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Lephema Defies Matekane as Labour Unions  
March Under LDF Intimidation

*...Page 2*

Democracy Will Always Win!

*...Page 15*

## RSL Raids City Council Yard Over Millions In Unpaid Tax

**Page 8**



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# Lephema Defies Matekane as Labour Unions March Under LDF Intimidation

**A labour protest that tested the Matekane administration's tolerance for dissent also exposed a quiet power struggle within the ruling RFP, as Police Minister Lebona Lephema allegedly defied the Prime Minister to allow the march.**

By: Tholoana Lesenya

Maseru

What began as a tense standoff between labour unions and the government over protest permits unfolded into a political power play within the ruling Revolution for Prosperity. On 29 October 2025, the Maseru City Council (MCC) granted labour unions permission to hold processions targeting the Sam Matekane government. Sources within the development-partner community said external pressure helped sway the administration into issuing the permit. However, the police were yet to issue the final permit as required by law. The MCC approval represented one step closer to legality.

Lesotho's trade unions had the previous day appealed to the Minister of Police and threatened court action after their earlier request to hold a protest march over job losses was denied. The coalition of unions, representing thousands of textile and garment workers, said they had followed all legal procedures under the Public Meetings and Processions Act of 2010. Despite this, Maseru Police Commissioner Tšeliso Moerane rejected the application. In a letter dated 23 October, Commissioner Moerane cited "crucial omissions" in the unions'



submission. The police stated that while they respected the right to assemble, they carried a "huge responsibility to protect life and property and promote peace and well-being of the people."

They outlined four deficiencies: the estimated number of participants, identification of organisers responsible for maintaining order, a permit from the Maseru City Council, and proof of prior arrangement with the Prime Minister's office. Moerane asked the unions to explain why their "intended procession cannot be refused."

The MCC's move was widely seen as a compromise. Development partners, whose funding and conditions emphasise governance and civic freedoms, were said to have quietly leaned on the government. The argument was that Lesotho could not credibly claim to pursue reforms while suppressing the right to assembly. The city council's decision thus reflected a tactical retreat from total restriction.

On Friday, the labour pro-

cession had taken place in the capital under tight police surveillance. Thousands of workers carrying banners marched peacefully, voicing frustrations over job losses and economic stagnation. Leader of the Basotho National Party, Hon. Machesetsa Mofomobe voiced his concerns about the behaviour of the Lesotho Defense Force (LDF) who had held road blocks searching both motorists and passengers who were attending the march. Mofomobe called this intimidation by LDF and put the blame squarely on LDF Commander Mojalefa Letsoela.

EFTU leader Tsepang Makakole said they were grateful to the Minister of Police, Lebona Lephema, for his intervention. "Apart from the pressure from development partners, we would also like to thank Minister Lephema who ensured that we secured the permit," Makakole said. Government sources revealed that Lephema, who heads both the police and local government ministries, went against Prime

Minister Matekane's wishes. The Prime Minister was reportedly opposed to granting the unions the right to protest. Insiders within the RFP told Lesotho Tribune that the move has widened internal rifts within the party. A subtle power struggle is said to be unfolding over succession planning. Lephema is reportedly unhappy with Matekane's preferred choice of successor. "Lebona is flexing his muscle trying to undermine the PM. We will deal with him properly," said a state house insider who spoke anonymously.

Adding to the tension, Matekane was scheduled to receive China-donated agricultural implements on the same day as the protest. Sources within the party said the Prime Minister ignored the unions' memorandum, sending a minister from his office to receive it instead.

"Ntate is busy. He will not waste his time by attending that march. Those are politicians, not labour unions," said one RFP insider not authorised to speak to the media.

Friday's procession marked the first protest under Matekane's administration and a rare public show of defiance by organised labour. It also exposed widening cracks inside the ruling party, where loyalty to the Prime Minister appears to be tested by internal ambition and political muscle-flexing.



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# Sekhamane Highlights Need for Parliamentary Oversight in Southern Africa

By: Staff Reporter

A recent keynote address by Right Honourable Tlohang Sekhamane, Speaker of the National Assembly of Lesotho, this week has underscored the critical role of parliamentary oversight in combating corruption, maladministration and impunity across Southern Africa.

