

LESOTHO

COUNTRY PROFILE

Lesotho - once known as Basutoland - is one of the world's smallest kingdoms and is surrounded entirely by South Africa. The population of Lesotho is less than two million. The capital, Maseru is a small city of 120,000 people and lies near the border of South Africa in Lesotho's western lowlands, where at least 70 per cent of the country's population lives.

The official languages are English and Sesotho although some migrant labourers who worked in South Africa also speak Afrikaans. About 90 per cent of the "Basotho" (people of Lesotho) are Christians, belonging to Roman Catholic, Anglican and various Protestant Churches.

HISTORY

The original inhabitants of this region were the San, followed by various Sotho-speaking clans. In the early nineteenth century, the legendary Zulu king Shaka attempted to gain absolute power over the inhabitants of what is now Lesotho. He was overthrown by the unified army of a leader called Moshoeshe, who by the 1850s had established a single language and a central government. In 1868, Moshoeshe sought protection from the British. By 1884 and continuing into the early twentieth century the British took over Basutoland. Their administration resulted in neglect and indifference to the needs of the people and thousands of Basotho had to leave and find work in South Africa. On October 4, 1966 independence was granted. Since then, Lesotho survived a military coup and only recently, the country returned to civilian democratic rule when Dr Ntsu Mokhehle's party won the elections in all the 65 constituencies.

ECONOMY

The soil in the lowlands is poor, and apart from small diamond deposits, there are no mineral resources in Lesotho. Despite the poor soil, at least 85 per cent of the work force is engaged in agriculture - maize (corn) is the leading crop, and wheat, sorghum, barley and beans are also important. Cattle, sheep and goats are also bred and their wool and mohair account for a third of the country's annual exports.

Jobs in Lesotho are scarce; so each year about 120,000 Basutos, mostly men travel to work in South Africa. However in recent years this source of employment has been greatly reduced as more and more miners are retrenched.

Water is now cause for hope in Lesotho. Work has begun on the biggest civil engineering project currently under way in

Africa - the Lesotho Highlands Water Scheme. When completed, the project will supply water from the catchment of the Sengu River in Lesotho to meet the growing demands of South Africa's major industrial and population centres. In the long run, the project aims to make Lesotho self-sufficient in electricity and increase exports, but at a cost of around US\$2 billion, it has contributed in the short term to Lesotho's foreign debt of more than \$250 million.

Most Basutos are subsistence farmers who live in small villages with between 20 and 1000 people. They barely grow enough crops or raise enough cattle to support their own families. In 1988, one quarter of the rural population did not own land and were dependent on the earnings of relatives working in the towns or in South Africa.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Many women in Lesotho are left alone to take care of the family, tend their fields and maintain their social and economic lives. Sometimes, the men do not send enough money home, and the women have to find alternative ways of making money, such as selling handicrafts, brewing and selling local beer or working on neighbours' farms.

A wide range of cereals, vegetables and fruits are grown in Lesotho but most of these are for export. Maize or wheat is used to make a stiff porridge that is eaten with the fingers, and sorghum is used for local beer brewing.

Recent years of drought have reduced crops and caused severe food shortages in Lesotho. Some families have been forced to live solely on maize, which has caused vitamin deficiencies and intestinal problems. Around a quarter of children under three have stunted growth. With a high proportion of the population not having access to clean water, gastroenteritis and other water-borne diseases are common in the rural areas. Sixty per cent of mothers still give birth without a trained helper.

The challenge for Lesotho is to discover new ways for the people to earn an income while protecting local resources for future generations.



The child that you are sponsoring lives in Lenkoane, a rural community in the State of Bera which is two hours car ride (74 km) from Maseru, the capital of Lesotho.

LENKOANE

COMMUNITY PROFILE

The community is situated on the hilly eastern part of the country. It is remote with an arid environment. It has a population of 5,012 people comprising 800 males, 1,400 females and 2,812 children. They belong to the Basutos people's group whose language is Southern Sotho.

Most of the families work as farmers. They barely grow enough to support the family as the land is infertile due to insufficient rainfall. Some of them had to work as miners in South Africa. The women are left at home to take care of the children.

The community's staple food consist of maize or sorghum flour taken with vegetables. Meat is rarely consumed as it is not readily available. As a result, the children are malnourished with poor health. The medical facilities are also not readily available. The mortality rate of the children is high at about 85 per 1000 as many women delivered without any trained helper.

The school is run by the community itself and the government supported it by providing qualified teachers. But even then, some parents still find it a struggle to send their children to school.

World Vision partnered the community and the Anglican Church to form the **Lenkoane** Community Development Project (LSO-171003) in **1996**. The project focused on the development of children, family and community through education, health services, economic development and spiritual nurture. By year **2012**, the project aims to improve the living standard of the Basutos by increasing their food production, improving their primary health care, enhance self-employment through income generating activities, improve the education facilities and encourage the children to go to school, reduce delinquency rate among the youth and enhance the Basuto's spiritual's life.

The following goals have been set to achieve the above objective by year 2012.

◆ Education

The project aims to ensure that all the children have the opportunity to go to school and attain at least a Grade 5 education. At this level, they will be able to read and write and at least 160 children get to attend High school.

A pre-school programme will be implemented for the children. Mothers who are working usually leave the younger children with the elder brothers who look after the farm animals. As the interest of the job grows, many of them are reluctant to go to school as it is more fun looking after the animals. The programme hopes to develop the childrens' interest in studies from young.

◆ Health

The project also aims to set up a permanent community health care station. Medical equipment will be provided and the government will provide competent staff to run the station. Issues like malnutrition, basic hygiene and immunization will be addressed.

◆ Economic Development

Assistance will be provided to 750 families to increase their food production from 100 kg to 1,500 kg per hectare. This will allow the family to be self-sufficient in meeting their basic needs.

Training in sewing/knitting will be provided for 150 women. These skills will enable them to make children's uniforms and winter clothing and to supplement the family's income. Some 300 youths (school drop outs) will be trained in stone cutting and brick making skills which will enable them to earn a living in the city or in South Africa.

◆ Spiritual Nurture

Worked closely with the various churches to promote and strengthen the understanding of God's Word through Bible study, Sunday schools and spiritual nurturing activities.

The community will also set aside a day for prayer and World Vision will help to organise a revival meeting.

