



BEIJING +30 LESOTHO REPORT

Thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)

**MINISTRY OF GENDER, YOUTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The BPfA provides a comprehensive framework that encompasses critical areas such as poverty eradication, education, health, and decision-making, which are all crucial for Lesotho's progress. Alongside similarly important Conventions to which Lesotho is a party, Lesotho has prioritized the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) due to its alignment with the country's development goals and its contribution to addressing gender inequalities and empowering women and girls. The BPfA offers a platform for Lesotho to showcase its commitment to gender equality on an international stage, potentially attracting investment and partnerships that can further advance its development agenda.

Like many other commitments, advancing the mandate of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) has faced significant challenges in Lesotho, including the unprecedented challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and the El Nino-induced drought over the last decade. These crises have disproportionately affected women and girls, exacerbating existing inequalities and hindering progress towards gender equality. Key areas impacted include livelihoods, gender-based violence (GBV), access to essential services, and education.

Through the NSDP II Extended 2024-2028 and the National Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030, Lesotho has outlined plans to accelerate progress and address priorities for women and girls over the next five years. Key areas of focus include equality and non-discrimination, poverty eradication, food security, agricultural productivity, eliminating violence against women and girls, access to affordable quality healthcare, and political participation.

Over the past years and beyond Beijing+25, Lesotho has made considerable strides towards reducing the gender digital divide, both in the public and private sphere, by removing discriminatory barriers to inheritance and property rights for women and girls, implementing programs to promote digital literacy and skills among women and girls, and creating inclusive digital services at all levels working with partners. However, challenges remain, including limited awareness of technology-facilitated GBV and the need for sustained investment in digital skills training.

Several factors have affected the implementation of the BPfA, including economic challenges and austerity measures that have had a disproportionate impact on women and girls. However, in collaboration with partners in Development and the private sector, efforts have been made to promote a more gender-equal economy through gender-responsive programs, financial inclusion initiatives, and legal and policy reforms. Additionally, to mitigate the challenges faced, especially by women and girls, Lesotho has implemented various measures, prioritization of GBV services, and efforts to build climate-resilient communities. Significant strides have been made in improving women's and girls' health outcomes, education, and access to justice. Further, although there is still room for improvement, with the support of development partners, efforts have been made to reduce maternal mortality and to increase access to education, including vocational training for women and girls, to make them employable.

In conclusion, while Lesotho has taken significant steps to address gender inequality and promote women's empowerment, challenges persist, necessitating continued advocacy and targeted interventions to address the specific needs of women and girls in Lesotho. Continued efforts and sustained investment are needed to ensure that the BPfA goals are fully realized and that women and girls in Lesotho can enjoy full and equal rights and opportunities.

SECTION ONE: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REVIEW PROCESS, CHALLENGES AND PROGRESS

The Government of Lesotho through the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social Development works with stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of international commitments. As part of the write-up of the Beijing +30 Report, the stakeholders involved were approached and presented with a questionnaire survey from the BPfA, requesting their submission of pertinent reports and as much information as possible on interventions in support of the BPfA +30 Report. Various organizations, including the Ministry of Police in particular the Child and Gender Protection Unit, the Women and Law in Southern Africa Trust Lesotho, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning in particular the Bureau of Statistics, and the Ministry of Justice in particular the Magistracy participated in writing of this report.

Information was collected from relevant ministries and institutions namely the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology. Institutions that provided information include the Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled, She - Hive Association, Women and Law in Southern Africa Trust Lesotho Chapter, the VodaCom Foundation, Solidarity Centre, National University of Lesotho, GIZ, UNDP, FAO and UNICEF.

With assistance from UNFPA, the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social Development hosted a multi-sector meeting that compiled this report.

The main challenge of this report is availability of data. This challenge will be overcome once the whole government system has mainstreamed gender equality issues into the development projects, programmes and budgets.

SECTION TWO: PRIORITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES AND SETBACKS

Important achievements, challenges and setbacks in the progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Lesotho continues to make progress in efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls. In 2021, the Amendment of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act 2011 allows any Magistrate to handle cases that fall under their jurisdiction, assisting with the backlog of trafficking cases. That is one more step in initiatives that address violence against women and girls (VAWG), as most of the victims of trafficking in persons are women and girls.

According to the Lesotho Population-Based HIV Impact Assessment Survey (LePHIA 2020),¹ most women and girls are infected with HIV, and the prevalence of GBV was highlighted by the 2021 Lesotho Demographic Survey Volume 4,² the GBV Analytical Report³ and the Lesotho Violence against Children and Youth Survey 2020.⁴ To address the challenges faced by Adolescents and Young People that lead to increased new HIV infections and GBV, the country, through the Ministry of Education and Training and partners, embarked on a Prevention package for Adolescent Girls and Young Women programme targeting rural young women and girls, including key populations.⁵ The programme focuses on empowering adolescent girls & young women on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), social and behavioural change, clinical care management for survivors of GBV and improving access to justice. Additionally, there was a Basic Education Strengthening Project for school girls in hard-to-reach areas on SRHR, school-related GBV, life skills, health education (menstrual health and hygiene and child marriages), study skills and promotion of STEM subjects.

DATA

Although there are still challenges with gender and GBV-related data, the country has made progress in facilitating the management of routine data. In 2022, the Lesotho Mounted Police Service, especially the Child and Gender Protection Unit, was supported in reviewing data tools. This led to the development of a GBV Data Management Information System that will collect information throughout the country with the support of UNFPA and the Global Fund. In 2021, the Bureau of Statistics included a module on GBV in the inter-census study, and this is considered a step in the right direction towards having reliable data on GBV⁶. Although the results have yet to be published, the 2023 LDHS has also included a specific module on GBV, and all these initiatives are aimed at improving GBV data quality and inform programming.

Challenges

There are challenges, especially regarding the capacity building of relevant stakeholders, such as law enforcement agencies, to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of laws and

¹ adolescent girls aged 15-24 years are an immediate concern due to high levels of new HIV infections with a 1.7% incidence, which is 2.5 times higher than among adolescent boys 15-24 LeHIA 2017

²<https://www.bos.gov.ls/Publications.htm>

³

⁴https://icap.columbia.edu/tools_resources/lesotho-violence-against-children-and-youth-survey/

⁵ UNFPA, UNESCO, UNAIDS, Global Fund

⁶ Inter Census Report

policies. This is a combination of limited resources and the absence of standardized tools meant for data collection.

The top 5 priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in Lesotho through laws, Policies and Programs.

A. Equality and no discrimination under the law and access to justice

Lesotho considers equality, non-discrimination under the law, and access to justice as fundamental principles for several reasons. These principles are crucial for promoting social cohesion, ensuring fair treatment of all citizens, and fostering sustainable development. These rights are enshrined in the Constitution of Lesotho, which mandates equal treatment under the law and prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and social status. The Constitution provides a foundation for promoting and protecting these principles.

Lesotho is a signatory to various international human rights treaties and conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These commitments obligate Lesotho to uphold principles of equality and non-discrimination. Ensuring equality and non-discrimination helps to protect the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as women, children, and persons with disabilities. Ensuring equality is essential for promoting social justice and human rights. Addressing discrimination and promoting equality helps to reduce social and economic inequalities, leading to a more just and equitable society. Promoting equality and non-discrimination fosters inclusive economic growth. When all citizens have equal opportunities to participate in economic activities, it enhances productivity, innovation, and overall economic development. Ensuring women's equal rights and access to justice can have significant positive impacts on economic growth, as women's increased participation in the workforce and economic activities boost household incomes and GDP.

Empowering individuals through access to justice enables them to enforce their rights, challenge discrimination, and hold authorities accountable. This legal empowerment is essential for ensuring that laws promoting equality are effectively implemented. Access to justice ensures that all individuals can seek and obtain a remedy through the legal system for grievances. It is a cornerstone of the rule of law and is fundamental to the protection of human rights.

To realise this, the Government of Lesotho enacted the Counter Domestic Violence Act 2022, the Harmonization of the Rights of Customary Widows with Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 2022, and the Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act 2024. As part of accelerating progress for women and girls in Lesotho, the government of Lesotho has taken several strides in

terms of law reform over the past five years to address discrimination and promote the rights of marginalised women and girls. The strides include legislative reforms such as the Harmonization of Customary Widows with Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act, 2022, which aims to protect the rights of widows in customary marriages, which is a group that has experienced discrimination in terms of property rights for a long time.

Another development in Policy has been the development of The National Migration and Development Policy 2021 that addresses the rights of migrant women...⁷ This Policy has recognized the need to extend context and gender-sensitive protection to women who migrate or are affected by migration and their children through rights-based equality-oriented approaches such as the inclusion of women and their children in contributory social security and welfare arrangements, information sharing and appropriate employment opportunities.

B. On poverty eradication, agricultural productivity, and food security

According to the Lesotho Gender Assessment Report 2022,⁸ Lesotho is a lower-middle-income country with high rates of poverty, income inequality, and unemployment, and with notable gender gaps across indicators. Lesotho prioritizes poverty eradication, agricultural productivity, and food security enhancement to address poverty. Agriculture is a primary source of livelihood for a larger part of the population. The Government of Lesotho has committed to increasing agricultural productivity to directly improve the income levels and living standards of rural households with the intention of affording citizens sufficient, safe, and nutritious food, which is essential for the health and development of the population. The Government of Lesotho has social safety nets, including cash transfers and public works programs, to support the most vulnerable populations. Efforts have been made to diversify the economy beyond agriculture, promoting sectors like manufacturing and services to create more employment opportunities.

The Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition, provides farmers with training and resources to adopt modern farming techniques improve crop yields and manage resources efficiently. The Ministry facilitates access to quality seeds, fertilizers, and other necessary inputs to enhance agricultural outputs, although these are taken advantage of by mostly men due to patriarchy. The Government has also resorted to the development of irrigation infrastructure to reduce dependency on rain-fed agriculture and improve resilience against climate variability. The Lesotho Lowlands Water Development Project, implemented in phases, including the upcoming Phase III in 2024, aims to improve water infrastructure in lowland areas, ensuring reliable access to clean water for households. This long-term project brings hope and optimism, particularly for women who are often responsible for water collection.

⁷<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.ls/launch-of-lesotho-national-migration-and-development-policy/>

⁸ Hemat, Samaneh; Smout, Jennifer Elizabeth; Sijapati, Bandita. Lesotho - Gender Assessment (English). Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en>

The Government of Lesotho through the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Social Development in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition supported by GIZ (2024 – 2025) have collaborated to prevent violence against women and girls in Lesotho through food security programs. This endeavour is done to reduce incidences of GBV by tackling issues of food security and empowering women in agriculture and business.

The Lesotho Compact II Market-Driven Irrigated Horticulture Project 2024 is a significant initiative aimed at enhancing the agricultural sector's productivity and sustainability, with a specific focus on horticulture. The project's primary goal is to develop and improve irrigation infrastructure to ensure a reliable water supply for horticultural crops, thereby mitigating the impacts of climate variability and ensuring consistent crop yields. Importantly, the project also aims to increase rural incomes related to commercial agriculture, including for women, youth, and the rural poor, and establish a sustainable and inclusive model of irrigation, water resources, and land management.

Lesotho is enhancing storage facilities and distribution networks to reduce post-harvest losses and ensure food reaches all regions of the country. The Government of Lesotho is implementing programs to promote nutrition education and diverse diets to provide balanced nutrition, particularly among children and vulnerable groups.

