



Lesotho Mountain Crafts

Crafts now for sale in Clarens

March 23rd was a landmark day for the companies of **Lesotho Mountain Crafts** when their first products went on sale at **Times Gone By** in Clarens, South Africa. This small, pretty town is famous for its artisan outlets, including craft shops, art galleries & boutiques. It is a premier Free State tourist destination and this new sales outlet is a great opportunity to bring LMC crafts to a much wider audience.

Pam & Andre, the owners of Times Gone By, had heard about LMC through the nearby **Gumtree Ladies Club**, who have regularly bought crafts from LMC at the annual **Cherry Festival** in Ficksburg. Pam asked to see a selection of LMC crafts and she quickly placed an order for jewellery, table mats and leather goods for her beautiful accessory shop.

Pam, Itumeleng (**Action Lesotho's** new Product Development Officer), Phabalo (**IDO Beads**) and Malipolelo (**Fusi Leather Designs**) had lots of fun in Pam's workshop discussing new product ideas and exciting ways to develop the LMC brand and product range. Many thanks to Pam for her enthusiasm & support.

Photo above (l-r): Itumeleng (IDO Beads & Action Lesotho's New Product Development Officer), Malipolelo (Fusi Leather Designs) & Phabalo (IDO Beads), with table mats from Elelloang Basali and travel bags from Fusi Leather Designs outside Times Gone By.

LMC gallery visited by dignitaries

The Honorary Consul of Lesotho in Finland, **Mr Harri Mannila** & his wife **Sirpa** (below) visited the Lesotho Mountain Craft Gallery in TY in February, accompanied by officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture. We were greatly honoured by their visit and delighted that they enjoyed the craft demonstrations and bought souvenirs to take home with them.



Katse Dam craft initiative – Dominic Matookane

A group of 50 craftspeople has been identified near the famous Katse dam. Action Lesotho worked with the group to prepare a needs assessment in February 2016. A meeting was subsequently held with the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority to explore how the group can be supported and developed.

Entrepreneurship & Innovation - Mahlonepho Makirika, Dominic Matooane & Mantai Mpesi

Action Lesotho Chairman visits projects



Paul Hanrahan with Mme Mamokete, and her paintings, Mme Nthathi (BEDCO), Patrick Rorke (Artist at Morija) and Mantai Mpesi & Dominic Matooane (Action Lesotho).

Action Lesotho's Chairman **Paul Hanrahan** visited the projects in Lesotho in January. He began with a visit to **Morija Museum** where Action Lesotho had conducted an Innovation & Entrepreneurship course last year with a group of potential craftspeople. This course was a follow up to a 7-week long art skills development programme run by **Patrick Rorke**, artist at Morija, in partnership with BEDCO.

Members of the group had no income at all at the outset of the training but are now reporting an income of more than R600/month. The next step is to grow their businesses to a level that qualifies as a small business i.e. R1500/month. The group are gradually developing more products and have started a well-attended monthly craft fair at Maeder House.

Training course at Ha Magele

A new Innovation & Entrepreneurship course was started by **Action Lesotho** at Ha Magele Community Centre in February. It is run by **Carl Von Maltitz** who is Action Lesotho's Farm Advisor as well as the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Trainer. The attendees included people wishing to start their own businesses as well as people involved in assisting business start-ups including staff from Action Lesotho, **Basotho Enterprise Development Corporation (BEDCO)** and **Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation (LTDC)**.

The training aims to give participants a high level of problem solving skills. Most of the potential entrepreneurs had previously failed with their businesses due to lack of problem solving and innovation skills. The problem solving methods which were outlined to the trainees will hopefully assist the participants to predict issues and overcome obstacles as they arise in their businesses.

The training was enjoyed by all the participants and they are eager to develop their creative problem-solving skills through the monthly innovation training sessions.

Kome Community Enterprise



Action Lesotho's Dominic & Mantai pictured with one of the last surviving Kome cave inhabitants (centre).

