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The weight men carry: Lesotho's mental health crisis in numbers

As Lesotho marks Men's Mental Health Awareness Month this June, data show the kingdom carries the world's highest suicide burden, yet fewer men seek help than in any comparable country. The silence is killing them.

By Staff Reporter



"In Lesotho, the suicide rate is 72 per 100,000 persons, but breaking it down between men and women it is 116 and 30, respectively."

SOUTHERN AFRICA LITIGATION CENTRE, 2023
THE SILENCE OF MASCULINITY
 Researchers and clinicians argue that the data do not simply reflect that more Basotho men die by suicide. They reflect that fewer Basotho men speak about distress before it becomes acute. A 2025 systematic review published in the American Journal of Men's Health, drawing on 47 studies, found that conformity to traditional masculine norms was

YEAR	MALE (PER 100K)	FEMALE (PER 100K)	TOTAL (PER 100K)
2000	73.9	16.0	42.6
2005	82.7	17.2	42.6
2010	152.7	30.7	86.9
2014 (peak)	195.2	46.3	116.2
2019	146.9	34.6	87.5
2021 (GBD revised)	n/a	n/a	36.7

2021 (GBD revised) n/a n/a 36.7
 Source: World Health Organisation / GBD Study. 2021 GBD figure uses revised methodology.

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Health researchers and advocates argue that destigmatising help-seeking among men requires more than awareness campaigns. The 2025 University of Limpopo systematic review found that men's willingness to seek help increased as their sense of connection and belonging within a social group strengthened. Community-based, peer-led models, radio programmes, and SMS-based counselling services have shown early promise in reaching isolated men in sub-Saharan Africa. Help Lesotho reported that in 2023 its long-term programmes had more than 2,000 participants, and that one-on-one psychosocial support conversations were held with more than 960 people. Participants reported increased confidence, a sense of belonging, and an expressed desire to encourage others.

For the country to move the dial, researchers broadly agree on what is needed: additional psychiatric professionals trained domestically, a dedicated rehabilitation centre, community-level mental health integration into primary care clinics, and sustained public messaging that reaches men before crisis point. The Ministry of Health's 2023-2027 strategic plan lays out those priorities. The question of June 2026 is whether the resources will follow.

Lesotho has, for several years, carried one of the heaviest suicide burdens of any country on earth. The most widely cited World Health Organisation figure places the national suicide rate at 87.5 per 100,000 people, a statistic that has attracted global scrutiny. A more conservative 2021 estimate from the Global Burden of Disease Study puts the age-standardised rate at 36.7 per 100,000, still the highest in the world for that year. The headline figure, however contested at the margins, conceals a starker truth about gender. Across two decades of WHO

data covering Lesotho from 2000 to 2019, male suicide rates have consistently run at roughly four times the female rate. In 2019, the male rate stood at 146.9 per 100,000, against 34.6 for women.

At the peak year of 2014, when the overall rate reached 116.2 per 100,000, the male figure was 195.2 per 100,000. June is Men's Mental Health Awareness Month globally, and those the single most consistent predictor of whether a man would seek mental health support. The fear of being perceived as weak, or as failing in the role of provider and protector, repeatedly emerged as the dominant barrier.

In Lesotho, those norms carry particular force. The Southern Africa Litigation Centre has documented how the fear of vulnerability contributes to the kingdom's elevated male suicide rate, with men often bottling up feelings and avoiding help. For those who are gender non-conforming, the pressures are compounded: a study by researcher Alex Muller found that one in three transgender women, one in six transgender numbers give it particular weight in Maseru. men, and three in five gender non-conforming people had attempted suicide in Lesotho.

A SYSTEM UNDER PRESSURE

Those men who do seek help face a service system that is acutely under-resourced. Lesotho's sole psychiatric hospital, Mohlomi Hospital, is the only dedicated inpatient facility for the entire country. According to the hospital's public relations officer, Maholi Ramahlele, the building has severely deteriorated and urgently needs replacement. The staffing picture is equally stark. Each of Lesotho's ten districts has only one psychiatric nurse, and the country relies on a single foreign psychiatrist.

The Ministry of Health's Mental Health Policy and Strategic Plan (2023-2027), launched toward the end of 2024, disclosed that nearly 431,000 citizens out of a population of about 2.2 million are affected by mental illnesses.

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Boring through the Maluti: the state of Lesotho's biggest infrastructure project

Two giant machines are now boring toward each other from opposite ends of the Maluti Mountains, the longest bridge in Lesotho has been inaugurated by two heads of state, and cumulative water royalties to Maseru have exceeded M19 billion. Phase Two of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project is running ten percent behind schedule and R11 billion over its last budget estimate, but it is unmistakably moving.

By Staff Reporter



In 20 April 2026, South Africa's Minister of Water and Sanitation Pemmy Majodina, Deputy Minister David LHDA CHIEF EXECUTIVE TENTE TENTE, OCTOBER 2025 TWO MACHINES BORING THROUGH THE MOUNTAIN

The centrepiece of Phase Two is a 38.5-kilometre gravity-fed transfer tunnel connecting the new Polihali Reservoir to the existing Katse Reservoir. Because the tunnel uses gravity rather than pumping, it requires no energy to operate, making it one of the most efficient large-scale water transfer systems in the world. The tunnel is being excavated by the SUN joint venture,

comprising Vinci Construction Grands Projets, Bouygues Travaux Publics, and South Africa's Raubex.

Each TBM measures approximately 423 metres in length with a 5.38-metre diameter cutterhead, designed to bore continuously through rock beneath mountain ranges exceeding 3,000 metres in elevation. The Katse-side machine, launched in January 2025, had excavated more than 600 metres by early 2026. The Polihali machine, launched in January 2026, had progressed 235.8 metres by the April ceremony. Both bore toward a meeting point deep inside the Maluti range, with drill-and-blast methods used in

more complex geological sections.

