

DISABILITY LESOTHO

NEWSLETTER

Operationalization of the Disability Advisory Council, a Tortoise Pace?



MINISTER OF GENDER, YOUTH, SPORTS, ARTS, CULTURE & SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, HON. LESAOANA PITSO.

BY LERATO MAKANANELO RAMOHOLI – ADVOCACY & HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICER.

The government of Lesotho enacted the Persons with Disabilities Equity Act in 2021 to fast track the protection and enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities in Lesotho. This is the first domestic law that seeks to promote the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Lesotho. The Act amongst others provides for the establishment of the Disability Advisory Council under Section 4. The Disability Advisory Council is an autonomous statutory body which is tasked with the oversight role, including the implementation overall monitoring of the Act. This means that it has a huge responsibility to contribute to the provision of equal opportunities and recognition of rights of persons with disabilities and for all disability related matters in Lesotho.

On the 14th July 2023, the government of Lesotho published in a gazette the names of the members appointed to the Disability Advisory Council in line with section 5 of Act (Government Gazette Vol. 68, No. 54 of 2023).

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LNFOOD MISSION IS TO ADVOCATE, PROMOTE, AND DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH PROVISION OF TRAINING, MATERIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT, AND BY REPRESENTING THEIR NEEDS TO GOVERNMENT, DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Valued Reader,

Welcome to another issue of Disability Lesotho, in this issue we talk to an appointed members of the Disability Council, Ms. Pascalina Letsau, to get an inside on the progress made since the appointment members of the council.

We also talked to A well-known broadcaster in Lesotho, Miss 'Matemo "Stymo" Kolo, who encourages young people to participate in the upcoming Local Government Elections.

Our Director's Corner is also jam-packed with all the important information in relation to the the Dissemination of event of Lesotho's Early Identification Project, funded by UNICEF Lesotho.

Our Gender & Disability Officer Ms. 'Masenono Letsie tells us about the celebration of Women's Month in Hlotse, Leribe.

Hear more on how participating in elections may accelerate change.

Enjoy!

**Disability Lesotho E-Newsletter, Editor:
Teboho Khofu**

About Disability Lesotho E-newsletter

Disability Lesotho E-newsletter provides a platform for stakeholders to share news, views, best practices and resources and includes job advertisements, expressions of interest in volunteering, upcoming events and other practical items.

If you would like to make a submission to the next edition of Disability Lesotho, please send your information/images to the editor: tebohokhofu@gmail.com. Please also use the same email if you would like to be included in the mailing list and share your valuable feedback.



Lesotho National Federation for Organisations of the Disabled



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Naleli Opposite Maria 'Mabasotho
Catholic Church

Director's Corner

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LNFOD, together with partners SPOON and Johns Hopkins School of Public Health announce the results of Lesotho's Early Identification Project.

BY Adv. Nkhasi Sefuthi.

The Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled, or LNFOD, together with partners SPOON and Johns Hopkins School of Public Health's Department of International Health are announced the results of Lesotho's Early Identification Project, funded by UNICEF Lesotho.

Developmental delays, or when a child develops more slowly than expected in one or more areas, and malnutrition are two major public health problems in Lesotho. Currently, 8.2% of children ages 2-4 have one or more functional difficulties, such as difficulty seeing, walking, or learning. One third of children under 5 in Lesotho are experiencing stunting, or poor growth, and half of children under 5 have iron-deficiency anemia. Early identification of malnutrition and developmental delays are critical, so that families and professionals can provide the best support to meet children's growth and development needs.

In the early identification project, staff at five health centers and five preschools in Mokhotlong and Maseru used a digital app called Count Me In to screen children for malnutrition and developmental delays. Count Me In guides users through a series of questions, then provides recommendations. Staff use these recommendations to counsel families, and refer them for further evaluation if needed. During a three-month pilot period, staff at preschools and clinics screened 470 children. Pilot data showed that 1 in 3 children was stunted, and 1 in 4 was at risk for developmental delays.