Kome Community Enterprise, one of the businesses started as a result of an Action Lesotho Innovation and Entrepreneurship course, was taken on a learning journey in February to **'The Cabin'**, a community run tourist attraction in Clocolan, South Africa.

Also taking part in the learning journey were BEDCO trainers and Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation partners (pictured below) for whom it was the first time they had visited a farm stall in South Africa. They were all very excited by the product ranges, the displays, the food and the general mix of tourism facilities and craft sector products.



LTDC and BECO staff at The Cabin, Clocolan.

The trip was very inspiring, particularly for Kome Community Enterprise (below) because it gave them hope that they too could establish a successful community enterprise in their own area, which is famous for the Kome caves.



New training manual

Action Lesotho & BEDCO are working together to produce an Innovation & Entrepreneurship training manual that can be rolled out across the country under the auspices of BEDCO by the end of 2016.

Agriculture

Mahlonepho Makirika

Coping with drought on the farm

Many farmers in Lesotho are facing an uncertain future due to a severe drought which was encountered this spring/summer. This affected many farmers very badly with most of them not able to plant anything at all and those who did plant producing very poor crops from their gardens and fields.

Action Lesotho, faced with severe drought on our own farm, took the decision to trial several hectares of sorghum, which is a drought hardy crop. Also planted were potatoes and more recently maize for animal fodder. Our potatoes will yield high quality seed but will not swell for table use. The sorghum is growing but the yield expected is 50% less than in good conditions.

Another big challenge our Farm Manager **Ntate Molemo Lethea** faced was an insect attack on the maize. This was successfully treated.

Fortunately, the vegetable harvest was very successful and Ntate Molemo was really excited and managed to sell those crops to local customers. Our biggest success was with spinach, tomatoes, carrots, beetroot and butternut squash (below).

Action Lesotho is encouraging other farmers and vegetable growers not to lose hope even though they encounter drought. Unfortunately many of the measures that can be employed to mitigate the impacts of drought cost money that most farmers do not have e.g. tap water can be used to water crops but most farmers do not have an access to a free, reliable source of water. Shade net and/or mulch can reduce evapotranspiration but netting is also costly except to cover very small areas. Finally, innovative irrigation techniques could be employed but training is needed in their implementation and access to any source of water for irrigation is also likely to be an issue.



Orchard project at Qoqolosing



There is an orchard project at **Qoqolosing** which was initially funded by Action Lesotho and is regularly monitored by the farm team. We began the project in 2010 and assisted the community to plant peach & apple trees and to erect fencing around the area.

The orchard was developed as a community enterprise initiative and **Chief Sekota** was asked to oversee the project on behalf of her community from 2012 onwards. She reported to the farm team that the community had made every effort to ensure the success of the orchard and the trees planted in 2010 are now bearing fruit. The apples and peaches were sold by the co-operative to the local community last year.

The co-operative was hoping to expand the orchard into a new area (pictured below). Last year the **Ministry of Forestry** offered to give the group peach trees but unfortunately they all died because of drought.



Maize silage: fact finding journey

Action Lesotho's Farm Manager, **Molemo Lethea** and our Farm Advisor **Carl Von Maltitz**, visited a farmer in the Free State by the name of **William Scott**. The aim was to gather information on how to make silage for animal feed.

Readers in Ireland will be very familiar with grass silage but it is also possible to make it from maize and other crops. Mr. Scott explained what silage is and how it can be produced. He said that silage made from whole maize is a valuable, high-energy fodder for animals. It can be a very good way of making the best use of maize that may have been planted with the aim of harvesting the grain but has been damaged by disease, frost or drought.

Community Development

Limakatso Rantsoa & Mahlonepho Makirika

Breakfast Club



Action Lesotho are delighted to announce that thanks to the generous donations made in response to the Chairman's appeal in December 2015 we were able to begin our breakfast club programme for 70 children in January. The programme provides children with breakfast before school. 46 of the children are at Primary School, 4 in High School and 20 in Pre-school. Those in primary and secondary school get breakfast between 6.30am and 7.30am and the pre-school children receive breakfast at 10:00 am. They are given porridge with peanut butter added to help provide each child with their daily protein need. Each child also receives a piece of fruit.

