

**GLOBAL INITIATIVES AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP: THE ROLE OF  
LEADERSHIP IN ERADICATING POVERTY IN LESOTHO AFRICA**

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**Abstract**

*This paper investigates the critical role leadership plays in eradicating poverty in Lesotho Africa. The paper integrates interview data collected from faculty at the National University of Lesotho with current literature on poverty, development of human capacity, and leadership. The first section of the paper centers on the challenges Lesotho faces in overcoming poverty. This is followed by a discussion of sustainable development in Lesotho that involves (a) a democratic government, (b) an infrastructure that supports the health and welfare of the people, (c) an accessible educational system, (d) employment opportunities associated with Lesotho's natural resources, and (e) the honoring of Basotho social values. The paper then identifies leadership characteristics seen by those interviewed as being critical to sustainable development and ultimately to the eradication of poverty. Three general leadership characteristics described are connected to the historical consciousness of Lesotho and include visioning, serving, and unifying.*

**Introduction**

The UN Millennium Summit of September 2000 brought together leaders of 189 countries to map out a plan for poverty reduction and sustainable development on a global scale. Leaders projected their thinking 15 years into the future and crafted a set of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that, if achieved, would eradicate extreme

poverty and promote sustainable human development worldwide. The leaders stated that although the goals were ambitious, they could be achieved by 2015 using current levels of resources, knowledge, and technology. Each of the MDGs represents a pathway for collaboration between wealthy and poor nations toward reducing poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women. The UN Millennium Declaration (UN General Assembly, 2000) lays the foundation for the eight MDGs (UNDP, 2000, p. 1) and includes details related to these goals as well as eighteen specific targets and related, measurable indicators to gauge progress toward achieving them. The MDGs are: (a) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (b) achieve universal primary education; (c) promote gender equality and empower women; (d) reduce child mortality; (e) improve maternal health; (f) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; (g) ensure environmental sustainability; and (h) develop a global partnership for development.

Sub-Saharan Africa is not on target to meet any of the eight goals. The region has experienced no change or a negative change since 1990 in the benchmarks (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2007, p.1; UNDP, 2004, p. 2). Nonetheless, the MDGs remain the foundation of Lesotho's Poverty Reduction Strategy, a three-year medium term development framework for the years 2004 – 2007, which explicitly sets national priorities and strategies for promoting economic growth and reducing poverty (Lesotho Government, 2004).

This paper examines the relationship between leadership and poverty reduction in Lesotho. To provide the context for discussing leadership qualities, the paper begins with a description of poverty in Lesotho and thoughts on the eradication of poverty as a form

of sustainable development. Findings reported throughout this paper bring together information from two data sources. One data source consists of literature on poverty in developing countries, leadership, and leadership formation as they apply to the focus of this paper. The second data source consists of perspectives elicited through interviews with four individuals in Lesotho. All interviews were conducted during November 2006 in Roma and Maseru, Lesotho. The interviews were semi-structured and each took approximately 60 minutes.

Each of the interviewed participants brings a unique background and focus to the discussion and provides deeper insight to the concepts of leadership, development, and poverty within the Lesotho context. Three of the participants are instructors at the National University of Lesotho who teach and mentor future leaders within distinct departments and disciplines. These participants are Mr. Labane Chokobane, Deputy Dean of Social Science and Lecturer of Economics; Professor Kapano Makoa, head of Political and Administrative Studies; and the Reverend Dr. T.G. Lerotholi, Theology and Religious Studies. The fourth participant, Miss Mamotseare Mphutlane, contributes an additional perspective from within community-based leadership training. She is the Country Business Manager of the Institute of Development Management in Maseru.

The three authors of this paper also bring diverse histories and perspectives to bear on the topic. Dr. Sandra Wilson is the chair of the Doctoral Program in Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University, Spokane Washington. She frames the discussion through her 25 years of involvement with leadership research, theory, and education. Her research emphasis is on community and relational practices. Dr. Theresa Power-Drutis lived for five months in Lesotho as a research associate at the Institute of Southern African Studies

where she conducted research on Information Communication Technology (ICT) and leadership. Sandra and Theresa later returned to Lesotho to collect the interviews referenced in this paper. Director Matšelisio Ma-Tlali Mapetla, of the Institute of Southern African Studies at the National University of Lesotho, has conducted research and developed programs in Lesotho for many years. Her insights on the topics of poverty and leadership in Lesotho are informed by this professional background as well as reflections on her own experience as a Mosotho woman in a position of leadership. (Note: Mosotho pertains to a singular person from Lesotho; whereas Basotho refers to a collective group of people.)

### **The Face of Poverty in Lesotho**

The mountainous Kingdom of Lesotho is home to approximately 1.8 million people (Bureau of Statistics, 2007), with an estimated 80% living in the rural areas. Lesotho's subtropical land area of 30,355 sq km. is surrounded on all sides by the Republic of South Africa. It is remarkable that the small country is one of the poorest nations in Africa despite sharing a continuous border with one of the continent's most advanced and resource rich countries. And the gap between Lesotho and its powerful neighbor is growing. Lesotho is one of only 18 developing countries that registered lower scores on the Human Development Index in 2003 than in 1990 (p. 21); moving from 137<sup>th</sup> to 149<sup>th</sup> place.

Lesotho is significantly influenced by political and economic changes in South Africa. For example, a continuous decrease in the number of Basotho employed by the mining industry in South Africa from 130,000 in 1984 to 62,125 in 2002, has pushed unemployment rates over 50% (Global Policy Network, 2004, pp. 3-4). Unlike its

neighbors, Lesotho has limited natural resources to develop other than mountains and water, so few local jobs are available for the approximately 25,000 young people who enter the work force each year (p. 4). Since independence in 1966, internal political struggle has also taken a toll on Lesotho's economy and infrastructure development. Following the national elections of 1998, accusations of election fraud resulted in riots and serious damage to the commercial infrastructure of the country.

