FAITH AND DEVELOPMENT IN FOCUS

LESOTHO

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ABOUT THE WORLD FAITHS DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE

The World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) is a not-for-profit organization working at the intersection of religion and global development. Housed within the Berkley Centre in Washington, DC, WFDD documents the work of faith-inspired organizations and explores the importance of religious ideas and actors in development contexts. WFDD supports dialogue among religious and development communities and promotes innovative partnerships, at national and international levels, with the goal of contributing to positive and inclusive development outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report, prepared by the World Faiths Development Dialogue, is part of a series of country reviews focused on the diverse faith influences on development strategies and operations. The Lesotho report represents a long standing partnership between WFDD and the International Shinto Foundation.

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FOREWORD

*Faith and Development in Focus: Lesotho* was inspired by the particular social and economic challenges of a country where religious institutions have long played central roles in providing basic services. The work of Worldwide Support for Development (WSD) in Lesotho suggested that a country mapping survey could be informative and offer useful insights both for Lesotho and more broadly.

This report provides an overview of faith-inspired development work within Lesotho’s broader political, religious, and development contexts. Reflecting primary and secondary research, it sets out Lesotho’s development challenges and the strategic and operational approaches of the government and its partners (international and national, public and private). The aim is to provide up-to-date information that might encourage interaction and collaboration among local faith-inspired organizations, international NGOs, and other development bodies currently operating in and around Lesotho, as well as those in the planning phase of projects there.

Several features set Lesotho apart from other countries. Its status as a small, land-locked country within the borders of South Africa means that it has been greatly affected by South Africa’s history, including the legacy of apartheid. Deep social and economic inequalities persist in Lesotho and the region today, and long-standing patterns of migration have shaped Basotho and South African society alike. Lesotho’s governance challenges and political instability also set it apart. Less studied and observed is the important roles of religious institutions and beliefs and their impact on development strategies (especially for health and education). Religious attitudes also shape sensitive topics, including gender dynamics and HIV/AIDS, in important ways.

We hope that a solid base of information—recognizing diversity and the immense cumulative impact of religious actors—will challenge an all-too-common narrative of inherent opposition between religion and development and will help open doors to new kinds of dialogue about Lesotho’s significant and complex development challenges.

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IN PROLOGUE

There’s an important set of questions that needs to be explored, central to life itself and also to the day to day work of those who labor to ease the pain of poverty and to fulfill the rich potential of each human being. These turn around spiritual and religious roles in a modernizing world. How can ancient traditions be valued and transmitted, even as they change? At this moment, with the world turned upside down by the COVID-19 pandemic, the basic questions loom larger than ever.

The World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), which I have served for 15 years as a patron, grapples with precisely these questions. One means is careful reviews of what development means for a country, and how religious institutions and beliefs relate, including where the paths diverge.

Lesotho is a special country that I have been privileged to visit and to engage there with some of the extraordinary challenges the nation faces. Among them are the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, coming full force in a nation that depends on the labor of its migrants in neighboring South Africa.

WFDD’s in-depth country specific “mapping” project for Lesotho takes a deep dive into the religious landscape and development landscape of this special, unique county, highlighting the many intersections between tradition and modernity, the local and the global. This report, Faith and Development in Focus: Lesotho, is particularly eye opening for me, with my deep sense of commitment to Lesotho. It is a privilege to support WFDD and to see both concrete, practical results and more informed approaches.

Anyone working with and for Lesotho can learn much from this report.

Dr. Haruhisa Handa
Founder and Chairman
Worldwide Support for Development
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ACRONYMS

AACC  All Africa Conference of Churches
ABC  All Basotho Convention
AG  Assemblies of God
AIC  African independent/instituted church
AIDS  Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AfDB  African Development Bank
ALET  Association of Lesotho Theologians
AME  African Methodist Episcopal Church
AMR  antimicrobial resistance
ART  Antiretroviral Therapy
BCP  Basutoland Congress Party
BNP  Basotho National Party
CCL  Christian Council of Lesotho
CBOs  community-based organizations
CGPU  Child and Gender Protection Unit
CHAL  Christian Health Association of Lesotho
CHW  community health worker
CMMB  Catholic Medical Mission Board
CPI  Corruption Perceptions Index
CPR  contraceptive prevalence rate
CRS  Catholic Relief Services
C-SAFE  Consortium for Southern Africa Food Security Emergency
CSOs  civil society organizations
DAC  Development Assistance Committee
DC  Democratic Congress
DCEO  Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences
DHS  Demographic and Health Survey
EHAIA  Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy
FIOs  faith-inspired organizations
GBV  gender-based violence
GDP  Gross Domestic Product
GNI  Gross National Income
GoL  Government of Lesotho
HIV  Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT  information and communications technology
IFC  International Financial Corporation
IPV  intimate partner violence
IMF  International Monetary Fund
LAPCA  Lesotho AIDS Programme Coordinating Authority
LCD  Lesotho Congress for Democracy
LCN  Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organizations
LDF  Lesotho Defence Force
LECSA  Lesotho Evangelical Church in Southern Africa
LGBT  lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
LHWP  Lesotho Highlands Water Project
LIRAC  Lesotho Inter-Religious AIDS Consortium
LMPS  Lesotho Mounted Police Service
MCSA  Methodist Church of Southern Africa
MDG  Millennium Development Goal
MDR-TB  Multidrug-resistant tuberculosis
MoET  Ministry of Education and Training
ACRONYMS (cont.)

MoHSW  Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
NGO  non-governmental organization
NYC  National Youth Council
ODA  official development assistance
OECD  Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFID  OPEC Fund for International Development
OPEC  Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
OVC  orphans and vulnerable children
PAC  Public Accounts Committee
PCA  Police Complaints Authority
PEI  Perceptions of Electoral Integrity
PEMS  Paris Evangelical Missionary Society
PHC  primary health care
PPP  Public-Private Partnership
PRSP  Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSIRP  Public Sector Improvement Reform Programme
SACBC  South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference
SADC  Southern African Development Community
SDG  Sustainable Development Goal
SILC  Savings and Internal Lending Communities
SSA  Sub-Saharan Africa
STEM  science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
TB  tuberculosis
TRC  Transformation Resource Centre
UHC  universal health coverage
UNDP  United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF  United Nations Children’s Fund
UNFPA  United Nations Population Fund
USAID  United States Agency for International Development
WBG  World Bank Group
WCC  World Council of Churches
WFDD  World Faiths Development Dialogue
WFP  World Food Programme
WHO  World Health Organization
WRA  women of reproductive age
WVL  World Vision Lesotho
TIMELINE: KEY EVENTS IN LESOTHO’S HISTORY

**Sixteenth Century**

Bantu farmers migrate from Central Africa, settling in the Caledon River valley and displacing the indigenous Khoisan hunter-gatherers

**1815–1840**

The Mfecane (Difaqane), a period of violence among the tribes of southern Africa; Chief Moshoeshoe forms an alliance of tribes to defend against the Zulu

**1822**

Chief Moshoeshoe unites local chiefdoms and becomes the first king of the Sotho Kingdom

**1833**

First Protestant missionaries from the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society arrive at the invitation of King Moshoeshoe I

**1834**

First Boers (descendants of Dutch Settlers) arrive from the Cape Colony and settle to the west of the Sotho kingdom; violent clashes occur over the next 30 years, with the Basotho losing land to the Boers

**1862–1863**

First Roman Catholic missionaries arrive

**1868**

King Moshoeshoe requests British assistance from encroaching Boers; Basutoland is annexed to the British crown but retains political autonomy

**1870**

King Moshoeshoe I dies; Letsie I becomes king

**1871**

Basutoland is annexed to the Cape Colony without the consent of local leaders; it loses political autonomy to the British and land to the Boers

**1875**

First Anglican missionaries arrive

**1880–1881**

An attempt by Cape Colony officials to disarm Basotho leads local chiefs to rebel; the Gun War (Basuto War) ends in stalemate

**1884**

Basutoland is returned to direct British rule as a British High Commission Territory

**1897**

First African Methodist Episcopal (AME) missionaries arrive

**1910**

Union of South Africa formed; demand for cheap labor in South African mines increases as mineral deposits are discovered

**1928**

First missionaries of the Wesleyan Methodist Church (later MCSA) arrive

**1945**

Pius XII College (later the University of Lesotho) established in Roma

**1952**

Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) formed, one of several nationalist parties to emerge under colonial rule after World War II

**1953**

First Baha’i Community in Lesotho founded by American missionaries

**1958**

Basutoland National Party (BNP) formed

**1965**

Basutoland granted self-governance by the British; first general elections are held and Leabua Jonathan of the BNP becomes Prime Minister
TIMELINE (cont.)

1966  Basutoland becomes independent from Britain and is renamed the Kingdom of Lesotho

1970  General elections held; BCP gains a majority of seats, prompting Jonathan to suspend the constitution, dissolve parliament, and arrest BCP leaders

1972  First mosque built in the northern district of Butha-Buthe

1974  BCP attempts to overthrow Jonathan’s dictatorial government, but the coup is quashed and the BCP leadership flees the country

1980  National currency (Lesotho Loti) introduced into circulation to establish monetary independence from South Africa

1982  South African Defence Force invades Maseru, attacking houses alleged to be guerilla bases for the African National Congress; more than 40 people are killed; South Africa calls on Lesotho to expel all South African refugees

1986  January: Military overthrows the government; Justin Lekhanya becomes Prime Minister and assumes dictatorial powers

1988  September: Pope John Paul II visits Lesotho

1990  King Moshoeshoe II sent into exile by Lekhanya’s government; his son, Letsie III, becomes king

1991  Military coup led by Elias Ramaema overthrows Lekhanya’s government; Ramaema assumes power and initiates the transition back to democracy

1993  First multi-party democratic elections held; Ntsu Mokhehle of the BCP becomes Prime Minister; new constitution adopted

1994  Nelson Mandela is elected president of South Africa in the country’s first democratic elections, signaling the end of apartheid

1995  June: King Moshoeshoe II reinstated

1997  King Letsie III reinstated after the death of Moshoeshoe II; Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) founded

1998  Internet access first made available in Lesotho

1998–1999  May 1998: National elections; Pakalitha Mosisili (LCD) becomes Prime Minister; election results are heavily contested by opposition parties; violence breaks out in Maseru, destroying much of the city; SADC forces are called in to restore order, withdrawing in May 1999
TIMELINE (cont.)

2002  National Elections; Mosisili wins second term as Prime Minister
2004  Phase I of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project completed
2005  First local government elections held since independence
2011  Mosisili leaves the LCD to form the Democratic Congress (DC)
2012  National elections; Tom Thabane of the All Basotho Convention (ABC) becomes Prime Minister
2014  August: Thabane fires the head of the army, Kennedy Tlali Kamoli; Kamoli stages a coup; Thabane flees to South Africa
       September: SADC and government leaders schedule elections for 2015
2015  February: National Elections; Mosisili becomes Prime Minister
       June: General Maaparankoe Mahao assassinated by a group of LDF soldiers
2017  September: Lieutenant General Khoantle Motsomotso, head of the army, assassinated by two senior LDF officers
       June: National elections; Thabane returns to Lesotho and becomes Prime Minister
2019  Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project launched
2020  February: Thabane announces that he will step down as Prime Minister in July 2020; this comes after police opened an investigation into the murder of his first wife
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Religious forces have shaped Lesotho from the precolonial era to the present. Today, the vast majority of Basotho identify as Christian. Faith actors, including individual churches, local and national faith inspired organizations (FIOs), and ecumenical networks, engage with nearly every development issue in Lesotho; some 80 percent of public schools are run by individual churches or church networks, while FIOs runs hospitals and health centers throughout the country, often in rural areas. Local, district, and national FIOs lead projects on a variety of interlocking issues, including agriculture, livelihoods, climate change, gender, and good governance; their work is often supported by international development organizations and government officials.

Despite these contributions to Lesotho’s development sector, faith actors’ roles are often not well understood. The government has yet to develop a formal framework through which to engage FIOs; doing so would not only harness their community-based experience, but also help state officials better understand religious perspectives on development challenges, which can play a pivotal role in determining which measures succeed. Other barriers to meaningful partnership among local FIOs and outside partners include a dearth of knowledge about existing faith-inspired work and a lack of precedent for effective partnerships between religious and secular groups. As is the case in many countries, overlooking or minimalizing FIOs’ contributions can stymie the effectiveness of development programs as a whole. Experience suggests that positive and informed engagement offers the potential to expand the scope and enhance the quality of the development response.

This report frames the development roles of faith actors in Lesotho as part of a country mapping initiative by the World Faiths Development Dialogue. It explores the religious dimensions of various development issues, with a focus on the actual and potential contributions of faith actors to Lesotho’s development sector. The report’s main aims are: (a) to provide a detailed overview of Lesotho’s religious landscape, including its numerous faith-linked organizations and networks; (b) to summarize the national development landscape today, with a focus on religious and secular organizations on the local,
national, and international levels; (c) to highlight key development issues and existing faith-inspired initiatives engaging these issues; and (d) to point to key areas for further research, analysis, and action. In deepening the understanding of religious contributions to development in Lesotho, the report seeks to promote collaboration between both religious and secular actors and, in doing so, enhance the overall quality and scope of development programs in the country.

KEY FINDINGS

Lesotho is predominantly Christian, with a significant diversity of denominations. The country’s missionary history is reflected in its contemporary religious makeup, with Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants comprising the largest portion of the population. There is also a growing number of Pentecostal and African independent/instituted churches across the country. Ecumenical groups such as the Christian Council of Lesotho bring together Lesotho’s major Christian denominations to coordinate outreach on a broad spectrum of development issues. Given the predominance of Christianity, interfaith initiatives are minimal.

