

THE ORIGINAL Khoisan hunter-gatherer communities in present-day Lesotho were displaced in the 16th century by Bantu-speaking farmers migrating south as part of the general dispersal of black Africans from the eastern parts of West Africa. The original Lesotho people spoke a unique seSotho dialect and called themselves the Basotho. They lived in reasonable harmony for nearly 250 years, but with the 19th century came a series of disruptions that was to change their lives forever.

To begin with, in the 1820s, unrest emanating from an epicentre of Zulu expansionism (in a socio-political process called the Difaqane) played havoc with the peace of the Basotho people living on both sides of the Caledon River (which now marks the border between Lesotho and South Africa's Free State province). Communities were annihilated or broken up and dispersed; and it was largely through the determination of Chief Moshoeshoe of the Meketeli clan that a defensive kingdom was established and maintained at Thaba Bosiu, high in the Lesotho mountains of the great Drakensberg escarpment that dominates the south-eastern seaboard of southern Africa. Even today, Lesotho is the only independent country in the world that lies entirely above 1 000 metres above sea level. Indeed, nearly two-thirds of its land area exceeds 3 000 metres in elevation.

From this mountain fortress, Moshoeshoe was able to weather the storms of the Difaqane, and in the late 1830s the land demands of the Voortrekkers who chose to settle in what is today the Eastern Free State. Finally, Moshoeshoe negotiated with the British for protection against the newly established Boer republic of the Orange Free State. In 1868, Lesotho became a British territory. After Moshoeshoe's death two years later, the mountainous enclave was annexed by the Cape Colony. However, insensitive administrative practices and above all an attempt to disarm the Basotho, led to open revolt. Lesotho was excised from the Cape in 1884 and made a British High Commission Territory, a status which persisted until full independence was achieved in 1966.

Lesotho's post independence history has not been without its problems. The country had been established as a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament consisting of a senate and an elected national assembly. Severe inter-party conflicts, elections marred by violence, accusations of electoral fraud, no fewer than six political assassinations, and several military coups d'état have characterised the first 40 years of the mountain kingdom's existence. For example, in 1998, in spite of internationally observed elections, opposition protests culminated in violence outside the royal palace in Maseru, and a period of unprecedented violence, looting, casualties, the destruction of property, and a mutiny by junior members of the armed forces led to the presence of a SADC task force to restore the authority of the democratically elected government. In 2002, on the other hand, Lesotho experienced its first peaceful election.

In spite of protracted political instability, the country has seen progress in the social and economic spheres. The basis of the economy for at least 50 percent of Lesotho's 2.4-million people remains agricultural, but is frequently subsidised by migrant labour remittances from South Africa's mining industry. Nevertheless, general educational levels are improving. A programme of free primary education is now in place; and an estimated 85 percent of the population over 15 years is literate.

The export economy has been boosted by annual revenue from South Africa for water and electricity supplied via the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. Lesotho has also become the largest sub-Saharan African exporter of manufactured clothing to the USA. A recently opened ski resort high in the Maluti Mountains is drawing increasing numbers of tourists from neighbouring South Africa.



KEY COUNTRY CONTEXT STATISTICS

Population:	2.447 million (2006)
GDP:	US\$ 668 (per capita, 2006)
Human Development Index (HDI):	0.549 (2007/08)
Unemployment levels:	45% (2002)
Key economic sectors:	Clothing and Textiles, Agriculture, Manufacturing and Tourism
Principal Exports:	Clothing and Textiles, Manufacturing, Food and live Animals, Wool and Mohair
HIV and Aids prevalence:	23.23% (2007)
Gross Primary Enrolment Ratio:	114% (2006)
Gross Secondary Enrolment Ratio:	37% (2006)
Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio:	4% (2006)

Source: Country context data was obtained from a variety of sources: (CIA, 2008; SADC; UNAIDS, 2008; UNDP; UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2006).



National day: 4 October



POLICY CONTEXT

The more global policy principle of the MoET, guided by the MDGs and EFA, is that basic education is an integral part of social and economic development and that it is a fundamental human right. It is also seen as an essential pre-condition for mid-level employment and secondary and post-secondary education and training, which is expected to lead to practical skills and knowledge. The SADC Protocol on Education and Training has explicitly influenced national HE policy and practice in that students from SADC countries are treated like home students in terms of paying fees. Science and technology has officially been identified as a priority area for HE, according to the MoET. The value of HE is noted in both the National Indicative Plan and Country Strategy Paper (2008-2013) as well as the Poverty Reduction Strategy (2005) (MCRI Report).

