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A HISTORIC VISIT- UN SECRETARY-GENERAL REAFFIRMS SOLIDARITY WITH LESOTHO

By: Reitumetse Russell



The Kingdom of Lesotho welcomed United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, António Guterres, on his first official visit, marking a momentous occasion for the Basotho nation as it celebrated its bicentenary.

The two-day visit underscored the enduring partnership between the UN and Lesotho and reaffirmed solidarity with Africa in addressing global injustices that continue to hinder the country's ability to achieve long-term development aspirations.

The Secretary General met with His Majesty King Letsie III at the Palace during which the two leaders discussed challenges that the Kingdom of Lesotho was facing as a landlocked and developing country. The Secretary-General and His Majesty King discussed continued UN support towards the country's long-term development efforts, including the national reform process.

The meeting by the Secretary General and the Prime Minister together with cabinet ministers, discussed the country's priorities as part of its long-term development aspirations and the needed for support to realise the vision for the Kingdom.

Throughout his engagements with officials in the Kingdom, the Secretary-General reaffirmed the UN's commitment to supporting Lesotho's long-term development agenda, including its efforts towards keeping its SDGs promise. He emphasized overcoming the challenges of Lesotho's landlocked geography and securing access to affordable financing for sustainable development programmes.

While in the country, the Secretary General addressed a joint sitting of the Senate and National Assembly. Mr. Guterres used the occasion to pay tribute to Lesotho's founding father, King Moshoeshoe I approach to governance, stating that "while others chose conflict, he embraced dialogue. When faced with hostility, he responded with wisdom and courage." By welcoming displaced communities and building bridges, he showed the world how diversity can strengthen the fabric of nationhood," the Secretary General added.

The Secretary-General called for justice in “a global system designed without African voices, maintained without African participation, and perpetuated despite African protests.” He further called for reforms in the UN Security Council, in the international financial system which he stated is outdated, dysfunctional and unfair to Africa. “Africa must not be forced to choose between economic development and climate action,” he added as he made the call for climate justice. [\[Read full speech here\]](#)

The government of the Kingdom of Lesotho honoured the visiting UN Chief by naming a road connecting South Africa and Lesotho through Marakabei in Butha-Buthe. The António Guterres road was named alongside Morena Lethole of Butha-Buthe. This gesture by the government was a demonstration of the deep ties between Lesotho, its traditional leaders, and development partners partners like the UN, working together for development and progress.

The Secretary-General also visited the Katse Dam, a critical component of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. The project, a product of the cooperation between Lesotho and South Africa, is critical for the kingdom’s efforts to achieve economic development.

Throughout his visit, Mr. Guterres highlighted Lesotho’s enormous potential, particularly in its renewable energy resources, youthful population, and resilient spirit. He urged global solidarity to support Lesotho’s development journey.



NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON DISASTER MANAGEMENT: A CALL FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

By: Reitumetse Russell



The Government of Lesotho, through the Disaster Management Authority (DMA), hosted a two-day National Dialogue on Disaster Management under the theme: “Disaster Risk Management is Everybody’s Business.” The dialogue, held on January 29-30, 2024, was supported by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), emphasizing the critical need for a collaborative approach to disaster risk reduction and response.

The event was officially opened by the Right Honourable Prime Minister of Lesotho, who delivered the keynote address. He reaffirmed the government’s dedication to strengthening disaster resilience in the country, stating: “I want to assure you that disaster risk reduction is not just a government priority; it is a national priority. We have witnessed, first-hand, the importance of preparing for the worst while hoping for the best. We are committed to putting in place the policies, infrastructure, and systems that will mitigate risks and ensure that our response to disasters is swift, efficient, and effective while still ‘leaving no one behind.’” His remarks underscored the importance of proactive planning, resilience-building, and inclusivity in disaster risk management.

A highlight of the dialogue was a panel discussion on Disaster Preparedness and Response in Different Sectors, moderated by the UN Resident Coordinator. The panel featured key government ministers, including the Minister of Education and Training, who addressed the impact of disasters on the education sector and strategies for ensuring continuity in learning. The Minister of Communications discussed the role of information dissemination in disaster risk management and the need for reliable communication infrastructure. The Minister of Gender, Youth, and Social Development highlighted the vulnerabilities of women, children, and youth in disaster situations and the necessity of targeted interventions.

