

Chapter 71

Reflections From Inside the World of Empowered Women: The Case of Thota-ea-Moli, Ha Luka Multi-Purpose Cooperative, in Lesotho

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is one of the most critical problems facing developing regions. In Lesotho, poverty is more deeply entrenched in the rural areas and closely linked to severe degradation of land on which rural livelihoods depend. Landlessness affects Basotho women more adversely than men who have better employment opportunities as mine labour migrants in South Africa. This chapter therefore, presents the case of Thota-ea-Moli Multi-Purpose Cooperative as a response to further threats of poverty to a community that lost its land to a government project. The chapter maps the historical trends of Basotho women's empowerment and their pivotal role in development and poverty alleviation through cooperatives. Having outlined the project design and implementation processes, its achievements and challenges are highlighted and their impact on Thota-ea-Moli women's economic and socio cultural empowerment. Future trends that hold promise for women's further empowerment are also presented.

BACKGROUND HISTORY OF THE ORGANISATION: THOTA-EA- MOLI (HA LUKA MULTI-PURPOSE COOPERATIVE)

Presented in this chapter is a case of women of Thota ea- Moli in Lesotho. The place, Thota-ea-Moli is a former seat of the traditional Basotho parliament) and now hosts, Moshoeshe I International Airport which is about 25 kilometres away from the Capital town of Lesotho, Maseru. In geographic historical terms, Thota-ea-Moli is no ordinary village in Lesotho as its background as provided below shows. Thota-ea-Moli is a peri-urban community in Lesotho which is of historic significance for Lesotho. Thota-ea-Moli, or Ha Luka, meaning the place of chief Luka, as communities are commonly called in

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Lesotho, is a small community of about three hundred (300) households, the average household size being about six people. It is about twenty (20) kilometres away from Maseru, the Capital city of Lesotho.

Thota-ea-Moli is closely associated with the growth of a popular consciousness and national identity for Basotho which was a response to the threat of incorporation into South Africa during the first sixty years of the twentieth century. The primary source of identity and tradition for Basotho is their founder Moshoeshoe 1 during the (1800s, (1786-1870 to be exact. This identity emerged as the basis of resistance to incorporation throughout the period of which Moshoeshoe offered protection (around the mid (900s to people fleeing the ravages of the famous Lifiqane wars. He assimilated these refugees into one group and sought for them protection from Britain against the Boers and Basotholand as their territory became known, was declared a protectorate of Britain in 1868. Thota-ea-Moli, the place, is one of the two perhaps most cited symbols of National consciousness. The other symbol aside from Moshoeshoe, himself, is Thaba-Bosiu, the mountain fortress of Moshoeshoe the founder of Basotho during the Boer and Zulu wars.

Lesotho is a small Kingdom in Southern Africa with a land area of around 30,355 square kilometres and an estimated population of 2.2 million. The country is one of the few left kingdoms of Africa which is geographically wholly surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. Lesotho is, often aptly described as the land of many contrasts, vivid history with scenic natural attractions which are complemented by its rich culture, and fascinating heritage. Lesotho is the only country in the world where the entire territory is more than 1,000 metres above sea level and much of the population lives in rugged, mountainous terrain, accessible only on foot or horseback. Lesotho's total land area is 30,355 square kilometres and only a little over 10% of that land is arable. In 1868, Lesotho became a British colony through annexation in 1868. With regard to power for Basotho, Eldredge (1985) describes the self-conscious initiatives of Basotho through resistance to British and Boer invasions as they struggled to determine their own affairs at all levels of society (p.24). Eldredge argues that, contrary to the assumptions about hegemonic colonial rule disabling and disempowering the colonised people for Basotho there are transcripts even from oral traditions which reflect Basotho's history of rejection not only of political colonisation but also colonisation of their consciousness, culture and their daily lives (p.27). Eldredge further notes that women in Lesotho were affected in many and varied ways by the socio-economic and political changes that came with colonial rule.

The terrain of Lesotho is usually just described as picturesque as the above snapshot of exactly what that means shows. It is mostly highland with plateaus, hills, and mountains. Hence the fond reference to Lesotho, as the Mountain Kingdom, the Kingdom in the Sky or the Roof of Africa. The highest point in Lesotho is Thabana Ntlenyana (3,482 m). This is also the highest peak in southern Africa while the lowest point is 1,400 m at the junction of the Orange and Makhaleng Rivers. It is this terrain and the described elevations which also have a bearing on the climate of Lesotho which is known to be temperate with cool to cold, dry winters with frequent spells of snow and; hot, wet summers. Lesotho winters are generally long (April-September, dry and cold with, warm to moderate temperatures during the day, and sudden cold temperatures just after sunset. The lowlands often receive cold rainfalls while heavy snowfalls are usually experienced in the highlands.

During winter the snow covered Traditional huts are a common sight in the mountain areas of Lesotho. These climatic conditions have direct implications for agriculture, the major employment sector in Lesotho, (which accounts for about 10 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Lesotho, Bureau of Statistics 2007b). Many Basotho (Lesotho's majority ethnic group) pursue rain fed agriculture and are thus highly vulnerable to climate change and variability (Turner et al. 2001; LVAC 2008 cited

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