THE POLIHALI DAM AND WHAT IT WILL DELIVER

The Polihali Dam, a 165-metre-high concrete-faced rockfill structure on the Senqu and Khubelu rivers, reached rockfill elevation 1,977 metres by November 2025. The LHDA expects impoundment to begin by end-2026 or early 2027. When full, the reservoir will store 2,325 million cubic metres across a 5,053-hectare surface area. Annual water transfer capacity to South Africa's Vaal River system will rise from 780 million to 1,270 million cubic me-

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tres, serving 26 million people across five provinces. Water delivery is targeted for the 2028/29 financial year.

KEY PARAMETER	DETAIL
Total projected cost (2025)	R53.3 billion (~\$2.9 billion)
Cost increase in one year	+R11.2 billion (~+\$609 million)
Transfer tunnel length	38.5 km (gravity-fed)
Polihali Dam height	165 metres
Reservoir storage capacity	2,325 million cubic metres
Water transfer capacity (on completion)	1,270 Mm ³ /year (up from 780 Mm ³)
Muela Hydropower output increase	~30%
Oxbow Hydropower capacity	80.3 MW / 180 GWh/year (2030/31)
Water delivery target	Financial year 2028/29
Construction progress (Oct 2025)	48% actual vs 57% planned

Sources: LHDA / DWS / PMG / DA Parliamentary Question / AfDB. USD at approx. R18.50/\$1 (June 2026).

THE SENQU BRIDGE AND THE ROAD TO POLIHALI

Constructed at approximately R2.4 billion (about M2.4 billion), the Senqu Bridge is the largest of three major crossings built under Phase Two, alongside the Mabunyane and Khubelu bridges. Standing roughly

90 metres above the valley floor, the 825-metre extradosed structure will provide a permanent transport link across the future reservoir, maintaining connectivity to the A1 national road linking Mokhotlong to Maseru once existing routes are submerged by rising water levels.

WHAT LESOTHO EARNS, Mahlobo, and Lesotho’s Minister of Natural Resources Mhlomi Moleko gathered at the Polihali site in Mokhotlong to officially launch the second tunnel boring machine on Phase Two of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. Two days later, King Letsie III and President Cyril Ramaphosa inaugurated the Senqu Bridge, an 825-metre extradosed structure that is the longest bridge in Lesotho and the first of its kind in the country. The back-to-back ceremonies marked a visible acceleration in one of Africa’s most consequential cross-border infrastructure projects, one that has taken four decades to reach this point and which carries profound implications for regional water security, Lesotho’s energy future, and the fiscal revenues on which the government depends. “We started slowly, but I think we will finish stronger. The planned progress is about 57 percent, while the actual progress is 48 per-

cent.”

AND WHAT COMMUNITIES SAY Cumulative water royalties paid by South Africa to Lesotho have exceeded M19 billion, with monthly inflows averaging M300 million to M400 million, deposited directly into the Consolidated Fund. A recalculation linked to Phase Two delays more than doubled the monthly royalty payment to M298 million. The increased flow from Polihali will raise Muela Hydro power Station output by approximately 30%. The Oxbow Hydropower Scheme, an 80.3MW peaking facility currently in detailed engineering design, is scheduled for commissioning in 2030/31. Community voices complicate the headline numbers.

About 1,600 people from 18 communities in Mokhotlong filed a complaint in 2025 alleging the project’s environmental and social commitments are not being met, with effects felt across at least 72 communities in northeastern Lesotho. The project proponents estimate 85,000 Basotho will benefit from associated infrastructure and development program mes. COST OVERRUNS AND OVERSIGHT CONCERNS

The total projected cost has risen from R42.1



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'I fired to save Hashatsi': soldier's self-defence claim tested in Mahao murder trial

A soldier on trial for the killing of former army commander Lieutenant General Maaparankoe Mahao has told the High Court he opened fire only to save a colleague's life, as prosecutors push back with questions about whether the entire operation was ever lawfully authorised.

By Tholoana Lesenya



Captain Haleeo Makara took the witness stand in the High Court this week to offer his account of what happened on 25 June 2015 at Ha Lekete in Mokema, the day Lieutenant General Mahao was shot and killed. Makara, one of several members of the Lesotho Defence Force facing charges linked to Mahao's death, told the court his decision to fire was driven entirely by a need to protect the late Captain Tefo Hashatsi, who was leading the operation to arrest Mahao.

According to Makara, the situation escalated rapidly when Mahao allegedly pointed a firearm at Hashatsi. "I had to protect Hashatsi," he told the court, insisting that his intention was not to kill Mahao but to disable him and neutralise what he perceived as an immediate threat to his colleague's life. "We never rehearsed shooting anyone because we did not expect what eventually happened."

CAPTAIN HALEEO MAKARA,
TESTIFYING BEFORE THE HIGH COURT

Makara rejected suggestions that he could have taken cover, repositioned or issued a warning before firing. He argued that a warning shot had already been discharged by Hashatsi, making a further warning unnecessary. He also challenged testimony from current Army Commander Lieutenant General Mojalefa Letsoela, who had suggested the arresting team could have taken up advantageous positions and waited for Mahao to react. "We could not arrive at the scene and then start taking positions and waiting for reactions," Makara said.

NO REHEARSAL FOR WHAT HAPPENED

Throughout his testimony, Makara sought to portray the shooting as a measure of last resort rather than a planned use of deadly force. He told the court that the arresting team had rehearsed the operation beforehand, but that those preparations had not included any scenario in which Mahao would be shot. He added that the equipment used on the day was standard issue, deployed in routine military operations and previous arrests of soldiers suspected of involvement in the alleged mutiny investigation.

PROSECUTION: SHOOTING WAS THE FIRST OPTION, NOT THE LAST

Advocate Lehlohonolo Phooko, leading the cross-examination, put it directly to Makara that the shooting was not a last resort but the first option chosen by the arresting team.

