

Worst drought in 30 years strikes Lesotho



Lesotho is struggling to cope with a severe drought, the worst in thirty years. If conditions don't improve soon, it could reportedly turn into the worst drought in over 100 years. Virtually no planting has taken place and grazing animals are stick thin. The Caledon River, which forms the boundary with South Africa, has turned into a sandpit and temperatures continue to soar with no sign of rain. Action Lesotho has managed to plant part of our farm with drought-resistant crops but most farmers in Lesotho have not been able to plant anything, not even the staple crop maize.

South Africa is also badly affected, with the government there already declaring five of its nine provinces drought disaster zones in relation to agriculture. Food prices are set to rocket as stores from the last harvest dwindle and the UN is reporting that 11 million children across sub-Saharan Africa are at risk from hunger, disease and water shortages as a result of this widespread drought.

World Meteorological Organization (WMO) data suggests that 'the global average surface temperature in 2015 is likely to be the warmest on record and to reach the symbolic and significant milestone of 1° Celsius above the pre-industrial era. This is due to a combination of a strong El Niño and human-induced global warming'.

Action Lesotho is committed to feeding 200 orphans and vulnerable children on our weekend programmes and 46 people on our Malimpho programme. If next spring's harvest is virtually non-existent, we will inevitably have to spend more just to maintain our existing programmes. Of course, if the situation is as bad as predicted there will be many more people in need of our assistance.

To help ensure we can properly support all the children in our programmes and enable us to react to the predicted crisis, our Chairman **Paul Hanrahan**, has made a specific and heartfelt appeal to find fifty people who would each be willing to donate €100. It costs only 30c/day to give a child breakfast so please read Paul's appeal on the back page of this newsletter and donate if you can.

Thank you!

Drought in pictures

Pippa Kearon, our In-Country Director, sent these photos on December 4th. They tell the story of how desperate the situation is. The picture on the left is of the government's water distribution point in Maputsoe. Pippa reports that 'people are bringing containers all day every day to fill and then walk up into the villages with them. Women bring their washing and wash in buckets on the side of the street and then walk up into the village with the wet washing'. Even across the border in South Africa, mains water is only available from 5am-9am and 5pm-9pm each day.



'The farmers ploughed in anticipation of rain but have not planted due to the lack of it. Planting should have been done from 1st to 10th November and not later than the 15th November for sorghum and 15th December for maize. Field after field is lying fallow this year which would normally have above knee height maize or sorghum by now', said Pippa. 'Very thin horses are tethered and left to graze on whatever green patches remain'.



Lesotho Mountain Crafts

Cherry Festival 2015



Shane O'Sullivan from Cahersiveen who helped to set up the Cherry Festival stall in Ficksburg with Mme Mamolapo (left), Mme Maoetse (right) and Mme Matali (at the spinning wheel).

The LMC companies were once again at **Cherry Festival** in Ficksburg. The stand this year was out of this world with many new and innovative products and a brighter more modern colour palette. With total sales reaching R17,300 over the three day festival the companies were rewarded for their hard work and perseverance.

Mme Matali from **Elelloang Basali** provided outstanding spinning and weaving demonstrations throughout the festival and **Mme Mamolapo** wowed the crowds through needle felting demonstrations. Our top selling companies were **Mamolapo Designs** (needle felt products), **Leribe Crafts** (loom woven mohair and wool scarves and shawls), **Koloi Matsosa** (bone jewellery) and **Eliza Crafts** (children's clothing and back packs) and **Fusi Leather Products** (laptop bags, handbags, sandals and belts).



Above: Mme Matali spinning for children and teachers from Katleho Pre-school.



Left: Mme Mamolapo demonstrating needle felting (with Eliza Craft children's clothing and backpacks in the background).

Lesotho Mountain Crafts' Gallery

Imagine a small café in the countryside of Lesotho. A place that sells beautiful handmade crafts products & freshly brewed coffee that you can sip while enjoying the fantastic scenery of the Mountain Kingdom. But not only that, it is also a place that serves as a hub for creative spirits, provides information about the crafts in Lesotho to tourists as well as business people and offers great craft-making experiences to kids. This is a vision. This is what we are aiming at.

