

Highlights since the last newsletter was published include the visit of King Letsie III to Ireland; receiving further funding from IMPACT; and significant progress on all our projects in Lesotho. We hope you enjoy reading all about it all!

King Letsie III visits Ireland for first time



At a reception for King Letsie III at Áras an Uachtaráin: (L-R) Sabina Higgins, Queen Seeiso of Lesotho, King Letsie III of Lesotho, Michael D. Higgins (President of Ireland) & Colleen O'Kane (Action Lesotho) © Louise McCoy

There was huge excitement within the Irish-Lesotho community, and all involved with Lesotho in Ireland, when it was learned that **His Majesty King Letsie III of Lesotho** was making his first official visit to Ireland. The king, along with **Queen Seeiso of Lesotho**, arrived in Cork airport on the 20th May, coming directly from the Queen of England's Jubilee celebrations in London. Action Lesotho Board Members were thrilled to be invited to receptions being hosted in the King's honour. Action Lesotho's Chairman, **Paul Hanrahan**, along with **Colleen O'Kane** (pictured above) and Dermot Walsh were invited to Áras an Uachtaráin by **President Michael D. Higgins**. At the exclusive gathering, the King of Lesotho and the President of Ireland both spoke of the long-standing links between the two countries and the ongoing importance of the mutual relationship. Action Lesotho Board Member, Colleen O'Kane said 'It was an honour to be invited to such an important gathering. As volunteers we see the unromantic side of poverty in Lesotho . . . it is nice to be reassured that work we are doing is appreciated'.

Other Action Lesotho Board members, and long-term volunteer **Guy Dalton**, attended a more informal evening reception held for the king by the Lesotho Embassy at Farmleigh (see photo p8). His Majesty was in relaxed form as he chatted and mingled with guests and happily posed for photos. The Lesotho Ambassador to Ireland, **Paramente Phamotse**, welcomed the king and congratulated him on the occasion of his first official visit to Ireland. In conversation, His Majesty praised the work of Action Lesotho and said that passing on skills to help the underprivileged in Lesotho become more self-reliant was important work. The king made a great impression during his visit and it was humbling for Action Lesotho to have been able to meet him.

Further IMPACT funding received

Action Lesotho is absolutely delighted to have received a further 3 year's funding from **IMPACT**, the Irish Trade Union. IMPACT had already been very generous in providing funding for Action Lesotho projects for the period 2010-2012, so it was a really unexpected bonus to receive this additional sum. The funding will be mainly used for the Action Lesotho projects relating to the development of enterprise and farming. One of the first demands on the money is the purchase of new machinery for the farm. The current tractor and implements are antiquated and inadequate for the area being farmed, especially with the ongoing expansion of the farm.

The farm team thanked IMPACT whole-heartedly saying, 'The introduction of a larger tractor and stronger implements will enable us not only to improve dramatically our own farming techniques but also afford us the opportunity to train and assist other farmers in the region. This is a particularly essential part of our work here in Maputsoe as without dissemination the project will have no long term, sustainable effect for the farming community and food security of the region'.

The contribution of IMPACT to the development of Lesotho was recognised recently. The Lesotho Ambassador to Ireland, **Paramente Phamotse** invited the organisation's president, **Kevin O'Malley** to meet **King Letsie III** at a reception the Lesotho Embassy hosted for the King at Farmleigh. Kevin O'Malley plans to travel to Lesotho in October for the official opening of Action Lesotho's new site at Phukalla, where the farm team is looking forward to showing him what a huge difference the IMPACT money has made. The site now contains a new mill, grain store, enterprise centre, wool store, toilets and will soon have a machinery workshop. Little more than a year ago this was an overgrown field with a few derelict buildings.



At the Lesotho Embassy's reception for King Letsie III at Farmleigh: (L-R) Kevin O'Malley (President of IMPACT), H.E. Paramente Phamotse (Lesotho Ambassador to Ireland) & Paul Hanrahan (Chairman of Action Lesotho) / Photo © Lesotho Embassy

Project News: Ha Masele Centre



Mojalefa Oliphant (Action Lesotho's Centre Manager & Enterprise Officer) reports on some of the activities and new developments that he has been involved with at the Ha Masele Community Development Centre.

Early childhood education for all

The Ministry of Education and Training provides free pre-school education to vulnerable children from the age of 4 whose parents cannot afford to pay for a place in an Early Childhood Development Centre. Action Lesotho is working with the Ministry and the local chief to try & start a free crèche in Ha Masele, where children will be provided with the same education as in the fee-paying crèches. Action Lesotho and the Ha Masele chief recently held a village meeting for parents. There was an enthusiastic response and it was agreed that interested parents would register at the Ha Masele Community Centre. Efforts have also been made to identify premises in the village, but so far the only two buildings proposed have been unsuitable and would need substantial work: one leaks in the rain and the other has no windows.

Kick4Life



A **Kick4Life** training programme took place at the Ha Masele Community Centre last month.