The speech was delivered at the 17th SADCOPAC (Southern African Development Community Organisation of Public Accounts Committees) Conference and 21st

Annual General Meeting held in Maseru. Shifting his focus to the ongoing conference's theme: "Strengthening Oversight for Sustainable Development: Enhancing Parliamentary Engagement in Public Financial Management," Sekhamane highlighted three significant maladies affecting Africa: corruption, maladministration and impunity.

He argued that these issues are central to Africa's lagging performance in global indicators such as GDP,

poverty rates and governance indices, dismissing theories attributing these failings to cultural biases in global indicators and asserting the need for practical solutions and accountability. Sekhamane emphasised that parliamentarians have a fundamental duty to represent the people, protect their welfare through effective legislation, allocate resources responsibly and exercise oversight to prevent abuses of power. He expressed concern that parliaments might be ceding too much control to

executive branches, undermining their ability to address critical issues such as unemployment. Among the many provocative questions he had for the delegates at the conference were whether the Public Accounts Committees of their country are known for their strict, no-nonsense approach, or for the high-profile prosecutions resulting from their work.

He also wanted to know about the rate of corruption and other maladies and if the PACs present at the conference would return home to success-

fully eradicate the issues. Sekhamane's address served as a call to action for parliamentarians to strengthen their oversight roles, tackle corruption and ensure accountability in public financial management.

Having addressed multiple organisations regarding corruption issues in Lesotho, Sekhamane left an impression of a leader hungry for change very ready to work for it. One of his most common addresses includes enhancing parliamentary engagement in the Public Financial Management.



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# Ruling Party MP Sues Police for Torture

By: Seipati Matobo

Maseru

A member of parliament from the ruling Revolution for Prosperity (RFP) party, Mr. Puseletso Lejone, is demanding over M5 million in damages from the Government of Lesotho and the police for what he calls a serious violation of his human rights.

In a letter dated 2 October 2025, Advocate Zwelakhe Mda KC, acting on Lejone's instructions, accuses twenty-seven officers of the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) led by Inspector Pheta of storming the MP's home in July. The officers allegedly scaled his fence, handcuffed him in front of his family, and beat him with sticks while firing shots in the air. The letter states that Lejone was dragged around the village in cuffs as frightened villagers watched. He was later taken to Police Headquarters in Maseru, where he claims further degrading treatment. Lejone, who sits in parliament under the RFP banner, is demanding



M5,007,000 in compensation. This includes M1 million for unlawful arrest, M3 million for torture, M1 million for impairment of dignity, and M7,000 for medical costs.

Advocate Mda warns

that if the Attorney General fails to pay within 30 days, Lejone will take legal action against both the Government of Lesotho and the Commissioner of Police in pursuit of justice.

The case puts the Matekane administration in an awkward position as it involves one of its own MPs accusing the police, under a government he helped elect, of acts of torture and brutality.

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# RSL Raids City Council Yard Over Millions In Unpaid Tax

By: Staff Reporter

Maseru

 On Friday 31 October 2025, the Revenue Services Lesotho (RSL) reportedly entered the premises of the Maseru City Council (MCC) at Maseru West and removed yellow-plant equipment valued at over M20 million, according to multiple independent sources. The move followed a tax-collection process initiated by RSL against MCC for outstanding liabilities. RSL's spokesperson, Thabang Loko, declined comment, stating: "We are obligated by law not to discuss taxpayers' affairs, therefore RSL will not comment on this." MCC likewise did not issue a statement in response.

## A Broader Enforcement Drive

This incident sits within a broader pattern of aggressive enforcement by RSL this year. Two recent high-profile cases illustrate the trend:

- The Lesotho Housing and Land Development Corporation (LHLDC), a state-owned enterprise, is subject to a court order

obtained by RSL for unpaid taxes amounting to M35,722,995.38. The order authorises seizure of movable and if necessary immovable assets

located in central Maseru.

- The Loti Brick (Pty) Ltd company also faces a tax liability in the region of M7.4

million following a court order for attachment of its property. Together, these show that RSL is willing to en-

**Continues in Page 11**



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# Lesotho, EU, UNICEF's National Social Protection Coordination Conference

By: Pheello Mosesi

According to the Lesotho National Social Protection Strategy of 2021- 2031, about 49.7 percent of Basotho live below the poverty line, with 80 per cent of this population residing in rural areas. The report also reveals a staggering statistic of 24.1 per cent being abysmal.