More than twenty years after the first HIV/AIDS case in Lesotho, the virus remains the country’s top development issue. Although incidence rates have decreased in the past decade, the prevalence rate—close to a quarter of the population—remains one of the highest in the world. The rapid spread of the virus has exposed severe weaknesses in the national health system, including out-of-date equipment, shortages in qualified health personnel, poor telecommunications infrastructure for relaying public health messages, and a lack of clinics in rural areas. Despite these obstacles, initiatives spearheaded by government ministries and local and international development actors have made significant gains in the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. Programming is often multi-faceted in nature: FIOs provide not only medical support but also address the nutritional, psychosocial and economic needs of HIV-positive individuals and their families, including orphans and vulnerable children.

Financial constraints and shortages limit the impact of government ministries and civil society groups. National budgets for health, education, and social assistance fall short of WHO and UNICEF benchmarks, while government-funded schools and clinics, especially those in rural areas, frequently lack up-to-date facilities, adequate equipment, and sufficiently trained personnel. Financial constraints extend to many CSOs, curbing their ability to plan long-term projects and hire staff to run their operations. While support from bilateral and multilateral donors has helped to mitigate these factors, political and economic instability jeopardizes future development assistance, which may undermine development projects run by local organizations.
Religious leaders are among the most trusted authority figures in Sotho society, which places them in a strategic position to shape public attitudes around sensitive development topics. These issues, which include gender-based discrimination and violence, family planning, and HIV/AIDS, are informed by deeply held cultural views; as such, they require engagement that is both respectful of different perspectives and genuine in its search for common ground. By anchoring their approach in shared religious values, groups such as the Association of Lesotho Theologians have been able to lead discussions on taboo or stigmatized subjects. International NGOs could benefit from a closer dialogue with local faith actors in order to gain insight into the complexities of sensitive issues in their own programming.

Close economic ties to South Africa, coupled with an undiversified domestic market, threaten Lesotho’s economic viability. For over a century, hundreds of thousands of Basotho have sought temporary work in South Africa, supporting Lesotho’s economy through remittances. This economic dependence threatens Lesotho’s long-term economic stability, especially as South African policies shift to favor local workers. A lack of local industry and cumbersome business regulations have contributed to the high unemployment rate and discouraged many Basotho from seeking work. With a growing youth population, job creation and adequate skills training are pressing issues for government action and CSO engagement.

Ongoing political instability jeopardizes development progress. Lesotho is no stranger to political tensions, but recent events, including the assassinations of several high-profile generals, have stalled development assistance in some cases. At the same time, the political climate is marked by corruption and rising political apathy. In order to secure the country’s development achievements so far, it is important for state and civil society figures, including religious leaders, to address these concerns more explicitly.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Lesotho showcases both the opportunities and challenges of development work in a particular geographical, political, and economic context. A mountainous, land-locked enclave state within South Africa, Lesotho has made significant strides in development outcomes over the past several decades, but it still falls far behind the sub-Saharan African average on many indicators.

HIV/AIDS poses the most significant public health threat to Lesotho, where the prevalence rate is the second highest in the world; the virus has had a crippling effect on almost every sector of society. The epidemic has contributed to the breakdown of traditional family and community structures, augmented already high rates of gender-based violence, orphaned thousands of children, and drastically reduced the workforce. Public and private health care providers face chronic shortages of medicine, equipment, and trained personnel, contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis as well as a high maternal mortality rate. At the same time, state programs on HIV/AIDS-related issues, such as prevention and psychosocial care, are frequently underfunded.

Financial constraints have also impacted the education sector, where low school enrollment and poor performance are widespread problems. The lack of adequate education leaves many young people without the necessary skills to join the workforce; low economic growth, an undiversified domestic market, and few local job opportunities push many Basotho to seek work in South Africa. Unsustainable farming practices on the country’s small amount of arable land and the effects of climate change have further contributed to food insecurity and loss of livelihood.

Lesotho underperforms by most international development standards. The country failed to meet any of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the 2015 deadline. Despite this, the government has reaffirmed its commitment to pursuing the MDGs and has signed onto the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, increased political instability in recent years, rising corruption, and plummeting rates of trust in public institutions not only present obstacles to successful implementation of new policy, but also reflect skepticism of the government’s capability to effect much-needed change.
Religious actors are engaged in development work at the local, district, and national levels, both in high-profile and less visible ways. FIOs in Lesotho shape discussion around sensitive topics, such as HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence, and provide much-needed services, including primary health care and skills training. The government has partnered closely with some FIOs in the past, especially in education and health care. International NGOs have likewise begun to partner with FIOs, recognizing the distinctive skillsets they bring to the development field. However, there is still much untapped potential for collaboration among government agencies, international NGOs, and local FIOs, especially those on the grassroots level. By taking a closer look at faith-inspired initiatives in Lesotho, outside development actors may come to appreciate what many local practitioners already know: religion and development work are deeply intertwined in Lesotho and FIOs and are invaluable to the continued progress of the development sector.

**STUDY OBJECTIVE**

Lesotho is one of several countries featured in a country-mapping project within WFDD and the Berkley Center’s joint Religion and Global Development program. This report lays out the development and religious landscapes of Lesotho, analyzes the role of religious actors and institutions in a wide range of development issues, and explores the religious dimensions of these issues. It aims to provide development actors, both religious and secular, with insights into the Lesotho context in order to strengthen collaboration and improve the overall quality of development initiatives.

It is important to acknowledge that there is no single, universally applicable definition of religion, faith, or spirituality. Rather, these terms remain the subject of much debate among scholars of religion and religious people alike. Furthermore, religious expression in Lesotho may not necessarily reflect understandings of religion conceived by Western scholarship; one example of this is the frequent blending of Sotho traditional practices with Christian beliefs, which demonstrates the complex ways in which religious belief and practice can take on new forms and meanings within a particular cultural and historical context. This report acknowledges the complex and varied ways in which religion is understood and practiced, but it affirms the value of studying religion more broadly as a phenomenon that interacts with social, political, and economic behavior. Looking to the development context, this approach may illuminate perspectives that have been thus far overlooked or obscured.

In a similar way, this report acknowledges that the terminology used to discuss development work is not always shared among its practitioners. While many grassroots FIOs have been at the front lines of this work in Lesotho, from running schools to operating clinics in their communities, religious actors may not necessarily see their work through the same lens as the international NGOs with which they partner. This report seeks to appreciate the often complex and varied ways in which development work is understood by its practitioners.
RESEARCH APPROACH

The project began with a literature review designed to assess existing scholarship on development work and religious initiatives, establish thematic connections among sources, and identify gaps in the research. From this phase of research emerged the major themes at the center of this report, including priority development issues in Lesotho today, as well as the main organizations engaged with these issues. Subsequent research focused on exploring these themes, issues, and organizations in greater depth. The research drew on scholarly articles, government documents, online databases, and a large range of literature published by FIOs online. It also included interviews with several scholars and practitioners familiar with the development context of Lesotho.

REPORT STRUCTURE

This report is divided into five chapters. Following this introduction, chapter two offers an overview of the challenges and opportunities in Lesotho’s development sector, including its national development strategy, bilateral and multilateral aid partnerships, NGO involvement, and governance structure. Chapter three focuses on the religious sphere of Sotho society, tracing the history of the country’s religious groups and discussing both their historical and modern role in shaping the lives of Basotho. Chapter four explores the contribution of international and local FIOs in key sectors of development work. Finally, the concluding chapter summarizes the report’s findings and identifies next steps for development work in Lesotho, as well as areas for further research.
CHAPTER 2: LESOTHO’S DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Development initiatives in Lesotho have covered considerable ground in the new millennium, but much work remains to be done. The government’s national development plans reflect a commitment to addressing the needs of the education, health care, and economic sectors. In addition to state initiatives, an array of international NGOs and a growing number of local civil society organizations are engaged in development work in Lesotho.

Lesotho’s poor performance across the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) reflects the country’s most urgent development challenges. Chief among these is public health: life expectancy dropped from 59 to 46 years between 1990 and 2003, in large part due to the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. While HIV/AIDS-related deaths have been on the decline since the mid-2000s, the epidemic remains the single largest development issue facing Lesotho. (Today, Lesotho has a life expectancy of 52.9 years, still one of the lowest in the world.1) Poverty is likewise a persistent problem; in 2010, the World Bank estimated that 59.3 percent of the population was living under $1.90 (2011 PPP) per day.2

The political situation in Lesotho poses further obstacles to successful development outcomes. Despite the adoption of a democratic constitution in 1993 and marked improvement in measures of electoral integrity since then, tensions between politicians and the military continue to pose a threat to the long-term sustainability of democracy. Corruption, while less pervasive than in other countries in the region, hinders transparency in the democratic process.

The population growth rate rose in the mid-2000s following a precipitous decline brought on by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.3 This growth poses a serious challenge to the capacity of the health care and education sectors, as schools and health centers already face chronic resource shortages. With over half of the population in the labor force and another third under the age of 14, the government faces strong pressure to provide its citizens
with vocational training and jobs. Without such opportunities, a large fraction of the population will likely continue to pursue (mostly unskilled) work in South Africa.4

This chapter provides an overview of Lesotho's development context. Special attention is given to the government’s national development strategies, Lesotho’s bilateral and multilateral aid partners, and civil society groups engaged in development work. Although religious institutions are not addressed directly in these discussions, this chapter aims to establish a framework for understanding the contributions of FIOs to
the broader development sector. The final section of the chapter highlights issues related to governance, including political instability, corruption, and human rights concerns, as these shape the political context in which FIOs operate.

**LESOTHO’S NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: LESOTHO VISION 2020**

Lesotho’s national development plan is laid out in Lesotho Vision 2020. Released in 2003, the plan calls for economic prosperity and technological development, stable and democratic government, environmental protections, and a healthy and educated populace. Lesotho Vision 2020 frames its development objectives along seven pillars: democracy, unity, peace, education, economic growth, management of the natural environment, and technological advancement. For each pillar, the plan identifies strategic actions and designates agencies responsible for implementing these actions; however, it lacks specific, measurable, and time-bound steps to achieve overarching objectives. In addition, Lesotho Vision 2020 lays out the main obstacles to achieving its goals, including government centralization, low management capacity, and corruption, but it does not suggest measures to address these concerns.5

Lesotho joined the countries of the world in committing itself to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000. In 2016, the Ministry of Development Planning released a status report evaluating Lesotho’s performance on each goal. Despite progress on education, gender equality, environmental preservation, and global partnerships for
development, Lesotho did not meet any of the eight goals by the 2015 deadline. “Very slow progress” was made with regards to extreme poverty, child mortality, maternal health, and HIV/AIDS (goals 1, 4, 5, and 6, respectively), with “slow progress” in the areas of universal primary education, gender equality and women’s empowerment, and environmental sustainability (goals 2, 3, and 7). Lesotho achieved “substantial progress” toward goal 8 (building global partnerships for development), but fell short of meeting it. According to the government report, key reasons for low performance included a failure to integrate the goals into Lesotho’s ongoing national policy development plan; heavy government centralization; weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; low capacity and lack of coordination amongst relevant sectors; and weak government ownership over the implementation process. The report emphasized the need for “comprehensive and timely data” on development programs, as well as a more integrated approach that addresses the underlying causes of poverty and inequality.6

In 2015, Lesotho committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The following year, government officials collaborated with a UN team to mainstream the SDGs into the NSDP and the African Union’s Agenda 2063. The team also established benchmarks, indicators, and monitoring frameworks for implementation of the SDGs.7

LESOTHO’S DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS

BOX 2.1: ADDITIONAL NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Since the publication of Lesotho Vision 2020, the government has released several plans outlining concrete actions for particular development areas; these plans include the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for 2005–2007, the Interim National Development Framework (INDF) for 2009–2011, and the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) for 2012–2017. The NSDP outlines specific goals related to job creation, economic growth, integration of technology, health systems strengthening, and promotion of efficient and democratic governance structures. As of early 2019, the government is finalizing a second National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP II) for the next five years.8

In July 2018, national and local government officials met in preparation for the launch of a Public Sector Improvement Reform Programme (PSIRP). This initiative aims to enhance the quality and accountability of public sector service delivery by more closely defining the roles of national and local government offices and establishing a framework for communication among relevant institutions. PRISP was introduced after several other policies to decentralize the national government and improve service delivery were deemed insufficient in their implementation (these included the Public Sector Improvement Reform Programme of 2001–2002 and the National Decentralisation Policy launched in 2014).9

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Since independence in 1966, Lesotho has had numerous bilateral and multilateral development partners. Aid flows grew in the 1970s, from US$9.7 million in Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 1970 to US$103 million in 1981. As Western Europe and the United States levied sanctions against apartheid South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they increased ODA to Lesotho in order to counteract the negative impact of sanctions on Lesotho’s economy. Following the collapse of apartheid, aid flows shrank considerably, reaching a low of US$32 million in 1999. In recent years, aid numbers have surged to US$321 million (2013), but increasing political instability in Lesotho has led many donors to withdraw funds from government and civil society initiatives. ODA plummeted to US$83 million in 2015, but rose to US$112 million and US$147 in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Future aid flows are likely to depend on the stability of democratic structures.8

Between 2004 and 2013, US$2 billion in aid flowed into Lesotho; this financing was nearly evenly split between bilateral governments and multilateral organizations. Forty-five percent of all aid during this period came from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries, with just over 4 percent coming from non-DAC countries. (The remaining aid came from multilateral donors.)9 The largest bilateral contributions came from the United States and United Kingdom. Bilateral ODA in 2016 and 2017 was primarily focused on projects in the health and population sector (78 percent), followed by humanitarian aid (9 percent), program assistance (4 percent), and education (3 percent).10
China has emerged as a major non-DAC development partner in the first two decades of the new millennium. Between 2000 and 2014, China provided close to US$190 million in ODA.\textsuperscript{11} In 2018, the Export-Import Bank of China authorized a loan of over US$100 million for a road construction project.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, China has pledged millions of dollars in food aid and forgiven outstanding debts linked to several high-profile construction projects.\textsuperscript{13}

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has also emerged as an important donor and lender to Lesotho. The UAE provided over US$4 million in loans for water infrastructure projects in 2016.\textsuperscript{14} As an OPEC member country, the UAE has also contributed to donations made by the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID), which has committed US$78 million to infrastructure, health, and education projects in Lesotho since the 1970s.\textsuperscript{15}

Among multilateral organizations, major donors and lenders include the World Bank; IMF; EU Institutions; African Development Bank; United Nations; Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; and OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID).\textsuperscript{16} Additional private sector support comes from both large and small-scale NGOs, religious institutions, and philanthropic organizations; however, these aid flows, including those donated directly to local FIOs in Lesotho, are difficult to track. Therefore, the extent of private contributions is unknown.