C. Eliminating violence against women and girls

Lesotho considers eliminating violence against women and girls (VAWG) a priority because it is a severe violation of human rights; it has significant physical and mental health consequences for survivors, impacting their well-being and quality of life; it hinders economic development by reducing women's participation in the workforce, it increases healthcare costs and perpetuates poverty cycles; and it contributes to social instability and undermines community cohesion. Reducing VAWG fosters a safer and more supportive environment for all citizens.

The Government of Lesotho has taken steps to address VAWG through the enactment of legislation, namely the Counter Domestic Violence Act, 2022. This Act provides legal protection for victims of domestic violence, establishing mechanisms for reporting and prosecuting offenders. The Harmonization of the Rights of Customary Widows with Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act, 2022, addresses discrimination in marriage, ensuring that women have equal rights and protection under the law. The Government of Lesotho, through the then Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sport and Recreation, developed a Roll Out Plan for these two pieces of legislation in 2022. It aims to create awareness of the laws among potential victims, survivors and care providers of domestic violence.

The Government of Lesotho has an extended National Strategic Development Plan II 2024-2028 that mandates all development programs to address gender inequalities.⁹ There is also a policy framework on Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030 aimed at promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, including measures to combat violence against women and girls.

With the support of Development partners and the private sector,¹⁰ the government intends to establish shelters and safe houses throughout the country to provide refuge and support for survivors of violence, as it currently uses one shelter with limited capacity to accommodate all survivors since it services the whole country and is situated in the capital city. This house offers counselling services and legal assistance to help survivors navigate the legal system and access justice. Campaigns and other awareness-creation mechanisms run by government sectors, civil society organisations, and community leaders nationwide all year round as a preventative measure.

D. Health care, including SRHR

Lesotho has prioritized access to healthcare, including Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights, to improve overall health outcomes, promote gender equality, reduce poverty, and achieve sustainable development. According to the Ministry of Health Facility List 2017 (updated in 2021), Lesotho has 276 health facilities, of which 25 (9%) are hospitals. 251 (91%) are healthcare facilities and private clinics that are meant to increase access to health facilities in the country. Further, to get to remote places, during the year 2022/23, the Ministry of Health recorded 579 developed outreach sites, 453 of which were regular (78%). The Ministry of Health also collaborated with PEPFAR and Global Fund to create a community-led monitoring system in 6 districts, covering 104 health institutions.

The Government of Lesotho's interventions in this area include building and renovating health facilities to improve access to quality healthcare services across the country. It periodically operates mobile clinics to reach remote and underserved areas with healthcare services. Targeted programs are implemented to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS, including antiretroviral therapy (ART) and prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) services. In 2022/23, an Environmental Health Policy, an Environmental Health Strategic Plan, and Standards and Guidelines were developed. The Ministry of Health introduced the Clinical Handbook and Job Aids for Intimate Partner Violence, which was adopted in 2020, and the Training Manual for GBV and the GBV registry were provided to hospitals in October 2022.

⁹<https://www.gov.ls/download/nsdp-ii-strategic-focus/>

¹⁰ The UN, Global Fund and Vodacom Lesotho.

E. Family Planning Program Interventions in 2022/23:

Healthcare staff in all areas received contraceptive use training. Step-down training was conducted in four districts: Mokhotlong, Qacha's Nek, Mafeteng, and Quthing. Healthcare personnel were trained on the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), as family planning is a fundamental human right for individuals and families. The Ministry of Health is working on implementing the 2020 Village Health Program Policy, which acknowledges that village health workers are the liaison between facilities and the communities they serve. According to facility-based figures, there were around 7,784 VHWs in March 2023, split across ten districts, representing a density of 37 per 10,000 people. The present density exceeds the regional distribution of 6.9 per 10,000 and the WHO benchmark of 25 per 10,000 required for the African region to achieve at least 70% of the UHC service coverage index.

F. Maternal Mortality Program Interventions

M-Mama Programme: Since 2019, the Lesotho government, through the Ministry of Health, has collaborated with Vodacom Foundation and its implementing partners, Touch Foundation (Touch) and Riders for Health (RFH) to establish an emergency transportation system known as m-mama.

The program uses digital technology to solve delays in the delivery of crucial care to pregnant women and newborns. M-Mama aims to reduce maternal and newborn mortality and assist those who need critical care. Its overarching goal is to reduce mother and newborn morbidity and mortality by enhancing the provision, coordination, and administration of emergency transport throughout the country. It has also established uniform referral procedures and standards for maternal and neonatal emergencies. Since its inception in April 2021, the Emergency Transfer System (EmTS) has transported approximately 2,976 maternal and neonatal crises. Most emergency referrals addressed were maternal emergencies, accounting for 90%-93% of total emergencies transferred since 2021. Further data disaggregation by level revealed that over two-thirds (1,962) of referrals are from health facilities, with the remainder coming from the community.

In 2021, the Ministry of Health, through the Nursing and Midwifery Directorate, completed the evaluation process for the National Nursing and Midwifery Services' (NNM) Strategic Plan 2021/22-2025/26. Following the development strategy, QUAD (Academia, Lesotho Nursing Council, Lesotho Nursing Association, Independent Midwifery Association of Lesotho, and

Nursing Directorate) was established as the strategy's implementation partners. In 2021, the following were developed: Midwifery Competency Review linked with the Lesotho qualification framework. The midwifery licensing examination for 2021- 2022 was used to assess the 2022 cohort.

Why has Lesotho prioritized political participation and representation, and what steps have been taken to address it?

Lesotho has prioritized political participation and representation of women for several key reasons, recognizing the fundamental role that gender equality plays in achieving inclusive governance, social justice, and sustainable development. The reasons for prioritization are namely: to address historical imbalances through the empowerment of the marginalised groups, especially women and girls as well as marginalised boys and men; to contribute to decision-making processes as well as to ensure that women participate fully in politics, which is crucial for achieving gender equality; to uphold equal representation in political institutions leading to more inclusive governance; to include women who bring different perspectives and priorities to the decision-making table, which can result in more comprehensive and equitable policies; to comply with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development; to cultivate positive social outcomes, such as improved health, education, and economic opportunities for women and children; and to enhance the legitimacy of democratic institutions and processes.

The Government of Lesotho established the National Reforms Authority (NRA) following political and social consensus to address long-standing issues and to create a more inclusive and effective governance framework. Its role is to act as the central body responsible for coordinating all reform activities across various sectors, including constitutional, parliamentary, judicial, public service, security, and media reforms, to ensure that all reform initiatives are harmonized and aligned with the overall goals of national development and stability; to ensure that the legal and policy frameworks are updated and aligned with international best practices and standards; as well as to facilitate the drafting, review, and enactment of new laws and policies required to implement the agreed-upon reforms. NRA established a Leaders' Forum in 2021 with a view to building consensus, mobilising support, enhancing accountability, providing guidance and promoting inclusivity.

The Justice Reforms Project was kick-started in the year 2023 based on the following objectives: to ensure that laws are applied fairly and consistently and that the judiciary operates independently and without undue influence; to enhance legal aid services, making courts more

accessible and ensuring that all citizens can seek redress and protection under the law; to implement measures to reduce case backlogs, streamline court procedures, and improve the overall efficiency of the judicial system; to integrate human rights principles into the justice system and ensuring that legal processes protect and uphold these rights; to promote transparency and accountability within the judiciary and related institutions to fight corruption and ensure integrity in legal processes; to provide training and resources to judicial officers, legal professionals, and court staff to enhance their skills and effectiveness.

Specific actions taken to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls.

Although the country has put up a number of actions to prevent and address discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls, discrimination still exists.. Due to patriarchy and structural barriers, women and girls face challenges of unequal access to opportunities. The Lesotho Population-based HIV Impact Assessment 2020 (LePhIA) revealed that most women and girls are infected with HIV. According to the Lesotho People Living with HIV Stigma Index Report 2021, the incidences of stigma and discrimination against people with HIV and AIDS have decreased.. The prevalence of GBV was highlighted by the 2021 Lesotho Demographic Survey Volume 4 the GBV Analytical Report and the Lesotho Violence Against Children and Youth Survey 2020. This is mainly due to inequalities and they expose women and girls to HIV infection.¹¹ The Human Development Index 2023-2024 still highlights the existing inequalities in politics where men are favoured over women to take part in politics.

Below are some of the initiatives undertaken by Lesotho to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls.

A. Ratification and Signing on International Commitments Addressing discriminations

Above those already ratified and signed and as a strategy to strengthen the national legal frameworks that protect women's rights, and addressing violence and discrimination, Lesotho continues to ratify conventions and protocols that advance women and elimination of both discrimination and Gender based violence. Lesotho ratified the ILO Convention 190,¹² which mandates states to adopt laws and regulations and policies that ensure right to equality and non-discrimination in employment and occupation including for women workers as well as other persons belonging to vulnerable groups who are disproportionately affected.

B Development of National Laws and Policies

¹¹<https://www.stigmaindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Lesotho-SI-Report-2021.pdf> and <https://www.undp.org/lesotho/news/human-development-report-national-launch-maseru-12th-april-2024>

¹²<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/lesotho-ratifies-three-ilo-conventions>

The Labor Act of 2024 has highlighted unfair discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, disability, sexual orientation, HIV and AIDS status, religion, pregnancy, marital status, political affiliation or opinion, national extraction, social origin, age, or any other group under its fundamental principles. Lesotho IEC Gender and Social Inclusion 2020 has provided for the need to ensure access to information by rural and hard-to-reach women and inclusiveness in the party structures.

The Lesotho National Migration and Development Policy 2021 has recognized the need to extend context and gender-sensitive protection to women who migrate or are affected by migration and their children through rights-based, equality-oriented approaches.¹³ It has also highlighted the need for the inclusion of women and their children in contributory social security and welfare arrangements, information sharing, and appropriate employment opportunities.

C. Legislative and policy reforms

Other strides include legislative reforms such as the Harmonization of Customary Widows with Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 2022, which aims to afford customary widows rights equal to those of other married persons. Anti-Trafficking in Persons (Amendment) Act 2021 allows magistrates to handle cases that fall under their jurisdiction, assisting in reducing the backlog of trafficking cases that mostly affect women and girls.

D. Programmes for prevention of discrimination and promotion of the rights of marginalised groups of women and girls.

.. The country has been embarking on a Prevention package for Adolescent Girls and Young Women programme, targeting rural young women and girls.. The programme focuses on empowering adolescent girls and young women in sexual health and reproductive rights, social and behavioural change, clinical care management for survivors of GBV, and improving access to justice through the help of posted paralegals in hard-to-reach areas.

Additionally, there is a Basic Education Strengthened Project for School Girls in hard-to-reach areas on sexual health and reproductive rights, school-related GBV, life skills, health education (menstrual health and hygiene) child marriages, and study skills promotion of STEM subjects.

Regarding safeguarding older people, awareness-raising campaigns on prevention measures include public sensitization, including campaigns on ageing and related matters for the elderly themselves.

Challenges

¹³<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.ls/launch-of-lesotho-national-migration-and-development-policy/>

There are challenges, especially in terms of limited capacity building of relevant stakeholders, such as law enforcement agencies, to ensure effective implementation and enforcement of laws and policies. Also, neutral policies and limited, targeted interventions exist.

How the confluence of different crises affected the implementation of the BPfA in Lesotho and measures taken to prevent the negative impact on progress for women and girls?

