

NEWSLETTER



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PRINCIPAL CHIEFS AS NUTRITION CHAMPIONS



In a joint effort to address the ongoing nutrition challenges in Lesotho, the Government of Lesotho, through the Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office (FNCO), convened a high-level Nutrition workshop for Principal Chiefs, with support from UNICEF and WFP. This landmark gathering brought together the College of Chiefs from across the country to position them as champions in the fight against malnutrition at the community level.

The dialogue was officially opened by His Majesty King Letsie III, who underscored the urgency of collective action, stating, "It is my hope that this dialogue on nutrition will build on what we have already started. You will know that in this nutrition space, among one of the things needed to address Lesotho's nutrition challenges. is to have a whole-of-society approach, all of us have a role to play."

His Majesty's remarks echoed the growing recognition that traditional leaders have a vital role to play in advancing community health and wellbeing. In support, the Minister in the Prime Minister's Office. Hon. Limpho Tau, emphasized the government's readiness collaborate closely with Principal Chiefs to ensure that nutrition programmes are effectively implemented and reach those most in need.

He noted that by becoming Nutrition Champions, chiefs can help ensure that interventions take root and flourish at the grassroots level.

Representing the United Nations in Lesotho, Resident Coordinator Amanda Khozi Mukwashi highlighted the community-led power of transformation. meaningful behaviour change to take root, it must begin where life is lived, in homes, families, and the village," she said. "And Marena, it is through your voices and your leadership that change can take hold. You have proven your power before in the fight against HIV stigma, in promoting peace, and in encouraging education. And now, we look to you to lead another national movement this time, to defeat malnutrition."

The dialogue produced several important insights and outcomes. These included the possibility for local communities to supply produce to the Government's School Feeding Programme, the potential for selling agricultural products in bulk to maximize financial returns, the introduction of creative ideas such as district-level nutrition competitions to productivity, and the innovative use of Principal Chiefs' offices as hubs for nutrition awareness, equipped with educational materials and trained officers. These ideas reflect a shift toward sustainable, community-driven solutions.

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On the last day, Principal Chiefs presented a road map for fighting malnutrition at the community level and taking up the roles as nutrition champions. Chiefs agreed to a list of commitments, including to serve as good examples in food production and good nutrition, provide land for communal gardens and promote diverse food production in schools.

At the core of the discussions was the understanding that nutrition challenges in Lesotho are complex and multifaceted, driven by socio-cultural norms, poverty, limited access to nutritious foods, and low agricultural productivity. Addressing these issues requires a holistic, inclusive approach that integrates education, empowerment, and strategic partnerships.

Principal Chiefs, when equipped with the right knowledge and tools, can become powerful agents of change. They are uniquely positioned to influence attitudes, safeguard interventions, and drive grassroots mobilisation around improved nutrition practices.



As Lesotho intensifies efforts to eliminate malnutrition and accelerate progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals, this workshop marked a significant milestone. It reaffirmed the critical role of traditional leaders in national development and laid the foundation for a stronger, more collaborative push towards a healthier, better-nourished future for all Basotho.





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His Majesty King Letsie III



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO HOSTS WORLD HEALTH DAY COMMEMORATION PROMOTING HEALTHY BEGINNINGS AND HOPEFUL FUTURES

By: Olivia Okoronduo



Roma – On Tuesday April 16, 2025, the National University of Lesotho (NUL) successfully hosted a vibrant and insightful commemoration of World Health Day. Under the theme "Global Action for Universal Health- Healthy Beginnings; Hopeful Futures," the event brought together students, university officials, health professionals, and representatives from other organizations to engage in critical discussions on global health matters.

Organized collaboratively by the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Faculty of Law at NUL, with support from the International Human Rights Lab and the World Health Organization in Lesotho, the commemoration served as a crucial platform to explore the interconnectedness of health, the law, and sustainable development.

