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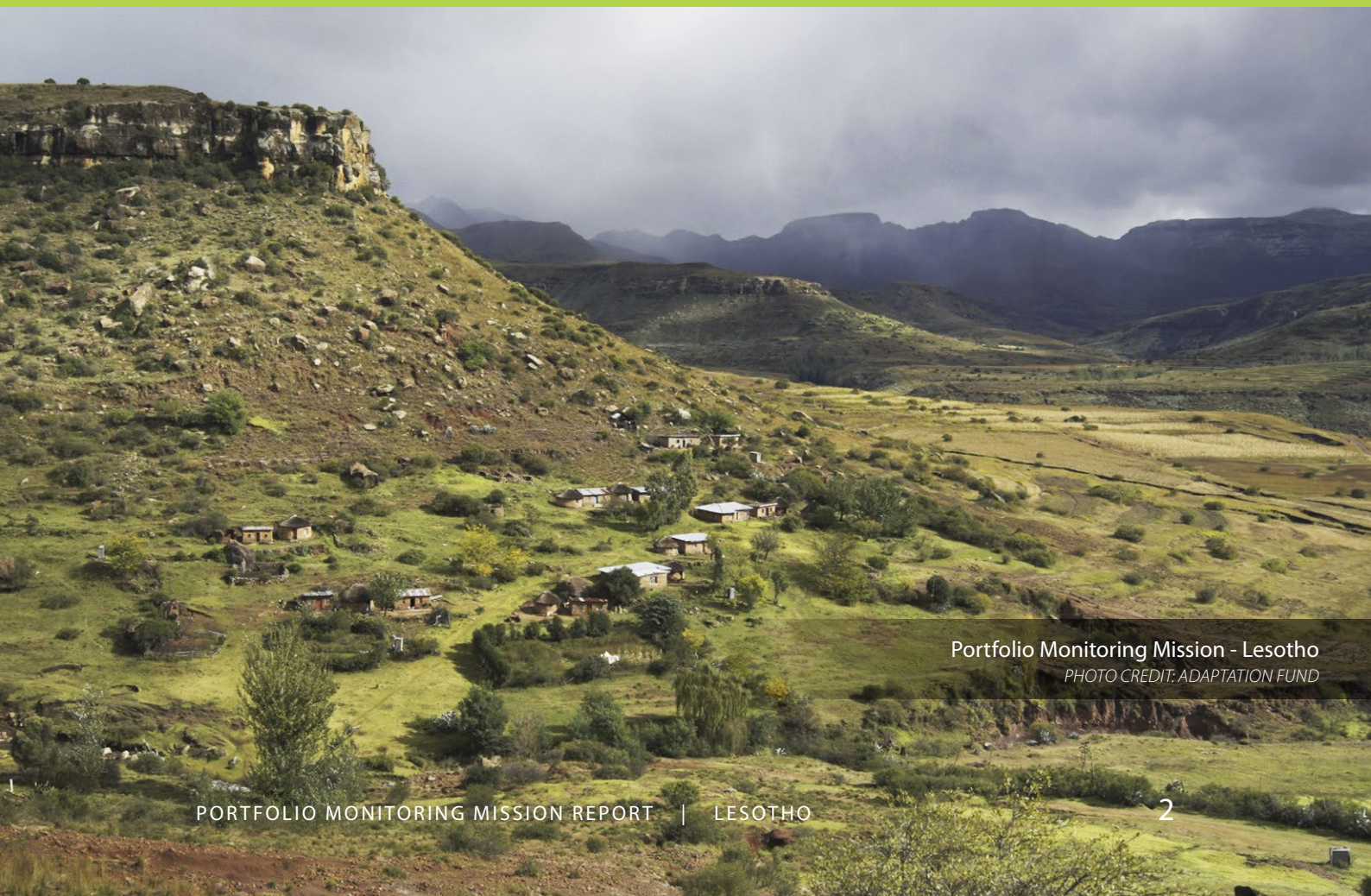
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PORTFOLIO MONITORING MISSION REPORT

