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DISABILITY LESOTHO NEWSLETTER

LNFOD Enhances Safeguarding Protocols at Regional PSEAH Workshop

By Refiloehape Sesinyi

The Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) joined regional stakeholders at a pivotal workshop in Johannesburg to strengthen frameworks for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH). Organized by the Australian Volunteers Program (AVP), the event convened representatives from Southern African nations, including South Africa, Botswana, and Eswatini, to address systemic gaps in safeguarding vulnerable populations.

Workshop Highlights: Building Inclusive Safeguarding Systems

The two-day workshop equipped participants with tools to design and enforce survivor-centered policies aligned with international standards, such as the UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on PSEAH. Key sessions focused on:

- Risk assessments tailored to marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities (PWDs).
- Mechanisms for confidential reporting and survivor support.
- Strategies to dismantle power imbalances that enable exploitation.

LNFOD, a leader in disability rights advocacy since 1989, shared insights on the compounded risks faced by PWDs.

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"Women and children with disabilities are three times more likely to experience sexual violence," noted LNFOD Gender Officer, Refiloehape Sesinyi. "This workshop is critical to ensuring our policies address these intersecting vulnerabilities."

LNFOD's Evolving Safeguarding Framework

While LNFOD established its PSEAH policy in 2021, the federation used the workshop to refine its approach. Key updates include:

- Disability-Specific Training: Staff will undergo mandatory modules on communication with survivors with sensory or intellectual disabilities.
- Community-Led Monitoring: Partnerships with local disability groups to audit safeguarding practices in rural areas.

Why This Matters

Globally, 34% of women with disabilities report sexual violence, yet fewer than 10% of cases are reported due to stigma and inaccessible justice systems. LNFOD's proactive stance underscores a regional shift toward intersectional safeguarding, a model prioritising the unique needs of PWDs.

"Zero tolerance starts with institutional courage," emphasised Sesinyi. "We're not just updating policies; we're transforming cultures."

Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) Invited to Inspect New Senate Building for Accessibility Compliance

By Thaabe 'Moso

The Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) was invited by the Senate to conduct a comprehensive inspection of Lesotho's newly constructed Senate building in March 2025 to assess its compliance with national and international accessibility standards for persons with disabilities. The exercise aimed to ensure the building's design and infrastructure align with legal and policy frameworks promoting inclusivity and equal access for all citizens.

The inspection team, led by Senate officials and LNFOD representatives and including architects, evaluated critical areas such as ramps, door widths, elevators, restrooms, signage, and parking facilities. Their assessment focused on adherence to accessibility guidelines that guarantee safe and independent mobility for individuals with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities.

National and International Legal Frameworks

The inspection underscored Lesotho's obligations under both domestic and global legal instruments. Nationally, the Disability Equity Act of 2021 mandates that public buildings be designed and retrofitted to ensure full accessibility. Additionally, Lesotho's Constitution (Section 26) enshrines the right to equality and prohibits discrimination based on disability.

Internationally, Lesotho ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008, which obligates states to eliminate barriers to accessibility in public spaces (Article 9). The inspection also referenced the African Disability Protocol, adopted under the African Union, which Lesotho has signed, emphasising the removal of architectural barriers to foster social inclusion.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Preliminary findings revealed mixed results. While the **S**enate building features modern ramps and elevators, handrails, and wheelchair-accessible walkways, inspectors noted insufficient tactile paving for visually impaired individuals, narrow restroom stalls incompatible with wheelchairs, no squat toilets with grab bars, no accessible parking space and inadequate auditory signals in elevators. The team also highlighted the absence of Braille signage and emergency evacuation plans tailored to persons with disabilities.

"Accessibility is not a privilege; it is a right," said LNFOD Advocacy Task Team (ATT) member Mr Molise Foso. "This building represents progress and a fundamental shift, but gaps remain. We urge the contractors and Senate to address these issues promptly to ensure no one is excluded from participating in democratic processes."

Government Response

Senate officials and contractors positively acknowledged the findings and pledged collaboration with LNFOD to implement corrective measures. "We are committed to inclusivity," stated Mr Teboho Sekese, an official from the Senate. "Adjustments will be mad e to align with legal standards, reflecting our dedication to serving all Basotho."

