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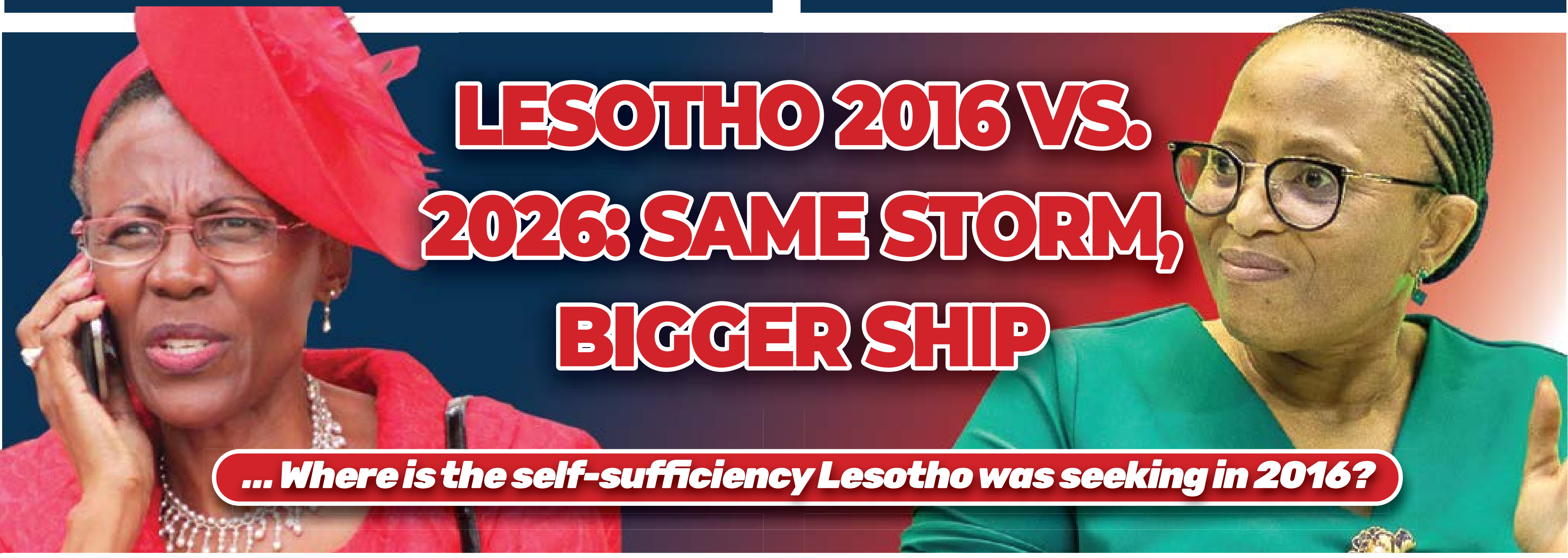
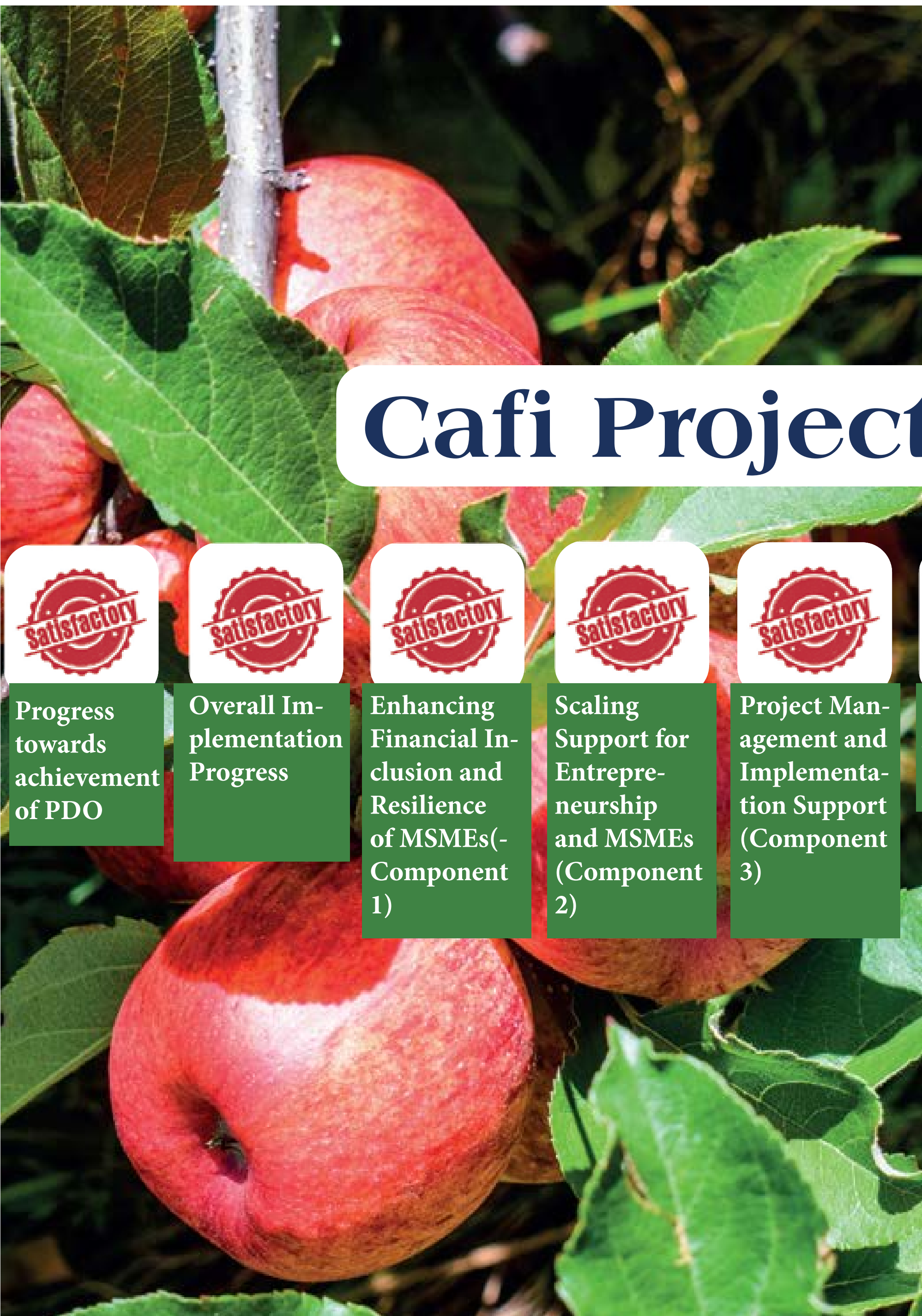


LESOTHO 2016 VS. 2026: SAME STORM, BIGGER SHIP

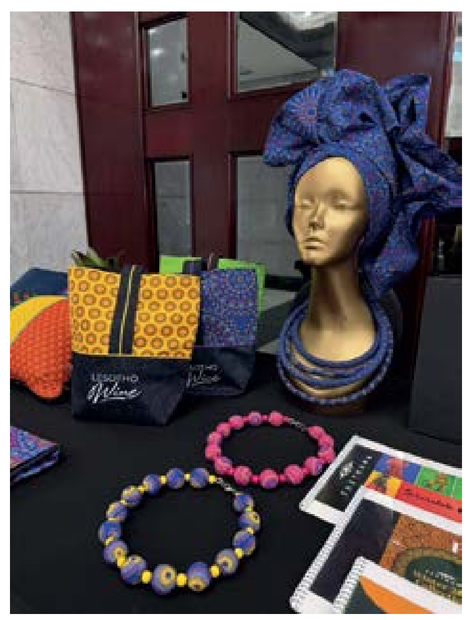
... Where is the self-sufficiency Lesotho was seeking in 2016?



Cafi Projects ratings

- Satisfactory — Progress towards achievement of PDO
- Satisfactory — Overall Implementation Progress
- Satisfactory — Enhancing Financial Inclusion and Resilience of MSMEs(-Component 1)
- Satisfactory — Scaling Support for Entrepreneurship and MSMEs (Component 2)
- Satisfactory — Project Management and Implementation Support (Component 3)
- Satisfactory — Financial Management
- Satisfactory — Procurement
- Satisfactory — Monitoring and Evaluation
- Satisfactory — Environment
- Satisfactory — Social

World Bank applauds Cafi



MASERU

US$52.5m Project value

Total Disbursement US$18.94m

US$1.9m Disbursement in Financial Year

Overall Disbursement 33%

18% Overall absorption

A MID-TERM review by the World Bank mission found that the Competitiveness and Financial Inclusion (CAFI) project has made significant progress towards achieving its objectives and its target results are on track.

The review report (Aide Memoire) rated the implementation of all CAFI components and sub-components as "Satisfactory", a testament to the project's good performance since inception in September 2022.

The mission, which conducted the review over 11 days in November last year, worked with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Business Development and engaged the CAFI's project management unit and implementing agencies to ensure the timely execution of project activities.

In addition, the World Bank team engaged the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, development partners and the private sector.

The report recommends minor adjustments to some subcomponents for efficient implementation and broader impact in line with the project's development objectives as informed by the government's economic strategy.

The "Satisfactory" ratings reflect the collective efforts of the government, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Business Development, the CAFI management and partners to efficiently implement the US$52.5 million project.

"The mission reviewed the implementation of CAFI activities and found that progress towards achievement of the PDO (Project Development Objectives) is maintained as Satisfactory," the report said.

Noting that the project target results are "mostly on track and achievable", the mission recommended adjustments to the Access to Finance and Disaster Risk Finance subcomponents effectively respond to the country's emerging needs and priorities.

The report emphasised that the project development objective "remains highly relevant given the country is facing significant challenges, including rising unemployment, vulnerability of MSMEs as reflected in the recent declaration of a national state of disaster to address economic distress caused by external shocks and declining textile exports".

It said these "conditions underscore the importance of CAFI's focus on enabling access to finance, strengthening MSME resilience, improving the enabling environment, and fostering inclusive growth".

The review revealed that at mid-term, CAFI is "on track to meet or exceed" two of its three project development objective level targets.

The two targets are the number of firms benefiting from private sector initiatives and the number of enterprises with increased revenue.

"Notably, the project is surpassing expectations for the percentage of women and youth beneficiaries, reflecting strong progress on inclusion objectives".

This, the report said, illustrates that CAFI "is having a catalytic role in unlocking the growth potential of MSMEs and transforming Lesotho's financial landscape".

It noted that while the value of financing accessed by enterprises, which is the third project development objective level target, "is less advanced, this is anticipated given the need to develop new financial products and establish dedicated funds".

"Achieving this objective relies on the timely design and launch of the seed financing facility and the establishment of the MSME resilience fund," said the report.

"These instruments are critical to unlocking access to finance and ensuring sustainability of project outcomes."

The highlights from the mid-term review indicate that the project supported 397 firms, with 54% being women-owned and 47% being youth-led. A third of these businesses reported an increase in revenue after a year of engagement with the project.

The Lesotho Entrepreneurship Hub and Seed Financing Facility (LEHSFF), which seeks to build an ecosystem for start-ups through incubation services and early-stage financing to foster innovation and growth, incubated more than 200 enterprises and strengthened 27 enterprise support organisations. A year after receiving support from the hub, enterprises recorded a 1513 year-on-year increase in full-time employment.

A total of 152 enterprises were assisted under the Lesotho Enterprises Assistance Program (LEAP), a matching grant which seeks to assist MSMEs improve productivity, adopt digital technologies and strengthen their resilience to climatic shocks.

Out of the enterprises, 86 are women-owned and 28 are owned by youth. These businesses have created 597 new jobs, and 15% of them have reported an increase in revenue year-on-year. Additionally, 44% have noted a rise in full-time employment since receiving the LEAP grant.

At least 15 percent have embedded new technologies into their business processes and operations, after technical support and training from LEAP.

The report said since the last World Bank mission, "the LEAP programme has made notable progress by revising its operational manual to improve both comprehensiveness and practical relevance".

For instance, the program has opened up its support to sectors beyond textiles and collaborated with local training providers to design and launch training programs to provide skill development.

Seven deciduous fruit farms, with a total 60 829 trees, have been established under the Lesotho Horticulture Incubation and Training Centre (LHITC), which aims to diversify Lesotho's economy by building a competitive horti-

Quote: "Since the last mission, the LEAP programme has made notable progress by revising its operational manual to improve both its comprehensiveness (i.e. opening up to more industries beyond textiles) and practical relevance (i.e. collaborating with local training providers to design and launch up to 10 training programs aimed at providing skill development).

culture sector focused on high-value deciduous fruits for export, while creating jobs and promoting climate-smart practices.

Launched in May 2023, the centre has so far trained 190 farmers, 46 of which are women and 53 are youth. Irrigation systems are currently being installed at the farms, while farmers training under the incubation program continues.

The review found the project's procurement to be satisfactory, noting that the CAFI team "is responsive and solid in handling the project procurement activities".

Financial management was also rated as "satisfactory", with an overall 33% disbursement on both lines of credit and an absorption rate of 18%".

The report said financial management arrangements "are still adequate to support the project".

"The project is in full compliance with its FM (Financial Management) covenants, acceptable IFRs (Interim unaudited Financial Reports) and Audit reports are submitted on time."

The report, however, noted that the "low disbursement and adoption rate is inherent to the nature of the project that involves reforms and regulatory framework that take time to be concluded".

This is in line with the Audited Finance statements of the year ended March 31, 2025, which gave an unqualified opinion on the CAFI financial statements.

Quotes from the Aide Memoire

- "The mission reviewed the implementation of CAFI activities and found that progress towards achievement of the PDO (Project Development Objectives) is maintained as Satisfactory."
- "Notably, the project is surpassing expectations for the percentage of women and youth beneficiaries, reflecting strong progress on inclusion objectives".
- "The project is in full compliance with its FM (Financial Management) covenants, acceptable IFRs (Interim unaudited Financial Reports) and Audit reports are submitted on time."
- "The PDO remains highly relevant given the country is facing significant challenges, including rising unemployment, vulnerability of MSMEs as reflected in the recent declaration of a national state of disaster to address economic distress caused by external shocks and declining textile exports."
- "The Government of Lesotho is demonstrating clear commitment to private sector development through proactive engagement and targeted sectoral support".

