

Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sport and Recreation

Lesotho Paper

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## 1. Introduction

The importance of youth in the development process of any country cannot be overemphasised. This has been reiterated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) which points to the need to develop decent and productive work for youth. The African continent has also developed the African Youth Charter adopted by heads of states and governments in The Gambia in July 2006. The charter provides a framework for youth development in Africa. In Lesotho youth development has been identified as one of the critical cross cutting issues in our Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). In addition, our National Youth Policy provides coherence to national development efforts focusing on the youth sector.

This paper is a result of national youth consultations coordinated by the Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sport and Recreation (MGYSR) in preparation for the ADF-V theme 'Youth and Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'. The paper is divided into the following four sections: the introduction; youth and economic development; youth and social development; and youth and political development. Key youth groups which participated during the consultations were drawn from religious, political and social orientations. The consultations were informed by the national policies or programmes that guide the development activities and initiatives in the country such as the Lesotho Vision 2020, Lesotho Poverty Reduction, and Strategy and Lesotho National Youth Policy.

### The Lesotho Vision 2020

Key components of the vision are:

- A stable democracy
- A united nation
- A nation at peace with itself and its neighbours
- A healthy and well developed human resource base
- A strong economy and a prosperous nation
- A well managed environment
- A well established technology.

### Lesotho Poverty Reduction Strategy

The PRS identifies eight national priorities and cross cutting issues as follows:

- Employment creation and income generation
- Agriculture and food security
- Infrastructure development-roads, water, electricity and communication
- Deepening democracy, good governance, safety and security
- Improving quality of and access to essential health care and social welfare services
- Increasing human resource capacity
- Managing and conserving the environment
- Improving public service delivery

## Lesotho Youth Policy

According to the Lesotho National Youth Policy, *“youth should be perceived and serve as an instrument of social development. The policy also states that they should be good citizens, moulded by dynamic cultural and religious values, so that they can take their rightful place in the society and fully participate in economic and socio-economic development of peaceful Lesotho through individual and coherent group self motivation.”*

The policy identifies the following objectives and strategies:

- Stimulating environmental awareness amongst the youth and their responsibilities towards sustainable environment and reduction of poverty,
- Safeguarding young people's means of subsistence and the right to work,
- Ensuring that the type of education and training provided in the country is comparable with and responsive to the needs of the youth and the nation,
- Protecting the health and welfare of the youth and promoting their healthy lifestyles,
- Providing opportunities to advance youth talents in artistic creativity and in sports performance,
- Protecting the fundamental human rights of the youth,
- Enhancing the integration of the youth into the socio political development of the country,
- Ensuring continuity of positive cultural and traditional values of Basotho amongst the youth for national identity and
- Facilitation of national, regional and international networking to exchange information and experience with other young people and youth organisations.

## 2. Youth and Economic Development

### Education and Life Skills

Quality of and access to education have been identified as some of the priority areas in the PRS. There are a number of key challenges that face the youth in the field of education and life skills. Ensuring quality, free and compulsory education at primary and secondary levels is one of them. Non-formal education should also be strengthened in order to ensure sustainable development. Other challenges include student-teacher ratio, provision of education facilities and equipment.

The Lesotho Government continues to implement free primary education. Statistics indicate that enrolment in the primary was around 85 per cent in 2002. The Ministry of Education also provides books to students at the secondary level. The government also supports vocational training centres through the Ministry of Education. It also sponsors students enrolled in these centres through the National Manpower Development Secretariat. The overall aim is indeed to equip the youth with life skills required for better livelihood and national development.

## **Employment and Migration**

Unemployment is one of the key challenges facing youth in Lesotho. Employment creation and income generation were identified as priority areas in the PRS. According to the Labour Force Survey of 1999 unemployment rate in Lesotho was around 31 per cent. Of particular interest is the age group 20-24 which has unemployment rate of 35.8 per cent. This is more pronounced in females. The main reason behind the high unemployment in Lesotho is the slow economic growth. There are other challenges to grapple with such as insufficient in-service programmes in the country.

