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Minister's Son Implicated in Alleged People - Smuggling Incident at Maseru Bridge



By: Lesotho Tribune

MASERU

A potential immigration scandal is brewing after information received by Lesotho Tribunesuggested that individuals linked to a cabinet minister's family may



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Judge Hands Down 40-Year Sentence in Brutal Killing of Eight-Year-Old

By: Tholoana Lesenya

A High Court judge has delivered a firm warning that crimes committed against women and children must be met with severe punishment, as he sentenced two people to lengthy prison terms for the brutal murder of an eight-year-old boy.

Justice Tšelisio Mokoko made the remarks this week while sentencing Motšelisi

Maoeng, a domestic worker, and her boyfriend John Lefoka for the murder of Liteboho Sekokotoana. The tragic incident occurred on April 7, 2025, at the Sekokotoana family home in Ha Leqele, Maseru.

The court found that the two accused wrapped the young boy with sellotape during a violent attempt to obtain a bank card pin number, causing him to suffocate to death.

In delivering the sentence, Justice Mokoko emphasized that women and children are among the most vulnerable members of society and that the courts have a duty to protect them through firm and decisive punishment.

“Those who commit offences against women and children deserve severe punishment,” the judge said, adding that the growing level of violence against these groups is deeply troubling.

The accused were found guilty of murder, theft and assault. The court heard that the pair not only killed the young boy but also stole a number of items from the Sekokotoana household. These included groceries, kitchen utensils, clothing, a cellphone, money and a bank card belonging to the



family.

The court further heard that the accused demanded the pin number for the bank card from the young victim. When he could not provide the information they were seeking, they wrapped sellotape around him, restricting his breathing and ultimately causing his death.

The tragedy did not end there. Evidence before the court also revealed that the accused assaulted the deceased's older brother, 15-year-old Lereko Sekokotoana, during the same incident.

According to the evidence, the accused demanded that Lereko also reveal the pin number for the bank card. When he could not provide it, they attacked him and attempted to wrap him with sellotape as well.

However, the teenager managed to fight back and escape from the attackers.

The court heard that the accused were under the influence of alcohol at the time, which may have contributed to their inability to overpower him. His escape ultimately allowed authorities to piece together what had happened inside the house that day.

Medical evidence presented before the court confirmed the cause of death. A forensic pathologist testified that Liteboho died from smothering, which occurred when his breathing was obstructed.

The medical findings sup-

ported the prosecution's case that the child suffocated after being tightly wrapped with sellotape by the accused.

While delivering judgment, Justice Mokoko said the prosecution had successfully established a prima facie case against the two accused persons.

He further stated that the evidence clearly demonstrated that Maoeng and Lefoka acted together with a common purpose when committing the crimes. “The court is satisfied that the accused shared a common intention and acted together when they committed these offences,” the judge said.

He added that the two must have foreseen the serious danger their actions posed to the young boy.

“The court is of the view that when they wrapped the deceased with the sellotape, they foresaw the risk of death occurring. However, they recklessly continued and gambled with the life of the deceased,” he said.

Justice Mokoko also used the opportunity to address broader concerns about the public's confidence in the criminal justice system.

He noted that there is growing concern within society about violent crimes, particularly those targeting women and children. According to the judge, the courts have a responsibility to ensure that justice is served and that the public maintains trust in the system.

“The court has taken judicial notice that the trust of society in the criminal justice system has diminished,” he said.

He added that it is the responsibility of the courts to help restore that trust by ensuring that offenders who commit serious crimes receive appropriate punishment.

“Through its sentences,

the court must send a clear message to potential offenders and

to the community that offences against women and children will face the full force of the

law,” Justice Mokoko said. After considering the seriousness of the offences, the court sentenced both Maoeng

and Lefoka to 40 years imprisonment for murder. In addition to the murder sentence, the court imposed five years imprisonment for theft and a further one-year jail term for assault.

However, the sentences will run concurrently, meaning the two will effectively serve the 40-year imprisonment term.

The case attracted attention due to the shocking nature of the crime, particularly because Maoeng had been employed by the Sekokotoana family as a domestic worker.

Her position within the household had placed her in a position of trust.

The judge's remarks highlighted the disturbing betrayal involved in the crime, as the victim and his family had allowed Maoeng into their home as an employee.

The prosecution in the matter was led by Advocate Thato Lepheane.

The accused persons were represented by Advocates Pelele Ntori and Nketsi Makhera.

With the sentencing now concluded, the case brings some measure of closure to a deeply painful tragedy that claimed the life of a young child and left a family grieving.

Justice Mokoko's strong remarks underscored the court's commitment to protecting vulnerable members of society and ensuring that those who commit violent crimes face serious consequences under the law.

NUL SRC President in R340,000 Scandal Over Intervarsity Event Deal

By: Molefi Tsumane

The National University of Lesotho (NUL) has been drawn into a growing financial controversy after an events company accused Student Representative Council (SRC) President Tumo Tsanyane of breach of agreement, unpaid services and reputational damage linked to the university's recent Intervarsity event. Entertainment and events company Unicon Productions has formally lodged a complaint with the NUL Vice Chancellor, demanding R340,000 from Tsanyane over what it describes as a botched service arrangement involving two musical artists. Services Allegedly Commissioned In a letter addressed to the university's leadership, Unicon Productions claims that Tsanyane approached the company to source and coordinate two artists for the Intervarsity event.

According to the company, the agreed cost for securing the artists and coordinating the performance arrangements was R170,000.

The company says it initially received R30,000,



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followed by another R30,000 payment which was later reversed.

Unicon claims that after the reversal, Tsanyane publicly alleged that the company had "scammed him," an accusation it

says is false and damaging to its reputation.

Breach of Agreement Alleged

The complaint outlines a series of issues that the company says constitute a breach of their agree-

ment.

Among the allegations are that the SRC leadership:

- Engaged another service provider without notifying Unicon

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[The main body of the page contains several columns of text that are heavily blurred and illegible due to the image quality. The text appears to be a continuation of an article or report.]

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“I Am an MP”: Tsoana-Makhulo Lawmaker Accused of Intimidation in Failed Borehole Project

By: Lemohang Botsane

A borehole drilling project worth more than M82,000 has turned into a bitter dispute after a Maseru family accused Tsoana-Makhulo Member of Parliament Teboho Notsi of using his political status to intimidate mediators instead of resolving complaints about the work done by his company.

The controversy centres on Notsi Electrical (PTY) LTD, a Teyateyaneng-based borehole drilling company owned and managed by Notsi.