\textbf{Figure 2.3: Net Bilateral ODA Disbursements, 1960–2017 (US$ millions, 2017 prices)}

Source: https://stats.oecd.org

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Lesotho boasts a wide range of civil society organizations of varying size and focus. While there is no reliable estimate of active NGOs in Lesotho, indicators suggest that the civil society sector has experienced significant growth since the 1980s. This is due in some part to a lack of government regulations, which has enabled NGOs to conduct business relatively unhindered. Both the government and ordinary Basotho hold generally favorable attitudes toward NGOs, and civil society is typically regarded as a valuable intermediary between government officials and citizens. NGOs are involved in a variety of sectors, including education, health, agriculture, emergency relief, and the arts, as well as advocacy for vulnerable groups, including women, youth, OVC, herd boys, farmers, LGBT individuals, and individuals living with disabilities.

NGOs must register under the Societies’ Act of 1966. The act does not define an NGO or place any restrictions on its area of focus. Other legislation regarding civil society likewise does not differentiate between NGOs (non-governmental organizations), CSOs (civil society organizations), or FBOs/FIOs (faith-based/faith-inspired organization). Some of the most active NGOs in Lesotho have a faith-inspired approach. For this reason, “CSO,” “NGO” and “FIO” are often used interchangeably when discussing civil society groups.

Figure 2.4: Net Multilateral ODA Disbursements, 1960–2017 (US$ millions, 2017 prices)
Source: https://stats.oecd.org
NGOs based in Lesotho face a range of challenges often specific to the national context. Foremost among these are chronic shortages in funding and personnel. The Lesotho tax code does not make exemptions for donations to most civil society organizations, which severely limits the flow of funds from within the country. As a result, NGOs rely heavily on grants from international organizations, such as the World Bank and European Union, rather than domestic sources. This dependence on foreign funding jeopardizes the long-term sustainability of NGO programs. Due to budget shortfalls, staff turnover is high, forcing many NGOs to rely heavily on volunteers.20

Civil society groups face frequent challenges in effecting change at the policy level.21 There is no clear framework for NGOs to consult with government officials; as a result, they are often left out of national conversations around development priorities and political reform. Moreover, many NGOs encounter obstacles in accessing government documents.22 The few NGOs that play an active role in policy formulation do so at the invitation of government officials who have the power to shape the conversation at the cost of excluding certain voices.

In recent decades, civil society organizations have taken steps to share resources and coordinate with one another. Established in 1990, the Lesotho Council of Non-Government Organisations (LCN) is an umbrella organization for close to 200 local NGOs. LCN supports its members through networking opportunities, capacity building training, and advocacy in front of government agencies and development partners.23 The Council has worked with the World Bank and European Union on projects targeting capacity building for NGOs; it also serves as a gateway for the distribution of grant money among member organizations.24

**POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE**

Political instability and low public trust in government pose a threat to the future success of development initiatives in Lesotho. After decades of post-independence political conflict, Lesotho’s Constitution of 1993 restored democratic governance and political rights to the people. Nevertheless, ongoing political tensions, especially with the military, have weakened democratic governance mechanisms. Incidents of corruption, while less common than in other countries in the region, occur in many government ministries. Citizens’ trust in government officials declined significantly in the 2010s, accompanied by low levels of civic engagement on both the local and national levels. Moreover, several recent incidents have called into question Lesotho’s human rights record, particularly with regards to freedom of the press. While several FIOs, most notably the Transformation Resource Centre, have focused on increasing citizens’ civic engagement, few groups have worked directly with policymakers on such matters as corruption and political instability. The following section examines these issues in greater detail with a focus on recent trends.
In the six decades since independence, Lesotho’s politics have been marred by contested elections, military coups, and violence. Military interventions and tensions among political parties have undermined the stability of Lesotho’s democracy and diminished the public’s trust in government officials: in 2017, an Afrobarometer survey indicated that more than half of the population was unsatisfied with the state of democracy in Lesotho.\(^{25}\)

In light of ongoing threats to Lesotho’s democracy from rival political parties and security forces, the government of Lesotho recently introduced legislation to reform the country’s political, electoral, and security systems.\(^{26}\) Prime Minister Thabane, who was reelected in June 2017, leads the efforts along with leaders of his party, the All Basotho Convention (ABC). The National Reforms Commission Bill of 2018 includes SADC recommendations to address the relationship between the government and LDF, as well as to reform the constitution to ensure greater political stability.\(^{27}\) However, opposition party leadership withdrew support for the reform efforts in late 2018 after Thabane suspended Chief Justice Nthomeng Majara, a move widely condemned as executive overreach.\(^{28}\)
In February 2020, Thabane announced his plans to step down in July of that year; the decision came in the wake of a police investigation into the murder of Thabane’s first wife.29

**BOX 2.2: POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN POSTCOLONIAL LESOTHO: AN OVERVIEW**

Challenges to democracy have a long history in postcolonial Lesotho. In 1970, Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan annulled the results of the country’s first post-independence elections, suspended the constitution, exiled King Moshoeshoe II, and cracked down on his political opponents. Jonathan served as Prime Minister until 1986, when he was overthrown by General Justin Lekhanya in a military coup. Lekhanya ruled as dictator until 1991, when his second-in-command, Elias Ramaema, overthrew him. Ramaema’s government lifted government bans on political activity, welcomed King Moshoeshoe II back into the country, scheduled elections for March 1993, and introduced a new constitution, which remains in effect today.

Although Ramaema’s efforts introduced democracy to Lesotho, they could not contain an increasingly divided political climate, which came to a head following the May 1998 elections. Opposition parties, including the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) and Basotho National Party (BNP), contested the landslide victory of the newly established Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), which won 79 of the National Assembly’s 80 seats. Protesters took to the streets across the country, questioning the fairness of the election. When protests persisted despite an official investigation by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Lesotho government requested that SADC troops be stationed in the country as a security measure. The political situation stabilized by May 1999, but only after widespread looting in Maseru and outbursts of violence between citizens and the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) resulted in the death of at least 80 people.a

While electoral integrity improved in the 2000s and 2010s, the relationship between the LDF and the government remains tense, with several flare-ups in recent years. Following his firing by Prime Minister Thomas Thabane, former LDF commander General Kennedy Tlali Kamoli staged an unsuccessful coup in August 2015. Fearing his safety, Thabane fled to South Africa, where he remained even after the elections of February 2015, at which point Pakalitha Mosisili of the Democratic Congress (DC) became Prime Minister.b The LDF remained in the public eye when General Maaparankoe Mahao was assassinated in June 2015; a group of LDF soldiers is widely suspected to have perpetrated the killing.c Following the incident, several more politicians who had been critical of the military fled to South Africa.d Just two years later, in September 2017, Lieutenant General Khoantle Motsomotso, head of the army, was assassinated by two senior LDF officers.e

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Freedom and Democracy under Threat

Recent political instability has undermined free and open democracy in Lesotho. A 2018 report by Freedom House rates Lesotho as “partly free,” with a score of 64 out of 100 (0 being “least free” and 100 “most free”). The score is broken into two sections: “political rights” and “civil liberties”; together, these sections take into account factors such as free and fair elections, lack of corruption in the government, political rights of minority groups, rule of law, personal autonomy, and freedoms of expression, assembly, and movement. Lesotho scored 27 out of a total score of 40 for political rights and 37 out of 60 for civil liberties.  

Public confidence in democratic governance structures has declined in recent years. More than half of respondents to a 2018 survey by Afrobarometer said they believed that the country is headed in the wrong direction. There has been a drop in popular support for elections: while three in four Basotho supported open, free, and honest elections in 2014, less than half of the population did so in 2017. This may be due in part to the perception that the current coalition government is ineffective; 66 percent of survey respondents in 2018 called for a return to the majoritarian electoral system, which had been in place following independence, to replace the mixed-member proportional
representation system adopted in 1998. (The proportional system has frequently led to hung parliaments.34)

General concerns about Lesotho’s democracy notwithstanding, international observers have praised electoral integrity in recent elections. Despite some concerns about the credibility of voter rolls and the voter registration process, observers from the SADC described the February 2015 national elections as “peaceful, transparent, credible, free and fair.” Similar language was used by Commonwealth observers to describe the 2017 national elections. The Election Integrity Project gave the elections a 63 out of 100 on its Perceptions of Electoral Integrity index (PEI), which is slightly above the world average and was the second highest score awarded to an African country in 2015. Lesotho’s robust electoral laws and strong adherence to electoral procedures were credited for the strong score.37

Persistent Corruption
Corruption is a pervasive and persistent problem in Lesotho, referred to by Prime Minister Thabane as the country’s “worst enemy after AIDS.” In 2019, Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) ranked Lesotho 85 among 180 countries (with 1 being the least corrupt and 180 the most). Lesotho received a score of 40 out of 100 (with 0 being “highly corrupt” and 100 “very clean”). While this was above the sub-Saharan African average of 32, Lesotho’s score has declined in the last five years, down from 49 in 2014.

Corruption is common across government ministries and public services, ranging from petty bribes and gift-giving to cronyism and other forms of political patronage in bids for government contracts. One of the most high-profile corruption cases occurred in 1998, when senior public officials and members of multinational companies were publicly tried for alleged bribery and embezzlement related to the Lesotho Highlands Water Project.

Box 2.4: Public Perceptions of Corruption

Government corruption is widely acknowledged among Basotho. Today, four in five Basotho believe that government officials are corrupt, and three in five believe that members of the judiciary are. More than half of Basotho believe that members of these groups who commit crimes frequently go unpunished. The police force is widely considered corrupt, especially outside of Maseru, where oversight bodies have fewer resources to closely monitor police actions; eighty-one percent of respondents in a 2018 survey said the police were corrupt, and two-thirds believed that police routinely abuse people in their custody. Despite this, a majority of the population believes that the government is doing either “fairly well” or “very well” in combatting corruption.

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As recently as February 2018, Lesotho’s Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) opened an investigation into Prime Minister Thabane’s alleged connections to South Africa’s Gupta family, who have been subject to widespread accusations of state capture in South Africa. However, most corruption is small-scale, such as exchanging small bribes and gifts. According to the World Bank’s 2016 Enterprise Survey, 35 percent of businesses in Lesotho report being requested or expected to give gifts or bribes as part of their bid for a government contract.

In Lesotho Vision 2020, the government identifies corruption and nepotism as key challenges facing the country, describing them as “a cancer in our institutions.” Since the late 1990s, policymakers have taken steps toward making Lesotho a “corruption-free country” by 2020. The LHWP bribery and embezzlement case prompted the passage of Lesotho’s first anti-corruption law, the Prevention of Corruption and Economic Offences Act No. 5 of 1999, which instituted penalties for bribery, created procedures for protecting informants, and established the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO), the country’s first anti-corruption agency. Laws passed in 2006 and 2008 expanded the powers of the DCEO, set regulations for the government contract bidding process, and criminalized money laundering. Several other anti-corruption and government oversight bodies have been established, including the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), comprised of MPs from the ruling party and opposition who work with the Office of the Auditor General to investigate complaints concerning the misuse of public funds or non-compliance with anti-corruption laws.

In practice, however, these monitoring and enforcement institutions lack the capacity to adequately root out corruption and hold government officials accountable. The DCEO is chronically understaffed and underfunded. Moreover, gaps in legislation undermine the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts; one prominent example is the lack of up-to-date measures to protect whistleblowers. The need for such protections is evident in public opinion: two out of three Basotho believe that reporting corruption to the authorities risks retaliation.

Dwindling Civic Engagement

Low levels of civic engagement further undermine Lesotho’s democracy. Civic education efforts sponsored by the government and CSOs typically focus on voter registration and are limited to the months prior to elections. Consequently, many Basotho consider their civic duty a matter of voting and little else. Even with this focus, voter turnout has sharply declined, going from over 70 percent in 1998 and 2002 to around 46 percent in 2015 and 2017. This is not necessarily due to a lack of interest in political affairs among citizens; rather, low engagement may be due to a lack of comprehensive civic education and few opportunities for political participation.