Implications for the Future

The inspection marks a critical step in Lesotho's journey toward disability inclusion, particularly as the nation advances its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). LNFOD commends the Senate for voluntarily taking this progressive step of ensuring that it provides a disability friendly and inclusive environment and service provision.This exercise highlights the importance of accountability but also serves as a reminder that true progress lies in creating spaces where everyone, regardless of ability, can thrive

Parents Unite to Support Their Children with Disabilities in Butha-Buthe District

By Pascalina Letsau

In a heartwarming and powerful gathering, a group of parents of children with disabilities—known as Morate Cerebral Palsy (CP) in Butha-Buthe—came together to share their experiences and aspirations for a brighter future. The meeting aimed to introduce the Mabita Federation of Persons with Disabilities, a district-level organization dedicated to advocating for the rights and inclusion of individuals with disabilities, to these devoted parents.

The Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (LNFOD) was invited to the discussion through a disability focal person and paralegal who is a member of Morate. LNFOD recognized this as an opportunity to encourage parents to join the Mabita Federation and collaborate in establishing a Safe Space within their existing group. This Safe Space would foster ongoing dialogue, emotional support, and empowerment among parents, alongside the exchange of resources and knowledge.

One of Morate's primary goals is to save money collectively throughout the year, enabling parents to purchase essential items in bulk by year-end. These items include milk, soap, clothing, and medical supplies such as disposable nappies. Parents also highlighted the importance of sharing caregiving advice, practical tips, and celebrating international disability awareness days within their district.

Despite their unity and determination, the group openly discussed the challenges they face, particularly the lack of support from the Department of Social Development. Many children with disabilities under their care do not receive the Child Dependency Grant, exacerbating financial strain on families already navigating hardship.

The parents earnestly appealed to LNFOD to assist them in securing a physiotherapist for their children, emphasizing the urgent need for professional support in stretching and physical care.

The presence of LNFOD at the meeting ignited joy and hope among the parents. They expressed profound gratitude for an organization that understands their struggles and is committed to walking alongside them in the fight for inclusion, dignity, and quality care for all children with disabilities in Mabita.

This gathering marks a significant milestone in building a stronger, more inclusive community—one where no child is left behind and where parents no longer feel isolated in their journey

Lesotho Must Ratify the : A Call from Women and Girls with Disabilities

By Pascalina Letsau

Lesotho, as a proud member of the African Union (AU), has taken significant steps toward upholding the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. The country has ratified international instruments on disability rights and further demonstrated its commitment by enacting national legislation aimed at protecting persons with disabilities. These milestones reflect Lesotho's intent to be a progressive and inclusive nation where everyone, regardless of ability, can enjoy their fundamental human rights.

However, as women and girls with disabilities in Lesotho, we continue to face disproportionate challenges that demand urgent attention. From systemic barriers in accessing inclusive education to deeply rooted stigma and gender-based violence, our lived experiences reveal a reality far removed from the ideals enshrined in both international and national laws.

One of the critical instruments that addresses our unique challenges within an African context is the African Disability Protocol (ADP). This Protocol establishes a framework that recognizes the intersectional issues faced by persons with disabilities across the continent—particularly women and girls—including cultural, socio-economic, and environmental factors that exacerbate our marginalization.

The ADP is not merely another legal document. It is a transformative commitment that speaks to the heart of what it means to foster inclusive, equitable societies in Africa. Ratifying this Protocol would enable Lesotho to align more closely with regional standards and strengthen protections for its citizens with disabilities through a lens that is uniquely African.

As advocates, daughters, mothers, leaders, and contributors to our nation, we, the women and girls with disabilities in Lesotho, issue a heartfelt appeal to our government:

Let us not be left behind.

Let our rights not remain mere words on paper.

Let us walk together into a future where no one is excluded.

We urge the Government of Lesotho to ratify the African Disability Protocol. This act would not only symbolize our country's deepening commitment to disability inclusion but also lay the foundation for practical actions that transform lives—especially for those who have been silenced and sidelined for far too long.

We are ready to rise. We ask our nation to rise with us.

Inclusive Education Undermined in Berea Schools: Policy Gaps and Systemic Failures

By Motheba Makara-Mpota

Despite being a signatory to international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the Government of Lesotho continues to falter in implementing inclusive education policies, particularly in Berea district schools. The 2018/19 Inclusive Education Policy highlights systemic neglect, leaving schools unequipped to support learners with disabilities and perpetuating cycles of poverty and exclusion.

Policy vs. Reality: A Stark Disconnect

While Lesotho's laws mandate accessible education for all, schools in Berea lack basic infrastructure such as ramps, elevators, or disability-friendly sanitation facilities. "Our classrooms are on the hill and rocky terrain, and there is no paving. How can a child in a wheelchair attend?" laments one principal at a public secondary school. District Education Officers confirm that the government has not allocated funds to retrofit schools or train teachers in inclusive trainings.

