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**MOHAHLAULA
AIRLINES**

Former IEC Director and Two Senior Officials Charged Over Alleged Illegal Procurement of 3,000 Bags

By: Tholoana Lesenya

Three former senior officials of the Lesotho Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), including a former Director of Elections, have appeared before the Maseru Magistrate's Court facing criminal charges linked to alleged unlawful procurement.

The accused, Mpaiphele Maqutu (54), former Director of Elections; Joalane Mavuso (45), former Executive Secretary to the Director of Elections; and Mabatho Sesoane (47), former Finance Manager, appeared before Magistrate Nkhethoa Molapo this week.

They face charges of contravening Section 164 read with Section 167 of the Public Procurement Act No. 3 of 2023, legislation designed to enforce transparency and accountability in public procurement. Allegations relate to procurement at IEC offices. According to court proceedings, the trio allegedly procured and purchased 3,000 paper bags without following lawful procurement procedures.

The alleged offence is said to have occurred between January 22, 2025 and February 22, 2025 at the IEC offices in Maseru.

Prosecutors allege that the accused acted in concert and with a common purpose, unlawfully bypassing required procurement processes when authorising



the purchase. The Public Procurement Act requires public institutions to follow strict procedures to ensure fairness, transparency, and value for money when acquiring goods and services. Failure to comply with these procedures constitutes a criminal offence. Defence argues accused cooperated with investigators. During bail proceedings, defence counsel Advocate Lepeli Molapo told the court that his clients had fully cooperated with investigating authorities. He submitted that the accused had attended

multiple interviews when requested and had not attempted to evade investigators.

"They were never arrested or summoned by police. They presented themselves voluntarily and are not flight risks," Advocate Molapo told the court. Court grants bail, case postponed. Magistrate Molapo granted each of the accused bail of M2,000, allowing them to remain free pending trial. The case has been postponed to March 3, 2026, when the accused are expected to return to court as proceedings continue.

Case adds to scrutiny over procurement compliance. The charges come amid increasing scrutiny of procurement practices within public institutions. Public procurement is a critical area of governance, as it involves the use of taxpayer funds to purchase goods and services. Authorities have in recent years intensified enforcement of procurement laws to address irregularities and strengthen accountability. The case against the former IEC officials remains before the courts, and the accused are presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

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Why Lesotho's new Trade and Tariff Law could reshape the country's economic future

By: Lesotho Tribune

MASERU

Quietly and with little public debate, Parliament has introduced a law that could fundamentally change how Lesotho protects its industries, manages imports, and positions itself in the regional economy.

The Trade and Tariff Administration Bill, 2024, once operational, will give government new powers to investigate imports, impose protective duties, and regulate strategic exports. In effect, it equips Lesotho with tools long used by more industrialised economies to defend domestic production and shape economic development.

At stake is nothing less than the country's economic sovereignty in an increasingly competitive global market.

Moving beyond passive participation in trade For decades, Lesotho's economy has been deeply integrated into the Southern African Customs Union, the regional bloc that includes South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, and Eswatini. While this arrangement provides revenue and access to a common market, it has also meant that Lesotho largely depended on regional structures to manage tariffs and trade remedies.

The new law begins to change that.

It establishes a dedicated Trade and Tariff Directorate within the Ministry of Trade and Industry, tasked with investigating tariff applications, monitoring trade trends, and advising government on protective measures. The Directorate will also represent Lesotho in SACU tariff processes and evaluate requests for



tariff changes or safeguard measures.

This institutional capacity has been missing.

Without it, Lesotho has had limited ability to formally respond when domestic industries faced pressure from foreign competition.

Protecting local industries from unfair competition

One of the most powerful aspects of the law is its provision for trade remedies.

These include anti-dumping duties, countervailing duties, and safeguard measures, all internationally recognised tools used to protect domestic producers.

Dumping occurs when foreign producers sell goods at artificially low prices, often below cost, to gain market share and eliminate local competitors. The law defines anti-dumping duty as an additional tariff imposed to offset the effects of such imports.

For Lesotho, this has real-world implications.

Local textile manufacturers, poultry farmers, and agricultural producers have long faced competition from cheaper imports.

With this law, government now has a formal process to investigate and respond.

This could mean tariffs designed to protect local industries and preserve jobs.

Greater control over imports and exports

The law also gives government authority to regulate specific imports and exports through permits.

The Minister will be able to prescribe goods that cannot be imported or exported without approval and impose conditions relating to quantity, origin, destination, and purpose.

Such powers are common globally.

They allow governments to protect strategic industries, safeguard natural resources, and manage economic priorities.

For Lesotho, this could prove particularly important in sectors such as agriculture, water, and mining. Aligning Lesotho with regional and global practice While the law introduces new powers domestically, it also ensures Lesotho can participate more effectively in regional trade governance.

Under SACU, tariff decisions are coordinated across member states.

The new Directorate will investigate applications, compile evidence, and make recommendations to the SACU Tariff Board.

This gives Lesotho a stronger voice.

Rather than relying entirely on external processes, the country will now have its own technical capability to

defend its economic interests.

Replacing a law from another era The Bill also repeals the Export and Import Control Act of 1984, legislation introduced in a vastly different economic context.

Since then, global trade has transformed.

Supply chains have expanded across continents. Competition has intensified. Industrial policy has become more sophisticated.

Updating Lesotho's legal framework reflects the realities of modern trade.

Economic opportunity and economic responsibility

The introduction of this law does not automatically guarantee economic transformation.

Its impact will depend on how effectively it is implemented.

Trade protection, if used carefully, can help local industries grow and compete. Used poorly, it can increase prices and reduce competitiveness.

The challenge for government will be balancing protection with openness. Encouraging domestic production without isolating the economy.

A turning point in Lesotho's economic policy For a small, open economy like Lesotho, trade policy is not abstract.

It shapes whether factories open or close. Whether farmers expand or abandon production. Whether jobs are created or lost.

The Trade and Tariff Administration Bill represents a shift toward a more active and strategic approach.

It gives Lesotho tools it did not previously have.

Whether those tools are used effectively will help determine the country's economic future.

Sadness after the gunfire

By: Staff Reporter

Emotions ran high in the High Court this week as Captain Haleeo Makara described the dull mood that followed the death of former army commander, Brigadier Maaparankoe Mahao. Speaking as both a defence witness and one of the accused, Captain Makara told the court that members of the arrest team “bowed their heads with sadness” when they were informed that Mahao had died at Makoanyane Military Hospital.

The testimony forms part of the defence case in the long-running trial in which nine members of the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF), including retired army commander Tlali Kamoli, stand accused of murdering Mahao. The incident dates back to June 25, 2015, when Mahao was shot at Ha Lekete in Mokema during what the defence describes as a lawful operation to suppress mutiny within the army. The prosecution, however, maintains that the killing was planned and deliberate.

Captain Makara confirmed in court that he was the soldier who fired the shot that struck Mahao. He told the court that the decision to shoot was made in a split second, under intense pressure.

According to his account, the arrest team had approached Mahao’s vehicle as part of an operation aimed at apprehending suspected mutineers. The defence maintains that Mahao was among those considered part of the alleged mutiny plot within the LDF. On the day in question, the team intercepted his vehicle and attempted to arrest him. Makara testified that Mahao was holding a firearm at the



time, posing a danger to Captain Hashatsi, who led the arresting team. Hashatsi was reportedly instructing Mahao to step out of the vehicle when the situation escalated.