Lesotho also experiences both internal and external migration. The poverty incidence in the rural areas has pushed sizeable numbers of youth from the rural areas to the urban areas in search of job opportunities. This has been the strongest pull factor in recent times and can be attributed to an introduction of Africa Growth and Opportunity Act. Historically, Basotho men have been employed in the neighbouring South African mines. But factors such as falling prices of gold and other precious metals and the performance of the South African currency against major international currencies have led to continued retrenchment of our young men.

## **Entrepreneurship**

Sustainable economic growth requires a strong private sector. The PRS identifies the development of small, medium and micro enterprises as a vehicle towards economic development and poverty reduction. However, there are a number of constraints to youth entrepreneurship in the country. These include employment oriented mind set. In addition, foreign direct investment has not resulted in sufficient skills transfer to trigger local entrepreneurship.

As an attempt to unlock entrepreneurship potential among the youth, the Government in collaboration with Commonwealth, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Labour Organisation (ILO) are establishing a revolving fund to assist youth to develop their income generating projects. This is expected to be in line with Lesotho decent work country programme. Other initiatives are led by the Ministry of Industry, Trade, Cooperatives and Marketing, financial institutions and other youth groups. The initiatives include formulation of small, medium, and micro enterprises policy.

## **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

There is a policy frame work in place that seeks to give a direction to our country's use of ICT in a broader perspective for overall economic growth. However, the legislative frame work which should amongst others legitimize, administer and govern the use of ICT in government, business and customer transactions will soon be finalized.

But worth-noting is that the Government with other NGOs and UN bodies are engaged in providing computers to youth resource centres, primary, secondary, and other tertiary institutions. The aim is to increase the level of understanding among youth in ICT.

## **Health and HIV/AIDS**

Lesotho is also confronted with HIV and AIDS pandemic. The prevalence rate is estimated at 23% of the population. There is evidence that the youth are the mostly affected as the bulk of the infected is in the age group 15-49. Young women in the age group 15-29 constitute about 75 per cent of all reported cases. There are a number of reasons behind the infection rate in youth. These include poverty incidence which induces vulnerability in youth particularly young women. In addition traditional practices which view sex as a taboo among youth are still strong in our society.

The government is at present implementing the primary health care for the poor and statistics indicate some success. The government is also implementing the 'Know Your Status' campaign through Voluntary Counselling and Testing and, as planned, the campaign will cover all households in the country. A number of key stakeholders including government ministries, district administrators, UN agencies, NGOs, churches, medical doctors and traditional healers are collaboratively engaged against the pandemic. Their endeavours therefore hold better prospects for youth.

## **Environment and Sustainable Livelihoods**

The youth in Lesotho are subjected to forces of population growth. They have to contribute to provision of basic human needs and poverty alleviation through employment creation, equity and economic growth.

All these determine the country's priorities and policies, which in turn influence which resources are used and how they are used. The youth are therefore expected to play a significant role in the conservation, preservation or protection of their environment from which some of these resources are derived. As earlier stated, the Lesotho National Youth Policy also points to the need to stimulate environmental awareness among the youth and their responsibilities towards sustainable environment and poverty reduction. The policy further states that this could be achieved by participating in programmes designed to protect, to preserve and manage environment. Worth-remembering again is that management and conservation of the environment have been identified as some of the priorities by PRS.

## **3. Youth and Social Development**

### **Culture and intergenerational Relations**

Basotho is a nation whose foundation is deeply embedded in its strong cultural heritage and this heritage has sustained this nation for centuries. Major features of her culture include a strong background of (1) an extended family, (2) chieftainship, (3) culture and religion (4), peace and respect, and (5) common language.

It is however important to note that culture is not static but dynamic. One culture can also be negatively affected by other cultures and thus threaten both language and a moral fibre of one nation. This is the case in instances where some people lack proper selection criteria for modernisation. Lesotho and other countries do face this problem and this has significant implications for our youth.

Intergenerational relations in Lesotho are a subject that also requires our immediate attention and action. Exacerbated by poverty and changing behavioural norms and culture, a new phenomenon characterised by young men engaging in sexual relations with old women and young women doing the same with old men has emerged. This may destroy the very structures of our families. However some measures are being devised in order to address this.