Women are underrepresented on both the national and local political stages; in 2017, only 27 of parliament’s 120 seats were held by women, down three seats from 2015.
Particularly in rural areas, women face numerous barriers in pursuing political leadership, including cultural and religious norms that consider leadership the domain of men. A 2004 amendment to the Local Government Elections Act sought to amplify women’s voices by requiring local government councils to reserve one third of their seats for female representatives. Another amendment in 2011 eliminated this measure but required councils to provide additional seats for women; this helped to boost women’s overall representation. In 2015, forty-nine percent of local government officials were women, although NGOs on the ground believe that this percentage would have been far lower without the 2004 law.

Youth (ages 15–35) are also heavily underrepresented in the country’s governance structures. While youth turnout in the 2012 national elections was slightly higher than that of the general population (58.9 percent and 56.4 percent, respectively), only 10 out of the 120 members of the eighth parliament (2012–2015) were under the age of 35. There have been several governmental and civil society attempts to educate and empower youth to participate in the political process, but there are no formal curricula for civic engagement. One effort to include youth in the political process is the National Youth Council (NYC), established in 2008. Comprised of youth representatives from every district of the country, the NYC is designed to foster youth participation in national
issues. However, council members were not elected until 2012, and the council has not become operational in the time since.54

Government efforts to encourage broad civic engagement have had limited success so far. One initiative, the Local Government Regulations Act of 2005, enabled citizens to attend local government council meetings, make suggestions to the councils, and gain access to council documents. However, information about the act was not effectively disseminated to community members; as a result, it failed to significantly increase political participation on the local level. In 2014, the government introduced the National Decentralisation Policy, which strengthened the role of local governments in service delivery; one aim of the policy was to increase political participation at the grassroots level.55 The impact of the program has not yet been assessed.

Another potential reason for low levels of engagement with local politics is the dominant role of traditional/tribal leadership in shaping community life, especially in rural Lesotho; concerned citizens may prefer to take up their grievances with a traditional/tribal leader rather than government officials.56

**Diminishing Human Rights**

Lesotho’s 1993 Constitution protects a number of “fundamental rights and freedoms,” including freedom of conscience, expression, movement, and assembly, as well as freedom from discrimination, inhumane treatment, and forced labor.57 However, human rights abuses and violations continue to make headlines, and further incidents of abuse go unreported; those that have been documented likely do not represent the full extent of the situation.58

Although the Constitution prohibits torture and “inhuman or degrading punishment,” the use of these methods by police and security forces is considered an open secret.59 A 2018 report by Afrobarometer reports that two-thirds of Basotho believe police “routinely abuse or torture people in their custody.” There is little public trust in the LDF and Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) to hold their officers accountable for these actions.60 Several high-profile instances of alleged torture have promoted this sentiment. According to Amnesty International, 23 LDF soldiers who were loyal to General Maaparankoe Mahao were arrested in May 2015, charged with mutiny, and allegedly tortured prior to the General’s assassination. In April 2018, a man arrested in a murder case accused police of waterboarding and beating him.61

Prison facilities lack proper sanitation, medical care, and ventilation, lighting, and heating systems, as well as accommodations for prisoners with disabilities. Violence and physical abuse are common among the prison population, and many of those imprisoned are either unaware that they can submit complaints or fear retaliation by prison officials for doing so.62
Government actors have a history of curtailing freedom of expression through censorship and intimidation. The Print and Publishing Act of 1967 and Internal Security Act of 1984 expanded state powers to censor independent media organizations. Recent reforms to the Lesotho Communications Agency have empowered the Ministry of Communications to revoke or suspend the licenses of broadcast media outlets. Government officials have also shut down radio stations, cut off access to transmission lines, and detained radio journalists at various points in the past several years. (Those targeted are often pursuing news stories perceived to be critical of government or security forces.) In December 2016, several LDF soldiers were taken into custody after the Lesotho Times editor was shot outside of his home; the newspaper had recently published a story about the head of the armed forces.

Children, the elderly, and LGBT individuals are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations. Child abuse is a pervasive problem, especially among orphans and vulnerable children; it includes neglect, assault, and sexual abuse. Young people are sometimes forced to work before the legal age of 15. In some parts of the country, elderly women are targeted and killed, usually by groups of young men, on the accusation of witchcraft. LGBT individuals are not guaranteed protections under the constitution, and sodomy remains illegal.

Capital projects in the water, mining, and construction industries have raised concerns about the socioeconomic rights of affected communities, most of them in rural areas. Community members have been forced to relocate without receiving adequate compensation for lost property from the private companies behind the projects. With few guidelines in place to regulate capital projects, community members frequently lack a formal mechanism through which to air their grievances.

Numerous government agencies have been tasked with improving the human rights situation in the country. Chief among these is the Office of the Ombudsman, which investigates complaints against government agencies and corporations. The Police Complaints Authority (PCA) investigates claims of police misconduct, the Child and Gender Protection Unit (CGPU) leads government efforts against child abuse, and the Ministry of Social Development works to protect rights of persons with disabilities, OVC, and other vulnerable groups. However, the scope and effectiveness of these agencies is limited by small budgets and scant personnel.

In 2011, parliament amended the constitution to establish a National Human Right Commission, but subsequent legislation to fully operationalize the commission has stalled. Despite support from the UN, EU and local NGOs, the commission is inactive at this time.
CHAPTER 3: LESOTHO’S RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

Lesotho’s religious history features various, often overlapping, belief systems. The majority Christian population is divided along denominational lines that date back to the arrival of missionary groups. Religious demographics have been further shaped by breakaway churches led by Basotho. This chapter provides an overview of the religious communities present in Lesotho today, as well as a brief history of these communities over the past two hundred years. Almost all religious groups in Lesotho engage in development work, whether formally or informally; this chapter grounds their work in the broader religious context of Lesotho.

RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHY OF LESOTHO

Over 90 percent of Lesotho’s population identifies as Christian. Half of the population is Roman Catholic and another third is Protestant. Prominent Protestant denominations include the Anglican Church, Lesotho Evangelical Church in Southern Africa, Methodist Church of Southern Africa, African Methodist Episcopal Church, and various Pentecostal churches. Some 10 percent of Lesotho’s Christians belong to independent churches, often established as breakaway groups from Protestant missionary churches. The remaining population includes Baha’is, Hindus, and Muslims. Followers of Sotho traditional religion are also significant.

The majority of scholarship on religion in Lesotho focuses on the history of religious movements; there is not much information about the contemporary “lived religion” of Basotho (e.g., frequency of church attendance, feelings of religiosity, and participation in religious/spiritual activities outside of worship services). One exception to this is a 2014 Afrobarometer survey, which offers important insights on religious practices among Basotho. Sixteen percent of survey respondents said that they engage in some form of religious practice, such as praying, reading a religious text, or attending a religious service or meeting, at least once a day; 32 percent said they do so at least once a week.
The vast majority of Lesotho’s population belongs to the Sotho ethnic group (singular: Mosotho, plural: Basotho). “Mosotho” and “Basotho” are also widely used to designate a Lesotho national, regardless of their ethnic or linguistic identity; the terms are used accordingly in this report.

While most sources estimate the ethnic Sotho majority at over 99 percent of the population, some report a Zulu minority comprising about 14 percent of the population. This discrepancy may be due to the presence of a Zulu-speaking population in northern Lesotho; however, there is limited information about whether or not these Zulu speakers identify as ethnically Zulu. Other minority languages include Xhosa and Phuthi, mainly spoken in the country’s southern districts. Lesotho is also home to small groups of Europeans, Afrikaners, Chinese, and South Asians.a

Table 3.1: Population of Lesotho by Religious Affiliation (2015)
(Note: Some respondents listed more than one religious affiliation.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>1,106,674</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>741,600</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African independent/instituted churches</td>
<td>207,283</td>
<td>9.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated Christian</td>
<td>188,000</td>
<td>8.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1,002</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>1,305</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baha’i</td>
<td>19,296</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Traditional Religion</td>
<td>143,734</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agnostic/Atheist</td>
<td>5,658</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,226,552</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: https://worldchristiandatabase.org

Data on religious affiliation is not definitive, as there is no single reliable source for demographic information in Lesotho. The government of Lesotho did not disclose information concerning religious affiliation in its 2016 Population and Housing Census. Besides the U.S. State Department, the World Christian Database offers a detailed overview of membership of different religious bodies; however, data from these sources do not always align. Moreover, self-reported membership numbers from religious groups often contradict other sources; one reason for this may be a discrepancy between the number of affiliated members and those who regularly take part in religious activities. Some Basotho may also identify with more than one religious tradition.
and 22 percent at least once a month. More than a third of survey respondents were either a member or leader of a religiously-focused group that meets outside of regular worship services. Despite these insights, it remains difficult to gauge the broader role of religious institutions in the lives of everyday Basotho. Further research into this area could be valuable for development partners.

**RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF LESOTHO**

Lesotho’s contemporary religious landscape reflects its Christian missionary history. Prior to the arrival of the first European missionaries, Basotho practiced Sotho traditional religion, which recognizes a panentheistic supreme being, known as the Modimo. Though a majority of Basotho identify as Christian today, many continue to practice traditional rituals in addition to attending church. Moreover, Christian institutions in Lesotho have incorporated certain aspects of Sotho culture into their religious practices; some Catholic priests, for example, wear traditional clothing during Mass.

The arrival of European missionaries preceded British colonial authorities by several decades. The first missionaries to Lesotho were members of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS), invited in 1833 by King Moshoeshoe I, a clan chief who had united local chiefdoms under the Sotho Kingdom in 1822. By placing these French-speaking, Protestant Christians throughout his kingdom, Moshoeshoe hoped to usher in educational, economic, and technological improvements.
The first Roman Catholic missionaries to Lesotho were the French-speaking Missionary Oblates of the Immaculate Order, who arrived in 1862 after several unsuccessful attempts to evangelize the Zulu people in the neighboring British colony of Natal. King Moshoeshoe granted them a site for their mission, which they opened in 1863 under the name Motse-oa-M’a-Jesu (“Village of the Mother of Jesus”). The following year, the Holy Family Sisters arrived in the Sotho Kingdom from Bordeaux to start a ministry for Basotho women. With the continued growth of the mission in subsequent years, including the establishment of Pius XII College (now the National University of Lesotho) in 1945, Motse-oa-M’a-Jesu was renamed Roma.

Other Christian denominations were established in subsequent decades, including the Anglican Church in 1875, African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1897, and Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1928 (later renamed the Methodist Church of Southern Africa). Christians were not the only ones to introduce the Basotho to an outside religion; the Baha’i community in Lesotho was started in the 1950s by a couple from the United States. Muslims, in contrast, did not come to Lesotho with an aim to convert local people. Most Muslims in contemporary Lesotho are of South Asian descent; some lived in South Africa before moving to Lesotho for economic opportunities, where they settled in the northern district of Butha-Buthe and around the capital city of Maseru. Lesotho is also home to a small Hindu community.

**RELIGION AND THE STATE**

Freedom of religion is enshrined in Lesotho’s Constitution of 1993, as is the freedom “to manifest and propagate” religious beliefs and practices. Religion is loosely defined as “a religious denomination and cognate expressions.” Religious institutions are encouraged, but not required, to register with the state; those that do so gain legal recognition and tax-exempt status. Any group with a constitution and leadership committee is eligible to register.

Political and religious leadership structures in Lesotho have historically been intertwined, and their legacy bears upon the present political situation. The Roman Catholic Church played a role in establishing the Basutoland National Party (BNP, later renamed Basotho National Party) in 1959, while the Lesotho Evangelical Church aligned itself with the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), founded some years earlier. These two parties were the main political players during two decades of political tension, from independence in 1966 through the coups of 1970, 1986, and 1991, until multi-party general elections were held 1993. Though both parties have lost support since then, the legacy of their religious affiliation continues to strain ecumenical relations between the two denominations.
Religious institutions play a crucial role in providing public services, whether in collaboration with or independent of the state. Nowhere is the historical legacy of religious institutions in Lesotho more evident than in the education sector. Religious operate close to 80 percent of the country’s schools. These schools are considered public, however, as they follow a standard curriculum set by the government, which certifies and pays teachers.84 Though church-run schools are allowed to teach religious education, the Constitution prohibits that students be required to receive instruction in a religious tradition other than their own.85

Religious leaders occupy a position of respect among most Basotho, second only to the king in terms of perceived trustworthiness. Nearly 60 percent of respondents to a 2018 survey said they trusted religious leaders.86 This perceived trustworthiness is reflected in Basotho's willingness to consult religious leaders; nearly 40 percent of respondents in a 2014 survey said they had consulted a religious leader in the past year to discuss a problem or to exchange views.87 Religious leaders are also considered the least likely to be involved in corruption.88

**RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND INSTITUTIONS**

*African Traditional Religion (ATR)*

Traditional religious practices remain an important feature of spiritual life for many Basotho. African/Sotho traditional religion is defined here as the broad, diverse set of beliefs and practices that have oriented the Basotho understanding of life, death, nature, and the universe since long before the arrival of outside missionaries. These beliefs center around a supreme being, the *Modimo*, and emphasize the role of departed family members (*Badimo*) in mediating between living relatives and the *Modimo*.89 Specific beliefs and practices vary among communities distinguished by geography, history, and tribe affiliation. Recognizing the centrality of traditional religion among the Basotho, many missionaries intentionally infused Christian beliefs and practices with those of Sotho traditional religion in their evangelization efforts. This legacy is reflected in the contemporary religious identity of the Basotho, many of whom practice Sotho traditional religion alongside Christianity. Engaging with Sotho traditional religion can shed light on the ways in which Basotho relate to one another, their community, and their environment.