A central highlight of the event was a compelling debate in a fully packed auditorium among NUL students from the Faculty of Law and Faculty of Health Sciences where the student debaters dissected the topic "Foreign aid cut was a necessary step for sustainable national development".

The students thoughtfully explored the extents to which the cuts may or may not have any effects on national development sustainability, especially in health and proposed innovative solutions to navigate this evolving landscape. The Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences expressed optimism, noting that the level of arguments and proposals presented during the debate signaled a promising future for health systems in Lesotho. She emphasized that students are the driving force behind the change the country needs.

"As students, you are giving Lesotho hope for better health outcomes. I believe that with your passion and our guidance, we can collectively steer the country's health systems infrastructure in the right direction," said Professor 'Maseabata Ramathebane, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the National University of Lesotho.

The WHO Representative, Dr. Innocent Nuwagira, who was also the Guest of Honour at the event provided a key note address which focused on providing context of how the World Health day came into being and its importance, how various stakeholders including Members States and ordinary citizens contribute to health and importantly the importance of the 2025 Health Beginnings; Hopeful Futures yearlong campaign and calls to action of stakeholders. "Health is the cornerstone of a just and equitable society—achieving universal health coverage and equity is not the work of health professionals alone, it is everybody's business. Together, let us move forward, united by compassion and conviction, to ensure that healthy beginnings truly lead to hopeful futures for every mother and child in Lesotho," said Dr. Innocent Nuwagira, WHO Lesotho Representative.

The audience also benefited from insightful presentations delivered by experts in fields of law, health and nutrition. The World Health Organization (WHO) provided a comprehensive overview of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) within the specific context of ensuring healthy beginnings and fostering hopeful futures for all. The National University of Lesotho also highlighted the Legal framework of the Right to Health.

Presentations were also made on Leveraging Health resource mobilization in Lesotho, offering perspectives on innovative strategies for sustainable healthcare financing within the nation and Baylor College of Medicine delivered a crucial presentation on the significance of Nutrition in the first 1000 days of life, underscoring the critical role of early nutrition in shaping long-term health outcomes and contributing to hopeful futures.

The event demonstrated the commitment of the National University of Lesotho to nurturing future leaders who are not only aware of global health challenges but also equipped to contribute to meaningful solutions. The diverse participation from law, health sciences, and nutrition students underscored the need for a multi-disciplinary approach required to obtain meaningful progress towards Universal Health Coverage and ensuring the well-being of all.

The successful World Health Day commemoration at NUL served as a timely reminder of the collective responsibility to invest in health systems that guarantee "Healthy Beginnings and Hopeful Futures" for all Basotho.



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Dr Innocent Nuwagira WHO Lesotho Representative

LESOTHO SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDES PILOT CENSUS AHEAD OF 2026 NATIONAL COUNT

By: Violet Maraisane



Lesotho has successfully concluded a two-week pilot census exercise, held from 16 to 30 April 2025, marking a major milestone in preparations for the upcoming Population and Housing Census (PHC) scheduled to begin on the second Sunday of April 2026.

The pilot census, led by the Bureau of Statistics (BOS), serves as a critical testing ground to identify and resolve any operational, logistical, or technological challenges before the main census.

According to an official of the BOS Mr. Pelesane Moerane, the timing of the pilot—exactly a year ahead of the actual census—is intentional and consistent with standard census preparation practices. "The pilot is done every time the census will be happening—this is why it was done in April this year, since the main census will be done in April next year. The pilot is done to see whether there is anything we will need to adjust before the census," he explained.

He added that one of the reasons for holding the pilot was to test the digital application for data collection and its synchronization with a real-time dashboard. "Once the dashboard is in place, we will pre-test it. The expectation is that it will clearly show in red the households that have not yet been enumerated and in green those that have," he said.

The 2025 pilot census covered 33 enumeration areas across 8 of Lesotho's 10 districts, with purposive selection ensuring that all regions of the country were represented. Areas included a cross-section of Lesotho's diverse geographic zones, such as the foothills, Senqu River Valley, and the highlands.

