In the rural northwestern Namakwa District of South Africa’s rolling Northern Cape, the negative effects of climate change are becoming commonplace. Recent long drought spells weakened local livestock production and sales. In 2015, 80% of lambs and 10% of productive ewes died in a cold period. Climate projections indicate an increase in temperature to the already arid landscape over the next few decades that will further impact agriculture, settlements and livelihoods.

These challenges have left farming communities increasingly vulnerable to climate change, leading some to form local cooperatives that work collaboratively to promote livestock resilience and sustainable grazing methods. Enter the Biodiversity and Red Meat Cooperative (BRC).

Working in partnership with a local NGO, Gondwana Alive, BRC received a grant to introduce new climate resilient breeds of livestock in the community of Leliefontein over two years through an innovative Small Grants Facility (SGF) project funded by the Adaptation Fund and implemented by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI). Some 40 semi-indigenous sheep and nine goat rams were distributed among 36 BRC farmers in November 2016, marking a major step toward building their adaptive capabilities.

“We will now have more resilient livestock that will fetch better market prices and thereby improve our financial security and livelihoods,” said Katrina Schwartz, of BRC.

The BRC program is just one example of the unique work of the SGF, which is a US$ 2.44 million pilot project approved by the Adaptation Fund Board in October 2014 to empower rural farmers and vulnerable communities to identify and implement local level responses to climate change. As an accredited National Implementing Entity of the Adaptation Fund, SANBI is part of the Fund’s pioneering Direct Access modality – which provides developing countries the opportunity to access Fund resources and develop projects directly while building their own capacity to adapt to climate change. The Adaptation Fund also has a pioneering role in funding the SGF, which is a US$ 2.44 million pilot project approved by the Adaptation Fund Board in October 2014 to empower rural farmers and vulnerable communities to identify and implement local level responses to climate change. As an accredited National Implementing Entity of the Adaptation Fund, SANBI is part of the Fund’s pioneering Direct Access modality – which provides developing countries the opportunity to develop projects directly while building their own capacity to adapt to climate change.

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In addition to the Namakwa District, the SGF is also working with the Mopani District in Limpopo in the northeastern part of the country – another region that is especially vulnerable to climate change. Both areas are subject to warming temperatures, increasing rainfall intensity and variability, water scarcity, droughts, seasonal and climate shifts and storm-related disasters that negatively impact the health and well-being of already stressed rural and poor communities who have limited capacity to adapt.

Photo by: Thabang Phago (Conservation South Africa)

Climate smart agriculture in Mopani.

Farmers of the Biodiversity and Red Meat Cooperative (BRC) receiving new climate resilient livestock.

www.adaptation-fund.org
There are plans to ensure sustainable, well-planned, carefully monitored and scientifically sound grazing regimens that prevent degradation and enable rangelands to provide adaptation services to farmers.

— Jozua Lambert, Biodiversity and Red Meat Cooperative

By supplying small grants that deliver tangible and sustainable benefits, the SGF implements climate adaptation strategies into local practice while protecting assets, livelihoods and ecosystems from climate risks. It empowers local institutions to identify and implement adaptation responses, and share lessons learned to facilitate scaling up and replication of SGF approaches. Local communities work in partnership on the projects with community-based organizations.

Six small grants have been approved to date in the two districts to reduce climate vulnerability and increase resilience in vulnerable communities.

In addition to the BRC program, the Namakwa District has three other approved SGF programs that are being implemented to help communities adapt to temperature increases and climate change. These include an activity in partnership with the Environmental Monitoring Group to refurbish homes, install 19 water tanks, eight compost toilets, facial boards and drainage elbows to improve water security and storage in the rural Melkraal and Soebatsfontein villages; another with Save Act Trust to mobilize groups from rural communities in Nourivier, Tweerivier, Kharkams, Bergsig, Spoeigrivier and Concordia, as well as neighboring villages to establish savings methods and groups that improve financial security in response to climate impacts like flash floods and drought; and a fourth activity where vulnerable farmers of the Heiveld Cooperative designed and implemented climate-smart agriculture mechanisms and infrastructure to improve water security and supplies at the Heiveld Tea Court on Blomfontein farm, climate-proofing a system of small-scale rooibos (indigenous shrub used as tea) production.

Meanwhile in Mopani, the SGF is pursuing a project with World Vision South Africa to enhance agriculture and livelihoods, and another with Tsogang Water and Sanitation to climate-proof settlements.