It still has a long way to go, but during the last month we have made some magnificent progress. In September 2015 we introduced monthly Demonstration Days. Each month shall be dedicated to a specific theme e.g. beads, weaving, leather etc. and the LMC group members will come to the gallery to get involved with their customers and demonstrate their skills. We have had three such days so far and they have been extremely worthwhile; fun, interesting and well attended.



We increased our marketing strategies and now try to constantly post news on Facebook (Lesotho Mountain Crafts) and a local online newsletter. This and our efforts to increase the visibility of the site by putting up flags & signs along the roadside has resulted in a growing footfall. We also achieved a significant rise in the overall turnover of the gallery and are busy evaluating the reasons for our increased sales so that we can capitalize on this change.



Overall the LMC Gallery has made progress, but there are still many challenges ahead. **Saskia Czimenga** worked with **Mme Matanki** & **Mme Maoetse** at the gallery from September - November and her input has been invaluable. She is now in Germany awaiting the birth of her first baby and we wish her the very best of luck with everything and look forward to having her back with Action Lesotho and the Lesotho Mountain Craft project in mid-March 2016.

Dominic Matooane and **Mantai Mpesi** will be working closely with the gallery management from January until Saskia returns in March. Their input will assist the management in understanding retail management and in leading the LMC membership towards a more profitable and innovative future.

Strategic planning for LMC

Lesotho Mountain Crafts are busy preparing their three year strategic plan under the guidance of our In-Country Director, **Pippa Kearon** and her innovation and entrepreneurship team, **Dominic Matooane** and **Mantai Mpesi**.

The three year strategy aims to empower the organization to source funding to employ a sales & marketing officer, provide administrative support and acquire a vehicle so that they become independent of **Action Lesotho** for exhibition attendance and sales throughout Lesotho and into South Africa. The plan is also to increase the membership of the group with companies entering at different stages of development.

Action Lesotho will continue to provide training to companies at all stages of development and particularly to deliver the new innovation and entrepreneurship training. Our Memorandum of Understanding with **BEDCO** is gaining in strength and direction and we have a newly formed partnership with **Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation** which will also support our development initiatives.

The aim is to further develop Lesotho Mountain Crafts as a national brand, encourage the youth of Lesotho to join existing companies and also encourage the formation of new youth led companies. Our first new young company is **IDO Beads** and they joined LMC in November this year. IDO Beads is a family owned jewellery business specializing in items made from innovative materials such as hand painted paper, inner-tubes and other recycled and hand crafted beads.

Funding



LMC would like to thank **Citywire**, London for their continued support of their project. The three year funding from Citywire is assisting in the development of the showcase gallery in Teyateyaneng and has enabled us to host the inaugural Creative Fair and Family Fun Day this year and also initiate demonstration days at the gallery. We have been able to print banners, improve the site and improve our marketing both in Lesotho and into South Africa. The funding also enabled Action Lesotho to engage **Saskia Czimenga** to train the management at the gallery in monitoring and evaluation, business management and marketing.

For regular news and updates, don't forget to check our Facebook pages & website:
www.facebook.com/ActionLesotho
www.facebook.com/Lesotho-Mountain-Crafts
www.actionlesotho.ie

Mela Artisans

Thanks to **Stephen Humphries** (pictured right with **Koloi Matsosa**) from **Mela Artisans** for coming to visit the Lesotho Mountain Craft project in October 2015. Action Lesotho and LMC were delighted to host Stephen for the week and very much enjoyed his input to our work and to the product development within all companies. We are very much hoping that we will begin developing a working relationship with Mela Artisans in USA in 2016.



Leribe Arts Revival



The **Leribe District Administration** and business people from the area have initiated an annual **Leribe Arts Revival** to encourage participation in the arts by the youth and communities in Leribe. **Action Lesotho** have been invited to participate in the steering committee and attended the launch on 28th November 2015. **Mme Eliza** and **Mme Matali** (pictured) from Lesotho Mountain Crafts exhibited the LMC products at the launch and **Pippa Kearon**, our In-Country Director, was there to advise and guide other crafters on the day. Amongst the group she was advising were a 65 strong association of crafters from Katse Dam and a group of young men from Tsubeng. It is hoped that Action Lesotho will be in a position to train the Katse Dam group in the second quarter of 2016.



