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## EXCLUSIVE: INSIDE US-LESOTHO HEALTH DEAL

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- No exit for Lesotho, highways out for the U.S.
- U.S. embassy defends the deal

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# EXCLUSIVE: Inside US-Lesotho health deal

- **Sends Basotho health data to Washington until 2050**
- **No exit for Lesotho, highways out for the U.S.**
- **U.S. embassy defends the deal**



## Staff Reporter

A draft copy of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Lesotho and the United States, obtained by Newsday, reveals that in exchange for critical health funding, Lesotho could be compelled to surrender its citizens' biological samples and highly sensitive national health data to the United States government for up to 25 years, binding the country until 2050.

On Wednesday last week, the United States signed separate five-year bilateral health cooperation MoUs with Uganda and Lesotho, aimed at advancing Washington's "America First Global Health Strategy" and building what it described as "resilient, self-reliant, and durable health systems" in both countries.

In Kampala, the United States and Uganda concluded a nearly US\$2.3 billion health cooperation agreement. Under that deal, Washington plans to invest up to US\$1.7 billion over five years to fight HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis (TB), malaria, and other infectious diseases, while strengthening Uganda's health system.

The Ugandan government, in turn, committed to co-invest more than US\$500 million in line with its National Development Plan IV and Vision 2040.

In Maseru, the United States and Lesotho signed a five-year health MoU valued at US\$364 million.

Through this agreement, the U.S. State Department, working with Congress, intends to provide up to US\$232 million to support Lesotho's HIV/AIDS response, strengthen the health workforce, improve data systems, and enhance disease surveillance and outbreak response.

The Government of Lesotho has committed to invest US\$132 million toward its domestic HIV/AIDS programme.

"From internet connectivity for health clinics to advanced robotics delivery of life-saving medical products, the US\$364 million MoU opens the door to innovations that mutually advance health care and the

local economy," said Thomas "Tommy" Piggott, the State Department's Deputy Spokesperson, in a statement.

However, Newsday has reviewed the 23-page draft MoU that was formally transmitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Relations on 13 November, ahead of negotiations held at Mpilo Boutique Hotel on 14 and 15 November, and its fine print raises serious red flags.

In a diplomatic note accompanying the draft, the U.S. Embassy invited Minister Lejone Mpotjoane to attend the negotiations.

"The Embassy of the United States of America presents its compliments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Relations of the Kingdom of Lesotho and has the honour to invite Honourable Minister Lejone Mpotjoane to attend Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) negotiations regarding the funding and management of Foreign Assistance for Health Programs in Lesotho," the note read.

It added that Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health Policy and Diplomacy Mamadi Yilla would lead the U.S. delegation and that a copy of the proposed MoU was enclosed for review.

Buried deep in the draft, however, are provisions that critics say point to long-term dependency, erosion of sovereignty, and what some health and governance experts are describing as a "neo-colonial pipeline" for Basotho genetic material and health intelligence.

Section 2.1.2 of the draft MoU provides for a 25-year specimen-sharing arrangement with the United States.

The United States and Lesotho plan to negotiate a specimen sharing arrangement that includes the elements set out in Appendix 4 for the purpose of providing physical specimens and related data, including genetic sequence data, of detected pathogens with epidemic potential to the United States within five days of detection. Both participants intend this specimen sharing arrangement to continue for twenty-five (25)

years," reads the document.

In practical terms, this means if a new virus, drug-resistant bacteria, or unknown fever emerges in Mohale's Hoek or Mokhotlong, samples taken from Basotho patients must be packaged and flown to U.S. laboratories within a week. Every time. For a generation.

Equally alarming is the mandated 25-year health data sharing agreement outlined in Section 2.5.2.

Under this clause, Lesotho would be required to transmit extensive national health data, including disease surveillance information and treatment outcomes, to the U.S. government for reporting to the American Congress.

"The United States and Lesotho intend to negotiate a data-sharing arrangement that includes the elements set out in Appendix 5 for the purpose of exchanging data on the long-term performance of this MOU and for accountability to the United States Congress for appropriated funds. Both participants expect this data sharing arrangement to continue for twenty-five (25) years," reads the document.

The draft offers no detailed provisions on how this data will be anonymised, stored, or protected from misuse or breaches. In an era of digital espionage and commercial data mining, critics warn that Basotho's health privacy is being bargained away.

Although framed as a technical health agreement, the MOU effectively binds not only the current government but future administrations that were not party to the negotiations, may pursue different public health strategies, and could operate under entirely different geopolitical conditions.

Newsday was unable to independently verify, at the time of publication, whether the final signed MoU materially differs from the draft circulated ahead of negotiations.

While the agreement was signed on behalf of the people of Lesotho by the Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Dr Retšelisitsoe Matlanyane, the document has not been made public, raising further concerns about transparency and accountability.

Efforts by this publication to obtain a comment from Dr Matlanyane were unsuccessful yesterday. Minister Mpotjoane, to whom the draft was transmitted and who was invited to the negotiations, was also unreachable at the time of going to print.

When contacted, the United States Embassy in Maseru said it would not comment on or release the text of what it described as private diplomatic communications.

In a written response sent via email, the embassy spokesperson said:

"We will not comment on or provide the text of private diplomatic communications, including purported drafts or the final MoU text. The agreement belongs to the Govern-

ment of Lesotho as well as the Government of the United States, and it would be inappropriate of us to publicise it without their consent."

The spokesperson added that the United States stands by the final negotiated agreement, saying it would "greatly benefit both our nations."

The embassy sought to allay concerns over data sovereignty and privacy, explaining that the United States and Lesotho have long-standing and well-established data-sharing practices that are limited to aggregated, programmatic data.

According to the embassy, such data is required for planning, monitoring progress, and reporting to the U.S. Congress on the impact of American health investments.

The spokesperson further stated that the MoU would increase the Government of Lesotho's ownership of public health data and would phase out parallel data systems currently maintained by implementing partners.

"While the details of the data-sharing agreement are pending further discussion, it is anticipated that the agreement will not create any new data-sharing requirements," the spokesperson said.

The embassy stressed that under the agreement no personally identifiable information (PII) would be shared, and that Lesotho would retain full ownership and control of all data in accordance with its laws.

"All data-sharing processes will continue to be governed by Lesotho's policies, laws, and approval mechanisms," the spokesperson emphasised.

The embassy added that the same type of aggregated, de-identified data that the Government of Lesotho has shared with key stakeholders and donors for years to demonstrate programme results would continue to be shared for a limited period, to ensure transparency and accountability for both U.S. and Lesotho taxpayer funds.

"The U.S. will continue supporting Lesotho to strengthen data systems and protect PII through secure systems and data governance," the spokesperson said. "The agreement maintains long-standing practices and helps ensure strong, secure data systems that benefit Lesotho's health sector while also ensuring the highest level of accountability for funds provided by U.S. and Lesotho taxpayers."

The spokesperson further stated that the MoU does not create new legal obligations for either government and that all programmes will continue to operate within existing national legal frameworks.

The imbalance created by the MOU deepens in Section 4, which grants the United States sweeping audit and enforcement powers over Lesotho's health system, while offering Lesotho little reciprocal leverage.

Section 4.2 states: "Lesotho acknowledges that so long as the U.S. government is providing any funding in support of activities described in this MOU, the U.S. government has a significant and material interest in ensuring the process metrics outlined in Sections 1.2 and 1.3 are accurately collected, complete and maintained."

"To this end, Lesotho commits to provide the U.S. government with any data access, on-site access, or other information needed to audit the process metrics in Sections 1.2 and 1.3 in up to five percent of randomly selected and/or specific health facilities, clinics, labs, or programs identified by the U.S. government."

This means that U.S. officials or their

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designated agents can demand access to randomly selected clinics, patient records (with data access), and operational data. Lesotho has no reciprocal right to audit U.S. processes or implementing partners in the same way.

Section 4.4 further gives the U.S. the right to scrutinise Lesotho's government spending and logistics to ensure no U.S. funds are misused and that Lesotho is meeting its co-funding promises.

It states: "Lesotho acknowledges that so long as the U.S. government is providing any funding in support of activities described in Section 2.2, 2.3, and/or 2.4 of this MOU, the U.S. government has a significant and material interest in ensuring Lesotho is making its committed co-investment."

"To this end, Lesotho commits to provide the U.S. government with any data access or information needed to audit any accounts from which or to which co-investment funding is being provided."

There is no clause allowing Lesotho to audit the administrative overhead or efficiency of the U.S. funding mechanisms.

Responding to these concerns, the U.S. Embassy in Maseru said yesterday that the agreement was co-developed through what it described as robust negotiations and reflects the priorities of both governments, including protecting citizens of both countries while strengthening Lesotho's health system through increased domestic financing.

The embassy maintained that the MoU reinforces, rather than undermines, Lesotho's sovereignty by supporting the country to assume full ownership of its health systems.

"Lesotho retains full authority over all decisions, systems, and funds," the spokesperson said.

"The United States is providing Lesotho with up to US\$232 million through this agreement, while Lesotho is also committing additional funding to its own health system. No other country provides anywhere near this level of support for saving the lives of Basotho, and this comes on top of more than US\$1 billion in U.S. health as-

sistance over the past two decades."

The embassy added that officials who negotiated the MoU were involved at every stage of the process and would also lead its implementation, with a clear understanding that every cent must be used responsibly to meet the agreement's ambitious goals.

According to the embassy, the MoU is designed to strengthen Lesotho's institutional capacity and includes performance benchmarks and audit mechanisms to ensure the proper use of both American and Lesotho taxpayer funds.

"Both governments have agreed to the creation of robust audit mechanisms to regulate implementation over the five-year period. If, beyond that, the Government of Lesotho wishes to conduct further audits, that would be welcomed," the spokesperson said.

The embassy further argued that the MoU marks a shift away from the traditional donor model, moving instead toward direct government-to-government collaboration and co-investment.

"We agree that the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho should have full knowledge and oversight of health-related activities within its borders," the spokesperson said.

The MoU provides the United States with multiple, clearly defined exit points to reduce or terminate funding, placing the risk of breach almost entirely on Lesotho.

Section 4.6 (Effect of Failure to Provide Data) states that: "Lesotho acknowledges that failure to provide the data access or information requested under 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, or 4.5 could result in changes in the planned assistance ... and/or discontinuation of this MoU by the U.S. Government."

Section 4.7 applies the same sanction to Lesotho's failure to honour the long-term specimen and data-sharing commitments under Sections 2.1.2 and 2.5.2, allowing the U.S. to alter or withdraw funding.

Section 5.1 (Co-Investment Requirements) is even more explicit:

"In the event that Lesotho does not make

the required co-investment outlined in Sections 2.2.3, 2.3.3 and/or 2.4.3 within the specified calendar year, the U.S. Government may unilaterally reduce or cease providing funding to Lesotho under this MoU in future years."

Similarly, Section 5.2 (Performance Incentives) allows the U.S. to "substantially decrease or eliminate funding" if Lesotho fails to meet agreed health outcome targets.

Together, these provisions establish a regime of strict conditionality for Lesotho. The United States, however, faces no equivalent penalties. Its central obligation, funding, is explicitly qualified rather than guaranteed.