### **Young People in Religious Settings**

Lesotho is predominantly a Christian nation with over 90% of Basotho belonging to different denominations. There are three main denominations, namely Roman Catholic Church, Lesotho Evangelical Church and Anglican Church of Lesotho, however there are other faith groupings which form part of a worshipping society in Lesotho such as Muslims, Hindus, and Bahaai.

Lesotho has a very strong church based youth work. The church in Lesotho understands that the development of a young person is central to the life of the church itself. It is against this background that young people in Lesotho have found the church to be a partner in youth development, more particularly in social and spiritual matters.

The Christian Council of Lesotho is a fellowship of Churches that confess Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour. These churches are guided by their strong conviction in the following: unity in diversity, promotion of religious tolerance, and dialogue with people of other faiths. Young people also have targeted activities in the programmatic areas of the Christian Council of Lesotho such as Peace Education and Conflict Management.

### **Girls and Young Women**

In our traditional set-up a girl child has been more advantaged than a boy child in terms of school going and literacy. Statistics reveal that more girls than boys enrol in primary and secondary schools, which gives advantage to the girl child. However, it is important to note that many girls drop out of school at a very tender age. This is due to a number of issues such as teenage pregnancy, earlier marriage and lack of financial support to continue their studies.

It is worth noting that the girl child today lives in an era of HIV and AIDS, which has taken the lives of many parents leaving young girls in many instances in charge of their households. This situation has seen many young girls working as domestic workers. These girls are also subjected to abuse and overexploitation by their masters. In addition a young girl is particularly in danger because she is not an inheritor of her family's property.

The issues just referred to are also exacerbated by the social up-bringing that causes young girls to humble themselves before their younger or older brothers, hence making girls to grow up knowing that they are but minors in the family and society. The girl child is also expected to get married and leave her family of origin.

The Lesotho Government has also embarked on the implementation of resolutions adopted by heads of states and governments which met at the World Summit on Children held in New York. These resolutions approve a set of promises made to children of the world in September 1990. In 2001 the Right Honourable the Prime Minister of Lesotho Mr. Pakalitha Mosisili officially launched the 'Say Yes Campaign' in observance of the Day of the African Child. This induced government ministries to support the rights of the child and all NGOs working for the welfare of all children. Married Persons Equality Bill, Sexual Offences Act of 2003, and Children Welfare Bill also hold good prospects for girls and young women.

### **Participation in Social Transformation through Sports, Music and Arts.**

Young people of Lesotho view social transformation as a necessary tool in the development of the society at large, it gives them skills which enable them to face life challenges and also allows young people to exercise their power to portray their potential. Music, sport and arts help young people to develop diversity management. It is also worth-noting that multi-purpose youth centres are being established throughout the country. Such centres will also have recreation facilities for youth.

## **YOUTH AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **DEFINITION AND CHARECTERISTIC OF YOUTH**

Youth as a concept has always maintained its relativity from state to state with regard to definition. The African states also differ, at least at the national level, in defining youth. Lesotho National Youth Policy defines youth as a person between 15 and 35 years of age. Similarly the African Youth Charter defines youth as a person between 13 and 35.

In the like manner the characterization of youth differs from country to country. In the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho, graduation from youthfulness is linked to several socio-economic and cultural trends such as acquisition of economic independence, attaining marital status, and undergoing initiation school.

What is the importance of defining and characterizing youth? All these can provide some guidelines on the persons to target as youth and creation of appropriate environment for their development. Such guidelines can also be used by international development agencies and governments in the allocation of resources to the youth.

## **AFRICAN CITIZENSHIP AND IDENTITY**

People and their states have identified themselves as Africans in terms of geographical location, geo-politics, history, economic status, cultural lineage, birth etc. African identity is not without inter or intra dispute. However, as young people of Lesotho we welcome transitional initiative from OAU to AU as a path toward a genuine African identity across the continent. We believe that African citizenship can be achieved through concerted efforts in first resolving the sporadic intra-conflicts of identity. The regional integrations can also be instrumental in achieving the above.