IMPROVING ADAPTIVE CAPACITY OF VULNERABLE AND FOOD-INSECURE POPULATIONS IN LESOTHO

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INTRODUCTION

This portfolio monitoring mission report draws on field observations and evidence from the project completion report to assess the performance of the Adaptation Fund-supported IACoV I project in Lesotho. It reviews results across the project's three components and reflects on the factors that shaped implementation, performance, and sustainability. It also identifies lessons and forward-looking considerations to inform future programming and portfolio management.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title	**Improving adaptive capacity of vulnerable and food-insecure populations in Lesotho**
Country	**Lesotho**
Sector	**Food security**
Implementing Entity (name and type)	**UN World Food Programme**
Executing Entity(ies)	**Ministry of Energy and Meteorology,Ministry of Forestry, Range and Soil Conservation**
Funding Amount	**USD 9,999,894**
Project start date	**2020**
Project completion date	**2025**
Portfolio Monitoring Mission Dates	**3 - 8 May 2026**



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COUNTRY CONTEXT AND PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Lesotho faces a combination of climatic and structural pressures that make adaptation an urgent development priority. These vulnerabilities are not abstract. During the 2015–2016 El Niño drought, more than one-third of the population saw food security and livelihoods come under serious strain. Nearly a decade later, another severe El Niño episode in 2023–2024 prompted the declaration of a State of National Food Insecurity Disaster, with around 700,000 people expected to face hunger, widespread water shortages reported across affected areas, and national maize production falling sharply.

Recurrent droughts, erratic rainfall, land degradation, and growing climate variability continue to undermine agriculture, water security, and livelihoods, especially in rural areas where many households depend heavily on natural resources and rain-fed production. These pressures are compounded by socio-economic vulnerabilities, including poverty, food insecurity, weak access to services, gender inequality, youth unemployment, and the additional burdens faced by people living with HIV/AIDS and other vulnerable groups. In this setting, climate shocks do not act in isolation. They intensify existing fragilities and increase the risk of long-term livelihood erosion, making a well-targeted, integrated adaptation response especially important.

Against this backdrop, the project was designed to strengthen the adaptive capacity and resilience of vulnerable and food-insecure households and communities in Lesotho. It pursued three closely connected objectives. The first was to strengthen government capacity to generate and use climate information in order to anticipate shocks, support early action, and provide locally relevant climate services. The second was to raise awareness among communities, particularly women, youth, people living with HIV, and other vulnerable groups, on climate risks, adaptation options, and the practical use of climate information for planning and risk management. The third was to support community-based resilience and adaptation planning through asset creation, income diversification, and stronger market linkages.



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PROJECT PERFORMANCE

The mission found that the project "Improving adaptive capacity of vulnerable and food-insecure populations (IACoV I)" delivered results across all three components and that its overall performance depended on the way institutional strengthening, awareness and behaviour change, and community-based adaptation investments worked together. National systems for climate services and anticipatory action were strengthened, public understanding of climate risk and response options expanded, and these gains were translated into practical livelihood, ecosystem, and resilience outcomes in vulnerable communities. Taken together, the project presents a coherent adaptation model in which information, inclusion, and investment reinforced one another.

3.1 Quantitative Results

What does it mean to strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability in the face recurrent droughts, erratic rainfall, land degradation, when a funded project moves beyond ambition, plans, and institutional structures into the daily decisions of vulnerable households? Numbers do not tell the full story, but they reveal its scale, direction, and depth. In the case of IACoV I, the figures below point to more than delivery against targets. They show how climate information moved through institutions into communities, how vulnerable households were reached with practical support, and how investments in water, land, livelihoods, and inclusion began to shift what adaptation could mean in everyday life. Read together, these results provide a quantitative entry point into a larger story of systems strengthened, risks reduced, and communities better positioned to face the next shock.

Reach and Inclusion		
1.4 million Total beneficiaries reached	**350,000** Direct beneficiaries	**1,050,000** Indirect beneficiaries
60% Women among direct beneficiaries	**24%** Youth among direct beneficiaries	**135,602** People reached through awareness activities

Systems Strengthening and Early Action

1,156
Government staff trained to respond to and mitigate climate-related events

171
Stakeholder staff trained through drought Standard Operating ProcedureS (SOPs) and Anticipatory Action Plans, including 103 women

76
Automatic Weather Stations procured for climate monitoring and early warning

10 districts
Covered by climate services, climate change, and nutrition information through partnership with the Disaster Management Authority

4 km resolution
Climate dataset produced at Lesotho Meteorological Service (LMS), with historical records back to 1981

Up to 6 months
Lead time for sub-seasonal to seasonal forecasts

4 districts
Drought SOPs and Anticipatory Action Plans developed and implemented

30% → 98%
Households applying adaptation responses from baseline to completion

13
Innovative adaptation practices, tools, and technologies rolled out or scaled up

Community Assets, Livelihoods, and Enterprise

17,736
Adaptation assets created or strengthened across natural, physical, and personal capital