The U.S. Embassy in Maseru said Lesotho "is free to withdraw from the agreement at any time" and that the MoU is intended to serve the interests of both countries.

"We believe it is in both our nations' interests to maintain this agreement, including U.S. foreign assistance and co-investment from the Government of Lesotho, with support and knowledge sharing to ease the transition to the Government of Lesotho maintaining full responsibility for its health-care system after 2030," the embassy said.

Also, by contrast, U.S. funding commitments are shielded by Section 6.8, which makes all assistance "subject to the availability of funds, personnel, and other resources," a clause that turns funding promises into conditional intentions rather than guarantees.

Section 6.8 states: "Participants acknowledge that this MOU is intended to exclusively cover activities funded by the U.S. Department of State and Lesotho. All activities described in and/or pursued by the participants under this MOU are subject to the availability of funds, personnel, and other resources."

This means that every dollar promised is prefaced with 'if we have it'. This standard clause gives the U.S. a built-in justification for not delivering full funding, based on its own internal budgetary processes.

Lesotho's co-investment commitments (Sections 2.2.3, 2.4.3) are framed as firm

obligations, not subject to a similar 'if our budget allows' caveat.

Section 6.9 (Legal Status), the most critical clause states: "This MOU is not an international agreement and does not give rise to legal rights and obligations under international or domestic law."

This is the cornerstone of the imbalance. The U.S.'s audit powers, termination rights, and Lesotho's compliance duties are all framed within an operational document that carries no legal weight for the U.S.

If the U.S. were to breach the MOU, for example, by not providing promised funds, Lesotho has no legal recourse in international or U.S. courts.

Conversely, the U.S. can enforce Lesotho's compliance through the very real, immediate threat of withdrawing assistance, as detailed in Sections 4.6, 4.7, and 5.1.

The enforcement mechanism is practical (aid withdrawal), not legal, and it is a tool that only one party holds.

Finally, the MOU demands that Lesotho change its domestic legal and regulatory framework to align with U.S. interests.

Section 2.7, second bullet, states: "Lesotho commits to modify its regulations and/or laws by December 31, 2026, to recognise approval from the United States Food & Drug Administration (FDA) as meeting all similarly required regulatory approvals by the Lesotho Medical Regulatory Authority (LEMERA)."

This undermines the sovereignty and purpose of LEMERA.

It turns the U.S. FDA into the de facto regulator for Lesotho for any medical products. It prioritises U.S. regulatory timelines and decisions over Lesotho's own capacity to assess what is safe and appropriate for its population.

This is a profound concession of national regulatory autonomy.

Taken together, the draft MOU reveals an agreement that offers short-term health funding at the cost of long-term sovereignty, regulatory independence, and control over biological and health data.

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# Polihali Dam rises above riverbed

## Staff Reporter

Another major milestone has been reached in the construction of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) Phase II, with the Polihali Dam achieving a critical stage in its development.

The dam has now reached a rockfill placement elevation of 1 977 metres, 65 metres above the riverbed, following an intense construction push in 2025 that saw more than six million cubic metres of rock placed by the end of November.

According to the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA), the main dam wall is currently achieving a rockfill placement rate of over 22 000 cubic metres per day, an amount equivalent to filling nine Olympic-sized swimming pools daily.

The saddle dam is also advancing steadily, with more than 154 000 cubic metres of rock already placed.

In total, approximately 14 million cubic metres of rock will be required to complete the Polihali Dam. Once finished, it will be a concrete-faced rockfill dam larger than the 145-metre-high Mohale Dam constructed during Phase I of the LHWP.

The basal rock, each layer weighing about 3.5 tonnes per square metre, is sourced from a quarry located within the dam basin itself. Once the dam is inundated, the quarry will be completely submerged.

LHDA explained that blasting operations at the quarry are conducted with precision to ensure the rock is broken into optimal sizes.

This allows excavators to load the ma-



South Africa's Melki Civils and Plant Hire and Mecsa Construction, Lesotho's Sigma Construction, and China's Kunming Engineering.

Supervision of the works is being undertaken by the Matla a Metsi Joint Venture, which includes South Africa's GIBB and Mpamot Africa, France's Tractebel Engineering SA/Coyne et Bellier, and Lesotho's LYMA Consulting Engineers.

Once Phase II is complete, the LHWP will increase the annual water transfer capacity from 780 million cubic metres to 1 270 million cubic metres, helping to meet South Africa's growing water demand.

At the same time, the increased water flows from Polihali are expected to boost hydropower generation in Lesotho, contributing to domestic electricity supply and reducing the country's reliance on imported power.

As construction gathers pace, the Polihali Dam is fast emerging as one of the most significant infrastructure projects in the region, reshaping both Lesotho's landscape and its strategic role in regional water and energy security.

# Untapped tourism in LHWP can unlock economic development - Majodina

## Seabata Mahao

The Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA) and South Africa's Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority (TCTA) have been urged to place tourism and hospitality development at the top of their priorities under the Lesotho Highlands Water Project Phase II (LHWP II), a move that could unlock significant economic potential for both nations in the Southern African region.

This call was made during a high-level site visit by Lesotho's Minister of Natural Resources, Mohlomi Moleko, and South Africa's Minister of Water and Sanitation, Pamela Majodina, who toured Katse Lodge, the Botanical Garden, Campsite and Caravan Park, as well as Katse Dam. The visit formed part of the second leg of the ministers' oversight tour of LHWP II sites.

Speaking during the visit, Minister Majodina emphasised the importance of fully utilising tourism and hospitality facilities developed under the project. She urged both LHDA and TCTA to actively promote these sites as part of sustainable economic development, noting that tourism could generate long-term benefits for local communities beyond water infrastructure.

The untapped tourism potential within LHWP represents a critical opportunity for regional economic development. According to research on tourism's impact in the Lesotho Highlands, the project has created substantial infrastructure that could support sustainable tourism growth, including improved road networks and telecommunications facilities that enhance access to remote highland areas.

The spectacular Katse Dam, Africa's second-largest double-curvature arch dam,



has already attracted thousands of visitors since its construction, demonstrating market demand for highland tourism experiences.

International Water Power magazine notes that improved roads and telecommunications put in place for Phase II significantly enhance tourism potential in Lesotho's Eastern Highlands. The region offers unique attractions including the highest botanical garden in the Southern Hemisphere at 2,230 meters altitude, home to

over 500 indigenous plant species, alongside opportunities for fly fishing, hiking, pony trekking, and cultural experiences with Basotho communities.

The Minister also called for greater transparency in infrastructure development and expenditure, particularly regarding roads and public facilities constructed as part of the project's broader social and economic obligations.

The tour, organised by LHDA, highlighted the continued cooperation and commit-

ment between the Kingdom of Lesotho and the Republic of South Africa in strengthening regional water security and advancing large-scale infrastructure development.

LHWP is a multi-billion Maloti/Rand bi-national project between the two governments, focusing on water transfer to South Africa, hydropower generation for Lesotho, and various ancillary developments aimed at improving livelihoods in project-affected areas.

LHWP II's strategic goals extend beyond water transfer and include Muela commercialisation, the proposed Oxbow Hydropower Station, tourism, fisheries, irrigation and other development initiatives.

Through partnerships with the Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation (LTDC), LHDA has supported community-based tourism training for 39 homestay operators and tour guides, as well as craft production training for 19 local participants.

Communities in the project areas have already begun to experience social benefits, including improved road networks, better access to health services and schools, and electricity supply. The project also aims to strengthen climate resilience, enhance food security, diversify the local economy, improve agricultural linkages and promote social cohesion.

With construction of the Polihali Transfer Tunnel now 48 percent complete, the ministers stressed the urgency of ensuring that social facilities and community development projects are fully operational, in line with the project's commitments to affected communities.

The visit reaffirmed the shared vision of Lesotho and South Africa to ensure that LHWP II delivers not only water and energy security, but also lasting social and economic development for the people of Lesotho.

# PAC draws line in the sand as officials run to court

## Thoboloko Ntšonyane

The Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), 'Machabane Lemphane-Letsie, has vowed that Parliament's watchdog will not retreat from its constitutional duty to demand accountability from government officials implicated in the Auditor-General's reports.

Speaking at the High Court this week, Lemphane-Letsie expressed shock that individuals who have not yet appeared before the Committee are among those seeking to interdict its work.

"There are people we have not even interrogated, yet they are part of the application to stop the Committee," she said, making it clear that the PAC will continue to ask hard questions and will not be intimidated.

Her remarks came after the High Court, sitting as the Constitutional Court, issued an order suspending the PAC's sittings, which were probing senior officials at Queen 'Mamohato Memorial Hospital (QMMH) over financial and administrative irregularities flagged in the 2022 Auditor-General's report.

The Committee's oversight unearthed what it described as a serious conflict of interest involving the wife of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Relations, 'Maitumeleng Mpokoane. PAC established that she allegedly sat on both the evaluation and procurement committees for a controversial tender linked to the private wing at QMMH.

QMMH officials, through their legal team, argued that the PAC was harassing witnesses and overstepping its mandate. In an interview with this publication, Lemphane-Letsie rejected these claims outright, insisting that the Committee does

not harass anyone but simply asks tough questions in line with its oversight role.

"This Committee will not relent," she said.

The dispute escalated after senior QMMH officials appeared before the PAC for only two days and then stopped attending sittings altogether. Their absence forced the Committee to instruct the Clerk of the National Assembly to issue warrants of arrest to compel their attendance.

Instead of complying, the officials approached the courts seeking to block the PAC from continuing its work.

The warrants were issued against QMMH Managing Director Dr Makhoase Ranyali and Human Resources Manager Thenjewi Dlangamadla, both of whom are the applicants in the case.

They have cited the Clerk of the National Assembly, the PAC, the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO), the Ministry of Health, the Auditor-General, and the Attorney-General as first to sixth respondents respectively.

In their application, the officials are seeking, among other reliefs, an order staying the execution of the warrants of arrest pending final determination of the matter. They are also asking the court to compel the respondents to submit a detailed report on the financial affairs of the Ministry of Health.

Additionally, the applicants want the Clerk of the National Assembly ordered to forward the Hansard records of PAC proceedings held on December 9 and 10 to the Registrar of the court.

PAC sittings remain suspended following the court order and the matter has been stood down to February 17, 2026, when both sides are expected to present oral arguments.



This is not the first time public servants have turned to the courts in an apparent attempt to avoid appearing before a parliamentary committee.

Officials from the Ministry of Public Works and Transport previously sought court intervention when they were questioned over alleged irregularities in the awarding of tenders for the rehabilitation of Moshoeshoe I International Airport.

More recently, the board and staff of the Lesotho Electricity Company (LEC) also approached the courts, seeking an interdict to halt proceedings before the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). LEC sought to stop the Committee from questioning its operations, a move that some observers viewed as an attempt to delay or derail the inquiry.

The application was lodged at a time when the PAC had intensified scrutiny into alleged mismanagement and fraud at the power utility. LEC had come under sustained criticism following a series of controversial and irregular transactions, raising serious concerns about its governance and future direction.

In its court papers, LEC argued that the PAC had acted ultra vires, beyond its legal powers, in

the manner in which it conducted its oversight.