LNFOD, Executive Director, Adv. Nkhasi Sefuthi

The project was designed together with a Core Team of professionals from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, the Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office, and UNICEF Lesotho. SPOON trained 55 district-level and five national-level master trainers in key topics on early identification, disability, and the use of Count Me In. The master trainers went on to train 40 pilot participants at the pilot health centers and preschools.

On 23 August, LNFOD, SPOON, and Johns Hopkins School of Public Health's Department of International Health held a dissemination event to share pilot results, discuss recommendations, and engage key decision makers in an action plan for early identification. They presented the project's rationale, scope, and results, and hosted a panel of speakers from the Ministry of Health; Ministry of Education and Training; Ministry of Information, Communication, and Technology; and UNICEF Lesotho to reflect on the project's findings and share their thoughts on the way forward.

Count Me In was found to be acceptable, feasible, and usable, and staff and parents at health centers and preschools had positive feedback on the Early Identification Project. Additional support for users, stronger referral systems and services for children; and financial sustainability are needed to make early identification and Count Me In sustainable at scale in Lesotho.

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Putting Inclusion in Civic and Voter Education for People with Disabilities First: Leaving No One Behind!



Harvest FM RADIO PRESENTER, 'MATEMO "STYMO" KOLO.

BY TEBOHO KHOFU

To advance a democratic society that values the participation of all people, including those with disabilities, inclusive civic and voter education is essential. Participating in civic and voter education empowers people with disabilities to exercise their rights, participate in public discourse, and actively influence decisions that have an impact on their lives. This is essential for social justice and equality. Making sure voters with disabilities can participate in the process and make informed decisions is essential to having inclusive elections.

Therefore, in order to continue educating people about Local Government Elections, the Lesotho Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) has collaborated with NGOs.

NFOD is one of the most active groups in promoting voter education, encouraging people with disabilities to vote in local

elections, and stepping up advocacy for better voting accessibility for people with disabilities.

Section Thirty of the National Elections Act protects the rights of people with disabilities. However, there are still some obstacles that people with disabilities must overcome, such as the extensive need for electoral information and the general lack of understanding and acceptance by the general public.

Thus, including people with disabilities in electoral affairs through support and participation, such as participation as election observers, polling station workers, and voter education providers, can provide a unique opportunity to challenge and change the mentality of some people regarding the abilities of people with disabilities.

In order to encourage young people and people with disabilities to vote in the Lesotho Local Government Elections on September 29, LNFOD spoke to a very well-known broadcaster in Lesotho, Miss 'Matemo "Stymo" Kolo who host popular youth radio programme called Bacha-Ba-Matla at Harvest FM. Kolo indicated that being able to vote is very important to people with disabilities because it is their legal right. "We have the same right as everyone else to vote for candidates we like or think will

effect change,” Kolo said. She concluded by indicating that people with disabilities shouldn't be the first to single themselves out by abstaining from civic engagement because of their disabilities. The IEC's initiative to collaborate with NGOs, such as LNFOD, is a good one because it will allow participants in civic and voter education programmes to benefit from the experiences of trainers who can relate to their difficulties on a personal level.



Harvest FM RADIO PRESENTER, 'MATEMO "STYMO" KOLO.

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Operationalization of the Disability Advisory Council, a Tortoise Pace?

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On the 21st July 2023, LNFOD in partnership with the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sports, Culture Arts and Social Development (Ministry of Social Development) convened a press statement to further publicize this appointment and to put pressure on speedy appointment of the Director General. Close to two months later since these official publications, the questions that still linger include, what significant, tangible progress exists on the ground to operationalize the council, especially to ensure that the preparations are made for the official sittings of the council and then for the appointment of the Secretariat in line with section 13 and 19 of the Act which make provision for employment of staff of the Council.

LNFOD reached out to one of the appointed members of the council, Ms. Pascalina Letsau, to get an inside on the progress made since the appointment members of the council and she had the following to say.

