

News from the DLN

The DLN/RSDA project is making a difference

by Karen Steffensen

Dear members and other friends of Lesotho,

This is the story about the DLN monitoring visit to RSDA in Lesotho, carried out in November 2006 by Anders Heedegaard and Karen Steffensen. We are both former development workers in Lesotho and Anders has worked with RSDA and he knows the organisation very well (and they know him).



What the project is all about.

RSDA is supporting 50 farmer groups in Mafeteng and Phamong, some of the very dry areas of Lesotho. The rain showers are heavy but too infrequent to keep their crops in good growing conditions. They need to store some of the rain water for later use in the dry periods. That is why the farmers want to build water tanks. By help of gutters they collect rain water from the roofs of their houses and direct the water to tanks build of stones, sand and cement. The stored water enables them to grow vegetables most of the year. The farmers collect stones and sand from the river beds for building, and DLN provides cement, wire mesh and the necessary pipes, taps and gutters. DLN also provides training on advocacy and self organising skills. The project is running from September 2005 and until September 2007.

Planning for the second monitoring visit.

Our first monitoring visit in 2005 took place at an early stage of the project, and only a few tanks were built. We saw 4 of them and we attended one of the workshops on sustainable agriculture.

In 2006 we knew that most of the 116 tanks were built and we were eager to see more tanks, to interview the farmers and to take photos. RSDA agreed to provide the necessary staff for 4 fieldtrip days and they accepted the list of 30 farmers and 4 farmer groups we suggested to be our targets for interviewing.



When we left Denmark I felt that our plans were far too ambitious. Interviewing 30 farmers is not realistic, I said to Anders, but he did not totally agree.

The field visits.



The field visits were hard work. Most of you know the condition of the roads in the remote areas of Lesotho. At the end of 2006 the roads were worse than I have ever seen them, eroded by heavy rains, and although we had rented a 4*4 for the trip, the vehicle was not at all suitable for climbing slowly over rocks and gullies. But we were rewarded for the hard work. Interviewing the farmers was indeed interesting. The whole exercise gave us a comprehensive picture of their situation and it gave us an impression of the amount of resources it required from the individual farmer to collect materials for the tanks and we learned about the benefits of the tanks. And the hospitality of the

farmers is unique. They were waiting patiently for us although we were sometimes several hours late, they answered our questions most obliging and they served us food and motoho.

The outcome.

The living conditions of the farmers are very hard. Many of the households are single women with children, some are children left alone, some are grandparents with one or more grandchildren and in some families they are also taking care of orphans from the village. Despite the hard conditions most of the RSDA farmers seem to do better than the average farmer in the village. Many of the farmers claim that they have achieved this through hard work and better techniques learned from RSDA.

Collecting sand and stones has been a major task and the transport has required a cart pulled by oxen or a tractor. Some farmer groups were able to organize transport for the group. In other groups the families had to organize transport individually. Many of the farmers had not received gutters from the project when we visited, but almost all of them had made their own gutters out of corrugated iron or they had been able to buy them. There is no doubt that the tanks have made a great difference in their lives. The water was not used for irrigation only. It was used for feeding livestock, washing, bathing, and cooking and in some cases also for drinking. (The tank owners told us that they do boil the water before they drink it).



The farmers also told us that they had attended workshops on self organizing skills.

They had learned:

Chairing a meeting, running cash books, water harvesting techniques and garden techniques.

We succeed to interview all 30 farmers except one, who was not well and 4 farmer groups, and it was not least due to the commitment of staff and board members from RSDA.

This and many more things we experienced, during our stay, and you can find it all in the report, which is soon available at the website www.lumela.dk

It is due to your support and membership that it is possible for DLN to do our little part of the Capacity Building Project.

Go to Lesotho as a tourist

By: Karina Ruby, DLN board

One way to promote contact and exchange between people of Lesotho and Denmark could be to motivate more Danes to travel to Lesotho to discover the beautiful country and it's people. At the vision meeting in September we decided that DLN would like to support people/members who want to organise trips for tourists to Lesotho.

If you want to organise a Lesotho-trip for a group of people, you are very welcome to approach the DLN board for advice and good ideas. We can try to link you to a tour operator with membership of Rejsegarantifonden, which will be preferable for a group tour. We can also advice you on some practical issues regarding travelling to Lesotho, such as infrastructure, health, hygiene, crime, food, water, culture. We can give you some tips on what to see and what to do in Lesotho. We can advice you on accommodation and transport. If you are a group and want to see the project supported by DLN, we can link you to the partner organisation in Lesotho and help you to organise a visit to the project.

