



Action Lesotho

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Newsletter No 5: June 2011

Dear Supporter,

We bring you the fifth Action Lesotho Newsletter. In this bulletin, we bring you the latest news from the Ha Nyenye Craft Group, who recently delivered their first International order; an article from Action Lesotho's Enterprise Officer Mojalefa; updates from several of our other projects; and lots of other information on news and events in Lesotho and Ireland.

Mill and farm: race to be ready for harvest



New mill building © Pippa Kearon

Action Lesotho's farm & mill project is progressing well, with the new mill building at a stage where it's nearly ready to deal with this year's crop. The mill was formerly on private land, but has now been relocated

to Action Lesotho's new site. The mill has been a profitable enterprise for many years and it is hoped the new location and improved building will lead to increased profitability. Any profit will be reinvested in Action Lesotho projects, in particular the mill and farm.

The crops in farm project fields are growing well under the new regime. The projected yield of maize is expected to be at least twice the average for Lesotho (which is only 1.2T/ha). It has been very evident that the effort that has gone into carefully planning the farming methods and the ongoing monitoring has been of huge benefit. However, as always in Lesotho, the weather is something that is impossible to plan for. Action Lesotho's crops survived the heavy rains earlier in the year, which damaged crops throughout much of the country, and which have led to fears of widespread food shortages in Lesotho. However, heavy rains fell again recently and Action Lesotho may have to harvest early to help ensure the cobs don't rot on the stalks. It's now a race against time to make sure the new mill and storage areas are fully operational in time to receive the harvest. Here in Ireland we're keeping our fingers crossed that the crop yield will do justice to the work of our extremely hard-working farm team in Lesotho.

The main funder of the mill building project is IMPACT Trade Union, who also funded the purchase of the land last year. Action Lesotho is extremely grateful for their support for this project, which aims to develop a model that can be replicated elsewhere in Lesotho.

Photo: Inspecting the crops (From L-R: Nt Mankoe General Manager; Molem Farm Manager; and Mojalefa Oliphant Enterprise Officer).



Farm inspection © Pippa Kearon

Dr Garret FitzGerald passes away

Action Lesotho's Patron and former Irish Taoiseach Dr Garret FitzGerald, very sadly passed away aged 85 on 19th May 2011. He was a major public figure who made a substantial contribution to Irish politics and policy over his lifetime. Throughout his life he had a strong interest in overseas development and was President of The Institution of International and European Affairs (IIEA) at the time of his death. The IIEA, an independent, not-for-profit organisation, is considered Europe's leading think-tank on European and International affairs.



Dr FitzGerald's relationship with Lesotho started in the 1970s during his appointment as Ireland's Foreign Affairs Minister from 1973 to 1977. Coincidentally, it was a Government post his own father had held fifty years early. It was under Dr FitzGerald's watch in Foreign Affairs that Ireland developed its first official development assistance programme in 1974. Under the overseas aid programme he initiated, Lesotho was established as one of Ireland's priority programme countries. Dr Garret FitzGerald realised the important role of training in development and was credited with establishing, for example, the Centre for Accounting Studies in Lesotho. Dr FitzGerald maintained an ongoing interest in Lesotho, visiting the country as recently as 2007.

Dr FitzGerald became Action Lesotho's patron in 2011, and although his time as our patron was very short, we are very grateful for the support he showed us. All of us in Action Lesotho would like to extend our sincerest condolences to Dr Garret FitzGerald's family on their sad loss. May his memory live on.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis

First International Order for Craft Group

The Ha Nyenye Craft Group, an Action Lesotho supported women's craft co-operative that specialises in making quilts from clothes factory scraps and felted sheep-wool figures, received their first major international order recently. See page 2 for more details.



Felted sheep © Pippa Kearon

Ha Nyenye Craft Group
 Photos: Pippa Kearon & Eileen Coates

Under the expert guidance of Pippa Kearon, the Ha Nyenye Craft Group has gone from strength to strength over the last few months. These photos illustrate some of the activities the group have been up to.



In May the group dispatched their first International order, consisting of almost €1000 worth of nativity sets for an American company www.worldnativity.com. The government in Lesotho has heard of their achievement and was so impressed that a group from a small village has managed to find an international market, that they intend sending a delegation, including the Trade Minister and the US Ambassador, to visit the project.