Over the past years, Lesotho has experienced the confluence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the El Niño-induced drought of 2019-2020, which have severely hampered the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) in Lesotho. These compounding crises have disproportionately affected women and girls, exacerbating pre-existing inequalities, reversing the gains made in the area of women's empowerment and creating new challenges to their empowerment and well-being. In particular, women and girls were affected in the following areas: Livelihood sources were affected, GBV incidences increased, particularly domestic violence incidents increased, limited access to essential services, including health services, and disrupted education.

Livelihoods: Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the El Niño-induced drought led to widespread job losses and economic instability, particularly affecting women who predominantly work in the informal sector. The job losses were exacerbated by the closure of factories that hired over 46,500 people, the majority of whom were women. The drought further worsened the situation by disrupting agricultural livelihoods, a major source of income for rural women, according to the UNDP and World Bank study on the Assessment of the Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on the Kingdom of Lesotho.

Increased Gender-Based Violence (GBV): The COVID-19 pandemic and the drought-induced stress and insecurity on livelihoods have led to a surge in GBV cases; women and girls have faced heightened risks of GBV when families experience limited resources. The challenges faced by women included having to prioritize food supplies over menstrual health commodities and, in some instances, engaging in negative coping mechanisms to ensure food is on the table. However, there were challenges with actual data on the prevalence of GBV during COVID-19; COVID-induced lockdowns and movement restrictions during the pandemic limited women's access to support services and safe spaces. For example, according to the Commonwealth Economic Cost of Violence against Women and Girls 2020 in Lesotho, the number of sexual assault survivors increased severely, and the number of VAWG-related survivors seeking health services was 195.149 compared to 1.334 in previous years.

Limited Access to Essential Services: The strain on healthcare systems due to the pandemic, coupled with drought-related disruptions in 2020, meant other essential services, such as reproductive health services, were not prioritized. This disruption of services severely impacted

women's access to essential health services. During the 2019-2020 drought response period, there were evident disruptions in services where pregnant women were asked to bring their water to health facilities for delivery due to acute water shortages in some health facilities.

Disrupted Education: School closures during the pandemic and displacement caused by the drought disrupted girls' education, increasing their risk of dropping out, child marriage, and early pregnancy. The teenage pregnancy surge of 2020-2021 has led to increased school drop-out by girls, thus negatively affecting the gains made in girls' education enrollment.¹⁴ Water scarcities also affect menstrual hygiene and lead to girls dropping out of school. School closure heightened existing inequalities as students from disadvantaged families were more likely to fall behind. The shift to online learning exacerbated the digital divide as many students need access to reliable internet and the necessary devices to join online learning.

Measures Taken to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19 and Drought:

Various organizations and the Lesotho government have implemented measures to address the following challenges:

Gender-Responsive COVID-19 Response: The government integrated gender considerations into its COVID-19 response plans, ensuring that women's specific needs and vulnerabilities were addressed. For example, Social safety nets were expanded to provide cash transfers and food assistance to vulnerable households, including female-headed households.

Prioritizing GBV Services: Efforts were made to maintain essential GBV services, including hotlines and shelters, and raise awareness about available support. At the onset of COVID, the government of Lesotho, in collaboration with Development Partners, supported remote reporting of GBV by establishing a toll-free and ensuring referrals for all essential services.

Climate Resilience and Adaptation: Efforts are underway to build drought resilience in communities, particularly focusing on empowering women farmers through access to climate-smart agricultural practices. In response to COVID-19 and drought, FAO implemented resilience and adaptation initiatives, including the provision of over 20,000 menstrual packages to vulnerable women and girls. 7,065 women were capacitated on climate change and the benefits of climate-smart agriculture technologies.

Challenges

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. It is crucial to continue advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment in Lesotho, particularly in the face of compounding crises. Sustained investment in gender-responsive policies and programs is critical to sustaining progress toward BPfA goals.

14

How Lesotho plans to accelerate progress and address the priorities for women and girls through laws, policies, and programs over the next five years.

The following issues have been identified as priorities for acceleration for women and girls, Equality and Non-discrimination, Poverty Eradication, Food Security, and Agricultural Productivity, Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls, Access to Affordable Quality Healthcare and Political Participation

A. Strengthen Laws and Policies to promote equality and ensure non-discrimination particularly against women and girls.

Lesotho can leverage laws, policies, and programs to achieve significant progress on these crucial priorities:

The Government of Lesotho undertakes to strengthen awareness and norm change to eliminate discriminatory practices towards women in inheritance and property ownership. The Harmonisation of the Rights of Customary with the Legal Capacity of Married Persons 2022, which accords customary widows the right to inherit their husbands' property, and the Administration of Estates and Inheritance Act 2024. Plans to disseminate and popularize the two acts are underway.

Programs:

There are continuing public awareness campaigns on gender equality with the support of development partners. The programs include men's engagement programs that tackle patriarchy and negative masculinity. Educational workshops will be held to capacitate Basotho citizens to understand gender equality, especially for women and girls. Further, a joint GBV program that is intended to counteract negative gender norms and stereotypes has started in 2024 – 2028. Mentorship programs that connect Basotho girls with successful women in politics and entrepreneurship as role models have been developed to instill motivation and provide hands-on skill development for women and girls.

B. Strengthen Laws and Policies for Poverty Eradication, Food Security, and Agricultural Productivity:

Laws and Policies:

The ongoing Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030, under the thematic area of Gender and Agriculture, Food and Nutrition and Security, has been serving as a guide for mainstreaming gender in agricultural activities and strengthening evidence based on interlinkages between food security and GBV.

Programs:

The implementation of the MCA Lesotho Compact II, Market Driven Irrigated Horticulture project, which aims to target primarily rural poor women and other marginalized people, will address the inequalities that have existed in terms of land ownership, Security and improved access to markets and networking. The Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Gender led the Food Security Flagship Project, under the support of GIZ Lesotho, which aims to improve food nutrition and security in the country.

C. Strengthen laws policies, and programs towards eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls:

Laws and Policies:

The Counter Domestic Violence Act 2022 has been enacted to protect victims within the domestic setting, who are mostly women and girls. Its implementation plan has also been developed to guide interventions to ensure effective implementation of the Act. In 2021, the Amendment of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons allows any Magistrate to handle cases that fall under their jurisdiction, assisting with the backlog of trafficking cases. The country further enacted the Persons with Disability Equity Act 2021, which specifically highlights access to justice by persons with disability, and later, in 2023, the Persons with Disabilities Procedural and Equity Rules that guide how to handle cases for persons with disability were developed. The ongoing Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030, under its thematic area on GBV, commits to promoting an environment of zero tolerance to all forms of GBV at all levels in order for women, men, boys, elderly LGBTQI+ and people with disability to live a violence-free life.

Programs:

The Ministry of Gender and key stakeholders undertake year-round sensitization of the public to gender transformative programmes through public gatherings, forums, radio, and television. Nonetheless, the country still needs to ensure that more funding is allocated to establish and decentralize more shelters and one-stop centres and support services like counselling and legal aid services for survivors of violence. Additionally, there is a dire need to capacitate law enforcement and judicial personnel on handling cases of violence against women with sensitivity and professionalism. Integrate comprehensive sex education into the national curriculum to promote gender equality and healthy relationships.

D. Ensure equitable Access to Affordable Quality Healthcare especially for women and girls:

Laws:

Review and potentially amend laws to protect women's SRHR, ensuring access to safe abortion services and law enforcement. Policies: Increase public investment in healthcare facilities and prioritize training programs for Basotho medical professionals, particularly in rural areas.

Programs

Develop national programs for preventive healthcare and early detection of diseases, focusing on women's health needs. Implement mobile health clinics to reach underserved communities, particularly women in remote areas. Organize educational programs on SRH for women and girls, promoting informed decision-making.

Challenges

E. Promote equal Political Participation of men and women at various Political positions including in diplomatic positions:

Laws and Policies: Advocate for inclusive laws and policy reform that promote increased political inclusion and participation of women in political portfolios (including diplomatic missions, cabinet, and at all decision-making levels). Conduct a thorough review of existing political and electoral laws to identify and amend provisions that are discriminatory or non-inclusive. Ensure that all laws promote gender equality and women's political participation.

IEC voter education should go beyond voting only and emphasize the importance of inclusive participation and representation. Electoral laws should be reviewed and revised to eliminate any discriminatory practices that hinder women's participation in political processes. **Policies:** Design and deliver **training and capacity-building programs** specifically for Basotho women aspiring to political leadership roles.

Programs:

Launch public awareness campaigns using local media to encourage women's voter registration and participation. Advocate for public funding for women-led political campaigns on an equal basis with male candidates to create a level playing field. Stratify constituencies, collaborate with IEC to change political structures, institutionalize gender equality through radio programmes and other relevant media houses.

SECTION THREE: PROGRESS ACROSS THE 12 CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN

1. Actions taken to advance gender equality in the world of work (including informal and non-standard employment as well as entrepreneurship)?

A. Improved legal and Policy environment in the world of work.

Lesotho has been active in promoting gender equality in the world of work through various initiatives. These efforts are aligned with the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) III, which spans from 2018/19 to 2022/23 and aims to address gender disparities in employment, social protection, and governance of the labour market.¹⁵ In 2022, with the support of UNDP, a gender audit of four pilot Ministries, including the Ministry of Public Service, was conducted. Some of the findings from the study include the fact that public service laws are limited in coverage of issues of preventing gender-based violence. In the same spirit and with the objective to address violence in the work place in particular in line with ILO Convention 190, the Ministry of Public Service took advantage of the Amendment of the Public Service Act in 2023 to incorporate provisions for the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in the workplace the process which is ongoing. This amendment in public service is in line with the adoption of ILO Convention 190, which provides for the elimination of violence and harassment in the workplace.

B. On improving financial inclusion and access to credit, particularly for self-employed women, through several initiatives:

Lesotho has made strides in ensuring financially developed national strategies like the Inclusive Finance Strategy and the National Financial Inclusion Strategy to guide efforts in expanding financial access. These strategies prioritize reaching underserved populations, including women and those in rural areas. The financial inclusion of women in Lesotho has increased significantly from 2011 to 2021. In 2011, only 61% of women were considered to be financially included. However, this number grew to 90% by 2021, largely due to an increase in the use of non-bank financial products and services. Despite these gains in financial inclusion, women still need help accessing formal banking services, with only 38% of women being banked in 2021. This percentage is slightly lower than the percentage of men (40%) who are banked.

Women are more likely than men to use informal financial products and services. In 2021, 50% of women reported using informal financial services, compared to 42% of men. The high use of informal financial services stems from barriers to accessing formal banking services, such as affordability and the inability to maintain a minimum balance.

Additionally, while women save at similar rates to men, they borrow more. In 2021, 64% of women reported borrowing money, compared to 54% of men. The high rate of borrowing by women is attributed to a variety of factors, such as women's increased responsibility for household finances and childcare. Women also have higher insurance coverage rates than men, with 62% of women reporting having insurance compared to 52% of men. However, this is largely driven by funeral cover, with 93% of insured adults having funeral cover. Finally, women

¹⁵<https://www.ilo.org/fr/media/527716/download>

are more likely to use mobile money services than men, with 69% of women reporting using these services compared to 63% of men. This difference suggests that mobile money may be a particularly important tool for increasing women's financial inclusion in Lesotho.¹⁶

Women have higher formal and informal financial inclusion than men, but this doesn't necessarily equate to gender equality. The increase in women's formal financial inclusion is largely due to mobile money usage. However, women are still more likely to use informal financial mechanisms. Women still face barriers to accessing credit due to factors like lack of collateral, limited financial literacy, and discriminatory practices. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted livelihoods and access to finance, further exacerbating existing inequalities.