According to information provided to Lesotho Tribune, the company was contracted in October 2024 by a Mazenod resident seeking borehole drilling services at a property in Ha-Jimisi.

Quotation and Site Inspection

The client says Notsi personally handled early communications and later provided a quotation covering the drilling and installation of the borehole system.

Before work could begin, the contractor requested a surveillance fee to conduct a site inspection. The terms were later renegotiated so that the inspection would be done first and the fee paid afterwards. Notsi reportedly visited the site alone to assess the location and marked what he said was the most suitable spot for drilling. The surveillance fee was then paid in full.

Project Handed to Foreman

Months later, when the project was expected to begin, the client says



Notsi became difficult to reach.

When communication eventually resumed, the MP allegedly informed the client that the project would now be handled by the company's foreman. According to the client, the foreman admitted he was not fully knowledgeable about certain aspects of the company's operations, but assured the client that the team could complete the project within a week.

The foreman then requested M82,400 upfront for borehole drilling costs.

After further negotiations, the client agreed to pay the amount in phases.

Payments Made
Records seen by Lesotho Tribune indicate the following payments were made:

Borehole Payment Summary		
Date	Payment Description	Amount (LSL)
05 Nov 2025	Borehole drilling costs	55,900
06 Nov 2025	Borehole equipment	17,000
12 Nov 2025	Stand and tank	9,500
Total Paid		82,400

Lesotho Tribune

Despite the payments, the project quickly began experiencing delays.

The contractor allegedly cited bad weather and mechanical problems as reasons for repeated postponements.

Borehole Location Changed

When work eventually began, the client says the drilling location was changed without her consent, despite the site having been previously inspected by Notsi.

A witness present during construction told Lesotho Tribune that workers discussed concerns that the original drilling point might run beneath latrine pipes, prompting them to shift the drilling site.

The client claims she was not consulted about the change.

During installation, workers allegedly made faulty pipe connections, which were reportedly left unrepaired.

Only Five Litres of Water
After more than three weeks, the project was declared complete.

However, the results were far from satisfactory. The client says that even after allowing the borehole to rest for 48 hours, it produced only about five litres of water, far below what had been expected. The water that did emerge was described as muddy and inconsistent.

Repeated attempts to reach Notsi to address the problems reportedly went unanswered.

Police Mediation

Frustrated by the lack of response, the client says they sought assistance from the local police station, where a station manager attempted to mediate the dispute.

It was during this mediation effort that the situation allegedly escalated. According to the client, Notsi responded by asserting his political status and warning the mediator against interfering in the matter.

The client claims the MP told the mediator they

were “biting the hand that feeds them” by getting involved.

Party Intervention Attempted

Because the dispute had taken on a political dimension, the client says they were advised to seek assistance from the Revolution for Prosperity (RFP) Secretary-General. Following that intervention, Notsi reportedly contacted the client and agreed to a meeting.

However, the client claims the meeting did not result in a resolution.

Instead, the MP allegedly repeatedly invoked his position as a Member of Parliament, which the client interpreted as intimidation.

Refund Refused

During the meeting, the client requested a refund of the M82,400 drilling fee, arguing that the borehole had failed.

Notsi reportedly rejected the request but instead proposed re-drilling the borehole.

Since that meeting, the client says the MP has only returned once to re-survey the site and has not taken further action to fix the problem.

Family Left Without Water

At the centre of the dispute is a family that had hoped the borehole would provide reliable access to water at their home.

Instead, they say they are left with a poorly functioning borehole and unresolved questions about the money paid.

MP Yet to Respond

Lesotho Tribune attempted to contact Teboho Notsi for comment.

He had not responded to requests for his side of the story by the time of publication.

ESG Lens

M3.49 Billion Missing on Paper as Audit

Auditor-General finds massive discrepancies in Lesotho's financial statements and raises questions about billions recorded in government books

Lesotho Tribune

By: Lesotho Tribune

The most explosive number in Lesotho's latest public audit is not a budget allocation, not a debt issue, and not even the admitted fraud case. It is a discrepancy. A staggering M3.49 billion gap sits between two parts of the same set of government financial statements.

The Auditor-General's report on the Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2023 delivers an adverse audit opinion, the most severe audit judgement possible. In simple terms, it means the financial statements do not fairly present the financial position of the Government of Lesotho.



The audit found that the Consolidated Statement of Cash Receipts and Payments shows that government had a cash

balance of M5.71 billion at the end of the financial year. Yet Note 15 in the same financial statements reports a cash balance of

only M2.22 billion. The difference between these figures is M3.49 billion. This contradiction lies at

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Ending GBV In Lesotho: A Call to Action

By: Lemohang Botsane

MASERU

Gender Links Lesotho has called the nation to work together to tackle gender-based violence (GBV) in Lesotho. The organisation made the call during the commemoration of International Women's Day in Maseru this week.

The event shared preliminary insights from the Gender-Based Violence Indicators Study aimed at understanding the scale and evolving nature of violence in Lesotho. The study is conducted with backing from the European Union and in partnership with several organisations including the International Commission of Jurists, Seinoli Legal Centre, People's Matrix and Sesotho

Media and Development. Mamolibeli Ngakane, an officer in the Department of Gender, Youth and Social Development, said gender-based violence remains one of the most serious barriers to gender equality and social justice in the country.

"Gender-based violence is not inevitable; it is preventable. The evidence we are generating must move from awareness to action so that women and girls can live free from fear and fully exercise their rights," Ngakane said.

The study aims to give updated information on



the drivers and patterns of gender-based violence and help guide national dialogue and policy responses. According to Gender Links, while progress has been made in addressing gender-based violence, new challenges are prevailing due to social, economic and technological changes.

"Violence against women and girls is a global pandemic that knows no borders, affecting women and girls of all ages, backgrounds and communities," said Gender Links Lesotho Country Manager, Thapelo Tlakanelo.

The organisation made an emphasis that addressing GBV requires a compre-

hensive approach that involves governments, civil society, communities and individuals working together to prevent and respond to violence.

"On this International Women's Day, we call on all stakeholders to join forces to end GBV and promote a culture of respect, equality and justice for all," Tlakanelo said. The commemoration of International Women's Day is an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of women while also spotlighting the hurdles that continue to affect their safety, dignity and rights. Lesotho has made commitments to address GBV, including the adoption

of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which sets targets for countries to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. However, more needs to be done to translate these commitments into action. The Lesotho government, civil society, communities and individuals must work together to prevent and respond to GBV,⁵ and promote a culture of respect, equality and justice for all.

