APPSA Lesotho trains staff on the technical administration and customization of the new website

Agricultural Productivity Programme for Southern Africa (APPSA) is a programme supported by the World Bank and seeks to promote a regional approach to agricultural technology generation and dissemination by supporting, strengthening, and scaling up of regional centers of leadership on commodities of regional importance. Lesotho selected horticulture-based farming systems as Regional Center of Leadership (RCoL) or commodity of excellence. The proposed RCoL in Lesotho focuses on Fruit Trees, Potatoes, and Vegetable Production. Other areas of research priorities are on Legumes (Beans) and Cereals (Sorghum). APPSA in Lesotho was officially launched in 2019 and will phase out in January 2025.

Research and development work undertaken by scientists under APPSA are made known and available to project beneficiaries through various dissemination pathways. Within the organizational structures, a unit of information communication and knowledge management also known as ICKM is mandated to facilitate information sharing and development of knowledge products. ICKM in Lesotho led by the Information Technology and Knowledge Management (ITKM) engaged a local consultancy firm to develop a website for the Department of Agricultural Research (DAR) to showcase the work(s) and services of department and other projects particularly magnifying the groundwork of APPSA programme in Lesotho. The website is a dissemination platform cited inside the APPSA Communications Strategy to hold enormous promise in the generation of project visibility at regional and domestic stage.

Five officials comprising of three (3) Information technology Officers from the Ministry of Agriculture Food Security and Nutrition (MAFSN); One Information technology Officer from DAR as well as the ITKM Specialist from APPSA Project Implementation Unit (PIU) attended the website training in Maseru, Lesotho from the 10th – 11th May, 2023. The training was designed to improve the skills on the customization and administration of the DAR website to respond to growing demands from external and internal stakeholders. The first day was an orientation on the overall elements of the popular contents management system (CMS) known as WordPress. The organization adopted the open framework of templating systems to speed up the technical development processes to a go-live website that is configurable, uses plugin systems, and is interoperable with standard interfaces to other systems. The cost of acquisition and maintenance is low compared to proprietary solutions previously explored.

On the last day of training, the trainees had a rigorous hands-on practical experience to modify some features and aesthetics of the websites and the feedback was encouraging. The training come as part of the deliverables of the firm. The training will be followed by hosting of the website on the department's domain which will be found at the following address - www.agricresearch.gov.ls. The website will be hosted under the national data centers managed by the Ministry of Communication Science and Technology (MCST) of the Government of Lesotho (GoL). As such, for a proper hosting arrangement, appropriate approval protocols ought to be observed for access rights. Once all processes come together, the website will be live for access and compliment other knowledge platforms under APPSA in particular the discussion group found within the website of the Center for Coordination of Agricultural Research and Development for Southern Africa (CCARDESA) which facilitates regional collaboration of APPSA participating countries in the South African Development Community (SADC).