The programme means the children start their day with full stomachs which has led to a centre full of very happy children, better concentration at school and a generally increased feeling of well-being.

*"My name is **Thabang** from Ha Masele. It was really hard for me to have breakfast before I go to school but Action Lesotho has played a big role for offering me breakfast from Monday to Friday. I am now able to concentrate in the class because I go to school with full stomach. Thank you very much".*

We are in contact with the local primary school who are assisting us in monitoring the progress of the children. We have had very positive feedback on the children's performances since the start of the year.

The biggest challenge we faced when we began this initiative is that some children were unable to attend at the times we distribute breakfast because of the long distances they travel to reach school. Our staff quickly responded by providing the children with breakfast in lunch boxes so that they could take it with them and avoid being late for school. The children were very grateful to the staff for enabling them to get to school on time and not miss breakfast.

Home Care Package



Until last year, **Action Lesotho** supported a weekend feeding programme at Lepoqong. After the programme ceased, Action Lesotho began a Home Care Programme for the 53 children. This programme consists of a monthly food delivery and a visit from Action Lesotho staff who build a relationship with the family and provide mentoring and support as required. The food packages for each child consists of: 12.5kg of maize meal, 750ml of oil, bar of soap, 500g of salt, 30 eggs, 1kg of beans and fresh potatoes or vegetables grown from our farm. The children are doing well and all are still attending school.



Moshoeshoe Day

The 11th March is **Moshoeshoe Day** in Lesotho and schools in the country celebrate it with communal sports days. 35 children registered in our programme could not afford to participate in their school trip due to financial problems in their families. Action Lesotho staff therefore took them to a local sports ground as a way of celebrating Moshoeshoe's Day.

They played football and did athletics and they were cheered up by the juniors and some people from the village. They competed with the other team from the village. This was really an exciting day for the children and at the end of the day they were very happy.



Homework Club



About 39 children come to the centre every day for the homework club where they complete their school assignments, receive support & guidance and extra coaching where needed. Children can also undertake research through the internet making good use of our computer room.

The children also continue to interact with children in Europe through Skype. The school they make contact with is **Hambridge Primary School** in England. The children are enjoying the chance to improve their English and the cultural exchange enormously.

The homework club is run by Action Lesotho staff, '**M'e Mats'ireletso** and '**M'e Marethabile**.



Women's Enterprise Course

The aim of this 6-month course was to equip young women from disadvantaged backgrounds with catering and computer skills. The women had low levels of education, no formal qualifications nor the necessary skills that would enable them to be self-employed. The women came to the centre four days a week, from 9 am to 1 pm. The initial proposed duration of the course was 6 months. 15 women joined the programme but eventually this dropped to 5. It became apparent that the majority of the women wanted to be employed at the clothing factories rather than be self-employed but none of them had the necessary skills in operating industrial sewing machines. **Action Lesotho** therefore started a programme to train the women to use the machines (see following article for more details).

Of the women who remained on the empowerment and entrepreneurship course, two young women want to start their own catering business. They have asked for financial assistance and are writing a proposal to put to Action Lesotho.



Industrial sewing machine course



To meet the identified needs of the women attending the Enterprise Course, **Action Lesotho** established sewing machine classes run by an external trainer. Action Lesotho bought four second hand sewing machines namely; cover seam, double needle, over locker and flat machine.

The sewing machine training course has been overwhelmingly popular and students are now coming from Hlotse and Pitseng (over 20 kilometres away). We have now trained 70 young people and nearly 50 of these have gained employment in local textile factories. We have received support from a number of factories in Ha Mapele for which we are extremely grateful.