Phooko also questioned the legality of the entire operation, arguing that the mission to arrest Mahao had not been sanctioned by either the Prime Minister or the Minister of Defence. The court also heard argument about the role allegedly played by former army commander Lieutenant General Tlali Kamoli, who is among the accused. The prosecution argued that Kamoli effectively endorsed the operation by failing to halt it after returning to work, by which time arrests of soldiers had already begun. Phooko contended that an operation targeting an officer of Mahao's rank could not have proceeded without Kamoli's knowledge and approval.

WHAT THE FIRST ACCUSED PREVIOUSLY TOLD THE COURT

Captain Litekanyo Nyakane, the first accused, had earlier told the court that he participated in the operation to arrest Mahao and acknowledged that the mission resulted in Mahao being shot and sustaining injuries that led to his death. In addition to murder, the accused face counts of attempted murder, theft and unlawful damage to property.

Proceedings continue before Justice Charles Hungwe. Makara's testimony has added another layer to the contest between two starkly different versions of the same event: one portraying the operation as an unlawful mission that ended in murder, the other insisting that the soldiers were forced to react to a life-threatening situation that spiralled beyond their control.

M13 million vanishes through the Central Bank, and nobody can explain it

Five payments worth more than M13.1 million processed through the Central Bank of Lesotho cannot be explained. No invoices. No vouchers. No receipts. And no trace of the money in the government's own cash book.

By THOLOANA LESENYA



Auditor General 'Mathabo Makenete delivered one of the most damaging audit findings in recent memory to the Public Accounts Committee on Tuesday, revealing that five payment transactions totalling more than M13.1 million (approximately \$800,000) were processed by the Central Bank of Lesotho between 27 May 2022 and 8 February 2023, yet no documentation exists to explain what the money was for, who authorised it, or where it went.

The transactions do not appear in the government's cash book maintained by the Accountant General. Auditors could find no supporting invoices, payment vouchers or receipts. The result was an adverse audit opinion on the Government of Lesotho's Consolidated Financial Statements for the 2023/24 financial year, the most serious finding an auditor can issue, signalling that the financial statements contain material misstatements and cannot be relied upon to accurately reflect the government's financial position.

"The public deserves answers whenever large sums of money cannot be properly accounted for."

PAC CHAIRPERSON 'MACHABANA

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LEMPHANE-LETSIE

PAC Chairperson 'Machabana Lemphane-Letsie demanded to know how such a significant amount of money could move through government financial systems without adequate documentation or explanation. She stopped short of drawing conclusions about what the transactions represent, but was explicit that the absence of records raises legitimate concerns about accountability and the possibility of financial misconduct.

WHAT AN ADVERSE OPINION MEANS

An adverse audit opinion sits at the most serious end of the spectrum of audit findings. It means the financial statements are not merely incomplete or qualified on a narrow point. They contain material misstatements that cause the statements as a whole to be unreliable. Makenete told the committee that the unexplained entries contributed to an understatement of government financial figures and exposed persistent weaknesses in financial reporting and reconciliation processes across key institutions.

NOT THE M6.1 BILLION, BUT A FRESH MYSTERY

The revelation immediately triggered comparisons with the controversial M6.1 billion reported missing from government accounts in 2021, a matter that generated widespread public debate and political controversy. Several PAC members suggested the two cases could be connected. Lemphane-Letsie dismissed the speculation directly, pointing out that the newly discovered transactions occurred between 2022 and 2023, well after the M6.1 billion issue first surfaced. The timing, she said, suggests this is an entirely separate matter requiring its own investigation.

That distinction matters. It means Lesotho's public finances may harbour not one unresolved mystery but at least two, with the earlier saga still unresolved and a new one now added to the register.

CALLS FOR A FORENSIC AUDIT

Lemphane-Letsie recommended that a comprehensive forensic audit be conducted at the Central Bank of Lesotho. A forensic audit goes beyond a standard financial review: it traces the movement of funds, examines supporting evidence, identifies possible irregularities, and determines whether laws or regulations may have been violated. She argued it is the only mechanism capable of providing clear answers about the unexplained payments and restoring public confidence in the integrity of the country's financial systems.

She also raised a structural concern: because the Central Bank is wholly owned by the government, relying solely on internal reviews may not satisfy public demands for transparency. "The circumstances require an independent and thorough examination of the facts," she said. She further questioned whether existing oversight mechanisms are adequate to detect and prevent irregular transactions, given that payments of this size could pass through the Central Bank without appearing in the Accountant General's records.

A PATTERN THE AUDITORS KEEP FINDING

The M13.1 million does not emerge in isolation. For years, successive audit reports have flagged recurring weaknesses across government institutions: poor record-keeping, unsupported expenditures, delayed reconciliations, and inadequate internal controls. Financial experts have consistently warned that such conditions create opportunities for errors, wasteful spending and potential abuse of public resources. Tuesday's PAC sitting is expected to be followed by further scrutiny of the full audit report, with attention shifting toward the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance for answers about the origins and authorisation of the five transactions. As things stand, the M13.1 million remains unexplained, with no documents, no corresponding entries in government records and no public account of who approved the payments or what they were meant to achieve.

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Matekane breaks ground on M1.4 billion road that will end decades of isolation for Lebakeng

Prime Minister Matekane has broken ground on a M1.4 billion road and bridge project that will end decades of seasonal isolation for communities in Lebakeng, Qacha's Nek, opening the district's most remote villages of year-round access to schools, clinics and markets for the first time.

By Lemohang Botsane



WHAT THE PROJECT WILL DELIVER

The Prime Minister told those gathered at Maheng that the consequences of current road conditions are felt across every dimension of community life. Children miss school during the rainy season. Teachers decline postings in Lebakeng because the roads make the district effectively unreachable for extended periods. Patients fail to reach health centres. “When this road and the bridges are done, many problems will be history,” he said. “No more children missing school for days. No more teachers refusing posts here because the roads are bad. No more patients failing to reach health centres.” He directed that the bridges be built to withstand any weather event and instructed the Minister of Public Works to ensure the work meets the highest construction standards. The project is aligned with the National Strategic Development Plan II, which identifies road infrastructure as a

prerequisite for trade, market access and service delivery in underserved districts.