This week, UNICEF, the European Union and the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social Development joined forces to share ideas on how to strengthen coordination across sectors to enhance coherence, effectiveness and sustainability of the social protection initiatives in Lesotho.

In her remarks, Mahlapanane Makakole-Bodiba, the Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Gender, expressed the ministry's ambitions and aspirations that they anticipate the event will meet.

She highlighted the idea of the meeting- to strengthen collaboration and coordination among stakeholders to build a more integrated, inclusive and effective system- as an initiative which should not be taken lightly, emphasising that social protection coordination is critical for effective service delivery, elimination of duplication and strengthening of overall system resilience. "This is so much imperative due to diminishing funding and increased requirements for social protection," she said, noting that the conference sets a stage for deliberation while improving efficiency to ensure no group is left



behind.

With initiatives like Nt-lafatsa Bana, an initiative supported by the government of Lesotho, the EU and UNICEF, Lesotho already receives financial support from one and technical support from the other.

This programme was implemented to improve the well-being and development of children living under the Child Grants Program Beneficiary households, improve their access to essential services including birth registration, nutrition, water and sustainable energy solutions and increase the efficient delivery of social assistance systems by creating new digital applications to update the National Information System for Social Assis-

tance, enhance management information system and digitize payments for beneficiaries.

The UNICEF Representative to Lesotho, Deepak Bhaskaran, reiterated the importance of unity in addressing social issues, highlighting the importance of focusing on four key priorities: evaluation of the effectiveness of current coordination mechanisms, recognition that coordination requires sustainable financing, breaking down silos across service clusters and strengthening coordination capacity at all levels. "Effective coordination depends not only on structures but also on the people who operate them. We must invest in capacity building for coordination teams, clarify roles and responsibilities and foster

a culture of collaboration across sectors and levels of government," Bhaskaran said.

Mette Sunnergren, Head of EU delegation to Lesotho, said they eagerly anticipate the complete digitalisation of social protection subsidies, adding that progress of this will not only enhance sustainability but also reduce costs and improve accessibility for all recipients to ensure that help reaches those who need it most.

The three-threatened partnership between the Government of Lesotho, the EU and UNICEF has spanned for over 15 years and has proven to be a partnership best described by Sunnergren as a "robust and resilient social protection system in the country".

# Lesotho Enhances Health Security with Second Joint External Evaluation

By: Lemohang Botsane

The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with key global health partners, hosted the second Joint External Evaluation (JEE) in Maseru, marking a significant milestone in Lesotho's commitment to enhancing national health security.

The evaluation, conducted under the International Health Regulations (IHR) monitoring and evaluation framework, brought together national and international

experts to assess the country's preparedness and response to public health threats.

Speaking on behalf of the Minister of Health, Deputy Principal Secretary Matsoanelo Monyobi, emphasised that JEE is a crucial process that fosters transparency, mutual accountability and shared progress.

"This event demonstrates Lesotho's strong commitment to strengthening national health security and improving our country's preparedness and response to public



health threats," she said. JEE, a voluntary process, provides an evidence-based assessment of a country's capacity to prevent, detect and respond to health emergencies.

Lesotho first underwent the evaluation in 2017, a process that exposed weaknesses in the country's public health sector and identified areas that needed strengthening. The current evaluation process, therefore, aims to build on the progress made since, ensuring a stronger and more resilient health system.

Some of the key objec-

tives of the Joint External Evaluation include Lesotho's capacity to assess, prevent, detect and respond to health emergencies, identification of areas that need improvement, collaboration between national and international experts, and to enhance transparency and accountability in health security.

The evaluation process involves a thorough assessment of Lesotho's health security capabilities, including its ability to detect and respond to public health threats.

The findings at the end

of the assessment will inform recommendations for improvement, enabling the country to strengthen its health systems and better protect its citizens.

This initiative is a testament to Lesotho's commitment to improving its health security and its collaboration with global health partners, including the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the Pandemic Fund and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC).

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**Continued from Page 8**

force tax claims not only against private firms but also public entities and parastatals.

**What the MCC Seizure Means**

The removal of over M20 million in plant equipment from MCC raises several urgent questions:

- What is the exact amount of MCC's outstanding tax liability, and what period does it cover?
- What process did RSL follow: Was there a demand notice, a court order, a period for negotiation or settlement?
- How will MCC maintain its operations and service deliv-

ery if key capital equipment has been removed?