“Unfortunately, since the publication of the gazette on appointment of Members of the Disability Advisory Council, we have not formally and or officially discussed the way forward with the Ministry of Social Development despite several attempts to do so through a meeting. However, it was only on the 14th of September 2023, when LNFOD successfully convened a formal meeting with the Ministry and the Council to discuss the remaining steps to be taken by the Ministry

to facilitate operationalization of the council. The agenda amongst others included; Coordination between the Ministry and Persons with Disability Advisory Council prior to the appointment of the Director General, Ceremonial inauguration of the Persons with Disability Advisory Council, first official meeting of the council and the appointment of the Director General." Ms Letsau concluded by indicating that she is hopeful that following this meeting, the council will formally resume office before the end of the year. She emphasized that one of the critical moves awaiting them as the council is to choose from among themselves, a Chairperson and a Deputy Chairperson and further to determine their own procedures in line with Article 5, as membership has now been legally appointed to officially get the ship sailing.

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Lesotho's under-five population's growth alarmingly stunted.



SPOON'S NUTRITION SCIENTIST, DR ZEINA MAKHOUL.

BY TEBHOHO KHOFU

The Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) reports that a third of children under the age of 5 experience stunting or poor growth,

and that half of children under the age of 5 struggle with iron deficiency. Around 8.2% of children ages 2 to 4 have functional difficulties. This report is in collaboration with the SPOON Foundation, the Johns Hopkins International Injury Research Unit, and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

At the Pilot sharing of the Early Identification Project's results (Dissemination Event) held in Maseru on 23 August 2023, The Executive Director of LNFOD Adv. Nkhasi Sefuthi stressed the importance of early detection of malnutrition and developmental delays. He said in order to screen children for malnutrition and developmental delays at the chosen health centres and preschools, the project's methodology involved using the digital app called Count Me In. Through a series of questions and individualised recommendations, Count Me In assisted the staff. Adv. Sefuthi emphasised that this project helps create inclusive systems in which all kids, regardless of disabilities, have equal opportunities. According to Adv. Sefuthi, Count Me In's recommendations helped with family counselling and, when necessary, referrals for additional evaluation. "Over the course of the three-month pilot programme, 470 kids were screened at preschools and clinics. One in three children were found to be stunted, and one in four were at risk for developmental delays, according to the data, which painted a worrying picture, according to him," Sefuthi said.

The project, which was initially piloted in the districts of Mokhotlong and Maseru, according to Dr. Nukhba Zia, Assistant Scientist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (USA), thoroughly evaluated five clinics and pre-schools in each district. Dr. Zia emphasised that a startling two percent of children between the ages of 0 and 6 have stunting, according to the project's survey.

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Participating in elections may accelerate change.



**ACCESS IS STILL A CHALLENGE TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.
BY PULENG MOSILI.**

Section 26 of the disability equity act speaks to entitlement of persons with disabilities to a barrier free and disability friendly environment to enable persons with disabilities to buildings, roads, and other social amenities among other provisions. However, in practice persons with disabilities suffer in carrying out their day-to-day activities ranging from schooling, participation in economic and social activities due to inaccessible buildings, school facilities and social platforms.

With local government elections coming up at the end of September, persons with disabilities, care givers and parents of persons with disabilities should take caution and exercise their right to vote for an individual who will put their needs into consideration and remove among other barriers, physical barriers hindering them to take part in economic and social actions.

In this day and time, children and adults with disability still face a serious self-degradation whereby they must be literally carried to access for instance buildings with long stairs, toilets (thereby invading their privacy) because they are unable to access the physical structures independently. Coupled with other barriers such as attitudinal barriers, environmental barriers hinder persons with disabilities to take part in education, socials, and economic activities.

By voting, people with disabilities participate in bringing change and developments that will ease their lives and help them partake in society.

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Women with Disabilities in Business celebrate women's Month.