“I had to protect Captain Hashatsi,” Makara told the court. “There was no other way I could be able to help him without shooting at the window of the truck. It was impossible for me to go open the window, then come back and shoot.”

One of the central issues in the case has been the manner in which Mahao was shot. Under questioning, Makara explained why he aimed at the right side of Mahao’s body rather than attempting to disarm him by targeting his hand.

He told the court that there was simply no time to aim at a smaller part of the body. “It was going to take me long to aim at the hand because it is one of the small parts of the body,” he said. In the heat of the moment, he believed shooting at the side of the body was the only viable option to neutralise the perceived threat.

Makara also acknowledged that the vehicle in which Mahao was travelling was damaged during the shooting. He described the incident as chaotic and fast-moving, leaving little room for calculated action. The defence argues that the damage to the vehicle and the fatal shooting were consequences of a lawful operation that went wrong, not evidence of a planned killing.

After Mahao was shot, he

was transported to Makoanyane Military Hospital. Makara told the court that when members of the team were informed that Mahao had died, the mood shifted dramatically.

“Our heads were bowed with sadness,” he said quietly. The statement appeared to underline the defence’s argument that there was no intention to kill Mahao. According to the accused, the outcome was tragic but unintended.

However, the prosecution disputes this version of events. State lawyers argue that the operation was not merely an arrest gone wrong, but a calculated act aimed at eliminating Mahao.

Captain Makara is not the first among the accused to take the stand in his own defence.

Earlier in the proceedings, Captain Litekanyo Nyakane, the first accused in the matter, also admitted participating in the operation intended to arrest Mahao. Nyakane told the court that while the mission was meant to apprehend Mahao, it ended in his shooting and death.

The nine accused soldiers face multiple charges. These include murder, attempted murder, theft, and unlawful damage to property. The attempted murder charges relate to others who were allegedly present during the shooting, while the property-related charges stem from damage caused during the operation.

The defence continues to insist that the team acted within the scope of their duties, responding to what they perceived as an immediate threat. The prosecution maintains that the evidence will show otherwise.

The killing of Maaparankoe Mahao on June 25, 2015, remains one of the most controversial and painful

chapters in Lesotho’s recent history. At the time of his death, Mahao was widely regarded as a respected senior military figure.

The incident intensified political and security tensions in the country and drew both regional and international attention. Years later, the matter continues to unfold in court, with detailed testimony painting differing pictures of what happened that winter day in Mokema. For the families involved, and for the nation at large, the proceedings are more than just a legal exercise. They represent a search for clarity and accountability over events that had far-reaching consequences. Throughout the trial, two sharply contrasting narratives have emerged.

The defence portrays the shooting as a tragic but lawful response during a volatile arrest operation. According to this account, Mahao’s possession of a firearm created an immediate risk to the arresting team, justifying the use of force.

The prosecution, on the other hand, contends that the operation was a cover for a premeditated killing. They argue that the evidence will demonstrate intention and coordination among the accused.

As testimony continues, the court is tasked with examining the credibility of witnesses, the consistency of their accounts, and the forensic and documentary evidence presented.

The matter is being heard before Justice Charles Hungwe, who has presided over the trial as it moves through complex and often emotional testimony.

With several defence witnesses already heard and more expected, the case remains far from conclusion. Each new account adds another layer to an already intricate legal battle. The case is said to continue on 08 th day of June 2026.

LCS Officers Face Murder Charge

By: Tholoana Lesenya

MASERU

Ten officers from the Lesotho Correctional Service (LCS) have appeared before the Magistrate's Court in Maseru charged with the murder of Bokang Tsoako, in a case that has drawn significant public attention and raised serious questions about conduct within correctional institutions.

The accused, Paseka Mpokothi (31), Palo John Posa (56), Matete Mahao (38), Ts'epo George (37), Saeaea Ratsetse (45), Kutloiso Nthonyane (50), Kamoho Masebale (34), Thabo Moiloa (39), Kholuoe Phasumane (43) and Mokiba Mokiba (44), stood before Magistrate Nkhethoa Molapo facing a single count of murder. They are charged under Section 40(1) read with Section 40(2) of the Penal Code Act No. 6 of 2010, which defines and prescribes penalties for the offence of murder.

According to the charge sheet presented in court, the accused allegedly acted together and in furtherance of a common purpose on December 22, 2023, at the Lesotho Correctional Service central offices in Maseru.

It is alleged that they unlawfully and intentionally assaulted Bokang Tsoako by beating him with sticks, kicking him on his body, slapping him and inflicting serious physical injuries.

The prosecution contends that the injuries sustained



during the alleged assault ultimately resulted in Tsoako's death.

The specific circumstances surrounding the incident are expected to be examined in detail when the matter proceeds to the High Court. For now, the charges formally place the ten officers at the centre of a serious criminal case.

During their appearance, Magistrate Molapo informed the accused that the Magistrate's Court does not have jurisdiction to grant bail in murder cases.

He advised them that any application for bail must be made before the High Court, which has the authority to consider such applications in serious offences.

The matter was postponed to March 3, 2026. The accused were remanded in custody pending further proceedings.

Following the court appearance, LCS spokesperson

and Assistant Superintendent Pheko Ntobane clarified the status of the accused officers within the correctional service.

Ntobane stated that the accused remain officers of the Lesotho Correctional Service until proven guilty by a court of law.

"They remain officers of the LCS until proven guilty by the courts," he said.

"They will continue to receive their salaries." He emphasised the principle of presumption of innocence, noting that disciplinary or administrative measures must align with due process.

Ntobane further indicated that for security reasons, the accused will be held at the Mohale's Hoek Correctional Service facility rather than in Maseru.

"They cannot be kept at Maseru Correctional Service where the incident allegedly took place," he explained. "For security

purposes, they will remain at Mohale's Hoek." The decision, he said, was taken to ensure stability and prevent potential tension within the Maseru facility.

In this case, the prosecution will need to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the accused not only participated in the alleged assault but did so with a shared intention that led to Tsoako's death. If the common purpose is established, each of the accused could face equal criminal liability.

The case has sparked public debate about accountability within state institutions, particularly those tasked with enforcing discipline and maintaining order. Correctional officers hold positions of authority and responsibility. Allegations that officers themselves may have engaged in unlawful violence have prompted calls for transparency and a thorough judicial process.

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Counsellors Raise Concerns Over Minister's Remarks On Pastoral Care Programme

By: Lemohang Botsane

MASERU

The Counsellors Association Lesotho (CAL) has shown its deep concern over comments made by Finance Minister Dr. Retselisitsoe Matlanyane in regard to the relevance of Pastoral Care and Counselling programmes in today's society. Dr. Matlanyane had questioned the value of such courses, suggesting they are less important than scientific fields in the current global landscape.

In a statement, CAL defended the main role of counselling services, highlighting their importance in addressing pressing issues such as mental health, Gender-Based Violence, and psychosocial support in communities. "Counselling remains a vital component of Lesotho's health, education, and social development sectors," the association stressed.

