

NEWSLETTER

A newsletter by the Resident Coordinator's Office in Lesotho

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A FOREWORD FROM THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR

Salvator Niyonzima

Hi Dear Reader

Welcome! I am pleased to share the first issue of our UN Lesotho Newsletter. The newsletter presents a snapshot of UN activities in Lesotho. This issue is published at a time when the impact of Covid-19 is being felt in every sector of life: health, education, social, economic, etc. So, inevitably, this issue covers the UN response to Covid-19. In support to the immediate health response, the UN mobilized USD 1 million for Lesotho.

In collaboration with the World Bank, the UN contributed with protection, diagnostics and patient care equipment. We are exploring and experimenting new solutions to prevent infection. We also look at the impact of Covid-19 on Basotho children due to school closure. At the same time, we acknowledge that challenges did not start with Covid-19.

Consecutive droughts generated food insecurity. The UN was already addressing food insecurity through food assistance and seed distribution. We support the continuation of essential health services, including HIV prevention. So despite the multiple challenges brought about by Covid-19, we are proud to say that the UN is present on the ground and active.

We are giving meaning to the principle of "stay and deliver". We are also thinking forward by listening to "We The Peoples". As part of the UN75 Initiative, we reached out to young Basotho to seek their ideas about what the UN should look like when it turns 100 years in 2045.

Enjoy your read.



HOW THE UN IN LESOTHO IS SUPPORTING THE COVID-19 RESPONSE THROUGH THE RESPONSE AND RECOVERY MULTI-PARTNER TRUST FUND

The UN Secretary General, Antonio Gueterres in March 2020, launched a call to action premised on "shared responsibility, global solidarity: responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19". This call to action is for all countries to respond immediately to the COVID-19 pandemic by firstly suppressing transmission, and to address the vast socio-economic challenges due to COVID-19 pandemic. With this trajectory, a global UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (COVID-19 MPTF) was launched.

The UN in Lesotho received from the global UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (COVID-19 MPTF) \$USD 1, 000, 000 for programme implementation of 6 months from 1 June 2020 to 31 December 2020. This programme is aimed at supporting the Government of Lesotho to scale up national readiness and response operations for COVID-19 implemented by four agencies: WHO, UNDP, UNICEF, and UNFPA, with the UN Resident Coordinator providing coordination support and ensuring accountability with the establishment of an oversight committee with key government ministries including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Gender and Youth.

Solutions provided by UN agencies:

- Strengthened coordination, planning, and monitoring at national, district and community level
- Enhanced disease surveillance for rapid case detection and management, investigation, tracing and monitoring of contacts
- Strengthened mechanisms and measures for infection prevention and control at health facilities and community settings
- Continuity of other essential health services



"The UN COVID-19 Multi-Partner Trust fund has leveraged the critical expertise and concerted delivery capacities of UN Lesotho ensuring the reach of the most vulnerable in an effective and efficient manner"

**- Vimbainashe Mukota,
Head of Resident
Coordinator's Office**



The UN Country Team at the Prime Minister's office. Photo:RCO

UN AND THE WORLD BANK PRESENT ESSENTIAL PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT TO THE GOVERNMENT OF LESOTHO IN SUPPORT TO THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

As the fight against COVID-19 continues, in August 2020 the UN in Lesotho handed over a shipment of personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 diagnostics and patient management equipment to the Government of Lesotho through the Minister of Health, Honorable Motlatsi Maqelepo and the National COVID-19 Secretariat CEO, Mr. Thabo Khasipe, at the Ministry of Health headquarters in Maseru.

The consignment included the following:

1. PPE from the UN Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries and the Organizing Committee of world Eco-Design Conference, for front-line workers.
2. Critical supplies specifically for midwives and nurses from UNFPA to ensure continued delivery of Sexual reproductive health and rights services (SRHR).
3. Critical supplies for the COVID-19 response from the World Health Organization (WHO), and UNICEF, with some supplies being financed by the World Bank.