According to the UNDP Human Development Report (2005), more than half the Basotho population lives below the poverty line. Over 36% are living on less than one US dollar per day and 56% are living on less than two dollars per day (Disaster Management Authority and World Food Programme, 2003). Lesotho is one of fifty countries currently identified by the UN as a Least Developed Country, a designation that indicates a high rate of poverty, weak "human assets" based on health, nutrition and education indicators, and high economic vulnerability based on indicators of unstable agricultural production and exports, inadequate diversification, and economic smallness (UN Conference on Trade and Development, 2004). Interview participants' descriptions of poverty in Lesotho focus on two major aspects; the first aspect concurs with statistical information and literature surveyed in the previous paragraphs. However, a second facet of poverty is described as "poverty of the human spirit." While acknowledging the difficulty of measuring or quantifying poverty from this perspective, some interviewees place great emphasis on addressing spiritual poverty and view it as inextricably connected to economic poverty. Sen (1999), development economist, suggests a relationship between income poverty and capability poverty:

While it is important to distinguish conceptually the notion of poverty as capability inadequacies from that of poverty as lowness of income, the two perspectives could be related since income is such an important means to capabilities. And enhanced capabilities in leading a life tend typically to expand a person's ability to be more productive and earn a higher income. (p. 90)

“Poverty of spirit” is framed in somewhat different terms by interview participant Chokobane. This poverty is evidenced when “you are not satisfied with anything that is around you; there is always cause for you to grumble.” When one is poor in this sense as well as economically deprived, the combination leads to “chronic poverty.” However, even those with material wealth can suffer from spiritual poverty. According to Martin Luther King, “The most pressing problem confronting humanity is the poverty of the spirit, which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance” (in Chatterjee, 2002, p. 288).

Sachs (1996) acknowledges the complexity of a universal definition of poverty by suggesting that all economic measures of development are false and that efforts should be redirected away from economic growth and toward autonomous progress based on the core, self-defined values and traditions of common people within their own cultures (p. 22). It is possible that, even where external value systems are not imposed, common people might choose economic growth as a core, self-defined value. Nonetheless, the tension between environmental, economic, and social considerations may vary greatly between countries if grass roots decision-making is employed. Even within individual developing countries, central planning has yielded poor results and many governments have implemented decentralization programs in an effort to increase consensus and tailor

reforms to both national and local governments (Smoke, 2000, ¶1). Initiatives undertaken with input from stakeholders at all levels are more likely to enjoy the broad support necessary for sustainable development.

### **Eradication of Poverty as a form of Sustainable Development**

Development is a multifaceted process that provides wider, evolving context of thinking and acting in the world (Dresner, 2002; Sen, 1999; So, 1999). Development is about engaging the human spirit in ways that yield new thinking, attitudes, and behaviors, while at the same time upholding social values that support the health and welfare of communities and their individual members now and for generations to come (Dresner; Sen; So). In essence, sustainable development “judges a society’s standards of living not just according to the average level of income, but according to people’s capabilities to lead the lives they value” (Dresner, p. 70).

Development in Lesotho is viewed by interview participants and by Lesotho-related literature as needing to balance the desire for economic wealth with the development and promotion of the human spirit such that people can live meaningful and fulfilling lives. Six dimensions of development interview participants identified as being critical to the eradication of poverty in Lesotho include (a) having a strong, democratic government that unifies the people; (b) having infrastructures that provide access to clean water, improved sanitation, and health-care facilities; (c) engaging the human spirit by encouraging self-sufficiency and personal responsibility; (d) providing an educated, well informed society; (e) providing business and employment opportunities that utilize natural resources in ways that ultimately serve the common good; and (f) upholding core cultural values while overcoming cultural values that become barriers to progress.

### *Maintaining a Strong, Democratic Government*

The term democracy has its origin in the Greek expressions *demos* (the people) and *kratia* (power) (Commission on Legislative Democracy, nd). This concept of rule of the people and by the people is viewed by the United Nations General Assembly as essential to good governance for sustainable human development. In fact, the UN Human Development Report (2002) states that democratic governance means that human rights are protected and also that “economic and social policies are aimed at eradicating poverty and expanding the choices that all people have in their lives” (p. 51). However, in Least Developed Countries such as Lesotho, poverty limits access to education, employment, health care services, and the infrastructure required for rapid dissemination of information. Civic involvement and critical evaluation of political policies are hampered when people must focus on survival and security issues. In the absence of an informed citizenry, charismatic leaders may move into positions of authority and wield power for their own purposes.

In a study of governance and public opinion conducted in six Southern African countries, Mattes, Bratton, Davids, and Africa (2000) found widespread popular support for democracy in the region with only one exception. In Lesotho large numbers of citizens expressed “indifference and apathy” toward democracy and only 39% “supported democracy unequivocally” (p. 5). The study also reports that “Basotho were the least interested and least involved in politics of all the countries sampled in the survey.” Respondents generally reported that they were unable to interact with or influence the political system and tended not to participate in politics (p. 42). The year before the study was conducted, accusations of election fraud resulted in riots, more than 60 civilian and



military deaths, and serious damage to the commercial infrastructure of Lesotho (Ambrose, 1999).