Volunteer opportunities with LMC

Action Lesotho would be very happy to hear from volunteers with craft expertise particularly in weaving, home décor, jewellery, basket making, leather work and needlecraft. We are also seeking volunteers with retail craft business expertise to work with the Lesotho Mountain Craft leadership and members. Volunteers should be able to pay for their own flights, living expenses and accommodation and ideally stay for a minimum of three months.

Applications should be sent to info@actionlesotho.ie



Action Lesotho aims to make a difference in people's lives by offering them training in Innovation and Entrepreneurship. This training equips the participants with knowledge on how to be innovative and how to become true entrepreneurs. This is a core element of Action Lesotho's three year strategic plan funded by Irish Aid.

Since July this year **Dominic Matooane** and **Mantai Mpesi** have been developing the Action Lesotho Innovation and Entrepreneurship training programme and creating manuals and training resources that can be used with groups at all levels of education and business experience. The first groups have been following the beginners' programme which has shown tremendous results.

The Innovation and Entrepreneurship programme grew out of two training courses delivered in 2014 & 2015 by **Maurice Knightly** and **Nick Allen** from University College Dublin's Innovation Academy. We are so grateful to them for introducing us to this extraordinary and impactful tool. Action Lesotho are developing the programme to suit the Lesotho context and ensuring that participants of all ages, educational backgrounds & business experience levels can start businesses that generate income from the outset. The training develops creative thinking, entrepreneurial skills and ensures that all products and services meet customer demand and generate a healthy wage for those involved.

So far the training has been offered to two groups namely: a farmers' group of 20 participants at Ha Masele and a group of 26 participants at Ha Matela which intends to capitalise on the tourism attractions in their locality.

Another four groups were trained through a **Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation (LTDC)** initiative. It was such a wonderful experience for these participants to have the opportunity to be trained in business idea generation, customer discovery, marketing and creative thinking.



Photo: Tourist Centre at Ha Kome where the group will sell refreshments together with area-specific craft produce.

The **Action Lesotho** innovations and entrepreneurship facilitators worked with the groups to identify the existing business potential within their areas. All four groups are in tourism hotspots and with the help of LTDC we have identified potential community enterprise centres that the groups can immediately begin working from. The facilitators encouraged the groups to link product development to their areas and develop suitable products for visitors.

A number of interesting discoveries were made about the areas during the course of the training. For example, Malimong was the home of the cannibals in Lesotho. Their group had many very interesting stories to relate and these are now being developed in artwork & craft products. Ha Kome has a beautiful tourist centre from where branded and area specific craft products will be sold along with snacks and refreshments for hungry and thirsty visitors.



There are the cave dwellings (above) at Ha Kome which were home to the surviving wives of the three leaders of the Cat, Leopard & Lion clans who settled here in 1824. It is believed that this is what provided the inspiration for the creation of the Seshoeshoe logo "Three Cats".

Thaba Bosiu is the area in which King Moshoeshoe I settled when he founded Lesotho in the 1800s. The history and tourism potential of the area is endless and the group are aware of how to capitalise on this opportunity.

Ha Boroana boasts fantastic rock painting and an area of outstanding beauty favoured by those who enjoy camping in tranquil surroundings. The centre there will focus on developing services for campers & visitors and also a wide range of craft products incorporating the rock painting images.



The group photo (top left) shows participants from the four tourism areas. On graduation day they reported that they were enthusiastic to return home and get started on their businesses. They created a plan within each area group to start their own businesses with capital contributions from each participant. Excitingly, the Kome group started their business in early December and the other groups plan to start before Christmas. **Dominic Matooane** and **Mantai Mpesi**, the Action Lesotho Innovation and Entrepreneurship trainers, will be visiting the groups twice a month and providing necessary follow up support and guidance. The other motivating factor was the certificates issued by **Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation** who were the sponsors of this training. LTDC and Action Lesotho have made a commitment to follow up on this group to ensure that they get the necessary support for making their business a success. LTDC and BEDCO will be providing further training, responding to the needs of the group that were highlighted during the last week of the course.

Article by Dominic Matooane



Dear Reader!