The panelists deliberated on sector-specific strategies for enhancing preparedness and response mechanisms. Key issues included climate-induced disasters, the need for investment in early warning systems, and strengthening institutional capacities to mitigate risks effectively. Throughout the discussions, participants echoed the need for a whole-of-society approach to disaster risk management.

Representatives from government, development partners, civil society, and local communities contributed insights on improving coordination, resource mobilization, and community-driven resilience strategies.

The dialogue concluded with a renewed commitment from all stakeholders to integrate disaster risk management into national development plans and ensure that Lesotho remains prepared for any emergencies that may arise. As the Prime Minister emphasized, disaster risk reduction must be a shared responsibility, where every citizen, institution, and partner plays a role in safeguarding the nation's future.

This National Dialogue marks an important step in advancing Lesotho's resilience agenda, ensuring that the country remains steadfast in the face of disasters while striving to build a safer, more prepared society for all.



EMPOWERING COMMUNICATION AND CHOICES: THE IMPACT OF HELP LESOTHO'S PARENT-TO-CHILD TRAINING

By: Violet Maraisane

The 'Malineo Poli, a participant in Help Lesotho's training program, now confidently engages in open, respectful discussions with her son about contraception, HIV prevention, and avoiding early pregnancies. She shared her innovative approach to communication: "When he goes out, I remind him using our own code language not to forget condoms. For instance, I might say, 'Pokane, please don't forget your papers (referring to condoms) so that you can protect yourself and marry when the time is right.'



Malineo is among many parents trained through Help Lesotho's Parent-to-Child Communication sessions in the Leribe district, supported by UNFPA, the Sexual and Reproductive Health agency. The sessions aimed to strengthen the relationships between parents and out-of-school adolescents by fostering open dialogue on Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

For Mosebetsi Tabola, the training underscored the importance of calm, respectful family discussions. "I have realized that issues should be discussed cordially. Now, we are all happy in the household; we discuss, and nobody raises their voice," he said.

The Young participants also gained valuable insights. Refiloe Makopo, 20, appreciated learning about the benefits of contraceptives. "I've learned that contraceptives help us achieve our goals. It's best to plan to have a baby when we can afford to raise a child," she said. Similarly, Teboho Mphasa emphasized the importance of planned parenthood and denounced gender-based violence.

Seventeen-year-old Reabetsoe Monate described the training as "impactful and informative," particularly the sessions on preventing pregnancy and STIs. "I knew nothing about birth control pills before, but now I fully understand contraception methods and how to avoid getting pregnant at a young age," she shared.



For 23-year-old Liako Letsie, the session on "speaking for yourself" was transformative. Previously prone to bottling up her emotions, Liako learned to confront situations constructively, reducing her emotional burden. "The training gave me the courage to access healthcare services, especially contraception, which I had feared before," she noted.

The sessions also tackled menstruation, encouraging male participants to support their female peers and promoting proper hygiene for females. Discussions on sex and gender challenged societal stereotypes, empowering participants to pursue their goals without fear of judgment.

One critical topic was the risks of dating older partners. The training highlighted power imbalances, manipulation, early pregnancies, and STIs, stressing the importance of financial independence to avoid exploitation. A pre-training survey revealed that 36% of participants recognized the risks of such relationships. Post-training, this awareness rose to 80%, demonstrating the program's impact.

Help Lesotho's initiative seeks to prevent the transmission of HIV and other STIs, reduce early and unintended pregnancies, and combat gender-based violence across the country. By equipping young people with knowledge, tools, and services, the program is creating a healthier, safer environment for the nation's youth. As evidenced by the participants' testimonies, this transformative training has fostered stronger family relationships, empowered young people to make informed decisions, and promoted a culture of mutual respect and understanding.

FROM LESOTHO TO KIGALI: A FUTURE OF POSSIBILITIES

By: Refuoe Kajane



"In 2024, Lesotho took a major step in advancing its youth development agenda by becoming the 33rd member of YouthConnekt Africa (YCA), a milestone made possible through the collaboration of the Ministry of Gender, Youth, and Social Development and the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The official launch of the Lesotho chapter, led by the Right Honourable Prime Minister Mr. Samuel Matekane in October 2024, was a moment of national pride, marking the beginning of a structured and strategic approach to youth empowerment. UNDP played a critical role in facilitating this process, providing technical support to ensure that Lesotho's youth could fully benefit from the opportunities presented by the YCA initiative.