Following the pilot, the BOS will conduct a comprehensive review to gather insights from the field and produce a report that will guide planning for the 2026 census. "We want to be sure that what we see on the computer is what's on the ground," Mr. Moerane said, noting that cartography will also be updated accordingly.

Preparations will continue into early 2026, with a nationwide training programme scheduled from February to April. This will include BOS staff, constituency and area supervisors, as well as enumerators. Strong supervision, spot checks, and post-enumeration surveys will be implemented to ensure accuracy and public trust in the process.

The 2026 census is set to be fully digital and is expected to enhance efficiency and allow for quicker release of preliminary results. However, challenges remain—particularly the shortage of devices for enumeration.

"We only have 1,000 tablets when we need 8,000," Mr. Moerane revealed, appealing to partners and donors for support. "This census is crucial to guide national programming and planning."

UNFPA, the United Nations Sexual and Reproductive Health Agency, has been a key partner in supporting Lesotho's census preparations. The agency recently supported the BOS with capacity-building initiatives focused on advocacy and communication, aimed at ensuring public engagement and awareness.

For UNFPA, the census is crucial because it provides the critical population data needed to guide evidence-based policies, allocate resources effectively, and ensure that no one is left behind—especially women, girls, and vulnerable populations. Accurate and comprehensive census data enables the government and development partners to better plan for health, education, employment, and social protection services, all of which are essential for advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights in Lesotho.

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THE LAUNCH OF SEBOPI UNIPOD: PIONEERING LESOTHO'S INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP REVOLUTION

By: Kefuoe Kajane



On February 21, 2025, the future of innovation in Lesotho took a monumental leap forward with the official launch of the Sebopi-UniPod by the Right Honourable the Prime Minister – Mr. Samuel Ntsokoane Matekane at Lerotholi Polytechnic. This groundbreaking initiative, spearheaded by UNDP Lesotho in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Information, Communications, Science, Technology, and Innovation, stands as a beacon of innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic transformation. It offers students, youth, innovators, entrepreneurs, and Basotho at large a dynamic hub to turn their ideas into reality.

Fondly referred to as "Sebopi-UniPod" (meaning furnace), the first of its kind in Lesotho, is equipped with state-of-the-art technology designed to foster creativity, collaboration, and technological advancement. This initiative bridges the gap between education, industry and entrepreneurship, aligning with the National Strategic Development Plan II (NSDP II) and global development agendas. It reinforces the Government of Lesotho's commitment to leveraging technology and innovation as catalysts for economic growth.

At the launch event, the Right Honourable the Prime Minister emphasized the UniPod's significance in shaping Lesotho's future as a knowledge-based economy. "The UniPod will catalyze creativity, research, and entrepreneurship fostering a culture of innovation, especially among the youth. It will provide a platform for students, researchers, and entrepreneurs to ideate, experiment, and prototype," he said.

Sharing the same sentiments, the Minister of Education and Training, Hon. Professor Ntoi Rapapa, described the UniPod as a transformative force in Lesotho's education system. With UNDP's substantial contribution of over 70 million Maloti, the initiative marks a milestone in the country's journey toward an innovative and prosperous future.

The Minister of Information, Communications, Science, Technology, and Innovation, Hon. Nthati Moorosi, highlighted that the Sebopi-UniPod is not just an innovation hub but a cornerstone of Lesotho's broader digital transformation ecosystem. She expressed her gratitude to the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Education & Training for their collaborative efforts in realizing this vision.



Dr. Jacqueline Olweya, UNDP Resident Representative, highlighted the tangible impact of UniPods, stating that the impact of the Sebopi-UniPod is already evident, with Basotho youth leveraging these facilities to refine their innovations, secure partnerships, and volunteer while sharing their skills. This is the power of investing in youth-driven innovation. She indicated that the Sepobi-UniPod is designed to reposition universities as dynamic hubs of innovation, experimentation, and accelerated learning. It aims to equip students with market-ready knowledge systems and cutting-edge technology infrastructure that align with the demands of today's fast-evolving digital economy.