However, the PAC Chairperson has drawn a firm line, making it clear that the Committee will not retreat from its mandate to ensure accountability in the use of public funds.

At the time the court order was issued, the PAC was in the midst of questioning officials from the Ministry of Health and QMMH. The hearings had begun the previous week and were scheduled to continue this week, but were suspended following the court's intervention.

During oral arguments, the applicants' lawyer, Advocate Christopher Lephuthing, submitted that his clients were being "harassed" by the PAC. He further argued that the Committee was overreaching by asking questions outside the scope of the Auditor-General's report.

Lephuthing told the court that his clients did not abscond from the proceedings but had instead requested that questions be submitted in writing, claiming the Committee was not well coordinated. He added that the questioning extended to procurement-related issues.

Representing the respondents, Advocate 'Mletsatsi Kao rejected the claims, arguing that the applicants had failed to demonstrate the urgency required for the matter to be heard on an urgent basis. She maintained that the applicants were themselves at fault for failing to honour invitations to appear before the Committee.

On the allegation that the PAC had overreached its mandate, Advocate Kao pointed out that this complaint had not been placed on record before the court.

The matter is before a full bench of the High Court comprising Chief Justice Sakoane Sakoane, Judge Fumane Khabo and Judge Moneua Kopo.

# Affected communities demand people-centred review of water treaty

## Thoboloko Ntšonyane

Communities whose livelihoods have been disrupted by the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) are demanding that the long-awaited review of the Lesotho-South Africa Treaty be driven by their interests, warning that development imposed without their meaningful participation has left many poorer, displaced, and marginalised.

The call was made during the recently concluded third Stakeholders' Conference on Human Rights and Development, convened over two days by the Seinoli Legal Centre, a local non-governmental organisation that supports communities affected by large-scale development projects to safeguard their social, economic, and environmental rights.

Affected community members said they want to be placed at the centre of the treaty review process, arguing that decisions about dams, roads, and related infrastructure have historically been made without adequately considering their lives, livelihoods, and long-term well-being.

Acting Executive Director of Seinoli Legal Centre, Advocate Lepeli Moeketsi, said the conference was held under the theme "From Advocacy to Action: Building Inclusive Pathways for Human Rights and Development."

"We gather here as part of our collective effort to support government in ensuring that its call for, and implementation of, the review of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project Treaty is firmly grounded in human rights and in the voices of affected communities," Moeketsi said.

"It is not for us to review the Treaty. That responsibility lies with the government, but communities must be heard."

Lecturer at the National University of Lesotho (NUL), Setšabi Setšabi, argued that Basotho were historically sidelined when the Treaty was negotiated and must now be given a meaningful opportunity to reshape it.

"When the Treaty was prepared and signed, South Africa had the upper hand," he said. "Basotho must now be present at all levels, from grassroots communities to professionals, so the Treaty can truly benefit the people."

The Treaty provides for review every 12 years.

It was signed in October 1986 during the military junta in Lesotho and commits both governments to the implementation and operation of the project, rolled out in phases.

While South Africa benefits from water transfers, Lesotho benefits from infrastructure such as roads and bridges, as well as hydropower generation. Article 4(1) of the Treaty states that the purpose of the project is to regulate and divert water from the Senqu/Orange River system to South Africa while utilising the delivery system to generate hydro-electric power in Lesotho.

However, speakers at the conference argued that these macro-level benefits have come at a heavy cost for local communities.

Participants emphasised that the project includes obligations relating to environmental protection, compensation, and resettlement, yet many affected households continue to struggle years after relocation. They argued that when people are excluded from decisions that directly affect their lives, development outcomes tend to be unjust and unsustainable.

Sustainability emerged as a central concern, with affected communities insisting that development must respond to their social, economic, and cultural realities if it is to endure.

Nthakeng Selinyane, one of the panellists, said it is critical to understand how communities sustained themselves before the construction of LHWP infrastructure.

"Livelihoods are not just about income," Selinyane said. "They include land, grazing, farming, fishing, everything people relied on to support their families."

Affected residents said that before construction began, they had access to fields and rangelands for grazing. Today, many have lost that land, forcing some to sell livestock to survive.

Malerato Pule, who was relocated during the construction of the Mohale Dam, said she was moved to Ha Thetsane in Maseru to make way for the project. Another affected resident, Lakabane Mokoatsi, who was relocated from Mohale and now lives in Thuathe, Berea, said several promises made to the community were never fulfilled.

"I was promised access to water, but I still have to buy it," Mokoatsi said. He added that the loss of



grazing land forced him to sell part of his livestock.

Communities also called for soil testing to be conducted before relocation and at resettlement sites to ensure they can continue farming. Where soil is unsuitable, they said alternative arrangements should be made.

Investigative journalist Billy Ntaote of the MNN Centre for Investigative Journalism highlighted the loss of fishing livelihoods. Ntaote said that before the construction of dams, communities relied on fishing for income, but strict controls have since been imposed.

"Local communities are restricted on when and how much they can fish, while big businesses are allowed to operate in dams like Katse," Ntaote said. "That disadvantages local people and weakens local economies."

Some participants proposed that land used for LHWP infrastructure should be leased to communities, allowing them to hold shares and receive monthly rentals as compensation for disrupted livelihoods.

Gender equality and social inclusion expert Dr 'Mamoeletsi Ntho challenged communities to be assertive and organised.

"Communities must form cooperatives and demand sustainable projects," she said, citing fishing and agricultural cooperatives that could benefit from shade nets, underground irrigation, and even hydroponic farming to ensure year-round food production.

Relocated residents also raised concerns about deteriorating living conditions. 'Mathabelang Pit-seng, now living in Lesia after being moved from Ha-Mohale, complained of water pollution and flooding.

"When the river overflows, it floods into our homes," she said. "We feel abandoned despite promises of better living conditions."

It also emerged during discussions that poverty and unemployment have exposed some community members to sexual exploitation.

Organisational Development Manager at Seinoli Legal Centre, Lerato Rabatho, said there is a serious lack of data on the lived realities of affected communities. She revealed that no comprehensive study was conducted even during Phase I of the project.

"When we enquired, we realised that from Phase I there was no proper study to understand the situation of the people," Rabatho said.

In August this year, the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA) announced it had disbursed more than M154 million in compensation to communities affected by Phase II construction activities.

Minister of Natural Resources Mohlomi Moloko, speaking at the conference, said he and his South African counterpart, Pemmy Majodina, have directed that all outstanding compensation claims must be settled by the end of March 2026.

The push for accountability gained further momentum following a recent Court of Appeal judgment ordering that 600 affected people be compensated. The court ruled that LHDA has a legal duty to compensate communities affected by the LHWP, a duty guaranteed by the Constitution, the LHWP Treaty, and the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority Order of 1986.

The court made it clear that this responsibility cannot be avoided or delayed by government or administrative policies.



# Newsday Business

## Reclaiming Lesotho's status as the region's food basket

### Seabata Mahao

As Lesotho prepares for crucial Public-Private Dialogue sessions, a bold vision of restoring the Mountain Kingdom's historic position as a major agricultural exporter to Southern Africa is emerging.

This after Chaba Mokuku, the Managing Director of the Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion (CAFI) Project, challenged stakeholders to think beyond incremental improvements.

In the 19th century, Lesotho was a significant agricultural exporter, supplying grain and mohair to South African mining camps, before declining agricultural output transformed the nation into a net food importer.

Now, through a landmark partnership formalised in October 2024, the government and private sector leaders are working to reverse that trajectory.

Mokuku stressed the urgent need for sustained collaboration. He challenged stakeholders to envision Lesotho reclaiming its historic position as an exporter of high-quality agricultural commodities, a goal he said is only attainable through coordinated action that links policy reform with practical, on-the-ground support.



CAFI Managing Director, Chaba Mokuku

The October 2024 Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Lesotho and the private sector establishes a predictable, institutionalised platform for dialogue designed to strengthen policy coherence, transparency, and consistency in implementing investment-climate reforms.

Under this framework, both parties have committed to driving reforms aimed at boosting trade,

attracting investment, and expanding private-sector competitiveness.

The World Bank-funded CAFI Project, which runs from July 2022 to June 2028 with \$52.5 million in financing, has established two strategic thematic working groups, one for Textile and Apparel, another for Agriculture and Food Security. Their mandate extends beyond discussion to delivering measurable reforms that influence economic outcomes across key value chains.

Speaking on behalf of the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition during a recent meeting of the Agriculture and Food Security thematic working group (TWG), Deputy Principal Secretary Johanne Masiea captured the shift in expectations.

"This TWG is not a talk space; it is an accountability mechanism. We expect concrete identification of bottlenecks, prioritization of high-impact reforms, and measurable progress that strengthens our farmers, agribusinesses, and national food security."

Representatives of the Lesotho National Farmers' Union (LENAFU) and the Lesotho National Dairy Board welcomed the formation of the working group, calling it a long-overdue platform to

amplify farmers' voices in national policy reforms. LENAFU emphasised the persistent challenges facing producers, from high input costs to limited market access.

"Our producers face persistent constraints... and only a coordinated reform process will unlock the sector's full potential. We stand ready to contribute evidence, priorities, and solutions that strengthen commercial agriculture while protecting the livelihoods of smallholder farmers."

The Dairy Board described the initiative as critical in stabilizing and modernizing the dairy value chain. "The sector needs clear regulatory alignment, upgraded production systems, and predictable standards that enable local processors and farmers to compete regionally. This TWG provides the structure required to drive those reforms."

Aligned with this vision is the Lesotho Enterprise Assistance Programme (LEAP), a matching grant scheme under the CAFI Project that continues to broaden support for enterprises by financing advanced machinery and modern production technologies. The programme aims to strengthen production capacity, enhance value-chain competitiveness, and prepare local agribusinesses for the demands of regional and global markets.

CAFI has already incubated 150 enterprises, including 92 women-led and 111 youth-led businesses, creating over 1,200 jobs. The project has also established the Lesotho Horticultural Incubation and Training Centre at Mahobong in Leribe district, scaling commercial fruit farming to meet both domestic and export market demands.

Together, the MoU, the thematic working groups, and the CAFI-supported initiatives signal a decisive shift toward building a coherent and resilient investment ecosystem. The strengthened partnership lays the groundwork for evidence-based policymaking, faster reform delivery, and increased investor confidence.

### Seabata Mahao

Telecommunications giant Econet Telecom Lesotho (ETL) has reinforced its reputation as a socially responsible corporate citizen by delivering groceries and household essentials to Kanana Old Age Home and 25 elderly residents from surrounding villages.

The handover ceremony, held at Ha Lekhobanya in Mazenod, formed part of Econet's flagship 12 Days to Christmas Campaign, an annual corporate social responsibility initiative aimed at supporting vulnerable communities across the country during the festive season.

Addressing stakeholders at the event, ETL's Chief Executive Officer Dennis Plaatjies said the campaign reflects the company's commitment to responsible leadership and inclusive development.

"Our elderly citizens deserve to feel valued, protected and celebrated. As Econet, we are committed to ensuring that no one is left behind during a season that symbolises love, compassion and generosity," Plaatjies said.

"Today's gesture, though modest, should inspire Lesotho's business sector to actively support the vulnerable and less privileged."

