

Update from Action Lesotho's Chairman - May 13th, 2020

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Action Lesotho in Ireland

When we closed our two fundraising shops on March 14th, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we expected it to last for a few weeks and that we would be back in operation soon enough to normal trading. We have all learned a lot since those early days. In the most recent Government update we learned that the Tralee Shopping Centre will remain closed until August 10th. That date of course is based on the expectation that the Health Authorities can contain, track, and trace the virus in the short term. Long term we hope science will find a vaccine, doctors will have an antidote and our leaders will find a pathway through this new dangerous landscape. A pathway that will enable us to meet up again with our families, go back to our jobs, if they are still there, and hopefully allow Action Lesotho to reopen our two fundraising shops in Tralee, Sparks of Joy (Bric-a-Brac) and our second-hand bookshop.



Action Lesotho bookshop



Sparks of Joy (bric-a-brac)

Here in Ireland, when the gravity of the pandemic was acknowledged in the country, the Government stepped up to the mark as best they could, ensuring most people had some sort of income, access to healthcare if infected, support in getting food onto the table each day. Being locked away is exceedingly difficult for everyone. Many of us though would appreciate coming out the other side of this pandemic, just being alive and in good health. We understand and accept isolation as the price to be paid. We understand there will be collateral damage and will have to deal with it in the best way we can.

What is the situation like in Lesotho?

At this point in time, May 13th, the Government has just announced its first confirmed case of Covid-19. Having said that, there have only been a couple of hundred tests carried out to date and many of the results have not yet come back from the test centre in South Africa. It is the authority's intention to ramp up testing in the more populated areas adjacent to the border with south Africa. As Lesotho is landlocked and surrounded entirely by South Africa, there is a lot of illegal movement of people over the border. Both countries went into lockdown in April. The official border crossings between the two countries were closed except for essential supplies. Lesotho went into full lockdown April 14th four days after South Africa. Of course, their circumstances are quite different to ours and

most people there are terrified of the impact on the community if the virus gets a foothold. It could have catastrophic consequences for the country.

This is a country with the highest incidence of TB in the world, the second most infected globally with the HIV/AIDS virus and out of a population less than half of ours, has over 110,000 orphans. When the lockdown was introduced, it was based on knowing that the only hope of surviving this as a nation, with the limited resources available to them, is to starve the virus. Unfortunately, because there is little or no government financial support available for those in lockdown, starving the population could be as big a problem as the virus.

The country has a population of around 2 million people. Its healthcare system has an extremely limited capacity to deal with the normal day to day issues, with just 200 doctors to service the whole country. It has one modern hospital in the capitol city, Maseru, this absorbs most of the country's health budget. Our own Action Lesotho nurse, Mme Fhuto, also does some hours in the local district hospital. She said she and the rest of the staff are terrified of the virus hitting the community as they have no Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) for themselves and little or no medicine to administer to the victims. The Government are doing their best, but it doesn't help when the Minister for Health advises everyone to wash their hands every 20 mins, in a country where 75% of the population have no running water and limited access to wells.

What are we doing on the ground?

Normally around 400 children and adults receive either a meal on a daily basis at our Centre or receive a food package of long-life goods to supply them the nutrition they need for a month. Learning from our own experience here in Ireland regarding the impact of the virus has on the community, we knew before any directives from the Lesotho Government that we would have to cease any activity that encouraged large gatherings. This included activities at our Community Centres where the children come, among other things, for breakfast weekdays and meals on weekends. We were also aware that it would be difficult to provide outreach support during this period. There is the danger, without access to testing, that if our staff were unknowingly infected, they could be spreaders of the virus to our clients. We took the decision to put into action an emergency plan as a precaution, the challenge of purchasing and delivering at short notice, enough non-perishable food to each of our clients to sustain them for 3 months. With a trojan effort on the part of our staff, we managed to make the final delivery on the last evening before lockdown.

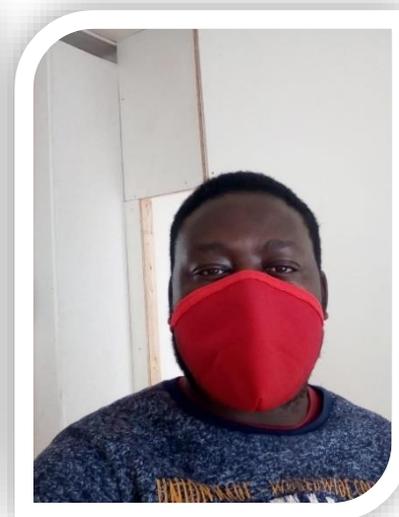


Client family



Preparing a delivery

Our farm, dairy and mill activities are allowed to operate for a maximum 5 hours each day and supply food to people in the locality. Our training centre for industrial sewing machinists closed when all the clothing factories closed, but our instructor continues to work each day making around two hundred face masks weekly to distribute to the community.



Most of our staff are in lockdown. There is no other financial support for them, so we continue to pay them a much-reduced salary until further notice.

The Future

Like any other charity, business, or organisation it is extremely difficult to predict how long we can sustain the project in its present format or what kind of environment we emerge into if and when this pandemic passes. When we closed our shops, we had enough reserves in mid-March to keep us going for another 3 to 4 months. We had hoped to reopen our shops again before our reserves dried up. With the lockdown of the shops stretching out to 6 months it is going to be extremely difficult to maintain the work we do on the ground.

We have been so encouraged by the response to our [GoFundMe appeal](#), the continuing support of those who signed up for the monthly direct debits, the donations we receive into our bank account and the cheques mail from supporters. All of this has kept our reserves ticking over and hopefully will get us through the worst period of the pandemic. Your continued support through these difficult times is deeply appreciated.

I hope this outline has helped bring you up to date on the evolving situation and how it is impacting on our efforts to support the most vulnerable of children and adults in Lesotho. Without your support none of this would be possible

On behalf of the Board of directors, my sincere appreciation to each of you.

Kind Regards

Paul Hanrahan

Chairman



Action Lesotho 32, The Mall, Tralee, Co. Kerry
www.actionlesotho.ie Charity No: 17838