I am currently writing this article at the end of a three week stint in Lesotho! The last three weeks have taught me more about life than the last three years in Ireland and the US combined. Part of me feels guilty for having enjoyed my time here. Shouldn't working in a developing country be difficult across all levels? Well it had its ups and downs but I have come away with a different point of view.

Lesotho and the Basotho have many challenges such as corruption, land tenancy issues, drought, poor infrastructure and HIV just to name a

few. The problems are very complex and very interlinked. When I came here three weeks ago, I did not know what to expect. The first week was frustrating and overwhelming because I came here with a bunch of ideas and energy only to find that the problem is much bigger than expected. My saving grace was **Ntate Brian Flaherty** and the warm welcome from Pippa and Dave. I can't thank them enough. We had a bunch of fun while I was learning the culture, meeting everyone and seeing first-hand the challenges and the great work being carried out by Action Lesotho.

My time here has been spread across many different projects including agriculture, innovation, crafts and a couple of days teaching Gaelic football to the kids. Mainly I have helped out with Agriculture. Thanks to many donations at home, I was able to purchase a cow and calf for the farm. We spent time constructing hail netting, visiting local vendors, making contacts, sowing sorghum and planning for a new orchard at the centre. Molemo is such a joy to work with and mighty craic. I quote 'Shane man, you are too used of food'!!



I was delighted and uplifted to have attended the graduation ceremony of the business students from the Innovation and Entrepreneurship training in Ha Matela. They have training, follow up and business plans ready but what struck me is the lack of capital these people have to actually set up a business. I have been talking to Pippa and Paul about setting up a new seed capital initiative. This would be a great way of offering start-up funding and also mentoring to make sure people have the best chance possible to succeed in business.

Cherry Festival offered me a great chance to see first-hand what great work Pippa and the Basotho have done with the crafts sector here. The quality of the work is second to none. I am hoping to get buyers from San Francisco and Ireland for some of these products.

On my last week, I was delighted to be able to teach a class to all the staff at Action Lesotho. The class was called Personal Development and Wealth Creation. I came away having learned so much more about the culture and what values people have as a result of interactive teaching. I really enjoyed it and I hope people learned something new and hopefully a new way of thinking for life and business.

What I found most interesting in Lesotho apart from the beautiful scenery and brilliant Basotho characters was the kids. They all are so happy despite having nothing. It makes you wonder what's wrong with the kids at home who have everything! It was a joy to play football with the kids and those two days alone made the trip worthwhile in itself.

I'm sure I will be back again. Huge thanks to Action Lesotho for having me and I hope my work was of value.

Kind Regards,

Shane 'Ntate Mololi!!!! (meaning Whistle)



Pippa Kearon, Action Lesotho's In-Country Director says, 'We were absolutely delighted to have **Shane O'Sullivan** from Cahersiveen, Co Kerry, with us for three weeks. He brought with him a wonderful mix of dedication, enthusiasm, a willingness to learn from his experience, a thirst to have a shared experience, new and innovative ideas, a sense of humour and a long term spirit of commitment to the work of Action Lesotho. Thank you Shane for your input during your stay and we hope that your ideas for helping us in the future come to fruition.'



We are very grateful to all those who have contributed to Shane's fundraising efforts for agriculture, the Children's Breakfast Programme and we are very hopeful that a seed capital fund will be initiated within the next month or two.

Our thanks also to **Brian Flaherty** from the Board of Directors for facilitating the preparations for his trip.

Innovation & entrepreneurship for farmers

A group of farmers that was already working together and had formed an association, took one of our training courses in innovation and entrepreneurship. Their challenge was to turn their farming into a profitable business. After the training they realised that products sell better when value has been added. At the time they faced a major challenge as they had an excess stock of cabbage which they could not sell due to poor quality. However, after the training they came up with the idea of chopping the cabbage & packaging it into small family sized bags. Suddenly they found their market and it sold like hot cakes to the factory workers who were very happy to have this product since they work late and do not have time for preparing cabbage.

Upon following up with this group in October we found a highly creative and motivated group that had secured an advance market for their agricultural produce of carrots, beetroot, green pepper & spinach. They are putting into practice what they learnt from the training and it is paying off in dividends.