- Does this signal that even local government entities can expect direct asset attachment if they fall behind on tax obligations?

**Implications for Surrounding Institutions**

For local authorities and state-owned enterprises, the message is clear: RSL appears to be ramping up enforcement. Entities that may have considered themselves insulated from tax action may need to reassess. The fact that LHLDC and Loti Brick are now subject to formal attachment orders suggests that the net is widening.

From a governance per-

spective, these actions underscore the importance of regular compliance with tax obligations and the risks of delays or defaults. Local government bodies in particular should review their internal controls, debt management practices, and engage proactively with RSL if they anticipate difficulty meeting obligations.

**Next Steps**

We will monitor the situation for:

- A formal response from MCC about its tax position and the nature of the seized equipment;
- Confirmation from RSL regarding the legal basis for the

seizure (e.g., whether a court judgment or warrant of execution was in place);

- Any follow-up actions by MCC—such as appeal, repayment plan, or public disclosure of the liability;

• Whether other local authorities or municipalities face similar enforcement by RSL in the near-term.

For now, the story highlights that in Lesotho's tax regime enforcement is no longer something that happens quietly in the background, it is visible, significant, and potentially disruptive for even publicly-owned or municipal organisations.

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# When Telecom Meets Law and Technology

By: Staff Reporter

**U**nder the theme “Leading the future- our shared role in legal evolution, the Vodacom Legal Symposium and Technology brought together legal professionals, regulators and technology experts to address critical topics including technology and law, stakeholder engagement as a cornerstone for policy development and the role of alternative dispute resolution.

For the telecommunications company, this symposium is a strategic move to navigate challenges, build trust and showcase its role in the country’s digital future.

It acted as a provider of direct dialogue with stakeholders on critical, evolving issues such as data privacy, cybersecurity and financial regulations, helping the company mitigate risk and stay compliant. Rethabile Hoohlo, the EHOD Legal and Compliance at Vodacom Lesotho, said as a telecommunications company, their focus extends beyond conventional success as they are intentional about including a deep commitment in terms of cultivating a culture that actively engages all their stakeholders. The symposium, a milestone in the company’s legal department’s view, aimed at cultivating fund leadership while driving discussions on critical policy enhancement and technological developments that will define a shared future going forward.

Hoohlo set an alarming tone in a room half-filled with legal practitioners



when she emphasised that Lesotho’s legal profession was very old yet it now intersects with humanity’s newest and most dynamic creation-digital technology. To move with the times, Hoohlo encouraged relevance, highlighting the need for a robust and supportive legal framework. According to the telecommunications legal expert, the Social Electronic Transactions and Electronic Comments Bill of 2013, which was revised in 2020, is one of the few important legislations to consider if the goal is to accept change and ignore the risk of irrelevance.

The symposium’s discussions were shaped around the adoption of innovative tools, AI-driven discovery and smart contracts to digital case-managing systems; changes that are entrusted to enhance efficiency, ensure transparency and expand access to justice. “To resist this evolution is to risk failure. To embrace it, on the other hand, is to redefine the very proposition of physical compassion in a digital economy,” Hoohlo said.

The formulation of law

and policy, in Hoohlo’s opinion, can no longer be a siloed exercise and the velocity of technological change demands a new model of collaborative governance. As a result, she urged the championing of inclusive dialogue that will encourage robust alliances between the government, the private sector and social awareness.

Mohale Ralebitso, the telecommunications company CEO, added to these sentiments, saying generations to come are already at a high risk of being chipped by the stream of technology, thus emphasising the need to change.

He made an example of AI, saying lawyers and people who are in the protection of intellectual property know the challenge the robot is posing as there are bots used to consolidate, re-digest and re-cut things.

He reminded law practitioners to be mindful of the necessity to maintain integrity as they adapt and adopt the use of AI to engage matters of the law as that is what people today are doing in their work.

“This is important because

we have to, with your knowledge, plug in the young people into being able to engage the challenges of our time, but to do so in a manner that respects that there are frameworks to observe,” Ralebitso reminded. He, however, said if lawyers are going to be at the convergence of technology and what the law requires of them, they should ensure they are active architects of research’s future and not merely the people who are the handbrakes in it.