Kick4Life delivers a wide range of programmes focused on sports-based education delivered by

local volunteers. They cover health education, HIV/AIDS counselling & testing and life skills development. Five Kick4Life coaches came from Leribe to deliver the programme to 52 children aged 10-18 years in Action Lesotho's Youth Development programme. The children were taught skills and how to set goals that will help them win in sport and life. They now understand more about HIV/AIDS, how it is transmitted and how they can avoid the risks of being infected.

The coaches provided positive feedback at the graduation ceremony noting that the Ha Masele centre 'is a unique place where children and youths can come together to tackle the issues that concern them'. One of the teenager participants, **Puleng Selometsi** noted 'I can now build positive friendships and fight off challenges; I can stand up and seek opportunities'. The children now feel empowered and believe they will make better decisions in life. As a result of this intervention, the children are now all certified 'peer educators' (see photo below).



Everyone in the Ha Masele Community Development Centre would like to thank the Kick4Life Coaches for coming to the centre to deliver the training. They are looking forward to more courses & ongoing cooperation with Kick4Life.

Lesotho Distance Training Centre (LDTC)

Action Lesotho is trying to promote education by making it accessible to members of the local community who cannot avail of formal education because it's too expensive for them: although primary education is free, second level education must be paid for. Rather than attend school some people study via LDTC distance learning, which is much cheaper.



There had been a huge number of people who came to **Action Lesotho** and expressed their interest in wanting to improve their literacy levels. It will be very beneficial and cost cutting for them if LDTC services could be brought into the local community centre of Action Lesotho, where books could be shared and computers accessed. In an effort to find interest in the community, Action Lesotho staff members & volunteers went out into the community to ask people interested in training to register their names. More than 50 people registered their names in one factory alone. Action Lesotho hopes to start the programme as soon as possible, but funding will be required to buy all the text books and pay for tutors.

Another initiative which is taking place is the delivery of more formalised computer classes. **Mamosetse**, who is a volunteer at the centre, has been developing a computer manual which is nearing completion. She now plans to offer a computer course at the centre.

Poultry project

The **Loant'sang Support Group** recently received their first batch of chickens as part of a new homestead produce project. Each of the ten members has been given four chickens & one cockerel plus enough 'grower meal' to last for one month. In return each recipient must provide housing for their chickens & keep detailed records of the health of the animals and the number of eggs laid. Two hens unfortunately died but the remainder are thriving. At the moment it is winter in Lesotho so full-scale egg laying is not expected until later in the year.



Photo: Detail from 'Chicken Dinner' by Setsoto Design

Local companies provide support

Two companies in Lesotho recently donated goods to the centre. Pearson Lesotho, based in Maseru, specialise in educational materials and they kindly donated a number of books including dictionaries and practical manuals covering topics such as metalwork, agriculture, accounting and needlework. Meanwhile, one of the factories in Maputsoe donated clothes for the orphans and vulnerable children attending the Youth Development Programme at the weekends.

Photo: M'e Secla (right) with one of the donated t-shirts



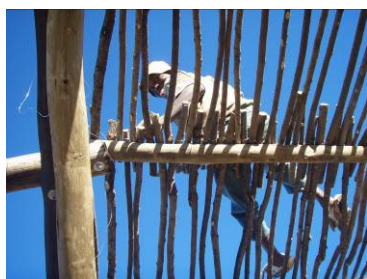
Irish Volunteers at Ha Magele

Woodwork classes – year three

Guy Dalton, a long-term Action Lesotho volunteer from Bantry Friends of Lesotho, visited Lesotho in April for his fourth visit to the country. For the third year in a row he was involved in teaching woodwork skills to a group in the Ha Magele Centre. The students made a wide range of items of furniture during the 3-week course, including bookshelves for the centre's gradually expanding library and cupboards & a special cutting table for Nyenye Crafts. The group also made six stools which the Irish Ambassador, **Gerry Gervin**, had ordered earlier in the year. This led to another commission from a volunteer at the centre for three stools for St. Luke's Mission in Maputsoe.



Guy Dalton (L) with Irish Ambassador, Gerry Gervin.



The group was also kept busy with other tasks to benefit the children attending the centre, including finishing off the playground that they had built in 2011 (left) and building a lean-to for the centre to help shelter the children from the sun. The participants also got a chance to design & make their own pieces to take home e.g. a vegetable rack made by **Mafale** (below right).

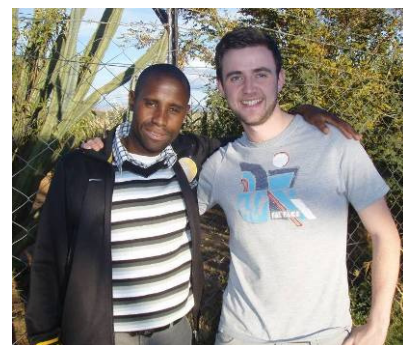
Apart from five people from the village, all of who had attended Guy's class last year, the group also included Action Lesotho's Farm Manager, **Molemo Lethea**. Although he was new to the group, he is a very practical person and enthusiastically took to the woodwork like a duck to water. He enjoyed the woodwork so much he said he would rather be a woodworker than a farmer! However, we managed to persuade him that we depend on him as our farm manager. He is now keen to put his new found skills to use at Action Lesotho's farm centre in Phukalla. The rest of the group are discussing whether they can continue to work together and possibly create a small woodwork business. **Mojalefa**, our Enterprise Officer, is on hand to give them business advice & training, including pointing them in the right direction in relation to start-up grants & other assistance.