PROJECT COMPONENT DETAIL
Total project value M1.4 billion (~\$85.5 million)

Funding source Government of Lesotho (fully funded)

Main road upgrade 45 km, Mateleng to Lebakeng (tarred, all-weather) School access

road 1.4 km gravel to Melikane Combined School Bridges Tseleng, Lijabatho, Melikane, Senqu rivers Contractor China International Water and Electric Corporation Unskilled jobs for local communities ~450 Target completion February 2030 USD equivalent at approx. M16.38/\$1 (June 2026). Source: Office of the Prime Minister / Ministry of Public Works and Transport.

LOCAL JOBS, PROCUREMENT AND COMPENSATION

The Prime Minister said approximately 450 unskilled positions will be created for residents of villages along the road corridor. He directed the contractor to source materials locally where available and further directed local leaders to ensure Basotho entrepreneurs are given preference in supplying project inputs. On the matter of compensation for affected landowners, Matekane was unambiguous. “Whoever is responsible must pay people whose fields are affected, and they must pay on time,” he said, cautioning that he did not want to return to the district to resolve compensation disputes.

TOURISM AND CONNECTIVITY

Matekane called on the Ministry of Tourism to develop and promote the area's cultural and natural assets once the road is complete, specifically identifying San and Khoi rock art caves between Thabana-li-Mele and Ha-Khanya, and the historic Melikane site. The Ministry of Forestry and Environment was directed to ensure development proceeds within a framework of environmental protection.

The Prime Minister also confirmed he had already engaged the Minister of Communications on extending internet connectivity to Melikane Combined School.

WHAT THOSE PRESENT SAID

Minister of to year-round access to schools, clinics and markets for the first time. Prime Minister Ntsokoane Matekane officially launched the Mateleng-Lebakeng Road Upgrading Project at Melikane Combined School in Maheng on

Thursday, turning the first sod on what the government has described as the largest project ever funded entirely from the national fiscus. The M1.4 billion contract has been awarded to China International Water and Electric Corporation, with construction scheduled for completion by February 2030. The project entails the upgrading of 45 kilometres of road between Mateleng and Lebakeng to an all-weather tarred standard, the construction of 1.4 kilometres of gravel road to Melikane Combined School, and the construction of permanent bridges over four river crossings: the Tseleng, Lijabatho, Melikane and Senqu rivers. It is those crossings, washed out every Public Works and Transport Motee Motiane described Qacha's Nek and Thaba-Tseka as among the least accessible districts in Lesotho, and said poor road infrastructure directly compounds poverty and limits access to basic services.

He told the contractor: “We have trusted you with Lesotho's biggest government-funded project. Treat it well and make sure the nation benefits.” China International Water and Electric Corporation's Southern Africa manager, Zhao Xudong, cited the company's 70 years of experience across more than 80 countries and pledged timely, high-quality delivery with full environmental protection. He invoked rainy season, that have repeatedly severed communities from the outside world for days or weeks at a time.

a Chinese proverb that has become a development axiom: “If you want to get rich, build a road first. Where there is a road, there is wealth.” Lebakeng MP Letlatsa Mokati said the project fulfils a commitment residents extracted from him at the time of his election in 2022, and urged the contractor to avoid the delayed payments and safety failures that have marred other infrastructure projects in the region. Melikane chief Leetso Khanya captured the broader sentiment for the occasion: “This government keeps its promises instead of just talking.”

Science & Technology



Technology, Connectivity and the digital transformation of economics like Lesotho

Lesotho signs M98 billion deal for 1,200MW hydropower plant and AI data centre in Mokhotlong

Lesotho has signed a binding agreement with a United States energy company for a M98 billion project that would pair the country's largest ever hydropower facility with an artificial intelligence data centre, in what the government describes as the single largest foreign investment commitment in the kingdom's history. "We are thrilled to be partnering with our Lesotho partners to bring clean energy, jobs and economic development to their nation." CONVALT ENERGY

BY LEMOHANG BOTSANE



Solar capacity (wider partnership)	~4.6GW (ground-mounted and floating)
Battery energy storage	Up to 4GWh
Location	Kobong region, Mokhotlong District
Agreement signed	4 June 2026
Construction start (targeted)	2029 (subject to feasibility)

Sources: Convalt Energy / Ministry of Energy / International Water Power / Investment Monitor. USD equivalent at approx. M16.38/\$1 (June 2026).

BROADER THAN THE HEADLINE FIGURE

The \$6.2 billion binding agreement covers the hydropower facility and AI data centre, but the wider partnership extends further. It also envisages approximately 4.6GW of solar generation capacity, including ground-mounted and floating solar installations, and up to 4GWh of battery energy storage systems. The Lesotho project company is expected to sit within Convalt International, a proposed entity intended to hold the company's international assets, subject to completion of corporate and regulatory processes. Convalt said it may supply solar modules from its US manufacturing operations, with deliveries potentially commencing in the fourth quarter of 2028. Financing is expected to The Ministry of Energy signed a binding Memorandum of Agreement with US-based Convalt Energy on 4 June 2026 for Project Kobong, a combined hydropower and AI data centre development valued at M98 billion (approximately \$6.2 billion).

The agreement commits the parties to

developing at least 1,200MW of renewable hydropower capacity in the Kobong region of Mokhotlong District alongside an integrated, green-powered artificial intelligence data centre. Diplomatic groundwork included discussions between King Letsie III and former US House of Representatives Majority Leader and Convalt Energy board member Richard Gephardt. The government described the agreement as the largest investment commitment in Lesotho's recorded history.

If constructed as planned, it would generate more than sixteen times the country's current installed generation capacity of approximately 72MW, primarily derived from the Muela Hydropower Station. draw from a combination of equity investment, multilateral development finance institutions, strategic partners and project finance facilities.