Overall, Lesotho has made progress in improving financial inclusion and access to credit. Still, continued efforts are needed to address the remaining challenges and ensure that all individuals, including self-employed women, can fully participate in the financial system.

What Actions Lesotho has taken to reduce the gender digital divide?

A. Removing Discriminatory Barriers (Laws and Policies)

Lesotho has worked on eliminating the barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing digital technology. The initiatives include Cyber Security Bill 2022, tabled before the parliament to counteract cyberbullying and cyber-safety to address issues such as Human Trafficking and Online-grooming; the Bill also addresses issues of cyber security as well. There is a development of National Digital Transformation Policy 2024) that aims to address;

- digital economic gaps and emerging trends
- promote digital skills
- cyber security
- Improves the policy legal and institutional framework supporting transformation
- establish a data governance framework¹⁷

Programmes

Programs that are geared towards bridging the digital divide are ongoing. For example, the Vodacom Foundation has a **Code Like a Girl** program that provides training to girls on computer coding to engage more girls. STEM in school-going children has been introduced to

¹⁶[FinScope](#)

¹⁷[digital policy](#)

provide sensitisation, affordable internet access and digital devices to women and girls in rural and underserved areas, thereby improving their ability to participate in the digital economy.

B. Digital Services

Creating and Expanding Inclusive Digital Tools and Services: The government, in collaboration with international organizations such as the World Bank and USAID, has supported the development of safe, affordable, and accessible digital services. These efforts include the introduction of the Nokaneng App, which was developed with the support of GIZ [Nokaneng app](#), which helps to reduce the acceptance of VAWG and break the silence among women and girls. The app is also aimed at creating safe spaces for women and girls to learn, reflect and have open and supportive conversations about violence against women and girls. In addition, **Mokhatlo-Savings Account**, which is a Vodacom Mpesa mobile money app that is used as a group savings scheme, thus addressing several issues, such as issues of safety, easing access to banking services and time-saving.

The National University of Lesotho has established an Innovation Hub geared to provide a research-based platform to:

- **Foster Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** The hub seeks to promote innovation and entrepreneurship among students, faculty, and the broader community by providing a platform for developing and nurturing innovative ideas.
- **Support Research and Development:** The hub supports research activities, encouraging collaboration between academia and industry. It aims to facilitate the commercialization of research outputs and technological advancements.
- **Enhance Skills and Knowledge:** The hub aims to enhance participants' skills and knowledge, particularly in areas related to technology, business development, and digital literacy, by offering training programs, workshops, and mentorship opportunities.

Sensitization and training on digital upskilling for women and girls were conducted in 2023 with the support of UNECA. The purpose of this training was to train trainers who would further roll out the training to other levels.

The macroeconomic and fiscal policy environment affected the implementation of the BPfA in Lesotho and the support for a more gender-equal economy.

Lesotho has faced economic challenges, including slow economic growth, high unemployment rates, and fiscal deficits, which have necessitated the implementation of austerity or fiscal consolidation measures. For example, Lesotho's economic growth decelerated from 1.3% in 2022 to an estimated 0.9% in 2023 owing to slowing manufacturing and agricultural activities.

Inflation dropped from 8.3% in 2022 to about 6.4% in 2023, as food inflation declined in South Africa, Lesotho's main trading partner. Public debt fell from 60.6% of GDP in 2022 to 57.5% in 2023, mainly because of the redemption of treasury bonds. Official reserves stood at 4.7 months of import cover in 2023. The loti, which is pegged at par with the South African rand, depreciated against all major currencies in 2023, including the euro (12.58%), the pound (24.73%), and the US dollar (29.63%) as the rand depreciated.

Following a deficit of 4.3% of GDP in 2022, the fiscal balance was estimated at a surplus of 1.0% in 2023 as South African Customs Union (SACU) revenues recovered. The current account deficit improved from 8.4% of GDP in 2022 to an estimated 3.4% in 2023 due to rising textile exports. The deficit was financed with South African capital transfers (foreign direct investment flows). As a result, monetary policy tightening led to a decline in nonperforming loans from 4.2% of gross loans in 2020 to 3.84% in December 2023. The capital adequacy ratio dropped from 22.95% in December 2020 to 17.16% in December 2023, which is still above the 8% minimum prudential requirement.¹⁸

Measures were taken to mitigate the challenges mentioned above, including cuts in public expenditure, public sector downsizing and other cost-saving strategies to stabilize the economy. For instance, there was a significant cut and downsizing of the budget in the Department of Gender, which subsequently rendered reduced funding for gender-specific programs and services, hindering the progress of initiatives aimed at promoting women's rights and empowerment. Austerity measures had a disproportionate impact on women and girls, particularly on cuts that affected social services, education, health, and other areas crucial for gender equality.

Actions taken to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls?

A. Lesotho's Initiatives to Reduce Poverty Among Women and Girls (2020-2024)

Lesotho has undertaken several initiatives in the past five years to address poverty among women and girls. Here's a breakdown based on the categories you provided:

The Smallholder Agricultural Development Project Phase II (SADP II) in Lesotho, a significant initiative in the past five years, has been instrumental in addressing poverty among women and girls. This project, which aims to support the increased adoption of climate-smart agricultural technologies, enhanced commercialization, and improved dietary diversity, has had a profound impact. SADP II targets youth and women to build a sustainable rural economy, with approximately 50% of the project's beneficiaries being women. This focus on women is crucial

¹⁸[Lesotho's Economic Outlook](#)

as they typically face difficulties accessing land and finance. By providing them with access to finance, high-quality inputs, and training, SADP II has helped women increase their agricultural production, processing, and sales, thereby improving household dietary diversity and nutrition .¹⁹

The United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has announced US\$62m in funding to boost food security and nutrition, mitigate the impact of climate change, and strengthen the livelihoods of 160,000 poor rural households in Lesotho.²⁰

B. National Financial Inclusion Strategy

C. Her-Empire Accelerator Lab, the Lesotho Accelerator Lab (AccLab), carried out an experiment dubbed Her Empireto empower women-led businesses to foster competitiveness and improve business sustainability and job creation. This experiment was aimed at building women's capacities to enhance business profitability and enable sustained business operations amid the multi-layered crisis that affected businesses recently, including COVID-19 and the rising cost of living and doing business. The Lab has also created an opportunity for women to compete in public and private procurement processes.

12. Lesotho's Actions to Improve Women and Girls' Health Outcomes (2020-2024)

A healthy population contributes to economic growth through increased productivity and reduced healthcare costs. Lesotho is committed to achieving international health targets, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality). Lesotho has implemented several initiatives to improve health outcomes for women and girls in the over the years and especially beyond Beijing+25 reporting period. The Initiatives include provision of subsidized primary health care in Government and CHAL facilities across the country.

The government is fully aware that improving access to healthcare has a positive impact on public health outcomes. The government is also aware that while ensuring better health outcomes for women and girls also entails ensuring access to SRHR services. Access to SRHR service us is critical for reducing maternal and infant mortality and improving overall maternal health which affects only women. Ensuring access to SRHR services also empowers women to make informed decisions about their health and bodies, fostering gender equality and women's empowerment.

¹⁹([Gov Ls](#)) ([Food Tank](#))

²⁰[IFADSADP Link](#)

The following are actions taken by Government to improve health count comes for women and girls

Access to Health Services:

A. Initiatives to reduce Maternal Mortality

Maternal Health: The government has implemented measures to reduce maternal mortality and increase access to prenatal and postnatal care services. According to the Lesotho 2022 **MDR** report, haemorrhage continues to be the major cause of maternal fatalities in Lesotho, accounting for 35.8% of those between 2016 and 2020. During the same period, hypertensive illnesses accounted for 21% of all maternal deaths, whereas those caused by pregnancy-related sepsis accounted for around 5.3% of all deaths.

Since its inception in April 2021, the Em TS has transported approximately 2,976 maternal and neonatal crises. The majority of emergency referrals addressed were maternal emergencies, accounting for 90%-93% of total emergencies transferred since 2021. Further data disaggregation by level revealed that over two-thirds (1,962) of referrals are from health facilities, with the remainder coming from the community.

The M-Mama Programme, a collaborative effort between the Lesotho government, Vodacom Foundation, and its implementing partners, Touch Foundation (Touch) and Riders for Health (RFH), is a testament to the power of partnerships in addressing healthcare challenges. This program, which uses digital technology to solve delays in the delivery of crucial care to pregnant women and newborns, has been instrumental in reducing maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality by establishing uniform referral procedures and standards for maternal and neonatal emergencies.

B. Ensuring continuity of community Health Outreach services to ensure access to services

The Ministry of Health revitalized outreaches and village health posts to improve community access to primary health care services. During the year 2022/23, the Ministry of Health recorded 579 developed outreach sites, 453 of which were regular (78%) with the support of PEPFAR and the Global Fund.

Lesotho reintroduced the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccination campaign nationwide in April 2022, with a target population of 128,558 girls aged 9 to 14 years. The vaccination campaign reached 86,866 girls with the first dose, achieving 68% coverage based on population projections and 78% (111,296) based on headcounts.

C. Legal and Policy Reforms

Since the last reporting period, Lesotho has continued to implement policies and legal frameworks designed to protect and advance the SRHR of all people, including women, girls, men, and boys. These measures include initiatives for family planning, maternal health care, and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as HIV and AIDS. The Environmental Health Policy, Environmental Health Strategic Plan, and Standards and Guidelines were developed in 2023.

Challenges

The main weaknesses in Lesotho's digital health ecosystem include a lack of a legal or policy framework to facilitate data sharing, limited interoperability of systems among different health institutions, no community-level data collection, insufficient digital health literacy among health care workers and decision-makers, and a scarcity of patient-level digital health applications. Hence, this makes monitoring issues of women and girls by other stakeholders nearly impossible. The MOH made efforts to strengthen health governance by developing and reviewing policy and strategic frameworks. However, the AJR 2022/23 evaluation discovered that the majority of these documents had yet to be signed and are classified as draft documents under WHO criteria for the creation of national policies. Despite budgetary stability, execution appears to be unguided in most health facilities, with Annual Operational Plans serving as a proxy.

13. Lesotho's Efforts to Improve Education for Women and Girls (2020-2024)

Over the past five years, Lesotho has taken several significant actions to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls, particularly in sectors where they are underrepresented. These actions include measures to increase access, retention, and completion rates in education and initiatives aimed at enhancing skills in emerging fields.

A. Access, Retention, and Completion:

Primary Education: The Lesotho Free Primary Education Policy ensures free access to primary education and gender parity in enrollment. Lesotho has one of the highest female enrollment rates in primary education in sub-Saharan Africa. The high enrollment rate has contributed to a more balanced educational landscape where girls have equal opportunities to pursue their studies

²¹.

The Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy Policy aims to prevent and manage learner pregnancy in schools, with the ultimate aim of decreasing learner pregnancies and promoting the completion of education by adolescents and young people.