The fight against GBV is a collective responsibility, and every person has a role to play in promoting a culture of respect and equality.

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the centre of the Auditor-General's findings and is one of the key reasons the national accounts were judged unreliable.

"Because of the significance of the matters described... the financial statements do not present fairly the financial position of the Government."

— Auditor-General The report also reveals inconsistencies in how changes in government cash were reported during the year. Note 15 indicates that cash fell by about M1.61 billion between March 2022

and March 2023. However, the Consolidated Statement of Cash Receipts and Payments reports a decline of only M597 million. The difference between those two figures amounts to roughly M1.01 billion. The discrepancy suggests that even the basic question of how much government cash increased or decreased during the year cannot be clearly established from the financial statements themselves.

Key figures highlighted in the audit report are summarised below:

Issue	Amount	Explanation
Cash balance discrepancy	M3.49 billion	Difference between M5.71 billion reported

cash and M2.22 billion recorded in supporting notes	Difference in reported cash decrease M1.01 billion	Cash decline reported differently in financial statements and notes
Problematic opening balance adjustments	M3.476 billion	Adjustments identified during reconciliation of historic balances
Overstated cashbook balances	M1.402 billion	Historic cashbook balances found to be overstated
IMF PRGF account balance	M973 million	Account later determined to belong to the Central Bank rather than government
Blocked Treasury Bills account	M575 million	Balance included in cashbook although transactions were not recorded in government books
Domestic debt payments outside IFMIS	M524 million	Debt transactions processed by the Central Bank outside the accounting system
Fraudulent payments not accounted for	M8 million	Fraudulent payments awaiting accounting treatment
Fraud detected in Consolidated Fund	Over M50 million	Fraud case uncovered during reconciliation of bank accounts
Funds recovered from South Africa	M18 million	Money recovered following fraud investigations

The audit suggests that the billions appearing in discrepancies do not necessarily represent a single missing transaction but rather a pattern of unresolved reconciliation issues accumulated over several years.

Treasury itself acknowledges that a reconciliation exercise uncovered multiple large historic distortions affecting opening balances. These include overstated balances in the government cashbook, accounts later found not to belong to government, and debt payments processed outside the main accounting system.

"These differences compromise the integrity of the consolidated financial statements."

— Auditor-General's report The report also indicates that government maintained nearly 300 bank accounts across commercial banks, the central bank and mobile network operators. A large number of accounts can complicate reconciliation and make financial oversight more difficult.

Compounding the concerns, the Accountant General disclosed that more than M50 million was fraudulently taken from the Consolidated Fund during the financial year. Investigations

resulted in multiple arrests and approximately M18 million has been recovered.

In addition to the cash discrepancies, the audit identified weaknesses in the reporting of public debt and loan guarantees. Certain liabilities lacked supporting evidence while foreign debt repayments were overstated by more than M131 million.

Sidebar: What an Adverse Audit Opinion Means
An adverse audit opinion is the most serious conclusion an auditor can issue on financial statements.

It means the auditor believes the financial statements are materially incorrect and do not accurately reflect the organisation's financial position.

For a national government, this implies that the reported figures on revenue, expenditure, cash balances or debt cannot be relied upon with confidence.

In practical terms, it signals that major accounting errors, unsupported balances or inconsistencies exist in the financial records.

Adverse opinions are rare and usually indicate deep structural problems in financial reporting and financial controls.

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Suspended Sentence in Lover's Death Case

By Tholoana Lesenya

MASERU

The High Court has sentenced a 27-year-old woman to seven years imprisonment, wholly suspended, after she was convicted of culpable homicide for the fatal stabbing of her boyfriend during a heated altercation.

Lintle Letima escaped an immediate jail term after the court ruled that the sentence would remain suspended for three years on condition that she pays M50, 000 in compensation to the family of the deceased within that period. Should she fail to pay the amount, the seven-year prison sentence will take effect.

The judgment was delivered this week by Justice Tšelisio Mokoko in the High Court in Maseru. Letima had initially been charged with murder following the death of her boyfriend, Motseki Kholotsa, who was 32 years old at the time of his death. However, during court proceedings she pleaded guilty to the lesser charge of culpable homicide. Her lawyer, Advocate Motjantji Kao, informed the court that the change in plea was made on the instructions of his client. The prosecution, represented by Advocate Tsebisio Fuma, accepted the plea. According to evidence



presented before the court, Letima and the deceased had been in a romantic relationship and were living together in the Moshoeshoe II area in Maseru. The tragic events that led to Kholotsa's death unfolded in November 2024. Court records show that on the night of November 8, 2024, Letima went to a bar at Sea point area after discovering that Kholotsa was there with another woman. The court heard that the other woman had just graduated from a higher learning institution earlier that day and that Kholotsa and several friends were celebrating the achievement with her. At the time, Letima had recently discovered that she was pregnant with Kholot-

sa's child.

The accused attempted several times to speak to her boyfriend that evening, but the court heard that he refused to engage with her. Evidence further revealed that Kholotsa and his companions later moved to another location. Letima followed them there and again demanded to talk to him, but he continued to avoid the conversation. The situation escalated when Letima phoned Kholotsa in an attempt to reach him. Instead of answering the call himself, the deceased reportedly handed his phone to the new girlfriend. The court heard that the conversation between Letima and the woman

was hostile and unfriendly, further intensifying the tension surrounding the situation.

Later, in the early hours of November 9, 2024, Kholotsa and his friends returned home.

Letima arrived shortly afterwards and knocked on the door. When Kholotsa opened it and realised it was her, he allegedly tried to prevent her from entering the house.

An argument broke out between the two.

During the confrontation, the situation turned violent. Evidence before the court showed that Letima grabbed a knife and stabbed Kholotsa during the altercation.

Kholotsa was rushed to hospital following the incident but was declared dead upon arrival.

The court also heard that immediately after the stabbing, Letima attempted to take her own life. However, friends of the deceased who were present managed to intervene and persuaded her not to harm herself. She later handed herself over to the police.

During mitigation of sentence, Advocate Kao told the court that his client and her family had attempted to engage the family of the deceased shortly after the incident. The intention, he said, was to contribute towards burial arrangements and

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to begin discussions about compensation.

However, those efforts were initially unsuccessful.

Kao told the court that the bereaved family rejected an earlier proposal by the accused to resolve the matter through mediation. Despite that setback, discussions between the families eventually took place and an agreement was reached.