Despite the impact of COVID-19 on global supply chains, the UN, with logistical support from World Food Programme, through humanitarian flights, has been able to procure and deliver these essential commodities to support the Government response to COVID-19. The supplies will be critical for healthcare workers on the frontlines supporting Basotho who need critical care. Upon handing over the equipment, the UN Resident Coordinator in Lesotho, Mr. Salvator Niyonzima, expressed solidarity and support on behalf of the UN family and said, "no one ministry or agency or donor can fight COVID-19 alone. These essential items will help equip healthcare workers and communities to protect themselves while caring for those affected by COVID-19. The UN stands ready to support the Government in its efforts to defeat the epidemic, including supporting additional procurement through the Global COVID-19 Supply Portal allowing the country to continue to procure essential supplies".

The World Bank Country Representative, Mr. Yoichiro Ishihara highlighted that the World Bank has joined hands with other development partners to assist Lesotho to respond effectively to COVID-19 to save the lives of the Basotho people. "In addition to financing the procurement of PPE, the World Bank has been implementing US\$7.5 million Lesotho COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response Project to prevent, detect and respond to the threat posed by COVID-19 and strengthen national systems for public health preparedness. We remain committed to helping the Government of Lesotho in its efforts to curbing the damage that can be caused by the spread of COVID-19." The Minister of Health, Hon. Motlatsi Maqelepo, thanked the UN and the World Bank for their ongoing support and noted that the cooperation between the Government and development partners in procuring the equipment has been exemplary. "COVID-19 requires all actors to work together in order to tackle all the challenges this pandemic presents. Today's ceremony is a demonstration of that much needed cooperation, which I hope will continue into the future. Our biggest challenge is in building a resilient health system that is able to withstand shocks such as COVID-19. I call on all partners to work with the Government and my Ministry in building such a system", he said.

Further, National COVID-19 Secretariat CEO, Mr. Thabo Khasipe, explained that this equipment comes at a crucial time when the country is faced with a shortage of PPE, increasing the number of Basotho testing positive for COVID-19, and a rising the death rate. Since Lesotho recorded its COVID-19 first case in May 2020, the country has, to date, registered 1,015 cases with 472 recoveries and 30 deaths. "This donation will go a long way in ensuring that our front-line workers, whom we all depend, work under the safe conditions, as they continue to step directly into COVID-19's path to support the afflicted and help curb the spread of the virus."



The handing over of PPE by UN Resident Coordinator
Photo: RCO



The new COVID-19 way of shaking hands
Photo: RCO

EU FUNDING ALLOWS MAMATSHELA TO FEED HER GRANDCHILDREN AMIDST COVID-19

COVID-19 is undoubtedly not only a health crisis, but a food security one. Measures which have been used by countries including Lesotho such as lockdowns, have affected food supply chains adversely and have left many people without jobs and food. The story of Mamatshela...

"I no longer have to beg for food from my neighbours"

The sharp, cold wind sweeps over the escarpment cutting through an otherwise sunny, pleasant day in Ha-Seqalaba village, Lesotho. Seasons have changed and in the highlands of Qacha's Nek, one of the four districts where WFP has ongoing emergency food distributions to offset the impact of drought, winter is harsh, and the first snow has fallen. Today is distribution day and the village is teeming with activity. Families from the across the area make their way to Mr. Phillip's shop, a contracted WFP local retailer. A herd of donkeys trot down the embankment and the young shepherds whistle and shout as they line up their animals outside the shop, ready to be loaded with the food destined for the most vulnerable in the community.

Mamatšela Khali is the head of one such family. Sitting with a young child on her lap, savouring the warmth of the winter sun, she explains that her life is a constant struggle — at the age of 70, she is the sole provider for her five grandchildren who range in age from 2 to 14. "I have two surviving daughters, but they have migrated for work and only come home once per year," she says. "I feel they have forgotten me even though I look after their children; they do not help us." Lesotho is extremely vulnerable to climate change and the past few years have been plagued by drought and poor harvests. The Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC) conducted a rapid assessment in March 2020 and projected that the number of food insecure will rise to 899,287 people from April to September 2020. The number has more than doubled from 434,000 people considered severely food-insecure and in need of humanitarian assistance between October 2019 and March 2020. "Look at the fields: they are not even ploughed. The whole community is suffering and hungry," says Mamatšela. "I do not own a field, I only have a small vegetable garden. But this season, I had no money to buy seeds as there were few jobs working in other people's fields."



