Newsletter

Supporting ecological land use management in Swaziland

Dear PELUM Partners and Friends,

It is with great pleasure that we bring you the latest edition of our September newsletter where we share positive stories in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic that is gripping the global community.

In this quarter, we conducted a survey on Covid – 19 impacts on food security with local farmers from around the country. We also bring you an update on our partnership with the Strengthening Protected Area Systems (SNPAS) project of the Eswatini National Trust Commission (ENTC) for planting 3000 indigenous trees and establishing an indigenous tree nursery.

Under our capacity building pillar, we facilitated a workshop on Farmer Managed Seed Systems in partnership with COSPE, for the extension and project officers of our member organizations. The workshop not only covered the importance of preserving our traditional seed varieties, seed selection, multiplication and storage, but also covered a synopsis of our current governing seed laws and what they mean to the average smallholder farmer.

Advancing food security and environmental sustainability in farming systems requires an integrated soil fertility management approach that maximizes crop production while minimizing the mining of soil nutrient reserves and the degradation of the physical and chemical properties of soil that can lead to land degradation, including soil erosion. That is why, in this quarter, member organization extension officers were also trained on how to improve soil fertility in partnership with Action Four Africa, an NGO that promotes organic farming in the country.

Lastly we have included some helpful tips on how to make an organic botanical spray which assists in managing pest problems in your backyard garden. Remember to keep growing your own vegetables and taking care of the earth, our only home.

Please do share the newsletter widely and follow PELUM Swaziland on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

Kind Regards,

Tsakasile Dlamini

Country Coordinator for PELUM Eswatini

ACAT truck delivering part of the 3000 indigenous trees to Luzelweni

Tree planting kicks off as first rains arrive

In August Eswatini experienced the first seasonal rains thus prompting the scheduled SNPAS tree planting activities to commence in all 7 communities namely Luzelweni, KaZulu, Mhlumeni, KaNdinda, Shewula, Velezizweni, and Emvembili. This tree planting initiative which will see 3000 indigenous trees being planted, is being conducted as part of the Strengthening Protected Area Systems (SNPAS) project of the Eswatini National Trust Commission (ENTC) funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Eswatini. The tree planting activities are being carried out on the ground by four of the networks member organizations, namely Green Living Movement, Tenvelo, Eswatini Conference of Churches and Eswatini Homeopathy Project.

All 4 organizations have attested to the fact that communities have welcomed the project and added their appreciation at being given the opportunity to reintroduce indigenous tree species, some of which have become very scarce in their communities.

The department of forestry under the Ministry of Tourism and Environmental Affairs provided essential training for the NGOs and communities that will be carrying out the tree planting activities and a Forester was assigned to each of the 7 communities to provide training and technical support. This was done to ensure that the trees are planted in such a way that their survival rate will be high and that the communities are made aware of the importance of preserving their indigenous forests. Some of the many trees are (umneyi), (Mkhiwa), (Umnyamatsi), (Umkhakhu), (Umhlume), (Umuwane), Forest Waterberry, (Umntulwa) among a few.

Tree Planting Manual developed for the country

Another success story that came from the partnership between PELUM, SNPAS and the Forestry Department is that an Indigenous Tree Planting Manual was developed and published. Dlamini added that the training manual is aimed at providing a standard guideline for planting indigenous trees and that a soft copy was available for download on the PELUM website www.pelum.org.sz.

Why you should plant indigenous trees

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 15 is set to 'protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss,' which is

why tree planting is an important activity and calls for the involvement of citizens, particularly rural people who rely on these indigenous forests for their livelihoods. If you are considering joining the tree movement, here are a few benefits you should consider:

1. When native plants are propagated, they help local wildlife live and thrive by providing them with a source of food and shelter.
2. Indigenous trees perform ecological functions such as absorbing airborne pollutants and reducing soil erosion.
3. Indigenous trees can provide medicinal properties that can be of benefit to humans that use them sustainably.
4. Climate change mitigation as indigenous trees are more effective at converting carbon dioxide into oxygen, a process known as carbon sequestration.
5. Reintroducing threatened species so that future generations can also have access to them.
6. Tree planting activities help in creating awareness on importance of biodiversity.
7. Indigenous tree planting helps to re-establish the original eco-system of the region.

Seed varieties by one of the local farmers from Mambane

Local Farmers engage more on Farmer Managed Seed Systems

PELUM Eswatini, in collaboration with COSPE Eswatini and the Department of Agricultural Research and Specialist Services (DARSS) of Ministry of aged seed systems workshop for extension officers and project officers of member organizations.

The workshop focused on the importance of conserving indigenous seed including seed selection, multiplication and storage.