²¹([Gov Ls](#)) [Ministry of Education](#)

TVET and Skills Development: The National TVET Policy (2018) The main objective of the Policy is to expand access to TVET, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including women and rural populations. The expansion initiatives include increasing enrollment and retention rates among these groups.²²

B. Underrepresented Sectors:

STEM Education: Lesotho has a National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation (2017-2022) that aims to promote STEM education for all, potentially benefiting girls. With the support of NGOs and Development Partners, the strategy promotes gender equity and has put in place strategies to ensure equal access and opportunities for women and girls in STEM education and careers.²³

Digital Literacy: The National Digital Inclusion Strategy (2020) provides Digital Skills Training, including targeted training programs and workshops focused on enhancing digital literacy and technical skills among women and girls in Lesotho. It also promotes equitable access to digital resources such as digital devices, internet connectivity, and digital platforms, particularly in rural and underserved areas where access barriers may disproportionately affect women and girls.

Safe Learning Environments through programs such as **Water, Sanitation, and Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM):** The Lesotho WASH Costed National Action Plan (2018-2030) aims to improve access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools potentially including MHM aspects.

14. Forms of GBV, and Specific Contexts which have been prioritized for action?

According to the Lesotho Population-based HIV Impact Assessment (LEPHIA, 2020) and Lesotho Violence Against Children (VAC) reports, higher HIV prevalence is among women aged 15+ (27.4%) compared to men (17.8%), with Adolescent Girls and Young Women aged 15-24 facing an 8.5% prevalence, over three times higher than men (3.5%)²⁴. In Lesotho, Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) face heightened HIV risk due to persistent gender inequality and multiple factors. LePHIA 2017 revealed that 11.8% of young girls aged 13-14 experienced sexual harassment or violence, while 25.7% reported physical violence. GBV, biological susceptibility, cross-generation relationships, lack of education and economic empowerment, harmful traditional practices, and limited access to comprehensive sexual health

²²[\(Planipolis\) \(UNHCR Data\)](#)

²³[\(Gov Ls\) Ministry of Education.](#)

²⁴ Lesotho Population-based HIV Impact Assessment (LePHIA 2020)

services contribute to their increased risk, necessitating targeted interventions to address their specific vulnerabilities.

To address these inequality gaps for women and girls, Lesotho is implementing interventions that prevent new HIV infections through human rights approaches and gender-responsive interventions. The Extended National Strategic Development Plan 2024/25 – 2027 has already identified key priority sectors and cross-cutting thematic areas that are addressed to reduce GBV. The interventions include prevention of Intimate partner violence, sexual violence and marital rape. They also include the promotion of human rights interventions, addressing community structures and law enforcement agencies, and providing access to justice and health personnel to ensure access to services for post-violence care. The country is implementing this through different line ministries and CSOs. A package of services for Intimate Partner Violence (economic, sexual, physical) includes interventions directed at boys and men, adolescent girls and young women. Some of the following concrete examples are interventions prioritized for implementation;

Legislation and Policy: Lesotho has also enacted laws and policies to combat trafficking, including women and girls. The Trafficking in Persons Act of 2011, as amended in 2021, criminalizes all forms of trafficking and prescribes penalties for offenders. Lesotho has also developed a National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons, which outlines strategies to prevent trafficking, protect victims, and prosecute perpetrators.

Awareness and Training: The government, in partnership with international organisations and civil society groups, has conducted awareness campaigns and training programs to raise awareness about trafficking in persons, particularly women and girls, and address harmful practices, such as child marriage, human rights violations and gender-based violence. These campaigns aimed to change attitudes and behaviours, promote gender equality, and empower women and girls while educating the public about the dangers of trafficking, how to identify potential victims, and where to seek help. With support from USAID and the International organization for Migration, the Ministry of Home Affairs and CSOs held sensitisation campaigns targeting school learners, especially young girls and women who are mostly vulnerable to sexual exploitation once trafficked.

Law Enforcement and Prosecution: with support from development partners, GoL has strengthened the capacity of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute GBV cases as part of prevention and care efforts. Training programs have been conducted for police officers, prosecutors, and judges to improve their understanding of GBV and trafficking laws and procedures. About 100 law enforcement agents (Magistrates and Police officers from the Central, North and South regions) have been capacitated with the relevant laws. The training programs for law enforcement officials included healthcare providers, social workers, and other stakeholders to improve their knowledge and skills in responding to violence and harmful

practices. Efforts have been made to enhance coordination among service providers and strengthen referral systems for survivors of violence. In 2021, a national referral framework for Trafficking in persons was established.

Some of the milestones include the contribution of the legal advancement of women and girls, raising awareness on gender-based violence, upscaling the use of the GIZ GBV smartphone application on reporting GBV, capacity building for local councils and institutions in the prevention of violence against women, community dialogues on gender transformative and positive social norms. Although the reporting of GBV might be seen as a post-violence intervention, it also acts as a prevention intervention once reporting mechanisms are put in place.

Sexual harassment and violence in public places, educational settings and workplaces.

In line with the implementation of the C-190 Labour Convention on Sexual Violence and Harassment in the Workplace, civil society organizations (CSOs) such as Workers' Rights Watch, WLSA, FIDA, and Trade Unions have taken steps to address sexual violence in workplaces. Initiatives such as educational sessions held for employers and factory workers in the textile industry serve both as preventative measures and as a means of managing gender-based violence (GBV). Additionally, interventions tailored specifically for girls and young women within the school setting have been implemented to address school-related GBV. To address TFGBV, Lesotho is in the process of enacting the Computer Crimes and Cyber Security Bill of 2024.²⁵ Above the Penal Code of 2010, which provides for the crime of Murder, and the Counter Domestic Violence Act, which provides for a conviction of life sentence for a person who commits murder as a result of domestic violence, there are other regulations such as the Internal Security Declaration of Unlawful Organization (2024) and the Internal Security Act (1984) which can contribute to the prevention and management of gender-related killings of women and girls.

The government, with support from development partners, has implemented prevention programs aimed at addressing the root causes of violence and harmful practices, such as gender inequality, poverty, and social norms that condone violence. These programs include community awareness campaigns, education initiatives, training on conflict resolution and positive parenting, and engaging men and boys in the fight against GBV. Providing survivors of violence with access to protection services, such as counselling, legal aid, and medical care.

Challenges

²⁵<https://nationalassembly.parliament.ls/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/COMPUTER-CRIME-AND-CYBER-SECURITY-BILL-2024>.

The challenges that still exist include limited care and no shelters for survivors of GBV, including young women and girls. While progress has been made in addressing GBV and GBVH among women and girls in Lesotho, especially among textile workers, challenges remain, including limited resources and gaps in the legal framework. Continued efforts are needed to strengthen prevention, protection, and prosecution measures to effectively combat GBV and ensure the safety and well-being of women and girls in the country. For the interventions on sexual health, there is a need to make more national interventions that empower women and girls to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and rights.

By employing these intervention strategies, Lesotho can work towards creating a safer and more inclusive society for all its citizens, particularly women, children, and other vulnerable populations.

15. In the past five years, what actions has your country prioritized to address gender-based violence?

In an effort to prioritize addressing GBV, the country has undertaken a number of actions, including the enactment of laws, policies, and legislative reforms that aim to address some of the systemic barriers that hinder women's ability and access to justice and protection.

Generally, GBV prevalence in the country is 37.6 percent of women aged 12 to 50 years, and 21.3 per cent of men aged 12 to 50 years have ever experienced any form of violence (physical, sexual, marital and emotional or any combination) since age 12 years.²⁶

According to the Culture Survey 2021 - How Workers at Four Nien Hsing Textile Factories in Lesotho Describe Work Culture and GBV and Harassment Gender Based Violence Harassment (GBVH) continues to be an issue at the Nien Hsing factories in Lesotho, workers do not trust management to hold perpetrators of GBVH accountable. And that there is a need for perpetrators to be accountable for their actions as the survey findings revealed that almost 20% of workers think GBVH in the workplace can be committed with impunity despite the 99% of workers believing GBVH should be addressed.²⁷

A. Legislative and policy reform

The policy and law reforms include the amendment of the Children's Protection and Welfare Act 2011 to criminalise child marriage, improve the jurisdiction of the Children's Court for criminal cases, and accord children born out of wedlock the right to inherit from both parents as well as the Harmonization of the Rights of Customary Widows with the Legal Capacity of Married

²⁶Website: <http://www.bos.gov.ls>

²⁷<https://www.wrwolesotho.org.ls/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Culture-Survey-of-GBVH-at-NH-2021.pdf>

Persons Act 2022 which removes the discriminatory customary practices which deny customary widows the right to inherit their property.

The Administration of Estate and Inheritance Act 2024 has reviewed and improved the laws relating to inheritance and estate administration. Meanwhile, the National Strategic Development Plan II (extended) 2023-2027 has provided for gender mainstreaming, including GBV, in sectors' projects and programmes.

B. National laws and policies enacted

The Disability Equality Act 2021 is in place. It accords persons with disability a right to give evidence in criminal and civil cases in any court and to be assisted to give evidence in any possible way where there is a need. Further, the Counter Domestic Violence Act 2022 provides for the protection of the rights of victims and the prevention of domestic violence and related matters. The same act also accords victims and survivors of domestic violence a protection order when it deems fit. The Labor Act 2024 has been enacted with the sole purpose of providing a comprehensive framework for regulating employment relations, promoting fair labour practices and ensuring the welfare and rights of both employers.

The Early and Unintended Pregnancies Draft Policy is close to completion. It provides for girls who fall pregnant while schooling to continue with school and also to return after delivering the baby.

C. Awareness raising campaigns

Additionally, the country mounted awareness-raising campaigns on GBV prevention and response in communities and the need to report cases of violence, as well as capacity-building workshops for law enforcement agencies. Different stakeholders implemented men's engagement programmes to challenge harmful norms and practices and promote positive masculinity.

Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) at workplace initiative aimed at designing new measures and strengthening existing ones to better prevent, detect, report and act against perpetrators. Where sectors were sensitized to the need to put in place clear policies against abuse at the workplace and to have clear reporting mechanisms, the initiative also informed some of the provisions addressing sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace in the current review of the Public Service Act 2005.

Moreover, the country has improved access to Justice for survivors of GBV who are disadvantaged women and girls through the decentralization of the High court to the Northern region and Law Clinics by Legal AID, community sensitization on services offered by Legal AID and the opening of Legal AID office in the northern region. Children's Courts were established in three more districts to ease the hearing of children's cases in a conducive

environment, as they have only been available in the capital city. There are functional Police Helpline and Child helpline where people, including children, can report cases of violence at any time.

Challenges

However, effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be in place to track and assess the impact of initiatives so as to enable concerned sectors to redirect focus or improve interventions. In addition, the government does not subvert women-led organizations addressing GBV in the country.

Macroeconomic Policies Supporting Gender Equality

1. Gender-Responsive Budgeting:

NSDP II (now extended) mandates all line ministries to mainstream gender in their programs and policies. Therefore, a few Ministries already initiated gender audits in Lesotho to implement more gender-responsive budgeting to ensure that fiscal policies and public expenditures are analyzed for their impact on women and men. Gender-responsive budgeting helps in allocating resources more equitably and addressing gender disparities to actualise the realization of SDG, notably SDG 5.

2. Financial Inclusion Initiatives:

The Department of Gender has started and is continuing financial inclusion training. These trainings are aimed at financial institutions such as micro-lending companies, insurance companies, and banks. The Department has also established an Economic Empowerment Forum. This forum's main objective is to consolidate activities to achieve the Gender and Development Policy requirement, which is to approach gender issues in a multi-sectoral manner.