Mamatšela with one of her grandkids after receiving her assistance.
Photo: WFP



Donkeys loaded with food assistance for the most vulnerable families. Photo: WFP

Mamatšela and her family are among some 19,000 households that receive monthly drought emergency assistance from the World Food Programme (WFP) thanks to donors such as the European Union (EU). Each family receives US\$ 50 per month, of which US\$28 comes in the form of a commodity voucher that they can exchange for a nutritious food basket comprising of maize meal, flour, protein (eggs, tinned fish, milk) and iron-rich foods (split peas, beans, wholegrain cereals). The remaining US\$22 is transferred through a mobile money platform, called MPESA, for other household requirements including school fees, school uniforms and electricity.

COVID-19 is adding to the woes of people like Mamatšela. As schools across the country are closed to contain the spread of the disease, children — including four of her grandchildren — are not receiving their daily school meal, which places further strain on food insecure families. To prevent further contagion, new preventative procedures — including the use of tippy taps, hand sanitizers and face masks — have been put into place at all WFP distribution points. WFP is also working closely with government partners to sensitize beneficiaries and retailers. "In this day and age, education is more important than ever. I had heard about the corona virus on the radio, but today we were provided with education on how to protect ourselves and those we love," says Mamatšela. "I hope this time will pass soon. I feel safe here, though — we have to wash our hands and stand apart from each other. It is a different way of life, but I know it is necessary." For this loving grandmother, the assistance she receives is easing her mind from the constant worry of what she will put on the table every day.

FAO WINTER SEED DISTRIBUTIONS ENCOURAGE FARMERS TO GO BACK TO THE FIELD AGAIN

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), working together with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, distributed agricultural winter inputs (wheat and peas seeds) amid the COVID19 pandemic in June 2020, to vulnerable active farming households in Maq̄haka, Berea so to assist them to get back to farming to produce food for their families. This is in response to the persisting drought conditions which have been prevalent since the start of 2019. Agricultural production of the 2018/19 season was largely affected by the late start of the planting season due to limited moisture and early frost. To mitigate the effects of the drought, FAO took immediate action to support farmers and vulnerable households, through funding from the Central Emergency Response Unit (CERF).

The intervention included emergency agricultural input packages to enhance winter cropping season of 2019-2020 to 3000 vulnerable, but active farming households in the country. The household package consists of seeds of staple crops (25kg wheat and 10kg peas). The beneficiaries gathered in numbers, wearing masks and observing social distancing protocols, many of them grateful that they would start farming again because of this seed contribution. "This will greatly help improve my produce and I am going to care for my crops, I am so thankful" remarked Mosheli Phalana, a 73-year-old man from the village of Ha Ramoseka in Berea District. The COVID-19 pandemic also negatively affected his family, both his sons lost their jobs, "they used to send me some money so I could buy food for the family, that stopped when this virus came. I am now hopeful that the crops I produce will keep us going" he explained. It is clear that seeds play a key role in human sustenance and FAO remains committed to building resilience and sustainable food and nutrition security.



Farmers and their inputs from FAO
Photo: RCO



Mr Moeketsi Phalana with his seeds
Photo: FAO



UN Resident Coordinator hands over farming inputs: Photo: RCO



BLEACHING SURFACES TO SAVE LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS: A RAPID RESPONSE TO COVID-19

A casual conversation with students from Botho University portrayed a scare among youth with regards to COVID19. In the eyes of these young people, they perceive the turmoil as a scary television series depicting end of days and naming it 'EARTH' – Episode 2020. They were referring to the apocalypse depicted in a movie called "EARTH" where animal mothers struggle to raise their youth in an increasingly dangerous environment; the Arctic melting down and the struggle for terrestrial animals to secure water sources. The basic truth to curbing the rapid spread of the virus has been pointed to hygienic practices from all angles. The spread of this knowledge is a masterwork in interjecting myths and stereotypes such as consuming alcohol, eating raw garlic, avoiding foreigners etc as preventive/curative measures.