The President of the Law Society of Lesotho, a representative of the legal fraternity in the country, Advocate Lintle Tuke, commended Vodacom Lesotho for the symposium, applauding it for not just being a meeting of minds but a gathering of custodians.

The thoughtful gesture, Tuke said, was a humble reminder that technology and law are not rivals, “in fact, they are dancing partners.” He assured the company that, as the legal fraternity of Lesotho, they were ready to partner up with other stakeholders to build a stronger framework for data protection and cyber resilience.

He reminded lawyers present of their importance to society, that when society moves into chaos, they are the first line of defence, “the bedrock upon which justice, accountability and responsibility can thrive.” “So as we lead the future and embrace technology, may we also protect that which Dick the Butcher feared the most; a profession that defends justice even when it is inconvenient,” Advocate Tuke exclaimed.



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# EDITORIAL

## Democracy Will Always Win!



# 15

Lesotho Tribune

By: Editorial



Here is the truth that keeps returning, no matter how loudly a government insists otherwise. Democracy wears down repression. It is patient. It is stubborn. It arrives with court papers, union placards, and the small courage of citizens who show up in daylight and ask to be heard.

Three years after taking office, the Matekane administration has run into that truth. Workers tried to march over job losses and the police said no. Unions then appealed to the minister and prepared to go to court. Within days, municipal authorities allowed a procession in Maseru. The sequence is not a triumph of benevolence. It is a reminder that rights outlast the political weather. Reports show unions threatened litigation after a denied permit, while the protest effort broadened through workers' associations and civil groups. Shortly after, the Maseru City Council granted permission for a procession.

That progression matters. It shows why power eventually bends to rules that are older and larger than any cabinet. The Constitution sits at the centre of this story. It protects the freedom of peaceful assembly and expression. Those are not favours that leaders hand out on good days. They are guarantees that leaders must respect on bad days, especially when criticism stings. The text is clear. Freedom of expression is protected. Freedom of peaceful assembly is protected. Any restriction must be narrow, lawful, and necessary for things like public safety or order. That is the law in Lesotho, not a suggestion. There is also an ordinary statute that draws the lines on processions. It requires notice and gives police limited powers to refuse, but only on exceptional grounds tied to real risks to peace or safety. Our courts have said so in plain terms. If you block a march, you must show compelling reasons, not vague discomfort with dissent.

That standard is why permits denied on thin reasoning tend to crumble when challenged. The law forces the state to justify itself. That is how democracy wears down shortcuts. Set this against the timeline of power. Sam Matekane took the oath on 28 October 2022 and formed a coalition government in early November. New leaders arrive with promises, energy, and a theory of control. Then the institutions quietly ask the same hard questions. Did you follow the Constitution. Did you follow the statute. Can you show proportional justification. Governments that ignore those questions discover that unions, courts, and councils can answer for them. That is not instability. That is the immune system of a constitutional order. Some will try to spin the late permission as magnanimity. It is not. It is compliance. Others will claim that marches threaten order. The law already balances that

risk. It allows restrictions, but it demands evidence. The burden sits with the state, not with citizens who want to walk in their own capital. When officials act as if a permit is a favour, they run into litigation and headlines. When they obey the Constitution, people protest, hand over memoranda, and go home. The streets stay open. The republic breathes.

There is an instructive lesson for the administration. You cannot win a contest against rights that are written down, litigated, and practiced by a public that refuses to be quiet. You can delay. You can posture. You can throw up roadblocks. In the end the text reasserts itself, the courts insist on reasons, and the unions find a legal route. That slow pressure is what turned a denial into a procession this week. That same pressure will keep returning every time the state forgets who owns the public square. Democracy is not a vibe. It is paperwork, statutes, and constitutional clauses that force governments to explain themselves. It is also people who keep showing up until the explanation is either given or ordered by a judge. After three years in power, the Matekane government has been reminded of that. Those who believe they can outlast democracy should look again. The record of the last week already says otherwise.



16

Lesotho Tribune

by:Hlalele 'Neko

Once upon a time, Lesotho's manufacturing belt was alive. Around 50 529 people worked in factories in 2020. Back in 2016, it was 46 000. A net gain of almost 6 000 jobs in just three years. Even during the worst months of Covid-19, the LNDC boasted of retaining close to 48 000 factory jobs.