A report of the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (2002) described Lesotho as a fragile democracy “despite the electoral and parliamentary reforms taking place” (p. 1). Lesotho’s former Deputy Prime Minister, Kelebone Maope (2000), claims that the violence associated with the elections suggests,

*We still live in a society where the respect for democratic institutions and the constitutions has not yet taken root among important players in our country. They also teach us that without sustained peace and political stability, the national ideal of the improvement in the living standards of the majority of the people of Lesotho will forever remain an elusive goal. (p.1)*

A separate survey, conducted in 2000, reported that 51% of those interviewed preferred democracy over all other forms of government (Rule & Mapetla, 2000, p. 97). The study also found that 21% of the participants were unable to express an opinion on issues related to national elections, and that 20% did not plan to vote in the next election (pp. 123 -25). Apathy and factionalism hamper full participation of the citizenry in governance. According to respondent Chokobane, national party affiliations increase the divisiveness of local politics as well:

*There is a chronic problem in this country and it happens everywhere, among the poor as well and among faculty at the university. There is a belief that we have to belong to a certain party and if you belong to another party then you are my enemy. When someone becomes a good leader who really desires to eradicate poverty, the community around him will first classify him according to which political movement he belongs.*

*And as soon as it seems he belongs to another party, the tendency is to destroy the efforts of that person rather than come and work together.*

This factionalism runs counter to the value that Basotho have historically attached to unity. The country was formed as a unified response of several disparate groups who joined together under the leadership of King Moshoeshoe I to face adversity as a single people. The importance of alliance for the common good is evidenced in Lesotho's history and expressed in the traditional proverb, "*Lets'oele le beta poho*," which translates to, "A crowd can easily overpower a bull" (Mokitimi, 1997, p. 18). Unity was identified as a key Basotho value during the interviews as well; however, attitudes and systems that obstruct this unity were also described.

The perception that leaders misuse funds and influence in Lesotho is widespread. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2006, corruption is perceived as rampant in Lesotho. Serious questions have also been raised by local and international media as well as by government insiders regarding responsible stewardship of public funds (Lekhetho, 2006, p. 3; Peta, 2007, p. 15; Sekoati, 2006, p. 3). According to respondent Makoa, "Donor representatives say that aid is increasing by the day in Lesotho, but with the current government system the money does not really come to the people." Mistrust of leaders and of governing systems impedes collaborative efforts and could obstruct effective approaches to a wide range of development issues that face Lesotho today, such as infrastructure development and health care delivery.

#### *Providing Infrastructures that Promote Health and Welfare*

Sachs (2005) states, "Everybody on earth can and should enjoy basic standards of nutrition, health, water, and sanitation, shelter and other minimum needs for survival,

well-being and participation in society.” Lesotho struggles to enjoy all of these basic standards, because of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho where it reached an estimated 30% of the adult population. The country had an estimated 70,000 AIDS orphans in 2002 (UNDP, 2005; Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2005). Another report estimated that in 2003 the number had increased to almost 100,000 (Disaster Management Authority and World Food Programme, 2003). Life expectancy in Lesotho is predicted to drop as low as 32.2 during 2010-2015; without the HIV/AIDS epidemic the life expectancy rate for this period would be projected as 63 years (UN Conference on Trade and Development, 2004). Kasongo, a participant in the Power-Drutis’ study (2007) described the worsening situation regarding AIDS in Lesotho in this way:

*It was difficult to see a young person buried fourteen years ago; in Lesotho we buried mostly old people and people who were involved in accidents. Today I can tell you that it is almost the other way around. We bury young men and young women who have completed University studies, and would soon be working or are already working. These are not those who have been behind the cattle [illiterate], these are the ones who have gone through school . . . and who could serve the country with that knowledge. HIV/AIDS takes them away. (p. 192)*

The government acknowledges, “HIV/AIDS is a key development challenge in the Lesotho context,” and that addressing this challenge must be a national priority (Government of Lesotho, 2003 ¶6). However, the country’s high maternal, child, and infant mortality rates are not entirely attributed to HIV/AIDS related illnesses; other issues include low and decreasing immunization levels, poor sanitation, and inadequate

access to safe drinking water, especially in rural areas. Many in Lesotho struggle to survive; they are not able to fully engage in what Farmer (2004) considers to be

*the most basic of human rights. . . . [and] the drama, the tragedy, of the destitute sick concerns not only physicians and scholars who work among the poor but all who profess even a passing interest in human rights. It is not much of a stretch to argue that anyone who wishes to be considered humane has ample cause to consider what it means to be sick and poor in the era of globalization and scientific development. (p. 6)*

As well, globalization and scientific development appear to have had little impact on sustainable food production in Lesotho. Food shortages place severe demands on the country's limited resources. According to a joint report of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Program (2007), approximately 401,200 Basotho will be in a food deficit during 2007/08. Most Basotho are subsistence farmers; however, arable land is limited and less than 10 percent of the country is presently under cultivation (p. 7). Erratic rains and recurrent droughts, rugged topography, severe soil erosion, and lack of sustainable land management practices further exacerbate the negative trend in per capita food production (p. 13).

