillor, were first introduced to the concept of conservation agriculture by Mr. Robert Tobias through the Namibia National Farmers' Union (NNFU). They received theoretical and practical training on the concepts of conservation agriculture in Ongwediva, Namibia. Furthermore, demonstrations were provided on the type and usage of support materials, manure application including the use of tractor drawn rippers, as well as digging ditches using hand-held hoes. Follow-up coaching sessions at community level were also carried out, for the smallholder farmers, with practical tutelage as how to measure a hectare of land using measuring rods and markers as well as manure application.

Currently in her third year of this project, Natanael has enjoyed the benefits that come with being part of such a sustainability project.

"My overall crop yield has considerably increased over the last three years under conservation agriculture management, and continues to change for the better over time", she said. She further stated that although the country experienced drought for the past two years she had managed successful harvests while noting her neighbour's lesser yields during the same time period.

Furthermore, Natanael noted that besides increased yields there were also changes in soil structure, citing that before implementing conservation agriculture principles, the portion of her land she gave up for that purpose was becoming less productive. She highlighted that conservation agriculture is very well suited for Namibia's changing climate. Previously, under conventional tillage, young crops would be lost once a dry spell is experienced, however under conservation agriculture, these crops have a higher chance of survival.

She encouraged other smallholder farmers in Namibia to implement conservation agriculture to increase food production. Natanael notes that more hectares of land could produce surplus for sale in or to earn additional income.

"While fellow farmers have observed how our crop performances and yield have changed over the past few years, as lead farmers we have also been showing them the benefits that comes with conservation agriculture", said Natanael. She currently assists with the training of farmers within her surrounding area of the SCORE project.

Though the benefits are plenty there are still several challenges to be faced. Currently SCORE and MAWF-DAPEES have only one tractor doing ripping for the entire constituency. The private tractor service providers are not affordable where available. As cultivation is a time sensitive matter this does pose as a challenge for all the farmers looking to use this service.

Additionally, the price of manure and seeds also pose a challenge to. Natanael, however, was encouraged by SCORE and MAWF-DAPEES efforts to continually provide support to the farmers within the region.

"I wish to continue putting this concept in practice, as you can see my field has not been ripped yet, I am just waiting for the first rain to fall, then I will call the Agricultural Extension Technician to bring the tractor. Do not stop assisting us", she concluded.

In implementation of this ongoing project UNDP and MAWF-DAPEES have fostered long lasting partnerships that will continue to provide support and assistance to the beneficiaries to continue to be self-reliant and empower those around them.

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