Because traditional and Christian practices are deeply intertwined, it can be difficult to gauge the extent to which Sotho Traditional Religion is practiced in Lesotho today; demographic data that categorizes African Traditional Religion as a discrete religious affiliation may overlook the frequent blending of traditional and Christian beliefs and practices. Recognizing this fusion, however, can be invaluable in bridging cultural gaps among Basotho, the government, and international NGOs in order to encourage greater dialogue around sensitive issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, and family planning.
Christianity

Over 90 percent of Lesotho’s population is Christian. As there is no single reliable source for demographic data in Lesotho, membership estimates included below are in most cases provided by the denominations themselves.

The Lesotho Evangelical Church in Southern Africa (LECSA) is Lesotho’s oldest Christian denomination. Established by PEMS missionaries in the village of Morija in 1833, it was first known as the Church of Basutoland. After gaining independence from PEMS in 1964, it was renamed the Lesotho Evangelical Church and later changed to the Lesotho Evangelical Church in Southern Africa to reflect its presence in South Africa’s Gauteng Province. Today, the Church has close to 300,000 members across more than 100 congregations in Lesotho and Gauteng. LECSA operates over 500 primary and secondary schools, two vocational training institutions, two hospitals, and a school of nursing.90

With over one million members, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination in Lesotho today.91 At the turn of the millennium, there were over 70 Catholic parishes and 700 Catholic schools in Lesotho. The Church has emerged as a key player in combatting the HIV/AIDS epidemic; its initiatives are coordinated by the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference and Catholic lay organizations. There is also a strong presence of Catholic women religious in the country, with over 600 sisters in the year 2000.92

The Anglican Church first sent traveling priests to Lesotho from South Africa in the 1860s; the first Anglican priest settled there in 1875. Prior to 1950, Anglican parishes in Lesotho belonged to the Diocese of Bloemfontein, after which the seat of the newly formed Diocese of Lesotho was established in Maseru. Today, the church has around 370,000 members, 50 priests and deacons, and 40 parishes. The diocese operates over 200 schools, an HIV/AIDS mission, and the St. James Mission Hospital in the central province of Thaba-Tseka.93

The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), an independent Methodist denomination founded by African Americans in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1816, was established in Lesotho in 1897. HIV/AIDS awareness has been a high priority among church-sponsored programs since the 2000s. The church claims over 150,000 members, though outside sources put the number closer to 10,000.94

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), founded in 1931, was the legacy of Wesleyan Methodist missionaries in Southern Africa. Methodism first arrived with British soldiers in the Cape in the early nineteenth century. Although the Sotho government did not initially welcome other missionaries into the Kingdom, Methodists evangelized many Basotho migrant workers in South Africa, making their influence increasingly difficult to regulate. The first Methodist ministers were allowed into Lesotho in the late 1920s, shortly before the Methodist Church of Southern Africa
was established as an independent denomination. Today, the denomination is active in eSwatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Mozambique, Botswana, and South Africa; it operates close to 20 schools in Lesotho. Membership estimates vary; while the church claims 140,000 members in Lesotho, the real number may be as low as 10,000.

**Pentecostal churches** claim upwards of 30,000 members in Lesotho. Among these are the Assemblies of God (AG), a loose association of autonomous, Pentecostal churches. AG missionaries arrived in Lesotho in 1909; today, the denomination includes over 130 churches. Individual congregations have hosted missionaries from abroad to assist in building schools and health centers throughout the country.

Lesotho is home to over 200 **African independent/instituted churches (AICs)**, established by Basotho. These churches frequently combine Pentecostalism with Sotho traditional practices. The size of individual AICs is difficult to quantify, but one source estimates that there a total of over 200,000 members of such churches in Lesotho today.

Several other Christian groups have a small presence in Lesotho, including Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Pentecostal Holiness Church.
Other Religious Communities

Islam is a small but growing religious minority in Lesotho, with the arrival of more Muslims from Asia, South Africa, and countries along Africa’s eastern coast. There have been few efforts by Muslims to convert the majority-Christian population. The majority of Muslims live in Maseru or the district of Butha-Buthe, where the country’s first mosque was built in 1972.100

The Baha’i Community of Lesotho was founded in 1953 by a couple from the United States. The National Spiritual Assembly in Lesotho was established in 1971, and as of 2003, there were over 26 spiritual assemblies across the country.101

National Religious Umbrella Organizations

Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL)

Founded in 1965, a year before Lesotho gained independence from Britain, CCL is the nation’s premier ecumenical organization. CCL credits the spirit of decolonization in the 1960s for the start of the ecumenical movement in Lesotho; just as Basotho religious leaders called upon the missionary churches to shift the locus of decision-making to local church communities, so too did they seek out new ecumenical partnerships that had previously been discouraged by a climate of competition among European missionaries.

Based in Maseru, the CCL comprises six member churches (LECSA, Roman Catholic, Anglican, AME, MCSA, Assemblies of God), as well as the interdenominational Student Christian Movement. As an independent, non-governmental body whose member churches account for the majority of Basotho Christians, the CCL is regarded as an authority in matters of governance, ecumenism, and social justice. A key focus of the Council is government accountability on matters such as democracy and human rights, as well as political and constitutional literacy among the general population. In addition, the CCL runs programs related to the protection of mineral resources, food security, climate change, gender justice, public health, and ecumenical dialogue.102
CHAPTER 4: FAITH-INSPIRED ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Lesotho’s rich civil society sector features dozens of FIOs engaged in development work at the local, district, and national levels. It is difficult to quantify how many such groups exist, especially at the grassroots level. A significant portion of actively engaged NGOs are religious in nature, and the vast majority of these are Christian. These FIOs vary in their affiliation with institutional religion; while some are closely aligned with a particular church and its leadership structure, others were founded by laypeople and are ecumenical in nature. FIOs also vary in size, ranging from major international NGOs to grassroots organizations started and operated by locals. This chapter showcases prominent FIOs active in Lesotho and provides detail on specific FIO-led initiatives in key areas of development.

FAITH-INSPIRED ORGANIZATIONS: FRAMING THEIR WORK AND ROLES

Religious actors have a long history of engagement with development issues in Lesotho. Their impact is evident in the numerous schools and health centers run by Christian churches across the country. A host of faith-inspired organizations operate programs that touch upon education, health, economic opportunity, environmental justice, gender equality, and civic engagement. These FIOs work with government officials, international organizations, and local community and religious leaders to deliver services to communities and advance the national development agenda.

Lesotho’s religious demography shapes the types of FIOs present there: in an overwhelmingly Christian country, nearly all FIOs draw on Christian ideas and beliefs. While there are numerous ecumenical groups and initiatives in Lesotho, the lack of religious diversity outside of Christianity means that interreligious dialogue is minimal, though not by no means nonexistent.
It is important to note that there is no single universally accepted definition of a faith-inspired organization. The Berkley Center/WFDD uses the term to denote any organization engaged in development work, broadly defined, whose mission and vision are inspired or guided by the teachings of a religious tradition or whose history is deeply rooted in such *traditions*. This definition is intentionally broad so as to include as many relevant organizations as possible that are united by a common religious identity and/or history. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that not all groups included under this definition necessarily self-identify as NGOs and/or FIOs. Finally, the definition does not seek to define the role of religion in the everyday operations of FIOs, as this may vary widely.

Lesotho’s FIOs run the gamut in terms of size and scope. Several large international FIOs—Catholic Relief Services and World Vision Lesotho among them—have country offices in Maseru. Staffed by a mix of both local and expatriate employees, these organizations may partner with secular international institutions such as the World Bank and European Union, as well as work with grassroots organizations and community leaders to implement programming on the local level. The majority of FIOs in Lesotho, however, are local: they were founded by and are primarily staffed by Basotho. It is difficult to quantify the total number of such organizations operating in the country today, just as it would be fruitless to attempt to speak of the wide diversity of FIOs in general terms.

**FAITH-SPECIFIC AND ECUMENICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT SECTOR**

Across Lesotho, religious institutions play a vital role in promoting the welfare of their communities. Eighty percent of Lesotho’s schools and a considerable number of its health facilities are run by Christian churches, reflecting a history of faith-inspired engagement in the education and health care sectors. Numerous local FIOs collaborate with international organizations in designing and implementing development projects. The structure and approach of FIOs in Lesotho vary; while some groups are closely aligned with a particular Christian denomination or ecumenical network, others operate independently of church structures.

The groups highlighted below reflect the diverse sizes and structures of FIOs in Lesotho; however, they are not meant to comprise an exhaustive list of religious actors engaged in development work. (Additional groups are included in the sector profiles later on in this chapter.)

**International FIOs and Networks**

After a near fifteen-year hiatus, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) returned to Lesotho in 2002, establishing an independent Lesotho office in 2005. CRS partners with
government ministries and local NGOs to run programs related to sustainable agriculture, entrepreneurship, orphans and vulnerable children, HIV/AIDS, and numerous other issues. An estimated 300,000 people have benefitted from CRS’s work in Lesotho.\textsuperscript{103}

Since 1987, World Vision Lesotho (WVL) has implemented programs focusing on children and youth in Lesotho. Through its child sponsorship program, World Vision has assisted more than 36,000 children and their families.\textsuperscript{104} WVL initiatives promote child literacy, provide support for HIV-positive youth and OVC, and increase agricultural sustainability, food security, income generation, and gender equality in Lesotho.

**Local and National FIOs and Networks**

Founded in 2005, the Association of Lesotho Theologians (ALET) fosters ecumenical dialogue at the intersection of Christian theology, gender, and health. ALET brings together Christian leaders and community members for focused Bible studies and discussions related to these issues. ALET has also contributed to the wider public discourse through a curriculum on harmful expressions of masculinity.

In addition to serving as the central coordinating body for Lesotho’s churches, the Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL) is active in a variety of development areas, including environmental justice, food security, public health, and gender equality. CCL has spearheaded numerous initiatives around democracy and good governance, including greater government accountability, political literacy, and human rights protections.

Founded in 1974, the Christian Health Association of Lesotho (CHAL) is the country’s largest non-government health care provider. CHAL’s membership is comprised of six Christian denominations: the Anglican Church in Lesotho, Assemblies of God, LECSA, Roman Catholic Church, and Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Southern Africa. Members operate their own health facilities, where they offer everything from primary care to specialty services. In 2006, CHAL members ran over 70 health centers, 8 hospitals, and 4 nursing schools. In addition to its day-to-day operations, CHAL has pioneered HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and research initiatives. The Association works closely with the Ministry of Health, sharing resources and expertise with medical practitioners in government-run facilities. In addition to state funding, CHAL relies on financial support from international NGOs and private donors.

The Transformation Resource Centre (TRC) is Lesotho’s premier FIO focused on good governance, civic engagement, and human rights. Since 1979, TRC has developed and implemented programming designed to raise awareness of political, economic, and social issues and to foster civic engagement, especially among women and youth, in communities across the country. The group disseminates information about recently passed or pending legislation affecting these communities, runs civic education workshops for women and youth, hosts discussions about local and national governance issues, and trains community leaders to lead civic initiatives of their own.\textsuperscript{105}
RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT: SECTOR PROFILES

Faith-linked groups offer invaluable contributions to development work in Lesotho, particularly at the local level. Each of the following sections provides an overview of a priority development issue, highlighting FIOs whose work exemplifies the contrasting and innovative forms of engagement by religious actors. An effort has been made to include a variety of organizations operating at the international, national, and local levels. The groups featured in each subsection should not be taken as a representative sample, however, as many faith-inspired initiatives are difficult to document, especially on the grassroots level.

Education

Lesotho Vision 2020 describes “universal, free and compulsory” education as the “joint responsibility” of government institutions, civil society groups, and churches. Lesotho’s schools face significant challenges today; chief among these are the accessibility, quality, and financing of education, particularly at the pre-primary and secondary levels. Although enrollment at all levels has increased in the last 15 years, only 27 percent of children ages 3 to 5 attend pre-primary schools, and only 34 percent ages 13–17 attend secondary school. Costly school fees and long distances between homes and schools, particularly in rural areas, contribute to low enrollment rates. The abolition of primary school fees in 2000 helped boost enrollment among children ages 6 to 12, but 20 percent of primary-age children still do not attend school, and only 56 percent of those who start primary school complete the full six years.

![Figure 4.1: Net Enrollment Rates at Pre-Primary, Primary, and Secondary Levels, 2000–2015](source: “Lesotho Education Budget Brief: Fiscal Year 2018/19.” UNICEF, 2018.)
Low performance in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) poses another problem. Poor results undermine the future employment prospects of young Basotho and the competitiveness of the national economy in a technologically evolving global marketplace.

Financing is a third key issue facing the education sector. While the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) receives the largest portion of the government’s 2018/19 budget (13.5 percent), this still falls below international standards. Moreover, 92 percent of the allocated education budget covered recurring expenses, including salaries, teaching supplies, and building maintenance; this left little funding for longer-term development projects, such as the construction of much-needed schools in remote areas. International partners provide additional funding for the MoET’s developmental budget, but their contributions have declined due to political instability, increased fiduciary risk, and low budget credibility.108

The Ministry of Education’s Education Sector Plan for 2016–2026 establishes guidelines for addressing these and other concerns; chief among its recommendations is an increase to the education budget, a call echoed by international bodies such as UNICEF. The plan highlights a greater focus on STEM subjects, vocational and technical skills training, and entrepreneurial education; it outlines steps for the construction of science laboratories in public schools, and allocates more funds for materials and equipment to teach STEM subjects.109
Today, around 80 percent of primary and secondary schools are run by churches (with financial support from the MoET). The remaining schools are run by the government or private, secular organizations. Strong religious involvement in education puts faith leaders in a strategic position to collaborate with policymakers in implementing the Education Sector Plan. In addition, several international FIOs with faith links are active in Lesotho’s education sector.

