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NEWSLETTER

By the Office of the Resident Coordinator

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Second jab of Astra-Zeneca launched in Morija

Lesotho launched its second dose vaccination campaign at Scott hospital where the World Health Organization (WHO) witnessed the second dose vaccine administration of His Majesty the King Letsie III, Her Majesty the Queen, and the Right Honourable the Prime Minister of Lesotho.

A number of health workers who continue to provide lifesaving interventions during this pandemic were also present to receive their second jab. The importance of village health workers in advancing primary healthcare can never be over-emphasized.

'Mathabang Kalaka has been a village health worker for 37 years at Scott Hospital, having started her career at the facility in her early 30's and now in 2021 it has almost been 20 years of service.



'Mathabang Kalaka administering a vaccine. Photo: WHO

It's the love of servanthood that has kept her doing this job and giving it her best, "I cannot imagine myself doing anything else but this. God did not give me the chance to go to school and become a professional nurse, but he did grant me this opportunity to be a community health worker despite my circumstances".

Although the country has seen a reluctance in people to get the COVID-19 vaccination, Kalaka never doubted her decision to take the vaccine as she explained, "the only best way we know how to deal with this covid 'thing'. We understand that experts are still trying to find out more information on the behavior of the virus so if they say this can protect us from dying, I see no problem in using what's available".

Mrs Kalaka recalls the early years of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the country when people refused to take ARVs and died in great numbers, "we need to make sure we don't go through a repeat episode of that."

Her work on advocacy and information mobilization on covid-19 vaccines has not been easy, she says some people are difficult to convince, indicating that this reluctance emerges from the misinformation making rounds on what the vaccine does.

The Government of Lesotho has carried out a risk communication campaign which the WHO is actively supporting to combat misinformation around the COVID19 vaccine.



Encouraging community members to get vaccinated

Lesotho began its first vaccination campaign in March 2021. The country has received 72 000 doses of AstraZeneca and 302 400 doses of the Johnson and Johnson vaccine through the COVAX facility. The first phase of the national vaccine rollout provided the initial vaccine dose to over 40 000 health workers and people with comorbidities. In addition, over 32 000 people have received their second dose and have been fully vaccinated.

UNICEF has supported the government of Lesotho in obtaining and administering the vaccine, availability of cold chain storage to store the vaccines, and demand creation and risk communication activities to improve public perception and acceptance of the vaccine.

This is the story of Thabo Masia, a 53-year-old village health worker from Moshoeshoe II in Maseru. Thabo has received his 1st vaccination dose and encourages people within his community to get vaccinated.

“Our role is to give health services to people in the community. On the issue of COVID19, there has been a lot of misleading information that misguided people. Because people no longer attend public gatherings, we had to resort to a door-to-door outreach campaign where we approach people with chronic illnesses and encourage them to get vaccinated as well as providing them with the right information.”

He further explains that being a health worker entails more than just doing advocacy work but also assisting sick people and ensuring they take their medication.

“Patients in the village come to me because the health centers give us medication to dispense to patients and keep daily records. Some of our patients are HIV/AIDS patients. We also help them in the community to access their medication. Our job is also to make sure that infants get all their necessary injections from the time of birth.”

Finally, as a health care worker, he is delighted that the second batch of AstraZeneca vaccines arrived: “I am happy that the second dose of the vaccine has arrived because I am afraid of COVID19 because it is killing people in high numbers. So, I am happy that I got a chance to get vaccinated. That’s what helped us convince people to get vaccinated.”

In the coming months and years, UNICEF Lesotho will continue to support the government of Lesotho to vaccinate its citizens so that essential services continue to reach people who need them the most.



Community members in Maseru get vaccinated. Photo: UNICEF



Jubilation as UNFPA hands over dignity kits to the Princess



It was a joyous occasion when the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) handed over Dignity Kits to Her Royal Highness Princess Senate Mohato Seeiso at the Royal Palace in May, in commemoration of Menstrual Hygiene and Health Day.

Princess Senate Seeiso received the dignity kits on behalf of Her Majesty Queen 'Masenate Mohato Seeiso's Hlokomela Banana Initiative. She then handed them over to 20 of the young girls during the handover ceremony. In total UNFPA has offered 400 dignity kits to Her Majesty's Hlokomela Banana Initiative.

Handing over the dignity Kits, UNFPA Representative to Lesotho Dr Marc Derveeuw noted that the distribution forms part of UNFPA's mission to support vulnerable young women and girls in humanitarian situations, which have been caused mainly by the drought in recent years, the floods early this year, further exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic.

"These natural disasters have affected most Basotho in agricultural production and economically, rendering women and girls even more vulnerable and susceptible to negative coping mechanisms such as sex work that could put them at the risk of unwanted pregnancies and infection to diseases," he added.