She said Through Sebopi-UniPod, STEAM participants gain hands-on exposure to real-world tools, machinery, and practical environments — empowering them to bring their ideas to life and transform concepts into impactful solutions.

The Sebopi-UniPod is set to unlock the potential of Lesotho's youth, students from higher learning institutions, and other aspiring entrepreneurs and innovators. By providing essential resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities, the hub enables young minds to develop their ideas into scalable ventures. The Sebopi-UniPod's strategic alignment with initiatives such as Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) ensures that it nurtures the next generation of problem-solvers and business leaders.

With the launch of the Sebopi-UniPod, Lesotho joins 15 other African nations in transforming universities into centers of innovation, research, and entrepreneurship. This milestone signals the country's readiness to embrace digital transformation and economic diversification, empowering its youth to lead in the global innovation landscape.

The impact of the Sebopi-UniPod will be far-reaching stimulating job creation, fostering inclusive economic growth, and positioning Lesotho as a hub of innovation in Southern Africa. As the country embarks on this journey, the Sebopi-UniPod stands as a testament to what can be achieved when vision, collaboration, and investment converge for national development.





LESOTHO CHARTS A NEW PATH IN PUBLIC SERVICE LABOUR RELATIONS

By: Tshepo Mohatle



The Kingdom of Lesotho has taken a historic step forward in strengthening its public service labour relations, with the support of the International Labour Organization (ILO). A three-day capacity building workshop was held in Maseru on 14 – 16 April 2025, which brought together senior government officials (Deputy Principal Secretaries, Human Resources Managers) and representatives of public service, health, education, judicial officers trade unions.

The workshop was part of a series of capacity building initiatives supported by the ILO following similar sessions that were organised in October 2024 for Cabinet and Principal Secretaries, and Human Resources and Legal Directors and leadership of public service trade unions.

The objective of the workshop was to sensitise participants on the provisions of ILO Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention, 1978 (No.151) which Lesotho ratified in 2023, and the Labour Act, 2024 which seek to align Lesotho's national labour relations system with international labour standards.

Participants were also sensitised on the ILO standards that promote freedom of association and collective bargaining (Conventions No. 87 and 98), as well as the practical application of these standards in the public service elsewhere.

Organized by the Ministry of Public Service, the workshop aimed to prepare bipartite partners in the public service for a significant transformation in the country's public service landscape. Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Public Service, Mrs. Makatleho Ledimo, emphasized the government's commitment to promoting harmonious, inclusive, and productive labour relations in the public service that are rooted in international best practices.

Mrs. Ledimo underscored the need to harmonize labour relations within the public service to promote labour relations stability, productivity, and effective service delivery. "Our journey toward public service reform must be underpinned by a firm commitment to dialogue and social justice," she noted.

Speaking on behalf of the ILO, Mr. Limpho Mandoro, Senior Specialist on Social Dialogue and Labour Administration, welcomed this development as a bold and progressive move by the Government of Lesotho., He commended the inclusive and participatory approach undertaken by Lesotho in this reform process, highlighting the importance of enjoyment of freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining and effective mechanisms for dispute prevention and resolution as foundational blocks for decent work in the public service.

Through this workshop, Lesotho has reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening labour rights and enhancing institutional frameworks for effective governance. The ILO stands ready to continue supporting Lesotho in implementing these reforms and ensuring they contribute to sustainable development, decent work, and social justice for all.

The Workshop was followed by a Workshop on the Validation of the Constitution of the Public Service Coordinating Bargaining Council on 28 and 29 April 2025. Once registered by the Registrar of Trade Unions, Employers' Organisations and Bargaining Councils, the Council will be a structure for social dialogue, collective bargaining and dispute prevention and resolution in the public service as provided for in the Labour Act 2024.

The objective of the Workshop was therefore to discuss and adopt the constitution of the Council which will provide a framework for its operations, as well as submitting it to the Registrar in order to comply with registration requirements.