The organization assured its members and stakeholders that it will continue to uplift the dignity and integrity of the counselling profes-



sion. CAL's Executive Committee plans to engage with Minister Matlanyane to discuss the context of her statement and advocate for greater recognition of counsel-

ling services across the nation. The association's response underscores the ongoing debate about the value of humanities and social sciences in

addressing societal challenges, and highlights the need for informed understanding of the contributions of various fields to national development.

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Courts Must Shield Women says Judge

By: Tholoana Lesenya

The High Court has sent a strong message against gender-based violence, with Justice Tšeliso Mokoko declaring that courts have a constitutional duty to protect women from abuse that too often ends in murder. Justice Mokoko made the remarks during the sentencing of former police officer Jeremane Sekhohola, who was convicted of killing his ex-girlfriend, 'Matsepang Moleleki. The judge sentenced Sekhohola to 40 years' imprisonment, describing the crime as brutal, calculated and deeply disturbing. Sekhohola was found guilty this week of stabbing Moleleki to death during an incident that occurred in Berea on February 17, 2025. The court heard that the killing happened after Moleleki had reported him to his superiors following threats he made when she attempted to end their relationship. In delivering sentence, Justice Mokoko stressed that the courts' fundamental constitutional obligation is to uphold the right to life. He said violence



against women is a grave and shocking problem that demands a firm judicial response. "Women look up to the courts for protection," he said. "That protection can only be meaningful if courts impose sentences that reflect the seriousness of these crimes." The judge's remarks come at a time when cases of gender-based violence (GBV) continue to trouble communities across the country. In many instances, women are killed by current or former intimate partners after attempts

to leave abusive relationships. Evidence presented during the trial revealed that Moleleki had taken steps to distance herself from Sekhohola after their relationship deteriorated. When she informed him of her intention to end it, he reportedly threatened to kill her. Concerned for her safety, she reported the threats to the Berea Police. The intervention by police was intended to resolve the dispute and ensure her protection.

However, despite that intervention, Sekhohola went on to carry out the fatal attack. Justice Mokoko said the fact that the killing occurred in broad daylight and in public demonstrated the accused's determination to execute his plan. The judge concluded that the attack was not a spontaneous act of anger but a deliberate and violent response to rejection. He described the manner of the attack as particu-

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larly cruel, noting that the accused stabbed the deceased in the chest, one of the most delicate and vulnerable parts of the body.

“As a trained police officer, not an ordinary person, a high standard of behaviour was expected from him,” the judge said. “Instead, he showed no mercy.”

A significant aspect of the court’s reasoning was Sekhohola’s position as a police officer at the time of the offence.

Justice Mokoko said that as a member of the police service, the accused had a duty to protect lives and uphold the law. By committing murder, he not only violated the law but also betrayed the oath he had taken.

The judge further observed that Sekhohola’s actions undermined the authority and efforts of the Berea Police, who had intervened in an attempt to resolve the dispute peacefully.

“He disrespected the Berea Police and undermined their efforts,” the judge stated. “His conduct showed a lack of respect for the institution he served.”

The court held that when law enforcement officers commit serious crimes, the impact extends beyond the immediate

victim. It damages public confidence in institutions meant to provide safety and protection.

Throughout his sentencing remarks, Justice Mokoko returned repeatedly to the broader issue of gender-based violence. He said acts of violence against women are deeply troubling, especially when they result in the loss of life. In many cases, he noted, women leave behind young children who must grow up without their mother’s love and care.

“After they are killed, women leave behind minor children who are deprived of motherly love and forced to fend for themselves,” he said. He emphasised that sentences imposed in such cases must serve both as punishment and deterrence.

“Public confidence in the criminal justice system has diminished,” Justice Mokoko said.

“It is the responsibility of the courts to restore that trust through harsh sentences.” He made it clear that exemplary sentences are necessary not only to hold perpetrators accountable but also to send a strong warning to others who might contemplate similar acts.

Despite the seriousness of the crime, the court considered several mitigating factors before imposing

sentence.

Among them was the fact that Sekhohola surrendered himself to police after committing the offence. The court also took into account that he pleaded guilty, thereby saving the court’s time and resources.

Justice Mokoko acknowledged that these actions indicated a degree of remorse.

However, he concluded that the gravity of the offence far outweighed the mitigating factors.

“No amount of sentence can bring the deceased back to life,” he said.

“However, the family of the deceased must feel that justice has been served.” After weighing all circumstances, the court determined that 40 years’ imprisonment was an appropriate sentence. Sekhohola was represented by Advocate Christopher Lephuthing, while the prosecution was led by Advocate Thato Lephheana.

During the sentencing phase, both counsel made submissions regarding aggravating and mitigating factors. The prosecution argued for a severe penalty, citing the brutality of the attack and the accused’s position as a police officer.

The defence highlighted the accused’s surrender and guilty plea as evi-

dence of remorse.

Ultimately, the court concluded that the seriousness of the offence, combined with the need to deter similar crimes, justified a lengthy custodial sentence.

The judgment is likely to be seen as part of a broader judicial effort to confront gender-based violence with firmness.

Justice Mokoko’s remarks underscored the view that courts cannot remain neutral in the face of escalating violence against women.

By imposing a 40-year sentence, the court sought to affirm the sanctity of life and reinforce the message that intimate partner violence will attract severe consequences. For Moleleki’s family, the sentence cannot undo the loss they have suffered. But the court expressed hope that the judgment would offer some measure of closure.

For society at large, the ruling stands as a reminder that the justice system carries a vital responsibility, not only to punish wrongdoing, but to protect the vulnerable and uphold constitutional rights.

As Justice Mokoko concluded, the courts must be a place where women can look for protection and find it.

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Lesotho Tribune

By: Lesotho Tribune |
Budget Analysis Series

MASERU

The Government of Lesotho has made one of its most candid economic admissions in recent years: it can no longer be the country's primary employer.

Buried within the 2026/27 national budget speech is a stark acknowledgement that the state's role as the main provider of jobs has reached its financial and structural limits, forcing a historic shift towards private-sector-led employment.

"The bloated public-sector wage bill... remains among the highest in the region and is fiscally unsustainable... Gov-

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Government quietly admits it cannot employ Basotho anymore



ernment cannot be the employer of first choice and last resort." This statement marks a turning point in Lesotho's economic model, one that has relied on public sector employment for decades. The end of the Government-as-Employer model For generations, Basotho have viewed government employment as the safest

and most reliable path to financial stability. But the budget makes it clear this model has reached its limits. The public wage bill alone consumes around 17 percent of GDP, one of the highest ratios in Southern Africa. This level of spending has created a dangerous imbalance. Money that could be invested in roads, energy,

agriculture, and industrial development is instead used to pay salaries. The result is a vicious cycle:

- Government employs more people to address unemployment
- Wage costs increase
- Infrastructure investment declines
- Private sector growth slows

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•Unemployment worsens

The budget explicitly warns that this path is unsustainable.

Government shifting responsibility to private sector

The new budget signals a clear policy shift. Instead of creating jobs directly, government will focus on enabling businesses to create them.

The Minister of Finance stated:

“To seize these opportunities, we must empower the primary engine of sustainable growth – the private sector... Jobs must be created not by temporary stimuli, but by sustainable productive activity.”

This reflects a fundamental redefinition of government’s role in the economy.

Going forward, the state intends to:

- Build infrastructure
- Improve the business environment
- Facilitate investment
- Provide financing support

But not employ people directly at scale.