Some of the woodwork class with the stools for the Irish Ambassador
L-R: Mojalefa, M'e Liepollo, Daniel, Mafale & Tsotetsi

Michael Mulpeter

Action Lesotho would like to extend a huge thank you to **Michael Mulpeter** from Donegal who spent 6 weeks working as a volunteer with **Mojalefa Oliphant** at the Community Development Centre in Ha Magele. He worked with Mojalefa on developing administrative processes at the centre as well as assisting in developing a computer course for beginners which will be our first paid courses run from the centre. Michael and Mojalefa were learning from each other whilst they constructed excellent administrative systems for the varied programmes that are now delivered from the centre. Michael & Mojalefa worked in partnership sharing ideas and learning about the Basotho culture and the issues surrounding development work on the ground. Action Lesotho is very grateful to St Luke's Mission for facilitating Michael's visit and providing him with accommodation and transport during his stay. From Lesotho, Michael travelled to Rwanda to carry out research as part of a Masters degree he is doing in Dublin. We would like to take this opportunity to wish Michael well in Rwanda and we all look forward to his next visit.



Teaching English manual

Eileen Coates

In Lesotho there is a lot of interest in learning to speak English; it is regarded as a step towards achieving better opportunities for work, for being able to talk to visitors from



L-R: Declan O'Donnell, Theresa Moriarty, Isabel Hanrahan. Brian Coates & Eileen Coates.

South Africa and overseas, and for gaining access to wider information resources. Children in English Medium schools such as St. Monica's Primary School in Maputsoe are taught English but many adults & young people are also very keen to learn. For some time now **Pippa Kearon** has been running English classes with a small group at the Ha Magele Community Centre and Action Lesotho is hoping to help build on this so that in time the local Basotho people can assist each other in acquiring the skills.

In October **Theresa Moriarty**, an experienced volunteer with Action Lesotho, is planning to spend a couple of months working with volunteer tutors, training them to teach English to people in the Community Development Centres and also perhaps visiting individuals in their homes to teach them there.

Declan O'Donnell (University of Limerick) is guiding the preparation of a manual for this pilot project and courtesy of **Alison Boardman** (Unique Voice / Celtic School of English) a group has met several times in Tralee (see photo above) to tease out some ideas. The others involved are **Isabel Hanrahan, Brian Coates** and **Eileen Coates**.

Project News: Crafts

Millennium Challenge Account



Nyenye Crafts is to be congratulated on obtaining a grant from PEPFAR under the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA), a joint USA-Lesotho initiative. The grant is for the purchase of equipment (e.g. sewing machines & specialised work benches) and raw material like wool & dyes. The new machines will help increase production and give more members an opportunity to train in their usage. Representatives from MCA visited the group in April (see photo above) & soon after the group attended training for recipients of the grant in Maseru. The MCA funds have not yet been distributed to the individual groups but the women are looking forward to the day when they can purchase their new equipment.

Training with Heather Kearon



Heather Kearon (2nd right) visited Lesotho in March with her husband Mike. Heather worked with Nyenye Crafts and also delivered meditation classes to the Support Group in Ha Masele and Nyenye Craft. The meditation classes were well received and even a baby participated which Heather said was a first for her!

Aside from the Meditation classes, Heather worked with the Nyenye Crafts teaching basic pattern cutting and sewing skills. Under her guidance the group worked to design and develop new products, in particular a range of stylish bags made with traditional Seshoeshoe (pronounced *Se shway shway*) dress fabric. Heather ensured that all the women understood the importance of quality control at each stage of the production & the women worked in teams playing to individual strengths. Nyenye Crafts has already received several orders from Ireland for these bags & hope to produce a range of accessory items over the coming months.



Heather and Mike are parents of Pippa Kearon, Action Lesotho's Management Consultant in Lesotho. Heather worked long days with Nyenye Crafts and we can see where Pippa gets her creativity and drive from! At the request of the Nyenye Crafts, Heather will be returning to Lesotho in 2013 to further the training.

A Brighter Future for Basotho Artisans

Action Lesotho invited Textile Marketing Consultant, **Anne Ritchie**, to visit Nyenye Crafts in May and also to examine wider craft issues in Lesotho. These included wool quality & uses, design & product development for wool & textiles and marketing and sales to the international market.

Anne & **Pippa Kearon** visited craft outlets throughout Lesotho and held meetings with relevant government departments. The Ministry of Culture subsequently arranged for Anne to make a presentation to artisans from the weaving industry. The presentation was very successful with the participants enthusiastically responding to the proposals put forward in relation to further training in design, marketing & exposure to the global marketplace.

Anne's visit highlighted some core issues facing all artisans in Lesotho and, as a result of this, it was agreed that a programme should be developed to benefit a broader group than just Nyenye Crafts. Whilst Basotho artisans are highly skilled in grass work, weaving, spinning of mohair and making traditional Seshoeshoe dresses, many of the designs and techniques were introduced to the Basotho some 30 or more years ago and have not evolved much since. As the majority of the artisans have no exposure to the world of art, craft & design beyond the borders of Lesotho it is difficult for them to produce goods which would be easily saleable internationally.