Why go to Lesotho?

Lesotho is a very interesting destination for many various reasons. The country has a pleasant climate with long and warm, not too hot, summers and short and cold winters. The landscape is beautiful with small and big mountains all over, rivers, lakes and charming villages in the valleys. The mountain areas are wonderful for trekking tours. The Basotho people is a friendly and peaceful one. Since the country is a high altitude country with the lowest point at about 1500 meters above sea level, there are not many of the usual tropical diseases seen in Africa. There is no malaria etc. So far not many tourists have discovered Lesotho, so you will get an unspoiled and natural impression of Lesotho



and it's people. Lesotho is encircled by South Africa and can therefore very well be visited in combination with a tour to South Africa.

DLN would especially like to support people, who will take tourism to Lesotho in such a way that the local people in Lesotho will benefit from the visitors. That could be by using local accommodation and buying food from local people.

Contact persons within DLN regarding travelling to Lesotho:

- John Knudsen, telephone: +45 76801428
- Karina Ruby, telephone: +45 87430285
- Karen Steffensen, telephone +45 97578252
- or any of the board members.

DLN Annual General Assembly in Hundested 21st April 2007

By: Claus Løschenkohl & Karina Ruby

As decided in the last AGM, September 2006, DLN has now moved the AGM to be held in the beginning of the year 2007 instead of towards the end of the year. This is to ensure a better coherence between activities and budgets. The constitution now says that the AGM must be held before the end of the month of April. This year it will be

Saturday 21st April 2007 in Hundested from 10:00 to 16:00

Joan and Claus Løschenkohl will host the meeting in their private house. If someone wants to stay overnight, before and/or after the meeting, there are some possibilities in convenient walking distance (max. 5 min.) you will find: Hundested Havnehytter (www.dansk-hytteferie.dk 47937788) and more adequate during the cold season:

Hundested Kro & Hotel (www.hundested-kro.dk phone 47937538 where you in the annex will get accommodation for the same price as with the huts. Of course, the floor in our living (and meeting-) room is also available after meeting and party. Most important is it probably that you take an early contact with hotels if that's what you prefer. Joan and Claus may be able to advice about other (far distance and not cheaper) possibilities.

For dinner Friday evening you will be charged 50,00 DKK.

Breakfast, lunch, tee and coffee during the meeting Saturday is free.

For those who want to stay for social gathering Saturday evening (and night) we will prepare for some

Joan and Claus Løschenkohl
Smedegade 5, st.
3390 Hundested



food, and the menu will depend on the number of participants. That will also include your breakfast on Sunday morning before we split up. You will be charged with 100,00 DKK.

Children (under 12) are charged 1/3, meaning 15 DKK (when adults pay 50) or 30 DKK (when adults pay 100) respectively

Alcoholic beverage and soft drinks are not included, but will be available for moderate prices.

For travellers coming from west-DK you should be aware of the ferry "short-cut possibility" Æbeltoft-Odden-Rørvig-Hundested. They sometimes have a special price for you, if you buy the package. With train and bus, you should study the "rejseplanen" sometimes it is easier than what you think.

Projects

By: Karina Ruby, DLN-board

The project with our partner RSDA on water tanks is now in its last year. The project is planned to be finished by the end of September 2007. DLN would like to start a new cooperation with a partner in Lesotho on a new project this year. It could be another project together with RSDA, or it could be a something completely new. We are awaiting a proposal for a new joined venture from RSDA very soon. We have just received a proposal from TRC (Transformation Resource Centre), which the executive committee will look into and decide on very soon.

We have donated 20.000 DKK/25.000 M to LCCU (Lesotho Child Counselling Unit) to help them finance school fees, school uniforms, medication and internet connection. LCCU is working with street children and abused children. Karen Steffensen and Anders Hedegaard visited LCCU while they were in Lesotho in November and got a proposal right away from Mrs. Lydia, the coordinator of LCCU. The money has been taken from the DLN account and has not been donated from Projektrådgivningen or any other donor.

A little over two years as DLN committee member

By: Karsten Lund, DLN board member

Two interesting years has passed since I entered the committee of DLN. I have learned a lot from the cooperation with Karen, Helga and Karina and we have had a lot of fun together.