Plaatjies added that ETL recognises the critical role played by institutions such as old age homes in supporting disadvantaged members of society.

"As the ETL family, we are humbled to contribute to their incredible efforts in caring for our elders," he said.

The event was officiated by Minister of Youth,

Gender and Social Development Pitso Lesaoana, who praised Econet for complementing government efforts in social protection.

"ETL sets an inspiring example of how corporate partners can uplift vulnerable populations in our society. Public-private collaboration is essential in safeguarding the welfare of our senior citizens. Interventions like these strengthen our national responsibility to ensure the elderly live with dignity," Lesaoana said.

Representing Kanana Old Age Home, Sister Sylvia



Econet Telecom Lesotho at Kanana Elders Home

## Econet puts smiles on senior citizens' faces

expressed heartfelt appreciation for both the material support and the personal engagement shown by Econet staff.

"Beyond the groceries and essentials, what touched us most was the companionship and joy brought to the home today. Our residents felt seen, respected and valued. Initiatives like the 12 Days to Christmas restore our hope and remind us of the true spirit of Christmas," she said.

In addition to the donation, Econet employees assisted with light chores around the facility, helped prepare a festive meal and presented individual care packages to invited elders from nearby villages.

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# Over 1,000 eye patients waiting due to broken equipment



## Ntsoaki Motaung

A critical shortage of working medical equipment is severely impacting eye care services in Lesotho, leaving over 1,000 patients waiting for crucial surgeries at the Maseru District Hospital.

The main issue stems from a broken microscope at a key hospital, which is essential for complex procedures like cataract and glaucoma operations.

An Ophthalmologist, Dr. Wenjun Fan, speaking about the challenges, confirmed that more than 1,000 patients were booked in for eye surgery before his suspension. However, these operations are being delayed because the microscope needed for detailed procedures is broken.

Fan said the broken microscope is vital for treating conditions like cataracts and glaucoma. While simpler surgeries for conditions like squint can sometimes proceed without the microscope, the majority of complex cases are on hold.

Fan stated that they had previously informed the management about the broken

microscope lens, but it had not been fixed for six months.

The general eye situation in Lesotho is described by Fan as "very bad." Glaucoma, a condition where high eye pressure damages the optic nerve and causes blindness, is particularly prevalent.

He said, Glaucoma is common in patients over 20 years old in Lesotho. The genetic risk for glaucoma is noted to be "very high" compared to other racial groups, such as white or Asian people.

The issue of limited equipment extends beyond the main hospital. While other hospitals like Mafeteng Hospital and Motebang Hospital have microscopes, these are often not fully utilised.

He said the microscope at Motebang Hospital is only used for one week a year by an American team, and attempts by him to transfer it for more regular use were unsuccessful.

A National Eye Program, which used to bring equipment and services country-wide, has been inactive since before COVID-19.

He indicated that the inability to perform

timely operations due to poor management and broken machinery is causing immense suffering for patients across the country.

He indicated that in Lesotho, there are nurses trained on basic eye screening, while there are few doctors to perform surgeries if needed, and they are expensive, so some people cannot afford them.

The Lesotho National League of the Visually Impaired Persons (LNLVIP) has joined the outcry, expressing deep concern over the deteriorating situation. Jeremane Teele, President of the LNLVIP Executive Board, confirmed that the waiting list at the Mohloli-oa-Bophelo Training and Rehabilitation Centre already exceeds 100 people.

"Failure for early prevention, limited screening, and no access to treatment has resulted in many people being permanently blind," Teele stated. He noted that even when the government offers services, they are often so slow that by the time a patient reaches their surgery date, the damage to their eyesight has already become advanced and irreversible.

As the hospital management and the medical staff remain at odds, the LNLVIP is calling for better collaboration and urgent intervention to save the sight of hundreds of Basotho who are currently being failed by the system.

Kekeletso Motanyane, the Public Relations Officer for Maseru District Hospital, has moved to reassure the public, stating that the eye department remains operational. According to Motanyane, trained nurses are still seeing patients and managing cases within their expertise.

For cases that require a specialist, Motanyane claimed the hospital has referral measures in place. "In such cases, we refer patients to facilities where there are eye doctors, including our tertiary hospital, QMMH (Queen 'Mamohato Memorial Hospital)," she said.

# Critical blood shortage looms as festive season kicks off



## Ntsoaki Motaung

As Lesotho enters the peak of the festive season, the Ministry of Health has issued an urgent plea for blood donations, revealing that the national blood bank is currently operating on a razor-thin margin.

In a press statement released on Thursday, December 18, 2025, the ministry detailed its Festive Season Preparedness Plan, highlighting a precarious situation at the Lesotho Blood Transfusion Services (LBTS).

Currently, the LBTS holds approximately 250 units of blood. However, this supply is not yet ready for clinical use, as it is still undergoing mandatory laboratory testing. Once cleared, these units will be distributed to various hospitals across the country.

While 250 units may sound substantial, health officials warn it is nowhere near enough to cover the anticipated surge in emergencies between now and mid-January.

"Blood can never be enough, especially when in a festive season," the ministry stated. "We need more volunteers to donate so that we don't run short and everyone's life is saved."

The urgency stems from a predictable spike in trauma cases during the holidays. The Ministry's preparedness plan identifies several high-risk factors that historically drain blood supplies including, road Traffic Accidents, increased travel often leads to high-impact collisions, Trauma and Violence, a rise in alcohol-related incidents and physical altercations and Maternal Emergencies, ongoing needs for life-saving transfusions during childbirth.

To combat the expected pressure on the system, the ministry has frozen leave for all doctors and limited leave for other essential staff.

A "call-back" system is in place for laboratory and pharmacy technicians to ensure 24/7 coverage.

The government is calling on the public to adopt the mantra "Health is our shared responsibility." By donating blood now, healthy citizens can provide the literal lifeline needed for those who may face emergencies in the coming weeks.

The public is encouraged to visit their nearest blood collection point or contact the Lesotho Blood Transfusion Services to volunteer.

# Call for integration of traditional medicine into modern healthcare

## Ntsoaki Motaung

In a landmark week for global health, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Government of Lesotho have called for a "new era" of healthcare, one that combines the ancient wisdom of traditional medicine with the rigorous evidence of modern science.

From the Second Global Summit on Traditional Medicine in India to national commemorations in Lesotho, the message was clear that traditional medicine is no longer just a natural option but a vital tool for achieving health for all.

Opening the summit in New Delhi on Wednesday this week, WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus highlighted that nearly 90 percent of countries worldwide use traditional medicine (TM).

"WHO is committed to uniting the wisdom of millennia with the power of modern science," said Dr. Tedros. "By harnessing innovation from AI to genomics, we can unlock the potential of traditional medicine to deliver safer, smarter, and more sustainable health solutions."

The summit aimed to push the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025-2034, focusing on better regulation and scientific evidence.

Dr. Sylvie Briand, WHO Chief Scientist, added that traditional treatments must meet the same high standards as modern drugs. "We need to apply the same scientific rigour while respecting biodiversity and

cultural principles," she stated.

Closer to home, Lesotho celebrated African Traditional Medicine Day with a health walk and a high-level dialogue involving the Ministry of Environment, UNDP, and the National University of Lesotho (NUL).

Maphakamile Xingwana (Principal Secretary, Ministry of Environment urged Basotho to reconnect with their roots, noting how traditional remedies provided vital relief during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We must document and preserve indigenous knowledge for future generations," she said, calling for a more organised system for traditional practices.

Remaketse Sehlakaba, Member of Parliament, expressed concern that foreign medicines often overshadow local ones.

Sehlakaba urged citizens to take pride in Lesotho's own flora. "We must become better informed and appreciate the therapeutic potential of our own country's plants," he remarked.

Dr. Shyama Kuruvilla, WHO Global Tra



ditional Medicine Centre Representing the global perspective, emphasised that this movement is an evidence-based, ethical, and environmental imperative that helps both people and the planet flourish.

Despite its popularity, traditional medicine receives less than one percent of global health research funding. To bridge this gap, the WHO launched the Traditional Medicine Global Library, a digital database of 1.6 million scientific records to help scientists and doctors study ancient remedies safely.

In Lesotho, speakers emphasised that the biggest threat to this sector is over-harvesting. Without proper conservation and fair trade rules, the plants needed for these medicines could disappear.



# Opinion

## How the country moves

### Beyond rhetoric: Reclaiming parliament's purpose

Dr. Tšeliso Moroke

Parliament can no longer afford to remain silent while the country sinks deeper into economic paralysis and social disarray. With the economy trapped in a cul-de-sac, corruption rampant, the workforce politicised, and institutions hollowed out by patronage, Parliament must pronounce itself, clearly, decisively, and honestly.

*Instead, what we witness is drift.*

Power is no longer exercised for the public good, but seized for immediate, often perverse, individual interests. Governance is reduced to transactional politics valuing survival over solutions and loyalty over competence. State institutions serve as extensions of political networks rather than drivers of national development.

*At the centre of this challenge sits Parliament.*

A legislature without vision risks becoming a spectator gallery. Parliament currently lacks a clearly articulated national vision, recovery plan, and a sense of urgency proportionate to the scale of the crisis facing Basotho. While households struggle, businesses close, and unemployment deepens, Parliament continues its work as if time is abundant and consequences are optional.

There is limited evidence of a determined effort to hold the executive to account. Oversight is weak, delayed, or selective. Committees meet and write reports, but accountability is routinely postponed. Urgent national questions are buried under procedure, party lines, and political considerations.

*This failure is not only behavioural, it is structural.*

Even the noble intent of the parliamentary system faces challenges in the way the Speaker of the National Assembly is elected. The Speaker is generally chosen by the numerical dominance of the governing bloc. This process can be seen to compromise the office, placing the Speaker in a position of potential indebtedness to the same majority whose conduct they are expected to regulate.

Under such conditions, impartiality becomes difficult, if not impossible. When the referee is chosen by one team, the integrity of the match may understandably come into question. This structural challenge can erode parliamentary independence and affect public confidence in the institution's ability to act as a neutral custodian of the national interest.

*The consequences of these systemic issues are increasingly visible.*

Civil servants increasingly evade parliamentary accountability by running to the courts whenever Parliament attempts to exercise oversight. They invoke the rule of law and assert their democratic right to seek legal protection, a right that is legitimate and constitutionally guaranteed.

But the pattern is revealing. What should be exceptional has become routine. Litigation is no longer used to clarify accountability, but to delay it. Parliamentary summonses are neutralised through injunctions. Committee processes are frozen. Oversight is stalled indefinitely, while the public interest suffers in silence.

*This is where constitutional clarity becomes essential.*

Under the Constitution, Parliament is not a subordinate institution. It is a coequal arm of the state. Its oversight role is not optional, discretionary, or symbolic. It is foundational to constitutional governance. Parliament is constitutionally mandated to make laws, control public finances, and scrutinise the actions of the executive and all organs of state that utilise public resources.

To suggest that parliamentary oversight infringes on the rights of public officials is to misunderstand the Constitution itself. Accountability is not a violation of rights; it is a constitutional obligation attached to the exercise of public power. Civil servants do not operate in a vacuum. They are entrusted with public authority and public funds, and that trust carries an inherent duty to account to the people's representatives.