The deeper problem:

Government simply cannot afford it

This shift is not ideological. It is financial necessity.

Several pressures have forced the Government’s

hand:

a. Slowing economic growth

Lesotho’s economy grew only 1.4 percent in 2025/26, a sharp slowdown.

Key sectors like:

- Mining
- Textiles
- Manufacturing

have shed jobs due to global competition and declining demand.

b. Declining external support

The budget confirms:

- Grants are shrinking
- Concessional finance is tightening
- Donor support is becoming more selective

This means government has less money available overall.

c. Overdependence on volatile SACU revenues
Southern African Customs Union transfers remain a major funding source, but they are unpredictable.

The budget warns:

Heavy reliance on SACU transfers poses a major macro-fiscal vulnerability.

This instability makes long-term salary expansion risky.

Youth unemployment forced government’s admission

The admission comes as youth unemployment reaches crisis levels Government has already declared youth unemploy-

ment a “National State of Disaster.”

But instead of promising government jobs, the new budget focuses on:

- Youth innovation hubs
- Private-sector apprenticeships
- SME financing
- Entrepreneurship support

This confirms the shift away from state employment.

Infrastructure replaces hiring as main spending priority

Instead of hiring more workers, government is redirecting money to infrastructure.

Capital spending will rise to M9.03 billion, a massive increase.

Major investments include:

- Roads and bridges
- Energy projects
- Aviation infrastructure
- Water systems
- Digital connectivity

he logic is clear: infrastructure creates private jobs indirectly.

Even civil servants get minimal increase

Public servants will receive only a 2 percent salary increase, barely keeping pace with inflation.

This further confirms government’s limited financial space.

A historic economic turning point

This budget may be remembered as the mo-

ment Lesotho “officially” abandoned the expectation that government will employ its citizens. Instead, the message is clear:

Government will enable jobs.

But it will not provide them.

What this means for Basotho

This shift has profound implications.

Reality 1: Government jobs will become scarcer
The era of expanding civil service employment is effectively over.

Reality 2: Private sector becomes survival engine
Future employment will come from:

- Agriculture
- Manufacturing
- Tourism
- Technology
- Services

Reality 3: Entrepreneurship will become necessity, not option
Government is positioning Basotho to create their own opportunities.

The bottom line

The 2026/27 Budget contains a quiet but unmistakable truth.

Lesotho’s government can no longer employ its people at scale.

The future of employment now rests on

whether the private sector can succeed where government can no longer afford to continue.

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Witness Describes Minor Injuries on Mahao

BY: Tholoana Lesenya

MASERU

The High Court this week heard fresh testimony regarding the condition of Brigadier Maaparankoe Mahao's body shortly after he was pronounced dead, with a defence witness describing one of the visible injuries as "an insignificant minor scratch" on his forehead. Retired Colonel 'Matšotetsi Tlelai took the stand as part of the defence case in the ongoing trial of nine members of the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) who stand accused

of murdering Mahao. Her evidence focused on what she personally observed at Makoanyane Military Hospital on June 25, 2015, the day Mahao was shot at Ha Lekete in Mokema.

The accused include former army commander, Lieutenant General Tlali Kamoli, alongside eight other soldiers. They face charges of murder, attempted murder, theft and unlawful damage to property. All have pleaded not guilty.

Colonel Tlelai told the court that she was present at Makoanyane Military Hospital while police officers were examining Mahao's body. It was during that time, she said, that she made her own observations of the



injuries.

Among the injuries she noticed was what she described as a minor abrasion on the deceased's forehead. She characterised it as insignificant in nature.

In addition to the mark on the forehead, she told the court that she observed a wound on one of Mahao's hands. She also saw what appeared to be a bullet hole.

Her testimony sought to clarify the physical condition of the deceased at the time the body was being examined. The defence has consistently maintained that Mahao was shot during what it describes as a lawful

operation aimed at suppressing mutiny within the army. The prosecution, however, contends that the killing was deliberate.

One of the more contentious aspects of the witness's evidence concerned the condition of Mahao's clothing.

During her testimony, Colonel Tlelai was confronted with evidence suggesting that the deceased's clothes had been washed. Asked to comment, she said she could not deny that possibility because the clothes were wet when she saw them.

"I cannot deny that because they were wet," she

told the court.

However, she added that she did not ask anyone why the clothes were wet, nor did anyone provide her with an explanation.

The issue of whether the clothes were washed has emerged as a significant point in the trial. If proven, it could have implications for forensic evidence and the preservation of the crime scene.

The defence has not conceded that any wrongdoing occurred in the handling of the body or clothing, and the matter remains one of the many factual disputes the court must resolve.

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Lesotho Tribune

By Staff Reporter

MOHALESHOEK

The Smallholder Agriculture Development Project 2 (SADP II) recently convened a two-day workshop in Mochalehoek, bringing together farmers and stakeholders to assess progress and identify areas for improvement in the implementation of agricultural projects.

The workshop aimed to gather insights from farmers and representatives of various banks on the challenges encountered during project implementation, including procurement processes and material acquisition. According to the matching grants specialist Rele-

FARMERS CORNER

SADP II Hosts Workshop To Track Progress And Address Hurdles In The Project



bohile Khatibe, the objective of the workshop was to track progress from the farmers' perspective, as well as that of the banks they work with, in order to identify lessons learned and areas for improvement.

Representatives from different categories of beneficiaries, including round 1, 2, and 3, as well as youth participants, at-

tended the workshop. The categories are divided regionally, with round 1 focusing on the mountain districts of Mochalehoek, Qacha's Nek, and Thaba Tseka, while rounds 2 and 3 cover all 10 districts, and the youth round targeting young farmers.

In his welcome remarks, the DAO representative emphasized the impor-

tance of reflection and learning from past experiences. He noted that previous projects had suffered from a lack of ownership, resulting in only about 5% of projects remaining operational. To address this, SADP II has introduced a matching grants system, which provides funding in monetary form to promote project ownership among beneficiaries. The representative expressed optimism that this approach would yield better results, citing positive progress to date. The workshop provided a platform for stakeholders to share experiences and best practices, with the goal of accelerating project implementation and improving overall impact. By the end of the workshop, participants were expected to have gained a better understanding of their role in driving progress and addressing challenges in smallholder agriculture development.

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Banks and Farmers Face Challenges in SADP II Project Implementation

By: Lemohang Botsane

MOHALESHOEK

A recent workshop held in Mochaleshoek under the Smallholder Agriculture Development Project 2 (SADP II) highlighted several challenges faced by both farmers and banks involved in the project. The workshop brought together representatives from three local banks, as well as beneficiaries from different categories, to identify and address issues hindering project implementation.

According to the feedback presented, beneficiaries from Rounds 1 and 2, who worked with one Bank, complained about high bank charges, with each transaction costing M300.00. They also cited instances where suppliers were not properly verified, leading to delays and complications.

On the other hand, the bank pointed out that incorrect bank account numbers were submitted due to negligence, and there were delays in obtaining feedback from SADP II.

Round 2 beneficiaries also working with the same bank highlighted the manual processing of transfer letters as a major challenge, leading



to prolonged approval timelines. Inaccurately completed transfer letters and submission of blurry documents, such as beneficiary Ids, further complicated the process.