The Lesotho Enterprises Assistance Program (LEAP)

- 152 — Enterprises assisted
- 28 — Enterprises youth-owned
- 13% — Reported year-on-year increase in revenue
- 10 — Training programmes launched
- 86 — Enterprises women-owned
- 597 — New jobs created
- 46% — Reported year-on-year increase in full-time employment
- 15% — Have adopted new technologies
- LEAP's scope broadened to allow for wider range of eligible industries

Lesotho Horticulture Incubation and Training Centre

- 7 — Deciduous fruit farms established and under full incubation
- 60 829 — Trees planted
- 190 — Farmers trained
- 46 — Women farmers trained
- 53 — Youth farmers trained
- Installation of irrigation complete
- Agreements outlining roles, responsibilities and cost-sharing between CAFI and incubated farmers complete
- Draft co-financing model developed to attract non-CAFI financing

CAFI

> **LEHSFF remains a cornerstone of the CAFI project. The Hub has the potential to become a major catalyst for entrepreneurship, innovation, and inclusive economic growth in Lesotho.**

The Lesotho Entrepreneurship Hub and Seed Financing Facility

- **196** — Enterprises incubated
- **120** — Women-owned
- **139** — Youth-owned
- **27** — Enterprise support organisations capacitated through regional training
- **1513** — Year-on-year increase in full time employment
- Hub Advisory Committee established
- Incubation management software implemented
- Diaspora engagement program launched to link Basotho abroad with local entrepreneurs for investment and mentorship

Textiles Sector Support

- Textiles Thematic Working Group established to steer reforms, attract investment and address critical challenges such as inadequate supply chain finance, expansion capital and skills gaps.

- Capacity-building initiatives have trained 243 participants from Lesotho National Development Corporation (LNDC), Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation (LTDC), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Relations on economic diplomacy, investment and trade promotion.

  Pilot Supply Chain Finance solution at advanced stage.
- Regional consultant engaged to support market diversification and facilitate B2B linkages with SACU and SADC buyers.

- Roundtable discussion with textile industry to address pressing challenges and identify opportunities for CAFI to focus its support

Access to Finance

- Credit Reporting Act 2011 and associated reviewed and enhanced to align with International standards
- Credit Reporting Policy Developed
- Credit Reporting Bill of drafting instructions for updated legislation in Place
- Capacity-building initiatives
- On-site inspection of the credit bureau
- Enhancement of the CBL's supervisory capacity through targeted training and frameworks
- Support for insolvency reform
- MOU signed between CAFI and Lesotho Post Bank (LBP) to facilitate product development and capacity building initiatives
- CBL approved the Lesotho Post Bank to launch a new group-lending product
- CAFI supported the LNDC and the Ministry of Trade Industry and Business Development to conduct assessments of the two existing partial credit guarantees to improve their efficiency for uptake by MSMEs

Quote: "These efforts align with CAFI's goal to increase access to fiancé for individuals and businesses, foster financial stability and promote sustainable economic growth".

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The broken promises of a volunteer economy

Minister of Finance Dr Retšelisitsoe Matlanyane

Thoboloko Ntšonyane

Government's unfulfilled promises are beginning to constrain its room to manoeuvre, a reality that came into sharper focus on Wednesday, 18 February 2026, when the Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Dr. Retšelisitsoe Matlanyane, tabled the 2026/2027 national budget.

Speaking at a post-budget gala dinner hosted by Revenue Services Lesotho (RSL) and Nedbank Lesotho, National University of Lesotho economics lecturer Nthabiseng Koatsa said difficult economic conditions compel decisive action.

Koatsa identified two major "pandemics" confronting the country: high unemployment, particularly among youth, and an unsustainably high public sector wage bill. She argued that Lesotho has the human capacity to produce more, stressing that the country's greatest asset remains its people.

As custodian of the public purse, the finance minister is constitutionally obligated to provide a clear account of what worked and what failed in previous budgets, including the 2025/2026 budget, which concludes on 31 March 2026.

However, this year's budget was presented while Parliament had not yet received a comprehensive mid-term budget review of the previous financial year. In addition, supplementary budgets for 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 were only submitted on February 13, 2026, leaving parliament with limited time for scrutiny.

The government has previously acknowledged spending more than M3.4 billion without proper authorisation and sought retrospective parliamentary approval. Sections 112 and 114 of the Constitution require that all public expenditure from the Consolidated Fund be approved by parliament.

Delivered under the theme "Accelerating Economic Transformation; Building Resilience," the budget drew mixed reactions. While some welcomed the M1.8 billion allocated for economic growth and job creation, aimed at stimulating private sector activity, improving productivity and expanding employment opportunities, others expressed scepticism.

This was Dr. Matlanyane's fourth budget speech since Prime Minister Ntsokoane Matekane assumed office following the October 7, 2022, National Assembly elections.

Several projects announced in the 2025/2026 budget were not referenced in the current speech. These include the construction of the Lesotho National Broadcasting Services (LNBS) complex, refurbishment of Setsoto Stadium and the establishment of a national standards body.

There was also no update on plans to upgrade Setsoto Stadium to accommodate 22,000 spectators.

Similarly, no detailed progress report was provided on the Inclusive Growth Fund (IGF), which was allocated M400 million and launched on November 28, 2025, to support youth and women-led small and medium enterprises (SMMEs). Although the minister briefly mentioned the fund, she did not disclose the number of beneficiaries or outline performance targets.

During her presentation before both houses of parliament, Dr. Matlanyane stressed the need for greater discipline among civil servants in managing public resources.

"In recent years, our efforts have been directed towards restoring macro-fiscal stability, strengthening governance, and laying the foundations for inclusive, broad-based, and sustainable job-creating growth. These efforts have been deliberate and necessary," she said.

She added that stabilisation alone would not deliver prosperity. "Foundations alone do not create opportunity. A nation does not transform by simply preserving what exists; it transforms by building what does not yet exist."

In terms of allocations, the education sector received M3.5 billion, followed by health at M3.1 billion. The water sector was allocated M2.4 billion, while energy will receive M1.7 billion. The agriculture budget was reduced to M1.1 billion, down from M1.3 billion in the previous financial year.

Although the minister acknowledged that youth unemployment remains "unacceptably high," she outlined several interventions.

The government plans to increase placements in the National Volunteer Corps (NVC) by 2,500 for a 12-month period. It also intends to revive the Youth Apprenticeship and Public Works Programme, requiring that at least 40 percent of the workforce on government-funded projects, including LHWP-II secondary roads, be local youth.

However, Dr. Matlanyane did not provide an update on the previously announced target of creating 62,000 jobs, nor did she explain the challenges encountered in pursuing that goal. Earlier this month, Prime Minister Matekane told tertiary students that job creation remains a significant challenge and that government cannot employ everyone.

While M124 million has been allocated for youth empowerment and development initiatives, no details were provided on beneficiary selection criteria or measurable targets.

On economic performance, the minister reported that the economy grew by 4.2 percent in 2024/2025, largely driven by construction activity under the Lesotho Highlands Water Project Phase II, which rose by 6.3 percent. The textile industry grew by 3.2 percent, recovering from a contraction of -11.1 percent the previous year, as firms fulfilled orders despite uncertainty surrounding the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

However, growth slowed to 1.4 percent in 2025/2026 due to external pressures, including higher export tariffs and declining global diamond prices.

The slowdown affected both the textile and mining sectors, resulting in reduced orders, layoffs and operational adjustments. Despite these challenges, inflation declined to 4.3 percent in 2025 and is projected to stabilise between 4.5 and 4.7 percent in the medium term, supported by lower food and fuel prices.

Nonetheless, risks remain, particularly from exchange rate volatility and disruptions in global trade.

Looking ahead, economic growth is projected at 1.5 percent in 2027/2028 and 1.6 percent in 2028/2029, signalling a modest and gradual recovery trajectory.

Are fresh solutions in sight?

While the minister emphasised the importance of "preventative" parliamentary oversight and stronger engagement between parliament and the executive, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Chairperson 'Machabane Lemphane-Letsie challenged that assertion.

She argued that there is little evidence of improved accountability, pointing to ongoing legal disputes involving government and public servants.

Describing the budget as ambitious but lacking commitment, Lemphane-Letsie questioned whether the stated goals would translate into action.

"From the statement, I do not see clear indications that what the minister says will hold true. The minister repeatedly mentioned the need for discipline in spending," she said. "But what exactly is discipline, and how will the minister ensure that public funds are used responsibly?"

Concerns over fiscal discipline

Although the government has outlined plans to stimulate economic growth and improve livelihoods, critics argue that implementation remains the weak link. Many previously announced initiatives have either stalled or failed to materialise.

For the 2026/2027 financial year, total expenditure is projected at M30.97 billion, representing 67.3 percent of GDP. Recurrent expenditure accounts for M21.94 billion (47.4 percent of GDP), while capital expenditure stands at M9.03 billion (19.7 percent of GDP), signalling a continued emphasis on infrastructure development.

In the medium term, revenue is expected to stabilise at 67.8 percent of GDP in 2027/2028 and 69 percent in 2028/2029. Expenditure is projected to decline to 67.7

Opposition Leader Hon Mathibeli Mokhothu

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percent and 62 percent of GDP respectively, resulting in anticipated fiscal surpluses of 2.9 percent and 7 percent of GDP.

Opposition leader Mathibeli Mokhothu criticised the government for what he described as weak fiscal discipline. He argued that a credible budget must be evidence-based and responsive to the challenges faced by ordinary Basotho.

However, he welcomed the allocation of M6.5 billion for infrastructure projects, noting that electricity, water connections and road construction are essential for improving community livelihoods.

Mokhothu further contended that parliament has not adequately scrutinised previous budgets, raising concerns about accountability.

Basotho Action Party (BAP) leader and proportional representation member Prof. Nqosa Mahao labelled the document a "campaign budget," citing the increase in capital allocations across constituencies.

He also criticised the reduction in the agriculture budget, arguing that previous increases had not translated into improved production levels, as reflected in Bureau of Statistics data. According to Mahao, the budget does not sufficiently address poverty.

"If you do not assign a number to the allocation, it becomes difficult to measure impact. If you cannot count it, you cannot manage it," he said.


Hon 'Machabana Lemphane Letsie - Picture Courtesy Mejametalana Newsroom

Government's position

Defending the budget, Dr. Matlanyane said the country is entering a new phase of economic transformation requiring clarity, determination and structural reform.

"We are entering a new phase in our journey to transform our economy, one that requires clarity, determination and acceleration through structural reforms and productive expansion," she said, adding that the process must prioritise the needs and ambitions of the Basotho people.

She described the budget as more than an annual financial plan.

"The time has come for us to move decisively from recovery to progress, from dependence to diversification, and from constraints to opportunities. This budget is a strategic tool to reshape our economy, unlock the productive capacity of our people, empower enterprises and position Lesotho competitively in regional and global markets."

It's time to break the status quo

The minister stressed that improving Lesotho's economic prospects will require collective effort and a departure from "business as usual."

However, questions about accountability surfaced during a post-budget gala dinner hosted to dissect and interrogate the fiscal proposals.

Budget Controller Maleshoane Lekomola Danzinger was unable to provide a direct response when Revenue Services Lesotho (RSL) Commissioner for Operations Support, Mpono Mosase, asked what consequences civil servants would face if they failed to demonstrate financial prudence.

In response, Danzinger said she expects all officials entrusted with managing public finances to execute their responsibilities as required.

During her address, Dr. Matlanyane acknowledged weaknesses within the public service, revealing that some civil servants receive salaries despite not reporting for duty.

Revenue and expenditure outlook

For the 2025/2026 fiscal year, total revenue is estimated at M27.1 billion, representing 60.2 percent of GDP. Tax revenue is projected at M10.7 billion (24 percent of GDP), comprising M5.4 billion from income taxes and M5.3 billion from taxes on goods and services.

The government will maintain a 2 percent salary increase for civil servants in the upcoming financial year, consistent with the previous year.

Value-added tax (VAT) is forecast to contribute M4.3 billion, while excise duties are projected at M1.0 billion. Grants are expected to total M1.8 billion (4 percent of GDP), and other revenue, including property income of M351.3 million, is estimated at M5.4 billion (12 percent of GDP).

Southern African Customs Union (SACU) receipts will account for 20.4 percent of GDP, remaining a critical pillar of fiscal performance.

Recurrent expenditure is projected at M19.3 billion (42.7 percent of GDP), including M2.5 billion for social benefits and M1.1 billion for interest payments. Capital expenditure is expected to reach M6.4 billion (14.2 percent of GDP).

Dr. Matlanyane indicated that the fiscal year is expected to close with a headline surplus of approximately 3.2 percent of GDP, compared to an initially approved deficit of 2.5 percent. The improvement is largely attributed to exceptionally high water royalties amounting to M4.78 billion.

Lesotho 2016 vs. 2026: Same storm, bigger ship

... Where is the self-sufficiency Lesotho was seeking in 2016?

Staff Reporters

In February 2016, Dr. 'Mamphono Khaketla stood before a joint sitting of Parliament to deliver a budget speech defined by crisis.

The theme was "Seeking Self-sufficiency," a response to a devastating drought, a looming fiscal crunch from declining Southern African Customs Union (SACU) revenues, and the embarrassing revelation of millions in unpaid government debt to the private sector.

It was a budget of pragmatism, of clearing the decks, and of hoping for better.

Ten years later, in February 2026, Dr. Retšelisitsoe Matlanyane presented her budget under a different, yet eerily resonant, theme: "Accelerating Economic Transformation; Building Resilience."

The immediate crisis is no longer a drought, but a "hostile" global trade environment threatening the very fabric of the nation's industrial base.

A decade of budgets, totaling hundreds of billions of maloti, has passed. The question that emerges from a comparison of these two fiscal blueprints is not whether Lesotho has progressed, it has, in many ways, but whether it has fundamentally transformed.

The answer, painted in the stark figures of the budgets themselves, is a complex and sobering one. Lesotho has built a far larger fiscal ship, but it is still navigating the same treacherous and unpredictable waters.

Part I: The scale of government – from pragmatism to ambition

The most immediate observation when comparing the 2016/17 and 2026/27 budgets is the sheer expansion of the state's financial footprint. The total proposed budget has nearly doubled, from M15.5 billion to M29.4 billion, a nominal increase of approximately 90 percent.


Dr Mamphono Khaketla
Picture Courtesy Africa Press

This growth reflects a combination of inflation, population pressure, and an ambitious government seeking to invest its way out of underdevelopment.

Capital expenditure, in particular, has been turbocharged.

In 2016, the government proposed M5.1 billion for development projects. For 2026, that figure has leaped to M9.0 billion. This is a tangible sign of progress.

The massive Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) Phase II, investments in renewable energy, and road infrastructure are now central pillars of the economy, driving what little growth exists . The 2026 budget is not one of a state in retreat, but of one actively trying to build the future.

However, this expansion has a costly partner. Recurrent expenditure, the day-to-day cost of running the government, primarily salaries, has ballooned from M11.5 billion to a staggering M21.9 billion.