3. Legal and Policy Reforms:

Implementing legal reforms to promote gender equality in the workforce, such as equal pay legislation, anti-discrimination laws and measures to prevent sexual harassment. There is an ongoing review of the Public Service Act to incorporate Sexual Harassment in the workplace. In 2023, Lesotho ratified International Labour Organisation Recommendation 190 on Sexual Exploitation and harassment. This ratification has led to several engagements through capacity building and training with workers' unions and the Public Service in an endeavour to mainstream GBV and Sexual Harassment.

The enactment of Harmonization of the Rights of Customary Widows with the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 2022 will strengthen land rights and tenure security for women, which is crucial for women's economic stability and empowerment.

16. What strategies has your country used to prevent gender-based violence?

Lesotho has prioritized initiatives to address GBV, recognizing the need for comprehensive interventions for Adolescent Girls and Young Women. As part of accelerating progress for women and girls through laws and policies or programmes, Lesotho enacted the Counter Domestic Violence Act, 2022, the Ministry of Education and Training is preparing to have a school health policy that is going to prioritize interventions on addressing Early and Unintended pregnancies (supported by UNESCO) ,. The Life Based Sexuality Education offers basic understanding of gender and types of violence that learners might experience in schools. Learner support hubs have been established to coordinate prevention efforts for school-related GBV. The country further improved the coordination of GBV prevention and response through concerted efforts by establishing the Anti-GBV Coordination Forum.

Lesotho has been granted over US\$1,300,000 in funds for HIV prevention targeting Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) and their partners. As part of the grant's allocation, GBV interventions, Violence exposure care that include legal services, access to justice, clinical management of GBV and psychosocial support for victims of GBV is part of the Global Fund grant (2020-2025), With support from the World Bank, the Ministry of Education and Training has also received funding to implement School-related gender-based violence, menstrual hygiene and management, early and unintended child marriage.

The country has also prioritized GBV Prevention services: Implementing prevention programs aimed at addressing the root causes of violence and harmful practices, such as gender inequality, poverty, and social norms that condone violence. These programs include community awareness campaigns, education initiatives, and training on conflict resolution and positive parenting. Providing survivors of violence with access to protection services, psychosocial, legal aid, and medical care.

Through support from development partners, Lesotho has enacted the Domestic Violence Act 2022, which provides legal protection for survivors of domestic violence and serves as part of prevention interventions. Increasing awareness and education, government and civil society organizations in Lesotho work to raise awareness about GBV and promote gender equality through educational campaigns, workshops, and training programs for community leadership structures and district councils.

Engaging men and boys: Lesotho recognize the importance of engaging men and boys in efforts to prevent gender-based violence. Programs and campaigns are implemented to challenge harmful gender norms and promote healthy relationships through male-led interventions. Some of the key CSO partners that support government to accelerate GBV interventions include women rights organisations (Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA); Federation of Women Lawyers-Lesotho (FIDA) and Gender Links Lesotho(GLL) Lesotho National Council of Women(LNCW), Migrants Workers Associations of Lesotho (MWA-Ls) and Young Christian Students in Lesotho(YCS).

Using a variety of implementation strategies such as networking, creating connections and synergies, lobbying, and establishing relationships with other Parliamentarians through National working groups, CSOs, and oversight structures promote GBV prevention activities. During the implementation period, the percentage of GBV Survivors reporting specific cases rose from 45% to 55%, especially Domestic Violence Cases. This activity was implemented through the SADC Parliamentary Forum, targeting parliamentarians, district councils and community structures.

The country has also made strides through interface with the Regional Parliamentary Model Laws Oversight Committee, which is the dedicated organ of the Forum for the domestication of Model Laws and related Forum policies and envisions to domesticate further the SADC Model Law on Child Marriage and GBV. Through the Social cluster portfolio committees, Members of Parliament successfully pushed for the adoption of GBV and Child Marriage model laws as instruments meant to address GBV and child marriages. Please provide source

17. Actions taken to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated GBV

Lesotho has taken significant steps to address Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) over the past five years through policy development, strategic frameworks, and collaborative initiatives with civil society and international partners. The Government of Lesotho has developed several key policies aimed at addressing digital challenges, including TFGBV. Notable among these are:

National Digital Policy 2024: A comprehensive policy framework aimed at promoting digital transformation, which includes provisions addressing the intersection of technology and gender-based violence.

National Digital Transformation Strategy 2021: This strategy lays the groundwork for harnessing digital tools and infrastructure to support Lesotho's economic and social development, including efforts to mitigate TFGBV.

Additionally, several Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and development partners have played a critical role in addressing TFGBV. Key initiatives include:

- **Internet Society Lesotho Chapter:** The Internet Society has been instrumental in driving discussions and promoting inclusive digital governance. The **Internet Governance Forum**, organized by the Lesotho Chapter, provided a platform for dialogue around digital governance, innovation, human rights, and sustainability. Stakeholders from various sectors, including government, industry, and civil society, contributed insights to build a more inclusive digital future.
- **School of Internet Governance (SIG):** This initiative, organized by the Internet Society Lesotho Chapter with support from the Lesotho Communications Authority (LCA) and the Ministry of Information, Communications, Science, and Technology (MICST), aimed to address challenges around internet access and inclusivity. The initiative brought together key stakeholders to engage in discussions on shaping Lesotho's digital landscape, focusing on inclusive governance and citizen-centered approaches. The SIG was a significant step toward ensuring that all citizens, particularly women and vulnerable groups, benefit from a safer and more inclusive internet.
- **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP):** The UNDP has provided high-level support to the government of Lesotho in enhancing coordination and promoting transformational governance. This collaboration has bolstered efforts to address TFGBV by supporting policy implementation and capacity-building initiatives.

The Lesotho Girls Coding Academy stands out as one of the most impactful initiatives aimed at empowering young women with digital skills. Organized by various stakeholders, including local and international educational institutions, government agencies, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the Academy seeks to bridge the gender gap in the technology sector. Through these partnerships, the Lesotho Girls Coding Academy has created a supportive environment where young women can pursue STEM careers, thereby contributing to gender equality and economic empowerment.

Despite the progress, Lesotho faces several challenges in its efforts to address TFGBV. The delay in the endorsement of the Cyber Security Bill is a significant obstacle to comprehensively addressing online violence, harassment, and abuse. The bill must be passed and effectively implemented urgently. Many stakeholders, especially in rural areas, have limited awareness of TFGBV and the available mechanisms to report and address such cases. There is a need for continued public education and capacity-building efforts to ensure that victims know where to seek help.

18. Actions taken to address the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and gender bias in the media, including social media?

The country has made significant strides in promoting gender equality by encouraging the creation of gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content. These efforts aim to break down

traditional gender stereotypes and provide balanced representations of all genders in media and communication channels. The key strategies employed in this area were the role of various stakeholders and the existing frameworks that support gender-sensitive media practices.

A core component of Lesotho's efforts to create gender-sensitive content is the provision of comprehensive training and awareness programs targeting media practitioners. These programs aim to equip journalists, presenters, editors, and content creators with the necessary knowledge and skills to promote gender equality and challenge harmful stereotypes in collaboration with NGOs and CSOs.

The Lesotho Consumer Complaints Guidelines 2022, issued by the Lesotho Communications Authority (LCA), provides a framework for consumers to lodge complaints about communication services, including concerns related to gender-sensitive content. While the guidelines do not specifically emphasize content that affects women or girls, they offer a neutral, fair, and accessible process for any consumer to lodge complaints about media content or services.

The guidelines stipulate that consumers have the right to fair treatment without discrimination based on race, colour, sex, religion, language, or social status. This framework ensures that any unfair treatment or discriminatory practices in media content can be challenged and addressed.

Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

19. Actions and measures taken to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making.

In the past five years, Lesotho has taken various measures to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making. These actions have focused on multiple areas:

A. Encouraging Equal Political Participation:

There have been numerous initiatives to encourage the equal political participation of all women, including young women and underrepresented groups such as indigenous women. This includes capacity building, skills development, sensitization, and mentorship programs designed to empower women and prepare them for leadership roles²⁸. For example, during the local government elections, through its programs, the Department of Gender held multi-sectoral campaigns advocating for the importance of inclusive participation with the target group of local government female candidates. Several workshop trainings were also held in a bid to raise awareness for traditional leaders and healers when implementing the Gender and Development Policy.

²⁸([ACE Electoral Knowledge Network](#)) (Africa, [unwomen](#))

B. To ensure political inclusion,

Lesotho is also a state party to many international instruments that have to implement and report on the Women's Peace and Security Agenda UN 1325. The country through the Department of Gender spearheaded the formation of the National WPS Steering Committee, which intends to involve women effectively as mediators and negotiators in conflict resolution. The task team elected also strives to effect change in electoral processes in a bid to

- Bring about political and institutional structures.
- Building capacity on localising WPS Agenda
- Utilise a multi-sectoral approach to bridge the gap brought by silo-mentality

C. Data Collection and Analysis:

Lesotho has focused on collecting and analyzing data on women's political participation. This includes monitoring the number of women in appointed and elected positions to understand the current landscape and identify areas for improvement ([UN Women](#)) ([UNDP](#)). With reference to the current data on various decision-making positions, the Department of Gender analyzes and scrutinizes data to disaggregate sex. On 17-21 June 2024, several gender equality issues were addressed at a workshop training with various parliamentary committees, namely; social and economic cluster committees to effect change on laws enacted by line ministries in order to eradicate political gender injustices. In conclusion, these measures are part of a broader strategy to create a more inclusive and equitable political environment, ensuring that women have the opportunity to contribute to decision-making processes at all levels.

Challenges

Measures put in place to effect change in the priorities mentioned above still face challenges ranging from;

- Under-representation of women in peace processes.
- The persistence of GBV in conflict zones.
- Need for more comprehensive and sustainable implementation of the WPS agenda.
- Need for funding dedicated to the WPS agenda.

20. Actions taken to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT)?

In the past five years (2020-2024), Lesotho has taken several actions to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media and through ICT:

Data Collection and Analysis: The NSDP II extension further emphasizes establishing a data hub with the Bureau of Statistics. It mainly indicates the importance of disaggregated data as a means to actualize Mainstreaming Gender across all sectors, and data plays a crucial role in designing indicators. Lesotho has been actively collecting and analyzing data on women's political participation, including their roles in appointed and elected positions. This data helps track progress and identify areas for improvement.

Gender and Development Policy (2018-2030) priority 3.2 Gender and Governance clearly outlines strategies and objectives which are applied to accentuate women's inclusive participation and representation. In collaboration with IEC Gender and Social Inclusion 2020-2030, the country through the Department of Gender has established a memorandum of understanding in place to effectively and intentionally increase women's numbers in decision-making positions.

Capacity Building and Skills Development: Lesotho has provided various opportunities for women to build their capacity and develop their skills. A programme called STEAM, supported by the UNDP, provides opportunities, such as mentorship and training, for youth and young women in the field of technology, Arts and Maths as an endeavour to promote their participation in this field. The EU is supporting the government of Lesotho through a programme called Strengthen Good Governance Through Reforms; the aim, among others, is to empower women with the necessary skills to participate effectively in public life and decision-making processes.

Promotion of Safe and Inclusive ICT Environments: Initiatives such as Girls in ICT Day, organized by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), have been instrumental in promoting the active participation of girls and young women in ICT and STEM fields. This initiative encourages girls to pursue careers in technology and provides them with the skills needed to thrive in the digital economy²⁹.