The second bank, which worked with Round 3 beneficiaries, cited insufficient training provided to farmers, non-compliance with payment obligations, and delays in disbursement of funds by SADP II as some of the challenges they faced. The bank also noted that some farmers showed limited interest and participation during training sessions, and incorrectly recorded email

addresses contributed to communication delays. The third and last bank, which handled the Youth Grants, pointed out the absence of a local branch in Qacha's Nek as a challenge, requiring farmers to travel long distances to access banking services. Delays in approving requisitions to utilize remaining account balances and dormant bank accounts also hindered progress.

The workshop identified several areas for improvement, including the need for better training and capacity building for farmers, streamlined processes

to reduce delays, and improved communication between SADP II, banks, and beneficiaries. Recommendations included reducing bank charges, implementing electronic processing systems, and increasing access to mobile banking services.

The SADP II project aims to support smallholder farmers in Lesotho, and addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring the success of the project. By working together, banks, farmers, and SADP II can overcome these obstacles and improve the lives of rural communities.

EDITORIAL

Lesotho has stopped pretending its budget can save the economy

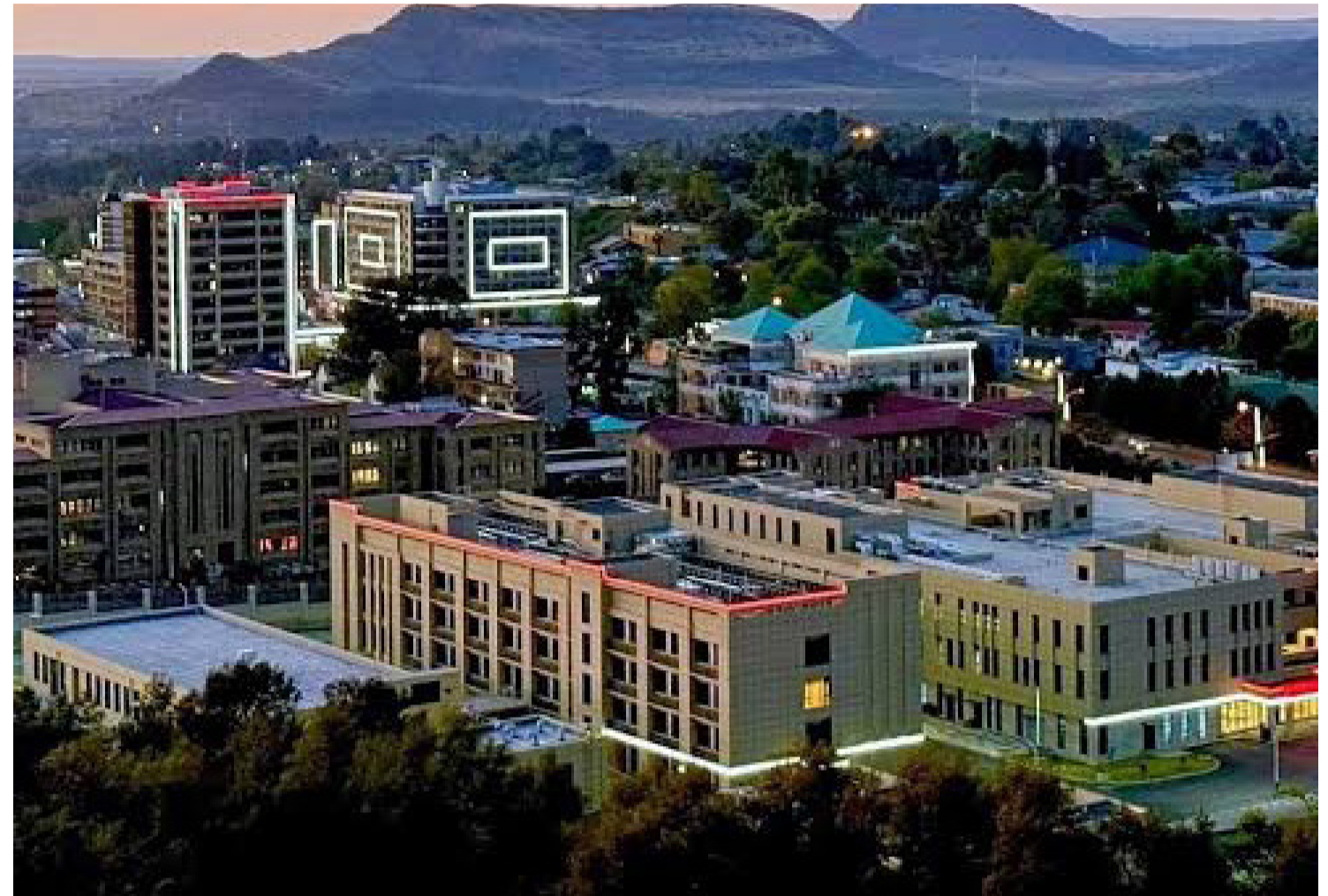


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Lesotho Tribune

By: Editorial

There was a time when Lesotho's national budget pretended to be something it was not. It pretended to be an engine of prosperity. A guarantor of jobs. A promise that government, somehow, would carry the nation forward. That illusion has now been quietly abandoned. The newly tabled 2026/27 budget does not say so bluntly. Budgets rarely do. But read carefully, and the shift is unmistakable. The language has changed. The ambition has changed. Most importantly, the honesty has changed. Government is no longer pretending it can employ its way out of unemployment. Instead, it is admitting



that Lesotho's future lies elsewhere. For most of the past decade, the budget was an instrument of survival. The 2022/23 fiscal plan was delivered in the long shadow of COVID-19, at a time when the economy had slowed, deficits widened, and uncertainty dominated policy thinking. Fiscal consolidation was the order of the day. Government borrowing filled the gap between ambition and reality. It was a defensive budget. Its purpose was not transformation.

Its purpose was endurance. In the years that followed, optimism briefly returned. Construction activity linked to the Lesotho Highlands Water Project lifted growth. Revenues stabilised. Government spoke of recovery and inclusive expansion. But the recovery was fragile. By 2025, the illusion was breaking again. Growth projections were revised downward. External shocks returned. Textile factories cut jobs. Mines scaled back oper-

ations. The vulnerability of Lesotho's economic model was exposed once more. These were not policy failures alone. They were structural realities. The truth is that Lesotho's economy has never been fully in its own hands. It depends on customs revenues collected elsewhere. It depends on water sold elsewhere. It depends on trade preferences negotiated else-

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By Lesotho Tribune

MASERU

The tabling of Lesotho's 2026/27 National Budget has triggered an immediate and largely negative public reaction, with a new Lesotho Tribune Sentiment Tracker showing that seven in ten Basotho are either disappointed or believe the budget represents "the same old story."