### *Engaging the Human Spirit*

Stephen Smith (2005) identifies personal empowerment as a key to ending global poverty, for poverty and powerlessness are “two sides of the same coin. When the poor are powerless they remain poor. Those without power find it very difficult to get the power and resources they need to make a better life” (p. 41). Powerlessness leaves people with the sense of inequity and a diminishing self worth. Bernard Loomer (1976) warns,

*As long as power is associated with the sense of initiative and aggressiveness, and passivity is indicative of weakness. . . [then the] inequalities among individuals and groups are the means whereby the estrangements in life become wider and deeper. The rich become richer, and the poor become poorer. The strong become stronger and the weak become weaker and more dependent. (p. 11)*

Those interviewed for this paper speak clearly about the importance of empowering the poor such that they have the freedom to develop their human potentialities; they are able to develop a sense of self-sufficiency and personal responsibility; and they are able to become stronger in their abilities to live meaningful lives. Respondent Mphutlane sees empowerment as being a challenge for the poor in Lesotho, because, “as Basotho, we have been indoctrinated to think we are poor, we have nothing, and we need to wait for [foreign] aid.” This way of thinking may hinder the development of human capacities. She explains,

*Of course, the resources are lacking in Lesotho; but some people do not want to wake up and go to work and so they remain poor. It is not as if it is a given that they shall be poor for the rest of their lives. It is their ability to deal with poverty that could be one of their strengths. I know sometimes we take food aid to try to help people who are poor; but that does not solve the problem. It adds to it; it complicates it and compounds it because people learn to expect to be helped because they are poor. Helping people help themselves is important, for experience shows that if people wait to be taken out of poverty it does not work. It has to be a give and take. If people say we know we are poor but we have hands and can work for ourselves, then they have the tools to get out of the problem.*

Although aid itself does not necessarily make the problem worse, aid has to be well thought out and be focused on human development that leads to empowerment through self-sufficiency and self-trust. According to Chokobane, people “have to be able to see that they have done something good today and they are better off than they were yesterday. Then they feel encouraged to do just a little bit more, they believe they can do something more.”

Smith (2005) also identifies community empowerment as a key factor in ending global poverty. He is clear that to escape poverty requires empowered people within empowered communities: “Individual empowerment is necessary but insufficient. Communities of the poor must be collectively empowered. . . . Well-being is fundamentally individual, but it is also social” (p. 43). Community empowerment entails people actively participating in their immediate communities, and to the extent possible, engaging in the larger society through actions such as being informed voters in political elections. Direct participation in one’s immediate community and indirect participation in the larger society can affect well-being. This is important in eradicating poverty for “the poor depend on their community’s security to survive, to defend their rights, and to preserve their opportunities to improve the lives of their families” (p. 43). They depend on their communities to provide processes and opportunities for a better life. Sen (1999) describes processes as actions that allow people the freedom to make decisions and to act accordingly; opportunities are what people are afforded given their personal and social circumstances (p. 17).

*An Educated, Well Informed Society*

A report from a United Nations working group described the crucial role of education in development and the eradication of poverty, saying, “No country has succeeded if it has not educated its people” (UNESCO, 2001, p. 1). Further,

*For the education system to truly respond to the needs of poor children and to contribute to wealth creation in communities and society at large, it needs to take the issue of poverty into special consideration in the planning of educational services. Essentially, it has to stress the preparation of all children to achieve at school, and empower them by heightening their awareness of their rights and responsibilities, their abilities, and enhance their self-confidence to enable them to improve their lives. (p. 3)*

Interviewees emphasize the importance of the education and well-informed civic engagement as tools for fighting poverty as well. They describe the efforts of government’s goal of universal education and active citizen involvement as well as strengths that could be leveraged to further this goal.

According to Makoa, the political and industrial infrastructure of South Africa is constructed differently and the people tend to be involved; whereas, “in Lesotho it is different—only people in the government are involved, so it has not worked. The government talks a lot about education but in ways that people do not understand.” Makoa stresses the importance of locally initiated and conducted research on which to base governmental policies. Mphutlane concurs, adding that research, consulting, and management training are available beyond the University through other institutions like the Institute of Development Management; “this agency is about learning, it is about

research. We are preparing managers who are ready to tackle the challenges [and] the process of getting out of poverty.”

However, a basic level of education is necessary to participate in advanced training of any kind, and full participation in civic life requires the ability to communicate effectively and evaluate information accurately. Lesotho’s educational system is hampered by perennial problems shared by many developing countries; these include unequal access to education, limited resources, a shortage of qualified teachers, and inadequate infrastructure. A low completion rate for Basotho students is one indicator of the scope of the problem. A 2006 UNESCO study reports that approximately 2% of the population at the theoretical graduation age actually completed tertiary education in 2004 (p. 13). Other issues relate to the relevance of the current curriculum within the Lesotho context and the impact of “colonial education” structures adopted by the country’s secondary education institutions (Boaduo, 2005, p. 74). Recommendations for reform typically address teacher recruitment and training, improved infrastructure, and increased collaboration with community and business entities in order to keep pace with economic, social, and technological changes (p. 81). Effective implementation of each of these reforms requires political will, efficient resource management, and public support.

In the face of staggering unemployment among secondary school graduates and high drop-out rates, some educational reformists advocate for re-incorporation of indigenous Basotho skills and knowledge into the curriculum so that learners might acquire basic survival and job skills that could be applied even in the case of non-completion of the secondary school curriculum (Boaduo, 2005, p. 75). This proposal



resonates with concerns of Basotho leaders interviewed for the Power-Drutis' (2007) study; these leaders cautioned that development assistance in Lesotho focuses on donations of food rather than encouraging and assisting farmers in returning to the original Basotho way of doing things. If this trend continues, they predict that few will go to the fields to grow enough food subsistence and traditional agrarian skills will erode along with the soil. Traditional Basotho skills and values were seen by these interviewees as important components of education and true citizenship.