Nevertheless I have decided not to run for an other two years at the next AGM in April. I will resign for the time being, and only do ad hoc jobs for the DLN.

I strongly encourage other members to consider running for election, DLN is in a very interesting phase of its life, with a proper programme beginning to come alive.

Do it for Denmark and Lesotho.



News from Lesotho:

Bo -`me le bo-ntat, lumelang

By: Makokoli Nthinya, former MS Language officer in Lesotho.

It is very hot these days, temperatures are extremely high, it is also hot in the heads of each and every Mosotho. We are all looking forward to election day, and what will happen after we all have casted our votes.

Every media corner is elections, and every street corner also elections. I think it is time that we need change and see what other politicians have in place for Lesotho and Basotho who are dying of hunger and HIV/AIDS. last Sunday it was a big day for the parties to have their last rallies and to present to their followers what they will do to Basotho if they win elections. I took an advantage to go round to see how big the rallies were, with main focus on the big parties, the Basotho National Party who ruled Lesotho for 20 years after independence, and the Lesotho Congress for Democracy-the ruling party and newly founded party All Basotho Convention. of the three parties i have mentioned the biggest gathering was ABC, followed by LCD and not many people gathered at BNP, which has also split immediately before the elections.

So we are all wondering who is going to win the election between ABC and the LCD, in fact these are the only parties with most followers, and who seem to be in competition.

I thought i could share this with you as people who have worked in Lesotho and who may have some interest on the current affairs of Lesotho.

Untill after the elections are announced bye



Ruling Party Takes Lead

MASERU, Feb 19, 2007 (AFP) –

The ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy began pulling ahead of its rivals Monday as counting continued after weekend general elections in southern Africa's mountain kingdom, organisers said.

Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili's party had won 18 of the first 31 constituencies to declare while former foreign minister Tom Thabane's All Basotho Convention (ABC) was trailing in second place with 12 seats, independent electoral commission spokesman Rethabile Pholo told AFP.

An alliance of minor parties had secured one seat after Saturday's elections, Pholo added.

A total of 80 MPs will be directly elected in constituencies while another 40 will be elected via proportional representation.

Observers from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) gave the vote a generally clean bill of health on Sunday but the spectre of another contested election loomed as Thabane outlined a list of grievances.

The former foreign minister, who quit the cabinet and formed the ABC late last year, claimed some of his supporters had found their names absent from the electoral register and alleged there had been some multiple voting.

When his camp tried to file complaints with the independent electoral commission, their representatives were nowhere to be found, he said.

Disputed elections in 1998, when Mosisili was first elevated to power, resulted in mass protests which were only quelled when the South African and Botswanan armies intervened in the small mountain kingdom.

Opposition Cries Foul

MASERU, Feb 18, 2007 (AFP) –

Lesotho's chief opposition leader Tom Thabane, looking to end the ruling party's decade-long grip on power, cried foul on Sunday over the country's elections as early results trickled in.

With the tally from 10 of the 80 constituencies declared, Thabane's new All Basotho Convention (ABC) was running neck and neck with Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili's Lesotho Congress for Democracy with five seats apiece.

Analysts however said the election was still too close to call and final results were not due to be announced until Wednesday.

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The former foreign minister, who quit the cabinet and formed the ABC late last year, claimed some of his supporters had found their names absent from the electoral register and alleged there had been some multiple voting.

When his camp tried to file complaints with the independent electoral commission, their representatives were nowhere to be found, he said.

"I don't think it was an accident. I think they kept away on purpose," he told reporters.

The head of the SADC mission acknowledged there had been problems with the register and over the small amount of airtime for the opposition, but said they should not be overstated.

"In spite of these shortcomings, it is our opinion that the mission can ... confidently say congratulations to the people of Lesotho following the holding of credible, peaceful and transparent elections," said John Chiligati, who is Tanzania's employment minister.

The protests nine years ago had cast doubt over the future of democracy in Lesotho, a nation landlocked by regional giant South Africa and one of the poorest on the continent.

Thabane pledged he would not incite his supporters but would not accept the result if it was fixed.

"I would like you to know personally that I control a lot of young people. I will not provoke any violence, but I will protest these things."

The first results appeared to back up predictions that the ABC would perform better in urban areas and the LCD would predominate in the countryside.

Khabele Matlosa, an analyst at the Johannesburg-based Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, said it was too early to predict an outcome.