28,459
Households gained more secure access to livelihood assets and sustained climate-resilient livelihoods

8,568
Households increased or protected income through agriculture and related activities

Physical assets
Included chicken coops, sewing machines, shade nets, solar dryers, feeder roads, and tools

Enterprise pathways
Poultry, cottage industries, homestead gardening, and market-linked businesses were supported

Market access
Communities linked surplus produce and products to local markets, including Home-Grown School Feeding

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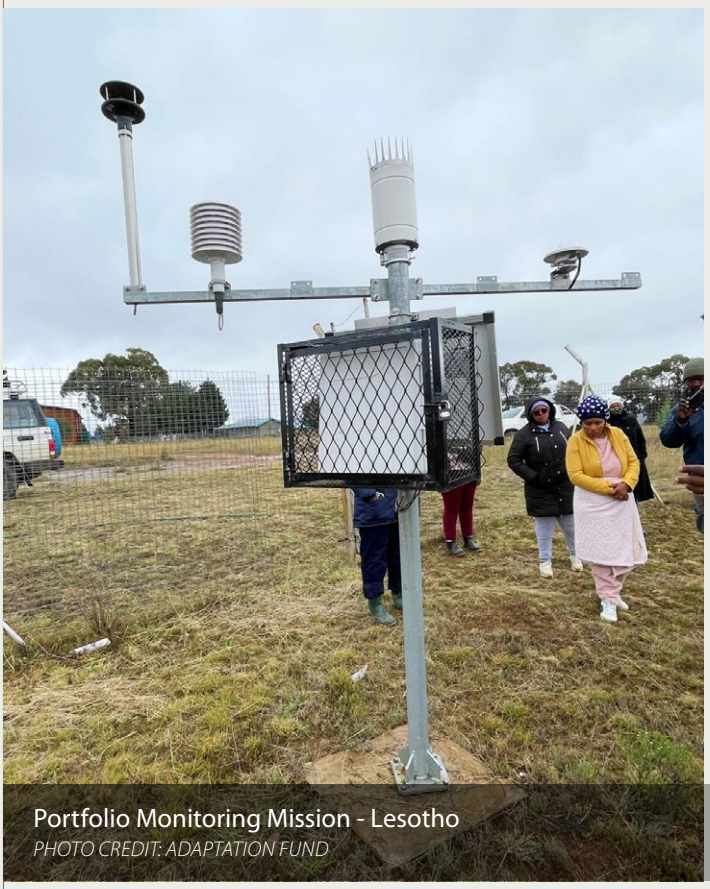
Natural Resources, Water, and Food Security

62,935 ha Land protected, rehabilitated, or planted	**62,411 ha** Rangeland protected	**290 ha** Forest land planted and protected
211 ha Agricultural land cultivated and harvested	**21 ha** Catchment area rehabilitated	**Remote sensing confirmed** Improved vegetation cover after invasive species removal
5 Water innovations supported: sand dams, boreholes, animal drinking points, spring tanks, and ponds	**86** Water tanks installed with geo-textile filtration for safe drinking water and irrigation supply	**Year-round water access** Project sites report water access for irrigation and household consumption
56% Households with acceptable Food Consumption Score at completion, up from 34% at baseline	**4 → 6** Average household dietary diversity improved from four to six food groups	**3 core facilities** Seed bank established with a bio chamber, cold room, and greenhouse

Source: Final Project Performance Report, Final Evluation Report and Project Completion Summary report, all available on AF website



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3.2 Qualitative Results

The qualitative results below reflect what was consistently observed during the field mission and what is further supported by the project completion evidence. Taken together, they show the project as a set of connected activities that produced results beyond individual interventions, with visible outcomes across institutions, communities, and livelihoods.

- **It was found that climate information had become more usable and more relevant.** Forecasting tools, early warning systems, and climate services were no longer confined to institutional levels, but were increasingly being translated into advice and information that could support decisions on farming, water, and preparedness.
- **It was also observed that awareness raising had moved beyond messaging alone.** Communities appeared more familiar with climate risks and response options, and there was a stronger sense that adaptation was something people could act on rather than simply discuss.
- **It was noted that the project's value was most visible where knowledge and assets came together.** In several places, households were using project-supported assets and training to strengthen homestead gardening, poultry activities, and cottage industries, while also linking production to local markets, including Home-Grown School Feeding.
- **The improvements in water access were especially tangible.** Water tanks, ponds, and sand dams were not described as stand-alone infrastructure, but as practical assets that were easing pressure on households, supporting irrigation, and making livelihood activities more viable across the year.