According to the defence, the two families ultimately agreed that Letima would pay M30,000 as compensation to the family of the deceased.

The lawyer also highlighted several personal circumstances affecting his client. He told the court that Letima suffered a miscarriage following the incident, adding that the emotional

trauma surrounding the events had a profound impact on her life.

He further stated that she had been drinking alcohol on the night the incident occurred, which may have influenced her behaviour. Kao emphasised that his client was still young and had demonstrated remorse for what had happened. He also pointed out that she cooperated fully with the police during investigations and complied with all her bail conditions while the case was pending before the court.

For these reasons, the defence asked the court to show leniency when imposing sentence. Kao argued that a custodial sentence would make it difficult for his client to compensate the family of the deceased.

Advocate Fuma, appearing for the prosecution, urged the court to impose a sentence that would reflect the seriousness of taking a human life.

He reminded the court that Kholotsa was still a young man with a future ahead of him.

Fuma said the deceased's parents had expected a great deal from their son and had suffered a painful loss.

At the same time, he acknowledged that the family of the deceased was open to the concept of restorative justice. He indicated that they were willing to allow the accused to compensate them for the death of their son.

The prosecution stressed that the court should send a strong message that conflicts, particularly

those arising from personal relationships, should be resolved peacefully rather than through violence.

After considering the circumstances of the case, Justice Mokoko imposed a seven-year prison sentence but suspended it entirely. The suspension will remain in place for three years on the condition that Letima pays M50,000 to the family of the deceased as compensation within that period.

Failure to meet this condition will result in the sentence becoming effective. The case highlights the tragic consequences that can arise from relationship conflicts and emotional confrontations, while also reflecting the court's attempt to balance punishment with restorative justice.



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LAST ACCUSED IN MUTUNGAMIRI SHOOTING CASE GRANTED BAIL

BY: Tholoana Lesenya

MASERU

The High Court has granted bail to Khutlang Mochesane, the last of four accused persons charged with the attempted murder of former Lesotho Times and Sunday Express editor Lloyd Mutungamiri, bringing all suspects in the long-running case out of custody.

Justice Molefi Makara this week ordered Mochesane's release on bail under conditions similar to those imposed on his co-accused, who had already been freed.

Mochesane had remained the only accused still in custody after Brigadier Rapele Mphaki and Lance Corporal Maribe Nathane were granted bail in December 2025, while Nyatso Tsoeunyane was released on bail this week too.

The four men are jointly charged with attempted murder following a shooting incident in which Mutungamiri sustained serious injuries nearly a decade ago.

In granting bail, the court ordered Mochesane to pay a bail deposit of M2, 000 and to secure a surety of M10, 000. He was also instructed to attend all remand hearings and stand trial whenever required by the court.

Justice Makara further warned the accused not to interfere with state witnesses during the course of the proceedings.

As part of the bail conditions, Mochesane was ordered to report himself to the Maseru Central Charge Office on his



remand dates and to surrender his passport to the Clerk of the Magistrate's Court.

The granting of bail to Mochesane means that all four accused in the matter are now out on bail while awaiting the continuation of the case. The bail applications by the accused were largely motivated by delays in the prosecution of the matter, which has been stalled due to developments within the judiciary.

During their applications, the accused argued that the progress of the case has been uncertain following the suspension of the magistrate who had been presiding over the matter. Senior Resident Magistrate Peter Murenzi, who was handling the case, was suspended by the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) after allegations of misconduct were raised against him.

Following his suspension, the JSC directed that all case files which were under his authority be locked away pending further decisions. As a result, several cases that were before him have not been able to proceed in court.

The accused therefore approached the court seeking bail, arguing that the delays were beyond their control and that they should not remain in custody indefinitely while the

matter remains stalled. Earlier this week, Nyatso Tsoeunyane became the third accused to be released on bail after his application was considered by the court.

Like his co-accused, Tsoeunyane was ordered to pay a bail deposit of M2, 000 and to secure a surety of M10, 000.

He was also instructed to surrender all travelling documents to the Clerk of the Court.

In addition, he was ordered to report himself to the Maseru Central Charge Office every two weeks as part of the conditions attached to his release.

The court emphasized that the accused must comply with all bail conditions and ensure that they attend all future court appearances related to the case.

The accused persons, Mphaki, Nathane, Tsoeunyane and Mochesane face charges of contravening Section 22(1), read together with Section 109 of the Penal Code Act No. 6 of 2010.

According to the charge sheet, the four allegedly acted in concert or with a common purpose when they attacked Mutungamiri.

It is alleged that on July 9, 2016, at or near Ha Thamae in Maseru, the accused shot Mutungamiri and inflicted serious injuries on him.

The shooting of the veteran journalist attracted widespread attention at the time and raised concerns about the safety of media practitioners in the country.

Mutungamiri, who was

the editor of the Lesotho Times and Sunday Express, survived the attack but sustained severe injuries.

The case has since been moving slowly through the courts, with various procedural developments contributing to delays over the years.

The suspension of Magistrate Murenzi has further complicated the situation, leaving uncertainty about when the trial will resume. In this instance, the accused argued that the indefinite delay created uncertainty about the future of the case and justified their applications for bail.

The court ultimately agreed to release all four accused persons on bail while awaiting further developments in the matter. Although they are now out of custody, the accused are still required to appear in court whenever the case resumes.

They also remain bound by the conditions imposed by the court, including the obligation not to interfere with witnesses and to comply with reporting requirements.

The prosecution is expected to proceed with the matter once the administrative issues affecting the case are resolved.

For now, the future of the trial remains uncertain as the judiciary continues to deal with the implications of the suspension of the magistrate who had been presiding over the case.

Until then, the four accused will remain on bail while awaiting the next direction from the courts regarding the continuation of the attempted murder trial.

EDITORIAL

A Nation That Debates Poorly Cannot Govern Itself Well



15

Lesotho Tribune

By: Editorial

Spend a few hours listening to the national conversation in Lesotho and a troubling pattern emerges.

Tune into a radio phone-in programme. Walk into a local shebeen. Scroll through social media. The rhythm is often the same. Loud voices, strong opinions, very little substance. Names are called, political loyalties are defended, rumours are recycled, and personalities are attacked. What is striking is not that people disagree. Disagreement is healthy in a democracy. The problem is the quality of the disagreement.

Too often our debates revolve around personalities rather than policies. We argue about who is corrupt, who betrayed whom, which party is better, or which leader deserves blame. What we rarely hear is a serious discussion about systems, incentives

and long-term national strategy.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the quality of debate in a country often reflects the quality of its institutions.