As a result of Anne's findings, Action Lesotho with the assistance of **Gerry Gervin**, the Irish Ambassador, engaged the government & artisans in a new development project: the **Brighter Future for Basotho Artisans** programme. The aim is to address the difficulties facing the creative industry in Lesotho. As a starting point, Action Lesotho will be hosting a monthly workshop for artisans and interested Government officers at the centre in Ha Masele. The workshops aim to train crafts people to be independent in designing, creating and selling a range of products suitable for sale in the international marketplace. Pippa Kearon will be hosting the workshops, assisted by Anne Ritchie & other designers & artisans from around the world.

Action Lesotho will encourage participants of the workshops to sign up for other training courses offered through our centre aimed at improving and setting up small enterprises. The Start and Improve Your Own Business (SIYOB) trainings offered by the **Department of Gender, Youth, Sport & Recreation** should get off the ground in July 2012. There will also be an opportunity for participants to sign up for our English and computer training courses and to avail of our Internet services. The artisans can also learn about Village Savings & Loans Associations.

It is hoped that the government departments who have so far shown their support for this project will work towards financing appropriate consultants; support learning journeys into South Africa & beyond; assist with the development of an umbrella association through which Basotho artisans can sell abroad co-operatively; work towards the development of ethical and eco labelling; and work towards attending international trade fairs.

Anne Ritchie's consultancy visit to Lesotho appears to have ignited a flame of enthusiasm at both a local & national level and it will be extremely interesting to see where this journey of development will lead to. Action Lesotho would like to thank Anne for her work & for the commitment she has shown towards making a success of this long-term development project.

Kyrgyzstan International Animal Fibres workshop



Action Lesotho's **Pippa Kearon** was invited by the **Odessa Centre** in the UK, to attend an **International Animal Fibres Learning Workshop** funded by the **International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)** in Osh, Kyrgyzstan at the end of May. The aim of the workshop was to bring together a wide range of people working in the field. The various groups & individuals were asked to give a presentation about their work & share their experience of working with fine fibres & their country's involvement with fine fibre production.

The participants were from all over the world; Argentina, Alaska, Iran, Italy, Tibet, Belgium, Mongolia, India, UK, France, China, Germany & Kyrgyzstan (& Pippa from Lesotho!). Many of the participants were working with Cashmere goats & there was a great deal of discussion in relation to education of shepherds regarding the value of Cashmere & keeping the breed pure. In Kyrgyzstan, there has been a great deal of interbreeding between the Cashmere & Angora goats due to lack of knowledge.



The group met in **Bishkek** & travelled by plane to the city of **Osh**, to spend a few days in workshops & discussions before heading up into the mountains to **Sary-Tash** where at 3,500 metres above sea level they slept in yurts, travelled the silk road, learned about Cashmere flocks, saw Yaks & met with craft co-operatives.

There were a few groups mainly working in Tibet producing a range of items from Yak wool. This was very interesting as the products being produced from this fibre range from exquisite fine scarves to chunky more hippy type garments. There were also many interesting discussions about wool processing & quality assessment. All of this will prove invaluable as Action Lesotho assist in the production of crafted items from wool and mohair in Lesotho.

Sigrun Robertson from Oomingmak Musk Ox Producers' Co-op represented probably the rarest of the fine fibres. In Bethel, Alaska, Musk Ox fibre is combed & sent for expert machine spinning & then distributed as spun yarn to co-operative workers in outlying villages. As these villages are inaccessible by road, the air postal service is utilised to deliver the yarn & then return the finished knitwear to Bethel. The women are paid by cheque after quality control & inspection of weights, etc. The women in each village knit their own exclusive patterns into scarves, hats & snoods. The items produced are softer than imagination & the rarity of the fibre, the complexity of getting the fibre spun & the effort to get the work produced in the outlying regions of Alaska, mean these items command a high price. The concept of an air postal service assisting craft production is one that could be considered in Lesotho. Whilst Lesotho is a small country, accessing the mountain regions is very difficult & time consuming. An air postal service would enhance the ability of artisans to sell their products at home & abroad.



Pippa's presentation to the attendees revolved around the challenges facing livestock owners & artisans in Lesotho. It materialised that many of these challenges are the same as those faced by livestock owners & artisans in Kyrgyzstan. For example, the nomadic population in Kyrgyzstan lack exposure & education & are often misled by traders from other countries & do not always appreciate the full value of the fibre they are selling. In relation to cooperative women's groups working at a village level in textile production both in fabric & wool, the groups are producing a wide range of products but they have a low quality control & their product would not be suitable for sale overseas due to poor design.



A highlight of the trip was **Tumar Craft Gallery** in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan, where they were showcasing craft products made to the highest levels of design & quality control. It was a shop where as a foreigner everything seemed appealing & every shelf had something you wanted to purchase. Tumar was founded in 1999 by three Kyrgyz craft workers & they have grown from strength to strength producing well-designed products based on the national crafts of Kyrgyzstan. The group outsource their production to groups of village cooperatives in & around Bishkek. They also invest heavily in design consultants who assist in the set up of product design & oversee production. Tumar recently won a design award at a German Trade Fair. The shop & its products were inspirational & show what can be done with traditional craft skills when quality control & good design are applied.

