

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

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ABSTRACT

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

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

Presented in this chapter is a case of women of Thota ea- Moli in Lesotho. The place, Thota-ea-Moli is a former seat of the traditional Basotho parliament) and now hosts, Moshoeshoe I International Airport which is about 25 kilometres away from the Capital town of Lesotho, Maseru. In geographic historical terms, Thota-ea-Moli is no ordinary village in Lesotho as its background as provided below shows. Thota-ea-Moli is a peri-urban community in Lesotho which is of historic significance for Lesotho. Thota-ea-Moli, or Ha Luka, meaning the place of chief Luka, as communities are commonly called in Lesotho, is a small community of about three hundred (300) households, the average household size being about six people. It is about twenty (20) kilometres away from Maseru, the Capital city of Lesotho.

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

Lesotho is a small Kingdom in Southern Africa with a land area of around 30,355 square kilometres and an estimated population of 2.2 million. The country is one of the few left kingdoms of Africa which is geographically wholly surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. Lesotho is, often aptly described as the land of many contrasts, vivid history with scenic natural attractions which are complemented by its rich culture, and fascinating heritage. Lesotho is the only country in the world where the entire territory is more than 1,000 metres above sea level and much of the population lives in rugged, mountainous terrain, accessible only on foot or horseback. Lesotho's total land area is 30,355 square kilometres and only a little over 10% of that land is arable. In 1868, Lesotho became a British colony through annexation in 1868. With regard to power for Basotho, Eldredge (1985) describes the self-conscious initiatives of Basotho through resistance to British and Boer invasions as they struggled to determine their own affairs at all levels of society (p.24). Eldredge argues that, contrary to the assumptions about hegemonic colonial rule

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