**Catholic Relief Services (CRS)**

CRS’s education work focuses primarily on the challenges facing pre-primary education. Through its “Whose Child is This?” program, CRS has trained close to 500 educators to improve the quality of early childhood education for children ages 3 to 5. Teacher training materials, which include information on early childhood development, classroom management, and play-based curricula, have been implemented in 48 pre-primary schools, reaching over 5,000 children in the country’s most remote areas. In addition, CRS piloted Lesotho Literacy for Young Visually Impaired Persons from 2015 to 2017, a program to improve the reading skills of 30 visually impaired students at two schools. By introducing two new types of braille technology into the classroom and training teachers in their use, the project helped to increase early grade reading skills among participants.

**World Vision Lesotho (WVL)**

World Vision partners with the MoET to address various education-related issues in Lesotho. Through its “Literacy Boost” initiative, WVL has trained over 800 teachers and provided reading materials to improve literacy rates among primary school children. World Vision programs have also engaged with families and communities to highlight the importance of literacy and education for their children’s future. In recent years, WVL has focused on adolescent girls’ education by implementing programs that ensure girls’ access to sanitary hygiene products and gender-separate bathrooms at schools. Overall, more than 55,000 children have benefited from World Vision’s programing, and there has been a marked increase in parent involvement in supporting education.

**Agriculture, Food Security & Climate Change**

Lesotho’s agriculture sector faces a range of interconnected challenges. While agriculture accounts for only 7 percent of the country’s GDP, it is a major source of income for 80 percent of Basotho living in rural areas. Only 13 percent of Lesotho’s land is arable, and what little land is available to farmers has been impacted by high-impact agricultural methods, top soil erosion, recurrent drought, water scarcity, early frost, and other weather fluctuations, the effects of which have been exacerbated by climate change. Long-term economic dependence on agriculture poses a risk for the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of Basotho, who harvest maize, sorghum, and wheat and rear cattle, sheep, and goats for a living.
Low agricultural productivity has been a recurrent cause of food insecurity and malnutrition; between 30 and 50 percent of the population is vulnerable to seasonal food insecurity and 33 percent of children under 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition. In January 2019, the World Food Programme estimated that 20 percent of the population would require “lifesaving humanitarian assistance” in the form of food and cash aid in order to survive through the lean season, estimated to last until June 2019. Food shortages, as well as the crippling impact of HIV/AIDS in rural Lesotho, has further impeded agricultural productivity by reducing the number of able-bodied farmers and slowing down their harvesting rates.115

FIO engagement has focused primarily on improving nutrition, raising smallholder productivity, and training farmers in sustainable agricultural practices. Some organizations have also piloted programs to reverse the harmful impact of farming techniques on the environment.

_Catholic Relief Services (CRS)_

CRS partners with the government of Lesotho and other NGOs to run programs in three of the country’s four Catholic dioceses.116 Together with World Vision and Care International, CRS implemented the Consortium for Southern Africa Food Security...
Emergency (C-SAFE) in Lesotho in 2006; the project aims to build the long-term resilience of food insecure communities while also meeting their immediate needs. C-SAFE provides seeds, tools, and training for farmers to grow nutrient-rich plants in keyhole gardens.\textsuperscript{117} CRS also offers cooking and nutrition classes and helps establish Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) to enable farmers to pool their savings and take out loans.\textsuperscript{118} In addition to its work on food insecurity, CRS improves agricultural sustainability through Restoring Ecosystems and Livelihoods (REAL), a project designed to reduce overgrazing, soil erosion, and water scarcity in mountainous areas. With the support of the Ministry of Forestry and Land Reclamation, REAL trains villagers to plant grasses that prevent soil erosion and promote sustainable grazing and water retention.\textsuperscript{119}

**Growing Nations**
Based in Maputseng, in southeastern Lesotho, Growing Nations trains farmers, religious leaders, and youth in an agricultural method known as Farming God’s Way. First introduced in Zimbabwe in 1984, Farming God’s Way employs three principles of conservation agriculture: minimal soil disturbance, soil cover with organic materials or cover crops, and crop rotation. This method preserves organic materials in the soil, improving its quality and fertility. Growing Nations partners with religious bodies, NGOs, and academic institutions, both local and international, including the Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa, the National University of Lesotho, and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization. Its team currently works in 37 communities throughout Lesotho and provides support to dozens of individual farmers.\textsuperscript{120}

**World Vision Lesotho (WVL)**
Since the 1980s, WVL has partnered with the government of Lesotho and other NGOs to address immediate and long-term issues around agriculture and food security. WVL partnered with CRS and other NGOs to implement C-SAFE in Lesotho. In August 2012, WVL and the World Food Programme (WFP) launched an Emergency Operation Program (EMOP) in response to a government-declared food emergency. EMOP provided food assistance to affected communities, planted trees, trained Basotho to build keyhole gardens and gravity irrigation systems, and rehabilitated *dongas*, deep gullies that had formed due to heavy soil erosion.\textsuperscript{121} WVL initiatives have also provided farmers with seeds, tanks for harvesting rainwater, and greenhouses.\textsuperscript{122}

**Local Churches and FIO Networks**
Food security and climate change are top priorities of CCL’s ecumenical programming, although there is limited information about how the Council translates this commitment into specific initiatives.\textsuperscript{123} Some denominations run their own agricultural training programs: the Lesotho Evangelical Church in Southern Africa (LECSA), for example, operates a technical school for trade and agriculture. Caritas Lesotho, established in 1970 by the Lesotho Catholic Bishops’ Conference, has led efforts to build keyhole gardens and offer cooking and nutrition classes.\textsuperscript{124}
Unemployment and Migrant Labor

Unemployment in Lesotho has decreased since the 1990s, but the current rate remains between 24 and 28 percent. Job opportunities are limited in the undiversified domestic market, and economic growth was a mere 1.3 percent between 2015 and 2018. The garment industry has been the main driver of economic growth in Lesotho since the 1990s, employing over 50,000 Basotho at its peak in 2004. Market shifts and the global financial crisis of 2008 slowed the industry’s growth, however, raising concerns about its long-term sustainability. With 46,500 employees in 2017, the garment industry remains the largest private employer in the country.

A lack of practical skills training in public schools disadvantages many Basotho looking for work, while limited financial resources and training create obstacles for entrepreneurs. Poverty levels remain high: in 2017, close to half of the population was living under the poverty line of US$1.90.

In some instances, job opportunities are not made available to the local population. Phase one of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP), one of country’s largest public works projects, brought in numerous international contractors, but hired few locals. Although the second phase of the LHWP, set to commence in 2019, promises to offer a modest boost to Lesotho’s economic growth, there is no guarantee that it will rely on local labor.
The government has focused on skills training and support for small businesses in its response to these issues. The Ministries of Labor and Trade, among others, have piloted programs to train youth in entrepreneurial, agricultural, and agro-forestry skills, and have offered start-up capital for small businesses. The Ministry of Small Business, Cooperatives and Marketing, established in 2015, oversees and facilitates the growth of small businesses. However, the impact of these efforts has been limited thus far, especially among youth, who are often not aware of government programs.131

Lesotho's close economic ties to South Africa makes it especially vulnerable to economic and political shifts in the neighboring country. With the second-largest economy on the continent, South Africa is Lesotho's primary trading partner, and their economies have been historically linked through the mining industry: since the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of Basotho men have crossed the border for temporary work in the mines. Young Basotho women have also sought work as domestic workers in South Africa, where they face exploitation and poor working conditions. Lesotho's economy relies heavily on remittances from these workers. With recent economic stagnation, however, South Africa's government has adjusted labor regulations to prioritize local labor, cutting out opportunities for migrant workers and reducing the flow of money into Lesotho. While the demand for unskilled migrant labor has dropped, South Africa remains a preferred career destination for university-educated Basotho, around half of whom leave Lesotho to seek work abroad.a

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Many FIOs approach issues around unemployment with entrepreneurial training and micro-financing programs. Some initiatives focused primarily on other issues, such as food security, also promote income generating-activities. One example is keyhole gardening, an agricultural method designed to promote nutrition and reduce food insecurity, which can also provide supplementary income for farmers.

While migration and migrant labor have been long-standing issues in Lesotho, there is limited information about the role of FIOs in addressing the needs of migrants, although some religious leaders have acknowledged the need for religious organizations to do more to assist migrants through pastoral care and support programs.\textsuperscript{132}

**Caritas Lesotho**
Since 2009, Caritas has collaborated with Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to coordinate Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) in villages across Lesotho. SILC members pool their savings and take out loans to start or expand small businesses. In fiscal year 2014/15, close to 400 such groups were formed with close to 7,000 active members. Caritas has also hosted training programs on business management and entrepreneurship and connected Basotho with formal financial institutions.\textsuperscript{133}

**Catholic Relief Services (CRS)**
In addition to its work on SILC, CRS has partnered with the Better Way Foundation in the “Whose Child is This?” project, which provides childcare services to children whose parents are absent due to work. The program has been particularly beneficial to Basotho who commute long distances for work.\textsuperscript{134}

**World Vision Lesotho (WVL)**
WVL’s Rapid Appraisal of Income Generating Opportunities (RAIGO) trains Basotho to establish and run savings groups that provide micro-loans for members to start their own businesses. In 2014, 131 such savings groups existed, with over 1,700 members.\textsuperscript{135}

**HIV/AIDS and TB**

**Overview**
HIV/AIDS is Lesotho’s greatest current development challenge. One in 4 Basotho is living with HIV/AIDS today, a prevalence rate that has remained relatively stable since 2010. Life expectancy dropped by nearly twenty years at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, going from 60 years in 1989 to 42.6 in 2006. Though it has risen since then, life expectancy remains low (53 years in 2017), and 40 percent of deaths in Lesotho are still attributable to HIV/AIDS. Mother-to-child transmission is at 11 percent, higher than in any other lower-middle income country in the region.\textsuperscript{136} Although HIV tests are widely available, fifteen percent of women and 35 percent of men have never been tested.\textsuperscript{137}

Women of all ages are at greater risk of contracting HIV/AIDS than men. Hegemonic notions of masculinity contribute to high rates of gender-based violence and
Misconceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission are pervasive and have contributed to the rampant spread of the virus in Lesotho. For example, half of respondents in a 2014 survey believed that HIV/AIDS could be transmitted by mosquitoes.\textsuperscript{a} Certain beliefs promote stigma around HIV/AIDS, such as the idea that infection is a form of divine punishment. Leadership in government, civil society, and religious institutions has been slow to address these misconceptions, in part due to cultural taboos around sex.\textsuperscript{b}

\textbf{BOX 4.2: MISCONCEPTIONS AND STIGMA AROUND HIV/AIDS}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{prevalence_hiv.png}
\caption{Prevalence of HIV, 1990–2017 (% of population aged 15–49)}
\end{figure}


Intergenerational sex, while poverty, unemployment, and food insecurity force many women into transactional sex; these factors increase a woman's likelihood to exposure. Prevalence rates are also disproportionately high among migrants, residents of urban areas, and people who have had multiple sex partners.

The pervasiveness of HIV/AIDS has contributed to Lesotho's high rate of tuberculosis. In 2016, Lesotho had the second highest TB incidence in the world, with 724 cases per 100,000 people. Seventy-three percent of TB patients also had HIV/AIDS. Since 2007, the MoHSW has offered free TB diagnosis and treatment for multi-drug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) through the National Tuberculosis Programme.\textsuperscript{138} Despite this, the treatment success rate was 74 percent in 2005, which fell short of the WHO target of 85 percent.\textsuperscript{139}
Figure 4.5: Incidence of HIV/AIDS, 2000–2018 (per 1,000 people)
Source: https://data.worldbank.org

Figure 4.6: HIV Prevalence by Sex, Residence, and Age (2014)
Figure 4.7: HIV Prevalence by Sex and Age (2014)

Figure 4.8: HIV Prevalence by District (2014)
Basotho seeking medical care face a variety of obstacles related to their geographical location and living situation. Health services are more difficult to access in rural and mountainous areas, where facilities often have lower supply stores, fewer nursing staff, and less access to electronic health communications from the government and health care providers. The cost of health services can be an additional barrier to effective and holistic HIV/AIDS treatment.¹ (For more information on the health care system, see Box 4.5: Universal Health Coverage in Lesotho.)

Due to their itinerant lifestyle, migrants face particular challenges in accessing consistent HIV/AIDS treatment; they are more likely to default on Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) than non-migrants, and they face the additional challenge of timing their travel in order to collect drugs from their medical provider.²

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**Figure 4.9: Incidence of Tuberculosis, 2000–2017 (per 100,000 people)**
Source: https://data.worldbank.org

**Government Response**
Lesotho Vision 2020 describes HIV/AIDS as “multi-sectoral development issue” with “social, economic and cultural implications.”¹⁴⁰ The government’s HIV Prevention Roadmap 2020 calls for a 75 percent reduction in new HIV/AIDS infections, particularly among young women and girls, by 2020.¹⁴¹ To work toward this goal, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) has focused on both HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. Since 2004, HIV/AIDS tests have been universally available. The MoHSW has also expanded access to ART in rural areas.¹⁴²
The state response to HIV/AIDS and TB has revealed serious weaknesses in the health care system that threaten the long-term efficiency and sustainability of prevention and treatment initiatives. The existing health infrastructure lacks accessible and properly equipped clinics, adequate mechanisms for the monitoring and storage of pharmaceutical drugs, medical training centers, and trained doctors, nurses, and lab technicians. Medical professionals are unevenly distributed across the country, with more in the central region than in the north and south. This leaves the bulk of work in many areas to community health workers (CHWs), who accounted for 56 percent of personnel in the health sector in 2004. Despite their central role, CHWs have been excluded from policymaking in the past, and CHW recruitment and replacement remains a low government priority. Government-sponsored treatment programs have also left out traditional healers, whose knowledge of the particular communities is useful to building trust among health care professionals and their patients.