Throughout the event the participants (below) were networking & finding ways to collaborate in the future. A number of participants offered to assist Action Lesotho in their creative industry development programme & invaluable contacts were made. The learning that took place in Kyrgyzstan will help Pippa enormously with the craft project in Lesotho & we now have an international pool to draw on for advice, guidance & expertise. **M'e Malisebo** from Leribe Crafts in Hlotse had also been invited but it was not possible to secure a visa in time for the workshop but she will be attending another workshop in Bolivia in August. Pippa was the only representative of Lesotho at this particular workshop but has met with Lesotho Ministry of Trade personnel to debrief them in relation to the workshop and its findings.

Pippa & Action Lesotho would very much like to thank **Carol** (front row, centre) & **Cara Kerven** (above left with cashmere kid) of the Odessa Centre for inviting her to participate in the workshop which was a dream come true; as a felt artist herself, she had always dreamed of travelling on the silk route, sleeping in a yurt & exploring the world of Shirdak and the patchwork traditions of Kyrgyzstan. In making this a reality she would also like to thank IFAD, the League for Pastoral People & Indigenous Livestock Development and Osh State University who provided translators, musicians and hosted the visit.



Project News: Farm & Mill

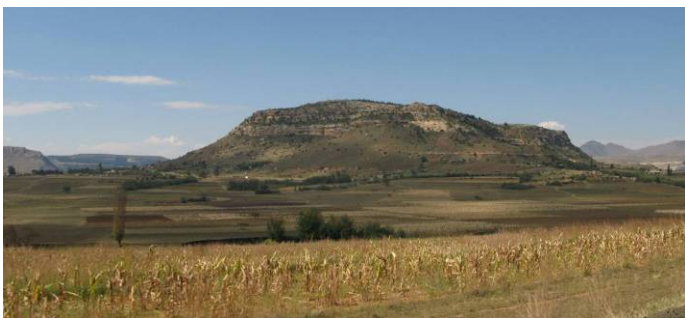
Brian Flaherty Makes Advisory Visit



Brian Flaherty and Ntate Mankoe inspecting the ripening maize.

In our last newsletter (No. 7), we mentioned that Action Lesotho Board Member, Brian Flaherty (above left), would be going out to Lesotho advising on the agricultural projects. We have this report from his trip to Lesotho:

Brian visited for 2 weeks in late April\early May and had a very successful time assessing the farm projects and putting in place monitoring systems for the existing farm and its future expansion. He was very impressed with the progress made to date in the maize-growing venture. The farming team have grown a good crop in the current year and hopefully the fruits of their work will be realised fully at the imminent harvest. Hans Taljaard, who is our advisor in South Africa, concurred with Brian and also pointed out that the year gone by was a very difficult one weather-wise. The crops are in excellent shape and under Han's guidance there has been very good weed control. The photos demonstrate this, one showing Brian and Ntate Mankoe inspecting our crop (above) & a neighbouring farm with a poor crop that had a lot of weeds in it (below).



During his visit Brian went through a lot of practical farming matters with the team such as maintenance of machinery (below right), testing the Decobber\Slattery (below left) and making contacts with other farmers both in Lesotho and South Africa so that our farm managers Ntate Mankoe and Molemo can join discussion groups.



L-R: Pippa Kearon, Brian Flaherty, Molemo Lethea & James Moffet

James Moffett (below left), a farmer in South Africa, will provide job experience and on-the-job training for Molemo. The team are very grateful for his help in assisting with advice in getting the maize planter operational.

Brian also visited an 'Open Day' (right) with the team members. The demonstration dealt with the application of liquid lime to the soil. The comparison in the trial plots on show was impressive.



Brian also ordered a second hand tractor (as pictured), a three-furrow plough, a disc harrow and a twin axel trailer for the team. This additional tractor and plough should be available to enable the team to plough the fields post harvest thus taking the pressure off all the other work that will be required for the next sowing season.



Photo: An overview of the Phukalla site, including new grain store which will be used to securely store this year's crop of maize.



Update from the farm team in Lesotho (June):

Harvesting began early this year due to considerable theft on the fields. We attribute this to the fact that we are really the only farmers in our area with a worthwhile crop this year and are therefore the main target. Despite having planted extremely late due to the drought our first impression is that the overall yield appears to be even better than last year. We are collecting the statistics as we harvest and should be able to publish our yields on our website and via Facebook by the end of July.

We have a team of 10 local workers assisting with the harvest. Molemo Lethea, Farm Manager, is overseeing the harvest and says, "We have been blessed this year with a wonderful harvest. We have much to be grateful for". It is extremely cold here in Lesotho but the cold, dry weather has worked to our advantage and the cobs are very dry and ready for decobbing immediately. Our new decobber purchased last year is making light work of the process. It takes off the sheaths and also grades the grain as it comes off the cobs. The harvest will take only a couple of weeks thanks to the addition of this wonderful machine. In previous years we have had to work for many weeks after harvesting to decob and grade the maize.