This 91 percent increase is the "bloated wage bill" that Finance Minister Matlanyane explicitly warns against in her 2026 speech, noting it "crowds out spending on the most essential growth inducing infrastructure."

The "albatross" identified in 2016 has grown heavier.

Part II: The revenue trap – the more things change...

The most telling indictment of Lesotho's stalled transformation lies in the composition of its revenue. In 2016, the government was acutely aware of its vulnerability to the volatile SACU receipts, which made up 34 percent of government revenue. The goal was to diversify.

A decade later, the SACU dependency is frozen in time. In 2026, despite all the talk of reform, SACU revenue still accounts for exactly 34 percent of the government's income.

The amount has more than doubled in nominal terms to M10.1 billion, but the structural vulnerability remains untouched . The risk is now far greater in absolute terms.

As one 2025 analysis noted, Lesotho remains one of the members "most dependent on SACU transfers and, consequently, the most vulnerable to the current downward trend in SACU revenue".

This fear is not abstract. South Africa has already signaled its desire to renegotiate the revenue-sharing formula to secure a "bigger slice of the customs union cake," a move that would be catastrophic for Maseru.

The one significant change in the revenue mix is the emergence of water royalties as a major pillar, contributing a projected 17 percent of revenue in 2026, up from a negligible line-item a decade ago. This is a genuine success story, transforming a natural resource into a strategic national asset.

However, as the 2026 budget itself notes, this is still a volatile and project-specific revenue stream. Furthermore, the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA) is currently facing potentially significant financial exposure from multi-million dollar compensation claims by communities displaced by the dams, creating a new and unforeseen fiscal risk .

Most worryingly, the share of domestic taxes in the government's coffers has actually shrunk from 47 percent in 2016 to 38 percent in 2026. This reveals a failure to broaden the tax base. The private sector, which both budgets champion as the "engine of growth," is not generating enough activity to support the expanding state.

Part III: From climate shock to trade shock – the new reality

The nature of the external shocks battering the economy has evolved. In 2016, the enemy was the weather. In 2026, it is geopolitics.

The 2016 budget was a response to a declared drought emergency. The 2026 budget is a response to a world of protectionism and trade wars. The immediate crisis is the fragility of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

The textile industry, the backbone of Lesotho's manufacturing and formal employment, was thrown into chaos in 2025 when AGOA expired and the US imposed swingeing tariffs of up to 50 percent on Lesotho's exports which were revised down to 15 percent.

While AGOA was extended at the last minute to the end of 2026, the damage has been done. The budget speech itself notes the "deterioration in AGOA related firms," with factories operating at reduced capacity and job losses mounting.

The 2016 speech worried about the future erosion of trade preferences. The 2026 speech is managing the present collapse of an industry. The crisis has shifted from a one-off weather event to a systemic challenge to the country's industrial survival.

Part IV: Fiscal health – the mirage of the surplus

At first glance, Lesotho's fiscal health appears to have improved dramatically. In 2016, the country was staring at a gaping deficit of nearly nine percent of GDP. By 2024, it recorded a remarkable surplus of 8.4 percent of GDP.

But the 2026 budget speech and recent data expose this surplus for what it is. It is a cyclical mirage, not a structural victory. The surplus was driven by exceptional, one-off revenues, a perfect storm of high SACU receipts and massive water royalty inflows.

As these windfalls recede, the underlying structural deficit is exposed. Growth projections for 2025 and 2026 have been slashed to around one percent, a figure that is essentially population-growth-plus-zero.

As the local media reported just this week, the economy is expected to grow "sluggishly" for the foreseeable future.

Furthermore, the fiscal surplus masks a critical failure, which is the under-execution of the capital budget. As one mid-term report noted, the projected surplus was "driven by halted projects rather than improved efficiency". Money allocated for building the future is not being spent, a problem that dogged the 2016 budget as well.

A bigger ship, same storm

The journey from the 2016 budget to the 2026 budget is one of a nation that has scaled up its ambitions and its resources. The government now manages a budget twice the size, invests in monumental infrastructure, and has unlocked significant value from its water.

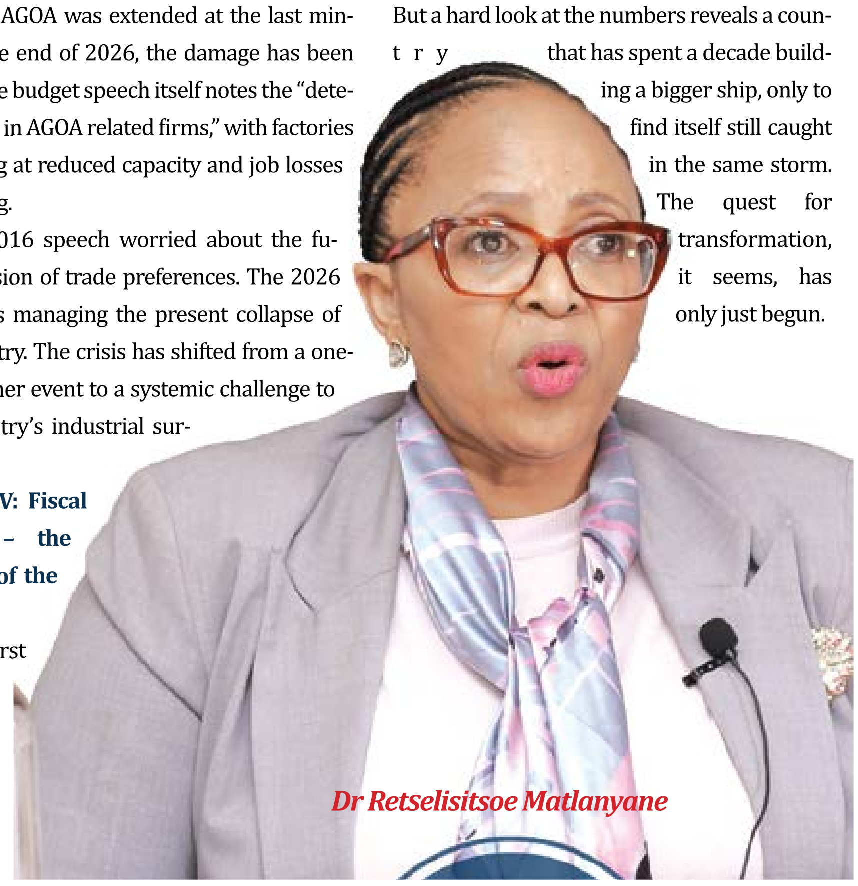
The policy conversation has matured, now focusing on fiscal rules, debt anchors, and structural balances.

However, the core mission of 2016, to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce vulnerability, remains tragically incomplete. The fundamental structure of the economy is unchanged.

It remains dangerously dependent on a handful of volatile, externally-controlled revenue streams: SACU, textiles under AGOA, and now, water royalties.

The private sector, still the "primary engine" in theory, has not grown enough to broaden the tax base or provide sustainable jobs for the nation's youth, a crisis now described as a "National State of Disaster".

The 2026 budget is a sophisticated and ambitious plan to fight the battles of the future. But a hard look at the numbers reveals a country that has spent a decade building a bigger ship, only to find itself still caught in the same storm. The quest for transformation, it seems, has only just begun.


Dr Retselisitsoe Matlanyane

Unions slam 2% pay rise proposal

Seabata Mahao

The proposed two percent salary increment for civil servants in the 2026/2027 financial year has drawn sharp criticism from public sector unions, who describe it as insufficient given escalating living costs and unmet government promises.

Speaking on behalf of the Coalition of Lesotho Public Employees (COLEPE), Secretary General of the Lesotho Public Employees Union (LPEU), Motebang Leboela, said workers had urged more substantial adjustments, especially for lower-paid employees.

The unions proposed a M1,500 increment for those earning below M3,000 monthly to help cover basic needs, but the government rejected this.

"We plead with the Government to add 10 percent while civil servants contribute five percent to the pension fund as a way of sustaining livelihoods post-retirement," Leboela said.

They also requested a M3,000 allowance for staff in remote areas to address challenging working conditions.

Concerns over public infrastructure maintenance

Leboela acknowledged some progress on union concerns but highlighted ongoing issues with public infrastructure upkeep. While funds have been budgeted for maintaining facilities like schools and police stations, she expressed worry over the increasing outsourcing of projects to private firms via tenders.

She noted that the Ministry of Public Works' Buildings Department has internal capacity to handle repairs more cost-effectively.

"We have noted that the available funds could be used more effectively if the work were handled internally. We are deeply concerned about this approach. Nevertheless, we remain hopeful, although it appears that this year we will once again endure ongoing challenges," she said.

Rising transport costs

The unions also flagged anticipated hikes in public transport fares, which compound financial strain for many civil servants commuting to work. Leboela questioned the allocation basis for transport-related support, emphasising government responsibility.

She reminded authorities of earlier commitments, citing Prime Minister Sam Matekane's pledge for living wages upon taking office. "We still remember that when this government came into office, the Prime Minister made a significant promise that workers would receive living wages. We are surprised that this is now the third year and yet we continue to receive only a two percent increase. The question now is: where do we stand regarding the promise of living wages?" she asked.

Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Dr. Retšelisitsoe Matlanyane, has confirmed a two percent across-the-board adjustment to public service salaries and wages for 2026/27.

She added that tax credits and thresholds would be revised to help shield lower- and middle-income earners from bracket creep due to inflation, while maintaining tax system fairness and revenue stability.

"The tax credit and thresholds will be adjusted accordingly to protect lower and middle-income earners from bracket creep and sustain fairness within the tax system while preserving revenue stability," Matlanyane said.

Makhalanyane warns billions for health won't fix system plagued by corruption

Ntsoaki Motaung

While the Government of Lesotho has earmarked billions for the health sector in its 2026/2027 budget, a top lawmaker warns that no amount of money can rescue a system crippled by corruption.

Mokhothu Makhalanyane, Chairperson of the Social Cluster Portfolio Committee and Member of Parliament for Mokhethoaneng, issued a scathing assessment of the Ministry of Health, arguing that the nation's suffering is no longer due to insufficient funding, but to deep-seated corruption and a consistent failure to implement planned projects.

"The Ministry's challenges, from system strengthening to procurement of medical equipment, have been addressed in previous budgets. Yet the money often remains unspent," Makhalanyane said.

He revealed that the Ministry of Finance was unable to increase the health budget for 2026/2027 because funds allocated in the 2025/2026 fiscal year were not fully utilised.

"Many facilities have returned huge sums because they could not use them due to complicated procurement processes and corruption," he explained.

Makhalanyane also criticised the Ministry of Finance for failing to publicly acknowledge the problem. "The ministry is overwhelmed by corruption. The Minister of Finance did not admit that, due to these issues, services cannot be improved or challenges addressed," he said.

The warning echoes alarming data from the 2023–2024 Lesotho Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS), which shows the human cost of a dysfunctional health system.

Despite high attendance at health facilities, the quality of care remains dangerously low. Maternal mortality stands at 530 deaths per 100,000 live births, neonatal mortality at 26 per 1,000 live births, and childhood stunting remains a major barrier to long-term productivity.

Access to integrated services remains below 30 percent for many communities. The LDHS suggests that Basotho are visiting clinics and hospitals, but are not receiving adequate care, a gap largely caused by a lack of specialists, broken equipment, and the diversion of resources through corrupt procurement deals.

Minister of Finance and Development Planning, Dr. Retšelisitsoe Matlanyane, presented a 2026/2027 budget focused on Accelerating Economic Transformation and Building Resilience.

The Human Capital Development sector, which includes health and education, was allocated M8.1 billion, with M3.1 billion earmarked specifically for health.

Key priorities for the sector include strengthening primary healthcare with a renewed focus on community-based services and prevention, continuing the construction of the National Cancer Centre with M100 million to reduce costly overseas referrals, advancing the establishment of Lesotho's own Medical School to address the shortage of specialists, and promoting early-life and community-based nutrition interventions to combat stunting.

Recognising that corruption could undermine these goals, the budget also allocated M70.8 million to the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO), which will conduct integrity audits, corruption risk assessments, enforce lifestyle and asset declarations for public officials, and perform a national corruption typology study to track where money is being lost.

Newsday Health

Seven rural sites record zero mother-to-child HIV transmission

Ntsoaki Motaung

Partners In Health (PIH) has announced that seven of its rural initiative sites in Lesotho recorded zero percent mother-to-child HIV transmission during the 2025 fiscal year.

According to the organisation, all 76 infants born to mothers living with HIV at the supported sites tested negative for the virus.

PIH attributes the outcome to its "5S Model," a strategy focused on strengthening staff, supplies, space, systems and social support within rural health facilities. The model ensures clinics are staffed with trained nurses and counsellors who provide ongoing guidance to expectant mothers.

The facilities are also equipped with prenatal starter packs and multi-month supplies of antiretroviral medication, reducing the need for frequent travel to health centres. This is particularly important in remote areas where access to healthcare can be difficult.

A key component of the programme is the establishment of maternal waiting homes at rural clinics. These homes allow expectant mothers to stay near medical facilities from 36 weeks of pregnancy until delivery.

"While staying at these homes, women receive nutritious meals and support to ensure they take their medication correctly. This care continues after birth, with staff providing demonstrations on safe breastfeeding and monitoring both mother and baby during postnatal visits," PIH said in a statement.

The organisation added that digital tracking systems are used to monitor treatment adherence. Health workers compare electronic records with paper files to ensure continuity of care. In cases where mothers are unable to reach clinics, staff travel to remote villages, sometimes by horseback, to deliver medication and provide follow-up support.

Nationally, Lesotho has made progress in reducing mother-to-child HIV transmission. The 2023–24 Lesotho Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS), released in late 2024, shows transmission rates have fallen to below five percent.

However, the survey indicates ongoing health challenges. The maternal mortality ratio stands at 530 deaths per 100,000 live births. Infant mortality is recorded at 39 deaths per 1,000 live births, down from 62 in 2018. Neonatal mortality stands at 26 per 1,000 live births, while under-five mortality is 54 per 1,000 live births.

The report also notes that 86 percent of women now deliver in health facilities and 82 percent attend at least four antenatal care visits.

PIH's zero-transmission result at its seven rural sites exceeds the national average and highlights the impact of targeted interventions in preventing mother-to-child HIV transmission.

Newsday Business

Lesotho's business climate improving, but major gaps remain

Bereng Mpaki

In Lesotho, it is easier to register and open a business compared to many other countries, while the opposite is true for handling companies that fail or go bankrupt.

Lesotho scored a commendable 75 percent in the Business Entry aspect according to the latest Business Ready 2025 (B-READY) report by the World Bank Group, suggesting that it is relatively easier to register and open a company compared to many countries around the globe.