YCA is an African homegrown solution designed to provide relevant strategies for the global South while advancing South-South initiatives that empower youth. Operating as a pan-African platform, its core mission is to connect young Africans for socio-economic transformation by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed to thrive. It fosters an environment where young people can turn their ideas and innovations into viable enterprises, actively contributing to Africa's economic growth.

By investing in youth-led initiatives and facilitating knowledge exchange, YCA serves as a dynamic force in driving sustainable development across the continent. With UNDP's strong backing, the initiative has grown into a movement that amplifies youth voices and champions policies that create an enabling environment for innovation and job creation.

As part of its integration into the YCA ecosystem, UNDP Lesotho sponsored 20 outstanding young entrepreneurs to attend the YouthConnekt Africa Summit in Kigali, Rwanda, in November 2024. These young innovators had previously emerged as the Top 20 finalists in the Sebatatso Innovation Challenge, which covered entrepreneurs and innovators through STEAM. This platform made them prime candidates to represent Lesotho on a continental stage. Accompanied by the Right Honourable Prime Minister Samuel Matekane and the Ministers of Gender, Youth, and Social Development (MGYSD) and Information, Communication, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MICSTI), the delegation set out to learn, connect, and showcase the incredible potential of Basotho youth in shaping Africa's economic landscape.

The summit, themed "Jobs for Youth Through Innovative Skilling," provided them with an unparalleled platform to engage with policymakers, business leaders, and fellow young innovators from across Africa. Their participation in discussions on digital skilling, agribusiness, financial technology, and creative industries broadened their perspectives, equipping them with insights that could shape the future of youth entrepreneurship in Lesotho. They participated in the "Buy from Youth, Buy from Africa" marketplace, where they showcased their innovative products and solutions to potential investors and business partners. This exposure not only opened doors for regional collaborations but also reinforced Lesotho's position as an emerging player in Africa's youth-led economic transformation. UNDP played a crucial role in making this possible by facilitating opportunities for young Basotho to pitch their ideas and secure potential partnerships.

A key highlight of their journey was a visit to Rwanda's UniPod Innovation Hub, where they witnessed firsthand how investment in technology, digital fabrication, and creative spaces can drive economic progress. With Lesotho's own UniPod set to be launched at Lerotholi Polytechnic, the experience provided invaluable lessons on best practices that could be replicated locally.

Throughout the YCA Summit, Lesotho's youth engaged in high-level networking, idea-sharing, and policy discussions that reinforced the country's commitment to fostering a supportive ecosystem for young entrepreneurs. The presence of the Right Honourable Prime Minister and Ministers underscored the government's dedication to prioritizing youth empowerment, with discussions on leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to expand market opportunities for young Basotho-led businesses. UNDP also facilitated engagements between Lesotho's youth and global stakeholders, ensuring that they could access the resources and mentorship needed to scale their businesses.

As the summit came to a close, the delegation returned home with more than just knowledge; they brought back a renewed sense of purpose and a clear vision for the future. Their participation strengthened Lesotho's standing within the YCA network, paving the way for increased investment in youth programs and continental partnerships.

MABITSOANE DIHOLO: CHAMPIONING FOOD SECURITY THROUGH POTATO FARMING

By: Mathabana Kotelo



For over 15 years, Mabitsoane Diholo, a 53-year-old potato farmer has cultivated potatoes in the mountainous region of Semonkong, Lesotho.

Her farming journey goes beyond supporting her family. With potatoes from her harvest, she also runs a thriving food catering business, contributing to local nutrition and food security in her community.

Diholo is one of over 1,000 Basotho farmers who have benefited from the FAO's support under the One Country One Priority Product (OCOP) programme, which identified potato as a key crop for improving nutrition and livelihoods in Lesotho. Through this initiative, farmers have received vital support, including seed potatoes, basal fertilizer, farming machinery, and essential training. These efforts have strengthened production capacity, empowering Basotho farmers, including women like Diholo to increase production, enhance nutrition and improve livelihoods.

Despite challenges such as limited storage facilities and an insufficient supply of seed potatoes, Diholo remains determined. Her journey is a powerful example of how investing in women farmers can drive food security, improve agricultural production, and empower communities.

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