The courts exist to interpret the law, not to shield officials from accountability. When litigation is frequently used in ways that frustrate parliamentary oversight, it risks undermining the doctrine of separation of powers rather than protecting it. A Parliament that is unable to summon, question, or demand explanations from public officials risks losing its legislative standing.

*There is further concern regarding Parliament's own response to this erosion of its authority.*

Instead of closing ranks to defend its constitutional mandate, parliamentarians are divided on a matter central to their existence. There is little consistent, unified defence of parliamentary supremacy in oversight. Few express a collective in-

sistence that Parliament must be respected as the people's forum. Instead, hesitation, contradiction, and silence prevail.

This division is not accidental. Many in Parliament benefit from the very system that needs reform. A weak legislature aids a powerful executive, a confused Parliament shields a politicised bureaucracy, and a compromised system rewards those who avoid challenging it.

This raises a fundamental question: Does Parliament genuinely intend to transform this country and help the nation overcome its hardships, or are other priorities at play?

Or has Parliament become a comfortable holding space for political careers, funded by taxpayers who receive little in return?

Basotho pay for Parliament to legislate, to scrutinise, and to safeguard the public interest. To restore this purpose, Parliament must unify to affirm its oversight mandate, insist on impartial structures, and ensure transparent accountability. Only by implementing these clear actions can the legislature fulfil its promise and deliver the dividends of democracy, accountability, service, and progress, that have been steadily squandered.

Parliament was never meant to be silent in times of crisis. It was designed to be the people's shield, firm, fearless, and accountable to the nation rather than to political convenience. If Parliament cannot rise to this constitutional moment, history will record that when the country needed leadership most, its representatives chose comfort over courage. And the country continues to move, not forward, but nowhere at all.

## “This Christmas, let’s address youth unemployment – not just gifts, but lasting change”

Theko Tlebere

As the Christmas season approaches, this is a time of rest and celebration for many Basotho, inclusive of Lesotho's leadership, including judges, ministers, and parliamentarians. Many have already made plans on how they spent their well-deserved break. This period typically sees a slowdown in work as the country collectively reflects on the past year. However, amidst the festive atmosphere, we must not overlook a critical issue: youth unemployment. The Christmas season, which commemorates the birth of Jesus, holds profound significance for both the Christian faith and those of us living and struggling in this beautiful country. As we close the year, I intentionally decided to close it off by appealing to all leadership in Lesotho, by urging them to remain mindful of the pressing crisis of high youth unemployment.

Since I will not be able to celebrate Christmas the way I am used to this year, I decided to use my pastoral inner self to make a reflection on one of the most painful realities we are all facing in Lesotho as young people. In an era where youth unemployment is an urgent challenge, it's easy for leaders to become absorbed in the festivities and enjoy their hard-earned respite. Yet, as we celebrate the joy of Christmas, we must also contemplate the future of our nation and the responsibilities that come with leadership. The birth of Jesus symbolises hope, renewal, and the promise of better days ahead, serving as a reminder that Lesotho's future rests in the hands of its youth. Unfortunately, that future is jeopardised if we fail to confront the escalating crisis of youth unemployment.

Youth unemployment in Lesotho is a complex crisis affecting not only the young individuals directly impacted but also the nation as a whole.

With over 40% of the youth population struggling to secure meaningful employment, the repercussions are widespread. Some youth are not looking forward to the festive season as they should, because they cannot afford to buy clothes for their kids, even those who have something cannot complete the payout for a lay-bye they did two months ago. This crisis stifles economic growth, limits the potential of our young people, and fosters feelings of hopelessness and frustration. For many young Basotho, the dream of a better future seems increasingly unattainable as they encounter barriers to employment opportunities, education, and skills development.

This festive season should remind Prime Minister, Ministers, and parliamentarians of Lesotho of the country's declaration of youth unemployment as a national crisis, and rightly so. As they do braai or lie on a beach somewhere, they should not forget that our economic future hinges on our ability to create opportunities for young people. However, addressing this crisis requires more than mere words; it demands decisive action. As our leaders take a break to celebrate the holidays, we must remind them that youth unemployment cannot be postponed. This remains and continues to remain an urgent issue needing immediate and sustainable solutions.

Christmas is a time for reflection, generosity, and goodwill. It is a season that celebrates the birth of Jesus, who came to bring hope, justice, and healing to humanity's brokenness. For many, this time is marked by acts of kindness and the spirit of giving. It is also an opportunity for leaders, particularly those in positions of power, to reflect on their roles and responsibilities in society.

The story of Jesus' birth offers valuable lessons

for the leadership of Lesotho. First, it reminds us that true leadership is about serving others, especially the marginalised and those in need. Jesus, born in a humble stable, did not come from a position of privilege; his message was one of upliftment for the unfortunate and hope for the oppressed. Lesotho's leaders should draw inspiration from this message and recognise that the youth of our country, many facing unemployment and social exclusion, deserve to be uplifted, just as Jesus sought to uplift the vulnerable.

Second, the birth of Jesus represents a new beginning, an opportunity for transformation and promise. This is the kind of change that the youth of Lesotho need. The high youth unemployment rate among young people is not merely an economic issue; it is a social and moral challenge that necessitates a shift in how our leaders envision the future of this country. Jesus' birth should inspire us to believe that a new era is possible, one where the youth of Lesotho can secure employment, build careers, and contribute meaningfully to the economy.

Finally, Christmas embodies hope. Amid challenges and struggles, its message is one of optimism for a better future. This is the hope that our young people desperately require. They must believe that pathways to success and opportunities for growth exist. As leaders enjoy their holidays and take time to relax, they must remember that the nation's hope rests with the youth. If we do not act decisively to combat youth unemployment, we risk extinguishing that hope.

In many villages, Christmas fosters community gatherings for football tournaments and other recreational events. These gatherings provide not only an opportunity for enjoyment but also a

platform for engaging youth in discussions about their future. Imagine if the energy and excitement of these community events were harnessed to address youth unemployment. What if, during a football match or a village gathering, young people could access information about skills development programs, job placement initiatives, or entrepreneurial opportunities? These informal settings can serve as powerful spaces for meaningful conversations, instilling hope and igniting pathways to employment.

As our leaders visit these villages to distribute groceries or provide seasonal support, they can use these moments to engage directly with the youth. Let these tournaments serve not only as celebrations but also as connections to programs that offer real opportunities. Let leaders remind the youth that they are not forgotten, that their struggles are recognised, and that their future is a priority for those in power.

As Christmas approaches, let us celebrate the season of goodwill, hope, and renewal. However, let us also acknowledge that for the youth of Lesotho, the future is uncertain, and the burden of unemployment weighs heavily on their shoulders. As our leaders enjoy their holidays, may they be reminded that the crisis of youth unemployment cannot be ignored! Let the spirit of Christmas inspire them to take bold action in the New Year that will secure a brighter future for the youth of Lesotho.

The birth of Jesus is a message of hope for all, especially the marginalised. In this spirit, Lesotho's leaders must act. May they return from their holidays with a renewed sense of responsibility, understanding that the nation's future rests in the hands of its youth. The Future is NOW!



# Lipholo is not misguided: The Lesotho – South Africa land issue in context

*"The land is the only thing in the world worth working for, worth fighting for and worth dying for because it is the only thing in the world that lasts" – Margaret Mitchell (1900 – 1949)*

## Nkopane Mathibeli

On March 29, 2023, a relatively unknown Member of Parliament (MP) tabled a motion seeking the return of land once stolen from King Moshoeshoe I. A year and a half later, on October 24, 2024, Afrobarometer released the findings of its survey on whether Basotho want their land lost to South Africa. 71% of the participants responded in the affirmative; 61% strongly agreed. The largest portion of this land he alludes to (129,825 km<sup>2</sup>) was stolen through the Bloemfontein Convention of 1854 before being converted into a Boer republic called the Free State. The name of this Member of Parliament (MP) is Rev Dr Tsepelipholo; a leader and sole MP of the Basotho Covenant Movement (BCM).

Verbatim, the motion read: *That this Honourable House, resolves, pursuant to Section 1(2) of the Constitution, to declare the whole of the Free State, parts of the Northern Cape, parts of the Eastern Cape, parts of Mpumalanga and parts of Kwazulu Natal as comprising the territory of the Kingdom of Lesotho in line with the United Nations Resolution 1817(XVII) passed by the General Assembly at its 1196th Plenary Meeting of 18th December, 1962.*

As clarified by the last few words of the last sentence of the motion, Lipholo's role is that of a catalyst for the enforcement of this old resolution of the United Nations. It must be noted that it is his motion that got a handful of opportunistic political parties frantically pronouncing themselves on this issue, an issue that none ever mentioned anywhere at any given time as part of their political programme. In other words, their newfound interest in this issue has absolutely nothing to do with their political ingenuity, itself a very rare commodity in Lesotho political circles. Given the importance of this motion in rectifying a very serious historical injustice of land dispossession, it is important to first have an appreciation of two things about it: (a) how the United Nations General Assembly came to pass it and (b) why the resolution remains unimplemented sixty-three years later.

### The journey to UN Resolution 1817(XVII)

On December 14, 1960, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) passed Resolution 1514 (XV) titled the "Declaration of granting independence to colonial countries and peoples". To monitor its implementation, it established the Special Committee on Decolonisation eleven months later (November 27, 1961), made up of twenty-four countries. Africa was represented by five, namely, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Mali, Somaliland and the then Tanganyika. As a result of the full-blown frustration of political formations in Lesotho, Botswana and Eswatini with the seeming reluctance of the government of the United Kingdom to implement Resolution 1514 (XV), a group of five petitioners from these three countries made a total of eight presentations to the Special Committee on Decolonisation. They were led by Ntsu Mokhehle in his capacity as President of the then Basutoland Congress Party (BCP).

These presentations spanned eight meetings held in New York, Tangier, Addis Ababa and Dar es Salaam between May 11 and June 7, 1962. From Lesotho, Mokhehle was accompanied by Mr G.P. Ramoreboli. Swaziland was represented by Mr J.N. Nkuku in his capacity as President of the Swaziland Progressive Party (SPP). From Botswana, there was Mr P. Matante in his capacity as Deputy President of the Botswana Peoples Party (BPP). On December 18, 1962, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) responded by passing the Resolution that forms the backbone of MP Lipholo's motion - UN Resolution 1817(XVII). It was titled: Question of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland.

### The gist of Resolution 1817(XVII)

In line with the concerns outlined by the Mokhehle-led petitioners, this resolution outlined all conditions to be met by the then administering power (UK) for the total decolonisation of these territories. These were: (1) grant inhabitants their right to self determination; (2) ensure that elections are held based on universal suffrage; (3) set the date of independence in consultation with all political formations; (4) establish a model/mechanism backed by UN programmes and agencies to provide economic, financial and technical assistance to these territories; (5) take immediate steps to return land dispossessed in whatever form or pretext from these territories; (6) ensure that there won't be any annexation or encroach-

ment of these territories.

