

## COUNTRY PROFILE Kingdom of Lesotho

The small kingdom of Lesotho sits high in the Drakensberg Mountains and is entirely surrounded by South Africa. Although considered to be a medium developed country, nearly half the population live below the poverty line on less than \$1.25 a day. Average life expectancy in the country is just 45 years and HIV/AIDS, which affects almost one in four people in Lesotho, is the biggest health issue facing the government. In 1993, after nearly half a century of undemocratic and military rule, multiparty general elections were brought in and have been repeated three times, most recently in 2007, bringing hope that human development will follow.

### SUMMARY FACTS

<b>Population:</b> 2 million, <b>UK:</b> 61.2 million	<b>GDP per capita:</b> US\$788 (UN, 2008), <b>UK:</b> US\$35,200
<b>Capital:</b> Maseru	<b>Monetary unit:</b> 1 Loti = 100 lisente
<b>Area:</b> 30,355 sq km (12,727 sq miles), <b>UK:</b> 243,610 sq km (94,060 sq miles)	<b>Main exports:</b> Diamonds, water, wool, mohair, clothing
<b>Major languages:</b> Sesotho and English	<b>CO2 emissions share of world total:</b> < 0.1%, <b>UK:</b> >2%
<b>Major religions:</b> Christianity	<b>Population without access to an improved water source:</b> 22% (UN, 2006), <b>UK:</b> 0%
<b>Life expectancy at birth:</b> 45 years (UN 2008), <b>UK:</b> 79 years	<b>Population using improved sanitation:</b> 36% (UN, 2006), <b>UK:</b> 100%
<b>Under-five mortality rate:</b> 79 per 1,000 live births (UN 2008), <b>UK:</b> 6 per 1,000 live births	<b>Government:</b> Lesotho Congress for Democracy
<b>HIV prevalence:</b> 23.2% aged 15-49 (UN, 2007), <b>UK:</b> 0.2% aged 15-49	<b>Prime Minister:</b> Patalitha Bethuel Mosisili
<b>Adult Literacy Rate:</b> 82% ages 15 and older (UN, 2008), <b>UK:</b> >99%	<b>Year Women received right to vote:</b> 1965, <b>UK:</b> 1918, 1928 (equal rights)

Sources: UN Statistics, UNICEF



## History

The small, mountainous and landlocked area that constitutes present-day Lesotho was inhabited for centuries by hunter-gatherers known as the San. The San occupied much of southern Africa until Bantu-speaking people from West and Central Africa gradually began migrating to the region from the **1<sup>st</sup> century AD**. The migrations accelerated in the **15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries**, and the Bantu people took control of much of the territory formally occupied by the San. Near the beginning of the **19<sup>th</sup> century** a minor chief named Moshoeshe gathered together the remnants of various tribes devastated by the Zulu and Matabele raids that took place during the Mfecane ('crushing'). Moshoeshe's group settled in the Drakensberg mountains and emerged in **1822** as a single polity known as Basutoland, with Great King Moshoeshe I as its first leader.

During the early days of their existence the Basotho had to contend with expansion by the Boers from the Orange Free State, and to prevent further incursions, King Moshoeshe sought protection from Britain. The King's appeals went unheeded by the British government until **1868**, when Basutoland became a crown protectorate. Moshoeshe died in **1870** and the following year administrative control over Basutoland was passed to the Cape Colony, a decision resented by the Basotho. This resentment turned into unrest, and culminated in the Gun War of **1880**. An uneasy truce in **1881** failed to resolve the conflict and the Cape government persuaded the British government to take Basutoland back as a protectorate in **1884**. Following the Union of South Africa in **1910**, the British government responded favourably to Basotho calls for the British not to cede the small territory to the new republic, and Basutoland was maintained as a colony operating under indirect rule despite being entirely surrounded by South Africa. For the following half a century, the British left intact the tribal structures of the Basotho, among whom many minor chiefs owed allegiance to a paramount chief descended from Moshoeshe. Initially Basutoland thrived on the export of grain to the mining regions of South Africa, but gradually it became manpower that was exported, and the colony became entirely dependent on the powerful nation surrounding it.

Changes elsewhere on the continent during the 1950s gave the Basotho hopes of internal self-government, and at this time two political parties were formed: the leftist Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) and the traditionalist Basotho National Party (BNP) led by Chief Leabua Jonathan. A constitutional conference in London in 1964 approved a new pre-independence constitution, which went into effect after the country's first elections were held in 1965. In the election Chief Jonathan's BNP narrowly defeated the BCP. A close National Assembly vote passed an independence motion in April 1966 and Britain granted the newly renamed Kingdom of Lesotho independence on 4 October 4 1966. Chief Jonathan became prime minister and paramount chief Seeiso was crowned King Moshoeshe II and made head of state.