The Action Lesotho farm team would not be improving the way it is without the advice and guidance of several people. We would like to thank Brian Flaherty for his invaluable support and consultancy; Hans Taljaard for his continued support of our project and for teaching us to plant, regardless of adversity, and to reap wonderful crops; James Moffett who has assisted us this year with equipment & advice; and Irish Aid & IMPACT in Ireland for their generous support of our work here in Lesotho.

Project news: Education

It's interesting to keep track of some of the earlier Action Lesotho projects. In April this year, **Clare Heardman**, one of our Board Members, visited two schools where AL had built classrooms four years ago.

Morate English Medium High School



In 2007/2008 **Action Lesotho** built & equipped a suite of classrooms at **Morate English Medium High School** to provide facilities for vocational subjects, namely home economics & woodwork.

Action Lesotho's former Executive Field Officer,

Eileen O'Leary, was introduced to the school by **Dee Fay** (wife of the former Irish Ambassador). Soon afterwards Eileen inspired a group who were interested in supporting an educational project, to raise funds for the building of the classrooms. An Action Lesotho volunteer, **Colleen O'Kane**, was working in the school at the time and she jointly oversaw the implementation of the project with **Ntate Isaac**, the School Principal **Fiona & Paddy de Buis**, two members of Waterville Friends of Lesotho, the group who had raised the funds, also got a chance to visit the project. The building was finished and equipped with sewing machines, woodwork tools etc., at a total cost of €25,000. At the start of the next school year the first pupils were happily studying in the new rooms.

It was Nt Isaac, who had identified the need for facilities to enable the provision of vocational subjects at the school. He hoped this would provide the less academic children with subjects they could excel in and would also provide all the children with an opportunity to receive a broader education and enhanced life-skills. He also hoped it would improve the children's pass rate in the Junior Certificate (JC). The JC is the most common entry-level qualification for employment in Lesotho so a good JC grade is an important educational milestone.

Nt Isaac hopes have clearly been realised: in the last year before the vocational subjects were available, the JC pass rate at the school was 48%. In the last two years the average has risen to nearly 60%. The teachers are obviously delighted with the classrooms and are thrilled with the achievements of their pupils e.g. there has been an average 95% pass rate in home economics. Unfortunately, the children at the Morate school are among the lucky ones: less than 25% of secondary schools in Lesotho provide vocational subjects mainly because of the expense of providing and maintaining all the necessary equipment.

The quality of the delivery of the new subjects at Morate has also met with the approval of the Government. The Ministry of Education & Training inspected the school after the JC exams were taken for the first time in 2010. Nt Isaac said, 'The inspector was very impressed with the quality of teaching and couldn't believe the work had been produced by the students themselves due to level of skill displayed'. Samples of the students' work were taken to the Ministry of Education & Training for display as examples of what students could achieve.

St. Monica's Primary School

St. Monica's Primary School is a large, well-kept school, with rows of neatly maintained classrooms, on the outskirts of Maputsoe. It has 1450 pupils and 33 teachers, with an average class size of 43 (below the district average of 47). One of its claims to fame is that it was the first primary school in Lesotho to have access to computers



It was a different story when Action Lesotho's **Eileen**

Outside the 'Kerry Block': School Principal, 'Malekhanya' 'Marethabile Lekhanya'

O'Leary (pictured below) first came into contact with the school. There were 1100 pupils, no toilets and the classroom for seventy of the children consisted of an old army-style tent. Until a tree fell on the tent in the night and they had no classroom at all. When Action Lesotho became aware of the situation it was decided to build and equip three classrooms and provide electricity for the school. The goal was to replace the tent so that by the winter of 2009 children would, for the first time, not only have classrooms but also have electricity and computers. The build was jointly funded by **Irish Aid** and a trust set up in memory of the late **Bill Mangan**, a GP from Killarney, while the computers were supplied by **Camara**. Meanwhile, a group of builders from Bantry and Tralee worked hard with School Principal, **'Malekhanya' 'Marethabile Lekhanya'** (pictured above), her teachers & the local community, to build the 'Kerry' classrooms. Volunteers from Ireland, such as **Tony O'Connor & Maria Deady**, taught the teachers the necessary IT skills to enable to teach their school pupils.

Three years on, a fantastic 500 children per annum are being taught computers at the school. Within Leribe District, which has more than 175 primary schools, only five other schools have computers. When you consider that only 4% of the population of Lesotho have access to the Internet (compared to 70% in Ireland in 2010), it is indeed a huge bonus for these schools to have computers. St. Monica's, has also benefited from an increased level of enrolment, as the school's resources prove attractive to parents. Exam results also count: the School Principal reports that the computer classes have been found to give the children an additional head start at high school, with teachers at second level reporting back to St. Monica's that their ex-students are excelling.

The school would love to have more computers so fewer children need to share each computer. Also the machines are already outdated and the school can't afford new ones. If anyone knows of an organisation that could provide the school with new computers we'd love to hear from you!