The Business Entry topic measures the process of registration and start of operations of new limited liability companies (LLCs) across three different dimensions of the B-READY report, referred to as pillars.

"In Business Entry, Lesotho has robust company information filing requirements, simplified company registration processes, and streamlined incorporation procedures characterised by low time and cost," the B-READY report said.

The B- READY's report assesses how easy or difficult it is to start, run and close a business in different countries. It looks at the full life of a business in terms of how easy it is to open a company, operate it, expand it and, if things go wrong, close it properly.

B-READY's strategic pillars are Reform Advocacy, Policy Guidance, and Analysis and Research.

Trade registry

Reform advocacy: By benchmarking economies worldwide, B-READY facilitates knowledge sharing and policy dialogue among governments, the private sector, and development institutions.

Policy guidance: The project provides detailed data to inform specific policy changes, highlighting where economies fall short of international best practices.

Analysis and research: B-READY offers granular data for in-depth research, illuminating the factors that drive private sector development. The B-READY process is distinguished by its rigorous development, comprehensive data collection, and commitment to transparency.

Overall, Lesotho scored 55.58 out of 100 in reform advocacy, 39.27 in policy guidance, and 54.19 in analysis and research, reflecting moderate progress but also clear shortcomings.

The B-READY framework covers 10 key areas, including Business Entry, Business Location, Utility Services, Labor, Financial Services, International Trade, Taxation, Dispute Resolution, Market Competition and Business Insolvency.

On winding up a business, Lesotho scored just 19 percent in Business Insolvency, placing it among the bottom 20 percent globally. This means the country's system for handling companies that fail or go bankrupt is weak.

The Business Insolvency topic measures key features of insolvency systems on a regulatory level. It also assesses the institutional and operational infrastructure associated with insolvency proceedings (judicial services), as well as the operational efficiency of insolvency proceedings across three different dimensions, referred to as pillars.

"Lesotho has room for improvement in the area of Business Insolvency, both in absolute terms and when compared to all measured economies. With 19 points out of 100, Lesotho is in the bottom 20%.

"Lesotho has gaps in its legal framework on pre-commencement and commencement standards. Insolvency proceedings are characterised by very low levels of digitalisation and there have been no completed (closed) cases of judicial reorganisation and judicial liquidation proceedings involving corporate debtors over the last three years."

The report noted that laws exist in Lesotho, but implementation is weak. Overall, Lesotho scored 56 points for its Regulatory Framework, 39 for Public Services and 54 for Operational Efficiency, placing the country in the lower half globally.

"The rules and regulations on the books are not matched by the actual ease of regulatory compliance and effective availability of public services in practice."

The country also performed relatively better in Labor and International Trade, but there are challenges. The Labor topic measures good practices in employment regulations and public services from the perspective of both enterprises and employees, while the International Trade topic measures different aspects of international trade, trade in goods, trade in services, and digital trade.

Meet Mpolai Tsakatsi – owner of a new Toyota Starlet from Econet

Seabata Mahao

An ordinary day in Ha Foso, Berea, recently changed Mpolai Tsakatsi's life after she won a brand new Toyota Starlet courtesy of Econet Telecom Lesotho's Hoa Khonahala ongoing campaign.

At a handover that came as the festive campaign officially surpassed M1 million in total prizes awarded, Tsakatsi drove home as the second brand new Toyota Starlet winner.

Tsakatsi, who has never owned a vehicle before, will use the car to ease her daily commute to work and improve mobility for her family, a tangible example of how everyday transactions through SEFS and ETL can translate into life-changing rewards.

She is a resident of Ha-Foso, working at one of the commercial banks in Lesotho, born and bred in Mokhotlong, and a family woman in her mid-life age.

Leading the ceremony, SEFS's General Manager, Moeketsi Mafereka, highlighted the campaign's growing national impact.

"HoaKhonahala is delivering on its promise. With 250 winners to date and over M1 million in prizes already awarded, including two brand-new Toyota Starlet vehicles, we are seeing real stories of transformation unfold across the country. This is about rewarding loyalty in meaningful ways while driving financial inclusion and digital participation," said Mafereka.

These prizes that have been awarded so far

form part of the M6 million prize pool set aside for the campaign, signaling that substantial rewards are still up for grabs as the promotion rolls towards its conclusion.

ETL's Acting General Manager for Marketing, Communications and Customer Experience, Puleng 'MathaboMasoabi, said the milestone reflects ETL and SEFS's appreciation for their loyal customers and the growing uptake of digital services.

"Each EcoCash transaction or campaign promo bundle purchase brings customers closer to exciting rewards while also playing a key role in driving Lesotho's digital economy," she said.

She added that the campaign demonstrates the increasingly transformative role of mobile money in expanding financial inclusion and empowering communities.

"Through our partnership with SEFS, we are ensuring that convenience, security and innovation translate into tangible value for Basotho. HoaKhonahala continues to showcase how loyalty and digital participation can be both empowering and rewarding," she said.

An emotional Tsakatsi described the moment as life-changing: "Owning a car was something I never imagined. This gives me confidence and makes my daily life much easier. I am incredibly thankful to ETL and SEFS."

"This campaign has truly changed my life for the better. I never imagined that by simply transacting with EcoCash and purchasing the campaign voice and data bundles, I could own a brand-new car. I am truly grateful to ETL and SEFS. Indeed, HoaKhonahala," she said.

With one more Toyota Starlet still to be handed over, alongside ongoing cash and device prizes, customers are encouraged to continue transacting via EcoCash and purchasing qualifying bundles for their chance to win before the campaign closes.

The campaign was launched in October 2025 with the first prize of M20, 000.00 won by Moeketsi Senokoanyane from Ha-Abia in November 2025, Senokoane was announced as the inaugural winner in the campaign's monthly draw, and the cheque handover took place at Ha-Matala in Maseru.

This was followed by a M50, 000 monthly cash prize won by LikhaphaLehlabaphiri of Maputsoe, Leribe, in December 2025.

The first vehicle was presented to NkamohelengTsekela of Qacha's Nek, on January 9, 2026 marking a major milestone in a campaign that has already delivered significant cash and lifestyle prizes to customers across Lesotho.

The campaign offers customers across Lesotho a chance to win a range of high-value prizes, including three brand-new Toyota Starlets, cash rewards, smartphones and Smart TVs.

Official
Press Release

LHDA Launches Senqu River Bridge Naming Competition – Tertiary Students Edition

Background
The Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA) invites all tertiary students to participate in the naming of the newly constructed Senqu River Bridge, a signature structure of national pride and engineering excellence.
This iconic bridge over the Senqu River along the A1 Road in Mokhotlong will soon be officially opened to traffic, marking a new chapter in the region's connectivity and infrastructure development.

LHDA is excited to share this moment with the nation and has launched a naming competition for tertiary institutions across the country, inviting them to take part in this historic milestone and contribute to the 40th anniversary legacy of the LHWP.

The 825m long Senqu River Bridge in Mokhotlong is the first extradosed bridge to be constructed in Lesotho. Featuring cable stays and advanced structural engineering, it is a technical masterpiece that rises prominently within the scenic highlands landscape.

Beyond its engineering excellence, the bridge serves as a critical connectivity asset restoring access across the reservoir, an iconic architectural landmark and a tourism attraction forming part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) infrastructure portfolio.
The bridge's elegant structural form, striking cable-stay configuration, and seamless harmony with the surrounding mountainous terrain make it both functional and aesthetically distinctive.

LHDA now invites tertiary students to help shape this legacy by proposing a name that captures the bridge's unique character, its shape, purpose, symbolism, and powerful visual presence in the highlands of Lesotho. This is a rare opportunity to leave a lasting imprint on national history, and we encourage students across the country to take part in defining the identity of this remarkable structure. The competition is valid from February 16 and closes on February 21, 2026, at 17:00.

Naming Criteria
Each submission must:
1. Propose **one Sesotho name only – not more than of one compound word**
2. Be **original and *not* previously published, copyrighted, or used for any other infrastructure asset.**
3. Be **culturally appropriate and respectful, reflecting the values and identity of Basotho.**
4. Be **concise, memorable and easy to pronounce.**
5. Include **a written motivation in English (500–600 words, submitted as an attachment and not in the email body)** that clearly explains:
   - o The meaning of the proposed name.
   - o How the name reflects:
     - The bridge's design and its engineering innovation and structural elegance
     - Its purpose of reconnecting communities.
     - Its aesthetic appeal within the highlands landscape.
     - Its role as a tourism icon.
     - Why it is suitable for a national landmark of this significance.

Eligibility
- The competition is open to students currently enrolled at accredited tertiary institutions in Lesotho.
- Students of any academic level and field of study may participate.

Lesotho's quest for self-sufficiency remains a distant dream

The comparison between Lesotho's 2016 and 2026 budget speeches reveals a nation that has grown in scale and ambition but remains stubbornly trapped in the same structural vulnerabilities it sought to escape a decade ago.

Dr. 'Mamphono Khaketla's 2016 address, delivered amid drought-induced crisis and titled "Seeking Self-sufficiency," promised pragmatic reforms to diversify revenue, tame the bloated wage bill, and reduce dependence on volatile external sources like Southern African Customs Union (SACU) receipts.

Ten years on, Dr. Retšelisitsoe Matlanyane's 2026 presentation, "Accelerating Economic Transformation; Building Resilience," echoes many of the same concerns, now amplified by a larger fiscal apparatus and new external threats.

The most glaring continuity is Lesotho's persistent over-reliance on SACU transfers, which stubbornly accounted for 34 percent of revenue in both periods.

While nominal SACU inflows have more than doubled, the structural exposure has intensified: a renegotiation by South Africa could devastate public finances.

Water royalties from the Lesotho Highlands Water Project represent a genuine achievement, rising to around 17 percent of revenue and providing a strategic asset.

Yet even this stream remains volatile, project-dependent, and now shadowed by compensation claims from affected communities.

Domestic tax revenue's shrinking share, from 47% in 2016 to 38% in 2026, signals a deeper failure: the private sector has not expanded sufficiently to broaden the tax base or generate sustainable employment. The textile industry, once a hope for manufacturing-led growth, now grapples with AGOA uncertainties.

The agreement's lapse in 2025 triggered tariffs, initially steep, later moderated, reduced factory capacity, and job losses, shifting the crisis from episodic weather shocks to systemic trade vulnerabilities.

Government spending has ballooned, from M15.5 billion to M29.4 billion, driven by higher capital investments in infrastructure, renewable energy, and LHWP Phase II.

This reflects progress in ambition and execution in some areas.

However, recurrent expenditure, dominated by salaries, has risen almost in lockstep (from M11.5 billion to M21.9 billion), crowding out growth-oriented investments and perpetuating the "bloated wage bill" warned about in both eras.

The recent fiscal surplus, around 8.4 percent of GDP in 2024, offers only illusory comfort. It stemmed from one-off windfalls in SACU and water royalties, not structural discipline.

Capital budget under-execution persists, echoing 2016's unspent development funds, while growth projections languish near 1-2 percent, barely outpacing population increase.

Lesotho has built a bigger ship: a more sophisticated policy framework, fiscal rules, debt anchors, and larger resource inflows. Yet it sails the same storm, external dependence, weak domestic engines, and youth unemployment now deemed a national disaster.

True transformation demands breaking the cycle: aggressive private-sector reforms, tax base expansion, export diversification beyond textiles and water, and disciplined wage management.

Without these, the 2036 budget risks reciting the same lament. The quest for self-sufficiency, declared urgent in 2016, remains unfinished, and increasingly urgent, in 2026.

No Comment

Common Concern

Dr. Tšeliso Moroke

How the country moves

The myth of autonomy

There is an incompleteness with which this country has been developed.

Not incomplete in the sense of "still progressing," but incomplete in its very conception. Lesotho has never been structurally developed as a self-sustaining national economy. It has been administered, financed, stabilised, and occasionally modernised, but never fundamentally transformed.

And until we confront this truth honestly, we will continue exhausting ourselves pretending we are something we are not.

The uncomfortable imperative is this: Lesotho functions less as an autonomous national economy and more as a structural reserve for whatever South Africa requires at a given time. Historically, this reserve function has shifted form, labour reserve during the mining boom, customs-revenue dependent satellite within the regional trade arrangement, consumer market for South African goods, and increasingly, a logistical appendage.

This is not rhetoric. It is political economy.

To present Lesotho as a fully autonomous economic system operating independently of South Africa's industrial core is to misunderstand the structural reality of Southern Africa. We are deeply integrated, but asymmetrically so. South Africa produces; we consume. South Africa industrialises; we administrate. South Africa's macroeconomic fluctuations reverberate directly through our fiscal stability.

And nowhere was this clearer than in the recent national budget.

The entire fiscal posture lacked vitality because of uncertainty surrounding SACU receipts. The projected decline in revenues from the Southern African Customs Union did not merely create technical budgetary anxiety, it exposed the fragility of our sovereignty. When a significant portion of your national revenue depends on regional trade flows you do not control, fiscal planning becomes speculation rather than strategy.

The budget was not expansionary because it could not be. It was not visionary because it dared not be. It was cautious, restrained, almost defensive, waiting for signals from Pretoria and global markets before daring to breathe.

That is not autonomy.

Your long-standing involvement in the modern capitalist economy of Southern Africa is vividly clear in this budget. Every revenue line and every restraint tells the story of dependency. Lesotho is integrated into capitalism, but not on its own terms. We are integrated as labour, as territory, as a customs pool participant, and as a consumer base.

Even the much-celebrated private sector reveals this contradiction.

We constantly hear that the private sector must lead growth. That government must "create an enabling environment." That entrepreneurship will unlock prosperity. Yet the very same private sector relies heavily on government business. Many firms survive primarily on state tenders, public contracts, and procurement cycles. When government spending slows, the so-called private sector contracts.

That is not a dynamic capitalist class driving structural transformation. That is a contractor economy orbiting around the state.

In effect, the state is fiscally dependent on SACU, and the private sector is commercially dependent on the state. This circular dependency produces motion without movement. Budgets circulate. Contracts circulate. Funds circulate. But production does not deepen, industries do not diversify, and competitiveness does not improve.

This is what incompleteness looks like.

We have infrastructure without industrial depth. We have fiscal frameworks without fiscal sovereignty. We have private enterprise without independent accumulation. We have political independence without economic autonomy.

And yet we continue to narrate ourselves as though we are a self-contained national economy temporarily experiencing turbulence.

We are not "temporarily stressed." We are structurally constrained.

The danger lies not in dependency itself; many small economies are integrated into larger systems. The danger lies in denying it. Because when you deny structural reality, you design policies based on illusion. You project revenue that is externally determined. You promise growth that you do not structurally generate. You speak of diversification without confronting the regional hierarchy that shapes your options.