#### *Gaining Employment and Utilizing Natural Resources*

Lerotholi sees that in Lesotho “there is good material in the people, and in the environmental resources.” Recently, news broke that Lesotho has the biggest diamond, possibly in the world. But some interviewed questioned the contribution value of the diamond and the mine from which it came to Lesotho’s economic development and to lowering the high level of unemployment in the country. The perception exists that money from the diamond mine is going into the hands of foreign investors and, subsequently, Lesotho as a whole is not gaining ground from such financial transactions. Similarly, the country has a large reservoir of water, “but we still say this is a poor country surrounded by a rich country [South Africa].” Some interviewees see that the two recently constructed dams at Ha Katse and Ha Mohale mountain areas are making little contribution to reducing poverty in the country. Although Lesotho receives approximately 15 million Maloti (2.7 million US dollars) a month in royalties from the dam (Mapetla), the money is not being distributed equitably to local communities. Money was at some point allocated under a community development fund program tended to eradicate poverty by creating employment and conserving the environment

through cash-for-work activities; however, the program has since been stopped. According to Lerotholi the average citizen benefits little from the exploitation of Lesotho's natural resources:

*We have running water in this country, but what are we doing with it? What are we doing with our [limited] arable land? There is so much we can gain from this country that has been given so much. How can we benefit from what we have been given? In a country that has resources like that people should be able to care for themselves. But it looks like the resources do not benefit the people. As Basotho people, we need to ask: Who is mining and benefiting from the mine? Someone, somewhere is in charge and has the power. Who is making these decisions on behalf of Lesotho? Who is deciding that for that diamond mine Lesotho is getting only 20% of the profit? And, where does the 20% go? How is this money helping Lesotho? And, where does the other 80% go?*

Makoa sees Lesotho being in a “poverty trap,” meaning there are forces that act and react on one another such that conditions of poverty are perpetuated. The poverty trap in Lesotho is based on the interplay of unemployment and lack of economic production—there is low production and therefore there are few employment opportunities. The poverty trap is exasperated due to the poor not being able to send their children to school, lessening their chance to have the knowledge and skills needed to enhance human and economic capital. The government has introduced a free primary education policy since 2001; however, beyond the primary level, many parents are unable to pay for school fees for their children. Makoa suggests that a viable solution to stepping out of this poverty trap is to get the right resources into the very poor areas. “It is about getting resources into those areas so they can stimulate the growth of other productive

forces. If resources are given to people in certain areas and they have the capacity to absorb and use the money in productive ways, they can get out of poverty.” Similarly, Sachs (2005) links the poverty trap to stagnation: “When poverty is extreme, the poor do not have the ability, by themselves to get out of the mess” (Sachs, p. 56). He attributes stagnation to the lack of trucks, paved roads, power generators, and irrigation channels. In essence, “Human capital is very low, with hungry, disease ridden and illiterate villages struggling for survival” (p. 56).

According to Sachs (2005), the hardest part of economic development, of getting out of the poverty trap, is getting the first foothold on the ladder. He acknowledges that this is not an easy journey; it requires building human capacities and establishing innovative processes that can lead to production and employment. He suggests that “as a global society we should ensure that the international rules of the game in economic management do not inadvertently or advertently set snares along the lower rungs of the ladder in the form of inadequate development assistance” (p. 24). Development assistance that includes both processes and opportunities that help develop human capacity is critical, for “in most poor countries, especially the smaller ones, the innovation process usually never gets started” unless such development assistance is available (p. 60). Ideally, development assistance provides the resources needed for economic growth in communities, as mentioned by Lerotholi. In the long-run, it not only inspires the people to develop knowledge and skills through educational opportunities, it enhances their economic status. However, emphasized during the interviews was the importance of making sure development aid is distributed to people in ways that are equitable and just.

There is confidence among those interviewed that the Basotho have within themselves the capabilities to move out of the poverty trap. One form of development assistance, mentioned by Mphutlane, involves more entrepreneurial training. She sees that many Basotho have skills that are needed for production within the community but they are unable to perform simple business function such as providing a cost estimate prior to beginning a project. “They have the skills but they are not able to employ themselves.” If innovation and enterprise are to be encouraged, “we need people who have been entrepreneurs to be mentors of others, to help them [also] become entrepreneurs.” These mentors could help others “see the bigger picture” and develop, “skills and learning that go beyond the technical to become more adaptive and flexible.” She emphasizes the importance of organizations incorporating as part of their mission the notion of developing local talent to run the business. Seeing and believing that there is good material in the Basotho people is critical in breaking the poverty trap (Mphutlane, Lerotholi).

#### *Honoring Core Social Values*

The Basotho speak with pride of their homogeneous cultural identity and voice concerns about the erosion of traditions and attitudes that define this identity. Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili (2001, p.1) identifies several core social values that are “part and foundation of the nation’s vision into the nation’s vision into the next twenty years.” He encouraged the Basotho to revive the values associated with expressions such as *khotso* (peace), *kopano ke matla* (unity), *u ka nketsang ha e ahe motse* (tolerance), *boitlhompho le tlhomphano* (self-respect and respect of others), *bana ba monna ba*

*arolelana hlooana ea tsie* (sharing), and *ntlo ea motho e mong ha e na boroko* (self-reliance).

The Basotho maintain numerous material symbols of cultural identity, such as the decorative blankets worn as outer gear, the Basotho hat, Seshoeshoe clothing, “surefooted Basotho ponies,” and various handcrafts. A wide range of ceremonies are also unique to Lesotho and people have devised an astonishing array of traditions to mark the many causes for celebration within their families and communities. These exterior expressions of cultural identity are symbolic of a commitment to the deeper values described by the prime minister: peace, tolerance, mutual respect, sharing, and self-reliance. Visitors to Lesotho often comment on an obvious and touching expression of these values, the kind attention and hospitality extended to strangers. Lerato (as cited in Power-Drutis, 2007) describes the country’s hospitality:

*The people of Lesotho really know each other and like each other; they network. I could walk from here to a village that I have never been to and by sunset I would know almost everyone in that village and everyone in that village will claim to know me. Wherever you go, you are welcome. (p. 224)*

Mapetla, Matobo, and Setoi (2007) have noted the role of civic leadership in maintaining the Basotho cultural practices in sustaining communities against poverty and providing social protection. Particular reference is made to women led, indigenous associations known as burial societies, which provide assistance to the poor when their loved ones have died and they are unable to pay for funeral costs. This is important to the social capital of Lesotho for funeral ceremonies have high social and cultural significance and cannot be readily scaled down relative to the wealth and income status of individual

families. These societies have grown in membership throughout Lesotho such that today many have been able to diversify into development/income generating activities.