Funding poses another challenge to effective HIV/AIDS care. The MoHSW budget for fiscal year 2018/19 represented 12.7 percent of government expenditures, which falls below the 15 percent benchmark set by the Abuja Declaration in 2001. Because the national budget is drawn from tax revenues, funding of the health sector is prone to market volatility. Moreover, funding for HIV/AIDS programs by both the government and NGOs is dependent on donor support, rendering these programs vulnerable to fluctuations in donor priorities.

**FIO Responses**

Since 2000, religious actors have grown increasingly vocal in combatting HIV/AIDS. Today, FIOs spearhead numerous initiatives to address HIV/AIDS at the local, district, and national levels. Trust and support from community members puts religious leaders in a strategic position to shape beliefs and behaviors to encourage prevention and reduce stigma around HIV/AIDS. In addition to projects run by international FIOs and local ecumenical partnerships, most Christian denominations in the country offer HIV/AIDS treatment services, disseminate information, host trainings in prevention methods, and provide pastoral care to individuals and families impacted by HIV/AIDS. Smaller denominations and individual churches, however, frequently lack the resources to run their own HIV/AIDS programming; those in rural areas are often far from the nearest medical facility, making it difficult to forge sustainable partnerships with health care providers. Furthermore, there has still been little assessment of the impact of FIO-led initiatives. The groups and initiatives highlighted below provide a snapshot of faith-inspired work on this multifaceted issue.

**Christian Health Association of Lesotho (CHAL)**

Since the 1980s, CHAL has been at the front lines of the HIV/AIDS response, dispensing drugs, building and maintaining rural clinics and laboratories, training CHWs, and coordinating nationwide HIV/AIDS prevention efforts. CHAL partners
with the MoHSW to maintain infrastructure and provide much-needed equipment to government-run facilities.150

**Choose to Care**
From 2000 to 2005, the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC) partnered with the Catholic Medical Mission Board (CMMB) to implement Choose to Care. The initiative aimed to strengthen the long-term sustainability of over 140 community-based HIV/AIDS organizations focused on HIV/AIDS prevention, education, and treatment in Southern Africa. Choose to Care helped these organizations raise funds, strengthen practical skills, and share resources with one another. Although the project concluded in 2005, the SACBC has maintained and expanded its programming through the help of alternative funders.151

**Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAILA)**
Launched in 2002 by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), EHAILA conducts trainings and workshops with local religious leaders across Africa to strengthen the local HIV/AIDS response. EHAILA workshops train participants in HIV/AIDS prevention, advise churches on effective resource mobilization, and offer culturally sensitive guidance on addressing stigma. In Lesotho, these workshops led to the creation of the Association of Lesotho Theologians (ALET), an ecumenical group dedicated to integrating HIV/AIDS and Christian theology. EHAILA’s and ALET’s work has empowered religious actors to mobilize against HIV/AIDS, collaborate with one another and with the government, and shape cultural norms towards greater compassion for those impacted by the virus.152

**Lesotho Inter-Religious AIDS Consortium (LIRAC)**
Formed in 2006, LIRAC brings together religious leaders from across Lesotho to “encourage, initiate, and support collaborative action” in the faith-inspired HIV/AIDS response. LIRAC members, which include over 26 Christian denominations and the Lesotho Baha’i community, have held forums for over 5,000 church leaders across Lesotho’s 10 districts; forum participants shared experiences, challenges, and best practices in addressing HIV/AIDS in their communities. With the support of CRS, WVL, and the National AIDS Commission, LIRAC developed a manual to help religious leaders approach HIV/AIDS from a faith perspective. LIRAC has also worked with UNAIDS, USAID, ActionAid UK, CCL, and community councils to implement programs initiatives on prevention, testing, healthy relationships, and OVC support. To date, LIRAC programs have reached over 170 communities and provided HIV/AIDS testing and counseling services to nearly 14,000 people.153

**Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC)**
The HIV/AIDS epidemic has left hundreds of thousands of OVC in its wake. In 2012, UNICEF estimated that there were 220,000 orphans ages 0–14 in Lesotho, at least 150,000 of whom had lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS.154 OVC face a range of
Health coverage in Lesotho is far from universal. Advances made by state-sponsored initiatives on immunization, nutrition, and childhood survival were largely rolled back by the HIV/AIDS epidemic starting in the early 1990s. Today, child malnutrition remain high: ten percent of children under age 5 are underweight, and 33 percent of children in the same age group experience stunted growth. Primary health care (PHC) receives a mere 7 percent of the health sector’s budget. Moreover, the health sector received only 12.7 percent of the government’s total expenditures in 2018/19, which falls below the 15 percent benchmark set by the Abuja Declaration.

One of the largest obstacles to UHC is the availability of quality health services. Facilities are unevenly distributed across Lesotho: there are far fewer clinics and hospitals in rural areas than in cities, and these are often difficult to access. A shortage of qualified health professionals is another persistent problem. The absence of doctors and nurses puts inordinate pressure on community health workers (CHWs) to provide primary health care services. Furthermore, CHWs frequently lack sufficient training for the tasks they are asked to perform.

The increasingly serious threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) reflects the inadequacies of Lesotho’s health infrastructure. A WHO review of International Health Regulations in Lesotho found serious shortcomings in health facilities’ capacity to detect AMR, monitor infections caused by AMR pathogens, and regulate the prescription of antimicrobial drugs. The WHO report recommended that the government expand health infrastructure, including laboratories and isolation blocks, and provide additional skills training for hospital personnel.

The implementation of health sector reforms is often slow and inadequate. A Public Health Bill drafted in 2013 outlines a plan for achieving UHC; however, the bill has stalled in parliament since then. The National Health Strategic Plan for 2017–2022 (NHSP) renewed the call for UHC, but did not specify a timeframe. The NHSP includes provisions to construct health posts in rural areas, expand community outreach, and bolster support for CHWs. The MoHSW has also launched

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**Figure 4.10: Neonatal, Infant, and Under-5 Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births), 1960–2018**

Source: https://data.worldbank.org

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challenges, including emotional trauma, food insecurity, and difficulty accessing health care and psychosocial support.

Government support for OVC includes a state-sponsored bursary program, which covers OVC’s secondary school fees. The program also sponsors children with sick, disabled, or incarcerated parents. As of 2018, it has sponsored over 23,000 children; however, chronic underfunding remains a major obstacle to expanding the reach of the program.\(^{155}\)

Numerous NGOs are engaged in OVC-related work, including Habitat for Humanity, SOS Children’s Villages International, the Lesotho Red Cross Society, and Sentebale, an organization co-founded by Prince Seeiso of Lesotho and Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex. These groups are joined by a crowded field of local and international FIOs whose work on issues such as health, education, food security, and income generation benefit OVC.\(^{156}\)

Several Christian denominations, among them the Anglican Church and MCSA, run OVC-specific programs.\(^{157}\) While some local FIOs operate orphanages, international organizations are primarily focused on supporting individual households with OVC.

**Beautiful Gate Lesotho**

Founded in 2001, Beautiful Gate Lesotho is an interdenominational Christian organization that provides temporary residence to orphaned, abandoned, and neglected children ages 0 to 5. Beautiful Gate’s care center in Maseru provides medical and psychosocial care to over 500 OVC residents. The organization has helped some 350 children return to their biological family or find an adoptive family. In addition,
Beautiful Gate has worked with government agencies to create a centralized adoption and foster care program.\(^{158}\)

**Caritas Lesotho**

Caritas’s Orphans and Vulnerable Children and Caregivers Empowerment Project (OCEP) focuses on strengthening OVC and caregiver resilience and improving community support structures. In addition to providing psychosocial support, OCEP also promotes financial and food security through nutrition and cooking classes, SILC, skills training sessions, and keyhole gardening initiatives. To date, the project has reached over 5,000 OVC and 1,000 caregivers.\(^{159}\)

**Catholic Relief Services (CRS)**

CRS’s multifaceted approach to OVC issues addresses education, health, nutrition, psychosocial care, and legal protection, as well as the economic empowerment of caretakers. On quarterly “Station Days,” CRS personnel and social workers collect data on OVC’s physical and psychological health, which they use, together with regular home visits, to monitor their wellbeing over time. CRS also offers mentorship, vocational training, and peer support groups for orphaned and vulnerable youth and their caregivers.\(^{160}\)

**Lesotho Inter-Religious AIDS Consortium (LIRAC)**

Since 2010, LIRAC has implemented OVC projects in six districts, reaching tens of thousands of OVC and caretakers. Working closely with community councils and case management workers, LIRAC affiliates support the nutritional, educational, economic, legal, health and psychosocial needs of OVC and their families.\(^{161}\)

**World Vision Lesotho (WVL)**

WVL implements World Vision’s global model for OVC-related work, known as Community Care Coalitions (CCC). These coalitions, whose members include local stakeholders, establish community guidelines to address urgent issues facing OVC and their caretakers. CCCs support community health workers who make home visits to OVC, provide counseling and psychosocial care, and monitor children’s health, nutrition, and education. CCCs also work to ensure OVC are legally registered with the government and can exercise their inheritance rights.\(^{162}\)

**Maternal Health and Family Planning**

Lesotho has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. Different sources place the rate between 427 and 1,024 deaths per 100,000 live births. (The former figure is a World Bank estimate from 2015, while the latter comes from a 2014 survey conducted by the MoHSW. Discrepancies in the data suggest a serious need for further research to assess the gravity of the situation and the impact of health interventions.)

Access to quality medical care is a major concern, especially for poor and rural women. In 2015, one in every four births took place without the assistance of a skilled attendant. (The problem is even more severe among rural and poor women: only 73 percent of
births in rural areas were overseen by a skilled attendant, compared to 90 percent in urban areas; 60 percent of births among the poorest women had an attendant present, compared to 94 percent among the wealthiest.\(^{163}\) A lack of adequate medical equipment is an additional risk factor for complications during and after childbirth.

High fertility likewise increases the risk of complications. In 2014, Lesotho’s national fertility rate was 3.3 children per woman, and one in seven women had given birth by age 18. Poorer and less educated women tend to have more children: those in the lowest wealth quintile have an average of 5 children, compared to 2.1 in the highest quintile. Fertility rates also vary by region; they are highest in Thaba-Tseka and Mokhotlong.\(^{164}\)

Low contraceptive use accompanies high fertility rates. Slightly less than half of women of reproductive age (WRA, ages 15 to 49) use modern contraceptive methods (MCM, such as male condoms, contraceptive pills, and injections). Many women who wish to use MCM lack access: thirteen percent of WRA (and 19 percent of married WRA) report an unmet need for MCM.\(^{165}\) While the National Health Policy mandates access to family planning, a 2017 survey found that one out of three health facilities do not offer MCM, and many frequently run out of stock.\(^{166}\)

The government, civil society organizations, and FIOs face serious challenges in improving maternal health. While the MoHSW has named it a priority issue in recent health sector reforms, its interventions have been insufficient in mitigating the challenges faced by pregnant women.\(^{167}\) The MoHSW fell far short of reducing the maternal mortality rate to 300 per 100,000 live births by 2015 (a target set by the Millennium Development Goal 5).\(^{168}\)

Faith-inspired work on maternal health and family planning takes on several forms. In their capacity as health providers, many FIOs focus on meeting the needs of poor and rural women in particular. Church-run health facilities (with the exception of Roman Catholic clinics) also dispense MCM and promote family planning, particularly as a method of HIV/AIDS prevention.

Christian Health Association of Lesotho (CHAL)

As the country’s second largest health care provider, CHAL delivers thousands of children every year at its hospitals and health centers throughout the country. CHAL has built waiting lodges at some of their facilities so that women traveling from afar have comfortable accommodations in the days leading up to delivery.\(^{169}\) Through its four Nurses’ Training Institutions, CHAL also trains health professionals in safe delivery procedures.

World Vision Lesotho (WVL)

As part of its Channels of Hope initiative, World Vision Lesotho runs community-based trainings on maternal, newborn, and child health. These trainings bring together religious leaders and community members to identify challenges facing local women and to design sustainable, community-based interventions. The project has raised awareness
Figure 4.11: Institutional Deliveries by District (2009–2014)

Figure 4.12: Fertility Rate by District (2011–2014)
of maternal health issues and led to the establishment of local initiatives on prenatal and postnatal care.\textsuperscript{170}

**Gender Equality and Gender-based Violence**

Discrimination and violence against women remain pressing issues in Lesotho today. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a widespread problem: 86 percent of women have experienced GBV and 40 percent of men have perpetrated GBV at least once in their lifetime. Whether the abuse is physical, sexual, psychological, or economic in nature, women most frequently experience GBV at the hands of an intimate partner; a 2014 study found that close to two thirds of women have experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime, and 28 percent in the past year alone. Sexual harassment is likewise rife: 63 percent of women have experienced some form of sexual harassment in the workplace, and 58 percent of women have experienced it in schools.\textsuperscript{171} Child marriage is another issue, with 17 percent of women ages 20 to 24 married before the age of 18. In addition, there have been incidents of forced elopement, when a man rapes a woman or girl in order to coerce her into marrying him.\textsuperscript{172}
One obstacle to effective and decisive government action on gender inequality is the split between civil and customary law in Lesotho. Although the Constitution guarantees women equal rights to men, civil law defers to customary law on matters such as inheritance. In effect, traditional leaders often wield authority over women’s and girls’ rights to inherit property. The contrast between civil and customary law is also evident in legal standards regarding child marriage; civil laws permit marriage at age 16, while customary law generally does not acknowledge a minimum age for marriage.a

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reinforce the idea that GBV, especially among intimate partners, is a private matter, which in turn discourages women from seeking the help they need; only 4 percent of women who have experienced IPV seek medical assistance and only 6 percent report their experiences to the police.\textsuperscript{173} Those who speak out are often met with skepticism and delayed legal proceedings.