Political economists such as Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, in their influential work *Why Nations Fail*, argue that societies become prosperous when they develop strong institutions that encourage productivity, innovation and accountability. But institutions do not appear by accident. They emerge from societies that debate governance seriously.

Where public discourse is shallow, institutions tend to be weak.

One can observe this contrast by looking at societies that have experienced rapid development. In coun-

tries such as Singapore, South Korea or Finland, public debate has historically centred on issues like industrial policy, education standards, productivity and technological competitiveness.

These societies argued constantly, but the arguments were about how to build the future.

Should the country prioritise manufacturing or services?

How should the education system prepare the workforce for the next generation of industries?

How should government regulate markets while encouraging investment?

Those are not glamorous debates. They require patience, data and a willingness to think beyond political slogans.

In Lesotho, by contrast, we

too often prefer the drama of political theatre.

The radio caller shouts about politicians. The social media commentator circulates unverified claims. The conversation quickly becomes emotional rather than analytical.

And so the national dialogue becomes trapped in a loop of reaction rather than strategy.

This is not simply a cultural observation. It has economic consequences.

Development economists such as Dani Rodrik have long argued that countries grow when they engage in what he calls "economic self-discovery." Societies must constantly ask themselves difficult questions about which sectors to develop, which policies to experiment with and which

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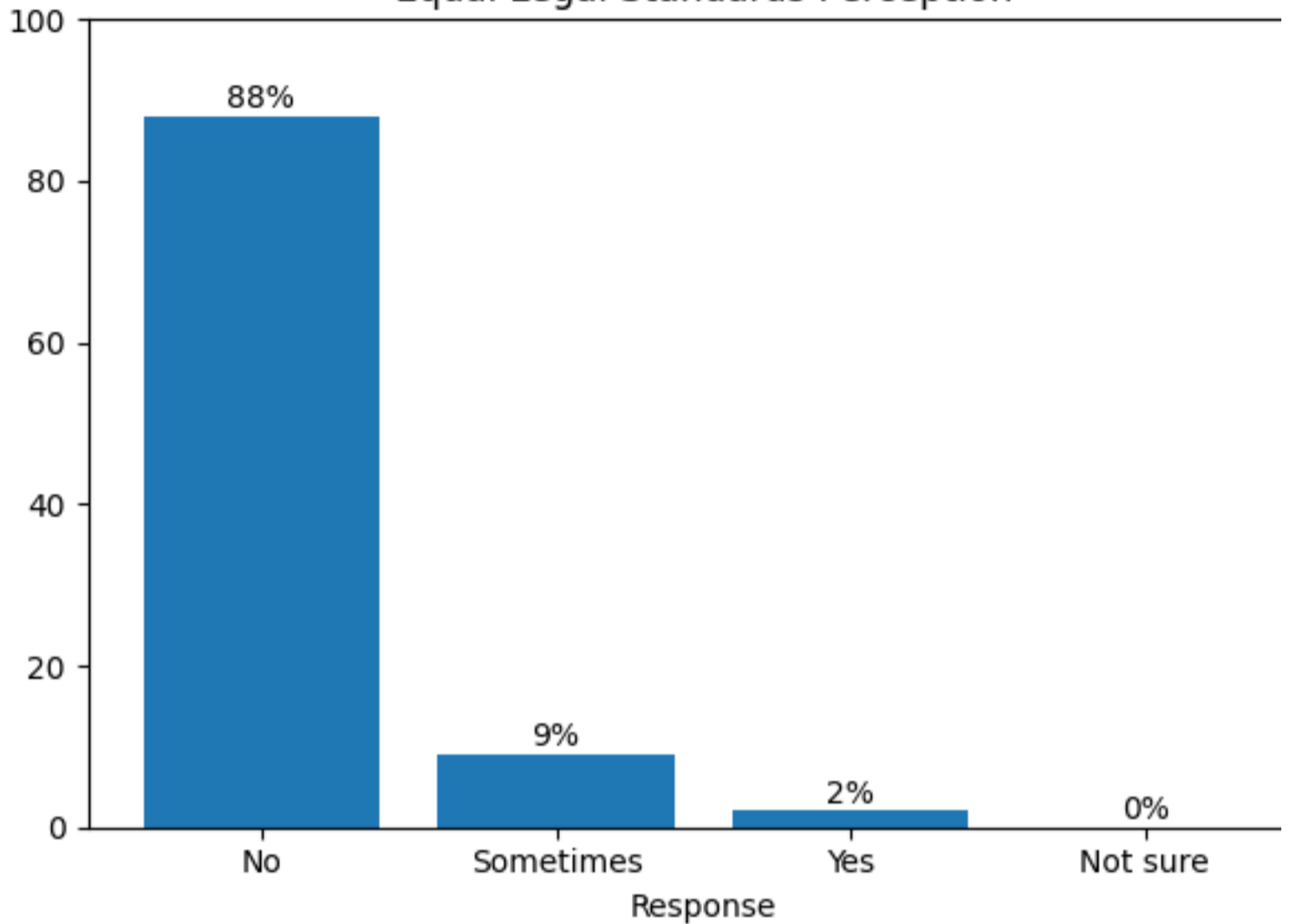
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SENTIMENT TRACKER

Basotho largely grasp Hormuz risk, but many still underestimate the full economic shock

Lesotho Tribune Sentiment Tracker
Equal Legal Standards Perception



By Lesotho Tribune

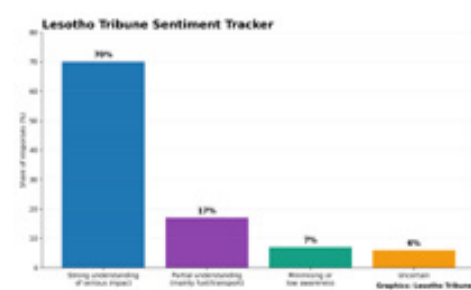
A combined reading of Lesotho Tribune’s X and Facebook polls suggests that most respondents understand that any closure of the Strait of Hormuz would hit small economies like Lesotho hard, mainly through higher fuel, transport and food costs.

Across the two platforms, the clearest message is that the public does not see this as a distant Middle East story. It is being read, quite correctly, as an issue that could quickly filter into daily life in Lesotho through petrol prices, commuter fares, imported goods and general inflation.

The strongest sentiment came from respondents who showed a clear understanding that the impact would be serious. On X, 66 percent said the closure would have a serious impact on countries like Lesotho. On Facebook, the dominant response was that it would affect the cost of food and transport, showing that

many readers are already connecting global oil disruptions to household economics.