The first general election following independence was held in **1970**. When it appeared that the ruling BNP would be defeated, Prime Minister Jonathan declared a state of emergency and suspended the constitution. Despite admitting he had lost the election, Jonathan arrested the leadership of the BCP and used repressive measures to put down the resulting unrest, claiming that Communist influences were to blame. The King was put under house arrest before going into exile in the Netherlands. He returned in **December** of the same year.

The BCP attacked police posts in January 1974 in an alleged attempt to overthrow the BNP. Reprisals for the abortive coup were severe, and many BCP supporters were arrested, killed, imprisoned or went into exile. The BCP continued to struggle

against BNP rule throughout the 1970s and 1980s and responsibility for periodic bombings in Maseru was claimed by the Lesotho Liberation Army (LLA), the military wing of the BCP.

Jonathan claimed that South Africa was deliberately allowing the LLA to use its territory as a base of operations, and he kept a profoundly hostile stance toward South Africa. This won him much international approval but caused serious problems for Lesotho, which was economically dependent on South Africa. Relations reached crisis point in 1976 when South Africa granted 'independence' to Transkei, a Bantu homeland on Lesotho's south-eastern border. Along with the rest of the world Lesotho refused to recognise this sham independence, and South Africa retaliated by closing the border that surrounded Lesotho, leading to serious economic pressures in the country. Lesotho further angered South Africa by harbouring members of the banned African National Congress (ANC) and in December 1982 South African troops raided residences in Maseru, killing 42 people including at least 12 Basotho.

Parliamentary elections scheduled for 1985 were called off by Jonathan after opposition parties boycotted them, claiming that the voters' roll was fraudulent. South Africa took the opportunity afforded to them to destabilise Lesotho, first by conducting cross-border raids and then by imposing a blockade on 1 January 1986. Severe food shortages quickly followed, and on 20 January a military coup led by Major General Justin Metsing Lekhanya overthrew the BNP. Executive and legislative power was transferred to Moshoeshe II, who was advised by a six-man military council. ANC exiles were expelled and political activity was banned. Shortly after this, South Africa ended its blockade. After Moshoeshe II refused to dismiss several senior officers Lekhanya exiled the King (for the second time since independence) and made his son Letsie III king in his place.

Scepticism arose among Basotho citizens about the military government and its links with Pretoria, and many called for a return to civilian rule. In **April 1991** there was a bloodless second coup and Lekhanya was replaced by Major General Phisoane Ramaema, who promised a return to civilian rule through introducing democratic elections. In **1993** a general election did take place and the BCP were voted into power with a landslide victory, winning all 65 seats in the national assembly. New Prime Minister Ntsu Mokhehle appointed several opposition ministers to his cabinet and offered to appoint four BNP members, although only one accepted.

In **January 1994**, army troops mutinied in Maseru after being refused a 100 per cent pay increase. After three weeks of sporadic fighting, the two factions within the military agreed to a Commonwealth-brokered negotiated settlement with the Government.

In **August 1994**, the fledgling democratic constitution received a blow when King Letsie III suspended Parliament and imposed a 'Ruling Council'. The King had been angered by the Government's creation of a board of inquiry to investigate the dethroning of his father. Although Letsie had the support of the security forces, his royal coup was condemned internally and internationally, and the United States cut off aid. The crisis was resolved in September when Letsie abdicated and his father Moshoeshe II returned to the throne. However when Moshoeshe II was killed in a car crash in **1996** Letsie reclaimed the throne, much to the consternation of pro-democracy groups.

In **1996** a dissident faction with the BCP attempted to oust Prime Minister Mokhehle on the grounds that he was incompetent and, at 78, too old for office. In response Mokhehle formed a new party, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) and a

majority of MPs followed him, enabling him to form a new government. The LCD won a majority in the **1998** general election under the leadership of Pakalitha Mosisili, who had succeeded Mokhehle as party leader. Despite the elections being pronounced free and fair by international observers, the other parties rejected the results and protests by opposition supporters occurred across the country. Disgruntled soldiers engaged in rioting that destroyed parts of the capital and the government requested SADC intervention to prevent a coup and restore stability. A joint task force of troops from South Africa and Botswana entered the country in **September 1998** and halted the uprising.