"It's very close. Absolutely it's too close to call," he told AFP.

The election generated much excitement this time after Thabane fought a lively campaign against his old colleagues on a ticket to fight poverty and corruption. Mosisili played the stability card as he appealed for a third term.

Thabane resigned and then formed the ABC in October, crossing the floor with 17 MPs. Apparently worried that Thabane would build up an unstoppable momentum, Mosisili asked King Letsie III to dissolve parliament and call a snap election.

Much of Lesotho still depends on subsistence agriculture, while those who have salaried jobs take home on average less than a thousand dollars (760 euros) a year.

HIV/AIDS has also proved a major handicap to development with around 30 percent of the population of about two million affected by the disease.

With 15 parties and 93 independent candidates contesting the elections, both the ABC and LCD will have to forge alliances to elect their man prime minister.

Final results were expected to be announced by Wednesday whereafter the king would open parliament and the prime minister would be elected.

AFP



First Results to be Announced

MASERU, Feb 18, 2007 (AFP) –

The first results of elections in the tiny African kingdom of Lesotho were to be announced Sunday, offering a glimpse of how well the ruling party has fared against a populist newcomer. Voting went smoothly in the landlocked country, ravaged by AIDS and poverty, and counting continued late into the night under the watchful eye of police and observers.

"It went absolutely smoothly; I have never seen anything like it," said electoral commission spokesman Rethabile Pholo.

After almost a decade as prime minister, Pakalitha Mosisili of the Lesotho Congress for Democracy is confident he can still make a change, but is battling promises by his former aide to rid the country of poverty and corruption.

Tom Thabane resigned in October last year to form the All Basotho Convention (ABC), crossing the floor with 17 members of parliament, causing constitutional monarch King Letsie III to dissolve parliament and call the snap election.

Lesotho, completely surrounded by South Africa, has experienced political upheaval in the past with aborted elections in 1970 and 1985.

Democracy was brought about in 1993, but disputed election results in the 1998 elections -- when Mosisili was elected -- led to violence which was quelled when troops from South Africa and Botswana entered the fray.

Both party leaders have said they would accept the results of the election.

"I have always said we want a clean election and I am praying that this election will be clean. We have had too much trouble with elections in the past," Thabane said.

Mosisili said he believed the process would be free and fair.

Lesotho - Still Poor, Still Volatile

MASERU , 13 February 2007 (IRIN) –

Lesotho, a small mountainous country surrounded by South Africa, provides its much larger neighbour, the continent's economic powerhouse, with water to fuel its industrial growth, and political volatility to test its patience.

On Saturday, Lesotho's roughly 1.8 million people - over half of which, according to the UN, live on US\$2 or less a day - will vote in a snap



election called after 18 members of the ruling party, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), crossed the floor to the opposition party, the All Basotho Convention (ABC), in a mass defection late last year.

Since achieving independence from Britain in 1966, Lesotho has held four elections. The first post-independence election in 1970 was annulled by Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan, which ushered in 16 years of a state of emergency, only to end in a military coup, followed by another round of rule by decree with an executive monarch at the helm, a brief return to democracy in the early 1990s, another military coup in 1994, a return to democracy with a disputed election in 1998, leading to an army mutiny that brought a Southern African Development Community military force to intervene, under the leadership of South Africa, to put an end to the unrest.

The source of Lesotho's political tension is not ethnic divisions - 99.7 percent of the population are Basotho - but the high premium placed on being in government, Denis Kadima, deputy leader of the observer mission sent to Lesotho by the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA), told IRIN. "The state is the main provider of salaries. Those outside of the state are almost nowhere, as there is no real private sector to go to."

One of the mainstays of the country's US\$1.3 billion annual gross domestic product is the Lesotho Highlands Water Scheme, a six-dam project scheduled for completion in 2015 but already providing water and hydroelectricity to both Lesotho and South Africa. In an arid region with increasing demands for electricity amid growing energy shortages, the water scheme has become the lynchpin of sustained growth in Gauteng, South Africa's economic heartland, and a divisive issue in Lesotho.

"Poverty is deep and widespread: 50 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, which is unacceptable, considering that Basotho earns over 20 million Maloti (US\$3 million) a month in royalties from the Lesotho Highland Water Project," the ABC manifesto said.