That matters. Lesotho does not import crude oil directly from the Gulf in the way larger economies do, but it is still highly exposed to external price shocks because it depends on imported fuel, imported goods and South African logistics chains. When global oil prices jump, the pressure eventually reaches local consumers.



The combined sentiment

also shows a second, smaller group that recognises some impact, but perhaps in a narrower way. These are readers who mainly associate the crisis with fuel prices only, or who say the effects would be only somewhat serious. That view is not entirely wrong, but it may still understate the wider knock-on effects. Fuel is usually only the beginning. Once transport costs rise, food prices, construction inputs, retail costs and service charges often follow.

A smaller minority appeared uncertain or dismissive. On X, 14 percent said not really, while 6 percent were unsure. On Facebook, uncertainty

was also visible, while the dismissive option attracted little visible support. This suggests that while public awareness is fairly strong, there is still room for more economic explanation and public education.

The broader takeaway is that Basotho audiences seem alert to the danger, but not everyone fully appreciates how quickly a shipping disruption in one part of the world can show up in taxi fares, shop shelves and monthly household budgets here at home.

For Lesotho, that is the real lesson. The Strait of Hormuz may be far away, but the shock would not stay there.

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institutional reforms are needed.

That process requires serious national debate.

Without it, governments stumble from crisis to crisis, responding to events rather than shaping them. Consider the issues that should dominate the national conversation in Lesotho today.

How should the country leverage its water resources as a strategic economic asset?

How can agriculture move from subsistence production to high-value export markets?

What reforms are necessary to attract industrial investment and create jobs?

How should state-owned enterprises be governed to prevent waste and mismanagement?

These are the kinds of debates that shape the trajectory of nations.

Instead, the public sphere is often consumed by arguments that produce heat but little light.

The tragedy is that Basotho are not incapable of serious discussion. On the contrary, the country has a long intellectual tradition rooted in mission schools, universities and a history of political engagement.

What has eroded is the discipline of reasoning. Political scientist Robert Putnam once observed that strong democracies rely on what he called “social capital” — networks of trust, civic participation and shared responsibility. When societies lose those habits, public debate becomes fragmented and cynical. Every discussion becomes a battlefield.

Yet a country cannot solve complex problems if it refuses to think carefully about them.

The real test of a society’s maturity is not whether people speak loudly about politics. It is whether they can ask better questions. A productive national conversation would sound very different.

Instead of asking which politician is to blame for unemployment, we would ask what structural barriers prevent businesses from expanding.

Instead of arguing endlessly about party loyalty, we would examine how procurement systems, regulatory frameworks and investment policies shape economic outcomes.

Instead of reacting emotionally to each new scandal, we would debate the institutional reforms re-

quired to prevent the next one.

In other words, we would shift from political noise to policy thinking.

Nations do not progress because they shout the loudest. They progress because they think more clearly.

Lesotho does not lack talent. It does not lack patriotism. What it lacks, increasingly, is a culture of disciplined public reasoning.

Until that changes, the country risks remaining trapped in a cycle where the conversation grows louder while the solutions grow weaker.

A nation that debates poorly cannot govern itself well. The first step toward progress is not simply better leaders.

It is better conversations.

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OPINION

Development Without Justice: What Manako Lethakha Reveals About Gender Equality in Lesotho



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Lesotho Tribune

By: Mosa Mary Letsie

Today, the 10th of March 2026, marks exactly one year since judgment was delivered in *Manako Lethakha & Ors v The Lesotho Highlands Water Commission & Ors* was read to the parties. The case arose from a constitutional challenge brought by three rural women affected by Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project one of the largest infrastructure and development initiatives in Southern Africa. At its core, the litigation asked a deceptively simple constitutional question: whether a policy that appears neutral on paper can nonetheless produce discriminatory outcomes when applied within deeply unequal social realities. The applicants asked the High Court to confront the lived consequences of development policy on women whose land, livelihoods, and social standing are shaped by long-standing customary and patriarchal structures. The court was therefore called upon to determine whether the LHWP Phase II Compensation Policy, particularly its reliance on the concept

of the “head of household,” violated constitutional guarantees of equality and protection of property. This anniversary arrives at a critical moment when the global community is itself reflecting on the unfinished struggle for gender justice. Just two days ago, on the 8th March, the world commemorated International Women’s Day under the theme “Rights. Justice. Action. For All Women and Girls.” The theme is not merely celebratory; it is a call to dismantle the barriers that continue to obstruct equal justice for women and girls. These barriers include discriminatory laws, weak or poorly implemented legal protections, and entrenched social norms that quietly but persistently erode women’s rights. The global conversation continues this week as governments, civil society organisations, communities and institutions convene at the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70). Among the central ques-

tions before the international community is whether the world is prepared to move beyond rhetoric and ensure that women and girls enjoy genuine equality before the law, or allow injustice to persist with impunity. Put differently, the moment calls for reflection on whether legal systems are capable of delivering justice in practice rather than merely proclaiming it in principle. It is precisely in this broader spirit that Lesotho must also pause and reflect. Anniversaries of landmark cases are not simply symbolic milestones. They provide an opportunity to examine what our courts have done, what they have failed to do, and what their decisions reveal about the trajectory of constitutional justice in the country. One year after *Manako Lethakha*, the question is not simply whether the court resolved a dispute about a compensation policy. The deeper question is what the judgment tells us about how our legal system un-

derstands To appreciate the significance of the case, it is necessary to situate it within the broader structure of Lesotho’s legal system. Lesotho operates under a plural legal framework in which Roman-Dutch common law/ the received law inherited through colonial administration law operates alongside Basotho customary law. While this dual system reflects the country’s legal history and cultural traditions, it has also generated profound enduring tensions in the protection and realisation of women’s rights. Customary law, particularly as applied in matters relating to marriage, property, land allocation, and inheritance, has long been criticised for reinforcing patriarchal authority and the subordinate legal status of women. Women were historically treated as legal minors within marriage, excluded from meaningful control over property, and frequently dependent on male relatives for access to land and economic resources. Recognising these structural inequalities, the early 2000s marked an important period of gender law reform in Lesotho. A series of legislative interventions sought to dismantle the legal disabilities historically imposed on women and align the country’s legal framework with constitutional guarantees of equality and international human rights commitments. Among the most transformative reforms was the Legal Capacity of

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Married Persons Act 2006, which abolished the marital power historically exercised by husbands over their wives in civil marriages. The Act grants married women full legal capacity to enter contracts, administer property, and participate in legal proceedings without the consent of their husbands. In doing so, it dismantles a doctrine that had effectively rendered married women perpetual legal minors. Subsequent reforms followed in related areas. The Land Act 2010 introduced measures designed to strengthen women's land rights by allowing women to hold and register land in their own names and encouraging joint titling within marriage. More recently, the adoption of the Counter Domestic Violence Act 2022 has sought to strengthen legal protection for survivors of domestic abuse, while the Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act 2024 has addressed discriminatory practices in succession and inheritance that historically disadvantaged widows and daughters. Parallel efforts to harmonise laws governing marriage, property, and inheritance have also sought to reduce the inconsistencies produced by the coexistence of statutory and customary legal systems.