ABOUT CONVALT ENERGY

Convalt Energy is a US-based renewable energy company and a portfolio company of the ACO Investment Group, specialising in utility-scale solar, wind, waste-to-power and hydropower projects. Project Kobong would represent its first hydropower project and first data centre development. Lesotho currently has two operational data centres, focused on telecommunications and government services.

The project remains subject to mandatory feasibility studies, which Convalt is expected to fund and launch, with construction targeted to begin in 2029 if those studies confirm viability.

FROM IMPORTER TO EXPORTER

In 2024, Lesotho imported 438 gigawatt-hours out of total national consumption of 970 gigawatt-hours, drawing primarily from South Africa's Eskom and Mozambique. Domestic demand stands at approximately 209MW. At full 1,200MW operational capacity, Project Kobong would satisfy all domestic demand and leave an estimated surplus of approximately 991MW available for regional export, reversing an energy dependency that has persisted for decades.

The government said the project is designed to bolster energy independence, reduce dependence on imported electricity, generate employment, and support local business development, positioning Lesotho as a regional centre for green energy and digital infrastructure.

PROJECT ELEMENT	DETAIL
Total project value	M98 billion (~\$6.2 billion)
Hydropower capacity	1,200MW (pumped storage)

AHF and Mothers2Mothers join forces on HIV, youth health and community care in Lesotho

Two of Lesotho's most active community health organisations have formalised a partnership designed to close persistent gaps in HIV prevention, treatment adherence and youth health services, while the larger of the two is simultaneously pushing for global debt reform it argues is inseparable from the task of achieving sustainable healthcare.

By LEMOHANG BOTSANE



The AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF) and Mothers-2Mothers (m2m) have concluded an agreement to integrate their community-based health programmes across Lesotho, combining the reach of AHF-supported clinics with m2m's

established network of mentor mothers and youth-focused interventions. AHF Lesotho representative Sebatatso Lentsoenyane confirmed that m2m initiated The collaboration will draw on three community-led programmes that both organisations say have demonstrated

measurable results in the field. Girls Act equips young women with health literacy and the tools to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. Boys to Men provides health education and mentorship to young men,

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‘I heard something crack’: witness recounts the night two nurses were bludgeoned to death in a donga

A state witness took the stand this week to give evidence of what he says he witnessed at a donga in Thaba-Bosiu eleven years ago: the methodical killing of two Ministry of Health nurses with a stone, carried out by a man he had known as his friend. His testimony left the courtroom in silence.

By Staff Reporter



Setsokotsane Majalle, an accomplice who was subsequently acquitted and turned state witness for the Crown, told the High Court this week that he was present when Lefa Mabusela allegedly robbed and bludgeoned to death nurses Mpho Khutsoane and Mathebane Ramatabooe on the night of 11 August 2014.

His evidence in chief, delivered under examination and cross-examination, described in harrowing detail the sequence of events that prosecutors allege culminated in one of the most brutal double murders in Lesotho’s recent criminal history. Mabusela has pleaded not guilty to two counts of murder and one count of armed robbery. The indictment alleges that he unlawfully and intentionally killed both women and

STATE WITNESS SETSOKOTSANE MAJALLE, TESTIFYING BEFORE THE HIGH COURT THE DECEASED AND THE ACCUSED

Ms Khutsoane was employed at the Ministry of Health headquarters in Maseru. Ms Ramatabooe was based at Motebang Hospital in Leribe. On the night in question, both women were attending a professional workshop at Mmelesi Lodge in Thaba-Bosiu. The Crown’s case is that what began as a contrived romantic reunion ended in premeditated murder and robbery.

THE EVENTS AS TESTIFIED

Mr Majalle told the court that he and Mabusela crossed into Lesotho from Bloemfontein on the evening of 11 August 2014 and made contact with the two women by telephone. Ms Khutsoane suggested they meet at Ha-Leqele. The four met in Maseru, where Ms Khutsoane handed her car keys to Mr Majalle and asked him to drive. The women sat in the rear of the vehicle. Mabusela took the front passenger seat. The stated destination was Mmelesi Lodge.

The witness testified that after the vehicle crossed the Ha Makhoathi bridge, Mabusela directed him to stop, claiming urgency of nature. After alighting briefly, he returned and produced a firearm. “He pointed the gun at me without saying anything” Mr Majalle testified. “The ladies were busy talking about how handsome he looked and did not realise what was happening. When they saw my face, they screamed and asked what was going on.” The accused ordered him to cut the engine. The group was then directed on foot into nearby fields at gunpoint.

THE ROBBERY AND THE DONGA

As the group moved deeper into the fields, Mr Majalle said Mabusela demanded money from Ms Khutsoane. She disclosed approximately M400 in cash and further funds in her bank account, surrendering her PIN number under duress. At the donga, the accused struck the witness with the butt of the firearm, knocking him into the depression. “He said: ‘This devil is the one who is going to set the police after me.’” All three were ordered to lie face down with their hands extended. The witness testified that Ms Khutsoane broke from that position and grappled with the accused. “Mpho managed to

stand up and grabbed him around the waist. There was a struggle and she

THE KILLINGS

Mr Majalle told the court that Mabusela then instructed him to retrieve a stone. His first attempt to flee was halted when the accused threatened to shoot him. He ultimately complied, locating a stone approximately 20 to 30 centimetres in length. “He sat on Mpho’s chest and struck her repeatedly with the stone. I heard something crack and believed it was her skull. There was a strong smell of fresh blood.” The accused then turned to Ms Ramatabooe. The witness said she begged for her life and offered to surrender everything she had, indicating she would also comply with a sexual demand if he spared her. Her plea did not result in her release. “He struck her numerous times on the forehead with the same stone until blood was gushing from her head,” the witness told the court.