The budget's anxiety over SACU receipts is not a technical glitch; it is a mirror. It reflects how deeply our fiscal health is tied to external industrial performance. When South Africa slows, we tighten our belts. When global commodity cycles shift, we recalibrate. When regional trade declines, we panic.

That is the behaviour of a peripheral economy in a regional core–periphery structure.

So what is to be done?

First, intellectual honesty. We must acknowledge that Lesotho's economy has historically functioned as a labour and fiscal appendage within the Southern African capitalist system. That acknowledgement is not defeatist; it is analytical clarity.

Second, strategic realism. True autonomy will not come from rhetoric about entrepreneurship alone. It will require deliberate industrial positioning within the regional value chain, identifying niches where Lesotho can produce, not merely circulate goods. It will require rethinking land use, aligning education with production, and linking infrastructure directly to export-generating sectors.

Third, political courage. Dependency benefits certain elites. A contractor class thrives on state tenders. Bureaucratic expansion thrives on administrative complexity. Regional dependency provides convenient excuses for domestic stagnation. Challenging this system means confronting entrenched interests.

And that is where the real struggle lies.

We are stressing ourselves by pretending to be what we are not. The path forward begins with acknowledging the incompleteness of our development and designing policy from structural reality, not nationalist fantasy.

A country moves not because it declares autonomy, but because it builds the material foundations to sustain it.

Until then, every budget will feel anxious. Every growth projection will feel fragile.

And every claim of independence will ring slightly hollow.

Newsday Opinion

Governing without breaking the party: lessons from Lesotho's "splits-in-power" era and what RFP must do to finish strong

Theko Tlebere

Last week, when I started this topic, I had forgotten that Parliament would reopen after a long festive break. But what I never anticipated was a Member of Parliament (MP) crossing the floor from the ruling party, the Revolution for Prosperity (RFP), to the opposition party, Democratic Congress (DC). Remember, the notion was to give a perspective on why balancing party affairs with those in government is critical at this time (when national elections are less than twenty-four (24) months away. And last week, as we published our article, a floor crossing was happening, and by the look of things, more might come in the coming weeks or months, hence the elitist timing of our article. This week, I shall focus solely on what a smart leader should do to finish his term strong and his political party remaining solid.

Mature leadership must establish deliberate institutional practices. The first balancing act involves creating a clear distinction between state functions and party competition. A leader of a ruling party must uphold the notion that government decisions, particularly regarding appointments and procurement, are governed by predictable procedures, not wielded as tools of factional rivalry. I should attest that, in my own accord, this does not imply that politics becomes entirely clean; rather, it becomes bounded. Practically, the leader should act in ways that diminish the likelihood of conspiracy theories. When decisions are consistent, documented, and logically explained, factions may still disagree, but they will find it difficult to frame every decision as evidence of persecution. Predictability serves not as a public relations tactic, but as a strategy for stability.

The second balancing act is to establish a legitimate, efficient, and trusted internal dispute resolution process. A party that cannot resolve its disputes internally risks outsourcing its unity to the courts. However, legal victories seldom restore political cohesion; they merely formalise winners and identify losers. When those who lose feel cornered, court decisions can trigger exits rather than reconciliation. The lesson is clear: internal mechanisms must be robust enough to resolve most disputes without resorting to judges. When courts become the default arbiters, the party is already in crisis mode.

The third balancing act is to approach the elective conference as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event.The moment you see 'ho se hona le ba mang mang' you must know such a party is in trouble. Lesotho's parties often enter conference season with improvisation, disputed memberships, contested branches, and unresolved grievances, only to be surprised when the conference hall devolves into conflict. A governing party should prepare for a conference as rigorously as a state prepares for a national election: by verifying registers early, clarifying branch legitimacy, clearly defining delegate selection procedures, creating windows for dispute resolution prior to the conference, and ensuring that rules are not altered midstream to favour one faction. Arriving at the conference with contested registers and unresolved disputes means the party has already opted for conflict.

The fourth balancing act is preventing ministers and senior officials from becoming factional leaders. In many ruling parties, portfolios serve as platforms for building personal networks and amassing resources. Consequently, ministers often act as commanders of camps rather than servants of a collective mandate. This behaviour is not only unethical but also destabilising. The state should not host internal party conflicts; when it does, governance devolves into factional administration. A leader seeking longevity must cultivate a clear culture: government should not be treated as a tool for internal election campaigns. Cabinet decisions must be guided by collective responsibility, and the public service should be protected from becoming a battleground for party ambitions.

The fifth balancing act involves reframing party discipline from a weapon into a rule-based system. While discipline is essential in parliamentary politics, it becomes problematic when it is personality-driven, selective, or retaliatory, as this fosters fear. Fear breeds scheming; when MPs and party officials perceive honest communication as betrayal, they shift from seeking internal solutions to devising exit strategies. In Lesotho's political landscape, exits are often imminent, and when they occur within a ruling party, they quickly escalate into national governance issues.

Underlying these balancing acts is a crucial requirement that many parties overlook: a ruling party must possess a strong programmatic foundation to maintain cohesion beyond mere access to power. Parties that operate primarily as electoral machines are fragile because their unity depends on state access. Once that access is contested, their cohesion disintegrates. A stable ruling party invests in a programmatic identity, meaningful policy forums, and legitimacy gained through effective outcomes rather than mere proximity to the leader. This approach does not stifle ambition; instead, it channels ambition into institutional frameworks, providing members with reasons to remain committed even when they are not at the forefront of power.

Consequently, party stability is not solely an internal matter. In Lesotho, when ruling parties fracture, the state faces immediate repercussions. Policy continuity falters, reforms stall, and the public service becomes uncertain. Coalition relationships grow tense, investors perceive instability as a risk, and citizens experience delays in services, weak accountability, and leadership preoccupied with internal conflicts. The tragedy is that the country does not falter due to a lack of economic ideas; rather, it collapses because politics lacks robust institutions capable of managing power without self-destruction.

As the RFP enters the latter stages of its term, this challenge must be taken seriously. The party's greatest risk may not stem from the opposition but from the emergence of internal competition in an institutional vacuum. The absence of an elective conference is not inherently a crisis; however, it becomes a risk when it suggests that internal democratic processes are being postponed without a clear and credible pathway that members can trust. In a system where conferences frequently trigger conflict, delays without institutional reassurances can instil the very anxiety that ultimately culminates in conflict.

Advice that not only applies to the current ruling party is that leadership should take charge and lead the parties. Such a phenomenon requires leadership that understands that balancing government power and party power is not just a matter of rhetoric; it is a strategic necessity. This involves establishing clear distinctions between state processes and party competition, creating credible internal dispute resolution mechanisms, preparing for internal elections with seriousness and transparency, preventing the government from being used as a factional weapon, and ensuring the dignity and political safety of those who lose internally. Most importantly, it demands a leader who can exercise authority without resorting to humiliation. Humiliation breeds enemies, and enemies lead to factions. Factions result in splits, splits create instability, and instability ultimately leads to failure.

Lesotho's history may not dictate its future, but it offers valuable lessons. It teaches us that parties do not fail due to disagreement; they fail because disagreement is mishandled. They fail when ambition goes unchecked by rules. They fail when losing becomes unsafe. They fail when the state is wielded as a tool in internal conflicts. If the RFP wishes to complete its five-year term and establish a lasting political brand, it must learn a crucial lesson from our era of power splits: governing the country is not enough. A ruling party must also govern itself, with institutions strong enough to wield power without being corrupted by it. The Future is NOW!

Katse Dam Festival 2026: Where culture meets opportunity

Refiloe Molise

The Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) is one of Africa's most ambitious binational initiatives, a large-scale water transfer and hydropower scheme established through a treaty signed in 1986 between the governments of Lesotho and South Africa.

Conceived to address South Africa's growing water demands in its industrial and urban heartland, particularly the Gauteng region around Johannesburg, the project harnesses the abundant water resources from Lesotho's highlands, often called the "Water Tower of Southern Africa," by diverting water from the Senqu/Orange River catchment through a network of dams, reservoirs, and tunnels.

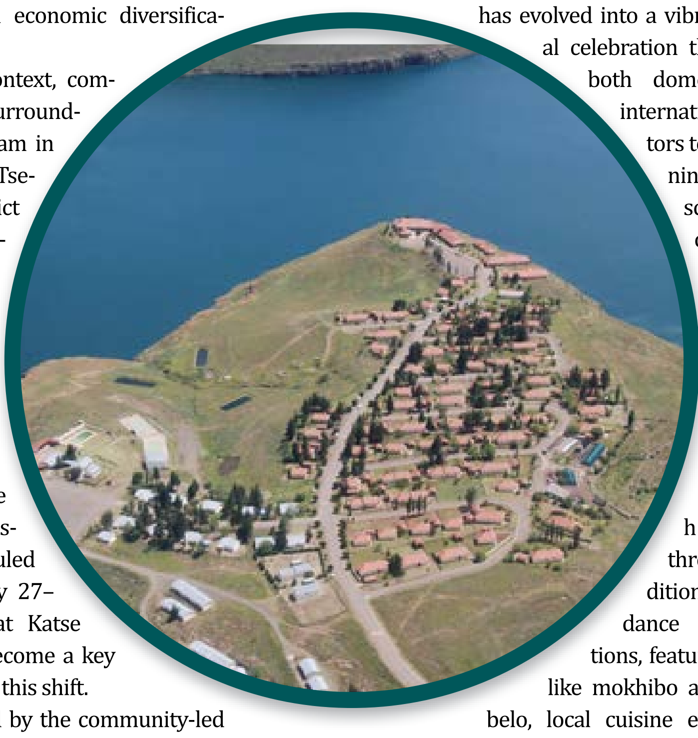
The project is implemented in phases. Phase I, which began construction in the early 1990s and was largely completed by the early 2000s, included the iconic Katse Dam, completed in 1997/1998, the Mohale Dam, transfer tunnels, and the Muela Hydropower Station.

Katse Dam, standing 185 meters tall and once the highest in Africa, created a vast reservoir in the Malibamatso River valley, enabling reliable water exports to South Africa while generating hydroelectric power for Lesotho.

The LHWP has provided Lesotho with royalties from water sales, surplus electricity, improved infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, and broader development benefits, though it has also faced criticisms over social and environmental impacts, including displacement of communities and unresolved compensation issues for some affected residents.

The Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA), the Lesotho-based implementing agency for the project, oversees not only the core water and power components but also complementary social, environmental, and economic programs. These include resettlement support, community development initiatives, and efforts to promote sustainable livelihoods in project-affected areas.

As the LHWP marks its 40th anniversary in 2026, 40 years since the treaty's signing, the focus extends beyond engineering milestones to celebrating long-term community empowerment and economic diversification.



In this context, communities surrounding Katse Dam in the Thaba-Tseka district stand to benefit from enhanced livelihood opportunities through tourism. The Katse Tourism Festival, scheduled for February 27–28, 2026, at Katse Dam, has become a key platform for this shift.

Organised by the community-led Katse Dam Action and Aid Community Forum and supported by the LHDA, the event has grown steadily since its inception in 2021, with earlier editions held around March to align with cultural commemorations like Moshoeshoe's Day, honouring the founder of the Basotho nation.

What began as a modest cultural gathering has evolved into a vibrant annual celebration that draws both domestic and international visitors to the stunning highland scenery, at over 2,000 meters above sea level.

The festival spotlights Basotho heritage through traditional music, dance competitions, featuring styles like mokhibo and mohobelo, local cuisine exhibitions, handicrafts, sporting activities, community performances, and entertainment by local and international artists. Attendees experience authentic Basotho hospitality, traditional attire, and the dramatic landscapes of Lesotho's mountains and the dam itself.

LHDA Chief Executive Tente Tente has emphasised that the project transcends mere infrastructure:

"The Lesotho Highlands Water Project is not only about water transfer and hydropower generation, but also fundamentally about improving lives." Tente highlighted how community-driven tourism fosters income generation, preserves cultural identity, promotes enterprise development, encourages youth participation, and instills pride in local heritage.

The festival aligns with LHDA's long-term strategy to diversify livelihoods in project areas, moving communities from reliance on traditional agriculture or limited opportunities toward sustainable options like tourism.

Seliane Rakuoane, Chairperson of the Katse Dam Action and Aid Community Forum, underscored the event's direct economic impact on residents near the dam. Local households and entrepreneurs earn income by selling food, handicrafts, and souvenirs; offering accommodation, such as homestays; providing transport services; and guiding tours around the highlands and cultural sites.

The festival serves as a marketplace for small businesses and a stage for young talents to reach wider audiences.

Beyond commerce, the event fulfills a social purpose. Proceeds from past editions have funded welfare efforts, including medical supplies for children with chronic illnesses and sanitary products for vulnerable groups, showing how tourism can translate into tangible community support.

As visitors flock to the 2026 edition, they will not only enjoy the festivities but also gain a deeper appreciation for Lesotho's natural beauty, resilient communities, and cultural richness.

In turn, residents are motivated to safeguard their traditions, knowing they carry real economic value. The Katse Tourism Festival thus exemplifies how a major infrastructure project can evolve into a catalyst for inclusive, sustainable development in the highlands.

Invitation to Bidders

BID NOTICE UNDER OPEN COMPETITIVE TENDERING
Re-Advertisement

Supply and Installation of Closed – Circuit Television (CCTC) - [LEGCO/CCTV/03/2026-2027]

1. *Lesotho Electricity Generation Company has allocated/received funds to be used for the supply and installation of closed – circuit Television.*
2. The Entity invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for the provision of the above works.
3. Bidding shall be conducted in accordance with the procedures contained in the Public Procurement Act of 2023 and is competitive to all bidders.
4. Interested eligible bidders may obtain further information and inspect the bidding document at the address given below at 8(a) from 8:00 a.m to 16:30 p.m. or on mnkotsi@legco.co.ls/nkotsimankhabu@yahoo.com.
5. The bidding document which has been prepared in English may be requested by interested bidders at 8(b) or on mnkotsi@legco.co.ls/nkotsimankhabu@yahoo.com.
6. Bids must be delivered to the address below at 8(c) at or before ***27 March 2026 at 11:00 a.m.*** All bids must be accompanied by a bid security of ***Five Thousand Maloti Only (M5000.00)***. Bid securities must be valid for until **22 July 2026**. Late bids shall be rejected. Bids will be opened in the presence of the bidders' representatives who choose to attend at the address below at 8(d) at ***11:30 a.m on 27 March 2026***.
7. There shall be a Compulsory site visit at **Ha Ramarothole in Mafeteng** on the dates indicated in the proposed schedule in this notice.
8. Bidders should note the following:

(a) Documents may be inspected at: ***[251 Sekhaila Tlali, Honeymoon Park, Maseru West]***

(b) Documents will be issued from: ***[251 Sekhaila Tlali, Honeymoon Park, Maseru West]***

(c) Bids must be delivered to: ***[LEGCO Foyer, 251 Sekhaila Tlali, Honeymoon Park, Maseru West]***

(d) Address of bid opening: ***[251 Sekhaila Tlali, Honeymoon Park, Maseru West]***

9. The Planned Procurement Schedule (subject to changes) is as follows:

Activity	Date
(a) Publish bid notice	12 February 2026
(b) Site Visit	25 February 2026 at 11:00 a.m
(c) Bid closing date	27 March 2026
(d) Bid Opening Date	27 March 2026 at 11:30 a.m.
(e) Evaluation process	30 March - 01 April 2026
(f) Display and communication of Notice of Tender	15 April 2026
(g) Contract signature	01 May 2026

PETROLEUM FUND.