Sometimes cultural values can serve as barriers to sustainable development, despite the positive effects they may have on culture in general. One barrier mentioned in the interviews concerns the devaluing of Basotho women. Even though women contribute substantially to the development of social capital in the country, the Basotho gender system maintains male superiority. Subsequently, few women occupy upper-level management positions, even though women tend to be relatively more highly educated than men in Lesotho (Bureau of Statistics, 2007). Another cultural barrier to sustainable development mentioned by interview participants is the value of “sharing” what you have with others. Although this is an important Basotho value that builds social capital, Mphutlane explains that when a person receives a loan to start a business, family and community members may pressure the person to share the money with them, often times to pay for food and shelter, leaving an insufficient amount to develop the business. Thus long-term economic progress is sacrificed for short-term contributions to family and friends.

Development initiatives to end poverty in Lesotho can only be sustainable to the extent that they honor the core social values held by the culture, evaluate the social values that can deter success, and appraise the true cost of development. Elkington (1998) suggests that the first “bottom line” of economic prosperity and personal profit is often the immediate goal of inadequate leaders. In contrast, leaders who take the needs of the people into account will weigh rapid economic gain against the environmental degradation and human suffering often associated with short-term, economic gains.

## **Leadership and Sustainable Development**

Eradicating poverty through sustainable development was described by those interviewed as being complex and the change process as being chaotic. It involves multiple layers of interactions between and among people as they create a living present tied not only to desires for the future but to their past experiences. To a large extent, sustainable development is moving toward a future that is not completely known or predictable, a movement that nonetheless calls for continual attention to both process and outcomes. Leaders play a critical role in developing human capacities and creating a sense of stability and continuity amidst the process of development (Burns, 2003; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Wheatley, 2005).

Leadership influences people to move toward a desired outcome (Northouse, 2001). For Lesotho, this means developing the economy and human capacities in ways that provide opportunities for people to choose their futures. Implicit across the interviews gathered for this paper are three interrelated leadership qualities important to sustainable development in Lesotho: Visioning, Serving, and Unifying. These qualities are applicable for all who, through their work, are responsible for the health and welfare of the Basotho people. Leadership for the eradication of poverty includes not only governmental officials but those who serve as religious leaders, those who are responsible for educating Basotho children and young adults, those who own and operate businesses that employ Basotho, and those in civic leadership who lead communities and their individual members toward a better future. In some way all of these leaders, working in a unified manner, have important contributions to make; all can contribute to

creating and enacting a vision for the future; all can carry in their hearts an attitude of serving others; all can contribute to efforts toward working in harmony with one another.

### *Visioning*

Greenleaf (1977/2002) emphasizes the importance of leaders providing prophetic voices and prophetic visions, visions that liberate the people and provide them hope for their futures. Clearly, those interviewed spoke of the importance of having a vision for Lesotho's future, a vision that informs people of desired outcomes, lifts their spirits, and inspires them to move in a direction that speaks of the good. Ideally, leaders for Lesotho are able to dream great dreams, see the potentialities Lesotho holds, and set sights on new beginnings that hold value and promise for the future. Such leaders truly believe in these incredible potentialities, and have the confidence and fortitude to act in accordance to these beliefs.

Lesotho's 20/20 vision is perceived by those interviewed as being important to the country, for it centers on having a peaceful nation, a stable government, a well-developed human resource base, and a well-managed environment. What is not clearly evident in the 20/20 vision is emphasis on developing the human spirit. Lerotholi emphasizes that any vision for the future of Lesotho must "address the common good." Ultimately, such visions speak not only of what the future might look like for the country in terms of economic development, they also incorporate social values that lift people's spirits toward higher realms of human potential, and ways of sustaining democracy. He emphasizes the importance of building capacities that in some way lift spirits, because the Basotho "have been told for years they have nothing." Visionary leaders, as described by those interviewed, come to understand and appreciate the needs and desires of the people,



challenges they currently face, and challenges they may face in the future as they engage in development efforts.

Such visionary leaders have foresight, a form of visioning that enables them to “understand lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequences of the future” (Robert Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 18). Both Lerotholi and Chokobane emphasize that “Basotho leaders need to know the history of the people,” for lessons from the past play an important role in understanding Lesotho today, they inform the present and the future as to cultural traditions and values important to the nation. It is important for Basotho leaders to be able to name cultural traditions and values that are core to their people and need to be maintained, and name those traditions and values that in the long run can deter progress toward sustainable development.

Visionary leaders are intelligent leaders in that they seek to understand interrelationships and associations that can lead to reasonable, truthful judgments and responsible, ethical actions. Makoia emphasizes that research is important in setting directions for the future, for it provides the foundation for understanding past trends and current conditions regarding Lesotho’s political effectiveness, the economy, the use of natural resources, and current conditions of poverty. He emphasizes that research is about intellectual honesty; it is about asking critical questions to deepen understandings of poverty such as its root causes and what is needed to address it. Research is a way of knowing centered on disciplined thinking that reaches beyond mere opinion and enables leaders to make thoughtful decisions most likely to positively affect the lives of the people.