## **YOUTH IN DIASPORA**

Many a youth were born and some are living outside Africa. This is due to obvious and understood factors such as slavery, political and economic pressures. Lesotho subscribes to the notion that young African people have a right to live, seek employment and work anywhere in the world. All Africans all over the world, we maintain, should utilise all their knowledge and skills to develop Africa, our Mother land.

Lesotho recognizes the need to preserve cultural dignity of Africa among the youth in Diaspora. She therefore strongly recommends that youth organizations liaise and work together with African youth in Diaspora for Africa's cultural enrichment and preservation.

It is through this position that the enculturation process shall also be effective in the globalised nations other than African nations. This shall also promulgate the mobilization of other nations in view of applying solutions with an African brand and compatible to Africa.

It remains an absolute issue of importance to Lesotho that African youth in Diaspora be fully re-integrated into social and economic life in Africa. Lesotho therefore supports the group identity of African youth in Diaspora for the enrichment of all facets of the respective countries and Africa as a whole. Lesotho fully encourages engagement of the youth in Diaspora in development activities in their countries of origin.

The rights of the youth in Diaspora for Lesotho stick out to be an issue worthy of protection and promotion forged against obscenities of racial or regional discrimination which have unfolded in the statement that "All blood carrying an African stain is naturally peripheral.

It is on the above grounds that Lesotho firmly supports the integration of the African youth in Diaspora for the achievement of a single heart beat for all African youth.

## **CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE BUILDING**

It is a well known fact that Africa is one of the continents most ravaged by conflicts and civil wars. We also note with great sorrow that participants in some of these conflicts and wars are relatively young people who ultimately become victims.

The African Youth Charter illustrates that the role of youth in post-conflict reconstruction and peace building is embedded within the framework of the United Nations, particularly on the protection of human rights and gender equality. As young people of Lesotho we recommend establishment of demobilization and reintegration programmes including those of child soldiers; resettlement and reintegration of all refugees; and assistance to all traumatised and vulnerable persons. To develop this reconstruction initiative, the following objectives should be pursued:

- Rehabilitation of child soldiers
- Prioritization of access to education, a fundamental right, particularly in view of the overwhelming preponderance of the youth among combatants and the increase in the number of street children
- Legal provisions for justice for victims of human rights violations, particularly those who suffer sexual violence during the conflicts
- Remedies for and reparations to youth victims of conflict;
- Tolerance across political, social and cultural divides among the youth; and
- Gender focal point to ensure that gender equity and empowerment of the youth are achieved.
- Political schools for young people
- Involvement of youth in peace building initiatives

Youth concerns for post-conflict reconstruction and peace building are cross-cutting. It is therefore imperative that all aspects of peace building should be tied to our vision, hopes and aspirations of all African Youth as enshrined in the African Youth Charter.

## **YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC, RIGHTS BASED AND GENDER EQUAL DEVELOPMENT**

The African youth charter stipulates that every young person shall have a right to participate in all spheres of our society and in conformity with the charter. Lesotho believes that gender discrimination in any form and exclusion of youth in decision-making is unjust and undemocratic.

Although our country has attained a relatively stable democracy, the problem of youth participation in the democratic process has indeed become a matter of concern for the Government. This is so notwithstanding the fact that our constitution gives franchise to anyone who has attained the age of 18 years irrespective of gender.

Our youth have largely remained unorganized and this creating some difficulty in mainstreaming youth into the economic and political processes. Notwithstanding the affirmative actions introduced by Lesotho in increasing women participation in

decision-making structures, their participation is still low. The gender biased enculturation and socialization is largely attributed to this low participation.

We therefore recommend the following:

- Introduction of a quota system in youth representation in decision-making structures.
- Establishment of national youth coordinating structures (youth councils)
- Creating economic empowerment programmes for young people
- Mainstreaming youth concerns in the departmental/ministerial policies in government.
- Condemnation of adults' hegemony in youth structures and issues.