Encouraging Political Participation of Underrepresented Groups: Lesotho has implemented programs aimed at encouraging the political participation of all women, including young women and underrepresented groups. These programs focus on capacity building, skills development, sensitization, and mentorship, helping to ensure that women from diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to participate in political and public life.³⁰

The NUL Innovation Hub has provided opportunities for capacity building and skills development, particularly for women. While the hub primarily focuses on innovation and entrepreneurship, it also supports initiatives aimed at empowering women in politics. The

²⁹ (ITU) (ITU)

³⁰(ITU) (fma)

empowerment programs include training in political campaigning and leadership for women candidates and elected officials.³¹

PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

21. Actions taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda.

The country through the Department of Gender spearheaded the formation of the National Women Peace and Security Steering Committee, which intends to involve women as mediators and negotiators in conflict resolution. The task team elected strives to effect change in electoral processes in a bid to build capacity on localizing the WPS Agenda through the following actions;

| PILLAR 1: PARTICIPATION | | | |
|---|---|-------------------|--|
| OBJECTIVES | INITIATIVES/ACTIVITIES | TIME FRAME | KEY ACTORS |
| To increase the level of participation for Basotho women in politics, decision-making, and leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Information dissemination through media houses, newspapers, public gatherings, ● Training programs –Schools, churches, factories, public and private platforms ● Mentorship programs ● Develop policies that advocate/promote women's empowerment ● Advocate for women mediators, | Three years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community action teams Chiefs and crime prevention committees Relevant government ministries Civil society organisations Faith-based organisations Private sector Development partners |
| To impart knowledge to the nation about the importance of peace and security | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training programs –Schools, churches, factories, public and private platforms ● Civic education ● Develop a peace and security curricula ● collaborate with educational institutions to integrate gender-sensitive curricula and teaching methods | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ministry of Education and Training and other relevant government ministries ● Educational institutions ● Civil society |

³¹ ([World Bank](#)) ([USAID](#))

| | | | |
|--|--|-------------|---|
| To increase the number of women deployed in peacekeeping missions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pre-deployment desk | | |
| PILLAR 2: PROTECTION | | | |
| To increase the number of women deployed in peacekeeping missions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Capacity building on prevention of GBV and other forms of violence ● Counselling ● Pre-deployment training ● Develop recruitment and retention policies for deployment ● Deploy skilled advisors for women, youth and children with special needs | Three years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Security agencies ● Relevant Government ministries ● Relevant development partners ● NGO's |
| To increase detection and investigation of violence against children and women | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reporting cases ● Safe houses/ kinship for the abused ● Apprehend and prosecute perpetrators ● Compile GBV data and other forms of violence (management of data) | | |
| PILLAR 3: PREVENTION | | | |
| To create a culture of peace | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct peace education training programs across the board ● Increase the number of certified women peace educators ● Introduce the concept of peace rooms ● Training on conflict prevention, management and reconciliation ● Create early warning systems | Three years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MOD, MTSAC, and other relevant ministries (Juvenile centre) ● Faith-Based Organisations ● Traditional leaders and healers ● CSOs |
| To enact peace law | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocacy campaigns ● Awareness and sensitisation of the nation about intended peace law | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ministry of Law and other relevant ministries ● Civil society ● Development partners |

| PILLER 4: RELIEF AND RECOVERY | | | | |
|---|---|-----------|--|--|
| To enhance systems for mitigating risks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create early warning systems ● Create Internally Displaced Persons camps ● Evacuation to safer locations ● Expand emergency fund for reconstruction and humanitarian aid ● Develop post-conflict and disaster reconstruction strategy | Two years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● DMA ● Red Cross ● Development partners ● Meteorology ● MoH and relevant ministries | |

Environmental Conservation, protection and rehabilitation

22: Actions taken to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation and land degradation.

How has Lesotho promoted the education of women and girls in science, engineering, technology and other disciplines relating to the natural environment

Lesotho has undertaken various initiatives to promote the education of women and girls in science, engineering, technology, and other disciplines related to the natural environment. These efforts are aimed at bridging the gender gap in STEM fields and encouraging more women and girls to pursue careers in these areas. The Lesotho Education (Amendment) Act of 2021 inserts the word “Basic” before the “Education Act,” emphasizing the importance of foundational education. The revised Act aims to enhance provisions related to education, addressing issues such as curriculum, teacher training, and infrastructure. Like the Principal Act, the amendment continues to emphasize holistic development—physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, and socially—for learners. The Extended National Strategic Development Plan 2023 – 2027 includes goals and strategies to improve education quality and access, with a focus on increasing female participation in STEM fields. This needs to be rephrased.

SECTION FOUR: NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PROCESSES

23. Lesotho’s national strategy or action plan for gender equality, the period it covers, its priority, funding and alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the targets under SDG 5.

The Lesotho Gender and Development Policy Implementation Plan 2019-2023 is a critical framework designed to facilitate the implementation of the Lesotho Gender and Development

Policy 2018-2030,³² which promotes gender equality and equity across all sectors of Lesotho's society. The overarching goal of the Policy and, thus, the implementation plan is to provide comprehensive national guidelines for integrating gender considerations into social, economic, and political development strategies.

The policy draws inspiration and guidance from global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Locally, it harmonises with the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP II).

A core priority of the GAD Policy is to create an enabling environment that promotes gender equality. This involves a multi-faceted approach that includes legislative reforms, institutional capacity building, targeted interventions for vulnerable groups, and broad-based awareness campaigns. Recognizing the interconnected nature of gender disparities, the policy identifies twelve priority areas for action. These areas encompass a wide spectrum of issues, including constitutional and legal rights, governance, education, economic empowerment, climate change, and health. Each priority area is supported by clear objectives, outputs, and indicators, ensuring a systematic and measurable approach to implementation.

The GAD Policy's alignment with the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, is evident throughout its framework. The policy objectives and indicators are deliberately crafted to resonate with SDG 5 targets. For instance, the policy prioritizes ending discrimination against women and girls, eliminating gender-based violence, ensuring women's full participation in leadership and decision-making, and promoting women's economic empowerment. These priorities directly correspond with SDG 5 and its targets a.

Successful GAD Policy implementation requires robust funding and resource mobilization strategies. The plan acknowledges potential funding risks, including low budget allocation and limited external financial support. To mitigate these risks, the policy emphasizes the importance of developing a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy. This involves consolidating information on ongoing gender-related projects and programs to optimize resource allocation and avoid duplication. Additionally, the policy advocates for gender-responsive budgeting across all Government Ministries and programs. This approach ensures that gender considerations are integrated into budgetary decisions, leading to more equitable and effective resource allocation. Towards this, with the support of development partners, the Ministry of Gender has been advocating for gender budgeting with relevant Ministries, particularly the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning. It will, in due course, be supported to capacitate the Ministries to implement gender budgeting strategies.

³²([Link](#))

24. Formal mechanisms exist for different stakeholders to participate in implementing and monitoring the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Lesotho has established formal mechanisms for various stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These mechanisms involve multi-stakeholder consultations and partnerships, which include civil society organizations, women's rights organizations, academia, think tanks, faith-based organizations, parliamentary committees, the private sector, and the United Nations system. For example, the Department of Gender, with the support of Development Partners, established a **Gender Based Violence Forum** in 2019 as a means to use a coordinated approach in addressing issues of empowerment for women and girls; it could be in the political sphere, economic and social sphere.

One key platform for stakeholder engagement is the National Strategic Development Plan II (NSDP II) as extended, which aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This plan is designed to facilitate holistic and sustainable development strategies, including raising national awareness and ownership of the SDGs.³³

Additionally, Lesotho has conducted consultations with diverse groups to gather public opinions on how to accelerate SDG implementation. These consultations bring together stakeholders from different sectors to validate data, understand priority SDG targets, and identify high-impact initiatives that can lead to tangible changes).³⁴ Overall, these participatory mechanisms ensure that a wide range of voices are heard in the development and monitoring processes, contributing to more inclusive and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the 2030 Agenda.

25. Contribution of Stakeholders to the preparation of the present national report.

The Ministry of Gender, through the GBV Coordination forum, works with stakeholders in the implementation and monitoring of international commitments. As part of the write-up of the Beijing +30 Report, the stakeholders involved were approached and presented with a questionnaire survey from the BPfA, requesting their submission of pertinent reports and as much information as possible on interventions in support of the BPfA +30 Report. Various organizations, including the Child and Gender Protection Unit in the Lesotho Mounted Police, Women and Law Lesotho, Bureau of Statistics, and the Ministry of Justice participated in writing of the report.

³³[The United Nations in Lesotho](#)) ([The United Nations in Lesotho](#)).

³⁴[The United Nations in Lesotho](#)

With assistance from UNFPA, the Ministry of Gender hosted a multi-sector meeting to compile a comprehensive report based on the information provided by the contacted stakeholders. Through consistent interaction and gender mainstreaming efforts, as outlined in the Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030, the government has succeeded in coordinating stakeholders, thereby creating a conducive environment for the Government of Lesotho to write a report.

SECTION FIVE: DATA AND STATISTICS

26. Lesotho has made progress over the past five years on gender statistics nationally.

Lesotho has a National Strategic Development Plan II extended from 2024 to 2027/28, which is a strategic document that gives direction to the country's development. Thus, this strategic development plan has a specific section on monitoring and evaluating all strategic development activities. The monitoring and evaluation section is mandated to monitor and evaluate all the activities through the newly developed Monitoring and Evaluation Policy ??? and its guidelines of 2024. These guidelines are meant to harmonize monitoring and evaluation activities in the country, including cross-cutting issues such as gender, environment, etc.

In addition to the extended National Strategic Plan and Policy, there is a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics II 22/23 to 2027/28, which is a driving pillar of the development of statistics in the country. The development strategy has a specific section on the generation of gender statistics, which is led by the population division (Gender and Health Unit) in the Bureau of Statistics. All Government Ministries were involved in the development of the NSDS II and budgeted for those gender statistics generation activities in the respective line Ministries. This activity gave birth to the partnership with UN Women to assess the administrative data collection system of LMPS – crime statistics, specifically on issues of GBV (2024).

The assessment report was then used to inform the already developed GBV information management system funded by Global Fund. The results and collaboration also led to the piloting of the femicide Statistical framework in Lesotho. The need for gender statistics has been one of the priorities the country has shown by putting interest in mainstreaming gender and gender statistics in all national development frameworks; the Department of Gender, with the assistance of a global fund in 2020, to do a study name Economic Cost of Violence against women and girls in Lesotho as one of the ways of showing the need of more gender-sensitive interventions. The study also brought more funds for training in gender statistics in the core ministries like finance and development planning, public services, the auditor general office, etc., with the inclusion of topics like sensitive gender planning and budgeting. Mainstreaming of Gender and gender statistics also led to the amendment of the Public Service Act 2005 to entail issues of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Further, reprocessing of data from surveys and censuses has been a continuous activity that the Bureau of Statistics does for every survey and census data, from planning, analysis and dissemination. Recently, the Lesotho Demographic Survey 2021 (Intercensal survey) further produced a thematic report named the 2023 Gender Statistics Report.