Enacting the vision requires courage and fortitude as leaders work toward filling the gap between the ideal and real (Senge, 1990). Critical to enacting the vision is communicating and gaining support for it. Not only must visions be communicated to the people, the people need to “be able to respond” to the vision; their voices need to be heard (Lerotholi). Also important to enacting the vision is a concrete plan of action so it becomes clear to the people as to how the vision will be lived out and what they are being asked to do (Lerotholi), and adequate strategies and resources needed to implement the plan (Chokobane; Makoia).

Senge (1990) suggests that for visions to survive over time there needs to be a reinforcing process of increasing clarity based on lived experiences, and degrees of enthusiasm and commitment (p. 227). In part, the reinforcing process is influenced by leaders’ abilities to understand the complex and unpredictable nature of change and the importance of being adaptive and fluid in how they think (Stacy, Griffin, & Shaw, 2006). Mphutlane describes successful leaders as being able to “make decisions based on the information available at the time. They are adaptive; these are smart leaders.” This thinking involves risk taking and experimentation; it involves continual monitoring of processes and outcomes to assist in updating or further clarifying the vision and corresponding action plan. Leadership means engaging people to make progress on the adaptive problems they face (Heifetz, 1994, p. 187).

Reinforcing the vision and its implementation requires systems that do not run interference with efforts toward sustainable development; systems that are transparent and honest (Makoia). Senge (1990, p. 6) describes a system as forces and interrelationships that shape the behavior of system members through institutionalized

values to which people conform. Ideally systems are transparent in their intentions and actions and leaders are attentive to the impact the system as a whole has on intended development outcomes—how the system itself supports or might be deterring efforts toward sustainable development in Lesotho. Makoia suggests that a system, such as government, can “not only be overwhelming to the people, it can overwhelm leaders themselves; leaders are a product of their environments, and even though leaders may have good intentions, the system can pull them around and corrupt them.”

### *Serving*

All participants interviewed spoke of the critical importance that leaders and their institutions engender a purpose of serving the Basotho people. This is concurred by Greenleaf (1977/2002), in his seminal book, *Servant Leadership*, where he emphasizes that a “great leader is seen as servant first” (p. 21), and a true test for effective servant leadership is whether those served grow as persons, whether they become “healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants” for others (p. 27).

Leadership for sustainable development means leaders engage in social change, whereby certain social customs and beliefs are changed in ways that enhance the development of human capacities. Throughout the change process leaders serve as agents of change who influence innovation decisions and lead people through the change process, providing intellectual, emotional, and moral support along the way (Rogers, 2003, p. 369). The personal and collective transformations required for a country, such as Lesotho, moving toward sustainable development pertain to “deep” change, a change that

“involves going inside the person and changing their perspectives” (Chokobane). Quinn (1996, 2000) describes deep change as distorting existing patterns of action in ways that involve taking risks (p. 3); it means letting go of old beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors that no longer serve one’s best interests. Leaders who hold a heartfelt commitment to serve others understand the change process and help build resilience and resolution to change among those served. Resilience and resolution to change for the Basotho can be enhanced by helping people gain a stronger sense of self sufficiency and personal responsibility and by helping them think creatively about their futures. Leaders “encourage people, [and] if people believe their contributions are important they do their best” (Mphutlane).

Lerotholi emphasizes that leaders for the eradication of poverty must “empower the people so they are encouraged to work toward their abilities.” The people need to feel they are valued. Basotho leaders who serve others listen to the voice of the poor. They engage in relational practices that show care, with the intention of promoting life (Wilson & Ferch, 2005, p. 50), recognizing “the tremendous responsibility to do everything within their power to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of others” (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 19). They pay attention to the health and welfare of the people and promote educational and training experiences that could help them grow personally, professionally, and spiritually.

Lerotholi views servant leaders as raising consciousness such that they can see the bigger picture, and perceive life in new ways. Servant leaders strengthen their thinking to “encompass broader-based conceptual thinking—to see potentialities beyond the day-to-day realities (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 18). Greenleaf (1977/2002) warns that a failure of a

leader to see in this way is unethical for it can set the stage for decline and eventual failure (p. 54). Philosopher and theologian, Bernard Lonergan (1957), describes decline as an unintelligent move from that which is good, a move that can set in motion a sequence of events, such as bad policies and inept courses of action, that ultimately lead to further decline. It is only through conscious, reasonable, and responsible acts of knowing that this state of decline can be transformed into cumulative, progressive results. Servant leaders seek to do what is right, giving themselves as examples through their actions in order that those served would themselves become servants. They would become “servants in search of, listening to, and expecting a better wheel for these times in the making” (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, pp. 22-23).

### *Unifying*

Unity (*kopano ke matla*), working in harmony with one another, is a traditional Basotho value considered by those interviewed to be important to the health and welfare of the nation. King Moshoeshoe I, the first leader of Lesotho, used the ancient resources of African chieftainship to unite several fragmented tribes into a single people. He would use the “*pitso*,” a community meeting, to gather feedback from the community, to learn of the dreams and desires of community members. Lerotholi named King Moshoeshoe I as an ideal model of leadership for Lesotho today, for “this man built a nation; he was able to feed the people; Lesotho today is based on the ingenuity and wisdom of that man.”