The importance of Lesotho breaking away from its volatile political history and holding well-run, peaceful elections is borne out by the host of election monitoring organisations that have descended on the country, including groups from the African Union, the United States, the Southern African Development Community, parliamentary forums from the region, and independent and Commonwealth observers.

According to a pre-election report by the US-based National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, after parliament was dissolved and a 90-day election timetable put in place, there was "intense pressure on electoral officials to update and correct the voter registration list" to



hold the country's first-ever snap elections.

"In short, this 'extraordinary election' calls for extraordinary efforts on behalf of the electoral authorities, government, political parties, media and civil society to ensure that laws and the rules of the electoral framework are followed in a spirit of maximum flexibility, and with enhanced efforts to ensure equity and fairness in the process. For some, doubts remain as to whether this has taken place," the report commented.

Hoolo Nyane, democracy and human rights coordinator for a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) umbrella body, the Lesotho Council of NGOs, said in a pre-election assessment that the situation was conducive to free and fair elections, despite the public outcry over inaccurate electoral lists, which had since been "corrected".

In 2002, a mixed electoral system was introduced in an attempt to end wild shifts of support from one political party to another at each election: for example, in the 1998 election, in which a 'first past the post' system was used, one party secured 79 of the 80 available seats.

In Saturday's poll there will be 120 seats up for grabs, 80 of which will be based on a 'first past the post' system, with the remaining 40 seats handed out on a proportional representation system according to party lists.

Kadima, whose EISA observer mission is being led Sir Ketumile Masire, former president of Botswana, said the rationale was to encourage consensus politics and nation building.

There are 14 political parties competing in the elections, the two main parties being the LCD and the ABC. But there is little to choose between the two, if judged by the roughly equal numbers attending their final election rallies on Sunday. The parties have tried to set themselves apart during campaigning, but their manifestos show much common ground, such as better education for the youth and poverty alleviation.
Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN)

Seventeen to Observe Elections

MASERU Feb 14 2007.

Seventeen members of Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA) are in the country to observe Saturday's elections..

The EISA Observer Mission is here at the invitation of the IEC and is led by Sir Ketumile Masire, former President of Botswana.



The Mission has drawn representatives from Electoral Commissions and Civil Organisations from Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

During its time here, the Mission will assess whether the conditions in the country are conducive for a free and fair election and whether the outcome indeed reflects the wishes of Basotho.

Speaking in an interview, Mission leader, Sir Ketumile Masire said the team was in the country in January this year to do a pre-election assessment. He said the EISA will deploy teams to selected districts to meet electoral stakeholders ahead of the elections.

On the election day, EISA teams will observe the voting and counting processes at the polling stations. The team will convene in Maseru on Sunday to issue an interim report of their findings and their recommendations.

The EISA Observer Mission will leave the country on 27 February after the election results have been announced.

More news and updates about the upcoming general elections can be accessed from Independent Electoral Commission website: www.iec.org.ls

Lesotho News Agency

Faith-Based Organizations Play Major Role in Hiv/Aids Fight

New York, Feb 9 2007

Faith-based organizations play a major role in HIV/AIDS care and treatment in sub-Saharan Africa and greater collaboration between them and public health agencies is needed if progress is to be made towards the goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010, [according to a new United Nations study.](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2007/np05/en/index.html)

"Faith-based organizations (FBOs) are a vital part of civil society," UN World Health Organization (WHO) Department of HIV/AIDS Director Kevin De Cock said. "Since they provide a substantial portion of care in developing countries, often reaching vulnerable populations living under adverse conditions, FBOs must be recognized as essential contributors towards universal access efforts.

According to the report - Appreciating assets: mapping, understanding, translating and engaging religious health assets in Zambia and Lesotho FBOs play a much greater role in HIV/AIDS care and treatment in sub-Saharan



Africa than previously recognized.

The report, released by WHO yesterday at the National Cathedral in Washington DC, concludes that greater coordination and better communication are urgently needed between organizations of different faiths and the private and public health sectors.

It estimates that between 30 and 70 per cent of the health infrastructure in Africa is currently owned by faith-based organizations, yet there is often little cooperation between them and mainstream public health programmes.

The study focused on Lesotho and Zambia, which had HIV prevalence rates of 23.2 and 17 per cent respectively in 2005. It found that Christian hospitals and health centres are providing about 40 per cent of HIV care and treatment services in Lesotho and almost a third in Zambia.