AFTER THE KILLINGS AND THE CRIME SCENE

Mr Majalle testified that Mabusela ordered him to search the victims’s bodies for mobile phones before the two men departed in Ms Khutsoane’s vehicle. They travelled via Roma to the witness’s family home in Mazenod, where an old passport was collected, allegedly to facilitate Mabusela’s return to South Africa. The bodies of Ms Khutsoane and Ms Ramatabooe were subsequently discovered in the donga at Ha Mosalla, Thaba-Bosiu. Investigators attending the scene described it as among the most gruesome they had ever encountered. Post-mortem findings confirmed severe head injuries and crushed skulls consistent with blunt force trauma. A blood-stained rock, believed to be the instrument used in the killings, was recovered at the scene. Mabusela maintains his plea of not guilty on all counts. The trial continues.

robbed Ms Khutsoane of her blue Volkswagen Golf 4. The trial is proceeding before the High Court. “Mpho managed to stand up and grabbed him around the waist. There was a struggle and she called for my help, but I felt weak and terrified. Then I heard a gunshot.”

called for my help, but I felt weak and terrified. Then I heard a gunshot.” Ms Khutsoane collapsed. Her final words, as testified, were: “Jonna, I am going to die because of adultery.”

News

Official Statements, government communications, and institutional announcements

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a demographic that health advocates have long identified as underserved by conventional clinic-based interventions. The Mentor Mother Programme trains women living with HIV to provide. Alongside its local programme work, AHF has escalated a broader advocacy campaign it argues is directly relevant to the sustainability of health systems across the Global South. Its Freedom from Debt campaign contends that the current structure of sovereign debt obligations is systematically diverting resources away from health and education in precisely the countries that need them most.

AHF cites figures that present a stark picture: approximately 3.4 billion people live in countries where annual debt service payments exceed total government expenditure on health and education combined. Developing nations are reported to face borrowing costs two to ten times higher than those available to wealthy countries. AHF estimates that poorer countries transfer approximately \$3 trillion annually to wealthier creditor nations through debt repayments, elevated interest charges, and tax arrangements related to natural resources.

AHF FREEDOM FROM DEBT: PROPOSED MEASURES PURPOSE

Borrowers' Forum Collective bargaining platform for Global South nations to negotiate debt terms from a position of greater leverage Automatic debt pauses Suspension of debt service obligations during declared public health emergencies and climate disasters 1% AI solidarity levy Small tax on artificial intelligence companies to generate a dedicated fund for debt relief and basic services Source: AIDS Healthcare Foundation Freedom from Debt campaign.

AHF has argued that the global financial system cannot deliver sustainable development outcomes while it continues to extract resources from the countries it nominally exists to support. The juxtaposition of a local partnership and a global structural campaign reflects a logic that AHF has articulated consistently: that community health interventions, however well designed, operate within systemic constraints that determine whether those interventions can be sustained, scaled, or ultimately made redundant by the conditions that produced the crisis they are trying to address. discussions to identify shared objectives and explore how the two organisations could support each other

in strengthening health and community well-being.

peer guidance and psychosocial support to other mothers and families navigating diagnosis, treatment initiation and long-term care. "This means people who use AHF-supported clinics and those in nearby communities will get better, more complete care. No one will be left behind."

SEBABATSO LENTSOENYANE, AHF

LESOTHO WHAT THE PARTNERSHIP AIMS TO ACHIEVE

Lentsoenyane said early evidence from the programmes points to increases in uptake of HIV prevention interventions among young people, improved antiretroviral treatment adherence, and stronger retention in care as adolescents transition into adulthood, a phase where dropout rates from treatment programmes are typically highest.

Both organisations have framed the partnership within Lesotho's broader public health commitments, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the global target of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. Lesotho carries one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world, with the epidemic



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Editorial

The Tribune's position, and voices that challenge, provoke and inform



FIFA knew the risks. It chose comfort over accountability

The 2026 FIFA World Cup was sold to the world as the most inclusive tournament in history. What has been delivered, at least for fans and officials from Africa and the Global South, is something closer to its opposite. FIFA owes those it failed a more honest accounting than it has so far offered.

By Editorial



Omar Artan arrived at Miami International Airport on 7 June 2026 with a valid US visa and a FIFA appointment to officiate at a World Cup for the first time. He had been named CAF Men's Referee of the Year for 2025, was listed among FIFA's 52 appointed World Cup officials, and had operated in conditions that would have ended most careers before they began. He was questioned for hours, detained, and put on a plane back to Istanbul. The US Department of Homeland Security told Al Jazeera he had been "determined to be inadmissible due to vetting concerns", without elaboration. The first Somali referee to reach a World Cup did not officiate a single match.

His treatment is the starkest single example of what has gone wrong with World Cup 2026, but it is far from the only one. This newspaper believes the pattern of access failures demands a serious editorial response, not because it makes for comfortable writing, but because football journalism that ignores it would be failing its readers. "We are going to play it in a country where some of us do not feel welcome."

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALIST TO FIFA PRESIDENT GIANNI INFANTINO, NAIROBI THE FACTS, PLAINLY STATED

Senegal and Ivory Coast were added to partial US travel restriction lists in December 2025, effectively barring fans without

pre-existing visas. Morocco supporters who had paid thousands for flights and tickets reported denials without explanation. Scottish fans had approved ESTA travel clearances revoked. Iran boycotted the December World Cup draw after federation officials including FIFA committee members were denied visas. The Iranian squad's visas arrived ten days before their first match, with key administrative staff still excluded. The International Sports Press Association wrote to FIFA to demand intervention in "countless" and "unacceptable" cases of accredited journalists, African and Iranian colleagues among them, being denied entry. South Africa's assistant football coach was initially denied a visa. The DRC squad was required to observe a 21-day isolation protocol before the tournament.

THE STRONGEST COUNTERARGUMENT, HONESTLY PUT

Sovereign nations retain the right to control entry regardless of sporting commitments, and the US did make a carve-out for competing athletes and coaching staff. The football happened.

Iran played. It is also true that some individual denials may have involved specific intelligence assessments rather than blanket national-origin profiling. We do not have access to whatever information the DHS held on Omar Artan, and we acknowledge that security concerns can be genuine rather than pretextual. We accept both points. They do not resolve the central problem.