Due to UNGA's oversight, the government of the United Kingdom did indeed implement five of these six conditions as outlined in Resolution 1817(XVII). The most urgent and highly significant issue is that all these territories were granted their rights to self-determination and independence. Botswana was granted independence on September 30, 1966; Lesotho on October 4, 1966, and Eswatini on September 6, 1968. Since their respective independence dates, each of these three territories became beneficiaries of all sorts of UN-driven economic, financial and technical assistance gestures. Lastly, the aspiration of apartheid South Africa to incorporate each of these territories never saw the light of day. However, only one condition was never implemented, i.e. condition (5) about returning land dispossessed from these territories.

### Cause of indefinite deferment

In the case of Lesotho, two factors are seemingly considered as legitimate causes for this deferment. The first one is Resolution AHG/Res. 16(1) of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), popularly known as the Cairo Declaration of 1964. Verbatim, its gist is that the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments of the OAU *"Solemnly declares that all Member States pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence."*

The second one is that claiming such land risks provoking conflict between Lesotho and South Africa. Seemingly to avoid this, Lesotho's foreign minister (Lejone Mpotjoane) proposed an approach different from that of Dr Lipholo. For context's sake, in January 2025, Lipholo travelled to the USA to submit a petition to the United Nations after his motion came to nought in parliament. Also petitioned were the UNSC, the governments of the UK, Lesotho and South Africa. On the other hand, the alternate route proposed by Minister Mpotjoane entails consulting international political analysts.

However, given the overall perspective of academic debates/discussions/analyses over the years about relations between Lesotho and South Africa, it is easy to predict the outcome of such consultations. Generally described as a small, poor country completely surrounded by and dependent on South Africa, Lesotho is advised in flowery language to adapt to its vulnerable status

by being submissive, not assertive. History, however, proves that this has not minimised but exacerbated this vulnerability. Central to this status is not its enclave nature, as generally argued. If this were the case, San Marino, which is completely surrounded by Italy, would be facing similar vulnerabilities, but it is not.

On the contrary, the vulnerability of Lesotho is rooted in two factors. The first one is its historical and intentional economic subjugation through the dispossession of 81.1% of its land. The second one is its political class, which pursues political power as an end in itself; a parasitic class that does not have much to offer by way of development and reversing the subjugation. This explains both the government and opposition's reluctance to fully support Dr Lipholo's motion. Instead, the opposition parties hold independent positions while the government presents its cowardice as diplomacy and hides behind the now-defunct 1964 Cairo Declaration.

### What is the Cairo Declaration?

Though never revoked, is it still worthwhile to consider the Cairo Declaration? I ask because in spite of its existence, four land/border disputes involving eight African countries were successfully resolved between 1994 and 2010. Briefly, they are as follows. On February 3, 1994, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled in favour of Chad in a dispute it had with Libya regarding a 114,000 km<sup>2</sup> piece of land called the Aouzou strip. A point of reference that gave Chad its victory was a treaty signed by the two countries in 1955 called the Treaty of Friendship and Good Neighbourliness.

With no legitimate recourse, Libya was forced to withdraw from the territory. On December 13, 1999, the ICJ ruled in favour of Botswana in a dispute it had with its neighbour, Namibia, regarding a 5km<sup>2</sup> piece of land called Kasikili/Sedudu Island. On October 10, 2002, the ICJ ruled in favour of Cameroon in a dispute it had with its neighbour, Nigeria, regarding a 665 km<sup>2</sup> oil-rich piece of land called the Bakassi peninsula. Nigeria was forced to withdraw from the territory.

Lastly, on December 22, 1986, the ICJ gave a ruling that fixed the disputed border between Mali and Burkina Faso. Finality was reached in 2010. What besides cowardice prevents Lesotho/Basotho offsetting processes that lead towards closure in the pending Lesotho - South Africa land issue? Absolutely nothing.

## The most powerful people in the room don't wear VIP tags; they carry notebooks

### Thato Ramafu

There is something fundamentally broken in the way many organisations continue to treat media. In rooms where the brand's story depends on them the most, they're often the least prioritised. And yet, long after the last guest leaves and the décor is packed away, it is the media that keeps the story alive.

I have seen this from both sides. I spent over two years working directly in newsrooms, attending events where media were sometimes treated as valued partners, and other times viewed as an inconvenience. I remember the corners we were pushed into, the lack of consideration, the dismissive tone, the sense of being an afterthought. It was, frankly, disheartening. Because no matter how dazzling the guest list or impressive the venue, nothing communicates to the public as the media does.

Fast forward four years, standing firmly in my role as a Public Relations Executive, one truth has only become sharper: media is not

optional. The media is not outdated. Media is not a third wheel in the communication ecosystem. Media remains one of the most powerful, irreplaceable tools in brand positioning, and anyone working in communications must understand this with absolute clarity.

As PR professionals, information officers, corporate communicators, whatever the job title, we have a responsibility to advocate for the media. It is our duty to ensure our organisations understand that the journalists in the room are not merely attendees; they are carriers of our message to the world. They are the bridge between brand intention and public perception. And if you cannot treat the bridge with respect, how do you expect your message to safely cross over?

Your influencers, your VIPs, and your executives all matter. But the media? They should always be a priority. Because outside the walls of your event, beyond the applause and the speeches, it is the media that ensures your narrative lands where it needs to. They expand your reach, correct mis-

conceptions, contextualise your impact, and call attention to your contributions. They amplify your work long after the spotlight is switched off.

Yet one of the most common gaps I continue to observe is not only poor media handling, but a lack of understanding of who the media truly are. Knowing your media goes far beyond comparing readership numbers or assuming one outlet is "smaller" or "less influential" than another. Every publication has a unique strength, its audience, tone, credibility, or influence within specific sectors. Effective PR means matching the right message with the right outlet, not simply chasing big numbers or familiar names. A campaign aimed at shifting consumer behaviour may not require the same media mix as one focused on policy change or corporate reputation. The nuance matters. The strategy matters.

This is why media handling is not a box-ticking exercise. It is a skill. A discipline. And for those who are unsure how to navigate it, this is precisely why specialists like

myself and colleagues in the field exist. To guide, to advise, to train, and to help organisations build healthier, more effective, and more respectful relationships with the very people who hold their public narratives in their hands.

As 2025 comes to a close, I believe the industry must reflect honestly on how it treats its most essential partners. The future of communication is integrated, yes, but integrated does not mean media becomes secondary. It means the media becomes central within a broader, smarter, more intentional strategy.

For me, beyond serving clients and shaping brand stories, I stand proudly as a media advocate. Because I know, from lived experience, the power, value, and necessity of media in every story worth telling. And I will continue to push for a communication culture where media is not merely accommodated, but respected, understood, and prioritised.

It is time we do better. Our brands depend on it.

## MALUTI FRESH PRODUCE MARKET

### Vacancy

#### Farm Operator

**Maluti Fresh Produce** is a dynamic and growing agricultural enterprise based in Lesotho, dedicated to cultivating high-quality, sustainably grown fresh produce for local markets and beyond. Our commitment extends from healthy soil to healthy communities, ensuring that every product we deliver meets the highest standards of freshness and nutritional value. We pride ourselves on employing innovative farming techniques, fostering a supportive work environment, and contributing positively to the economic development of the region. As a cornerstone of agricultural advancement in Lesotho, Maluti Fresh Produce is passionate about empowering our team members, providing continuous learning opportunities, and embracing practices that protect our environment. Join us in our mission to nurture the land and feed the nation with pride and excellence.

#### Job Description

Are you an experienced and dedicated individual with a passion for agriculture and a keen eye for operational efficiency? Maluti Fresh Produce, a leading agricultural enterprise committed to sustainable farming practices and delivering high-quality produce across Lesotho, is urgently seeking a skilled Farm Operator to join our dynamic team in Maseru. This is a critical hands-on role that requires a proactive approach, technical proficiency, and a strong work ethic. As a Farm Operator, you will be instrumental in the daily activities that ensure the health and productivity of our crops, from planting to harvest. You will operate and maintain a variety of farm machinery, assist with irrigation systems, monitor crop health, and contribute to general farm maintenance. This role is ideal for someone who thrives in an outdoor environment, enjoys problem-solving, and is committed to contributing to the success of a vital agricultural operation. We are looking for someone who can hit the ground running, apply their expertise, and grow with us as we continue to expand our reach and impact within the local food system. If you are ready to make a significant contribution and are eager to work in a supportive team environment where your efforts directly impact food security and quality, we encourage you to apply today! Your

role will involve ensuring all farm operations run smoothly and efficiently, adhering to strict safety protocols and environmental guidelines, and collaborating with farm management to achieve production targets. This is more than just a job; it's an opportunity to cultivate a career in a sector that truly matters.

#### Key Responsibilities

- Operate and maintain a range of farm machinery and equipment, including tractors, cultivators, planters, sprayers, and harvesting equipment.
- Perform daily pre-operation checks, routine maintenance, and minor repairs on machinery.
- Assist with planting, cultivating, irrigating, and harvesting various crops according to established schedules and procedures.
- Monitor crop health, identify signs of disease or pest infestation, and report findings to farm management.
- Apply fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides safely and accurately under supervision.
- Participate in the installation, maintenance, and repair of irrigation systems.
- Conduct general farm duties, including fencing, weeding, land preparation, and facility upkeep.
- Adhere strictly to all health, safety, and environmental regulations and company policies.
- Maintain accurate records of daily activities, equipment usage, and crop treatments.
- Collaborate effectively with other farm staff and management to ensure efficient farm operations.

#### Required Skills

- Proven experience in operating agricultural machinery and equipment.
- Basic knowledge of crop production cycles and farming techniques.
- Ability to perform manual labor and lift heavy objects (up to 25 kg).

- Strong mechanical aptitude for equipment maintenance and troubleshooting.
- Excellent observational skills for monitoring crop health.
- Ability to work independently and as part of a team.
- Valid driver's license, preferably with experience driving farm vehicles.
- Physical stamina and ability to work outdoors in various weather conditions.
- Good communication skills and a positive attitude.

#### Preferred Qualifications

- High school diploma or equivalent.
- Certificate or vocational training in agriculture or a related field.
- Experience with specific crops cultivated by Maluti Fresh Produce (e.g., vegetables, grains).
- Knowledge of sustainable farming practices or organic agriculture.
- First Aid certification.

#### Perks & Benefits

- Competitive monthly salary.
- Opportunity for career growth and professional development.
- Training in modern agricultural techniques and equipment operation.
- Supportive and collaborative team environment.
- Contribution to local food security and community development.
- Potential for performance-based incentives.

#### How to Apply

Interested candidates are encouraged to click on the application link below to submit their resume and a brief cover letter outlining their experience and suitability for the Farm Operator role. <https://malutifreshmarket.co.ls/opportunities/>

Please highlight your experience with farm machinery and any specific agricultural skills you possess. We are reviewing applications immediately and encourage early submissions.



## Ministry of Trade, Industry & Business Development COMPETITIVENESS AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION (CAFI) PROJECT

### INVITATION FOR BIDS

#### SUPPLY, DELIVERY AND INSTALLATION OF HAIL NETTING FOR SEVEN (7) FARMS FOR LESOTHO HORTICULTURAL INCUBATION AND TRAINING CENTRE

1. The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho has received financing from the World Bank toward the cost of the Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion (CAFI) Project. The Government intends to apply part of the proceeds toward payments under the contract for the **Supply, Delivery and Installation of Hail Netting for seven (7) farms for Lesotho Horticultural Incubation and training Centre (CAFI-WB-G-06)**.