Those that have recently gained employment are very excited and have expressed their appreciation to their trainer. They also thanked Action Lesotho for establishing the sewing programme. Action Lesotho is very proud to have a group that has shown so much interest and made so much progress.

Computer Classes



Thapelo Khasela, Action Lesotho's Computer Skills Tutor, with his three graduating students on Mon 18th Jan 2016.

In a world where everything continues to advance and technology becomes more and more a part of our daily lives, being computer literate is very important, especially for increased employability.

The students undertook an 8 week course taught by **Thapelo Khasela** at the Action Lesotho Community Development Centre. They were trained in Microsoft Word, Excel, Access, Powerpoint, internet & email. Hopefully these new skills will assist them in gaining employment.



In general the **Malimpho programme** continues to be extremely successful in caring for those identified with critical illness in the community and who, with our care, can regain their health and return to work or enter into self-employment.

The clients continue to be happy with their monthly food parcels and the regular visits from our **Nurse 'M'e Futho**. In recent months, our Project Officer Maki has established direct communications with **Dr Diane Forde** in Ireland. This has resulted in increased assistance in problem solving which has given increased support & guidance to our team.

Case studies:

1) **Malimpho client** has a new house! **Ntate Sonnyboy** (above), who was admitted to our programme last year, lived in a house that had partially collapsed in bad weather. He has not only regained his strength but thanks to Action Lesotho he has a new house. He was also donated a bed which he is delighted with. Now Nt Sonnyboy can sleep easy without living in fear of his house collapsing during wind or rain.

Sonnyboy recently moved into his newly finished house. 'I don't know what to say. I'm now going to get myself a wife!', he said to Maki. Ntate is so grateful to have a new house. He said he doesn't know what he would have done without Action Lesotho: 'You guys found me dying when you first helped me', he said as the project officer departed.

2) **A young man** with HIV who was refusing to go to school and refusing to attend the clinic for his regular CD4 count tests was counselled over a 2 week period by Maki and Mme Futho and we were eventually successful in both getting him back into school and getting his CD4 count tested.

3) **Nt Thabo** was a Malimpho Programme patient since it began. His illness took a serious downturn late last year and although, through skilled counselling by our nurse, he began ARV treatment, he didn't regain his health. His condition began to deteriorate rapidly and we took him to the main hospital in Maseru where he was sadly diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. Our experienced team of caregivers provided palliative care with the assistance of Dr Jesse's Polyclinic in Maputsoe until he died peacefully at home on March 15th. May he rest in peace.

Pallet of goods from Ireland: Thanks to **Action Trust Ireland**, two pallets of goods donated by **Action Lesotho** supporters in Ireland were delivered to Lesotho. The staff send many thanks to everyone who donated goods which included football jerseys (below), football boots, clothes, shoes, books, pencil cases and toys. The boys have already formed a football team: previously they did not have a team strip so they are delighted with the new jerseys. They promise to train hard for their team.



School shoes: Reflex Shoes in Maputsoe donated school shoes to the children attending Action Lesotho's Homework Club, Weekend Programme & Lepoqong Centre (below). For many of them their existing school shoes were in very poor condition so now they feel more pride going to school. **Colin Peddlar**, from **Reflex Shoes** has been a wonderful supported or our work since 2007 and we would like to extend our thanks to him and wish him every joy as he retires in April this year. We will miss you Colin.



Clothes: Action Lesotho also sends many thanks to **Line 1** at **Humin Jeanswear** for the 108 pairs of jeans which were donated to the children in February this year. They were absolutely delighted and will benefit from the warmth of the jeans as winter approaches.

A special mention for Georgia & Andrew Sheils who once again generously donated the proceeds from their winter show jumping league.

Chairman's Review of 2015 – Paul Hanrahan

The past year was one in which many of our projects matured to a very satisfactory level of performance, where we are having a real & lasting impact on people's lives. I visited Lesotho in January 2016, and I was absolutely delighted with the amount of activity going on, and the level of energy, commitment & ability being displayed by our amazing team.