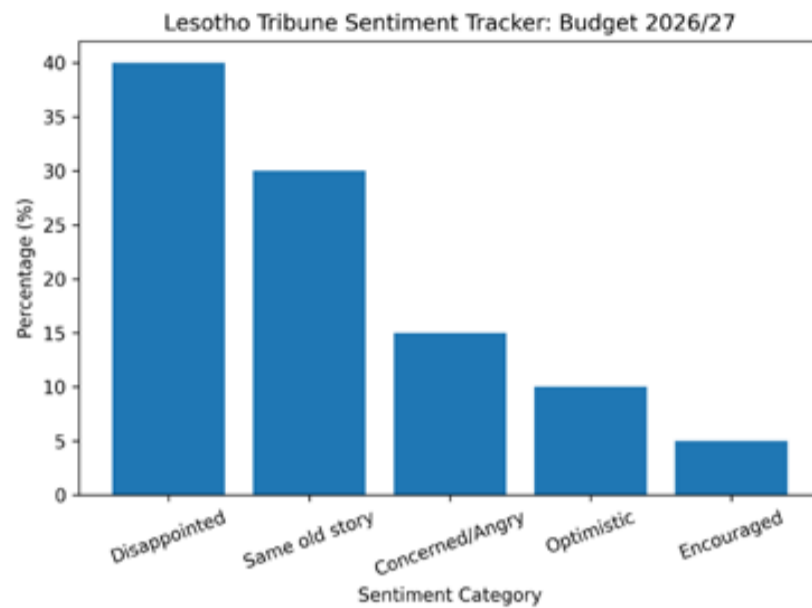
The findings, based on reader responses and verified public commentary, highlight a widening gap between fiscal policy and public expectations in an economy grappling with unemployment, weak private sector growth, and declining household purchasing power.

Public mood tilts sharply negative. According to the Lesotho Tribune Sentiment Tracker analysis:

- 40 percent of readers expressed outright disappointment
- 30 percent said the budget represents "the same old story"
- 15 percent expressed concern or anger
- Only 15 percent combined expressed optimism

SENTIMENT TRACKER

Budget 2026/27 triggers wave of public disappointment, Lesotho Tribune Sentiment Tracker shows



or encouragement. This places the overall sentiment firmly in negative territory. For many citizens, the budget failed to address what they consider the country's most urgent crisis: unemployment.

One reader summarised the frustration in blunt terms: "Job creation Nop."

Another pointed to deeper structural concerns:

"Lesotho's biggest problems: Massive youth unemployment, weak private sector, low industrialisation, too much dependency on government jobs."

Salary increase fails to inspire confidence

Government's decision to approve a 2 percent salary increase for civil servants also drew widespread criticism.

While authorities framed the increase as fiscally responsible, many workers viewed it as inadequate in the face of rising living costs.

One reader recalled earlier political promises:

"During his election campaign PM Matekane said civil servants salaries will be equivalent to international salaries."

Another questioned the

fairness of public sector adjustments:

"What is funny is that they never increase parliamentary salaries with 2%."

The reaction suggests that, while technically an increase, the adjustment has done little to shift public perception of economic stagnation.

Budget figures seen as disconnected from lived reality

Several readers expressed confusion over how such a large national budget translates into everyday economic hardship.

"I see nine billion Maloti but our day-to-day living cost keeps rising. I can't even talk of wants," wrote one commenter.

Others questioned allocation priorities, suggesting that sectors critical to economic expansion were not sufficiently prioritised.

Youth empowerment funding, in particular, was criticised as inadequate relative to the scale of the unemployment crisis.

"So R100k will empower youth? No job creation nothing else related to youth unemployment," another reader noted.

Institutional reform message fails to resonate

Government has emphasised institutional strengthening and governance reforms as central pillars of the budget.

While some readers welcomed this focus, these views remained in the minority.

"I had to go read on institutional strengthening... this will be a good one," one reader said cautiously.

However, such optimism was overshadowed by broader scepticism.

What the sentiment reveals about Lesotho's economy. The Lesotho Tribune Sentiment Tracker suggests the public is not simply reacting to the size of the budget, but to its perceived impact on daily life.

Three conclusions emerge clearly.

First, Basotho want jobs, not just fiscal stability.

Second, modest wage adjustments are unlikely to restore confidence amid rising living costs.

Third, public trust in economic transformation remains fragile.

This presents a political and economic challenge for government.

While fiscal discipline may be necessary, public confidence ultimately depends on visible improvement in employment, incomes, and opportunity.

Sentiment Tracker verdict
Public Confidence: Low
Economic Optimism: Weak
Dominant Public Mood: Disappointed
Expectation of Immediate Improvement: Limited
For now, the numbers may balance on paper.

But in the court of public opinion, the verdict is far less favourable.

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where.

It depends on demand determined elsewhere. And when those external forces weaken, Lesotho weakens with them.

This dependence is not new.

But the 2026/27 budget is the first in recent memory to confront it directly. It states clearly that government must create conditions for growth, not attempt to manufacture growth itself.

This is a profound shift.

It is also an overdue one. For decades, government has been the country's largest employer.

This created stability. It also created dependence.

A generation of Basotho grew up believing that economic security would come from public employment.

But public employment cannot expand indefinitely.

The budget now acknowledges what economic reality has long dictated.

Jobs must come from productive enterprise. Not from the state.

This is not a message of pessimism.

It is a message of transition.

Lesotho stands at an inflection point.

The old model, driven by government spending and external transfers, has reached its limits.

The new model, driven by private investment and productive expansion, has yet to fully emerge.

Between those two realities lies uncertainty.

And opportunity.

The challenge now is not to write better budgets.

It is to build a different economy.

Budgets can allocate resources.

They cannot create dynamism.

They can signal direction.

They cannot generate momentum.

That must come from elsewhere.

From investors willing to take risks.

From entrepreneurs willing to build.

From institutions capable

of enabling growth rather than constraining it.

The most striking feature of this year's budget is not what it promises.

It is what it stops promising.

It no longer suggests that transformation will come easily.

It no longer suggests that government alone will deliver prosperity.

It no longer suggests that structural constraints can be wished away.

This is not defeatism.

It is realism.

And realism is where serious economic transformation begins.

Lesotho has stopped pretending.

Now it must start building



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Lesotho Tribune

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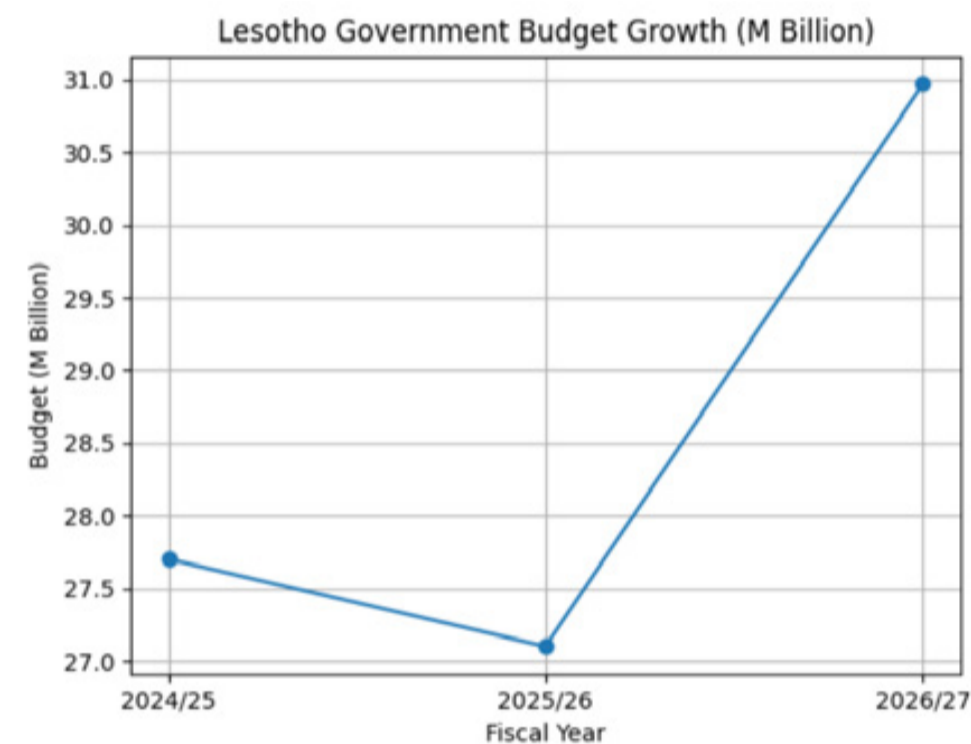
SPECIAL BUDGET EDITION 2026/27