The pilot <"http://www.arhap.uct.ac.za/research_who.php">study was undertaken by partners in the African Religious Health Assets Programme (ARHAP) at the Universities of Cape Town, KwaZulu-Natal, and Witwatersrand in South Africa, and researchers from the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University in Atlanta, United States.

United Nations press release

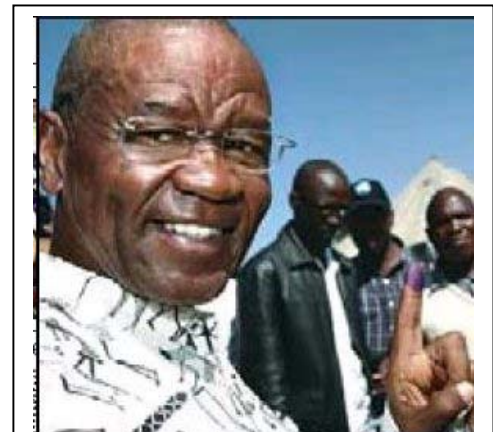
Lesotho public flocks to vote for president

MASERU, (ASSOCIATION FRANCE-PRESSE, February 18th 2007)

Voters flocked to the polls yesterday in Lesotho where Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili faces a tough challenge from a former aide who has vowed to transform one of the world's most impoverished nations.

Mr Mosisili, who is hoping for a third term, voted in the morning in the tiny and Aids-ravaged southern African kingdom, and said the process was "transparent from the onset".

The prime minister is facing an unprecedented challenge from former foreign minister Tom Thabane, who once was seen as his successor. Mr Thabane broke away from the ruling party and formed the All Basotho Convention.



Former foreign minister Tom Thabane of the All Basotho Convention shows his ink-stained finger after voting in Maseru yesterday.

"I'm confident that I will win the elections because of the people, they want change, everybody wants change and we are the symbol of change," he said.



Yesterday's turnout appeared higher than in the past where elections had been marked by voter apathy, due to violence and tensions.

Rethabile Pholo, a spokesman for Lesotho's electoral commission, said although it was too early to estimate the turnout, the numbers were impressive.

"We cannot determine now but by the look of it there is a lot of positivity. Every polling station is full and voters are enthusiastic. Everything is going smoothly. We had sporadic incidents of polling stations opening late," he said.

Voters streamed to the voting stations on foot, in vehicles and even on horseback to pick representatives to the 120-member national assembly.

There are around 920,000 registered voters in Lesotho to elect the 121 representatives to parliament and observers say public interest has been heightened by the new challenge to the ruling Lesotho Congress of Democracy.

Jobs, healthcare on poll agenda

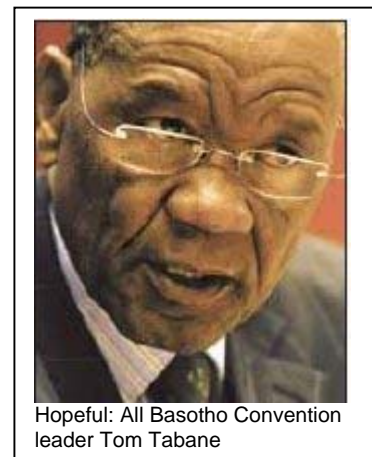
Thabo Thakalekoala (Mail & Guardian, 16 Feb, 2007; South Africa, Page: 16)

The people of the kingdom of Lesotho will go to the polls on Saturday to elect a new national assembly of 120 members after Head of state King Letsie III surprised the nation when he announced that the date of election would be brought forward to February from May this year.

During the entire 90-day election campaign period, the HIV/Aids crisis, job creation, poverty and education have emerged as burning issues.

It is now more than 20 years since the first HIV/Aids case was diagnosed in the tiny Southern African country. This year, the rate of infection stands at 23,3% of the estimated 2,2-million population. The infection rate continues to rise, and most of those who are infected are young people.

Under Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili, the government launched the "Know Your Status" campaign, which was intended to encourage people from the age of 12 upwards to test for HIV/Aids. However, some opposition parties feel that the HIV/Aids situation in the tiny kingdom is far from under control as many people still do not know their status. They also say that the campaign has serious financial problems because of a lack of donor funding.



Hopeful: All Basotho Convention leader Tom Tabane



The challenge facing the new government will be to determine how many people are in need of treatment, to increase the testing rate and to halt the escalating infection rate. So far, few political parties have been convincing on this matter.