- **Food security and nutrition outcomes also appeared stronger where community assets, awareness, and local organisation reinforced one another.** The evidence suggests that improved production, better water access, and stronger local planning contributed to more secure household food access and more diverse diets.
- **It was further observed that ecosystem restoration was not treated as separate from livelihoods.** Rangeland protection, tree planting, soil and water conservation, and vegetation recovery were understood locally as part of protecting productive land and reducing future risk.
- **Another notable result was the way the project brought social inclusion into adaptation practice.** Women were highly visible across project sites, and the wider approach also reflected attention to youth, people living with HIV/AIDS, and other vulnerable groups whose risks are often overlooked in climate interventions.
- **Finally, it was found that the project left behind more than outputs.** It strengthened systems, local confidence, and institutional relationships, while also showing that adaptation can support enterprise, public awareness, environmental recovery, and stronger policy alignment at the same time.



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SUCCESS FACTORS, SUSTAINABILITY, AND LESSONS

4.1 Success Factors and Sustainability

The field mission gave a clear sense of why the project has held together well and why many of its results are likely to last. What stood out most was that the project did not rely only on external support or one-off investments. In many places, it helped put in place systems, relationships, and local structures that communities and institutions are already using to carry the work forward.

Box 1

Selected success determining factors

- Community ownership and local self-governance
- Complementarity and synergy with related initiatives
- Strong government coordination and institutional buy-in
- Women's leadership and participation
- Effective grievance redress and accountability mechanisms
- Policy alignment, national visibility of the project, and continuity through Phase II funding

Local ownership and local self-governance: One of the strongest success factors was the way the project supported communities to organise themselves around the assets and activities it introduced. Across the project sites where the missions team visited, multi-purpose cooperatives' committees, rangeland management committees, grazing association committees, and community grievances committees were not just present on paper. They were visible in practice and played an important role in strengthening accountability, resolving local issues, and protecting shared assets. This gave the project a degree of local ownership that is often missing, and it is one of the clearest reasons why many of the outcomes are likely to outlast the funding cycle.

Complementarity and synergy with related initiatives: The mission also found that the project did not operate in isolation. It built on existing community efforts and linked well with other initiatives, including the GEF-funded Reducing Vulnerability to Climate Change (RVCC) initiative, NGO-supported beekeeping activities, and UNEP-supported early warning work. This kind of complementarity matters. It allows different interventions to build on one another, reduces duplication, and helps ensure that progress made under one project is not lost when another comes to an end. In practice, it created a broader, more connected resilience effort than any single project could have delivered on its own.

Strong government coordination and institutional buy-in: Another important factor was the level of coordination seen at national level. The mission found that engagement extended well beyond the formal executing entities. Ministries and departments with roles in forestry, gender, youth, social development, water, and local government were actively engaged and able to explain clearly how the project connected with their own mandates. This was especially evident during field discussions, where representatives demonstrated both familiarity with the project and a sense of ownership over its relevance to their sectors. The example of the seed bank was particularly telling, with forestry officials describing it not as a stand-alone project asset, but as something directly supporting the ministry's longer-term objective of increasing forest cover.

Women's leadership and participation: Women's participation and leadership were equally striking across project sites. In many places, women were not only present in high numbers, but were also clearly driving implementation and showing visible ownership of project activities.

Effective grievance redress and accountability mechanisms: The grievance mechanism also appears to have been well understood by beneficiaries. During the mission, there was clear awareness of how complaints could be raised and addressed, suggesting that the mechanism had become more than a formal requirement and was functioning as a useful accountability tool.

Policy alignment, national visibility, and continuity through Phase II funding: Another factor that contributed to the project's success and is likely to support its sustainability is its strong alignment with Lesotho's national climate policy framework, particularly the priorities set out in the Nationally Determined Contribution and the National Adaptation Plan. This alignment gave the intervention a firm policy foundation and helped position it as a flagship national adaptation investment. The project attracted attention from relevant decision makers, national institutions, and the media. This visibility raised awareness of the project's objectives and results, reinforced government ownership, and strengthened its profile as a national priority rather than a stand-alone project. The approval and commencement of Phase II would further supports sustainability by creating continuity between project cycles and providing an opportunity to carry forward, deepen, and institutionalise the gains achieved under Phase I.