27. Priorities for strengthening national gender statistics in Lesotho.

The Bureau of Statistics (BOS) is dedicated to enhancing gender statistics within the framework of the NSDS II for the period 2022/23 – 2026/27. The NSDS II is built upon five strategic goals that are crucial for transforming Lesotho’s statistical landscape and ensuring that gender statistics are at the forefront of national development efforts. The BOS's efforts are focused on the following key priorities:

A. Citizen-Generated Data (CGD)

The BOS, in collaboration with PARIS21, is leading work on citizen-generated data to close existing data gaps in the country. This initiative aims to improve data coverage and respond to national, regional, and international commitments related to data in general and gender equality. Citizen-generated data help fill voids in official statistics and provide more inclusive and accurate gender data.

B. Strengthening and standardization of Administrative Data Systems

The BOS aims to fortify the National Statistical System (NSS) by embedding statisticians in the planning units of all line ministries. This initiative seeks to improve the generation and utilization of statistical data within these ministries, thereby enhancing the quality and availability of gender-disaggregated data. Efforts are underway to assess and standardize administrative data collection tools across all line ministries to ensure that data is considered official and reliable. This process, which began with a pilot project involving the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) with support from UN Women, is essential for establishing a robust administrative data system. However, broader implementation is constrained by current funding limitations. Collaborative efforts with stakeholders to eliminate data silos and promote a holistic approach to gender statistics are put in place through the indicator mapping of MDAs to make sure they may share data accordingly using MOUs proper channels.

C. GBV Case Management Systems

Working with the Global Fund, the BOS is building a comprehensive GBV case management system. This project follows an assessment of administrative records conducted with the support of UN Women. The goal is to create a robust system for managing and monitoring cases of

gender-based violence, which will improve data collection and support effective responses to GBV.

D. Dissemination of Gender Statistics

The BOS is committed to enhancing the dissemination of gender statistics through a dedicated Communication, advocacy and dissemination Strategy. This involves tailoring the messaging of reports to specific audiences and conducting dissemination workshops that utilize user-friendly visualizations and briefs. These efforts aim to make gender statistics more accessible and actionable for policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders. By focusing on these priorities, the BOS, as the NSS coordinator, aims to significantly improve the quality, accessibility, and utility of gender statistics in Lesotho, thereby supporting informed decision-making and advancing gender equality and empowerment of women.

28. Which data disaggregation is routinely provided by major surveys in your country?

The Lesotho National Strategy for the Development of Statistics II (NSDS II), covering the period 2022/23–2026/27, emphasizes the importance of data disaggregation, particularly by sex, as a critical tool for addressing gender disparities. The strategy has mainstreamed gender into its implementation by involving twelve ministries in the planning and financing of activities over the next five years. This comprehensive approach ensures that gender-specific issues are systematically identified and addressed in policy and program development, enabling a more inclusive and equitable development process.

Major surveys conducted under the NSDS II by the BOS and in support of other MDAs routinely include sex disaggregation alongside other essential variables such as age, geographic location, education level, employment status, household composition, etc. These disaggregations are fundamental for identifying and addressing disparities, ensuring that policies and programs are effectively tailored to the diverse needs of the population. They also play a crucial role in monitoring and evaluating gender equality and women’s empowerment initiatives, providing valuable insights into various demographic, economic, and social indicators.

A. Major Surveys in Lesotho

Major Surveys in Lesotho (2020–2021) The Lesotho Demographic Survey (Intercensal) 2021 provides comprehensive data on demographic, social, economic, and gender-based violence (GBV) asked of both men and women aged 12 to 50 years, fertility, mortality, economic activities, education, and disability indicators for the entire population. It updates the indicators covered in the 2016 Population and Housing Census, ensuring that data remains relevant to current policy needs.

1. **The Lesotho Routine Immunization Cluster Survey (RICS) 2023** produces critical data on demographic and immunization indicators, contributing to the understanding of public health trends and the effectiveness of immunization programs across different population groups.
2. **The Lesotho Population-based HIV Impact Assessment (LePHIA) 2020** offers detailed data on health and demographic indicators, including those related to HIV/AIDS programs, such as testing, diagnoses, viral load measurements, tuberculosis, violence, and GBV. The data is essential for informing public health strategies and interventions, particularly in addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Lesotho.
3. **The Lesotho Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2023/24** provides extensive data on population health, including fertility, maternal and child health, nutrition, and family planning. The survey's disaggregation by sex, age, geographic location, and socioeconomic status allows for a nuanced analysis of health outcomes and informs targeted interventions to improve health services.
4. **The Lesotho Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2022** offers detailed insights into employment patterns, including labour force participation, unemployment rates, and types of employment (formal vs. informal). Disaggregating data by sex, age, and education level is essential for understanding labour market dynamics and informing policies aimed at reducing unemployment and promoting decent work.
5. **The Agricultural Census 2019/2020** Conducted by the Bureau of Statistics (BOS) and guided by the Strategy Plan for Agriculture and Rural Statistics, provides detailed data on agricultural practices, land ownership, livestock, and rural development. It includes disaggregation by farm size, types of crops grown, and household agricultural activities, contributing to the broader understanding of agricultural trends and rural livelihoods in Lesotho.

B. Categories of Data Disaggregation

Demographic disaggregation:

- **Age:** Data is segmented into various age groups (e.g., children, youth, adults, elderly) to analyze trends specific to different stages of life.
- Sex:** Disaggregating data by sex is crucial for identifying the numbers of males and females with opportunities. In Lesotho this will also align to patriarchy, depicting gender disparities existing between men and women which are a basis for gender inequalities.
- Geographic Location:** This includes distinctions between settlement types (urban vs. rural), ecological zones (mountains, lowlands, foothills, and the Senqu River valley), and administrative boundaries at the district level, allowing for a geographical analysis of development indicators. Overall geographic location shapes the social and economic structures that influence gender roles and opportunities leading to varying levels of gender equality.

C. Socioeconomic Disaggregation:

Income Levels: Data is categorized by income brackets to understand economic disparities and inform poverty reduction strategies.

Education Levels: Disaggregation by education level helps assess the impact of educational attainment on various outcomes, such as employment, health, and social mobility.

Employment Status: Data on employment, unemployment, and types of employment (formal vs. informal) is provided, offering insights into labour market trends and challenges.

Household Composition: Information on household size and structure, including the number of children and dependents, is crucial for understanding social and economic dynamics within households.

D. Health and Social Disaggregations:

Health Status: Data is often disaggregated by health indicators such as disease prevalence, access to healthcare, and nutritional status, providing insights into public health needs and challenges. Due to patriarchy women in Lesotho suffer gender based violence and domestic violence that compromises their health status.

Disability Status: Information on individuals with disabilities is essential for assessing their specific needs and ensuring their inclusion in development initiatives. This renders women and girls with disabilities defenseless even when confronted by perpetrators of rape and gender based violence as patriarchy has exacerbated their vulnerability. Even in the courts of law women with disabilities are not afforded justice on sexual violence cases as the courts do not accommodate them.

Marital Status: This disaggregation helps understand social dynamics related to marriage, divorce, and widowhood, informing policies on family and social welfare. The Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 2006 has equalized the marital power of spouses. However a lot still needs to be done to change patriarchal norms and values for families to benefit from this law, and this will curb the escalating divorce cases. According to the Commonwealth Secretariat (2020) (insert link) women and children bear the brunt as they are mainly dependent on their spouses who are advantaged economically, politically and socially due to patriarchy. The government of Lesotho has further enacted The Harmonization of the Rights of Customary Widows with Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 2022 to address issues of property grabbing that widows suffered upon the loss of their loved ones.

E. Specialized Disaggregation:

HIV/AIDS Status: Given the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho, data is often disaggregated by HIV status to inform targeted interventions and monitor the

effectiveness of HIV/AIDS programs. In Lesotho most women and girls are infected with HIV as a result of promiscuity and multiple partnerships preference that are based on a patriarchal culture and tradition.

Access to Services: This section provides information on access to various services such as education, healthcare, water, and sanitation, highlighting disparities in service delivery and access. Even though, women and men in the rural areas have to travel long distances to acquire these services, this puts the lives of women and girls at risk and danger of being raped and harassed by men and boys due to patriarchy.

Agricultural Activity: Data on agricultural practices, land ownership, and livestock is included, particularly in rural surveys, to inform policies on agriculture and rural development. Gender blind agricultural activities fail to recognize the distinct needs, contributions and challenges of women and men in agriculture resulting in inefficiencies missed opportunities for growth and the perpetuation of gender inequalities.

Housing Conditions: Details on housing types, ownership, and access to utilities are provided, offering insights into living conditions and informing housing policies. Gender blind housing conditions perpetuate gender inequalities by failing to recognize and address the distinct needs and vulnerabilities of women.

29. Gender-specific indicators prioritized by Lesotho to monitor progress on the SDGs.

Lesotho has defined a national set of indicators for monitoring progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The country has undertaken several initiatives to align its national development plans and statistical systems with the global SDG framework. Here are some key steps Lesotho has taken in this regard:

The National Strategic Development Plan Extended 2024- 2028 (NSDP II) is closely aligned with the SDGs and includes specific targets and indicators for monitoring progress across various sectors. This plan serves as a roadmap for integrating the SDGs into national policies and programs.

The country has developed a national monitoring and evaluation framework outlining the country's priorities and strategies for achieving the SDGs. This framework includes a set of indicators tailored to the national context, reflecting the specific development challenges and opportunities.

The NSDP II extended 2024- 2028 identified 152 SDG indicators that the country must report on. However, data from 101 indicators is available, representing 66 percent. Of the 152 SDG selected indicators, 44 (29%) are gender-related, of which 37 (84%) of the applicable ones are available. Of the 44 applicable Gender-related indicators, the 37 with data available reflect a large concentration in Goals (1,3,4,5,8, 17); the least concentration is noted for Goal 16. Gender-

related indicators mostly pertain to the People's goals; the concentration is on Health, Education and Gender Equality.

Data collection and compilation on gender-specific indicators began gaining significant traction in the early 2000s, with several key milestones marking the development and enhancement of gender statistics over the years. The establishment of the Lesotho Bureau of Statistics (BOS) after the enactment of the Statistics Act 2001 laid the groundwork for systematic data collection, including gender-specific data. Initial efforts focused on integrating gender perspectives into national surveys and censuses. After the assessment of the first NSDS, it was established that gender mainstreaming should be included in the next NSDS and other ministries, departments, and agencies' strategies. The adoption of the first National Gender and Development Policy emphasized the importance of gender-disaggregated data in informing policy and decision-making processes. This policy highlighted the need for comprehensive data to address gender inequalities.

The country's Voluntary National Review (VNR) is a crucial document that outlines the country's progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The VNR provides an opportunity for Lesotho to share its achievements, challenges, and best practices in the journey towards sustainable development. Gender equality is a critical focus area in Lesotho's VNR. The country highlights progress in areas like education, health and political participation. However, challenges remain, particularly in addressing GBV and economic empowerment for women.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

As the report comprehensively demonstrates, Lesotho has taken significant steps towards addressing gender inequality and promoting women's empowerment, yet challenges persist. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, coupled with the climate-change-induced drought over the years, have disproportionately affected women and girls negatively, exacerbating existing inequalities and hindering progress towards gender equality.

Through various initiatives, including legal, policy, and programs, the country has made efforts to ensure women and girls are positioned to realise their full potential and are protected from harmful practices. Using the extended NSDP II 2024-2028, Lesotho plans to accelerate progress in key areas, including equality and non-discrimination, poverty eradication, food security, agricultural productivity, eliminating violence against women and girls, access to affordable quality healthcare, and political participation. Specific actions to be taken include legislative reforms, public awareness campaigns, mentorship programs, and targeted interventions.