**So what happened?**

**Where did the jobs go?**

If your answer starts with "Donald Trump," please stop and go fly a kite.

Trump only took office in 2025. Our job losses began long before that. The truth is harder to swallow. We did this to ourselves. Factories closed. Orders dried up. But the reasons were local too. Our costs rose. Our power flickered. Our infrastructure aged. When a brand in New York or Tokyo looks for suppliers, they compare more than wages. They compare reliability. And Lesotho's record is no longer convincing.

# OPINION

## Where Did the Jobs Go, Lesotho?

### ...IF YOUR ANSWER STARTS WITH "DONALD TRUMP," PLEASE STOP AND GO FLY A KITE



Global demand changed after the pandemic. Supply chains shifted. Countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, and Vietnam undercut us on price and efficiency. We relied on AGOA access but never built beyond it. We thought preferential trade terms were permanent. They were not.

Inside the country, we failed to upgrade. We trained workers only after hiring them. We import-

ed every input; zippers, thread, packaging and still called it "manufacturing." We never built proper linkages. When borders tightened, everything stopped. And while we comforted ourselves with retention numbers, the reality on the ground was shrinking. Some factories downsized shifts. Others paid half wages. The LNDC counted jobs that barely existed.

**The painful question is not who took our jobs. It is what we did to lose them.**

If Lesotho wants to rebuild, it must stop chasing ghosts. Fix the power grid. Fix the data. Build local supply chains. Train before hiring. Diversify markets. And stop pretending that old AGOA-era growth will come back by itself.

**The jobs did not vanish. We watched them leave.**

# The selective memory of western critique must not derail Africa's preferred path to genuine development

By: Silence Charumbira

**H**istorical amnesia about colonial exploitation. Recent Western policy briefs on Chinese activities in Africa reveal troubling historical amnesia. For centuries, European and American corporations systematically extracted Africa's wealth through colonialism and continue doing so through neo-colonial arrangements. Western capitals were built directly on African minerals, timber, and enslaved labor—yet throughout this plunder, Western civil society, environmental watchdogs, and governments remained silent.

Western nations built their prosperity on centuries of unrestricted emissions and environmental destruction, yet now impose stringent climate requirements on developing nations. The same Western corporations that benefited from "weak" regulatory environments—deliberately created through structural adjustment programs imposed by Western-dominated financial institutions—now criticize Chinese firms operating under identical conditions. Western corporate environmental damage in Africa rarely generates criticism. This selective outrage reveals the primary concern is not environmental protection, but maintaining Western commercial dominance. Deconstructing flawed recommendations. Western policy reports sys-



Silence Charumbira is an international journalist based in Maseru, Lesotho. He is former Deputy Editor of the Lesotho Times and Sunday Express. He has also worked with multiple reputable organisations like China Daily, Guangming, Associated Press (AP) The Guardian and CNN, among others. He writes on diverse topics including China-Africa relations. Views expressed in this article are his own and do not necessarily represent those of the publication.

tematically attribute environmental degradation to "Chinese entities" while ignoring the multinational nature of African extractive industries. Many sites involve partnerships between Chinese, Western, and local actors, yet damage is selectively attributed to Chinese participants without comparative analysis showing whether Chinese operations are systematically worse than Western counterparts. Environmental destruction in African mining predates

Chinese involvement by decades. Western corporations established the extractive infrastructure and exploitative practices characterizing the sector. Many "Chinese companies" are actually joint ventures with significant Western investment and technical participation. The neat attribution of environmental problems to "Chinese" entities obscures globalized capital and shared responsibility. Impractical and discriminatory recommendations

The policy recommendations reveal their true purpose: creating obstacles to Chinese engagement rather than solving environmental problems. Suggestions that African countries implement comprehensive digital reporting systems ignore the reality that most African governments operate with analogue systems. The reports fail to address who provides digital infrastructure, who maintains it, or where data is stored—likely because