The Budget Explained: What It Really Means for Basotho

By: Lesotho Tribune

Analysis

Lesotho's 2026/27 national budget, valued at M30.97 billion, represents one of the most consequential fiscal policy statements in recent years. While government has framed it as a budget for economic transformation and resilience, a careful reading reveals a more complex reality: this is fundamentally a budget designed to stabilise a vulnerable economy while attempting to create conditions for private-sector-led growth.



Source: budget speech 2026/27, graphics: Lesotho Tribune
Where the Money Comes From

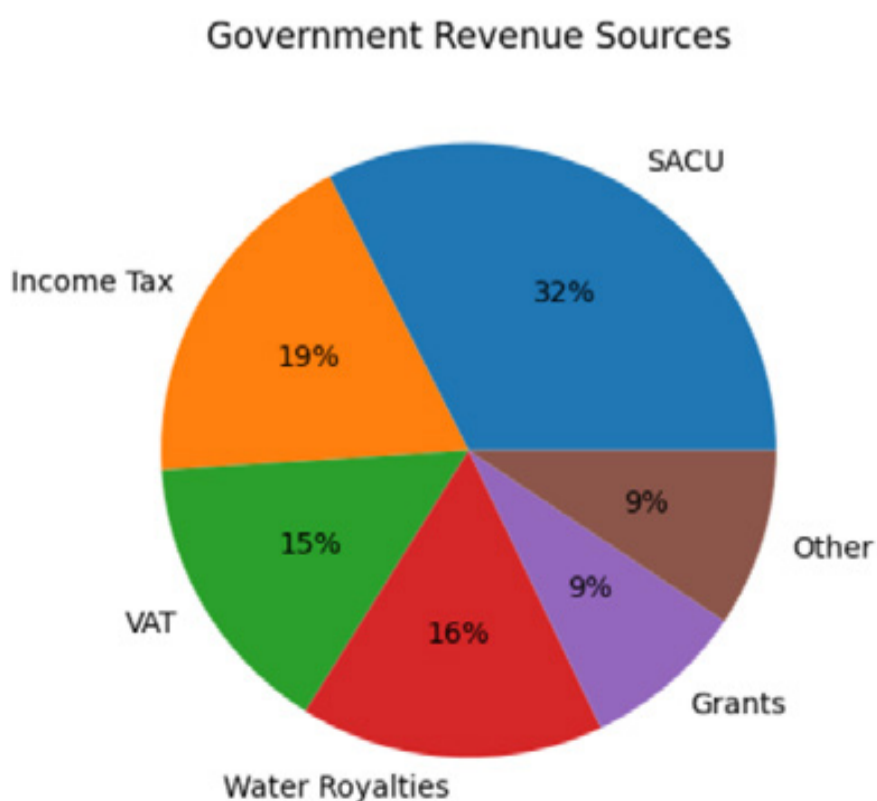


Chart 2: Revenue Sources

Source: budget speech 2026/27, graphics: Lesotho Tribune

Government revenue continues to rely heavily on SACU receipts, which remain one of the largest sources of income. This dependence exposes Lesotho to external risk, particularly economic conditions in South Africa.

Domestic taxes, including VAT and income tax, form the second major revenue pillar, but remain insufficient to fully fund government spending.

Where the Money Goes

The largest share of government expenditure goes to recurrent spending, including salaries, social programs and operational costs. However, capital spending has increased significantly to M9.03 billion, reflecting government's decision to invest heavily in infrastructure such as roads, water systems, and energy.

Government Jobs Era Ending

Perhaps the most important policy shift in this budget is government's acknowledgement that it cannot employ everyone.

This signals a transition toward private-sector-led job creation, a major structural shift in Lesotho's economic policy direction.



Image 1: Basotho Youth Protesting Demanding Jobs from Government During Budget Speech

Day

Winners and Losers

The biggest winners are construction, energy and water sectors, which will benefit from infrastructure investment.

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Continued from Page 19

Those who did not benefit significantly include civil servants, who received only a modest salary increase, and pensioners, whose grants remain



Image 2: Minister of Finance & Development Planning, Dr. Retselisitsoe Matlanyane getting ready to deliver her forth budget speech.

Debt Explained

Lesotho's total public debt now stands at M22.7 billion. While still within sustainability thresholds, continued borrowing presents risks if economic growth does not improve.

Debt servicing also reduces government's ability



Image 3: Lesotho's development partners at-

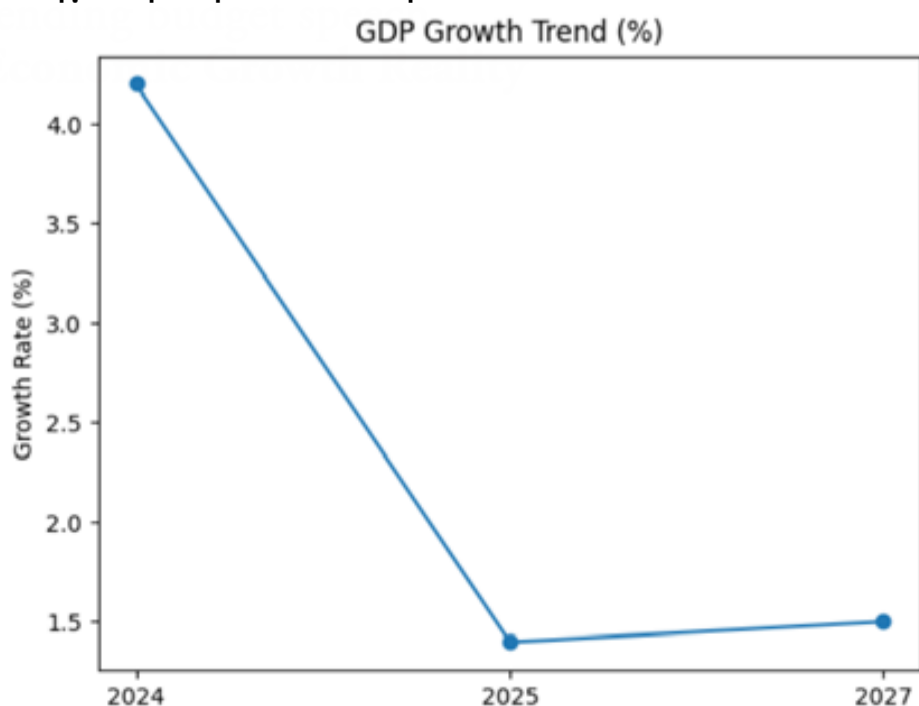


Chart 3: GDP Growth Trend

Source: budget speech 2026/27, graphics: Lesotho Tribune

Economic growth has slowed significantly due to challenges in textiles and mining. This highlights the urgency of diversifying Leso-