1) Humanitarian Relief:

(a) HIV/AIDS: Our Malimpho program of food & nursing care for seriously ill AIDS patients, delivered by our nurse, 'M'e Futho, enabled 10 patients to recover sufficiently to exit the program and we helped them to take up employment or self-employment. Sadly 3 patients died during the year, 2 of whom came to us too late in their illness for our help to be effective. We cater for 40 patients at a time and every vacancy is immediately filled, such is the demand for our services. Regretfully, the rate of new HIV/AIDS infections in Lesotho does not seem to be abating.

(b) Orphans & Vulnerable Children: During 2015 we provided the following services for orphans and vulnerable children:

- Week-end meals & activities for 70 – 80 children.
- Pre-school program for 10 - 20 children.
- Homework club for 35 - 40 children.
- Month-long winter holiday program of activities, academic support & meals for 53 children.
- Out-reach delivery of monthly food parcels to 53 children who cannot attend at our centre.

In the December newsletter we appealed for funding to provide breakfast for children who would otherwise go to school hungry, with the objective of improving their nutrition and helping them perform better at school. Thanks to a very generous response, we were able to start this "Breakfast Club" in late January 2016, and have over 70 children enrolled.

In addition to providing meals for the orphans and vulnerable children, we use every engagement with them as an opportunity to improve their life chances by encouraging recreational, artistic and academic activities, and by applying the four "Aistear" themes of Exploring and thinking; Identity and belonging; Communication; and Well-being. This approach is showing results in better behaviour, improved school performance and more self-confidence among the children. I would like to pay tribute to our staff who have trained themselves in these techniques, and delivered them so effectively and enthusiastically.

2) Enterprise Development:

Action Lesotho's main focus is on helping to break the cycle of poverty in Lesotho. The key to this is in the creation of self-sustaining enterprises & employment. We have identified craft enterprises as an area with real potential for growth. A large part of our resources are focussed on helping individual craft producers to improve the quality of their products and increase

their output of crafts which will sell profitably on the domestic and export markets. We are working closely with Basotho Enterprise Development Corporation (BEDCO) & Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation to provide training in the necessary design, production, marketing and organisational skills to develop the national craft industry to its potential. In July 2015 Irish Aid agreed to provide a very substantial level of grant-aid to this project over the next 3 years. Over the last 6 months we have recruited and trained a number of specialist staff to deliver this training and follow-up mentoring which is a vital part in moving craft producers from start-up to becoming a successful, profitable business.

3) Training of Unemployed Adults

In 2015 we ran basic literacy & numeracy courses for unemployed adult males and facilitated them to move on to a carpentry course run by BEDCO. We ran a similar course for unemployed females, including catering and sewing machine operating. The latter course proved so popular that we had to move it from Ha Maqele to our Craft Enterprise Centre at Phukalla, where we have installed a range of machines and are training 50 trainees at a time, with a high rate of subsequent employment in the clothing factories around Maputsoe.

4) Agriculture:

The past year has been the most difficult for agriculture in a decade. Lack of rainfall during the critical Jan-Feb growth period meant that 2015 crop yields were very poor. This was followed by a longer, more severe drought throughout southern Africa from Aug to Jan, which meant that many crops could not be planted and those that were have failed. Our own farm has not escaped the impact of the drought; we could not plant any maize and the sorghum crop will be fit only for animal fodder. However, our farm team have made the most of the limited land around our farm centre at Phukalla to plant and irrigate a vegetable garden. Temperatures of over 40°C mean that water evaporates as soon as it hits the ground, so they have installed netting to minimise this. The vegetables are supplied to our feeding programmes and there is a ready market for any surplus. We are investigating how we can help our neighbouring farmers who are struggling to grow any crops, by supplying netting and water to them where possible.

5) Outlook for 2016

I have no doubt that our projects will make further progress in 2016. The one shadow on the horizon is the effect of the drought, which will cause widespread crop failure and an inevitable rise in food prices. Many families who are lucky to get even one meal a day will be struggle to survive. We expect that the number of children needing extra nutrition will grow dramatically, as will the demand for our services. Action Lesotho will respond to this emergency in every way possible.