Photo: Eileen O'Leary & Ntate Mankoe at the official opening of the classrooms in 2009

Marathon Success for Lesotho *Rosarii Griffin*



Yes, I'm still alive! I got there in the end. The infamous finishing line! The final lap. The total elation! London marathon 2012 was the experience of a lifetime... there was a terrific buzz all throughout the race. The air was totally electric, complemented by the wonderful weather. Great camaraderie generated between runners; between spectators & runners; and between the spectators themselves.

Such a fantastic atmosphere created by the thousands who lined the streets to watch, to cheer, to encourage, to

motivate and even to sympathise. There was music playing on every street corner, from orchestras to jazz bands, from rock n'Roll to Disco! People hung out of balconies, waving their beers. All the ethnic quarters and districts of London formed part of the marathon course; which was interesting in itself. We ran along Canary Wharf, over Tower Bridge, next to the Cutty Sark. Best of all were the little kids looking to be high 5'ed as you ran; grannies handing out sweets, and families with balloons and placards, cheering on their loved ones.

The numerous charities participating were also very moving, lots of 'in memory of...' whoever, for whatever reason or charity, inspiring lots of hope and good wishes, often to the point of hair standing on back of the neck, or tears welling in the eyes. And in contrast to that, there was the gaiety - I was running next to Santa at one stage (ho, ho, ho), then the Easter Bunny, later on, I ran past a guy who ran with an looming mast several metres high over his head (no doubt the result of a failed drunken bet). Further along, I joined 'Spencer the Rhino', American football players in full kit (whatever!), a uniformed soldier with a weighty rucksack, and several people with various disabilities, all running for a reason, cause or for themselves, to feel that sense of achievement over 26.2 miles.

The race itself was very enjoyable for the first 10 miles or so, as the atmosphere alone just carried me along. It was from mile 12-20 that the going got tough, 'why the hell did I sign up to this...' syndrome, but still knowing deep down I was glad I did, (somewhere really deep, deep down...). Once passed the 20-mile mark, it was a matter of picking off the miles (even if each one felt like 10). Helping me along were the words of my trainer, Denis Kelleher, sitting on my shoulder the entire time; or Max Scott Cook, who wandered in and out of my mind, keeping me company; the echoes of words of encouragement from family, friends and colleagues, and of course, images of the Basotho orphaned children who depend on us for now.



It was at this point, the heavens opened and it poured down, and I expected the crowd to start thinning and

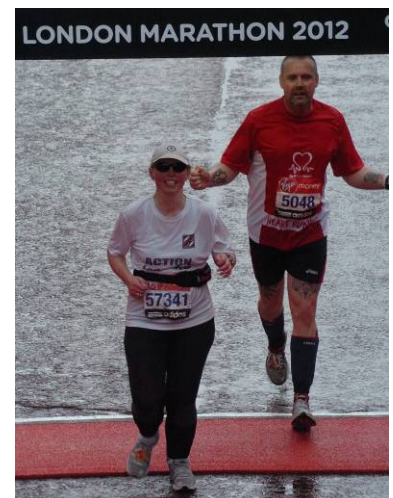
taking off to 'the local'... but NO, I forgot how stoic the English are. They just popped up their umbrellas, rolled on their jackets, covered their heads, and continued to roar, willing you onwards with verbal power, as though that sun was still shining down on them: most impressive! That really kept us going over the final 5-mile stretch. And then came that infamous .2 (of the 26.2 miles) of road, which wasn't as bad as the crowds got thicker, the road got narrower, the cheering louder. And then FINALLY the finishing line, gold medal, timing chip removed, a warm hug from some random stranger, the t-shirt, goodie bag and emergency tinfoil blanket.

All very emotional stuff! Yes, I shed a few tears when I had finished from pure exhaustion and delight that I had ran it non-stop, still in one piece, and injury free. There is a God there after all! I then headed slowly back to the hotel where the Irish brigade had begun to congregate to celebrate our collective victories for various charities and for ourselves. Needless to say, we celebrated till the early hours of the morning, fuelled on by an excellent DJ Matt who kept saying 'are ye marathoners not tired yet???'.

A special thanks to all my family, friends and UCC work colleagues, Killeagh neighbours, Midleton Toastmaster club and Midleton AC (running mates and coaches Edmund, Vincent and Danny, especially my running mentor Denis Kelleher - your patience knows no bounds!). Thank you one and all again for your generous support and encouragement for which I am indebted. The collective funds donated amounted to €1,052 excluding those who paid through PayPal on the Internet. Your kind contributions will go directly toward the Action Lesotho feeding programme to support the orphaned and vulnerable children of Lesotho and will keep the feeding programme going for at least another 6 months. If anybody would still like to contribute to this worthy cause, just log online to www.actionlesotho.ie and click on the 'donate here' button.

Thank you so very, very much to one and all.

Finally, I would recommend anybody thinking of doing the marathon, especially one of the big international ones, **just go for it**. You will be glad afterwards! ☺



Rosarii Griffin is one of Action Lesotho's Board Members and this was her third long-distance run to raise funds for Action Lesotho. What a star!