Women's Empowerment & Entrepreneurship

There has been a great opportunity to work with young women at the centre in Ha Masele since August 2015. They have been attending a catering and business class for 4 months now. We had about 16 girls initially but the number came down to 8. They have been coming to the centre each morning (9am–1pm) from Monday to Thursday. The curriculum we are following covers:

- Computer skills for beginners to intermediate
- Business planning, start up and management skills
- Catering skills
- Book keeping
- Sewing



Challenges

Though we consider this to be a success, we have encountered some challenges with the young women along the way. We had 16 participants at the outset of the course and the number decreased to 8. Of those who left one found employment at the factories, one became pregnant and is at home and another got married.

Most of the group have small babies and this can be quite challenging in the classes. In most cases it is difficult for them to listen attentively or fully participate because of their children. They come with their kids to the centre and they cry or run around the class which distracts the whole class. We also have slow learners who are really struggling and we do all we can to help but it is not easy. Some of them have learning difficulties which makes it very hard to cope with the course material.



Transformation

Ever since they started this course the young women have come to the centre clean and looking good. They are really taking good care of themselves and their children now. They now have higher self-esteem, confidence and motivation in everything they do. There is a huge difference in them personally and professionally. They are able to work without our supervision. They are able to use the computer on their own and do some research on the internet.

Future plans

Initially the course was supposed to end in December 2015 and then we reflected through our processes of monitoring and evaluation that the course should be extended to the end of June 2016. This is because we believe that they have not been given adequate time to get their businesses off the ground and will require intensive supervision in order to successfully start and grow their business. It is our goal to see them having their own catering business running successfully and showing signs of sustainability by the end of 2016. The young women have also expressed an interest in being given an opportunity to sit for external examinations next year; we have five that will sit for grade 7 examinations and three participants who will be writing JC examinations and they hope to have certificates at the end. This will help them in the future as education is a key to everything these days.

Children's activities

Homework club and revision

We set up a homework club where children complete their assignments with our help and work as a team in order to share their knowledge amongst themselves. We also do some English exercises to help improve their language skills. The club benefits the orphans and vulnerable children who often have no one at home to help them with school work.

Performing drama

We do drama classes with the children using both Sesotho & English. We teach them how to perform and their performance helps them improve their language skills as well as boosting their confidence.

Malimpho programme

Malimatle Saniboy Lekalaka

is a 53 year old man, single (never married) and has no children. He is staying alone in a small mud house which might fall anytime. He does not have close relatives that he knows of. He is one of our **Malimpho** clients and has been on our program for 2 months now. As a team, we are very concerned that the house might fall down during rainy/windy days. Having assessed the situation, building a new house seemed the only solution. The estimated costs are M6000.00 which consists of materials and labour. A meeting was held by the Malimpho team and it was agreed that the emergency fund will be used to help the man. 'Providing nutritional help to someone living in that house is very stressful', said the nurse, 'as neither him nor I are safe there'. Due to these reasons, a new house will be built as soon as possible.



People & Places

Rita Kelly RIP



Rita (third from left) with the Board and Puseletso in 2012.

In remembrance of Board member Rita Kelly

Rita had a passion for Justice, A passion that drove her lifelong commitment to helping the poorest of the poor. While she had a simple, uncomplicated approach to life, she exuded that rare quality, common sense.

She was a founding member of Action Lesotho, an organisation she was extremely proud of. It was always a joy and a comfort to her to hear reports of our projects successful results on the ground in Lesotho, particularly those that empowered the poor. She was a woman who had little time for things that began and ended with words.

Of course there were many sides to Rita, an accomplished crafter and painter but above all, a woman who loved a good laugh and had a great sense of fun.

Our sympathy goes out to her husband Jim and her extended family and friends. She was dearly loved and will be missed by all.

Died 17/11/2015

New baby

Many congratulations to staff member **Mme Mahlonepho** (pictured far left in the back row) and her husband on the safe arrival of their baby boy on 24th November 2015. The baby arrived a little earlier than expected at a very healthy weight of 3.9kgs. Mother and baby are doing well and, as a result of the drought, the parents decided to name him **Tsepo** which means hope. Mme Mahlonepho has been working with **Mme Matsireletso** in our children's programme and we look forward to seeing her back at Ha Magele in February 2016.