INVITATION TO BID

ISUZU D-MAX 300 D/C 4X4 DOUBLE CAB (2019 Model)

The Fund hereby invites sealed bids from eligible members of the public for the purchase of a used vehicle of the following description:
Make: **Isuzu**
Model: **D-Max 300D/C 4x4 LX**
Year of Manufacture: **2019**
Mileage: **122,125 KM**
Reserve Price: **M355,800.00**

Inspection and viewing: The Fund will make the vehicle available for viewing at the Petroleum Fund offices at LCCI Building, Corner Orpen Road, Old Europa Maseru, from 08:00hrs until 16:30hrs on **Thursday, the 12th February to Wednesday, the 25th February 2026**.

Bid Submission Method: Bids must be submitted in Sealed envelopes clearly marked **'Bid for Purchase of Used Vehicle Isuzu D-Max 300 D/C 4x4 LX'**, and be deposited in a tender box situated at the Petroleum Fund Reception Area by 12:00 hrs on **Friday, the 13th March 2026**. This will be followed by a public opening of bids at 12:15 hrs on the same day, in the Petroleum Fund Boardroom. The highest bid will be considered.

Terms and Conditions
Payment Terms: Successful bidder must pay the full purchase price within seven (7) working days of bid acceptance by bank transfer.

Warranty: The vehicle is sold **as-is**, **where-is**, with no warranty.

Rejection of Bids: Late Bids will be rejected.
The Fund reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bids, to waive informalities, and to award the sale in the best interest of the organisation.

For further clarifications, please contact the procurement unit at Petroleum Fund, LCCI Building, on **22312137**.

Kingdom of Lesotho
Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social Development

FEBRUARY 2026
ITT: 004 of 2026/27

Invitation for Bid

Tender for supply and delivery of Baby formula, Diapers, Hygiene kits and Groceries - ITT: 004 of 2026/2027

Tender for supply and delivery of Baby formula, Diapers, Hygiene kits and Groceries - ITT: 004 of 2026/2027

1. The Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social Development invites bids from locally registered eligible companies for the supply and delivery of **Baby formula, Diapers, Hygiene kits and Groceries** for Maseru District.
2. Bids must be delivered to the address below on or before 12th March 2026 at **12:00 noon**. All bids must be accompanied by a bid security in the form of a Bid bond from a financial institution recognised by the Central Bank Lesotho.
3. ***NB* Tenderers will not be awarded more than ONE Lot**
4. A complete set of bidding documents may be purchased by interested bidders at the address below and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of **(M2,000.00) Two thousand Maloti only**. The method of payment will be cash at Accounts Office at Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social Development, office Maseru. Second Floor 1010 Building.
5. It is mandatory for bidders to submit certificate of bona fide and will be included in the document, their tax clearance certificates from the Lesotho Revenue Authority together with their bids as well as their trader's license. These documents shall either be originals or certified copies by Lesotho Revenue Authority and Trade Department. Non- compliance with this requirement may invalidate their bids.
6. Bids will be opened in the presence of the bidders' representatives who choose to attend at 14:30hrs on Tuesday 12th March, 2026 at the address given below.

Interested eligible bidders may obtain further information from and inspect the bidding documents at:
Procurement Unit
Gender, Youth and Social Development Headquarters,
10 10 Building Opposite Pitso Ground
Second Floor Room 201
Maseru 100, Lesotho.
Tel: + 266 – 27003549

Confidentiality
Due to the nature of this assignment, the Ministry of Gender Youth and Social Development (MGYSD) shall require that documents and any other information acquired by the company from any source during the course of undertaking of the assignment be kept strictly confidential, and that such information shall not be shared with third parties without the express permission of MGYSD.

1.1. **ITT Process**
The Principal Secretary for Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social Development now invite sealed bids from eligible bidders for the **supply and delivery of Baby formula, Diapers, Hygiene kits and Groceries - ITT: 004 of 2026/2027:**

LOT 1	
ITEM	**DESCRIPTION**
1	HUGGIES BABY DIAPERS
LOT 2	
2	CLEMENSE ADULT DIAPERS
LOT 3	
3	BABY FORMULA
LOT 4	
4	HYGIENE KITS
5	GROCERIES

No one Bidder will be awarded more than one Lot, however Bidders
Clarifications:
All clarifications and queries on this tender must be addressed to the Secretary Tender Panel, Procurement Unit, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social Development Headquarters,
10 10 Building
Second Floor Room 201
Tel: 27003549

Email nmohomaneva@gmail.com. All requests for clarifications should be received no later than 10 days before 12th March 2026. All requests for clarifications must be in writing through email.

Government of Lesotho
THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST NO: 1 OF 2026/2027 (CONSULTING FIRM)

A CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST- CONSULTING FIRM TO UNDERTAKE AN ASSESSMENT OF SYSTEMS, DESIGN AND DEVELOP A NATIONAL DATA AND M&E SYSTEM

1. Introduction
In Lesotho, data serves as a cornerstone for setting development targets, establishing benchmarks, and designing systems that translate national development plans into tangible outcomes. Robust national statistical and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are therefore critical to ensuring the availability of reliable data and strategic information to drive effective development initiatives. The national, regional and international development plans depend heavily on the functionality and credibility of these systems. This reliance assumes that national systems are well-established and capable of producing accurate and timely data for tracking developmental progress. It against this background that the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning wishes to engage a consulting firm to undertake an Assessment Of Systems, Design and Develop a National Data and M&E System.

A complete set of bidding documents in English will be available to interested bidders for collection at Planning Procurement Unit office number **124** during office hours (between 8:00 am until 4:30 pm).

Bids must be deposited on or before **24th February 2026** at **12:00HRS** in the tender box situated at Government Complex Phase 2 at Development Planning 2nd floor. Bids arriving after the closing date time shall be rejected. Tenders will be opened in the presence of bidders or representatives at 1**4: 30** hours on the same day.

The address for procurement of bidding documents, clarification requests and bid submission is:
Ministry of Finance and Development Planning
Procurement Unit P.O. Box 630 Maseru 100.
Tel no. 22 317433 / 266 22 328187

Tender Timetable for the expression of interest

Activity	Dates
ITT Issued	*2nd Feb 2026*
Clarifications dates	*2nd Feb 2026 – 23rd Feb 2026*
Deadline for obtaining Tender Document	*19th Feb 2026*
ITT Close	*24th Feb 2026 at 12:00 noon*
Tender opening	*24th Feb 2026 at 14:30 hours*
Evaluation dates	*2nd Mar 2026*

The Ministry of Finance and Development Planning is not bound to accept the lowest or any bid also reserves the right to reject or cancel the contract in any illegal or corrupt practices have been connected with one award.

Newsday Opinion

Kananelo Boloetse

2026 Budget: A nation on painkillers

My grandmother lived with pain for more than 20 years. Her knees were bone on bone. Her back curved like a question mark. Every morning, she would shuffle to the kitchen, boil water for tea, and swallow two small white tablets. Then she would sit, motionless, waiting for the medicine to do its work.

We, children, would watch her and wonder why she did not see a doctor. Why doesn't she get the surgery that would fix her knees, straighten her back, and let her walk without wincing?

The answer, we learned, was that the painkillers worked. Not perfectly, she never ran, never danced, never carried a child on her hip. But they worked well enough. The pain was manageable. The surgery was terrifying. So she took the tablets, year after year, until the day she stopped taking anything at all.

I thought of my grandmother on Wednesday, watching the Minister of Finance deliver her budget speech. I thought of her as the Minister announced the 2 percent salary increase for public servants. I thought of her as she detailed the new programs for youth employment. I thought of her as the parliament applauded politely.

And I realised that Lesotho has become my grandmother.

We are in pain. The indicators are unmistakable:

- Hundreds of thousands of young people unemployed
- A wage bill consuming 17 percent of GDP, crowding out investment
- SACU revenues making up a third of our budget, entirely dependent on South Africa's economy
- Grants collapsing, development partners retreating
- Textile factories closing, diamond mines faltering, jobs disappearing

The pain is real. The pain is chronic. The pain, if left untreated, will eventually kill us.

But the truth is that the painkillers still work.

Consider the medicine cabinet we have assembled over decades.

SACU revenues are our strongest painkiller. Every year, billions of maloti flow from the customs union, allowing us to pay wages, fund programs, and maintain the appearance of a functioning state. Never mind that we have no control over these revenues. Never mind that they could disappear with a change in South African policy or a global recession. They work today. That is enough.

Water royalties are our newest prescription. The Minister proudly announced M4.78 billion from LHDA, "exceptionally high," she called them, and "temporary and cyclical." But temporary is fine. Cyclical is fine. The pain is managed for now. Tomorrow is tomorrow's problem.

Development assistance has been our reliable tonic for generations. Grants, loans, and technical assistance, they have flowed consistently enough that we built a government dependent on them. The Minister acknowledged their "structural withdrawal" in this budget, but the acknowledgement itself feels like a painkiller. We name the problem, and in naming it, we feel we have addressed it.

Borrowing is our emergency injectable. When the pain spikes, when revenues fall short, when disasters strike, we reach for the debt syringe. M23 billion and counting. Moderate distress, the ratings agencies say. Limited space to absorb shocks. But the injection works for now. We can worry about the side effects later.

Programs are our daily tablets. Youth programs, agricultural programs, health programs, education programs, each one a small white pill designed to manage a specific symptom. The Power Hub Initiative. The National Volunteer Corps. The Inclusive Growth Fund. Take them regularly. Report progress. Issue press releases. Manage the pain.

The pharmacopoeia is extensive. The side effects are accumulating. But the medicine cabinet is not yet empty.

So who needs surgery?

The surgery we require has been prescribed many times. The diagnosis is not mysterious. The procedure is not experimental.

We need to **reduce the wage bill** by fundamental restructuring of the public service. Functional reviews. Attrition targets. Voluntary separation. A smaller, better-paid, more productive civil service.

We need to **diversify the economy,** not by pilot programs and feasibility studies, but by creating an environment where private enterprise can flourish. Reliable electricity. Functional roads. Access to capital. A regulatory environment that rewards risk rather than punishing it.

We need to **invest in productive capacity**, not at the margins, but at scale. Irrigation schemes that actually irrigate. Factory shells that actually house factories. Digital infrastructure that actually connects.

We need to **confront the beneficiaries of the status quo**, the connected, the comfortable, the protected, and tell them that their comfort is killing the country.

This is the surgery. It is painful. It is risky. The patient might not survive the procedure. There will be recovery time, and the recovery will hurt.

But here is the question the budget answers, whether the Minister intended to answer it or not: Why would any government choose surgery when the painkillers still work?

Let us be honest about why the budget looks the way it does.

The Minister gave public servants a 2 percent raise. The pundits will debate whether this is too much or too little. The economists will calculate its impact on the fiscal deficit. The commentators will wring their hands about unsustainable wage bills and crowded-out investment.

All of them will miss the point.

The wage bill is not large because public servants are overpaid. It is large because the civil service is overflowing with people who should not be there. It is large because we have turned government employment into the ultimate patronage prize, the golden ticket handed out to relatives, friends, and political activists who have nowhere else to go and nothing else to offer.

In Lesotho, if you are related to a minister, you do not need to look for a job. The job comes to you. If you campaigned for the ruling party, you do not need to update your CV. Your reward is waiting. If you are connected to the right people, you do not need qualifications, experience, or even a clear job description. The system will find a place for you.

This is not speculation. This is the open secret that every Mosotho knows. Walk into any ministry in Maseru. Look at the faces. Ask how they got there. The answers will tell you everything about why our wage bill is 17 percent of GDP and why our public services remain abysmal.

The government has made a deliberate political choice that no one connected to power will go hungry. If a minister's nephew cannot find work in the private sector, put him in the ministry. If a party activist needs an income, create a position.

When the government freezes wages, as it should, as fiscal responsibility demands, it does not freeze only the salaries of the minister's niece who cannot type. It freezes the salary of the dedicated teacher in Quthing who has been inspiring children for twenty years.

It freezes the salary of the nurse in Mokhotlong who works in an understaffed clinic. It freezes the salary of the engineer in the Roads Directorate who actually knows about building bridges.

The meritorious, those who entered the civil service through genuine competition, who understand their jobs, who show up and deliver, are punished alongside the patronage appointments. Their real wages decline. Their families struggle. Their commitment is tested.

And when the government gives a raise, however modest, it gives it to everyone. The nurse gets the same percentage as the nephew. The teacher gets the same as the party activist. The engineer gets the same as the entirely unnecessary "special assistant" whose only qualification is a family name.

This is the cruelty of patronage. It makes reform nearly impossible because the meritorious and the connected are bound together in the same pay scale. Any attempt to discipline the wage bill punishes the people we need most. Any attempt to protect real workers also protects the parasites.

Here is the trap we have built for ourselves:

Step one: Staff the civil service with patronage appointments to reward political loyalty and keep the connected from going hungry.

Step two: Watch the wage bill balloon as more and more people are added to the payroll.

Step three: Find that there is no money left for investment, infrastructure, or the things that might actually create private sector jobs.

Step four: When fiscal pressure mounts, freeze wages across the board, punishing the competent alongside the connected.

Step five: Watch the competent leave, reducing the civil service's capacity to deliver anything at all.

Step six: Hire more patronage appointments to fill the gaps, because the connected never stop demanding their sliver platters.

Step seven: Repeat until the system collapses.

We are somewhere between step five and step six. The competent are leaving. The connected are arriving. The wage bill remains unsustainable. The services continue to decline.

And every budget, including this one, treats the symptom (the wage bill) while ignoring the disease (the patronage system that fills it).

The capital budget cut is not an economic decision. It is a political decision. Roads and factories and irrigation schemes do not vote. The future does not have a constituency. The young people who would benefit from investment are not organised, not mobilised, not demanding. Their pain is real, but it is diffuse. It can be managed with programs rather than addressed with investment.