He pointed out that UNFPA recognizes the multi-layered challenges faced by women and young girls in Lesotho especially during the COVID19 pandemic.

"The loss of jobs due to COVID19 induced restrictions of movement, have been evident in the communities. We saw the rise of gender-based violence incidences as women and girls were confined in the same space as their violators during the lockdowns," he stated.



He therefore expressed hope that the 400 dignity kits being offered for young women and girls under Her Majesty's tutelage would come a long way in helping the girls regain their dignity and overcome the challenges that are brought about by nature to women of reproductive age.

He also expressed gratitude to Her Royal Highness Princess Senate and the Office of Her Majesty the Queen for partnering with UNFPA in various areas overtime and in once again agreeing to distribute the dignity kits to vulnerable young girls in Lesotho.

Receiving the dignity kits, Her Royal Highness expressed gratitude to UNFPA saying the gesture was a clear testimony of the fact that UNFPA is indeed a dependable partner of Lesotho in the pursuit of the development agenda.

“UNFPA has always stood with Lesotho in its efforts to support vulnerable members of the society, especially women and girls,” she added.

She stated that young women and girls in Lesotho face several challenges every day of their lives, which can be devastating to their young lives if not addressed adequately and early enough. She further addressed child marriage, which is estimated at 24% and early and unintended or unplanned pregnancies which sometimes force girls to drop out of school and seek employment, saying these expose young girls to untold vulnerabilities.

The UNFPA continues to work with the Office of the First Lady and the Disaster Management Authority in distribution of dignity kits to vulnerable young women and girls in Lesotho.

What's in a dignity kit?



Dignity kit handover ceremony. Photo: UNFPA

Enhancing Youth empowerment and Resilience through entrepreneurship

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) Lesotho is assisting 180 vulnerable returnees and vulnerable youth from Mohale's Hoek, Quthing, and Qacha's Nek with the support from UKaid and the government of Japan under the: "Humanitarian response to vulnerable and stranded migrants in Southern Africa Regional project."

IOM Lesotho has been working closely with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), DISCOSEC (District COVID-19 Secretariat) and the District Disaster Management Team (DDMT) to identify vulnerable returnees and their family members, as well as other extremely vulnerable youth in the three districts for skills training, empowering them to start their own businesses, an effort to restore their livelihoods.

Through this project they acquired skills in different fields including cosmetics production, catering and decoration, hair dressing, computer literacy, sewing and fashion design, leather works, electrical installation, automotive mechanics as well as carpentry and joinery...

The recipients of the skills training graduated in May 2021. The IOM then followed up with a visit to Qacha's Nek and Quthing in July to witness the work of those who had started their businesses after the training period, and to hear the challenges of those who have not been able to start.

Mamello Binyane and Moleboheng Khamali are the leaders of newly formed cooperative 'Botle Cosmetics and Fragrances'. These cooperative members are among those who were selected for the skills training: "we acquired skills in cosmetics manufacturing through the IOM vocational training."



'Beneficiaries in Quthing at their catering business. Photo: IOM



Mamello Binyane & Moleboheng Khamali. Photo: IOM

“While at school, we discussed as a group on how we can get funds to start our cosmetics business. After the training, we decided to form a cooperative of 10 members and each member contributed M650. The first products we produced were petroleum jelly (250ml), glycerine (250ml), in two flavours of rosehip and aloe, and perfumes (30ml). We are able to produce 100 petroleum jellies, 80 glycerine and 60 perfumes per month, so far we have been able to sell them all,” they explain.

Although people seem to be enjoying their products and business is off on a good start there have been some challenges, “some of the cooperative members live far from the production site and it becomes expensive for them to travel on a daily basis, some are also not yet fully confident in selling skills, so they sell very little.”

The Ministry of Trade and Small Businesses has further assisted them in the registration of their new corporative, how to market their business including pricing and bookkeeping and setting rules for the new corporative.

“Our aim is to have a big cooperative that will also supply products to the shops, supermarkets, wholesalers and even exporting to other countries. We would like to see our lives changing to better than we are now. We really thank IOM Lesotho for changing our lives through the support they got from UKaid and the Government of Japan.”

Plastic Free Wednesdays’ – the right direction towards creating the Lesotho We Want



In African countries, plastic pollution is causing severe environmental and health damage that manifests itself in several ways. This adversely affect the environment which impacts animals and humans. Lesotho is no exception to this, as illegal dumping sites are mushrooming on roadsides, market, and other public places.

On the 14th July 2021, UNDP through the Lesotho Accelerator Lab in partnership and the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture, private sector and civil society introduced a weekly “plastic free day” campaign to promote advocacy for a plastic free society, reduce plastic waste and promote use of more sustainable products to help protect our environment. The campaign aims to raise awareness on the plastic pollutions challenge in Lesotho as well as influence behaviour change to reduce use of commercial single-use plastic carry bags.