While Lesotho has recorded just over 1300 cases, the threat of the disease on lives and livelihoods is getting worse everyday. The challenge is adhering to the WHO guidelines and hygiene standards in joint community spaces to abate the rate of infection. In Lesotho, one of the toughest areas to keep germ-free is the bus-stop area due to population concentration, human and service exchange. The primary preventive measure to disrupt possible transmission is hand hygiene, but the challenge of water and detergents accessibility remains. Who is responsible? This question is a key trigger for innovation and a call for strategic partnerships with all affected communities to reduce chances for contagion and contamination in these areas.



The remodeled "Tippy Tap" innovation through UNDP Accelerator Labs. Photo: UNDP



The older version of the tippy tap. Photo: UNDP

A 'Tippy-Tap' as a solution The UNDP Accelerator Lab discovered the 'tippy-tap', during a solutions safari in Mafeteng in October 2019. This simple hand hygiene mechanism was seen in different households dangling in front of external lavatories to encourage hand washing after the use of the facilities. It is anticipated that a simple modification and adoption of this for different communities in the urban and rural areas would save lives and livelihoods and promote the new socialisation required by the COVID19 pandemic.

This uses 5-litre containers and has a small hole on the cap which releases water when stepping on the loose string attached to the container. The UNDP Accelerator Lab has remodeled this, using the same technology, to address hygiene needs for densely populated and high traffic areas. The model uses a flat iron instead of a string to release water without a need to touch the tap. As part of its response to the COVID19, UNDP is partnering with Relationships Inspiring Social Enterprise (RISE), the Ministry of Health and Maseru City Council to deploy these improved dispensers to local communities, targeting bus-stop areas, market centres, border posts and other populous areas to promote the culture of hygiene in these areas. Local communities and authorities will be responsible for maintaining the service by refilling the water and detergents as needed. The dispensers will be produced in two sizes, a household single dispenser and larger containers for populated areas.



WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN AND COVID-19? BASOTHO CHILDREN SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

The Covid-19 crisis has affected everyone globally without exception. Lesotho has not been spared and as cases continue to increase everyone is expressing fears and concerns about their health and their future. Though most of these concerns are being shared from a paternalistic viewpoint, children in Lesotho have not taken a back seat but are projecting their voices on how covid-19 is affecting them using various multi-media platforms. One such platform is a 30-minute radio programme on Radio Lesotho where, every Saturday morning from 08:30 to 09:00, children from the ages 6 to 13 from all the ten 10 districts are phoning-in to ask questions about Covid-19 and sharing experiences on how they are coping with the pandemic. The programme is anchored Mr. Mabitso whom the children affectionately call "Malome (uncle) Bizo".

Each week, UNICEF staff in Lesotho engage with the producers of the children's programme to design content and presentation format. The content is informed by the children who call into the programme to say what issues on covid-19 they would like more information on. Thabo is a 12-year-old regular caller from Thaba-Tseka. He usually shares tips on handwashing and how children can cope with not being in school.

"Because schools are closed, I have made a time-table for myself on how my day should be like. I first do my schoolwork in the morning and then I help my mother in the garden", says Thabo in one of the calls.

"Uncle Bizo" then opens the phone lines and other children call-in to share their experiences. A pervasive issue is that children are longing to go back to school, and they do not know when schools will open. They feel that when they are in-school they can be able to educate their peers on covid-19 and other issues that impact their lives. "In school we will encourage others to wear masks all the time", "we will show them how to wash their hands with soap and running water" and "we will teach them how to sneeze and cough so as not to infect others". These are some of the ways issues are raised by the children during the programme. Common topics on the programme often include handwashing techniques, safe respiratory hygiene, wearing of masks, use of social media during school closure, study tips, child protection issues – for example walking in groups when fetching water or wood and helping other children and generally educating parents in the context of Covid-19. This programme has brought a different dimension to community engagement in that it has become a platform through which children have a say in shaping conversations around Covid-19.

Through the programme, children from different geographical and economic backgrounds can share their experiences and coping mechanisms in times of COVID-19 while also acting as agents of change in their communities. "The children's programme has influenced our response plan particularly using children as agents of change. Noting that not all children have access to radio, we are supporting the Ministry of Education to develop learner packs which will provide information on covid-19 in a child friendly manner. This will ensure that children in hard to reach areas are also equipped with knowledge and skills on how to protect themselves against covid-19", says UNICEF Representative, Anurita Bains.