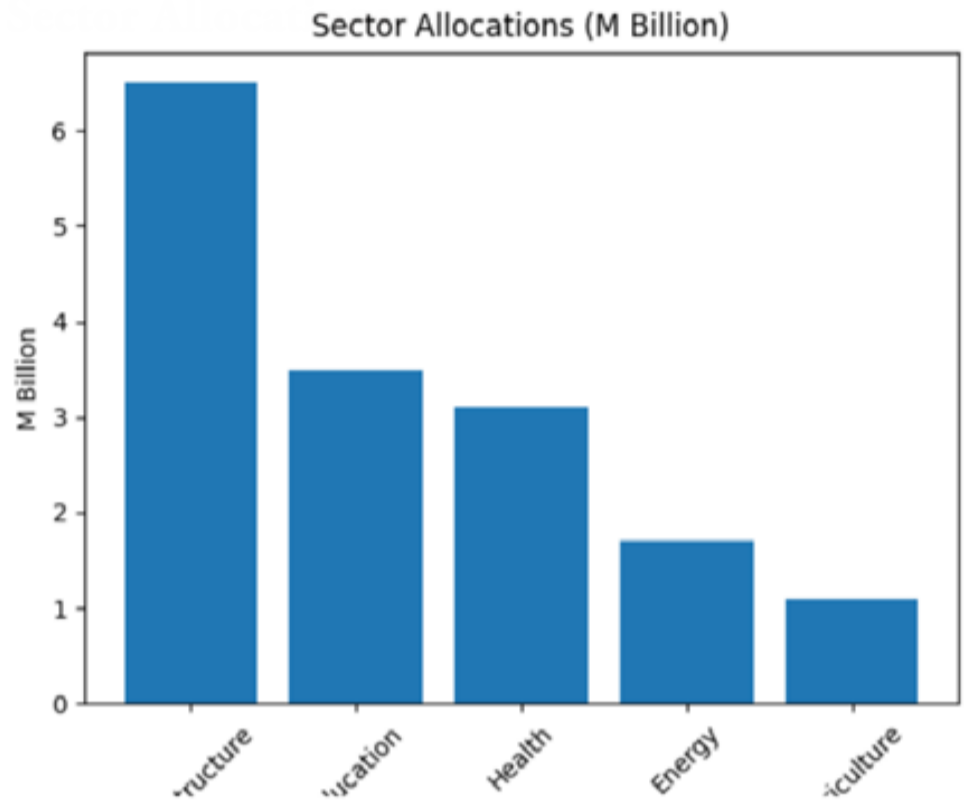


Chart 4: Sector Allocations

Source: budget speech 2026/27, graphics: Lesotho Tribune

Infrastructure received the largest share, followed by health and education. This reflects government's attempt to balance development with social services.

Fact Check: Budget Misinformation

Lesotho Tribune confirms that claims of pension increases and constituency allocations circulating on social media are false.

No such provisions exist in the official budget.

Impact on Ordinary Mosotho

For ordinary citizens, the budget means continued economic uncertainty but potential future benefits if infrastructure investment succeeds. Job creation will depend heavily on private sector response.

Private Sector Expectations :

Private Sector Now Carries Job Creation Burden

Government has, in effect, formally shifted the burden of job creation to the private sector. This marks a significant policy signal. It acknowledges fiscal limits, but it also exposes a structural vulnerability. If the private sector is

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unable to expand meaningfully, unemployment will remain entrenched. The policy therefore creates both opportunity and risk.

Agriculture and Rural Economy

Increased funding toward agriculture creates a pathway to strengthen food security and revitalise rural livelihoods. For a country that continues to import a large share of its food, this shift is economically rational. However, Lesotho's long-standing challenge has never been policy intent. It has been execution. Without efficient delivery, farmer support systems, and functioning markets, allocations alone will not translate into production.

Digital Economy

Investment in information and communications technology reflects growing recognition that the digital economy is no longer optional. It is foundational. This is particularly significant for Lesotho, whose digital economy remains under-monetised despite high mobile penetration. If implemented properly, ICT investment could unlock new sectors, expand entrepreneurship, and integrate Basotho into regional and global digital value chains.

Long-Term Outlook

Ultimately, Lesotho's economic trajectory will be determined less by the Budget itself and more by execution, global economic conditions, and structural reforms. The Budget can create direction, but it cannot, on its own, de-

liver transformation. Without institutional capacity, private sector confidence, and sustained reform, the gap between policy ambition and economic reality will remain.

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Lesotho Tribune

By Litšitso Letsunyane

The Federation of Cycling Lesotho (FCL) has officially announced that its application for the 2026 UCI Solidarity Grant has been endorsed by the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI), marking a significant boost for our country's cycling ambitions. The funding represents a calculated investment in the future of the sport of cycling in Lesotho, targeting structural growth rather than short-term gains. Central to the programme is the introduction and expansion of cycling initiatives within schools, combined with a comprehensive Talent Identification (TID) system. The objective is to detect talented riders at an early stage and channel them into an organised national development pipeline, ensuring that promising athletes are nurtured through

clearly defined progression routes.

Beyond grassroots discovery, the grant also reinforces the federation's athlete performance model. High-potential cyclists will benefit from systematic coaching, performance tracking, sports science support and carefully planned exposure to international competitions. This layered approach is designed to move athletes from foundational training to elite readiness under a monitored and data-driven framework.

The initiative also aligns closely with Olympic preparation structures, particularly through collaboration with the Lesotho National Olympic Committee (LNOC) School of Excellence. By aligning development pathways with Olympic standards, FCL aims to establish a sustainable route

that transitions young prospects into future Olympic contenders. The newly secured grant also works in tandem with the recent delivery of 594 bicycles in January 2026 under the Working Bikes/ Bikes for Lesotho programme. With equipment resources now increased, the UCI funding ensures that infrastructure, technical guidance, and athlete development systems operate cohesively rather than in isolation. Access to quality bicycles at grassroots level removes one of the biggest barriers to participation, particularly in rural communities where talent often goes unnoticed due to limited resources.

The broader benefits of this integrated model are both sporting and socio-economic. At a development level, structured school programmes



promote physical activity, discipline and life skills among young learners. At a performance level, a clear athlete pathway reduces stagnation by providing measurable benchmarks, competition exposure and long-term athlete management. Over time, this increases the likelihood of Lesotho consistently qualifying riders for continental championships, World Championship events and potentially the Olympic Games. For already established riders such as Tumelo Makae, the strengthened system offers a more stable high-performance environment. Instead of relying primarily on individual effort, sponsorships and sporadic opportunities, elite cyclists will now operate within a framework that supports periodised training, international race calendars and professional progression. This will surely raise the overall standard of domestic competition, as younger athletes are inspired by more visible role models competing at higher levels. The FCL is laying the foundation for a sustainable cycling ecosystem rather than isolated projects. If effectively implemented, the 2026 UCI Solidarity Grant could mark a turning point, shifting the country's cycling landscape from potential-driven to performance-oriented.

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