The SOE audits and PPP reviews are not reform. They are delay. Audits take time. Reviews take longer. By the time the reports are written and the recommendations are considered, this government will be preparing for the next election. The pain is managed. The crisis is deferred.

This is not conspiracy. This is not corruption, or not only corruption. This is the political economy of palliative care. Governments, like patients, choose the path of least immediate pain. They manage symptoms because symptoms are what voters feel. They defer surgery because surgery is what voters fear.

The miracle is not that the budget fails to transform. The miracle is that anyone expected it to.

The patients who demand painkillers

We must also be honest about our own role.

We, the people of Lesotho, are not innocent bystanders in this drama. We are active participants. We demand painkillers.

When the government tries to reduce the wage bill, we protest. When it tries to rationalise the public service, we resist. When it proposes reforms that threaten the comfort of the connected, we elect someone else.

We want jobs, but we do not want the economic transformation that creates them. We want investment, but we do not want the regulatory certainty that attracts it. We want prosperity, but we are not willing to endure the pain of achieving it.

The budget gives us what we demand: manageable pain. Not relief, not cure, but enough tablets to get through another year.

Who needs surgery when the painkillers still work?

We have answered that question with every election, every protest, every defence of the status quo. We do not need surgery. We need the prescription refilled. We need the pain to stay manageable. We need tomorrow to look enough like today that we can pretend everything is fine.

The Minister understands this. She is not stupid. She is not malicious. She is responding to the incentives we have created, the demands we have made, and the limits we have set.

She gives us what we ask for.

We should be careful what we ask for.

The addiction we cannot acknowledge

There is a name for what we are doing. It is called addiction.

We are addicted to SACU revenues we do not control. We are addicted to development assistance we cannot replace. We are addicted to a wage bill we cannot afford. We are addicted to borrowing we cannot repay.

And like any addiction, ours is characterised by denial, by short-term thinking, by the relentless pursuit of the next dose.

The budget is our daily fix. It delivers the revenues, the programs, the adjustments that keep the withdrawal symptoms at bay. It allows us to pretend, for another year, that we are not in crisis.

The Minister's speech, for all its honesty about the global environment and the structural challenges, is also an enabler. It diagnoses the addiction without prescribing detox. It names the disease while dispensing the medicine.

Why do we fear surgery so much? Because we know what withdrawal looks like.

A real wage bill reduction would mean pseudo-public servants losing jobs. It would mean families losing income. It would mean villages losing their most reliable source of cash. The social cost would be immense. The political cost would be catastrophic.

A real economic diversification would mean industries failing while new ones struggle to be born. It would mean a period of transition when jobs disappear before new ones appear. It would mean uncertainty, anxiety, fear.

A real confrontation with the beneficiaries of the status quo would mean conflict, with the connected, the powerful, the protected. It would mean fights we are not sure we can win.

So we choose the pain we know over the pain we fear. We choose manageable decline over uncertain transformation. We choose palliative care over surgery.

And the budget reflects this choice perfectly.

The moment when painkillers stop working

Here is what my grandmother's story does not tell you. The painkillers did not work forever.

Eventually, her body could no longer absorb the medicine. The doses stopped helping. The pain broke through. By then, she was too weak for surgery. By then, the only option was more painkillers, stronger painkillers, until even those stopped working.

She died in bed having never had the surgery that might have given her years of pain-free life. She chose comfort over cure. She chose the known over the unknown. She chose the path of least immediate pain.

I loved my grandmother. I do not judge her choice.

But I do not want my country to make the same choice.

The moment is coming when the painkillers will stop working. SACU revenues will decline and not recover. Development assistance will dry up completely. Debt will reach its limit. The wage bill will consume everything and still be insufficient.

When that moment comes, we will be too weak for surgery. We will have spent our reserves, exhausted our options, and used up our chances. We will reach for the medicine cabinet and find it empty.

The Minister's budget does not prepare us for that moment. It delays it. It manages the pain today while ensuring the crisis tomorrow.

This is the slow suicide of a nation that has lost the will to live.

The surgery we must demand

I am not a doctor. I cannot prescribe the specific procedure our nation requires. But I can name the organs that need attention:

The heart, our economy, must be restarted. It cannot continue pumping blood only to the head while the limbs wither. We must redirect resources from consumption to investment, from wages to infrastructure, from the present to the future.

The brain, our governance, must be rewired. It cannot continue rewarding loyalty over competence, connection over merit, comfort over courage. We must build institutions that serve the nation, not themselves.

The muscles, our people, must be strengthened. They cannot continue carrying the weight of a system that offers them nothing in return. We must educate, train, employ, and empower every Mosotho who wants to work.

The spine, our leadership, must be stiffened. It cannot continue bending to every pressure, accommodating every interest, avoiding every conflict. We must demand leaders who tell the truth, take risks, and accept that surgery hurts.

This is the surgery. It is not a metaphor. It is not a speech. It is the hard, painful, necessary work of transforming a nation that has spent sixty years learning to manage decline.

Who will wield the scalpel?

The Minister will not wield it. Her budget proves she will not. She is competent, honest, and trapped, trapped by the incentives of her office, the demands of her colleagues, the limits of her mandate.

Parliament will not wield it. Its silence during the budget speech proves it will not. The members nodded and applauded while the future was being sacrificed. They are part of the comfort coalition, not its challengers.

The Prime Minister will not wield it. His confession that job creation is "difficult" proves he will not. He promised 62,000 jobs and delivered an acknowledgment of impotence. He is not a surgeon. He is a pharmacist, dispensing the same prescriptions, refilling the same bottles.

The development partners will not wield it. Their retreat proves they will not. They have decided that Lesotho is not worth the investment, not worth the risk, not worth the surgery. They are walking away, and who can blame them?

That leaves us.

The people. The citizens. The ones who suffer the pain and swallow the pills. The ones who will be left holding an empty medicine cabinet when the painkillers finally stop working.

We must wield the scalpel. Not because we want to, but because no one else will. Not because we are qualified, but because we are desperate. Not because surgery is safe, but because the alternative is death.

The choice before us

My grandmother chose painkillers over surgery. She died in bed, comfortable until the end, having never run or danced or carried a child on her hip.

I do not blame her. But I do not want to be her.

I want to live in a country that runs, that dances, that carries its children toward a future worth wanting. I want to live in a country that chooses surgery while the patient is still strong enough to survive it. I want to live in a country that looks at the medicine cabinet and says: this is not enough.

The budget is delivered. The speech is history. The applause has faded.

Now the choice is ours.

We can continue managing the pain. We can accept the programs, the adjustments, the small white pills that keep the symptoms at bay. We can pretend that next year's budget will be different, that the next government will be braver, that the next generation will somehow inherit a country we were too afraid to build.

Or we can demand the surgery.

We can organise. We can mobilise. We can vote differently, speak differently, live differently. We can tell our leaders: the painkillers are not enough. We want to walk without wincing. We want to run. We want to dance. We want to carry our children toward a future that does not require medicine.

The choice is ours. It has always been ours.

Who needs surgery when the painkillers still work?

We do.

Beaten, enslaved, then forced to abort

Ntsoaki Motaung

The quiet villages of Lesotho often look southward, toward the promise of better opportunities across the border in South Africa.

For one woman we will call Palesa, to protect her identity, that dream of escape from hardship became a descent into unimaginable horror.

Palesa's ordeal offers a stark window into the hidden machinery of human trafficking: the false promises, the illegal crossings, the descent into forced labour, sexual violence, and the ultimate violation of a forced abortion.

In 2022, Palesa was running a small poultry farm in Lesotho, but mounting debts and the struggle to make ends meet pushed her to seek help. She contacted a friend already working in Ceres, South Africa, who promised to arrange a legitimate job by the December holidays.

The plan was for Palesa to relocate after Easter the following year.

Desperate to bypass bureaucratic hurdles, Palesa was guided across the border through an informal, illegal crossing, a choice driven by necessity that immediately left her vulnerable, stripped of legal protections before she even set foot in her new life.

Once in South Africa, she was handed over to a man presented as her employer. He assured her of respectable work in a shop. Instead, she was delivered into modern slavery.

The "shop" was a cramped spaza shack built from corrugated iron. Palesa's world shrank to its confines. She worked behind a small, reinforced window, her only contact with the outside. At night, she slept in a tiny back area, effectively imprisoned in her workplace.

After a month of grueling, unpaid labour, she confronted her captor. His response was textbook exploitation: he claimed she owed him for her keep, then pressured her to move into his main house as a domestic worker and nanny for his children, promising to "make up" for lost wages by doubling her pay.

With no money, no phone, and no legal status, Palesa had little choice.

What began as labour abuse soon escalated into total control. Her employer monitored her every move, forbidding contact with men. When a regular customer spoke to her in his presence one afternoon, the man erupted in fury.

He beat Palesa brutally, accusing her of prostitution and blaming her for his refusal to pay. Then came the declaration that sealed her fate: from that day on, he told her, she was his wife.

What followed was relentless sexual violence. Palesa endured daily assaults until she discovered she was pregnant. Hoping the news might stir some compassion, she told him. His reply was chilling: he already had a "real" family, and her role was strictly to serve.

Rather than allow the pregnancy, he took matters into his own hands in a savage act of reproductive violence. He brought unidentified pills, forced some into her vagina, and made her swallow the rest.

The pain was excruciating. Palesa collapsed on the shop floor, bleeding heavily for hours, teetering on the edge of death. Her captor closed the shop to customers, hiding the crime. Only when she began to recover enough to stand did he give her basic medication—not out of concern, but to keep his "worker" operational.

Even in the depths of trauma, Palesa's resolve never broke. She began a careful, high-risk plan for escape. Each day, she skimmed small amounts from the shop's takings, hiding the cash despite daily searches. These coins became her secret freedom fund.

She also built trust with her captor's children, becoming a reliable, affectionate figure in their lives. That bond proved decisive. One afternoon, while the man was away, she persuaded the eldest child to fetch the gate keys for a pretend supermarket errand.

With calculated calm, Palesa layered extra clothes under a large cloth to mask her intent. She opened the gate, pretended to forget something inside, and waited until the children were distracted. The gate appeared closed but remained unlocked. In that fleeting window, she walked out, and kept walking.

Exhausted and terrified, she reached a nearby house where a compassionate family took her in. They helped her search Facebook for relatives, eventually reconnecting with a cousin in South Africa. By December, Palesa was back in Lesotho, reunited with family she had feared she would never see again.

But the woman who returned carried deep scars. For a long time, she remained silent about the abuse. Healing only began when she enrolled in nursing school to study social work. There, learning about power dynamics and abuse gave her the words to name her experience.

Supported by the Lesotho Migrants Association and World Vision Lesotho, Palesa received emotional guidance and practical help, including secondhand goods to restart her business aspirations.

Today, she is a graduate and entrepreneur, standing as proof that even from the darkest captivity, resilience can prevail.

Palesa's story underscores the persistent dangers of cross-border trafficking in the region. According to the 2025 U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report, Lesotho remains on Tier 2, making significant efforts but not yet fully meeting minimum standards, while South Africa was downgraded to the Tier 2 Watch List amid concerns over declining victim identifications, fewer prosecutions, and potential official complicity at borders.

The latest UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons notes that forced labour has overtaken sexual exploitation as the most detected form globally, around 42 percent of victims compared to 36 percent for sexual exploitation, though convictions still skew heavily toward sex trafficking cases.

In Southern Africa, Basotho women are frequently lured into domestic servitude or sex work, while men face exploitation in illegal mining. Lesotho's principal response rests on the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act No. 1 of 2011, bolstered by 2021 amendments that fully criminalize all forms of trafficking, including sex trafficking, with penalties up to 25 years' imprisonment (or life for child cases.

The law provides key protections, such as non-prosecution of victims for crimes committed under coercion, including illegal entry, and safeguards for victim safety.

The new Labour Act of 2024 further strengthens prevention by requiring licensing for recruitment agencies, authorizing inspections of private homes for domestic labour cases, and criminalizing fraudulent recruitment practices.

Lesotho is also party to core international instruments, including the UN Palermo Protocol, ILO conventions on forced labour and modern slavery, and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which addresses cross-border risks for women.

Palesa's survival is extraordinary, but her story is far from unique. It is a reminder that behind every border crossed in hope lies the potential for exploitation, and that combating trafficking demands stronger regional cooperation, better victim support, and unyielding accountability.

Arts & Entertainment Newsday

Remembering Jazzy Tea's life that moved with the music

Chris Theko

Lesotho has lost one of its most enduring cultural figures following the death of Toka Thomas Thabane, popularly known as Jazzy Tea, who passed away on 18 February 2026 at Queen Mamohato Memorial Hospital in Maseru.

His passing has sent shock waves of grief through the music, broadcasting, and creative communities, where his influence was felt for more than four decades.

Born on 19 January 1964, Toka was the eldest son of former Prime Minister Dr Motsoahae Thomas Thabane, founder of the former ruling All Basotho Convention (ABC).

While his family name was firmly rooted in Lesotho's political history, Jazzy Tea chose a different path, one guided by rhythm, sound, and an unrelenting passion for music.

His entry into the music world came at a remarkably young age. In 1982, when he was just 18 years old, he secured a breakthrough opportunity as a driver for the iconic Basotho band Sankomota.

What began as a logistical role quickly evolved into a deeper involvement, as he later became the group's stage assistant. This exposure placed him at the centre of live performances during a defining era for Lesotho's music scene and provided him with invaluable insight into stagecraft, production, and audience engagement.

Those formative years laid the groundwork for a career defined by adaptability and longevity. Jazzy Tea transitioned from behind-the-scenes roles into becoming a respected DJ and broadcaster, building a reputation for his refined ear, broad musical knowledge, and ability to connect with listeners across generations.

His voice and presence became familiar to many through radio, where he helped shape tastes and gave emerging artists a platform.

In 1996, Jazzy Tea took a decisive step into recording artistry with the release of his debut Kwaito single, Soare. The song resonated widely and became a hit among music lovers, cementing his place not only as a curator of music but also as a creator.

The success of Soare marked a significant milestone in his career and reflected his ability to evolve with the changing soundscape while remaining authentic.

Colleagues describe Jazzy Tea as a trailblazer who "stood the test of time," not through hype, but through consistency, humility, and deep respect for the craft. He navigated shifting musical trends with ease, remaining relevant in an industry known for rapid change.

Beyond the spotlight, he was known as a grounded and generous individual, deeply committed to music as a tool for connection and expression. His legacy lives on in the artists he inspired, the audiences he moved, and the cultural footprint he helped shape.