The Inclusive Education Policy and Persons with Disability Act 2021 explicitly require schools to adopt accessible formats (e.g., Braille materials, sign language interpreters) and hire specialized staff. However, over 80% schools in Berea reportedly have no assistive devices, and fewer than 10% of teachers have received disability-inclusive training, according to inspections done by the Lesotho National Federation of Organizations of the Disabled (LNFOD) between 2023 to date.

Parental Challenges and Accountability Gaps

Although the law prohibits schools from denying enrolment to children with disabilities, enforcement is virtually non-existent. Many parents, particularly in rural Berea, keep children with disabilities at home due to stigma or logistical barriers. "My son is deaf, but his school has no interpreter. What's the point of sending him?" asks 'Mamohau Lekhema, a parent in Motanasela Community Council.

While the Act penalizes guardians who withhold education, authorities rarely act, citing "resource constraints."

Broader Implications: Poverty and Vulnerability

The failure to prioritize inclusive education entrenches inequality. Over 60% of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Lesotho live below the poverty line, linked directly to limited educational access and subsequent unemployment. "Without education, PWDs are denied opportunities to thrive. This is a human rights crisis," asserts Thaabe 'Moso, an LNFOD advocacy officer.

Calls for Action

Educators and activists urge the government to:

1.Revise and reactivate the Inclusive Education Policy with clear funding timelines.

2.Audit school infrastructure and allocate budgets for accessibility upgrades.

3.Partner with NGOs to train teachers and distribute assistive technologies.

4.Launch awareness campaigns to combat stigma and hold non-compliant institutions accountable.

"Laws alone aren't enough. We need political will," emphasizes 'Moso. As Berea's schools remain inaccessible, the promise of equitable education grows increasingly distant for Lesotho's most vulnerable learners

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LNFOD

NOTHING ABOUT US, WITHOUT US!

LNFOD Hosts Quarterly Disability Advocacy Meetings and Principals' Forum in Mokhotlong

By Pheko Makhetha

Mokhotlong Urban Council Meeting: Addressing Challenges and Celebrating Progress

On March 17, 2025, the Lesotho National Federation of Organizations of the Disabled (LNFOD) convened a meeting at the Mokhotlong Urban Council boardroom. Seven disability focal persons and one paralegal were scheduled to attend, though one representative from the Mojakisane Electoral Division (ED) missed the session due to delayed invitations. Attendees submitted completed reporting forms and collected new ones for ongoing advocacy efforts.

Key Challenges:

- Lack of Timely Communication: Focal persons highlighted difficulties in staying informed about public gatherings, as chiefs' aides often fail to notify them promptly. A proposed solution involves regular coordination with local chiefs and councillors.
- Stigma and Labeling: Some individuals with disabilities reject being identified as such, complicating data collection and support efforts.
- Resource Misuse: A few families reportedly conceal children with disabilities until donation drives, while others falsely claim disabilities to access benefits.

Notable Successes:

- Counselling Impact: Focal persons provided counselling to individuals with disabilities, fostering greater self-acceptance.
- Employment Opportunity: A focal person in Ntlholohetsane ED secured employment for a deaf woman at Lithoeleng.
- Increased Cooperation: Previously reluctant guardians now willingly share personal details for documentation, signalling growing trust.

Seate Community Council Meeting: Combating Stigma Through Awareness

A follow-up meeting on March 19, 2025, in Mapholaneng's Seate Community Council saw five focal persons and one paralegal in attendance. Three representatives were absent—two were unreachable by phone, and one was in Maputsoe.

Persistent Challenges:

- Negative Public Attitudes: Despite awareness campaigns, societal biases against persons with disabilities (PWDs) persist.
- Exploitative Behavior: Some families hide children with disabilities until donation events, undermining genuine support efforts.

Achievements:

- **Attitude Shifts:** Public gatherings led by focal persons have gradually improved community perceptions of PWDs.
- **Parental Engagement:** After advocacy efforts, parents now allow focal persons to accompany daughters to clinics for Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) services.
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Principals' Forum: Advancing Inclusive Education

On March 27, 2025, LNFOD organized a meeting with eight primary school principals at Mokhotlong's Education Office Hall. Discussions focused on:

1. **Defining Disability:** Principals engaged in robust dialogue to clarify misconceptions.
2. **Inclusive vs. Special Education:** Participants differentiated between the two approaches, emphasizing inclusive education's role in mainstream classrooms.
3. **School Disability Clubs:** Principals unanimously supported launching disability-inclusive student clubs to promote awareness and peer support.

Conclusion:

These meetings underscore LNFOD's dual focus on addressing systemic barriers and celebrating grassroots victories. While challenges like stigma and resource gaps persist, collaborative efforts between advocates, educators, and communities offer hope for a more inclusive Mokhotlong.

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