The group had been taught felting by Pippa two years ago, but for this order the women had to come up with some new designs, one of which was this trio of the three kings of Lesotho. Having taught the group the basics, Pippa has been thrilled how the group has shown imagination and skill in developing new designs on their own initiative.



Five of the women recently attended a training course in wool spinning at Setsoto Designs. It was so successful that the plan is to develop a small business supplying carded and spun wool directly to Setsoto Designs, a company that makes woven wall hangings and rugs www.setsotodesigns.com. At the moment Action Lesotho is sourcing two spinning wheels for women so that the business idea can progress.

As part of the process of working towards new business opportunities, the group have also undertaken Business Management training with Mojalefa Oliphant, Action Lesotho's Enterprise Officer (see next page for details).



At the end of May, the foundations were laid for Action Lesotho's new craft centre, which is being funded through the fantastic efforts of Waterville Friends of Lesotho, a local branch of Action Lesotho. One of the main functions of the centre will be to provide workshop space for the Ha Nyenye group. At present they have very limited work-space in one of the women's outbuildings and often work outdoors (see below).

My name is Malebololo Mothoalo and I was born in 1949. My husband died in 1984 leaving me with 5 children. Three of my children are still living. My last born is now at the local tertiary.

I have been a member of the Ha Nyenye Women's Craft Group for two years. Before this time I was idling at home because I could not be employed due to my old age. My craft work helps me to take care of myself. I am very thankful to Mme Matsepo for having the idea to bring us together. Being a member of this group has helped me settle down as I was previously having to do irregular jobs.

Please follow our work on Action Lesotho's website and introduce us to your friends, family and neighbours.

Supported by Action Lesotho
www.actionlesotho.ie

Each nativity set produced by the women will also have a personalised label attached. Each maker's name and photo will be on the front of the label, with a little piece of her personal story on the back.



Business management training programme

Words: Mojalefa Oliphant Photos: Pippa Kearon



My greetings to all readers and followers of the Action Lesotho newsletter. My name is Mojalefa Oliphant and I have been employed by Action Lesotho to deliver training in order to encourage entrepreneurship and develop business management skills within the existing groups working with Action Lesotho.

Overview of the training programme

We are offering the groups a business management training package that is divided into three inter-related training programmes: 1) Business Idea Generation; 2) Business Start-up; and 3) Business Management. The first training programme assists aspiring and potential entrepreneurs to generate as many business ideas as they can and to eventually select the most suitable ones for them. The second one helps the trainees to develop their concrete business ideas into proper business plans in order to start a properly planned business. The third intervention imparts business management skills which assist the trainees to improve their businesses.

Progress to date

Since March this year, we have already delivered entrepreneurship training to 3 different groups. The trainees have generated many concrete and feasible business ideas and are conducting market research in order to develop those ideas into viable business plans. A considerable number of the business ideas generated have been agriculture related, especially poultry (broilers and layers). Retail business ideas, e.g. tuck shops or general cafes, were popular as was the idea of starting up a hair salon.

Participant's feedback

The training courses have been appreciated by the participants despite the different challenges faced by the different groups. Many of the participants were older women, and the majority of them have not gone beyond standard six (primary school). The elements of the training programme that some did not particularly enjoy at the beginning were in areas like costing and the financial planning. Most of them did not like anything to do with figures or mathematics but I worked to change their mind set and eventually they said they were happy they attended the courses and now enjoy the basic financial formulas. One participant even said she wished she could go back to school because the course helped her to think that "things are easy if you believe so and grasp the formulas".

How the courses benefited the participants

The courses created a forum whereby the participants could interact with each other and share ideas about how they can develop themselves and create opportunities. For many, the aim was ultimately to develop a self-employment business. Through the research they had to conduct it provided an opportunity to interact with established business people thus establishing mentoring and advice networks.

The training courses have also been a first step towards providing an environment for self-help groups to develop

which will help to further cooperation between participants.

An important aspect of the training courses is that it provides an opportunity to invite relevant organisations and companies come to the training sessions to inform the participants of what they offer and ways in which small business start-ups can access such support. The speakers on the courses have included business representatives, Government organizations and NGOs who provide assistance to entrepreneurs.