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4.2 Lessons Learned

The project offers a set of practical lessons that are relevant not only to this portfolio, but also to future adaptation programming more broadly. Read together, they show how adaptation investments can create value not only through climate risk reduction, but also through employment, financial resilience, social inclusion, stronger public communication, and more capable local institutions.

Box 2

6 lessons from 5 years of project implementation in Lesotho

1. Climate services are less impactful if they never reach the last mile.
2. Adaptation finance can address both climatic and non-climatic vulnerability multipliers without compromising results.
3. Cash transfers do not create dependency. They can ignite local enterprise and strengthen financial inclusion.
4. When communities own the plan, they defend the results. Savings groups, cooperatives, committees, and community by-laws helped sustain resilience long after direct project support began to taper.
5. Acting early is a smart investment decision. Anticipatory action proved more cost-effective than post-shock response across four districts, with every USD 1 invested before a shock delivering the same benefits as USD 1.28 spent afterwards.
6. Institutional ownership determines whether adaptation gains endure.

1. Climate services are only transformative when they reach the last mile through inclusive communication. The project showed that investments in forecasting systems, early warning, and climate information become far more impactful when they are translated into practical, accessible advice for communities. Through local languages, trusted technical voices, comedy-based messaging, radio, television, social media, print media, and other multi-channel approaches, climate, nutrition, and early warning messages reached diverse groups, including women, youth, farmers, urban and rural communities, and people facing overlapping vulnerabilities. The lesson is that last-mile climate services are not only about delivering information; they are about communicating in ways that people trust, understand, and can act on in real time when making decisions on farming, water, preparedness, and livelihoods.



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2. Adaptation finance is most effective when it tackles intersecting vulnerabilities from the outset. The project demonstrated that climatic risks are compounded by non-climatic stressors such as HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, poverty, weak access to services, and structural inequality. By deliberately targeting women, youth, people living with HIV/AIDS, and other vulnerable groups through awareness, asset creation, and inclusive planning, the project showed that addressing overlapping vulnerabilities does not dilute adaptation outcomes. It strengthens them.

Box 3

Through Community-Based Participatory Planning (CBPP), the project identified vulnerable social groups including smallholder farmers facing declining productivity and soil erosion; women and children burdened by domestic responsibilities and limited access to income-generating opportunities; youth experiencing high unemployment and lack of vocational training; people living with HIV/AIDS facing compounded health and nutritional challenges; and cottage industry entrepreneurs hindered by inadequate equipment and market access.

Source: project completion summary report avilable on AF website

3. Cash transfers do not always create dependency, they can ignite local enterprise and strengthen financial inclusion. One of the most forward-looking innovations documented through the mission and the completion report was the formation of voluntary savings groups using cash-based transfers. Communities used these transfers to convert short-term support into longer-term productive investment, including farm inputs, small stock, cottage enterprises, , and other market-linked business activities. This experience shows that cash transfers can do far more than meet immediate needs when they are linked to savings, group-based lending from pooled savings, and basic financial management. For future programming, the lesson is clear: adaptation finance can achieve stronger and more durable results when it helps vulnerable households absorb shocks, maintain assets, and continue investing after project resources end.

Box 4

Communities used cash-based transfers to form voluntary savings groups. These savings were used to launch income-generating activities to sustainably improve their households' economy. Farm inputs and small stock animals were bought and used for starting enterprises. The small businesses were then linked to the school feeding programme to enable surplus sales.