2. The Ministry of Trade, Industry & Business Development through the CAFI Project Implementing Unit now invites sealed Bids from eligible Bidders for the **Supply, Delivery and Installation of Hail Netting for seven (7) farms for Lesotho Horticultural Incubation and Training Centre**.

3. Table 1

Ref	Farms	Delivery and Installation Sites	Estimated Completion Period (Weeks)
1.	Majaheng Farm	Mapoteng Majaheng, Berea District	4-6
2.	Peka Fresh Produce	Peka, Leribe District	4-6
3.	Botle Farms	Sehlabeng sa Thuathe, Berea District	4-6
4.	Nala farmlands	Sehlabeng sa Thuathe, Berea District	4-6
5.	Healthwise Farm	Thaba Khupa, Thaba Bosiu, Maseru District	4-6
6.	Ts'akholo Farm	Ts'akholo, Mafeteng District	4-6
7.	Mountain Fruit Growers	Ha Ntsi (Nazareta), Maseru District	4-6

4. Bidding will be conducted through national competitive pro-

curement using a Request for Bids (RFB) as specified in the World Bank's "Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers" *Sixth Edition, February 2025* ("Procurement Regulations") and is open to all eligible Bidders as defined in the Procurement Regulations.

5. Interested eligible Bidders may obtain further information from *Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion (CAFI) Project Management Unit* from following email Address: [tmohejane@cafi.org.ls](mailto:tmohejane@cafi.org.ls) and copy [nieutsoa@cafi.org.ls](mailto:nieutsoa@cafi.org.ls) and [itsoinyane@cafi.org.ls](mailto:itsoinyane@cafi.org.ls) and inspect the bidding document during office hours *Procurement Unit from 09h00 to 16h00 hours* at the address given below.

6. A complete set of bidding documents in English may be purchased by interested eligible bidders upon payment of a non-refundable fee of LSL 1,000.00. The method of payment will be direct deposit to the **Nedbank Account Name is: Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion Project Maloti Account (Ministry of Trade and Industry), Account Number is: 11990167259 and Branch Name is: Maseru Branch**.

7. A mandatory site visit will be conducted on the dates below to allow suppliers to familiarize themselves with the scope of work.

Farms	Sites	Site Visit Date
Peka Fresh Produce	Peka, Leribe District	11/12/2025 at 09h00
Majaheng Farm	Mapoteng Majaheng, Berea District	11/12/2025 at 11h00
Botle Farms	Sehlabeng sa Thuathe, Berea District	11/12/2025 at 14h00
Nala farmlands	Sehlabeng sa Thuathe, Berea District	11/12/2025 at 15h00
Ts'akholo Farm	Ts'akholo, Mafeteng District	12/12/2025 at 10h00
Mountain Fruit Growers	Ha Ntsi (Nazareta), Maseru District	12/12/2025 at 12h00

Healthwise Farm	Thaba Khupa, Thaba Bosiu, Maseru District	12/12/2025 at 14h00
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8. Bids must be delivered to **Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion Project, 1st Floor 'Matanki House, Corner Balfour and Kingsway Road on or before January 15, 2026, at 10h00**. Electronic Bidding will not be permitted. Late Bids will be rejected. Bids will be publicly opened in the presence of the Bidders designated representatives and anyone who chooses to attend at the address below on **January 15, 2026, at 10h15**.

9. All Bids must be accompanied by Bid Securities as follows

Ref	Farms	Amount (LSL)
1	Majaheng Farm	10,000.00
2	Peka Fresh Produce	10,000.00
3	Botle Farms	10,000.00
4	Nala farmlands	10,000.00
5	Healthwise Farm	10,000.00
6	Ts'akholo Farm	10,000.00
7	Mountain Fruit Growers	10,000.00

10. Attention is drawn to the Procurement Regulations requiring the Borrower to disclose information on the successful bidder's beneficial ownership, as part of the Contract Award Notice, using the Beneficial Ownership Disclosure Form as included in the bidding document.

11. The Ministry of Trade, Industry & Business Development through CAFI Project reserves the right to cancel the procurement process at any stage before the bid opening, during the bidding process, or prior to awarding the contract without incurring liability or obligation to any bidder. Cancellation may occur due to changes in project requirements, budget constraints, administrative or technical challenges, irregularities, non-compliance with regulations, or if the process no longer aligns with project objectives or funding availability.

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# Arts & Entertainment

Newsday

## Has Lesotho's entertainment industry grown in 2025? A critical analysis



### Chris Theko

As 2025 draws to a close, Lesotho's entertainment industry stands at a moment of reflection. On the surface, the sector appears livelier, louder and more visible than in previous years. From music releases and packed live events to brand activations and digital content, there is no shortage of activity.

Yet the central question remains: has this activity translated into real, sustainable growth or is the industry still surviving on individual hustle rather than a supportive system?

Music continues to dominate Lesotho's entertainment landscape. In 2025, established names such as Ntate Stunna, Citizens, Sannere, Phoka Ea Boroa, Litšepe, Omali Themba, alongside dominant famo artists such as Ntate Mantša Thope Tse Khang, gospel performers such as Minister Spokes, Rorisang Motsamai and emerging hip-hop acts such as Ati Zee and Nixon Thabane, maintained a strong presence on radio, social media and live stages.

Radio stations such as Bokamoso 974, PC FM and Ultimate Radio, and new kids on the block, Mohale FM and Lekope FM, remained key platforms for promoting local music, while presenters and on-air personalities increasingly became influencers and brands themselves.

However, behind the popularity lies financial instability.

"I believe there was growth in terms of growing the business side for me as an artist, and the consensus is similar with most of my fellow artists I engage with," said one Maseru-based recording artist, Omali Themba.

"We saw people pass over 2 million streams, and that was big for local artists. I also shone my light on other people in terms of working with other upcoming artists."

The performing arts from a cultural perspective did a lot more this year. We witnessed Sothokids Culture Agency travelling abroad to Japan for a week to showcase Lesotho along with Ntate Milo, Sannere and Citizen Ls.

Sothokids also travelled to Northern and Eastern Europe, where they spent two months showcasing Lesotho culture. They would also be invited to Botswana to celebrate International Children's Day.

"On my side, growth happened so much.

I saw things happening in many ways I did not expect. These efforts, though, might be seen as small. They are actually big for our country to grow the creative industry," said Talent Manager Makhebe Seatlana.

"We had a lot of corporate involvement and investment."

While collaborations with South African artists boosted exposure for some Basotho musicians, industry insiders argue that these partnerships often benefit individuals rather than the local ecosystem. The visual arts sector recorded quiet but meaningful progress in 2025.

Pop-up exhibitions, creative markets and fashion showcases, mostly self-funded, created space for young artists to display their work. Digital platforms allowed artists to reach international audiences, but the sector remains largely unsupported.

"I think there is growth, and we are seeing a lot more appreciation from Basotho towards the creatives. Most of us are not waiting for permission anymore," said a young visual artist who exhibited work in Maseru this year at the 2nd Lesotho Arts Fair, Uncle Donze.

"We create, we sell online, we collaborate, and now we have an art gallery at Pioneer Mall, and we see the government starting to also invest in the arts sector."

Despite this, the sector's resilience points to untapped economic potential if properly supported. Live entertainment gained momentum in 2025. Music events, campus shows, corporate activations and beauty pageants attracted large audiences, reinforcing the idea that Basotho are willing to pay for entertainment when it is well-produced.

Pageantry remained particularly visible despite Miss Lesotho deciding not to host this year, rather putting all efforts and funding towards an international competition such as Miss Cosmo, which has sparked national conversation and pride, even as questions about funding and institutional support persisted.

"The appetite is there, Basotho want and have been hungry for the entertainment industry to grow. The challenge is sustainability. We plan event to event, sponsor to sponsor, instead of building long-term calendars," said events organiser, Dj Thizozo.

Thizozo's Soul, R&B and Comedy lifestyle event, which happens on a larger scale twice a year, during Easter weekend and in

yane Braai Fest. However, there's still dissatisfaction in approach.

"Entertainment is still treated as an add-on, not an investment. Yet the same artists influence youth culture more than most advertising campaigns," said a marketing professional involved in brand activations, who spoke on anonymity.

The absence of long-term corporate strategies continues to limit growth and professionalisation. Social media continued to reshape the industry in 2025. Radio personalities, content creators and entertainers used digital platforms to bypass traditional limitations and build direct audiences.

"Today, your phone can be your studio, your TV station and your marketing department. I think there is growth that is notable. We used to depend a lot on outside artists as headliners for events, but this year we started seeing our big events being headlined by local artists. But without data, structure and training, growth remains fragile," said media personality, Patrick Motšoene.

The lack of serious arts journalism and industry data makes it difficult to measure progress beyond online engagement.

### So, has the industry grown?

The consensus among industry players is clear: Lesotho's entertainment industry has grown in creativity and confidence, but not yet in structure or sustainability.

"We are no longer asking whether Basotho are talented; that debate is over. The real question is whether the country is ready to take its creatives seriously as economic contributors," said industry enthusiast, Raymond Mosoeu.

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# Morena Sway in landmark brand deal

**Chris Theko**

In a significant milestone for Africa's growing creator economy, award-winning musician Morena Sway has officially signed a brand partnership with NALAR, a new African-owned digital content platform, alongside celebrated gospel artist and preacher Apostle Praise Peterson.

The signing ceremony that took place at NALAR offices at Executive Floor in Maseru marked the official launch of NALAR's Music and Spirituality category, positioning the platform as a game-changer for African musicians, faith leaders, and content creators seeking fair monetisation and safe digital spaces.

Speaking at the event, the founder of NALAR, a former beauty queen, Miss Vodacom PC FM 2008, Miss Earth Lesotho 2011 come prominent business analyst, Rorisang Motlomeng, described the moment as more than a contract signing, it was the beginning of a new era where African creators can own their audiences, monetise sustainably, and tell their stories on their own terms.

NALAR was born out of the challenges faced by African creators on global digital platforms. While the content creation economy has transformed lives globally, many African creators, particularly in Southern Africa, have struggled to earn meaningful income due to unfavourable algorithms, geographic limitations, and low revenue shares.

"NALAR comes from the Sesotho word nala, meaning prosperity," the platform's leadership explained.

"Our vision is to build a digital ecosystem where Africans can create, educate, inspire, and earn sustainably."

Unlike traditional platforms, NALAR is

designed specifically with African creators in mind, ensuring they are not left with "thin slices of the pie" despite generating high engagement.

For Morena Sway, one of Lesotho's most respected musicians, the decision to sign with NALAR was driven by two key factors: fair monetisation and brand alignment.

"One of the biggest struggles for musicians is that we create a lot of content that ends up going to waste," he said.

"We invest heavily in our art, but monetisation remains a major challenge, especially when location limits your earning potential."

He added that NALAR's clean, values-driven approach resonated strongly with his personal brand.

"I've been intentional about building a clean brand. It's not easy to push that kind of content on platforms that aren't necessarily clean themselves. With NALAR, I know my audience is coming intentionally for my music, not just stumbling across it. That changes everything."