Once the Council is registered, it will usher in a new era of labour relations in the public service in Lesotho in which terms and conditions of employment for public officers will be determined through negotiations as opposed to unilateral action by the Government as an employer.

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Our journey toward public service reform must be underpinned by a firm commitment to dialogue and social justice...

Makatleho Ledimo Principal Secretary Ministry of Public Service

SAFEGUARDING LESOTHO'S WATER FUTURE THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

By: Thato Mochone



Access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) remains a significant challenge in rural Lesotho. particularly in remote highland areas communities are widely dispersed and infrastructure is limited. Many households rely on unprotected water sources, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. To address these gaps, the Metsi-A-Lesotho initiative was launched in 2024 through a partnership between the European Union, UNICEF, the Government of Lesotho. and local stakeholders. The initiative aims to expand access to safe, affordable, and sustainable WASH services, with a focus on underserved rural areas.

Launched in 2024, Metsi-A-Lesotho is part of the Global Gateway, Europe's strategy to boost smart, clean, and secure connections in digital, climate, energy, and transport sectors, and to strengthen health, education, and research systems across the world. Metsi-A-Lesotho focuses on improving access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene services.

Through a partnership between the EU, UNICEF, and the Government of Lesotho, the programme is rehabilitating and expanding water systems to reach over 250 rural communities, 125 schools, and 15 healthcare facilities.

The programme also aims to develop and operationalize a decentralized framework for rural WASH, while strengthening institutional capacities at the national. district. and community levels to enhance accountability and support evidence-based decisionmaking through a GIS-based, robust monitoring and evaluation system. Often referred to as the "Water Tower" of Southern Africa, Lesotho plays a critical role in regional water security due to its high-altitude water sources. Yet, many communities within the country still lack access to basic water services. The Metsi-A-Lesotho initiative responds to this paradox by investing in inclusive, community-driven solutions to protect water resources while improving equitable access.

The initiative goes beyond physical infrastructure. It reflects a broader commitment to building resilient systems and promoting sustainable water resource management. Integrated efforts under national programmes such as ReNOKA and the Lesotho Lowlands Water Development Project Phase II are focused on restoring catchments, improving water supply networks, and embedding sustainability in community water systems.

Notable progress has already been achieved. In Qacha's Nek, Thaba Tseka, Mohale's Hoek, Leribe, and Quthing districts, 25 rural communities have benefited from rehabilitated water systems under the EU-funded Ntlafatsa Bana initiative, implemented by UNICEF. As a result, over 9,000 people—including hundreds of young children—now have access to clean and safe drinking water.

A key pillar of the Metsi-A Lesotho initiative is community engagement, with a strong focus on education and behaviour change. The #LedByExample campaign actively involved schoolchildren in promoting water conservation and hygiene practices. Through songs, quizzes, poetry, and drama, students gained a deeper understanding of water stewardship. At Thabants'o RC School in Semonkong, for instance, learners explored catchment protection through interactive activities, cultivating environmental awareness and responsibility from an early age.

These efforts underscore a vital truth: sustainable access to water is not solely dependent on infrastructure but also on community ownership and behavioural change. By empowering children, educators, and health workers with the knowledge and tools to manage water resources responsibly, the initiative is laying the groundwork for long-term impact. As climate variability intensifies and water scarcity increases, such community-driven approaches are critical to ensuring continuity and resilience.

Lesotho's highlands remain a critical source of water for millions across Southern Africa. Protecting this natural resource is imperative for regional health, stability, and economic development. The Metsi-A-Lesotho initiative stands as a compelling example of how multilateral cooperation can translate into meaningful progress—improving lives, protecting ecosystems, and strengthening communities.

As implementation continues, the focus remains on advancing equitable access, promoting sustainability, and supporting communities to become active custodians of their water resources. The partnership between the EU, UNICEF, and the Government of Lesotho reaffirms the shared commitment to achieving SDG 6: ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

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