The government has passed noteworthy legislation regarding GBV, including the criminalization of spousal rape in the 2003 Sexual Offences Act (2003) and a 2011 constitutional amendment that lays out greater protection for victims.\textsuperscript{174} The Ministry of Gender and Youth drew up a National Action Plan on gender-based violence in 2008 to support programming around GBV awareness and prevention.\textsuperscript{175} A domestic violence bill has been in front of parliament for several years but has not yet been passed; the bill would criminalize GBV, provide protections for survivors, and bolster prevention programs.\textsuperscript{176} Despite these steps, the government’s response is widely perceived to be inadequate given the scope of these issues.

FIOs are working to shift the paradigm surrounding gender issues in communities across Lesotho. They do so by addressing gender inequality and GBV on numerous fronts, including prevention, awareness, and psychosocial support for survivors. In addition, some faith-inspired efforts have focused on shaping cultural norms around gender-related issues.
Association of Lesotho Theologians (ALET)
Through its “Transformative Masculinities” initiative, ALET has made significant contributions to the public discourse around gender roles and GBV. The initiative designed a workshop curriculum to foster dialogue among men about how cultural understandings of masculinity have normalized GBV and exacerbated the spread of HIV/AIDS. By raising awareness of harmful actions connected to hegemonic masculinity, such as nonconsensual, unprotected, or intergenerational sex, ALET’s workshops encourage alternative, positive forms of masculinity. After the success of the first round of workshops, ALET adapted its curriculum for theology courses at the National University of Lesotho, as well as for radio and television programming and workshops for state correctional facilities, the armed services, and the National AIDS Commission.

Christian Health Association of Lesotho (CHAL)
CHAL plays a significant role in shaping the health sector’s approach to GBV. CHAL includes “gender sensitivity” on its list of core values, training personnel at its over 80 health facilities in clinical approaches to managing GBV. In addition, CHAL programming raises awareness of GBV issues, advocates for prevention, and highlights connections between GBV and HIV/AIDS prevalence.

World Vision Lesotho (WVL)
World Vision’s work addresses gender-based inequality and violence on several fronts. Through its Channels of Hope program, WVL convenes discussions with religious leaders and community members on the role of religious institutions in addressing the norms and values around gender in Basotho society. The program equips religious leaders with the tools to meaningfully address unhealthy gender norms and GBV in their communities. WVL has also brought greater public attention to the problem of child marriage, partnering with Queen Masenate Mohato Seeiso to call upon national and local leaders to bring an end to the practice.

Democracy, Governance, and Corruption
Democracy in Lesotho has deteriorated since the mid-2010s. Petty corruption is rife in numerous government industries, while lack of civic education fuels low voter turnout and political apathy. For a fuller accounting of issues related to governance, democracy, and corruption, see the “Politics and Governance” section in chapter 2.

With some exceptions, there have been few documented efforts by civil society organizations to address issues of governance and corruption. From 2012 to 2015, the Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (LCN) ran a capacity building initiative for grassroots CSOs designed to help the latter shape local development policy. In 2019, LCN met with 76 community councils, sector stakeholders, and groups of Basotho living in South Africa to document concerns and suggestions about the ongoing constitutional reform process. These were summarized in a press statement released in July 2019.
Christian Council of Lesotho (CCL)

Good governance is a central focus of CCL programming. Drawing upon the authority of its member churches, the Council sponsors community gatherings, radio broadcasts, and television programs to educate citizens about their political rights and civic responsibilities. Since 2016, CCL has conducted awareness campaigns about the ongoing constitutional reforms.186

Transformation Resource Centre (TRC)

TRC was founded in 1979 by a group of Christians inspired by the ideas of philosopher Paulo Freire. Today, it is Lesotho’s most established FIO engaging with issues of democratic governance, civic engagement, and human rights.187 The Centre runs numerous projects that raise awareness of political issues and encourage civic engagement, especially among traditionally underrepresented groups such as women and youth. TRC publicizes its work through a print newspaper and journal, research papers, a weekly radio broadcast, and regular meetings and press conferences.188

TRC’s Parliamentary Affairs and Public Participation Programme promotes civic engagement by convening quarterly “constituency clinics” where citizens can share their concerns with elected officials. TRC is currently lobbying the government to systemize feedback mechanisms such as these across all levels of government. The Programme also works with political parties and parliamentary committees to strengthen good governance practices and feedback mechanisms.189

In addition, TRC’s work focuses on socioeconomic rights, especially in communities affected by water and mining projects. TRC officials train locals CSOs to represent the interests of community members in negotiations with project leadership, with a focus on ensuring company accountability for projects’ environmental impact. One such effort is TRC’s Polihali Liaison Community Participation initiative (PCLP), which focuses on communities affected by LHWP dam construction. PCLP brings together citizens and LHWP officials to discuss fair compensation and resettlement policies. TRC has also called for an updated national compensation policy for communities affected by capital projects nationwide.190
Lesotho's religious institutions are engaged at the front lines of almost every development issue facing the country. In a society in which Christianity is ubiquitous, churches and FIOs play a significant role in providing education and health services, as well as in advocating for job creation, environmental sustainability, and good governance. This is especially true given that the civil society sector, while on the rise, is limited in resources and personnel, especially outside of the capital. In addition to providing much-needed services, FIOs are well positioned to shape cultural attitudes on sensitive issues, including HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence, in ways that promote healthy behavior. For these and other reasons, FIOs’ presence in the development sector merits more explicit attention.

The goal of this report is to provide an overview of faith-inspired development work within Lesotho's broader political, religious, and development contexts. Primary and secondary research, including a literature review, written communication, and conversations, sought to highlight Lesotho’s rich religious landscape alongside its numerous local, national, international development actors, including government agencies, secular NGOs, and FIOs. By providing up-to-date information on government development strategies and FIO-led initiatives, the report aims to encourage ongoing interaction and collaboration among these groups, as well as with organizations looking to start development projects. It is important to note, however, that this report can only offer a partial view of the religious and development landscapes of Lesotho, as these are continually changing. Those wishing to know more about a specific development field would benefit from additional research and communication with local practitioners.

Several research limitations should be noted. Firstly, the grassroots nature of faith-inspired development work in many communities often means that these efforts are left undocumented. As a result, local initiatives are often absent from scholarly literature and media coverage related to development in Lesotho. While an effort has been made to
feature both small and large-scale development projects, this report was able to go into greater depth on well-documented projects, which were typically associated with larger, more established FIOs.

Secondly, up-to-date information from government ministries and local NGOs was often difficult to find online, and media reports on national policies were likewise scant. As a result, the themes discussed in this report present a view that may differ from that of government insiders and NGO leaders on the ground in Lesotho. Nevertheless, an attempt has been made to provide the most current information on government policy and development work.

Finally, it is worth noting how little information was available on transnational development projects between Lesotho and South Africa. The absence of information may be due to an actual lack of such initiatives, but it may also be because of the structure of international FIOs. Many organizations, such as CRS and World Vision, have separate offices in each country where they work; as a result, similar or identical initiatives in Lesotho and South Africa may be framed as national, rather than regional and/or transnational projects.

The following sections distill this report’s key findings about the religious and development landscapes in Lesotho, as well as highlight potential subject matter for further research. Rather than offer any definitive conclusions about these topics, it aims to invite discussion on existing research and encourage new lines of inquiry.

**KEY OBSERVATIONS**

**Christianity is the predominant religion in Lesotho, reflected in the Christian identity of nearly all local FIOs.** The missionary history of Lesotho is evident in its religious demographics, with the Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant Churches having the largest share of followers. In addition to these large denominations, there is a growing number of Pentecostal churches, as well as independent churches founded by local people. In general, when FIOs are invoked in the Lesotho context, “faith” implies “Christianity.” As a result, many Basotho do not have a strongly defined conception of other religions, and interreligious dialogue efforts are minimal.

**FIOs exercise significant influence in the education and health sectors, often providing key services in place of the government.** Christian churches run the vast majority of public schools with the financial backing of the Ministry of Education. The Christian Health Association of Lesotho provides a substantial chunk of the country’s health services, sharing many of its resources with government-run facilities. This symbiotic relationship between government and religious institutions has not always been without strain, however, as the Ministry of Health has recently scaled back financial support and increased oversight of CHAL-affiliated facilities.
Religious leaders are highly respected and trusted in their communities, which puts them in a strong position to shape cultural attitudes around taboo issues. Groups like the Association of Lesotho Theologians have started meaningful discussions around HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, and related issues. Their work demonstrates the potential of religious authorities to shape cultural attitudes that lead in turn to more beneficial lifestyles. However, many religious leaders choose not to address taboo topics in their social outreach, and their silence can sometimes serve as an obstacle to breaking through stigma around these topics.

A lack of financial resources and trained personnel jeopardizes the long-term sustainability of development work. Government ministries and NGOs alike face budget constraints. The percentage of the national budget allocated to education, health, and social assistance falls below international benchmarks; personnel shortages are common at health facilities across the country. Local NGOs are chronically underfunded, which impedes effective long-term planning. High staff turnover and a heavy reliance on volunteers further threatens the sustainability of their efforts.

Political instability threatens the progress of development. Growing tensions between politicians and members of the military, marked by high-profile assassinations of several prominent generals, have raised serious concerns among international donors. In some cases, this has delayed the flow of aid money into the country. The continued progress of development projects, both on the national and grassroots levels, hinges on these aid flows; as a result, the political situation will likely play an increasingly important part in determining whether or not NGOs and government ministries can continue to operate at their current capacity.

Many Basotho view the border with South Africa as fluid; however, FIOs tend to operate along national lines. In a time when tens of thousands of Basotho cross into South Africa for work, many consider their movement more of a temporary relocation than a permanent or semi-permanent migration. However, the majority of Lesotho-based FIOs do not extend their work into neighboring South Africa. (International NGOs tend to organize their work through country-specific offices, further reinforcing this separation.) One notable exception is church jurisdiction; several mainline Protestant churches include Lesotho with parts of South Africa when drawing their district lines.

POTENTIAL AREAS FOR ACTION

FIOs engaged in development work merit greater recognition and financial support from government ministries and international NGOs alike. The Ministries of Education and Health might benefit from a more sustained and in-depth dialogue with FIOs in crafting national development strategies for the upcoming decades. Church-run schools and health centers would likewise benefit from greater government recognition
and funding for their work; this is especially true for FIO-operated health facilities at the forefront of the HIV/AIDS response.

**NGOs lack sufficient avenues through which to meet with government officials and influence policy related to their area of expertise.** The absence of a formal framework in which civil society groups can lobby government ministries limits the potential for productive collaboration. More consistent and inclusive government-initiated outreach to NGOs would increase the number of diverse voices heard in the policymaking process.

**Faith actors have been effective in shifting attitudes around cultural taboos and sensitive topics, but there remains room for more religious leaders to prioritize these issues.** Successful initiatives by groups such as the Association of Lesotho Theologians can serve as a model for faith-inspired discussions around gender-based discrimination and violence, as well as HIV/AIDS-related stigma. NGOs and government ministries have an opportunity to recognize FIO achievements and bring their work to wider audiences.

**On the issue of land use, religious institutions can play a valuable role in mediating between the government, private companies, and citizens.** FIOs, most notably the Transformation Resource Centre, actively address community concerns about the impact of capital projects on local agriculture, natural resource management, land ownership, and food security. Religious leaders’ close knowledge of local needs is essential for addressing grievances and mediating disputes among government representatives, company officials, and community members in such a way that gives due consideration to all perspectives.

**With a stagnant economy and growing workforce, Lesotho is in need of new policies for job creation and skills training in order to reduce overall unemployment and keep Basotho from leaving the country.** The long history of migration to South Africa demonstrates that many Basotho are willing to leave their homes for work. Unless a concerted effort is made to diversify the domestic economy and provide citizens with job opportunities and skills training, migration will likely continue. The government has an opportunity to collaborate with FIOs in the education sector to improve STEM skills that are invaluable in today’s economy.

**With more than a third of the population under the age of 14, concerted engagement with young people on development issues is essential in shaping beneficial political, economic, and social outcomes.** Civil society groups who work with youth, including faith-linked organizations, are well positioned to solicit feedback and work with government ministries in formulating youth-specific policies. This approach may be especially impactful on the issues of education, employment, and health.
Endnotes

1 “Life expectancy at birth, total (years).” World Bank, 2017. Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=LS


183 Public Participation & NSAs Capacity Building for Development Project-PuPNaC.” Lesotho Council of Non-Governmental Organisations. 1–3.
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LESOTHO

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