Participants were particularly in the aspect of ecological post-harvest management and storage of seed as this is one area where farmers find themselves resorting to chemicals.

Another important topic that was covered during the workshop was that of seed laws including the SADC and COMESA Seed Harmonization policies and how these affect small holder farmers. The facilitators also provided a session on the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) and how far the country has come in implementing article 9 on Farmers Rights.

With climate change a major problem to small holder farmers, indigenous seeds are highly recommended when it comes to surviving this hectic unpredictable weather conditions. Indigenous

seeds have been proven to be drought and climate resilient. These seeds are locally adapting to weather conditions, and can also grow without excessive water which is very good in this unpredictable weather conditions and it is easily adapting to local weather conditions. It is anticipated that these extension officers will transfer the skills and knowledge from this workshop to the over 30 000 small holder farmers that are reached by our Member Organizations combined thus pushing the agenda of seed sovereignty and preservation of traditional knowledge on seed selection, multiplication and storage as well as the practice of seed sharing.

PELUM Programs Officer conducting Covid-19 survey

How Eswatini Farmers have affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic

PELUM Eswatini in partnership with PELUM Zambia conducted a two-day survey at the Mbabane Urban Garden on the impact of Covid - 19 to food security Systems to local farmers.

The farmers expressed concern that the pandemic had affected them in terms of food production and marketing of produce. One of the key challenges they noted was that there is no easy access to seedlings in time to start planting and the availability of a market to sell their produce to make ensure household income. This was largely due to the lockdown measures that were implemented which meant that farmer's products were left in the fields with no customers to purchase.

However, on a positive note, due to this pandemic there have been a lot more people who have established backyard gardens to ensure they have food at household level and with the unemployment rate on the rise, a lot more have turned to farming as a source of income generation.

Also worth noting is that due to climate change small holder farmers have resorted to focusing more on their traditional seeds which tend to do well in spite of climate change and its effects. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about the need for households to explore options that will ensure food security since employment and income generating opportunities have dwindled.

Workshop in progress

Soil Fertility workshop at the Mbabane Urban Garden

As a network of NGOs that are working to advance food security and environmental sustainability in farming

systems, we realize that this requires an integrated soil fertility management approach that maximizes crop production while minimizing the mining of soil nutrient reserves and the degradation of the physical and chemical properties of soil that can lead to land degradation, including soil erosion.

Based on this understanding, we hosted a soil fertility training at the Mbabane Urban Garden, which was facilitated by Mr. John Weatherson from Action Four Africa who has vast experience in soil fertility and organic composting methods.

He highlighted that to improve soil fertility, plants and herbs can be quite useful. Participants were particularly interested in learning about the different plants that can be used to improve soil fertility such as pigeon peas, lab-lab and jack beans which were said to be a good source of nitrogen for our crops and vegetables we grow. He also mentioned about Lippia javanica (umsutane), a good repellent plant to insects which can be used to in organic fields.

The workshop was half theoretical with the other half being practical whereby participants assisted in the compost making process using ingredients such as egg shells, mulch, dried leaves, tea bags, coffee grounds, fresh green leaves, maize stover, manure (goat, cow, chicken).

Weatherson added that if you are intent on making good compost, the ingredients should be collected in the correct quantities before doing the layering process.

Participants were advised that the materials must be placed in layers repeatedly until the heap reaches the desired size/height and that one must remember to water the heap after each level placed on the compost until the last top layer.

Bio - Pesticides

Simple and easy bio-pesticide recipe

One of the frequent complaints we hear about practicing organic farming is that it's difficult to manage pests without the use of chemical pesticides. However, there is a home remedy that can be used to get rid of pests in your backyard garden leaving you plants healthy and toxin free. Below we share the ingredients and the method used when making the botanical spray in the comfort of your home. One can make quantities depending on the size of your backyard garden or the affected area.

Ingredients

- Garlic
- Chillies
- Lipia Javanika (Umsutane)
- Cooking Oil
- Onions
- Liquid soap
- Warm Water
- Bucket

Method

- Chop all the ingredients into small or medium pieces
- After chopping all of them put them in the bucket
- Mix all the ingredients inside the bucket and leave to ferment, the bucket tightly closed.
- After some days or week use the botanical and spray your organic vegetables, repeat this method after every week until you see the difference.

This type of spray is recommended to all vegetables and it is very organic and good for plants and not harmful to humans in any way. There are other home remedies through the experience of small holder farmers which they have tried and are very effective. PELUM Eswatini will be compiling a booklet with various integrated pest management techniques and bio-pesticide recipes in the coming weeks.