*Continues in page 18*

Continued from page 17

honest answers would reveal Western technology firms controlling the systems. This represents digital colonialism embedding Western surveillance into African governance. The recommendation for visa requirements specifically targeting Chinese nationals is transparently discriminatory. This would restrict Chinese mobility while maintaining visa-free arrangements for Western nationals, hampering legitimate business, cultural exchange, and technical cooperation while doing little for environmental protection. This exposes the recommendation as a geopolitical tool to disconnect Africa from China rather than genuine environmental protection. Modeling development against China's environmental protection achievements China has achieved remarkable environmental progress contradicting Western narratives. China has incorporated environmental protection into its Five-Year Plans since 1975, with increasingly sophisticated approaches, and has developed some of the world's most comprehensive environmental legislation, demonstrating that rapid development can transition toward sustainability through strong state capacity. Since the 11th Five-Year Plan, China has included binding environmental targets as government promises, representing governmental commitment to environmental outcomes few nations have matched. China's achievements include massive reforestation programs, dramatic air pollution

reductions, leadership in renewable energy deployment, and the world's largest carbon trading scheme. This demonstrates environmental protection and economic development need not be mutually exclusive—a model directly relevant to African countries seeking their own development pathways. China's 15th five-year plan: deepening environmental commitment China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) places green development and environmental protection at the center of its development strategy, with this cycle placing low-carbon transformation front and center through ecological restoration, green manufacturing, renewable energy, and digital governance. This domestic commitment demonstrates China's seriousness about sustainable development and provides a model that African nations can study and adapt. Unlike Western climate action focused on imposing restrictions on developing nations while protecting Western industries, China's approach emphasizes technological solutions, renewable energy investment, and support for other developing nations' green transitions. This offers African countries partnership for environmental protection respecting their sovereignty and development needs. President Xi's concrete FOCAC commitments At the 2024 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), H.E. President Xi Jinping emphasized China is ready to help Africa build 'green growth en-

gines,' with China pledging 30 green cooperation projects focused on green investments in energy and renewable technology sectors, along with \$51 billion in financial support over three years. These are concrete pledges backed by financial resources, not mere rhetoric.

China announced it would 'use development assistance to deliver 1,000 'small and beautiful' projects to improve people's livelihoods,' reflecting a focused approach prioritizing tangible improvements in African lives. This evolution—moving from only massive infrastructure toward smaller-scale initiatives directly improving livelihoods—demonstrates China's willingness to adapt based on African partners' expressed needs.

Renewable energy impact and transformation in Lesotho The tangible benefits of Chinese investment become clear examining specific examples. In Lesotho, the Mafeteng Solar Power Plant Project, financed by the Exim Bank of China, generates 30MW of electricity that could power 30,000 homes, helping Lesotho optimize its energy structure and address electricity shortfalls that previously forced many people, especially in rural areas, to rely on biomass such as wood for fuel. This exemplifies China's 'small is beautiful' philosophy in practice. Rather than creating unsustainable debt burdens, this approach delivers meaningful energy access improvements directly impacting daily lives. The Lesotho government

has engaged Chinese firms to construct an additional 70 MW solar power plant, further expanding Chinese contributions to renewable energy. These investments address real needs in a country where only 47 percent of households have electricity access, concentrated in urban areas.

Unlike abstract policy recommendations, these projects represent concrete improvements in African lives. They demonstrate Chinese engagement delivers genuine development outcomes while advancing environmental sustainability—precisely the partnership African nations need. Impetus for African agency and rejection of weaponization of African voices African nations must recognize when their voices are weaponized to serve external geopolitical agendas. Western policy reports claim to incorporate African expertise, yet recommendations align with Western interests in containing China rather than genuinely empowering African institutions. True respect for African agency would produce recommendations centered on strengthening African institutions using African-designed solutions and South-South cooperation, not mechanisms increasing dependence on Western technical assistance and oversight.

African environmental experts must ask: who benefits from these recommendations? When proposals systematically favor arrangements embedding Western control into African governance, increasing dependence on Western technology, and

Continues in page 19

Continued from page 18

restricting partnerships with non-Western actors, they serve external interests. Genuine African agency means determining development pathways, environmental priorities, and international partnerships without external dictation. Strengthening South-South Cooperation African countries should deepen South-South cooperation as an alternative to dependent relationships with Western institutions. China's development experience—transforming from widespread poverty to prosperity within decades while increasingly addressing environmental challenges—offers directly relevant lessons far more applicable than Western models from countries that industrialized under completely different circumstances with unlimited colonial resources.