Donations

Pallets to Lesotho: Many thanks to everyone who donated items for two pallets of goods, including football gear, books, medical equipment, winter clothes, toys and much more. The pallets set off on their journey to Lesotho in mid-Nov thanks to the generosity of **Action Trust Ireland** who were sending out materials & offered us space in their container. Many thanks too to the Action Lesotho Board members & volunteers in Tralee who packed and organised the pallets and to **Garryowen Transport Ltd** who shipped the pallet to Co Dublin free of charge to join Action Trust Ireland's pallets bound for Maseru. Photo: Owen & Steve from Garryowen Transport with David Buttimer (Action Lesotho).



Thanks to **Heather and Zoe Kearon** and the parish of St Thomas More, Seaford for their generous gift of clothing for the children this Christmas. Photo: Heather & Pippa Kearon sorting t-shirts for the children's Christmas parties.



Thank you to **Anne Farrell** for her generous donation which assisted us in providing new jeans for the children to go with their new t-shirts.

Thanks to **Zoe Hanrahan** for her donation of sandpit equipment to the pre-schoolers in Ha Magele. The children were thrilled with their new toys and our exploring and thinking programme through Aistear got a huge boost with the introduction of the play resources.

New Action Lesotho bookshop in Tralee



Action Lesotho's bookshop in Tralee recently moved into larger, brighter premises in a better location within The Mall, Bridge Street, Tralee. The shop was officially opened by the reigning Rose of Tralee, **Elysha Brennan**. There was good press coverage of the event and sales have increased. The shop is a significant contributor to Action Lesotho's finances, with its total profit for 2015 expected to be in the region of €23,000.

Chairman's Appeal

To provide a breakfast each morning, every day of the year, for an orphan in Lesotho costs around €100 per child (just under 30 cents a day).

We are looking for support from 50 people to provide us with €100 each to provide a breakfast to these children. It not only improves their health and wellbeing but also their education, and education is the best known solution for breaking the cycle of poverty. We can confidently assure you that all of the €100 will go to the breakfast programme as any administrative costs involved will be covered by us.

Action Lesotho is primarily a development organisation:

- ❖ **We explore ways of improving farming techniques and production.**
- ❖ **We provide training for entrepreneurs to start their own businesses.**
- ❖ **We motivate and assist job seekers to secure employment.**
- ❖ **We are at the heart of the revival of the craft industry in the country.**
- ❖ **We bring community development programmes to empower women, improve nutrition in babies and guide the community on how to help, support and comfort the most vulnerable of their members**
- ❖ **We operate a very successful support, recovery and integration programme for people with HIV and AIDS.**

However, there is one group that requires special humanitarian support, these are the orphans.

The term single orphan is used when the significant parent is dead, usually the mother, as the father is often absent, and double orphan is used when both parents are dead. These children are often raised by a grandmother in failing health, or sometimes the head of the family is just a child. It is not unusual for these children to be starving most of the time. Without an income or proper guardian quite often there is absolutely no food in the house. Fortunately the government, through the World Health Organisation, provides all children with a meal at school. For many years we in Action Lesotho have run a feeding programme where these orphan and vulnerable children can get a meal at weekends and on school holidays. We are painfully aware that these children are hungry going to school and remain so until lunch time.

Our research shows that a hungry child's ability to concentrate and retain knowledge is very low.

We are trying to address this problem by introducing a breakfast program for 50 of these children at our community centre. The children can come and eat before going to school. We also help them prepare for school properly by teaching them some basic skills in cleanliness and hygiene as this is most effective in helping them socially integrate with their peers.

To preserve the dignity of the children involved there are no pictures with this article. I am sure you can visualise the situation for yourself.

If you would like to be one of the 50 supporters to contribute €100 to this project, our details are in the box below.

Paul Hanrahan

Chairman of Action Lesotho

I would like to donate €100 to provide one child with breakfast each day for a year

My name is

My email is
(if you would like to be emailed updates on the programme)

Account name: Action Lesotho

Sort code: 90-58-38

Account number: 27016723

IBAN: IE23BOFI90583827016723

Swift/BIC: BOFIE2D

Bank address: Bank of Ireland,
Castle Street, Tralee, Co. Kerry,
Ireland.

Or donate online via:

<http://actionlesotho.ie/donate/>