Plastic free days will be observed every Wednesday starting from 14th July 2021 to 29th December 2021. The campaign is a country wide initiative where stores in the districts and those with branches across the country are taking part. Every Wednesday, retail stores do not issue plastics to customers after purchases have been made. Customers are encouraged to bring their own reusable shopping bag or to purchase those in stores. Another alternative is to reuse the old plastics that customers have previously been issued.

This campaign is part of the joint project by the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture and UNDP on ‘Strengthening partnerships for plastic life-cycle management’.

The project aims to support partnership building and advocacy on plastic life-cycle management and encourage behavioural change for responsible production and consumption patterns for attainment of the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

The project has mobilised partnerships in government, private sector civil society and consumer groups, and will be implemented from June – December 2021.



UNDP Representative delivers remarks at the Project Launch . Photo: UNDP



Plastic hats. Photo: UNDP



Contributing to healthy and sustainable diets through seed inputs

Lesotho is facing severe food insecurity with the recent LVAC (April 2020) rapid crop assessment report projecting that from April to September 2020, the food insecure population in Lesotho to rise to 899,287 people. Food insecurity is severe in the Southern Districts.

COVID-19 has added more pressure to the already existing compromised food insecurity situation in the country, further lockdown restrictions due to COVID-19 have also made it difficult for both small and medium-scale farmers to effectively participate in food production and maintain the health of their livestock. Qacha's Nek is a district in the south-most of Lesotho and one of the worst affected by impacts of COVID-19 on food security.

Matebeng is a hard-to-reach area in the rugged mountains of Qacha's Nek, with meandering gravel roads along the mountain terrain of Lesotho. It is one of the most isolated areas of rural Lesotho. People here survive by livestock rearing and subsistence crop farming.

Mzimkholo Lehlokoa is a 35-year-old man who lives with his four children and wife. He provides for the family through the production of crops like maize, peas, and sorghum for household consumption mostly. What is left he sells to community members for some income. Lehlokoa also keeps small livestock which he uses for ploughing, he would also sell some of his goats and sheep in the nearby town of Qacha's Nek to make ends meet. When the movement of restrictions was imposed early last year to reduce the spread of COVID 19, Mr. Lehlokoa faced a challenge as he could no longer travel to Qacha's Nek to sell his Livestock. "I could no longer travel to Qacha's Nek to sell my goats. I used to sell a goat for around M700.00 and this helped provided the needs of the household", Mr. Lehlokoa claimed.

In this difficult time, Mr. Lehlokoa resorted to working on his garden to produce vegetables like rape and cabbage, but he did not have adequate seeds.

In 2020 FAO, with the support of the Government of Lesotho through the Smallholder Agriculture Development Project and the World Bank, launched a project called "Special Programme for Food Security in Response to the Impacts of COVID 19 in Lesotho". Lehlokoa was selected as one of the beneficiaries of the project under the component of vegetable inputs where he received training on home gardening and 6 types of vegetable seeds.

"I am happy to receive these seeds and training. I will work hard so that I can have a good harvest and I believe the vegetables will give me a good return when I sell them later, thank you FAO for this help", Mr. Lehlokoa said ecstatically.



Mzimkholo with his vegetable seed package. Photo: FAO

The WFP crisis response

In response to drought exacerbated by the COVID-19 situation, WFP provided drought emergency assistance in Thaba-tseka, Mokhotlong and Maseru districts that ended early June. The assistance was targeting rural and urban community councils using cash and commodity voucher modalities. Each household received USD 54.75 per month and in the rural areas, the assistance was administered through a network of 139 local retailers.

In the urban councils where markets are functional, equivalent of cash was offered and beneficiaries redeemed the cash through Vodacom Mpesa mobile money agents to allow beneficiaries the flexibility to buy other foods and non-food essential items. A total of 50,752 (26,391 women and 24,361 men) people were assisted in June and the total amount injected into the local economy through this response in the month of June is USD 955,507.00 (Equivalent to LSL 13.6 million).

As a response to malnutrition which is rife in the rural councils, the voucher included nutrient-dense food items to improve the dietary diversity of nutritionally vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant and lactating women, people living with HIV & AIDS, hosted by targeted households. The voucher assistance was delivered through the use of the SCOPE system, WFP's beneficiary and transfer management platform for information management, better administration and transparency.

The assistance included a Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) component focusing on improving women, men, boys' and girls' knowledge on nutrition, HIV awareness, sexual reproductive health, human rights, gender, climate change awareness, and other care practices that contribute to improved household food security and nutritional status.

Partnership with key nutrition, protection, health partners in the districts was secured and retailer shops were used to discuss gender issues with assisted households. Key topics discussed include gender division of labour, harmful practices including Gender Based Violence (GBV), meal planning and optimum and prioritization in the distribution of foods within households.



WFP distribution point in Thaba-Tseka. Photo: WFO



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