At the constitutional level, further steps have been taken to strengthen women's participation in public life. Recent constitutional reforms introducing affirmative action measures aim to address the persistent underrepresentation of women in decision-making institutions and promote greater gender balance in political leadership. Taken together, these reforms demonstrate that Lesotho has not been indifferent to the demands of

gender equality. Over the past two decades, the country has made notable efforts to align its legal framework with modern principles of equality and international human rights standards, including through the ratification of key regional and international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples's Rights.

However, the existence of progressive legislation does not automatically translate into substantive equality in practice. Making women's rights real requires far more than the enactment of legal reforms. The translation of formal equality before the law into equal outcomes is neither automatic nor guaranteed. Even where gender-equal laws exist, their impact may be undermined by entrenched inequalities, discriminatory social norms, and harmful customary practices that continue to structure everyday life.

Moreover, patterns of economic development themselves can reproduce or deepen gender inequalities. Large-scale development initiatives, land allocation systems, and compensation frameworks often operate through institutional arrangements that assume male authority within households or communities. In such contexts, policies that appear neutral on paper may still produce outcomes that systematically disadvantage women. It was precisely within this intersection between legal reform, customary practice, and development policy that the dispute in *Manako Lethakha* emerged.

The case was brought

before the Constitutional Division of the High Court by three women from Mokhotlong, a district directly affected by the implementation of Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. The applicants challenged the legality of the LHWP Phase II Compensation Policy (2016), arguing that its design and implementation produced discriminatory consequences for married women.

The dispute centred on the policy's requirement that compensation payments for affected land and assets be disbursed to the "head of household." In practice, this designation frequently corresponded with the husband, even in circumstances where land was jointly owned or where both spouses had participated in the compensation process. The applicants argued that although they had co-signed compensation documentation relating to their land and property, they were ultimately excluded from accessing the compensation funds, which were paid directly to their husbands. As a result, they were deprived of meaningful control over compensation linked to property in which they had a legitimate legal interest.

On this basis, the applicants mounted a constitutional challenge against the policy. They argued that the designation of husbands as heads of households for purposes of compensation disbursement disproportionately affected married women and was inconsistent with statutory reforms such as the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 2006 and the Land Act 2010, both of which recognise the equal legal capacity and property rights of spouses. They further argued that the compensation framework exacerbated

gender inequality by systematically privileging male authority within the household and marginalising women economically. The applicants also contended that the policy violated the Constitution of Lesotho, particularly Section 18, which guarantees freedom from discrimination, and Section 17, which protects individuals from the arbitrary deprivation of property without adequate compensation.

The High Court ultimately dismissed the constitutional challenge. The majority concluded that the Compensation Policy was formally gender-neutral and therefore consistent with the Constitution and relevant statutes. In the court's view, the applicants had failed to demonstrate that the policy itself discriminated against women or authorised the arbitrary seizure of property. Although the court acknowledged that difficulties might arise in the implementation of the policy, it held that such issues fell outside the scope of a constitutional challenge to the policy itself. A separate opinion reached the same outcome through a different reasoning, emphasising the principle of constitutional avoidance and suggesting that alternative remedies such as proceedings before the Land Court or civil claims, could address the applicants' grievances.

However, the factual record reveals a more complex story than the one reflected in the judgment.

The applicants did not passively accept the compensation arrangements imposed upon them. On the contrary, the record demonstrates that some of the women raised concerns during the compensation process itself and requested

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alternative arrangements, including the possibility of receiving their share of the compensation separately. One applicant explained that she had been estranged from her husband for several years and specifically raised the issue of separate compensation with officials administering the process. Despite this, the officials insisted that compensation would proceed through the husband's account in accordance with the "head of household" arrangement. The applicant ultimately agreed to co-sign the documentation only after being assured that she would receive her share of the compensation.

In practice, however, the compensation was deposited directly into the husband's account. While she was able to obtain a portion of the first payment after intervention from a family member, the subsequent compensation payments were never shared with her. The economic value associated with property in which she held a lawful interest was therefore effectively placed beyond her control.

These facts are significant because they contradict the suggestion that the applicants' grievances arose merely from private marital disputes. The women did not discover after the fact that their husbands controlled the funds. Rather, they warned officials in advance about the risks associated with directing compensation exclusively to their husbands, particularly where marital relationships were already strained. Despite these warnings,

the compensation process proceeded in a manner that placed full financial control of the funds in the hands of the husbands. The difficulty with the reasoning adopted in *Manako Lethakha* is that it rests on a narrow conception of equality one that looks only at whether a rule is neutral in its wording, rather than whether it produces unequal outcomes in practice. By focusing almost exclusively on the formal neutrality of the Compensation Policy, the court effectively insulated the policy from meaningful constitutional scrutiny. However, constitutional equality cannot be reduced to a purely textual inquiry. A rule may appear neutral while still reinforcing existing hierarchies. This is particularly true in contexts where policies operate within deeply gendered social structures, such as rural land ownership, household authority, and economic decision-making.

In such contexts, a policy that channels compensation through the "head of household" cannot be assessed in the abstract. The concept of the head of household is not socially neutral. In many rural communities in Lesotho, it continues to be understood through a patriarchal lens, where men are presumed to be the primary decision-makers and economic controllers within the family.

A policy that directs compensation through this structure inevitably interacts with those underlying norms. From the perspective of substantive equality, public authorities administering

compensation schemes cannot ignore the predictable consequences of their decisions within unequal social contexts. Where women explicitly express concern that directing compensation to a spouse may deprive them of their lawful share, a gender-sensitive administration of the policy would require safeguards ensuring that both spouses have meaningful access to compensation.

Instead, the approach adopted effectively transferred the economic value of jointly owned property into financial arrangements controlled exclusively by men.