HIGHER EDUCATION LEGISLATION	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Higher Education Act 2004	Provides for the regulation of HE, for the establishment, composition and functions of a Council for Higher Education, for the governance and funding of public HE institutions, for registration of HE private institutions, and for quality assurance.

LIST OF STATUTORY BODIES IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
None	

FUNDING DATA	
Public Expenditure on Education as a % of Gross National Income (GNI)	10.0%
% Education budget allocated to higher education	37% (2004/05)
Loan/Grant scheme in place	Yes

Source: SARUA (2008) – 'Towards a Common Future: Higher Education in the SADC Region'

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	
KEY INDICATORS	INDICATORS FOR LESOTHO
R&D Intensity [The ratio of Gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) to Gross Domestic Product (GDP)]	0.1% (2004)
ISI Output (Number of papers published in the 7500+ journals of the ISI Web of Science)	1990-1995: 79 1996-2001: 59 2002-2007: 68

Source: SARUA (2008) – CREST report

LIST OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN LESOTHO	
UNIVERSITIES IN LESOTHO	WEBSITE
National University of Lesotho (NUL)	www.nul.ls

NATIONAL LEVEL OVERVIEW

The Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for the management, provision and regulation of education and training in Lesotho. The education sector consists of four years of pre-primary education (non-compulsory), seven years of primary education, five years of secondary education and three to six years of tertiary education. Post-secondary education has two main strands: higher education and technical and vocational education and training. The National University of Lesotho (NUL) is the only university, although there are close to 20 other tertiary-level public institutions and 15 private tertiary institutions (Ntimo-Makara, 2003).

TYPE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION	NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONS
Publicly funded universities	1
Publicly funded HE institutions and colleges	1
Privately funded HE institutions	6
Other (Centre for Accounting Studies)	1
TOTAL	9

Source: Lesotho MoE questionnaire response

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO

TERTIARY EDUCATION in Lesotho developed from the determination of the Roman Catholic Church in Southern Africa to establish an institution of higher learning for Africans. This determination led, in 1945, to the establishment of the Pius XII Catholic University College at Roma, a rural valley some 34 kilometres southeast of Maseru, Lesotho's capital. The college was at first housed in a primary school building at the Roma Mission, but soon moved to the present university site. From its foundation, Pius XII College was affiliated to the University of South Africa (UNISA), and from the mid-1950s, the fledgling university was offering courses leading to UNISA bachelors degrees in commerce and science, as well as a postgraduate diploma in education.

By the end of that decade, however, financial problems and a deteriorating relationship with UNISA led to dramatic change. Through an agreement between the High Commission Territories and the Catholic Church, a new independent institution, the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland was established at the Roma

site. By 1963, 180 students were enrolled; the first degrees were conferred early in 1967; and by 1970 student numbers had grown to over 400. Of these, 36 percent were from Lesotho, the balance coming from Botswana and Swaziland.

In 1975, however, a decision was taken to establish the National University of Lesotho (NUL), an unexpected development that excluded students from Botswana and Swaziland. This forced these countries to move towards alternative arrangements and ultimately to establish their own national universities.

Over the years, new facilities and departments have been established at Roma, on the original historic site of the Pius XII College. Considerable assistance has been received from external sources, particularly from countries within the European Union. The Netherlands, for example, has been instrumental in establishing a powerful education faculty at NUL.

FACTS AND FIGURES AT A GLANCE¹⁹

The National University of Lesotho (NUL) is a predominantly contact university with the majority of students being enrolled in undergraduate programmes.

TABLE 1 NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO: SUMMARY OF ENROLMENT NUMBERS (2006/2007)

MAJOR FIELD OF STUDY	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS (HEADCOUNT)	NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED PER LEVEL OF STUDY	
		UNDERGRADUATE	POST GRADUATE
Science, Engineering and Technology	1259	1246	13
Law	624	621	3
Humanities and Social Sciences	3077	3035	42
Health Sciences	359	359	0
Other (Education)	1463	1463	0
Other (IEMS)	1784	1784	0
TOTALS	8,566	8,508	58

Source: Data provided per email by NUL

Of the 6724 undergraduate students registered in 2006/07 3477 (52%) were female and 3247 (48%) were male.

NUL reported in its Draft Strategic Plan 2007-2012 that in 2006/2007 there were 374 academic staff (162 female and 212 male) and 308 non-academic staff (157 female and 151 male) at the University (National University of Lesotho, 2007).

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¹⁹ All data presented in this section is headcount data.