6) Financial review of 2015

2015 saw a satisfactory consolidation of our finances, with our accounts showing a small surplus of income over expenditure and healthy reserves of over €66,000 at year end. It is the policy of the Board to hold reserves equivalent to around 4 months expenditure in order to fund the organisation during periods of weak or unpredictable cash-flow & to meet emergencies. We must thank all our generous donors, particularly IMPACT Trade Union which contributed €50,000 as part of a 5-year program of support, & Irish Aid who provided €63,000 as part of a new 3-year program of grant-aid starting in July 2015. We are grateful, too, for the continuing support of other regular donors, including Citywire (UK), Arrabawn Co-op, Bantry Friends of Lesotho & Dochas Drama Group. Particular thanks go to the individual donors who supported us in record numbers, responding so generously to our appeal for funding to enable us to provide breakfast for orphans & vulnerable children who would otherwise go to school hungry.

Financial Summary of Year 2015

Income: Our main funders are **Irish Aid** and **IMPACT** Trade Union, to whom we are very grateful for their on-going support. In 2015 funding came from the following sources:

Irish Aid	€63,000
IMPACT	€50,000
Other organisations	€13,640
Individual donations	€13,687
Tralee Bookshop (net of rent, etc.)	€23,136
Bantry Friends of Lesotho	€10,200
Tax refund on 2014 donations	€1,426
Total	€175,089

Funds transferred to Lesotho:	€126,656
Health & Nutrition	23%
Agriculture	20%
Enterprise Development	26%
Skills Development	20%
Capital Expenditure	11%
Total	100%

Other expenditure:

In-country (Lesotho) management	€28,964
Fees & flights to Lesotho for craft & enterprise consultants.	€4,850
Other flights & travel expenses	€1,568
Insurance	€1,455
Audit & accountancy	€1,558
Printing, stationary, postage, etc.	€2,166
	€40,561

Surplus of income over expenditure **€7,872**

Current Assets @ 31 December 2015:

Bank of Ireland € Current Account	€51,197
Bank of Ireland Rand a/c R149,287	€11,309
PayPal Account	€3,763
Cash-in-hand	€878
	€67,147

Less Current Liabilities **(€890)**

Net Current Assets (= Reserves) €66,257

Total Bank balances in Lesotho @ 31 Dec.

R192, 177 € 11,647

Response to the Chairman's appeal for funds for the Breakfast Club – Paul Hanrahan



In our December newsletter I made a special appeal for financial support to fund a breakfast club. This was for the orphans and vulnerable children we work with at our community centre after school and weekends.

For some time, we have been running a feeding programme to provide children with a meal at weekends & during school holidays. This is necessary because, while all children receive a meal at school in Lesotho, for many children there is no food at home, so they don't eat outside of school times.

These children also start the day without breakfast, so go to school hungry, which was having a very negative effect on their ability to study.

We made an appeal to raise €5000, which would allow us to provide breakfast to 50 children for a full year. We have had a heartwarming response. As I write, over €9000 has been donated. With the extra funds we are able to bring 70 children on to the programme and also put aside some back-up funds for the spike in food prices due to the severe drought the country has been experiencing. Food prices are leaping up and a 12.5kg bag of maize meal, the main staple, costing R80 in December 2015 is now R150.

At the moment we have 70 children availing of the programme. Some of the children walk up to 5 miles each morning to arrive at the centre for breakfast before heading to school. It demonstrates how important it is to them. We include in the breakfast 20 infants who take part in our preschool programme.

We appreciate the generosity of our supporters so much. The funds received for this programme are ring fenced for this activity & not used for any other projects we operate. We would appreciate continued support of 100 euro to give breakfast to a child for a year or whatever is affordable to you as we expect the need to include more children will grow in the coming months

My sincere thanks for your support.