Swaziland and FAO have partnered since the country joined the Organization in 1971. FAO assistance has covered the formulation and implementation of food security and nutrition policies, including risk reduction and management strategies, and activities to increase agricultural productivity. More recently, cooperation has included a focus on market access and agricultural competitiveness, with support to smallholders’ transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture. Emphasis is also given to the sustainable management of natural resources.

**Promoting climate smart agriculture**

As part of activities aimed at resilience building and sustainable livelihood support in the face of difficult climatic conditions, FAO has established a national Conservation Agriculture Task Force. The purpose of the Task Force is to boost domestic food production while promoting Conservation Agriculture techniques. These revolve around three interlinked principles: minimal soil disturbance, permanent soil cover and crop rotation – applied with a view to protecting the environment and relieving the pressure of agriculture on limited natural resources.

An FAO project funded by the European Union, “The Swaziland Agricultural Development Project (SADP)”, and the Swaziland component of the project "Conservation Agriculture Coordination and Advocacy in Southern Africa" funded by the United States Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance aim to increase sustainable food security and household income generation by following a conservation agriculture approach. They jointly trained more than 9 000 smallholder farmers in good agricultural practices (GAPs), including agroforestry and seed production techniques as well as conservation agriculture. The livelihoods of almost 5 000 participating households were strengthened, and the projects served to improve coordination and collaboration among stakeholders as well as increasing the capacities of the Task Force itself. A draft three-year Conservation Agriculture strategy and work plan was developed and a related census piloted to benchmark the level of uptake by farmers.

**Matching FAO’s expertise to Swaziland development priorities**

Recent FAO assistance in Swaziland has been shaped by the 2013-2015 FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF), which sets out four priority areas of intervention:

- **Pluralistic agricultural support systems and institutional strengthening and efficiency**, with a view to creating an enabling policy and investment environment in support of agriculture-based livelihoods
- **Sustainable agricultural productivity, market access and competitiveness**, boosting domestic production and increasing market access for medium- and small-scale producers
- **Sustainable management of natural resources**, strengthening adaptation to climate change while promoting the conservation of plant and animal biodiversity
- **Mitigation of food insecurity by improving livelihoods and reducing vulnerability**, with an emphasis on people living with chronic vulnerability and HIV and AIDS-affected family members

Jointly developed with the Government and other partners, the CPF reflects relevant priorities in key national development policies, including the National Development Strategy (NDS), the National Food Security Policy, the Comprehensive Agriculture Sector Policy (CASP) and the National Programme for Food Security (NPFS). The CPF supports FAO’s corporate strategic objectives and regional priorities, also taking into account the objectives of regional economic communities, including the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA). It is fully aligned with the UN Development Assistance Framework for Swaziland for 2011-2015.

**New CPF formulation**

Consultation and drafting of a new CPF are ongoing.
**The transition to commercial farming**

Agriculture has traditionally been the backbone of the Swazi economy, with the vast majority of people dependent on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods. However, the sector has been seriously impacted by recurrent droughts and a struggling economy compounded by chronic underinvestment and other factors such as a high HIV/AIDS rate. Today, undernourishment is estimated to affect one in three people.

With support from the European Union, the Government and FAO are working to improve food security, nutrition and livelihoods by supporting subsistence farmers in the move towards higher-quality and market-oriented agricultural production. In addition to environmental conservation, these objectives are at the heart of the five-year Swaziland Agricultural Development Project (SADP), targeting the country’s most vulnerable communities.

More than 2,000 farmers were trained in good agricultural practices and 800 home gardens were established, each equipped with a 5,000 litre water tank for irrigation. As a result, household vegetable production has been significantly increased, with part of the output directly consumed by the producer households while the surplus is made available for sale within the community.

To strengthen smallholders’ linkages to the markets, a 1 million euro Marketing Investing Fund was established under SADP and about 60 youth groups were established, with members receiving agribusiness training for setting up small poultry, pig and crop production enterprises. Targeting more than 20,000 farmers overall, SADP has also proved successful in strengthening infrastructure for the livestock sector, improving water management and government services, and promoting a more conducive environment for sustainable and equitable development growth.

**Strengthening an integrated animal health information system**

Livestock production is a major activity in rural areas and an important subsector for the economy, accounting for some 26 percent of agriculture’s total contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP). Furthermore, Swaziland is one of six African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries to have been accredited for meat exports to the European Union. An effective tracking system at the national level is therefore crucial.

FAO has assisted in the computerization of the Swaziland Livestock Identification and Traceability System (SLITS), which is facilitating establishment of an integrated animal health information system by the Ministry of Agriculture. The key objective of SLITS is to ensure that each individual animal in the national herd is traceable for life, thanks to rigorous identification procedures combined with digitalized veterinary services reporting. Support to the SLITS has enabled Swaziland to improve its compliance with international standards and to retain its share in the European beef market.

**Mobilizing investments in agriculture**

FAO has been supporting the country’s drive to promote new public and private investment opportunities for emerging farmers. With FAO assistance, the Government and regional partners are currently completing a ten-year Swaziland Agricultural Investment Plan (SNAIP). Prepared in line with the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Plan (CAADP), the national plan will serve as a basis for driving future investments in the country. The aim is to achieve an average annual growth rate in agriculture of 6 percent by 2025 — a goal that should in part be achieved by increasing public spending in the sector to a minimum of 10 percent of the national budget.

*Project: SADP, funded by the European Union and FAO.*

“Agriculture and food security are the entry points for growth and development strategies in many countries.”

José Graziano da Silva
FAO Director-General