Toka Thomas Thabane is survived by his wife, 2 kids, (girl and boy), family, friends, and a nation of listeners who will remember him not only for his sound, but for the life and soul he poured into Lesotho's music landscape.

Funeral and memorial service details will be announced by the family in due course.

Mister Teen Lesotho 2024 Liphalana eyes continental glory

Refiloe Molise

Nineteen-year-old Bafokeng Liphalana from Maseru is preparing to represent Lesotho at the Mister Teenager Africa 2026 pageant in Nairobi, Kenya. He is determined to showcase Basotho pride, talent and resilience on the continental stage.

Liphalana, who was crowned Mister Teen Lesotho 2024, says the opportunity marks an important step in his journey as a young leader and creative. He sees the competition not only as a personal milestone, but also as a chance to elevate Lesotho's presence in Africa.

His pageantry journey began in 2023 when he was crowned Mr 'Mabathoana High School. He describes that experience as the moment he discovered his passion for leadership and self-expression. The school title motivated him to pursue platforms beyond the classroom and to use pageantry as a voice for young people.

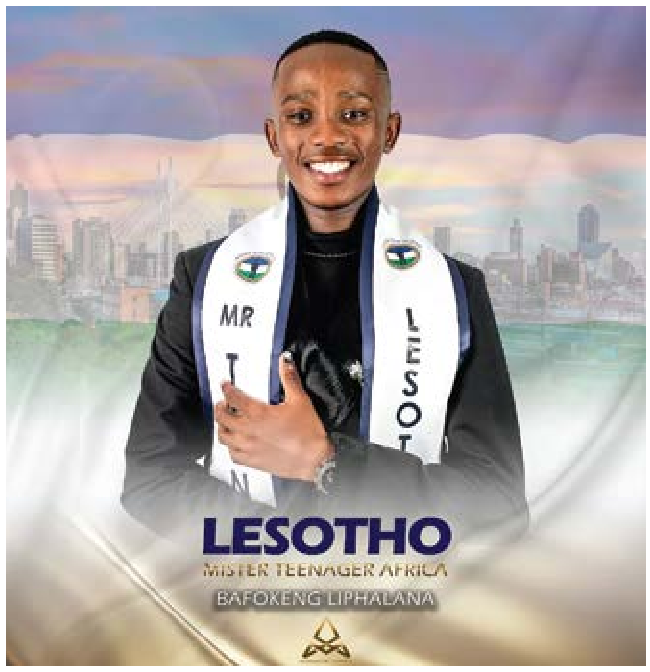
In September last year, Liphalana told Chris Theko that he had ambitions beyond national borders and was working towards competing on the continental stage. That dream has now materialised as he prepares for Mister Teenager Africa 2026.

Mister Teenager Africa is organised under Teenager Africa Pageants, a platform that gives talented and ambitious young Africans an opportunity to showcase their potential, intelligence and charisma, while promoting leadership and cultural exchange across the continent.

Currently pursuing a degree in Public Administration and Political Science at the National University of Lesotho, Liphalana says his academic background has strengthened his understanding of leadership, governance and youth advocacy. He believes education and pageantry complement each other in shaping him into a well-rounded representative.

Beyond academics, he is a model and a Latin and Ballroom dancer, talents he plans to showcase during the competition. He describes dance as his favourite form of self-expression and says it has sharpened his confidence and stage presence.

He says representing Lesotho at a continental level carries deeper meaning, particularly at a time when discussions about the country's global recognition have gained attention internationally.



"As Basotho, we have to put ourselves out there and excel so the world knows Lesotho exists and has resilient, peace-loving people," he said.

Through his participation, Liphalana hopes to highlight the need for greater investment and structured opportunities for teenagers in creative industries such as modelling and dance. He says many young people abandon their dreams due to limited financial support and lack of mentorship.

"Talent deserves opportunity regardless of background. But talent must also be nurtured through training, mentorship and a supportive environment. Persistence, determination and humility are key, nothing comes easy in life," he said.

In preparation for the Nairobi pageant, he has intensified his physical training, personal development and public speaking practice. He is also seeking guidance from experienced mentors in pageantry and leadership. He identifies discipline, cultural pride, confidence and resilience as his core strengths, while acknowledging that public speaking remains an area he continues to improve.

Winning the Mister Teenager Africa title, he says, would be a historic achievement for Lesotho and a turning point for his advocacy work.

"It would open doors for youth advocacy and inspire other teenagers to see that young people from Lesotho can compete and lead at continental and global levels. Your background should not limit you; it should motivate you toward excellence," he said.

However, financial constraints remain a challenge as he prepares for the competition.

"I am currently raising funds to register for Mr and Miss Teenager Africa 2026, which will be hosted in Nairobi, Kenya. The registration fee is USD525, plus the cost of a plane ticket. I humbly request assistance from anyone who can help me make this dream a reality," he said.

He indicated that he still needs M8,405.25 to cover the registration fee.

Liphalana has called on the public to support his journey by following him online, sharing his campaign, engaging with the official Mister Teenager Africa platforms and voting through Facebook and Instagram under "Teenager Africa."

He concluded by thanking his supporters for their encouragement, saying their belief in him fuels his determination. He also encouraged other teenagers to recognise that pageantry is not about perfection but purpose, adding that anyone with a voice and the courage to try should step forward because their story matters.

Sports budget slammed despite notable improvement

Seabata Mahao

The proposed sports allocation in the 2026/27 national budget has sparked sharp criticism from opposition lawmakers, who argue that the increased funding still falls far short of what is needed to revive and grow the sector.

In her budget speech themed 'Accelerating Economic Transformation, Building Resilience,' Minister of Finance and Development Planning Dr Retelisitsoe Matlanyane announced that the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sports will receive M288.7 million, with M150 million specifically earmarked for sports infrastructure.

"This money has been provided to the Tourism, Culture and Sports sector to expand tourism offerings, preserve national heritage, and strengthen sports development," Matlanyane stated.

"To support growth in tourism, culture, and sports, Government has prioritised high-impact investments within the sector. M150 million has been allocated for sports infrastructure to upgrade key facilities and expand access to quality sporting amenities nationwide."

While the allocation marks a notable increase compared to previous years, former Sports Ministers and opposition leaders have described it as inadequate and lacking long-term vision.

A significant portion of the M150 million is expected to go towards refurbishing Setsoto Stadium, which has been barred for five years by both the Confederation of African Football (CAF) and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) from hosting international matches.

The ban has forced Lesotho's national teams to play home matches in South Africa at considerable financial cost.

Although renovations were previously estimated at M85 million last year, rising construction costs have pushed the required amount much higher, raising doubts about whether the M150 million will be enough to fully restore the stadium to international standards.

Former Sports Minister Mahali Phamotse did not mince her words, describing the allocation as insufficient and poorly targeted.

"The national budget covers many sectors, but my main interest is in the portion allocated to youth development, job creation, and sports," she said.

"I am particularly concerned about how we are going to financially support our players and sports professionals. What specific jobs are being planned for the youth? Are there any investors involved? These issues will only become clear once the budget is fully allocated and implemented."

Phamotse warned that the M150 million "is just a drop in the ocean compared to what is actually needed," and expressed concern that the funds could be mismanaged.

"For example, we are currently working on the stadium, yet I know very well that it may never qualify under FIFA standards. When compared to other nearby stadiums that are even better than ours but still do not qualify, it raises serious concerns," she noted.

She called on FIFA to closely monitor the renovation process to ensure compliance with international standards and to guard against potential tender corruption.

Beyond Setsoto, Phamotse argued that the country is missing opportunities to invest strategically in facilities such as the Rapokolana High Altitude Training Centre. She believes the centre could position Lesotho as a regional hub for high-altitude training and generate much-needed income.

"Because of our country's climate conditions, we often travel to Pretoria to use high-performance training facilities. Rapokolana has the potential to attract teams from the Southern African region for training camps, which could generate income for the country. Instead of spending three hundred thousand for just one night of travel to South Africa, we could be earning money by hosting others," she said.

She further stressed that Lesotho needs new, modern sports infrastructure rather than repeated renovations of ageing facilities, and urged Government to actively involve private investors to bridge funding gaps.

Echoing similar concerns, former Sports Minister and Leader of the Opposition Mathibeli Mokhothu said the allocation fails to recognise sport as a serious economic driver.

The Minister of Sports, Motlatsi Maqelepo

"As a country, we must work much harder in sports because we are far behind. The budget allocated to sports is very small compared to other government departments. Another issue I have noticed is that the country does not fully understand the potential within sports. Many young people who are not academically inclined could use their talents in sports to build successful careers," Mokhothu explained.

He described the continued closure of Setsoto Stadium, now stretching into its sixth year, as deeply unfortunate, especially at a time when sporting codes in Lesotho are expanding and diversifying.

Mokhothu also questioned whether the M150 million would be sufficient to modernise the facility properly, warning against installing artificial turf without comprehensive structural upgrades.

"Many young people are not aware that installing artificial turf requires a proper concrete base first. This means the stadium would only be suitable for football. If we were to host Olympic events, the stadium would not be suitable. Instead, the stadium should be restored to its original design with natural grass so that it can host multiple sporting codes at national level," he said.

He concluded that sports development requires more than headline figures in a budget speech, it demands strategic planning, transparency, investor participation and adequate long-term funding.

"If managed well, sports can create jobs, generate income, and uplift the youth of our nation," Mokhothu added.

Chess sensation bags M5, 000 as runners up

Mamello Rakotsoane

Chess rising star, Naleli McPherson Teeke, clinched the coveted second prize in the intermediate category of the ladies in the recent Bojanala Closed Chess Championship 2026, in North West, South Africa.

In a remarkable display of skill and determination, 28-year old McPerson Teeke from Mohale's Hoek has bagged M5, 000 and cemented her place as a rising star in Lesotho's chess scene.

Her journey from a high school beginner to a national contender is a story of passion, perseverance, and quiet strength, offering inspiration to aspiring players across the region.

McPerson Teeke first discovered chess during her high school years, drawn in by her Mathematics teacher and the influence of her chess-playing friends.

"I was always around them when they play," she said.

One of her fondest early memories is qualifying for the World Youth Chess Championship Olympiad in Durban, South Africa just a month after starting.

Naleli McPherson Teeke

"I did well and even qualify for a prestigious tournament."

Though she did not undergo extensive preparation for the Bojanala event, her coaching work keeps her fundamentals sharp. She also draws insights from watching her husband, a higher-rated player, play. Entering the tournament as the top seed in her section, she faced intense pressure, as opponents targeted her.

"When you are the favorite, everyone comes for you."

Her strategy was simple play for enjoyment rather than victory, especially after a disappointing performance at the Lesotho Open the previous week.

"This was my second tournament this year, and the plan was to enjoy myself and see what happens."

The Bojanala Chess Federation's annual closed tournament fosters a supportive atmosphere, with a prize pool rewarding excellence, M10,000 for first winner, M5,000 for second, M,500 for third, and an additional M2,500 for the best female player. The event aims to give back to the chess community and honor players' dedication.

She competed in five rounds, drawing three and winning two, against formidable South African opponents, including junior masters.

"All my games were difficult; I was playing against quite large players in South Africa, some young but with strong game plans. Everyone was coming for me, so I had to not feel under pressure."

Despite lacking full preparation, she pushed through, with her final draw securing second place.

"Winning the price felt great, especially as it was my first tournament with a dedicated ladies' section but I thought I might not get anything because people prepare more for the highest-rated player, and the money was an extra helping hand."

Naleli awaits Lesotho's national team selections for the Chess Olympiad.

"If I get selected, I will definitely give it a chance to represent our country."

This year, she plans to compete in as many tournaments as possible, though it may be her last before a break to focus on her professional career.

"During my time when I have been playing and trying to fight that us female we should get considered and be treated the same way men are treated in sports, I have noticed that something that we really cannot change or we can try by all means to change it but it is taking a longer period of time.

"What I can say to females is that try to be playing as much as you can and don not give up even if you feel like the favour is not on your side as female just continue playing because you never know what future holds," she said.

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All set for biggest marathon in the land

Seabata Mahao

It is all systems go for the annual Nedbank Maseru City Run (MCR) this Sunday, February 22 as this year's edition rewrites the record books.

With over 3,400 runners registered just days before the big day, the MCR has firmly established itself as Lesotho's biggest marathon, attracting more than double last year's figures.

In 2025, just over 1,400 athletes took part, but this year's numbers have dwarfed that figure, underlining the race's explosive growth and nationwide appeal.

Now in its fourth year, the Maseru City Run has evolved from a promising road race into a full-scale sporting spectacle that draws elite athletes, social runners, corporate teams and families alike, all converging on the capital for what has become the country's flagship marathon event.

Adding royal sparkle to the occasion, Her Majesty Queen 'Masenate Mohato Seeiso, and Crown Prince Lerotholi Seeiso will participate in the 21km half marathon, while Princess Senate Seeiso is set to compete in the 10km race. Their involvement highlights the marathon's broad national appeal and its unifying spirit.

The event has also attracted high-profile political figures. Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sports Motlatsi Maqelepo, Minister of Communication, Science, Innovation and Technology Nthati Moorosi, and other prominent personalities are expected to take part. Speaker of the National Assembly Tlohang Sekhamane has registered for the 10km race.

Beyond Lesotho's borders, the marathon's reputation is gaining traction. More than 300 athletes have registered from outside the country, representing South Africa, Pakistan, Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe.

The growing international presence reflects the race's rising regional stature and its emergence as a preferred destination for road running enthusiasts.

The competitive edge is equally sharp. Over 35 professional runners have confirmed participation, promising fierce contests across the various distances, including the 42.2km full marathon, 21km half marathon and 10km race.

A major milestone for this year's edition came after a successful World Athletics route measurement and certification exercise conducted in Maseru in October. As a result, the 42.2km marathon is now an official qualifier for both the Comrades Marathon and the Two Oceans Marathon, a development that places the Maseru City Run among internationally recognised races.

Organisers are also working towards having the event listed on the World Athletics annual calendar, with ambitions of attracting at least 400 foreign runners in future editions.

The event's growth has been matched by strong corporate backing. Nedbank Lesotho headlines the 2026 edition as title sponsor, supported by Maseru Toyota, Maluti Mountain Cement, Stanlib Lesotho and NBC.

Overall, a total of 27 sponsors have come on board, including 21 trade sponsors that feature Newsday among others.

Organisers have assured participants that preparations are well on track. Water stations have been strategically placed at approximately three-kilometre intervals along all routes, in line with international race standards.

While late entry payments remain a recurring challenge, organisers expressed optimism that extending the no-pack registration deadline to February 20 will help manage last-minute demand and ensure a smooth race-day experience.