However, unity is seen by those interviewed as being compromised amidst existing political divisions. Chokobane explains that in politics there are competing leadership agendas that seem to divide the rich from the poor and divide the poor people,

resulting in only certain poor people receiving aid. The political division and lack of unity has brought about a tendency to not listen to ideas and to destroy all efforts of persons who are from a particular [political] party, even though these ideas may be wise and thoughtful. The hope is that leadership would embody a vision of the common good that unifies minds and hearts, bringing strength and integrity to the country as a whole. Chokobane states, “I would like people to understand that we are one nation and if you belong to different parties, you can still sit at the same table and share the same meal.”

Mapetla identifies two sources of tension in Lesotho today that challenge unity. Historically, chiefs have been entrusted with maintenance of law and order, preservation of the environment, and protection of the people. The present day challenge stems from the transfer of some chiefly functions to the politically elected local authorities. This change has left chiefs and the Basotho people unclear as to who is responsible for what. There is some conflict between these leadership institutions that have a stake in providing development, control of natural resources, and social welfare issues.

Another source of tension Mapetla attributes to the “middle” segment of society not being involved in decision making process. The middle segment includes a highly educated, professionally working group; these people are considered to be the pillars and drivers of the economy and are responsible for delivery on improved livelihoods for the Basotho people. Their exclusion defies the principles of sustainable democracy which among others emphasize providing opportunity for all and ruling for and by the people, and the traditional Moshoeshoe I core leadership values of consultative democratic decision making.

Leadership is called to create a culture of community (Wheatley, 2005). Mentioned in the interviews is the desire that Basotho leaders be well grounded in principles and practices of unity and the civil engagement this entails; this is a critical time for Basotho leaders to establish common ground in pursuit of the common good. Unity through common ground is about people having the capacity to engage in constructive public discourse in ways that are healthy, encouraging, and open-minded. Leaders who embody unity develop the capacity to create relationships that help people come to know one another and to discern how their lives, although different, are connected to their neighbors at a deeper level. Connection encourages community members to continually turn toward one another to learn of each other's struggles and successes when deep change is occurring, providing a sense of unity during challenging times (Burns, 2003; Lipman-Blumen, 2000; Wheatley, 2005; Quinn, 2000). Chokobane emphasizes, "We have to understand that we are different, we have our differences, but together we make a common entity. However, people need to trust. They have to believe in a better future." Leaders who embody unity build trust among and between people that enables relationships to develop and flourish. Through trust people gain full confidence in one another and develop the capacity both to influence and to be influenced by others (Lewick, & Tomlinson, 2003).

Community is chaotic, a creative force that needs constant tending (Palmer, 2004, p. 76). Leaders embodying principles and practices of unity are able to work through conflict, paying attention to tough questions, bringing conflict to the surface (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002, p. 111), encouraging people to deal creatively with the challenges they face. Chokobane focuses attention on dissonance as holding the key to learning. Leaders

help community members reconcile dissonance, encouraging them to see new possibilities for their lives (Wilson & Ferch, 2005). During conflict, however, “an atmosphere of emotional harm can emerge, resulting in a culture of confusion, cynicism, clouded vision, and fear” among community members (p. 54). When this happens “the temptation may be great to leave or dissolve community because of difficulties experienced. However, caring calls us to engage in relational practices in full confidence and hope for a better future, in full awareness that such difficulties are needed for self and community to transcend and evolve” (p. 54). At times of conflict and chaos, unity can appear unattainable, but Basotho leaders who are principled in unity choose hope over cynicism, a hope that is connected to intelligent thought and purposeful actions, a hope they realize requires commitment, patience, and love.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Meeting the sustainability challenge in Lesotho requires holistic and integrated leadership that can contend with environmental and economic issues while providing for social protection and human development. Those interviewed easily identified common goals for good leaders such as provisioning, serving, and unifying. Participants also described ethics, integrity, transparency, and accountability in the management of public resources as essential tools for attaining these goals. However, most were unable to name such a person currently holding a leadership position.

Perhaps leadership for poverty reduction at national and local levels must be addressed as a sustainability issue as well. According to interview participants, strong, ethical leadership is central to eradicating poverty in Lesotho. Formal education and



training opportunities can lay a foundation for such leaders; however, these tools alone cannot build the necessary leadership skills. Two additional factors were identified by participants as important to sustainable leadership development. First, continuity and support must be provided to leaders even after they have entered the workforce and/or attained positions of leadership. This support might be offered through formal or informal mentoring or through some other structure to provide a network of collegiality and collaboration. Second, citizen involvement in planning and discernment provides benefits beyond the improved decisions; active participation by civic and private sector leaders can engage and strengthen local governance for poverty reduction. In addition, citizens may form organizations that fulfill leadership roles as a group rather than assigning leadership to a single individual.

In his book, *Blessed Unrest: how the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being*, Paul Hawken (2007) describes the global sustainability movement and the human network upon which it is built:

*Individuals are associating, hooking up, and identifying with one another. From that meeting and experience they are forming units, inventing again and again pieces of a larger organism, enjoining associations and volunteers and communities and groups, and assembling these into a mosaic of activity as if they are solving a jigsaw puzzle without ever having seen the picture on its box. The insanity of human destructiveness may be matched by an older grace and intelligence that is fastening us together in ways we have never before seen or imagined. (p.165)*

Hawken's vision of a "planetary immune system" is a collaboration of people and organizations working for sound environmental stewardship and social justice. All of these actions lead to global sustainability but each requires individual and/or community action. Likewise, international/global interventions will only be effective in promoting sustainability in Lesotho if they are integrated with local initiatives and are cohesive with

the cultural values of the country. Lesotho's history is replete with stories of an “older grace and intelligence” that has bound the Basotho together through time. Tapping into this strength in order to unify the country toward a common vision and common goals is challenging in light of more recent political upheaval, but the future of the country may well depend on leaders who are capable of doing so.

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