UNICEF Lesotho is working closely with the Government of Lesotho to ensure that its COVID-19 prevention and response programmes across all sectors prioritize children's needs, is inclusive, gender sensitive, and effectively addresses inevitable future shocks. This will help prevent inequalities in the delivery of Health, HIV, Social Protection, Water and Sanitation, nutrition and Education services.



9 year old Pulane asks her sister to sanitize her hands to prevent COVID-19. Photo:UNICEF



10 year old Balang Mashale is an agent of change in his community & teaches hsi peers hand washing. Photo: UNICEF

ALONG THE BORDERS: EFFORTS AGAINST THE PREVENTION OF HIV & AIDS

A In a bid to intensify efforts towards preventing HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) amongst risk populations such as, migrants and youth, UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund in collaboration with the Lesotho Planned Parenthood Association (LPPA) have initiated a project on preventing HIV transmission and improved access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and rights information and services along Lesotho's three borders. The Comprehensive HIV prevention project dubbed "Along the Borders," is aimed at reducing HIV incidences and risky behavior among the youth and key populations along three border posts: Maseru Border, Maputsoe Border and Van Rooyen's Gate border. These are the busiest borders which are deemed highly porous and catalytic to the transmission of new HIV infections, hence the project is targeting migrants, long distance truck drivers, youth and key populations along these borders.

The project, which is scheduled to take eight (8) months ending in December 2020 with possibility of extension based on availability of funding has engaged peer educators whose role is to mobilize target populations and facilitate their access to health services, link them to nearby health facilities and ensure that they access integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and HIV services.

They are also expected to organize outreach activities for the target populations such as distributing condoms in identified hot spots with clear refill plans, provide Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials and be advocates/champions that influence their peers to access HIV and SRHR services. Amongst others, the project will provide scented and branded condoms which according to consultations held before the development of the Lesotho National Condom Strategy were regarded as more appealing to the target populations. The project was prompted by results of LePHIA (2018) which have shown HIV incidences are estimated at 13,000 annually. It shows the most affected populations as Female Sex workers 70-73.3%, Men Sleeping with Men (MSM) 31.1-33% and migrant populations 29.8-31.8%.

The project aims to reach 14,876 mobile people including youth and key populations around the three target borders with enhanced knowledge of HIV prevention, engage more in safer sexual behavior practices and/or have a reduced rate of HIV infection (incidence) through regular use of prevention technologies and services. Furthermore, 100 000 male condoms and lubricants and 40,000 female condoms are to be distributed.



Outreach activities near Van Rooyens Gate. Photo:UNFPA



Peer educators conducting training. Photo:UNFPA



IOM DEVELOPMENT FUND SUPPORTS LESOTHO GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TOWARDS IMPROVING MIGRATION DATA

With an overall objective to "strengthen capacities of key stakeholders to collect, collate and analyze migration data that informs decision making and evidence based migration policies towards achieving objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and other migration related agenda, IOM Development Fund (IDF) has released the new project to implement the project titled "Strengthening migration data collection and analysis including undertaking Lesotho Migration Profile - Phase I" with a total amount of USD 100,000 for one year from 1 August 2020 to 31 July 2021.

The project will be implemented by International Organization for Migration (IOM) in collaboration with the Ministry of Development Planning (MoDP). Bureau of Statistics (BOS), which is the national coordinator of data, will be the key counterpart to implement this project. The project will also collaborate with relevant stakeholders including the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) and the National Consultative Committee on Migration (NCC), which plays a pivotal role in migration related matters in Lesotho. The intended outcome of the project is improved data literacy and a coordinated approach to generating migration data relevant for migration related policies and the development of the first Lesotho Migration Profile.