Morena Sway also expressed excitement about hosting concerts on the platform, making his music accessible to fans who may not be able to attend live shows physically.

"This creates opportunities for families to enjoy music from the comfort of their homes. That's powerful."

Joining Morena Sway in signing with NALAR was Apostle Praise Peterson, a veteran gospel musician and preacher with over 20 years of experience in the industry.

He described NALAR as "revolutionary," particularly for young creators and faith-based content producers.

"We are in a season where many young people want to make a living from content creation but don't know how," he



said.

"NALAR offers something rare, ownership, clarity, and direct connection with your audience."

Apostle Peterson highlighted how mainstream platforms often come with hidden restrictions that creators only discover later.

"What excites me is the ability to create content for a specific audience, people who actually want the message. I don't have to dilute the message or worry about misinterpretation."

He believes NALAR could spark a transformation similar to what has been seen in the United States, where content creation has become a full-fledged industry supporting families and communities.

How monetisation works on NALAR

NALAR's founder also unpacked the platform's monetisation model, which includes:

1. Advertising revenue sharing, where creators earn based on content performance.

2. Fan-supported premium content, allowing creators to place content

behind a paywall using a credit-based system.

3. Partnerships with telecom companies to introduce dedicated NALAR data bundles, with revenue shared directly with creators.

In addition, NALAR prides itself on being a 100% perfect safe platform, with vetted creators and clearly defined content categories, including music and spirituality.

The signing of Morena Sway and Apostle Praise Peterson is symbolic of NALAR's broader ambition, to take African talent to the world while keeping ownership within the continent.

As the ceremony concluded with the official signing of contracts, it was clear that this was not just a launch, but a statement: Africa's creators are ready to prosper on platforms built for them.

With Morena Sway's influence in contemporary music and Apostle Praise Peterson's reach in faith and gospel communities, NALAR's Music and Spirituality category launches with credibility, vision, and continental impact.

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# Kick4Life Academy honours tomorrow's stars

## Sebata Mahao

Kick4Life Academy demonstrated once again that football can be a transformative force for education and character building when it hosted its fourth annual Academy Prom, celebrating 14 student-athletes who completed their secondary education in 2025.

The event, which is a fixture on the Kick4Life calendar, brought together graduating academy participants and their families for an evening that honoured resilience, discipline and unwavering academic commitment.

The organisers recognised effort and personal growth rather than focusing solely on examination results during the prom.

The honoured graduates have been dedicated participants in the Academy's tutoring programme, skilfully balancing rigorous training schedules with intensive study sessions, a powerful testament to their determination to excel both on the pitch and in the classroom.

Academy Manager 'Mahapilo Putsoane opened the ceremony by expressing deep gratitude to parents and guardians for their steadfast support throughout the students' educational journeys.

"This achievement belongs to all of you," she said, acknowledging the collective effort behind each graduate's success.

Staff reflections followed, with contributions from football coaches, the Academics Coordinator and tu-

tors, all emphasising the critical importance of holistic development.

Character Enrichment Coach Thabo Mosebekoa particularly highlighted how strong personal values help young athletes navigate the dual pressures of sport and education, a fundamental principle of the Kick4Life Academy model.

Parents delivered emotional messages of appreciation, thanking Kick4Life for developing not only skilled players but responsible and confident young adults. Representatives from the Community Programmes and Social Enterprises departments also addressed attendees, explaining how Kick4Life's support extends far beyond football into broader life opportunities.

The evening's most inspiring moments came during graduate speeches by Mariam Monnapula and Thapelo Mahao, both of whom received special recognition for their outstanding contributions.

Monnapula described Kick4Life as "more than just a community, but a catalyst for growth," crediting the Academy's tutors, especially the Sesotho tutors, for helping her overcome academic challenges. She urged her peers to recognise the significance of their journey.

"We have made it. Let us acknowledge our hard work, our perseverance, our achievements, and most importantly, our late nights and everyday prayers," she said, before closing with a faith-filled reminder: "He who began a good work in you shall



*Kick4Life honours players on and off the pitch for their student-athletes in Lesotho with the annual Academy Prom.*

bring it to completion."

Thapelo's address captured the authentic reality of student-athlete life. "Today is not about finishing school, it is about surviving the pressure, the stress, the long nights, the training sessions, the injuries, and still showing up," he told the audience.

He described Kick4Life as "a second family" and energised fellow graduates with powerful words: "We are done with school, but we are just getting started with life and trust me, the world is not ready for what's coming next."

Each graduate received certificates of achievement recognising their successful completion of secondary education, alongside acknowledgment of their discipline, effort and personal development during their Academy tenure.

Kick4Life Country Director Motlatsi Nkhahle officially closed the event, urging graduates to remain adaptable and multi-skilled in an evolving world.

"Opportunity favours those who are prepared," he said, reinforcing the evening's guiding principle: "Luck is when opportunity meets preparedness."

Portugal. Four venues are located in the capital Rabat, with others spread across Agadir, Casablanca, Fez, Marrakech, and Tangier.

Beyond Morocco, several nations arrive in strong form. Senegal, Algeria, Egypt, and Ivory Coast all boast impressive recent records, while DR Congo have turned heads after recent victories over Cameroon and Nigeria in World Cup play-offs.

Yet AFCON's history suggests unpredictability, seven different nations have won the last eight editions.

As Africa's biggest sporting event returns, fans across the continent, including here in Lesotho, can look forward to a thrilling festive period filled with passion, drama, and the unmistakable magic of AFCON.

## AFCON kicks off in Morocco as Africa's finest gather for festive football feast



*Ivory Coast squad celebrating after their 2023 title at Africa Cup of Nations. Getty Images*

## Sebata Mahao

African football takes centre stage this Sunday as the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) bursts into life in Morocco, marking the first time the continental showpiece will be staged over the Christmas and New Year period.

The four-week tournament kicks off on Sunday, 21 December, with hosts Morocco facing Comoros at Rabat's iconic Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium at 19:00 GMT. A total of 24 teams will battle it out across nine stadiums in six Moroccan cities over 52 matches.

The group stage runs until 31 December, before the knockout rounds begin on 3 January. The final will be played at the same 69,500-capacity venue on Sunday, 18 January, when Africa will crown its new champions.

All eyes will be on the Atlas Lions, Africa's highest-ranked nation and currently 11th in the world. Morocco arrive on the back of a remarkable 18-match winning streak, a world record in international football, having scored 50 goals and conceded just four since March 2024.

However, despite their recent dominance, the North Africans have not lifted the AFCON trophy since 1976, and expectations at home will be immense. Morocco headline Group A alongside Mali, former champions Zambia, and Comoros.

The six groups promise fireworks from the outset. Record seven-time champions Egypt, led by Liverpool star Mohamed Salah, headline Group B

with South Africa, Angola, and Zimbabwe. Salah is still chasing his first AFCON title after finishing runner-up in 2017 and 2021.

Group C carries an East African flavour as Uganda and Tanzania take on continental giants Nigeria and Tunisia, while Group D sees 2021 champions Senegal lock horns with DR Congo, alongside Benin and Botswana.

Defending champions Ivory Coast face five-time winners Cameroon in a mouth-watering Group F showdown, joined by Gabon and Mozambique. Group E rounds out the field with Algeria, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, and Sudan.

The top two teams in each group, along with the four best third-placed sides, will progress to the round of 16. From there, it is straight knockout football, quarter-finals, semi-finals, a third-place playoff, and the final. Drawn matches in the knockout stages will be decided by extra time and penalties if necessary.

AFCON 2025 offers fans a festive football bonanza, with up to four matches per day during the group phase. Games will be played at 12:30, 15:00, 17:30, and 20:00 hours, ensuring wall-to-wall action through Christmas and New Year. Following the opening match on Sunday, three fixtures are lined up on Monday, 22 December, as Egypt begin their campaign against Zimbabwe, while South Africa face Angola. The knockout stage begins on Saturday, 3 January, with matches mainly kicking off at 16:00 and 19:00 GMT.

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Morocco has invested heavily in infrastructure as it prepares not only for AFCON 2025 but also for co-hosting the 2030 FIFA World Cup with Spain and

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# Heartbreak for Lishoeshoe



*Lishoeshoe squad photo*

## Seabata Mahao

Lishoeshoe's dream run at the Girls Under-17 Integrated Football Tournament ended in heartbreak, as a well-drilled Sundowns side powered to a commanding 5-0 victory to be crowned champions.

The scoreline told a harsh story, but it did little to erase the respect earned by Lesotho's young girls throughout the competition.

In recognition of their discipline and sportsmanship, Lishoeshoe were awarded the Fair Play Award, a fitting honour for a team that displayed character on and off the pitch despite facing

elite opposition.

In reaction of her team's performance, Lishoeshoe's coach Elizabeth Yelimala, struck a defiant yet hopeful tone after a demanding season across youth and senior levels.

Despite mixed results and narrow margins against strong regional opponents, Yelimala insists that Lesotho football is moving in the right direction.

"The spirit and work ethic of this team will carry us forward. We are not where we want to be yet, but the growth is clear," she said.

Yelimala recently guided the Lishoeshoe Under-17 girls at the CAF U-17 GIFT Zimbabwe 2025 tournament,

where the team earned praise for competing bravely against some of southern Africa's strongest youth sides.

A commanding 6-0 victory over Eswatini stood out as a tournament highlight, showcasing attacking flair and growing defensive organisation. Lesotho also pushed Mozambique and other group opponents, narrowly missing out on a place in the final after a late setback.

While disappointment lingered, Yelimala applauded her players' resilience and eagerness to learn.

"These matches exposed us to the intensity of continental football. The girls responded with courage and discipline,

and that experience is priceless," she said.

Earlier in the year, Lesotho's youth development programme delivered promising signs during a two-match friendly series against Botswana.

Working alongside Lire Phiri, Yelimala oversaw a draw and a victory, with goals from Nteboheng Sooane and Liteboho Sekali highlighting the team's attacking progress. Though unofficial, the fixtures proved valuable against a physically imposing opponent.

"Our players showed heart and tactical growth. These games prepare them mentally for bigger tournaments," Yelimala reflected.

At senior level, Lesotho's men endured a challenging period. The Likueuna suffered a heavy 4-0 defeat to Angola at the 2025 COSAFA Cup, although later group matches showed improved competitiveness.

In FIFA 2026 World Cup qualifiers, a 3-0 loss to South Africa served as a reminder of the gap that still exists at the highest level. The results underline the need for depth, consistency, and sustained investment in youth pathways feeding into the senior ranks.

On the home front, the conclusion of the 2024-25 Lesotho Premier League brought a bright note, with Lioli FC crowned champions once again. Their title defence reinforced the strength of domestic competition and the vital role clubs play in supplying talent to national teams.

Football administrators believe sustained club success is key to narrowing the gap between Lesotho and regional heavyweights.

Beyond the football pitch, Lesotho enjoyed a productive year across multiple sporting disciplines. The national youth delegation returned from the AUSC Region 5 Youth Games with 13 medals, shining in athletics, boxing, table tennis, and Special Olympics events. These achievements signal a broader rise in sporting potential for Yelimala.

"Confidence comes from preparation, belief and the support of our communities. We have the talent now we must convert it into consistency on the field," she said.

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