South-South cooperation could include: exchanges of environmental enforcement officials to share practical implementation experience; technical cooperation on renewable energy deployment including technology transfer and training; collaboration on developing appropriate environmental standards balancing development with ecological protection; and joint research on environmental challenges specific to developing countries.

This cooperation should extend beyond China to

Brazil, India, Vietnam, and other Global South nations with relevant experience, building a knowledge network on sustainable development reducing dependence on Western expertise. Seeking African agency and African-led solutions African nations must strengthen environmental governance by revitalizing enforcement of existing laws and building indigenous capacity—exactly the path China followed. This requires adequate funding for environmental agencies, eliminating corruption through institutional reform, and developing homegrown expertise rather than dependence on external consultants. Strengthening enforcement means ensuring environmental laws already on the books are implemented. Many African countries have adequate legislation; the problem is insufficient enforcement capacity. This requires investing in training inspectors, equipping them properly, ensuring adequate salaries reducing corruption incentives, and backing enforcement actions with political support.

Any digital transformation must be homegrown—developed by African engineers, hosted on African servers, controlled by African institutions. African countries pursuing digital governance must insist on technology transfer, local capacity building, and full control over data and systems.

Regional cooperation through African Union

mechanisms offers more promising governance frameworks than externally-designed systems. African nations should develop continent-wide environmental standards, monitoring frameworks, and enforcement cooperation respecting national sovereignty while enabling collective action.

The rise of the Global South, with China as a leading partner, offers African nations genuine alternatives to centuries of Western exploitation. This creates space to negotiate better terms, diversify partnerships, and pursue development pathways aligned with their own priorities. Western attempts to delegitimize these partnerships through selective environmental criticism must be recognized as desperate efforts to maintain fading hegemony.

Western reports on Chinese activities in Africa weaponize environmental concerns to maintain dominance over African resources and delegitimize China's growing partnership with African nations. While environmental protection is crucial, these recommendations serve Western geopolitical interests rather than African development. African nations must chart their own course—strengthening environmental governance on their own terms, applying regulations equally to all investors, building strong state capacity, and deepening South-South cooperation offering genuine

alternatives to dependent Western relationships. China's experience demonstrates rapid development and environmental protection can be reconciled through strategic planning, while its FO-CAC engagement shows willingness to support African development respecting African sovereignty. The transformation of Lesotho's energy sector through Chinese-financed renewable energy demonstrates concrete benefits South-South cooperation delivers—clean electricity, has allowed Lesotho to dream, with Foreign Affairs Minister Letjone Mpotjoane proclaiming last year that the kingdom would have 100% renewable energy on its grid by 2028. As China implements its 15th Five-Year Plan with deepened commitment to green development, African nations have unprecedented opportunities to pursue partnerships respecting their sovereignty and serving their interests. The future of African development will be determined by Africans, not by Western think tanks pursuing geopolitical agendas. That future includes strengthened environmental protection—but achieved through African agency, South-South cooperation, and partnerships respecting African sovereignty rather than mechanisms designed to maintain Western dominance.

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20

Lesotho Tribune

By: Lemohang Botsane

**I**n Friday, Prime Minister Sam Matekane received donations of agricultural equipment in the form of harvesters, tractors and thrashers worth M36 million from China. This generous handover is a significant step towards eradicating hunger and poverty in Lesotho.

Upon receiving the equipment on behalf of the government, Matekane urged farmers to utilise the current rains to engage in summer cropping and maximise food production, emphasising that the equipment would benefit farmers in both lowland and highland areas. He appealed to the recipients to take care of the equipment, reaffirming the government's commitment to improving the lives of Basotho through investing in agriculture.

# FARMERS CORNER

## Lesotho Gets M36 million Boost From China



Chinese Ambassador Yang Xiaokun expressed hope that the equipment would soon be put to use, enabling Lesotho to increase its food production, particularly maize, sorghum and wheat. He highlighted the strong partnership between Lesotho and China, noting that both countries share a traditional friendship and have been supporting

each other on major concerns outside just farming.

The Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Thabo Mofosi, described the donation as a valuable support that would promote food production, saying it comes at a crucial time when the country is striving to combat hunger and poverty.

The Minister of Foreign

Affairs, Lejone Mpotjoane, added a voice too, saying the donation marks a milestone in promoting food security and transforming the agricultural sector.

To solidify the cooperation between the two countries in the agricultural sector, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed at the end of the handover ceremony.

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