An Interim Political Authority (IPA) was set up to find a way of preventing unrest occurring after future elections by making alterations to the electoral system. An element of proportional representation was decided on as a way to guarantee opposition representation in parliament. The new system retained the existing 80 'first-past-the-post' seats but added 40 seats to be filled on a proportional basis. Elections were first held under this new system in **May 2002**, and the LCD won again. For the first time, due to the changes in the electoral system, opposition parties gained a significant number of seats in the National Assembly.

In **February 2004** Mosisili declared a state of emergency, due to the effects of a severe three-year drought, and appealed for food aid to ease severe shortages. In March the first phase of the multi-billion-dollar Lesotho Highlands Water Project, aimed at supplying water to South Africa, was officially opened.

A split in the LCD in **2006** forced an early second general election under the revised system, and the vote in **February 2007** resulted in another LCD victory, with the party gaining 62 out of 120 seats. The National Independent Party (NIP), an ally of the LCD, came second with 21 seats and the All Basotho Convention, the new party formed from the LCD split, came third with 17. Despite some dissatisfaction about the results from the opposition no serious unrest followed.

Although the largely peaceful elections in **2002** and **2007** are a positive step forward for the country, much is still to be done. While Lesotho is categorised as a medium developed country (albeit marginally) in the 2010 Human Development Report, more than 40 per cent of the population still live below the poverty line on less than \$1.25 a day and around 50 per cent of Basotho are unemployed.

## Population

The population distribution of Lesotho is 25 per cent urban and 75 per cent rural. However, it is estimated that the annual increase in the urban population is 3.5 per cent. The annual population growth rate is 0.1 per cent. Lesotho consists almost entirely of the Basotho, a Bantu-speaking people group: an estimated 99.7 per cent of citizens identify themselves as Basotho, and the term Basotho is preferred to Lesothan when describing people from Lesotho. Other ethnic groups include Europeans, numbering in the thousands, and an estimated 5,000 Chinese working mostly in the textiles industry.

The population of Lesotho is estimated to be around 90 per cent Christian. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'i and members of traditional indigenous religions comprise the remaining 10 per cent of the population.

## Politics

The Lesotho Government is a parliamentary monarchy. The Prime Minister, Pakalitha Bethuel Mosisili, is head of government and has executive authority. The

King serves a largely ceremonial function and possesses no executive authority and is prohibited from actively participating in political initiatives.

The Lesotho Congress for Democracy controls a majority in the National Assembly (the lower house of parliament) with 63 seats (after one ABC member crossed the floor in 2009). The All Basotho Convention, under the leadership of former foreign minister Tom Thabane, is the main opposition. The upper house of parliament, called the Senate, is composed of 22 principal chiefs whose membership is hereditary, and 11 appointees of the King, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister.

The constitution provides for an independent judicial system, made up of the High Court, the Court of Appeal, Magistrate's Courts, and traditional courts that exist predominantly in rural areas. Basic civil liberties, including freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of the press are protected by the constitution. Lesotho was ranked 12th out of 48 sub-Saharan African countries in the 2008 Ibrahim Index of African Governance.

### **Economy**

Lesotho is geographically surrounded by South Africa and economically integrated with it as well. The majority of households subsist on farming or work as migrant labourers, primarily miners who remain in South Africa for three to nine months. The western lowlands form the main agricultural zone. Almost per cent of the population earns some income through crop cultivation or animal husbandry, with over half the country's income coming from the agricultural sector.

Water and diamonds are Lesotho's significant natural resources. The 21-year, multi-billion-dollar Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) began in 1986. The LHWP is designed to capture, store, and transfer water from the Orange River system to South Africa's Free State and greater Johannesburg area, which features a large concentration of South African industry, population, and agriculture. The World Bank, African Development Bank, European Investment Bank, and many other bilateral donors financed the project.

Lesotho is a member of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), which eliminates tariffs on the trade of goods between other member countries Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland. Lesotho has received a large amount of economic aid from a variety of sources, including the United States, the World Bank, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and Germany.

Economic woes, exacerbated by periodic drought, high HIV/AIDS rates and the global economic crisis, have been compounded by the scrapping of a global textile quota system which exposed producers to Asian competition. Thousands of jobs in the industry have been lost, adding to already high levels of unemployment.

Some think the only viable future direction for Lesotho is for it to become part of South Africa- its 10<sup>th</sup> province. Others counter that this ignores what the Basotho want and their proud history of remaining independent from their neighbours, even during apartheid, and it is debatable South Africa itself would welcome such a challenge

### **Civil society and trade unions**

The Lesotho Congress of Democratic Unions (LECODU) is a national trade union center in Lesotho. It was formed in 2004 by the merger of the Congress of Lesotho Trade Unions and the Lesotho Federation of Democratic Unions (LFDU).