Inception meeting on Supporting Evidence -based Migration Related Policy Making and Planning in Lesotho. Photo: IOM



Project workshop. Photo: IOM

TEBELLONG HOSPITAL, A SUCCESS STORY

Tebellong hospital is found in the district of Qacha's Nek in Lesotho, 222km from Maseru and 5km from the main road going to Qacha's Nek town. From the main road, the facility is accessed by crossing the widest and longest river in Lesotho called Orange River (Senqu in Sesotho). There is no bridge and road to cross Senqu river, the only transport to cross this river is a traditional boat. These boats are not only providing transportation, they are saving the lives of Basotho living in the catchment area of Tebellong Hospital. Pregnant mothers, critical patients, medical equipment and drugs are transported by this traditional boat during day and night. Sometimes pregnant mothers deliver in the boat while referred for better treatment and assistance.

A team from Ministry of Health and WHO was established to assess and support activities of COVID-19 preparedness, readiness, response and continuation of essential health services. The team was assigned for two weeks for a field visit for the most porous districts in the country, starting from Mokhotlong, to Quthing and Qacha's Neck districts. The visited health facility Tebellong Hospital was identified by the team as a laboratory of change, to share their good practices with other health facilities in preparedness, readiness, response to COVID-19 and continuation of essential health services.

Coordination and planning are very good in this hospital – they have excellent team spirit. The team includes drivers, security guards, cleaners, and the community in general. The facility has prepared a live plan for COVID-19 response.

GATHERING BASOTHO VOICES: THE UN75 INITIATIVE

As the UN celebrates its 75th anniversary this year, the UN Secretary-General launched an initiative that would be participatory, a huge listening exercise that would include everyone and everywhere! The largest global conversation that asks people to share their ideas on the kind of world they want to create by 2045 when the UN turns 100 the UN75 initiative.

The efforts in Lesotho to reach as many people as possible has been ongoing through many platforms such as hosting radio dialogues, television programmes, reaching out through social media, newspapers, billboards, and even the engagement of volunteers who are going out into communities to tell people that their voice does count and that they too can be catalysts of change through the UN75 initiative by completing the one minute survey at www.un75.online. "I felt that I also needed to contribute to this initiative, by going out into the community to engage people for more responses. We as the youth in Lesotho need to play our part if we want to see a lasting change," said Ishmael Mahanyele, one of the UN75 volunteers.

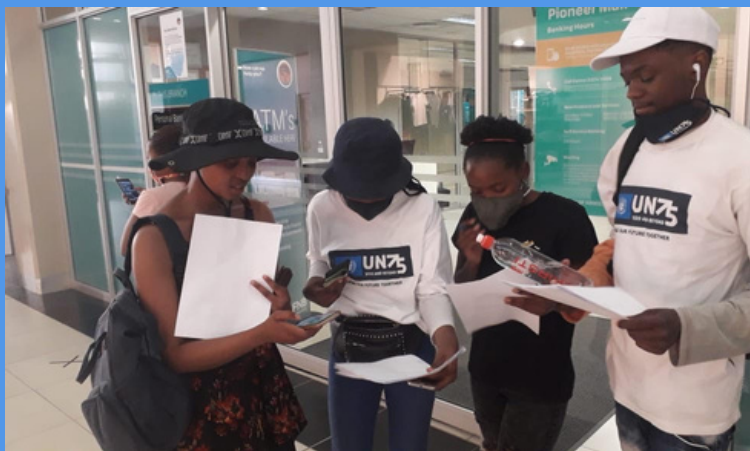
Liteboho Molise, a popular soapie actress was particularly interested in the initiative and agreed to spread the word through her extensive social media presence. She felt that the initiative was yet another opportunity for women to voice out pressing issues such as gender-based violence which has now been exacerbated by COVID19. "I am so excited that the UN has provided the platform and space for people to also have a say, I encourage all young people to take this one-minute survey, every voice it will make a difference" she explained during a television interview with SABC News. All the responses gathered from the one-minute survey and dialogues will be discussed with policy makers including government representatives, ministers and UN leaders at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 75) which opened on 15 September 2020.



UN Youth Advisory Panel members and UN Resident Coordinator at a UN75 radio dialogue. Photo: RCO



Liteboho Molise showing the world she has has her say. Photo: Liteboho Molise



UN75 Volunteers gather survey responses at Pioneer Mall. Photo: RCO



A UN75 billboard near Roma in Maseru. Photo: RCO

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