Challenges

The majority of the participants commented that the time period for the training courses was very short. Until they actually took part they had not really appreciated the importance and relevance of the courses. After having done the courses, they said they felt that everyone in their community should be given the opportunity to receive this sort of information and it should not be seen as 'insider information' for the chosen few. My observation was that almost all the people trained were women. This is probably due to the fact that in Lesotho women have been found to be more enterprising than men, especially in small and micro enterprise.

Many of these trainees have not yet started businesses or fully completed business plans which is mainly due to lack of micro-credit companies in Lesotho and general difficulties in raising start up capital.



Conclusion

We have succeeded in increasing the spirit of entrepreneurship among those who participated in the training. The participants were motivated by the courses and eager to learn new skills. The biggest challenge that still remains is to see new businesses established by those who have completed the training processes. This could be addressed if they have access to funding. This is complicated by the fact that most of the participants lack funds or assets to put up as collateral against business loans. My hope is that I can report on business start-ups in a future newsletter.

Mojalefa Oliphant has been employed as an Enterprise Officer with Action Lesotho since March 2011. He previously worked in Lesotho delivering a business programme designed by the International Labour Organisation (a United Nations agency).

Project News

Photos: Pippa Kearon & Ciara Walsh

Loant'sang Community Development Centre



❖ **Outfits:** The Loant'sang committee, who operate out of the Community Development Centre in Ha Mapele, recently received their Action Lesotho 'uniforms' of T-shirts and sun hats. The delighted committee is pictured above with Ntate Mankoe (third from left).

❖ **Enterprise and management:** Action Lesotho's Enterprise Officer, Mojalefa Oliphant, will be based in an office at the Loant'sang centre and, as well as running business training courses, will help develop and manage other activities at the centre. The group has already undertaken business training with Mojalefa (see photo p3) and they hope to work towards developing a viable business or businesses as most of them have little or no income.

❖ **Woodwork project:** One of the committee members, along with several young men from the village, has been making wooden tables. Most of the group had very little carpentry experience, until they did a three week woodwork class last year with Guy Dalton (a volunteer from Ireland). It's fantastic to hear his training course made a difference and see the group's initiative & enthusiasm in continuing to develop their skills.



❖ **Feeding programme:** the Loant'sang committee continues to feed up to 100 orphans & vulnerable children on the weekend feeding programmes. In Lesotho, the weather is turning cold as the season heads towards winter, so they are particularly concerned about making sure the children stay warm and well fed. They are putting hot tea on the menu instead of juice for the winter months!



Loant'sang @ Ciara Walsh

❖ Meanwhile the recipients of the **Malimpo Feeding Programme** (a programme for very sick or disabled adults and children), will all be receiving one of the Ha Nyenye group's lovely thick quilted blankets to keep them warm through the winter. It can be very cold in the winter, with temperatures dropping below freezing point.



Lepoqong Community Development Centre



A **disability support group**, who provide physiotherapy and other support to disabled children (left) continues to operate from the Lepoqong Centre. The group was recently visited by Gillian Saloojee

(below right), a physiotherapist from Johannesburg. She ran a training programme for the support group, carers and parents. She was extremely impressed with the care the children were receiving through our programme and promised to continue to work with the group on an ongoing basis through her own organization, Malamulele Onward.



The disability support group at Lepoqong is still in a position where it can only care for a limited number of children, but after Gillian's visit it was decided to try involve the Silesian Mission (who own the building) to assist in identifying and treating more of the children that desperately need therapeutic interventions. Meanwhile M'e Heshie (Action Lesotho's physiotherapist) and Pippa Kearon are working together to lobby the government in Lesotho in relation to providing state provision for children with disabilities.

Action Lesotho continues to run a **feeding programme** for orphans & vulnerable children from the Lepoqong centre. Many of the children's parents have died as a result of HIV/AIDS – Lesotho has the third highest incidence of the disease in the world with nearly 25% of the population infected. As part of an attempt to try and break the cycle of infection and poverty, the children attending the centre recently took part in a one day awareness-raising course (pictured below). Topics covered included Children's Rights, how to make the most of educational opportunities and discussions around HIV/AIDS.