The majority judgment nevertheless characterised the resulting harm as a private dispute between spouses, suggesting that the applicants' difficulties arose because they were "married to delinquents" who misused the funds. Such reasoning overlooks a fundamental point: the state cannot design or administer compensation mechanisms that foreseeably expose women to economic exclusion, and then disclaim responsibility when that exclusion materialises.

Where a policy operates within entrenched patriarchal structures, formal neutrality alone is insufficient. Substantive equality requires courts to interrogate how institutional practices interact with existing social hierarchies and whether those practices inadvertently reinforce them. By failing to engage meaningfully with this reality, the judgment risks normalising a system in which women's legally recognised proper-

ty rights can be effectively neutralised through administrative practices that concentrate financial control in the hands of men. What, then, should be taken from *Manako Lethakha* one year later?

The first lesson is that legal reform alone is not enough. Lesotho has made significant strides in reforming discriminatory laws and recognising women's rights. However, the promise of those reforms will remain incomplete unless institutions ensure that equality is realised in practice. This is where the courts play a crucial role. Courts are not merely interpreters of statutory language; they are guardians of the Constitution's transformative vision. When disputes reveal that administrative practices undermine the spirit of equality laws, courts must be willing to examine those practices critically. International Women's Day this year called for "Rights. Justice. Action." The message embedded in that theme is clear: rights proclaimed on paper must translate into justice in practice.

One year after *Manako Lethakha*, Lesotho has an opportunity to reflect on what equality before the law truly requires. The Constitution promises equality to all Basotho. The challenge before our courts, policymakers, and development institutions is to ensure that this promise is not confined to statutes and judgments, but becomes a reality that women from urban centres to the remote highlands of Mokhotlong can genuinely experience in their daily lives.

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Lesotho Tribune

By Lesotho Tribune

Agriculture remains one of the most important livelihoods in Lesotho, yet many farmers continue to struggle to make a profit even when they manage to produce food successfully.

The paradox is striking. While thousands of Basotho depend on farming, the country still imports large volumes of food from neighbouring South Africa. Experts say the problem is not only about production but about markets, infrastructure and policy.

Agriculture contributes roughly 8 percent to Lesotho's GDP and supports the livelihoods of a large portion of rural households. In fact, around 80 percent of households rely on some form of farming, mostly small-scale subsistence agriculture.

Yet the sector continues to face structural challenges that prevent it from reaching its full potential.

Farming remains heavily dependent on rainfall. One of the biggest obstacles facing Basotho farmers is the country's heavy reliance on rain-fed agriculture. Without reliable irrigation systems, crop

yields fluctuate dramatically depending on weather conditions.

Climate change is making matters worse.

Droughts, floods and extreme temperatures are becoming more frequent, directly affecting crop production. The agricultural sector is considered one of the most vulnerable parts of Lesotho's economy to climate change impacts. Farmers have also complained about limited access to climate-resilient seeds. In some cases, they are forced to use the same crop varieties even when weather patterns change dramatically.

This results in poor yields and increased risk.

Access to markets remains a major barrier. Even when farmers produce successfully, they often struggle to sell their crops.

Agricultural authorities acknowledge that market access remains one of the biggest problems in the sector. Farmers may harvest vegetables or cereals but fail to find buyers at fair prices. As a result, produce sometimes goes to waste while supermarkets continue



importing food from South Africa.

For many farmers, this situation creates frustration.

"If farmers cannot be sure their produce will sell, they cannot reinvest in farming," agricultural analysts have noted in studies of Lesotho's food system.

Limited arable land adds pressure. Lesotho also faces geographic constraints. Only a small portion of the country's land is suitable for crop farming.

Overgrazing, land degradation and soil erosion have further reduced productive farmland. These pressures make it difficult to increase agricultural output without significant improvements in technology and land management practices. Because of these limitations, experts argue that improving productivity per hectare is more realistic than simply expanding farmland.

Potatoes and horticulture offer hope. Despite the challenges, certain crops show strong potential for growth. Lesotho's high-altitude climate is particularly suitable for potato farming, which has increasingly been identified as a strategic crop for improving food security and generating income. Vegetables such as cabbage, spinach and peppers also perform well in many districts, especially where irrigation systems are available.

Some policymakers now argue that the future of

agriculture in Lesotho lies in commercial horticulture rather than traditional subsistence farming.

The policy question Agricultural experts increasingly believe that the key issue is not whether Basotho can produce food, but whether the country can create an environment where farming becomes a profitable business.

This includes:

- stronger protection for local farmers during harvest seasons
- improved irrigation infrastructure
- better agricultural extension services

•organised produce markets and aggregation centres

Without these interventions, many farmers will continue to struggle despite their efforts.

The bigger question for Lesotho

The debate over agriculture ultimately raises a larger question for policymakers. If a country where most people have farming experience cannot produce enough food for itself, what does that say about the economic system supporting agriculture?

For many rural communities, the answer is clear: Basotho farmers are capable of producing. What they lack is a system that allows them to compete.

Until that changes, the country will remain caught in a cycle where farmers produce food, but the nation still imports most of



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Lesotho Tribune

By Litšitso Letsunyane

Iran may not participate in the 2026 FIFA World Cup, according to the country's sports minister Ahmad Donyamali, who seemingly confirmed the decision on Wednesday. The tournament, organized by FIFA, is set to be co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada, with kickoff scheduled for June 11th to July 16th 2026.

The decision comes amid escalating tensions in the Middle East following airstrikes carried out by the United States and Israel that reportedly killed Iran's former Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and sparked a wider regional conflict.

Speaking to state television, Donyamali said the

ARTS & SPORTS

Iran May Miss 2026 FIFA World Cup After Minister Hints Withdrawal



circumstances surrounding the attacks have made it impossible for Iran to take part in the tournament. "Considering that this corrupt regime has assassinated our leader, under no circumstances can we participate in the World Cup," he said. "Our children are not safe and, fundamentally, such conditions for participation do not exist." Iran had initially secured its place in the tourna-

ment comfortably in March last year after finishing top of Group A in the Asian World Cup qualifiers. The team had been drawn into Group G for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, where they were set to face the Belgium national football team, the Egypt national football team, and the New Zealand national football team. The announcement has now placed the tour-

namment organizers in a difficult position. Iran's withdrawal could force FIFA to find a replacement team from the Asian confederation to fill the vacant spot in the competition. However, FIFA has not yet issued an official statement regarding the situation, leaving uncertainty over how the governing body will respond as preparations for the World Cup continue.

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