WHAT MAKES THIS DIFFERENT

The issue is not that the US exercised immigration authority. Every host nation does. The issue is the pattern of who was affected and how FIFA responded. The countries whose fans and officials bore the heaviest burden are, with few exceptions, from Africa, the Middle East, and parts of South and Central America, the very nations whose qualification for a 48-team tournament represented the centrepiece of FIFA's

universality argument. The visa regime operated in direct tension with that argument. FIFA accepted the US bid in full

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR LESOTHO AND AFRICA

Lesotho does not have a team at this World Cup. But when a South African journalist tells the FIFA president in Nairobi that she is going to play at a tournament where "some of us do not feel welcome" that is not a fringe concern. It reflects a legitimate and widely held anxiety about whether African participation in global football is genuinely valued or merely tolerated when commercially convenient.

Omar Artan returned to Mogadishu to a stadium packed with thousands of Somalis who understood exactly what his exclusion meant. UEFA, to its credit, appointed him within days to officiate the European Super Cup. The football world beyond the United States borders knew what it had lost.

WHAT SHOULD COME NEXT

This newspaper does not argue that World Cup 2026 should be condemned or that the matches now underway are illegitimate. We do not demand FIFA sever its relationship with the United States. What we do argue is this: FIFA cannot simultaneously claim the mantle of universal inclusion and decline responsibility when its hosting arrangements produce systematic exclusion. Future host agreements must carry enforceable access guarantees covering fans, officials, journalists and referees, not only players. FIFA must be willing to place that requirement above political comfort. Omar Artan did not deserve what happened to him. The fans from Senegal, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Iran, Haiti and the DRC who could not attend did not deserve it either. FIFA knew the risks. It chose comfort over accountability. The least it can do now is acknowledge that plainly, and commit to doing better before the next host city is announced.

knowledge that the Trump administration had, in its first term, implemented travel ban policies affecting the same countries. FIFA had the information it needed to negotiate binding access guarantees, or to refuse to place group-stage matches for affected nations exclusively in US cities. It did neither. Instead, FIFA's president accepted a gold World Cup trophy from President Trump in the Oval Office, attended the presidential inauguration, and characterised the relationship as a partnership. The International Sports Press Association used a different word: unacceptable.

Farmers Corner



Small holder farming, land, climate risk, and Lesotho's climate risk

Foot and mouth disease: what the outbreak means for Lesotho's farmers and consumers

FMD has swept through Lesotho and South Africa in the worst outbreak either country has recorded in a generation. From the cattle posts of Butha-Buthe to the feedlots of KwaZulu-Natal, the disease is reshaping what farmers earn, what consumers pay, and what arrives on the family table.

BY Staff Reporter



On 18 February 2026, veterinary officials at a cattle post in Mahlasela, Motebong, Butha-Buthe district, tested 17 head of cattle showing signs of illness. Six tested positive for foot and mouth disease (FMD). Within days, samples had been dispatched to the WOAHP reference laboratory in Botswana for virus typing. Within a week, the WOAHP formally suspended Lesotho's status as an FMD-free country where vaccination is not practised, a designation that underpins the kingdom's ability to trade livestock and animal products internationally.

The outbreak was not isolated. It emerged against the backdrop of South Africa's most severe FMD crisis in recent memory, a crisis President Cyril Ramaphosa had already declared a national disaster earlier that month. Lesotho, surrounded entirely by South Africa, shares hundreds of kilometres of porous livestock border. The disease had crossed. "In businesses, people buy goods using money earned from livestock sales. If farmers fail to sell, families will struggle to survive."

DISTRICT ANIMAL PRODUCTION

OFFICER MOHAPI LITS'OANE, QACHA'S NEK

WHAT THE DISEASE DOES

FMD is a highly contagious viral disease of cloven-hoofed animals, affecting cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. Infected animals develop fever and blister-like sores on the tongue, lips, mouth, teats and between the hooves, causing severe production losses. FMD does not infect humans. Meat and milk from infected animals are not a public health risk. Animals are tested before slaughter and health standards are adhered to throughout the supply chain.

THE SCALE IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's red meat industry is valued at approximately R80 billion (about \$4.9 billion). BFAP reported 24,400 FMD cases confirmed in 2025, obliterating the previous 20-year high of 7,700 set in 2022. The disease spread to seven of nine provinces and penetrated commercial beef and dairy operations, as well as five game reserves where buffalo serve as long-term carriers. South Africa's beef exports fell 26% in 2025. Shipments to China plunged 69% to 1,687 metric tons following a ban imposed in May 2025. BFAP calculated that

cumulative export losses could reach R2.6 billion (about \$158 million) by the end of 2026. Dairy losses exceeded R1 billion by mid-January 2026, with losses of close to R5,000 per cow in affected Eastern Cape farms.

INDICATOR	FIGURE
FMD cases in SA livestock, 2025	24,400
Previous 20-year high (2022)	7,700
SA beef export decline, 2025	-26%
Cattle slaughter decline (YoY)	-15.6%
Projected cumul. export losses to end-2026	R2.6 billion (~\$158m)
SA dairy sector losses (to mid-Jan 2026)	Exceeds R1 billion (~\$61m)
Dairy loss per cow (Eastern Cape)	~R5,000 (~\$305)

USD equivalents at approx. M16.38/\$1 (June 2026). BFAP: Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy. RMIS: Red Meat Industry Services.