**Women's month celebration, Hlotse.
BY 'MASENONO LETSIE.**

Women with disabilities are largely excluded from economic opportunities in Lesotho, with the financial assistance from Diakone Act Austria, LNFOD has set up proactive measures to create income-generating activities specifically for women with disabilities in Maputsoe, Hlotse and T'sifa-li-Mali. In celebration of women's month, women with disabilities in business from the above-mentioned community councils celebrated together to share their business success stories and challenges with other women. Economically successful women with disability and those without disability were engaged as inspiration for women with disabilities to thrive in business.

Over and above, the fact is, the overall aim is to see women with disabilities employed, it is also LNFOD's goal to also promote self-employment. Through the savings and credit groups that have been formed by these women, it is the expected that at the end, they form businesses from these schemes so that they become economically resilient during and beyond the programme. The activity was held at Leribe Hotel, on the 18-August-2023.

- The activity aimed at lobbying women with disabilities in savings and credit groups in Maputsoe, Ts'ifa-li-mali and Hlotse to start their own businesses using the savings from the schemes as capital.
- Through engaging women with disabilities who are already in business, raise awareness by sharing success stories of women in business so that women in savings and credit groups can replicate.
- To mobilize women with disabilities in savings and credit groups to celebrate women's month together under the theme "Basali ba nang le bokooa khoe bong" (Women with disabilities in business) to economically empower and support one another in business.
- To lobby potential employers (public, private) present at the forum to employ women with disabilities

The office of the District Administrator and Social Development through their representatives encouraged women with disabilities to individually conduct market research before engaging in any kind of business because that will assist them to invest in viable and sustainable businesses which can generate a lot of income in the long run. They were strongly urged to write and submit business proposals to Social-Development-Disability Unit to obtain funding which could assist them to expand their businesses. If women with disabilities are empowered to become economically resilient, they may overcome financial dependency which subjects them to all forms of abuse.

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Lesotho's under-five population's growth alarmingly stunted.

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She indicated that the global sustainable development goals agenda sets ambitious targets to reduce stunting in children under five by 40% and acute malnutrition or wasting to 5%. "According to the survey, children between the ages of 0 and 24 months are shockingly at risk for developmental delays at a rate of 23%," Zia said.

The importance of this project's early identification, according to Dr. Zeina Makhoul, a Nutrition Scientist at SPOON Foundation, is to provide professionals and families with the information and resources they need to have an impact on children during their most important growth and development stages.



EID DISSEMINATION EVENT, VICTORY HALL MASERU.



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“Identifying delays in development and malnutrition as early as possible means children and their families can be provided with support sooner, which gives them the best chance to grow and learn. This project gives professionals and families knowledge and tools to make an impact when children are at their most critical periods of growth and development,” Makhoul.

Speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Health, Dr. 'Makhoase Ranyali, Director of Primary Health Care, emphasised how much they would like to see the project expand due to its originality, highlighting the need for additional training for all stakeholders, including the local population and health professionals.

According to Mrs. 'Masekhoane Khatleli, the Project Officer for the Early Identification of Disability/Delays Project, one of her main duties in this project is to monitor and oversee the pilot sites and pilot participants. She stated that in order to do that successfully, she needs to know what the difficulties are in the pilot sites. She claimed that being able to use Count Me In and its reporting feature has given her the tools she needs to prepare in advance for monitoring visits as the app enables her to view activities in real time, and to monitor their performance, to see if

they are falling behind in screening, and which facilities need more help. “I can schedule my time more effectively and offer assistance where it is most needed thanks to the Count Me In app. Teachers and healthcare professionals can both use this tool, which also easily generates reports that can help people know what to look into, thus supporting monitoring and supervision,” Khatleli said.

Sponsored by UNICEF-Lesotho, SPOON is worked with the Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) and the Department of International Health at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health to develop guidelines, instruments, educational materials, and capacity for identifying disabilities in young children under the age of six and for monitoring the nutritional status of children with disabilities.



EID DISSEMINATION EVENT, VICTORY HALL MASERU.

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