Increase the benefit of your donation

Don't forget that if you are a PAYE worker and donate €250 or more during one year to Action Lesotho, then we can claim the tax back on your behalf. All you need to do is sign & return the relevant form: CHY2 or 'tax relief form'. It's a painless way to increase the benefit of your donation to Action Lesotho. To obtain a form & allow us to claim the tax back, contact Action Lesotho's Treasurer, David Buttimer at djbuttimer@eircom.net

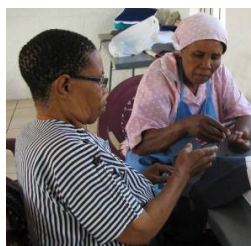
People



Action Lesotho Board members & volunteers arriving at Farmleigh to attend a reception being hosted by the Lesotho Embassy for King Letsie III of Lesotho.
L-R: Guy Dalton, Brian Flaherty, David Buttimer, Nkhotla Machachamise (First Secretary at the Lesotho Embassy), Ann Buttimer, Rosarii Griffin, Paul Hanrahan, Jacqui O'Riordan, Clare Heardman & Dermot Walsh.

Births, deaths & marriages

It has been a turbulent time of great joy and great sadness for the family of **Ntate Mankoe**, our General Manager in Lesotho. Good news was the birth of two granddaughters, who were born within weeks of each other to Nt Mankoe's two sons Pule & China. But just five weeks after giving birth, China's wife, M'e Malerato, tragically died very suddenly and unexpectedly. They had been married less than a year. Everyone in Action Lesotho extends their sincerest sympathies to all the Mankoe family.



Action Lesotho would also like to extend their sympathy to **Nyenye Crafts** and the family of **M'e Mamotala** (pictured far left) who died suddenly in April. She was a dedicated & talented member of the Nyenye Crafts. She is greatly missed by her friends & colleagues. May she rest in peace.

On a positive note, Action Lesotho sends the very best of wishes to **Pippa Kearon** and her fiancé **Dave Moffet** who are travelling back to Ireland to get married in August. We wish them a joyous day of celebration and may they have a very long and happy life together.

❖ **Radio:** a Lesotho special was broadcast in May on **Rosarii Griffin's** 'Perspectives' programme, on Community Radio Youghal (CRY 104fm). The programme features Action Lesotho Board members, Brian Flaherty, Dermot Walsh & Clare Heardman. You will be able to listen to the programme via the Film & Audio page of www.actionlesotho.ie

❖ **Lesotho-Sesotho newsletter:** a short version of the quarterly newsletter is now being produced in Sesotho, the national language of Lesotho. It is aimed at the people involved in our projects in Lesotho and for others who might be interested in finding out more about what we do. The second edition is available on our website.

❖ **Facebook:** keep up-to-date with Action Lesotho's activities in Lesotho and Ireland via our Facebook page. There are always lots of photos and bits of news being posted so it's a good way to keep in touch from day to day: www.facebook.com/actionlesotho

Board of Directors

❖ Welcome to new Board of Directors member **Maurice Angland**. Maurice, from Co. Cork, ran his own business for many years and has a background in agriculture. He has also studied International Development at UCC and previously volunteered for the Niall Mellon Trust in South Africa. He is now a member of Action Lesotho's Finance Committee, where his broad range of relevant experience is much appreciated.

❖ **Colleen O'Kane** recently stepped down as Treasurer of Action Lesotho, with **David Buttimer** taking over the role. Colleen is to be congratulated on doing a magnificent job over the last few years, working with great dedication & enthusiasm. Apart from working on keeping the finances in order in Ireland, she has also worked closely with the team in Lesotho to ensure good accounting systems were developed and maintained. A presentation in recognition of her huge contribution to Action Lesotho, was made at the last board meeting. Colleen plans to go travelling but we know Lesotho will always be close to heart and she will stay involved with Action Lesotho.

Accompanying **Brian Flaherty** on his visit to Lesotho (see p6) was **Ellie Cronin** (below right), from Ballinskelligs, Co. Kerry. Ellie added an extra dimension to the trip and coped with the Basotho language in her own inimitable way! Ellie is involved in fundraising for Action Lesotho in Ballinskelligs.

Puseletso (Action Lesotho's Projects Manager) and her daughter Keke will be coming to Ireland in August. We look forward to hosting them in different parts of the country.



Fundraising snippets

❖ **Donors:** Many thanks to everyone who continues to support us through monthly standing orders. This regular contribution to Action Lesotho is greatly appreciated & is a cornerstone of our funding. If anyone is interested in contributing a monthly amount – just €5/month will feed one of the orphans or vulnerable children for a year – visit our website to sign-up www.actionlesotho.ie Also, if you are a PAYE worker who donates €250 or more a year, Action Lesotho can claim the tax back.

❖ **Books wanted:** a book sale is coming up in Bantry and a market stall in Limerick: if anyone in either area has good quality second-hand books, CDs & DVDs that they are willing to donate, please contact Colleen O'Kane in Bantry (intd@hotmail.com) or Eileen & Brian Coates in Limerick (ebcoates@gmail.com)

Best wishes to Dee: Action Lesotho would like to send a good-bye & thank-you message to **Dee Fay** who is leaving Lesotho to join her husband Paddy in Nigeria (Paddy is the Irish Ambassador there). Dee has been a wonderful source of guidance & support since the foundation of Action Lesotho. She will be greatly missed by the many projects she has been involved in, not least of which was her work with Morate English Medium High School.