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THE SCALE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Continues in Page 17

Farmers Corner



Small holder farming, land, climate risk, and Lesotho's climate risk

Continued from Page 16

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INDICATOR FIGURESOURCE

FMD cases in SA livestock, 2025

24,400 BFAP / SA Govt Previous 20-year high (2022) 7,700 BFAP

SA beef export decline, 2025

-26% RMIS / Reuters

Cattle slaughter decline (YoY) -15.6%

RMIS Projected cumul. export losses to end-2026 R2.6 billion (~\$158m) BFAP

SA dairy sector losses (to mid-Jan 2026)

Exceeds R1 billion (~\$61m) BFAP Dairy

loss per cow (Eastern Cape)

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LESOTHO: DISTRICT BY DISTRICT

By May, confirmed cases had spread to Butha-Buthe, Leribe, Thaba-Tseka, Qacha's Nek, Berea and Mohale's Hoek. The Ministry of Agriculture declared FMD a state of national disaster. Farmers wishing to sell livestock must now obtain clearance

certificates from the District Veterinary Office, but delays in that process have deepened hardship for households relying on livestock sales for day-to-day cash. In Berea, dairy farmer Makhetha Leokoke told a ministry awareness campaign that his cows, which previously produced between 15 and 20 litres daily, could no longer be marketed to the district dairy under emergency restrictions. In Qacha's Nek, District Animal Production Officer Mohapi Lits'oane warned that the ripple effect of livestock immobility reaches shopkeepers and labourers far beyond the cattle post.

WOOL AND MOHAIR: A SECOND BLOW

Lesotho is the world's second largest mohair producer, and wool is the kingdom's leading agricultural commodity export. FMD-related transport restrictions have severed the traditional route through which both reach South African brokers and international auction markets in Port Elizabeth and Durban. In May 2026, Minister Thabo Mofosi convened a Maseru meeting with WOAHA representatives, farmers' associations and veterinary officials to find protocols allowing safe trade to resume. Local buyer Baokunyoda stepped into the gap, purchasing wool and mohair at prices above South African broker rates and stockpiling fibre in anticipation of the ban being lifted, offering immediate financial relief to farmers.

WHAT CONSUMERS ARE PAYING

South African Statistics data showed beef prices surging 28.8% year-on-year by mid-2025. Beef mince climbed from around R102.95/kg in July 2024 to R126.79/kg in July 2025. By early 2026, beef steak was up

31.2% and beef stew up 30.3%, the highest rates for those categories since December 2017. Because Lesotho imports a large proportion of its processed and packaged meat from South Africa, those price movements feed through directly into Maseru's butcheries and supermarkets.

Agricultural economists noted in February 2026 that a sustained consumer price surge was not inevitable. Ongoing slaughter levels, base effects, and consumer resistance were identified as moderating factors. All of this hinges on the speed and effectiveness of vaccination.

THE VACCINATION RACE AND WHAT COMES NEXT

South Africa shifted strategy in late 2025 toward an FMD-free with vaccination policy. The Botswana Vaccine Institute was contracted to supply one million doses per month from January 2026. In Lesotho, the national FMD response plan was approved following the disaster declaration. Virus samples sent to the WOAHA laboratory were intended to confirm vaccine matching before a national vaccination rollout. The case for a regional approach has grown louder. Apart from Namibia, no country bordering South Africa has escaped confirmed outbreaks outside controlled areas. For Lesotho, entirely enclosed within South Africa, the regional dimension is not merely relevant, it is decisive. District Agricultural Officer Mamoholi Mphutlane put it directly in Berea: climate change is one of the major contributing factors to the spread of disease and economic decline. Her warning points beyond this outbreak to a structural vulnerability that will demand sustained investment long after this emergency is resolved.



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Arts & Sports

The stories Lesotho about itself - on the field, on the stage, and on the page

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How Somalia's Top Referee Missed Football's Biggest Stage

BY LITS'ITSO LETSUNYANE



For Omar Abdulkadir Artan, the 2026 FIFA World Cup was supposed to be the culmination of years of perseverance and hard work. Instead, the dream ended before it even began.

The Somali referee, who had been selected by FIFA to officiate at the biggest football tournament on the planet, was denied entry into the United States upon arrival at Miami International airport on June 6, abruptly ending what would have been a historic appearance at the World Cup for him and his country.

Artan had been set to become the first Somali referee in history to officiate a FIFA World Cup match. It was a milestone not only for the 34-year-old official but also for Somali football and African refereeing as a whole.

He first became FIFA-listed referee back in 2018, Artan steadily built a reputation as one of Africa's most respected match officials. He took charge of high profile fixtures in CAF competitions,

and eventually earned appointments at the Africa Cup of Nations. His selection for the 2026 World Cup was viewed as both deserved recognition and a powerful symbol of progress for a country that has long battled instability and conflict.

However, after arriving in the United States, Artan underwent US customs and Border Protection described as an "additional inspection". He was then questioned for approximately 11 hours before he was ultimately informed that he would not be permitted entry into the country.

U.S. authorities cited "vetting concerns" as the reason for the decision. Subsequent reports quoting American officials alleged that the referee had connections to suspected members of a terrorist organisation. According to The New York Times, Omar Abdulkadir Artan shares a very similar name with an individual listed in U.S. sanctions databases as having ties to the militant group Al-Shabaab. No evidence supporting those allegations has been publicly released, and officials have not provided further

details regarding the specific nature of the concerns.

Artan himself later told reporters that he was never given a clear explanation for why he had been refused entry. He said officials asked him about Somali politics and the militant group Al-Shabaab, despite him presenting his FIFA credentials and documentation related to his refereeing career.

What has fueled the controversy is that Artan really held a valid U.S. visa and had already passed FIFA's own accreditation and screening processes before travelling to the tournament. Although under U.S. law, possessing a visa does not automatically guarantee entry into the country. Border officials retain the authority to deny admission if they determine that an individual is inadmissible. Still, the lack of transparency surrounding the case has left many questions unanswered.

On June 8 FIFA confirmed that he will not participate in the World Cup and on June 10 he returned back to Mogadishu, Somalia. Many thought all the controversy would damage his career. Instead, he returned home a national hero, and was presented hero's welcome upon his arrival. He even had a meeting with the President, and had football match played in his honour, he received cash gifts and more.

Just days after missing out on the World Cup, Artan was appointed to officiate Paris Saint-Germain against Aston Villa at the UEFA Super Cup, a significant vote of confidence from European football authorities and a reminder that his reputation within the game remains intact.

For now, Omar Artan's World Cup dream will remain one of football's great "what if" stories.