The provision of healthcare is another item on the agenda during this election campaign. The ruling party has, on numerous occasions, told its supporters that the government has embarked on a large-scale initiative to improve health services in the country. It claims to be improving the working conditions and terms of service of health professionals, and seeking the services of medical doctors from Cuba and China. But opposition parties say the health sector is in a shambles and has totally collapsed.

They complain of poor service provision and an insufficient number of trained staff and equipment in most of the government-controlled health facilities around the country. This has led to professional health personnel, especially doctors and nurses, leaving the country for South Africa and elsewhere.

Unemployment is also seen as a major challenge that needs to be tackled urgently. The rate of unemployment in Lesotho has risen to more than 45% in the past eight years, despite the country receiving R20-million a month from the sale of water to South Africa as part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project.

The poverty reduction strategy implemented by the government in the past few years has failed to eradicate or reduce poverty in the country, especially in the rural areas, where people live below the poverty line on less than \$1 a day.

Opposition political parties are saying they will deal with the issue of poverty if elected to power, but there are no clear poverty reduction strategies in their manifestos.

The ruling Lesotho Congress for Democracy, led by Mosisili, and the All Basotho Convention, led by Tom Thabane, appear to be the main contestants in this election. Other parties that are set to figure prominently are the Basotho National Party, the Alliance of Congress Parties and the Popular Front for Democracy.

Bethlehem turns to hydro power for salvation

Tumi Makgetla (Mail & Guardian, 02 Feb, 2007; South Africa, Page: 49)

Low energy reserves have forced South Africa to ease up on air conditioning and find new ways to conserve electricity. But in the little town of Bethlehem, in the Free State, construction is under way to insulate the town's inhabitants from South Africa's electricity crunch.

Renewable energy in the form of hydroelectric power will reduce Bethlehem's reliance on the national grid. When its hydro plant comes online early next year it should provide 7MW of electricity, equivalent to 20% of the town's energy needs.



Dutch energy company Nuplanet first contemplated the project in 1999 and began construction in December last year on the Ash River. The plant will cost about R70-million to build.

Hydro stations are not always viable because South African rivers tend to run dry during winter, but an agreement between the South African and Lesotho governments guarantees the flow of the Ash. This is part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, which provides a constant flow of water from Lesotho to Gauteng.

The Bethlehem hydro project is one of several independent power producers that the government hopes will provide 30% of future electricity generation capacity.

While experts say there are opportunities in small hydroelectric power generation, most large-scale independent production is expected to come from non-renewable or "dirty" energy, such as gas turbine power.

One of the challenges facing independent renewable energy producers is the problem of long-term financing and finding a buyer, said Yaw Afrane-Okese, the manager of renewable energy at the National Energy Regulator of South Africa.

South Africa's 10 hydrostations produced almost 0,4% of the country's electricity in 2004, according to the regulator, and Eskom produced 97% of this hydro power.

"South Africa does not have many big hydro resources, so the focus is on small hydro," said Afrane-Okese. Small hydro is defined as less than 10MW.

"The advantage of hydro power is that it has a relatively short lead time," he said. "The electricity may not have to go on to the national grid because one can place the station close to the need," he added.

Denmark Lesotho Network?

The NGO Denmark Lesotho Network (DLN) was founded in 2002 by former Danish development workers in Lesotho and other good friends of the tiny mountain kingdom in Southern Africa. DLN aims at supporting NGO's in Lesotho in their work to develop civil society. DLN uses its network of people and organisations in Lesotho to pinpoint beneficiaries of DLN's support – and to keep an eye on that funding is used according to agreements made. DLN wishes to enhance knowledge of the living conditions in Lesotho and to seek funding from foundations, business enterprises and organisations for actual projects in Lesotho.



Membership of DLN

Anyone, who can support the aims of DLN, can achieve a membership. Members contribute to support initiatives in Lesotho that develop and better living conditions in the country. Members will receive an electronic newsletter four times a year and be invited to DLN's annual general assembly. The cost of a membership is 100 Danish kroner yearly. For membership contact cashier Karen Steffensen, tel.: +45 97578252, e-mail:

karen.steffensen@mail.dk

DLN's address is: Denmark Lesotho Network, C/O Helga Halck Højsager, Asylgade 16, DK-5000 Odense C, Denmark

Noticed the new lay out? Our homepage has also had a make over:

www.lumela.dk

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