Action Lesotho has a new Facebook page. Join us there to keep up to date weekly with all the news about Action Lesotho's projects and events.



People

Changes on the Board of Directors



The most recent addition to the Board of Action Lesotho is **Dr Rosarii Griffin**. She is currently working at University College Cork to assist in setting up the Centre for Global Development (CGD). Rosarii is former Director of the *Centre for Global Development through Education* based at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick and previously worked at the

Centre for Adult and Continuing Education at UCC as both a Lecturer and Course Coordinator.

Rosarii first began her career as a secondary school teacher before continuing with post-graduate studies at UCC in education. Rosarii received an ESRC Scholarship from the British Council to read for a Doctorate at Oxford University where she studied 'International and Comparative Education'. Her supervisor, Dr Colin Brock, both encouraged and inspired her to pursue her interest in working with developing countries. Rosarii became the recipient of the European Anspach-Weiner Scholarship and pursued a post-doctorate at ULB, Brussels, Belgium before returning to Ireland.

Rosarii has published three books in the area of international and comparative education, focusing particularly on developing countries, and is currently working on a fourth book.

Her experience in Africa includes working with the Lesotho College of Education in Lesotho, and with Kyambogo University in Uganda. Rosarii also assisted in project work in Rwanda, South Africa and Brazil.

Action Lesotho's finance team news

❖ Congratulations are due to **Popa Seako** (pictured right and featured in Newsletter No. 2). He graduated on April 30th 2011 with a certificate in computing and information technology. Popa had volunteered with Action Lesotho for many years before becoming our part-time book-keeper. Through Action Lesotho, he has also found paid employment working with a computer business, which involves servicing and installing computers in South Africa.



Popa Seako @ Pippa Keaton

❖ A big welcome to **Vincent Daniels**, our new accountant in Lesotho and also to **David Hornibrook**, our new accountant in Ireland. Many thanks are also due to **Martin Moore** of Blennerville, Co. Kerry, who has worked tirelessly as our accountant over the last few years and has been a fantastic supporter of Action Lesotho.

Chairman's visit

Paul Hanrahan, Action Lesotho's Chairman (pictured left, with Hans Taljaard, Agricultural Advisor) visited our projects in Lesotho in late April/early May. He was there to assess progress on all the projects and to meet with our staff and advisors. He was very impressed with the achievements of the Action Lesotho team in relation to all the projects. Pippa Keaton (employed through Irish Aid funding) and Ntate Mankoe (General Manager) are working closely together to develop the team and as a result all the projects are benefitting massively.



Paul Hanrahan (L) & Hans Taljaard

Paul said, 'It was so uplifting to visit our new site to experience all the activity taking place, where I could truly see Action Lesotho in full flow. It was not only the building projects, or planning the processing of our largest crop of maize to date. No, for me it was the sense of commitment of our local Basotho staff and their strong belief that the project on this site is going to improve the lives of many people. They have the vision and confidence that they are going to be the agents of change for the better in their community.'

During his visit, Paul also received a warm welcome from the new Irish Ambassador to Lesotho, Gerry Gervin, and had a long, fruitful meeting with former Ambassador to Ireland and now Minister for Tourism, Environment and Culture, Me Mannete Ramaili.

Exchange programme

Brenda Friel, former Board Member of Action Lesotho, was back in Lesotho in April this year with students and teachers from Pobal Scoil Chorca Dhuibhne (Dingle, Co.Kerry). The school is twinned with Morate English Medium High School and the students from both schools had a fantastic time during this cultural exchange project. The relationship between the schools was established several years ago and last year students from Lesotho visited Dingle. During their recent trip to Lesotho, Brenda (pictured below centre) and the rest of the group visited some of the Action Lesotho projects, including the farm and mill.

The visit was funded by the school's own fund-raising efforts and was also supported by Irish Aid WorldWise, an organisation which encourages links between schools in Ireland and schools in some developing countries.