The Lesotho Textile Exporters Association (LTEA) was established in 1993. It represents the industry at national, regional and international level. Foreign employers, mainly textile groups from South Africa, Hong Kong and Taiwan, sometimes ignore national legislation and pay wages below the statutory minimum. They can be very anti-union, and collaborate with government to declare strikes 'illegal'. However, according to a report published in 2007 by the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations, the pressure exerted on the big brands with suppliers in Lesotho by NGOs and trade union organisations were having a real impact. The Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (LCN) is a Council of organised non-governmental organisations. It was established in 1990 with the objective of providing supportive services to the NGO Community. The Council does this through networking, leadership training and development, information dissemination, capacity building and representation when dealing with the government and international community.

### **Achievements**

1. Improved prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV (PMTCT): UNICEF has noted that there has been significant success in the country's rapid expansion of prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV services. In 2006, only 5 per cent of HIV positive pregnant women in Lesotho received PMTCT services, today the coverage stands at 42 per cent. Out of 207 health facilities around the country, 180 of them now provide PMTCT services.
2. Improved working condition of textile workers: In the past there have been problems with factory working conditions in the textile industry in Lesotho. Recently however, Lesotho is no longer considered a sweatshop economy and is gaining recognition as an ethical sourcing destination. Most of the factory owners have signed codes of conduct which are policed by US retailers and clothing brands. Women workers have benefited through provisions around maternity leave, health and safety, working hours and improved working conditions.
3. Corruption: the Lesotho Government has aggressively prosecuted corruption charges against international corporations involved in the Highlands Water Project who bribed officials in order to secure contracts. A number of these cases have resulted in convictions.

### **Development Challenges**

1. HIV/AIDS: Lesotho has the third highest HIV prevalence in the world. Just under one in four 15-49 year olds are living with HIV. Around 18,000 people died from AIDS in 2007 and 110,000 children have lost at least one parent to the epidemic. Over half of the 260,000 adults living with HIV in Lesotho are women.
2. Food insecurity: the UN World Food Programme (WFP) has been providing food aid to Lesotho since 1965, yet it is still not closer to achieving food self-sufficiency. The Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC) said between 400,000 and 450,000 people would be in need of food assistance before the harvest in April 2010. Continued food and agricultural support, coupled with falling production, have led some to believe that aid might actually be at the root of the problem. Some complain that food handouts create disincentives to produce. Lesotho has a lack of agricultural inputs and poor farming practices which mean the quality of the already scarce farmland is deteriorating too. Increasingly erratic weather patterns and the impact of HIV/AIDS on farming families are crippling the country's agricultural production.
3. Lesotho Highlands Water Project: despite promises by developers, human development benefits from the multi-billion-dollar project have remained elusive.

Lesotho's fragile mountain environment has been degraded and at least 27,000 people have lost their homes. A further 150,000 people downstream of the dams have had their livelihoods affected by reduced river flows. Income from water exports was supposed to contribute to a development fund, but this fund was dogged by corruption and closed in 2003. Compensation and resettlement programmes have failed to restore the livelihoods of displaced people, so it is imperative that more effort is made to provide for those dispossessed by the project. One potential income source that could be developed is tourism. Reservoirs created by the dams are ideal for water-sports, and could be used to provide much-needed jobs to those who have lost farmland. Another issue with the LHWP is that severe droughts have occurred in Lesotho since 2001: in a country actively exporting its own water supplies this is clearly unacceptable and a balance must be found between exporting and providing for the needs of Lesotho's own citizens.

4. Freedom House changed Lesotho's status from 'Free' to 'Partly Free' in 2010 due to unresolved disputes over seats in the legislature from elections in 2007 and 2008, and the breakdown in internationally mediated negotiations between the government and opposition. There is concern that undemocratic governance is creeping back in to Basotho politics and efforts to ensure democratic, representative government must be renewed.

**For more information on Lesotho, visit the following websites:**

Government of Lesotho [www.lesotho.gov.ls/](http://www.lesotho.gov.ls/)

Lesotho Council of NGO's [www.lecongo.org.ls/programmes/cssp.php](http://www.lecongo.org.ls/programmes/cssp.php)

Africa Travel Guide – Lesotho [www.africaguide.com/country/lesotho/](http://www.africaguide.com/country/lesotho/)

Christian Council of Lesotho [www.edicisa.org.zw/FOCCISA/lesotho/index.html](http://www.edicisa.org.zw/FOCCISA/lesotho/index.html)