Source: project completion summary report avilable on AF website







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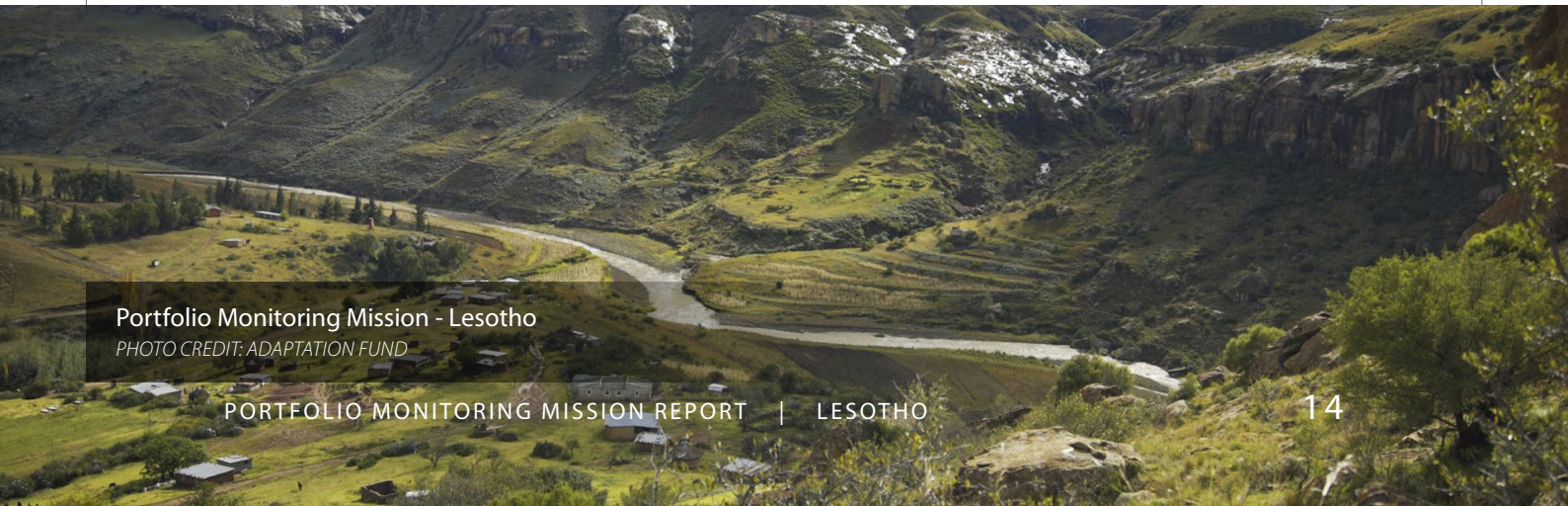
4. When communities own the plan, they protect the results. The project's experience with community-based participatory planning, savings groups, cooperatives, local committees, and community bylaws confirmed that ownership is central to sustainability. Where communities shaped interventions themselves and understood their value, they were more willing to defend assets, maintain systems, and sustain practices after direct project support declined. This lesson is especially important for long-term resilience investments in fragile rural settings.

5. Acting early is a smart investment decision. The project provided strong evidence that anticipatory action is not only operationally feasible but also financially sound. Across four districts, the anticipatory action approach proved more cost-effective than post-shock response, with every USD 1 invested before a shock delivering the same benefits as USD 1.28 spent afterwards (Project Completion Summary Report, 2026). This makes a compelling case for future adaptation finance to prioritise early action, triggers, and preparedness systems rather than waiting for losses to escalate.

6. Institutional ownership determines whether adaptation gains endure. The project invested heavily in national systems, local delivery structures, technical tools, and community institutions. The wider lesson is that these gains last only when government and local actors are able to maintain, update, use, and finance them over time. Sustainability therefore depends not only on successful delivery during implementation, but also on embedding capacities, roles, and responsibilities into existing institutions and community structures from the beginning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING AND PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT

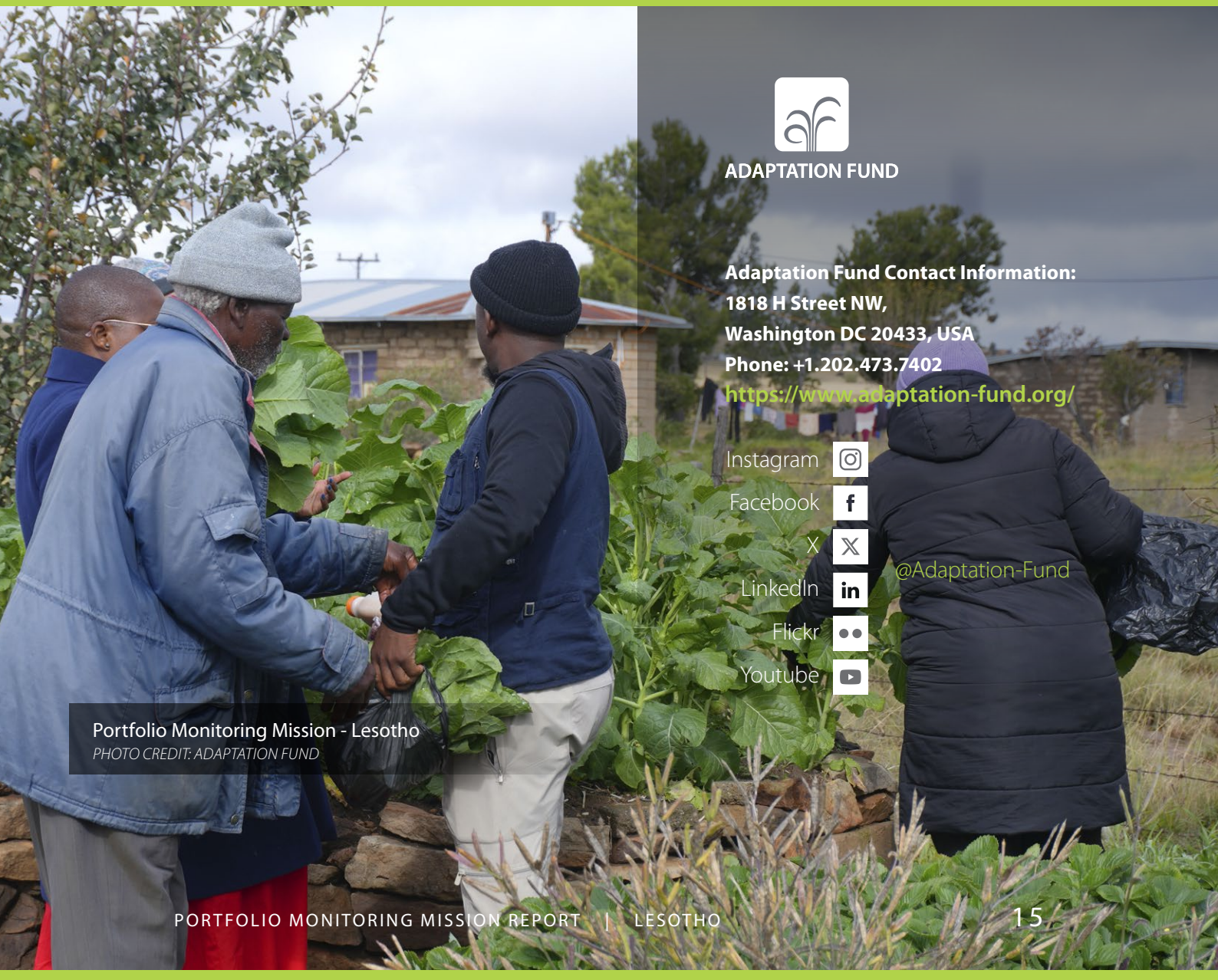
The most important implication for future programming is that IACoV I worked because it connected climate systems, awareness, and community investment within one integrated adaptation model. The task for Phase II is therefore not to reinvent the approach, but to sharpen delivery, strengthen inclusion, and secure sustainability. In practical terms, this means targeting the most vulnerable households more deliberately in order to maximise resilience gains; expanding peer learning through exchanges among nutrition clubs, poultry groups, and other community initiatives; and introducing simple self-governing by-laws or constitutions for farm schools, savings groups, and group-based programmes before implementation begins. The mission also points to the need for stronger post-harvest infrastructure, including refrigerators and dryers for cottage industrial parks, alongside better coordination with government ministries on first-aid, training, and security as rural enterprises expand. Finally, planning processes should engage men more deliberately, including herders who may initially see limited value in some interventions, so that they contribute to decision-making and to the self-policing and protection of shared community assets. Together, these adjustments would help Phase II consolidate the gains of IACoV I while improving the practical resilience value and long-term sustainability of future investments.



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CONCLUSION

This mission concludes that IACoV I has delivered a strong example of integrated adaptation programming in Lesotho. Across its three components, the project strengthened national systems for climate information and early action, expanded awareness and ownership of climate adaptation among vulnerable communities, and generated concrete livelihood, ecosystem, and resilience outcomes at local level. The final evaluation and the project completion summary reports show a project that reached large numbers of people, strengthened institutional capacity, improved adaptation uptake, increased livelihood security, rehabilitated degraded landscapes, and supported innovation with potential for replication and scale-up. For the Adaptation Fund portfolio, the key message is that adaptation delivers the greatest value when it is approached as a connected system, linking institutions, information, communication, community planning, and economic opportunity into one coherent resilience pathway.



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