Exchange visit @ Pippa Keaton

Fundraising news

Women's Mini Marathon Dublin



Rosarii Griffin (see page 5) has organised an Action Lesotho team to take part in the women's mini marathon in Dublin on the 6th June 2011. The main aim of the team's fundraising efforts is to

help children in Action Lesotho's feeding programmes remain in school. Rosarii says 'many children have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. Such children cannot afford school uniforms and therefore cannot go to school. However, as most schools offer one free meal a day, they now not alone miss out on education, but also miss out on what is often the only guaranteed meal they have in the day'.

Help a child stay in school by sponsoring Rosarii and her team. You can use the PayPal facility on our website www.actionlesotho.ie or send a donation to her directly at Rosarii Griffin, No. 6 Bloomfield Terrace, UCC, Cork.

Women's Mini Marathon Killarney



On 10th September, 2011, a 10km mini marathon is taking place in Killarney following a scenic route within Killarney National Park. Is there

anyone out there interested in joining an Action Lesotho team and helping raise funds for us?

If so, contact us at info@actionlesotho.ie

Entries to: www.killarneywomensminimarathon.ie

Small Change for Big Change



Action Lesotho has some regular donors who collect spare change in a jar & donate the money to Action Lesotho. It gave us the idea of 'Small Change for Big Change'. We have Action Lesotho stickers we can send you to put on a jar. Just fill the jar and donate it to Action

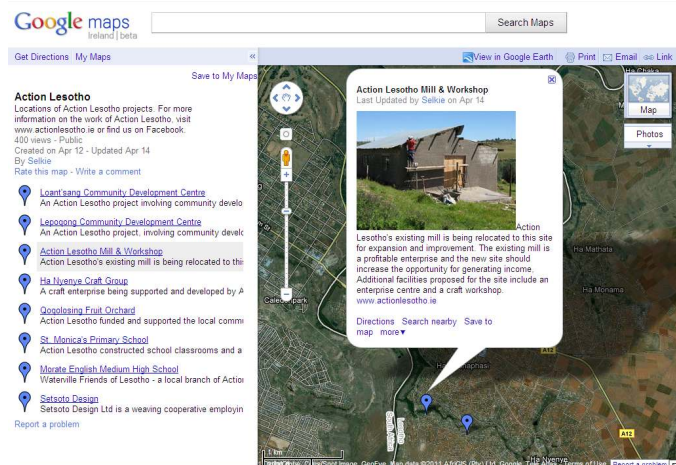
Lesotho. Do it at home or at work. A little goes a long way in Lesotho: remember it costs only 50c for each hot meal for a child on one of our feeding programmes. To get a sticker for your change jar, e-mail info@actionlesotho.ie with your name and address or contact Paul Hanrahan, 32, The Mall, Tralee, Co. Kerry.

Bantry Book Sale

Bantry Friends of Lesotho is holding a two week long second hand book sale in Bantry, Co. Cork, 15th-30th July. Donations of good quality second hand books welcome. Drop them in to the Craft Shop, Glengarriff Road or in to the book sale itself (opposite Supervalu). Contact: Colleen O'Kane, The Craft Shop, Bantry or e-mail Clare Heardman at info@actionlesotho.ie

Snippets

Action Lesotho Google Map



If you're interested to know exactly where all our projects are in Lesotho, you can now use our Google Map facility. Each project is marked with a blue 'flag' and when you click on the 'flag', information about the project will come up. It's possible to zoom in and see the landscape in detail or zoom out and see where Lesotho is in the world. The easiest way to access the map is via our website www.actionlesotho.ie. On the home page of the website there's a small version of the Google Map, but if you click below the map on 'View Action Lesotho in a larger map' you'll see a full screen version.

Action Lesotho Leaflet

Action Lesotho has a new leaflet, designed by Tessa Dennison, Kenmare (who also designed our logo). The short leaflet introduces the work of Action Lesotho and is full of colour photographs. It also includes a Standing Order form. If you're giving a talk or organising a fundraising event for Action Lesotho, get in touch with us and we'll send you some leaflets to handout to the public.



Photographs from Lesotho



The photographs of **Tony O'Connor**, who volunteered to teach computer classes with Action Lesotho for six weeks last year (see his article in the last newsletter), can now be viewed online. There are photos from Africa, China and Ireland.

To see some of Tony's stunning and dramatic photos of the landscapes and people of Lesotho visit his new site:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/eliotkami>