



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Lesotho

Fostering Urban Resilience through Preparedness Activities in Southern Africa

CONTEXT

Often deemed as a primarily rural economy, more than one-third (34.2%) of Lesotho's population of 2.2 million people now resides in urban areas.¹ Here, there are deep-rooted pockets of poverty masked by the perceived access to services and opportunities that comes with urban living. 54% of the country's urbanites are living in informal settlements² and the level of poverty in cities continuous to rise, mainly driven by high levels of unemployment resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

With factories and school closures during Covid-19, many people returned to their rural homes as they could no longer afford rent after losing their livelihoods, due to the loss of jobs and income-earning opportunities that came with the pandemic. The result was reversed socio-economic trends, including the influx of female textile workers who had moved to urban areas of the lowlands drawn to job opportunities created by the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which encouraged the export of materials to the United States of America. This also translated to other households losing their livelihoods as they depended on rent income earned from the rural people who had come to the urban areas in search of job opportunities.

URBAN LESOTHO

At a glance

+1/3

of Lesotho's population (34.2%) lives in urban areas³

45.9%

of the population is expected to live in urban areas by 2050⁴

33.5%

of urban dwellers live in slums and informal settlements⁵

1 IN 5

adults in Lesotho is living with HIV⁶

158,000

people in urban areas are food insecure⁷

31.2%

people below the international poverty line⁸



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Lesotho has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the world (20.9%),⁹ with one in five adults living with HIV. The prevalence of HIV is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas. The high HIV prevalence rate, compounded by the uncertainties of the Covid-19 pandemic, has caused an increase of vulnerable groups, particularly Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs).¹⁰

Urban vulnerability in Lesotho is further amplified by people's frequent exposure to heavy rains, floods, droughts, precipitation-induced landslides, strong winds, heavy snowfalls, and hailstorms.

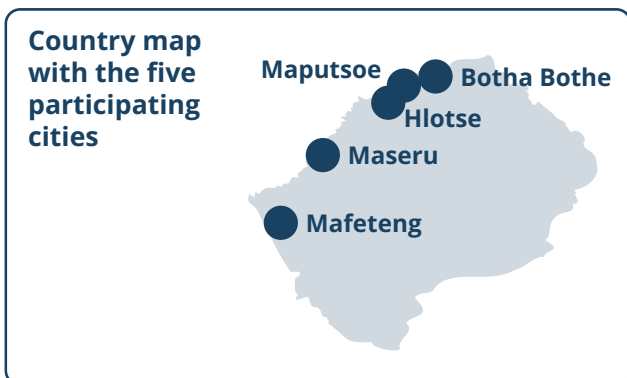
Due to the unavailability of land and long processes of land acquisition in planned parts of urban areas, rural-to-urban migrants often settle in unplanned and hazard-prone areas of the urban councils, increasing their levels of exposure to natural and man-induced hazards.

This interaction of natural and human-induced hazards adds to the vulnerability and complexity in urban areas of Lesotho and requires context-specific preparedness and response measures and tools to respond to the dynamic nature of cities.

THE REGIONAL URBAN PREPAREDNESS PROJECT IN LESOTHO

In Lesotho, WFP is implementing the Regional Urban Preparedness Project in partnership with the Disaster Management Authority (DMA), the Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC) and the Ministry of Social Development. The goal is to build a common understanding amongst stakeholders on the specific characteristics of urban vulnerability and essential needs, and strengthen country capacity by providing partners, local governments, and national institutions with a set of tools to better prepare for responding to shocks in urban areas. Assessments were carried out in the cities of Botha-Bothe, Hlotse, Maputsoe, Mafeteng, and Maseru—the latter being the main contributor to Lesotho's urban growth—to identify gaps in knowledge and coordination, as well as the adequacy of cash-based programmes in these urban centres.

Civil society organisations and community representatives were involved in each phase of the project to ensure their needs and aspirations were placed at the centre of urban emergency response planning. The participatory approach taken highlighted the importance of involving vulnerable groups, such as women, older persons, migrants, orphaned and vulnerable children, and persons with disabilities. For example, in Mafeteng, persons with disabilities emphasised how they are the only ones who can fully comprehend their vulnerabilities, providing insights that can benefit disaster preparedness and response.



FINDINGS #1

Emergency coordination. The DMA coordinates disaster risk management activities at the national, district, and village level, liaising with ministries and other non-state actors to perform its activities. The DMA leads the Lesotho Vulnerability Committee (LVAC)—a multi-disciplinary group including relevant ministries, international agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) through which multi-hazard contingency plans and DRR plans are prepared, and disasters are managed.

The DMA also works closely with the Ministry of Social Development to implement shock-responsive social protection measures, using the National Information for Social Assistance (NISSA).

Since 2019, the NISSA is being updated to expand its coverage to selected urban areas, a need further emphasized after witnessing the impacts of Covid-19 over city dwellers. Going forward, the NISSA requires further expansion, updating, and testing of the targeting criteria in urban areas (see Box on Pg. 7: “Country-Led Opportunity under the Theme of Social Protection”).



Consultations revealed that community-based organisations, the private sector, and civil society organisations are often not involved in coordinated disaster preparedness. Yet, during disasters they voluntarily support response. For example, during Covid-19, the private company Alliance Insurance supported response to affected populations in urban areas. Street vendor associations supported validation for reliable community-based targeting of vendors in need of assistance.



FINDINGS #2

Urban vulnerability dynamics. The livelihood patterns of urban dwellers in Lesotho show a mix of urban livelihood strategies and peri-urban livelihood strategies with most households having land and livestock holdings, which provide casual labour opportunities for the vulnerable. There are limited income-generating opportunities outside of formal employment in the public sector, with retailers, banks, and communication networks. Most poor households, therefore, rely on street vending as a source of income, such as in Mafeteng. In Botha-Bothe, high rates of unemployment and lack of casual labour opportunities force community members to commute to the urban centre in search of job opportunities; however, poor access to roads poses a major challenge to securing livelihoods, particularly during the rainy season, while presenting a serious safety hazard.

Despite the proximity and availability of land, the soil texture and drought frequency undermine agricultural efforts, further pushing households to rely on purchases. Despite the prominence of backyard gardening

throughout the towns, purchase is still the second most important and sometimes the only source of food for vulnerable households.

Two meals a day are commonly consumed due to the scarcity of food, driving households with HIV/AIDS-affected members to often exhibit non-compliance with antiretroviral therapy (ART) procedures. High food shortages hamper them from taking the treatment adequately, even though the treatment itself is offered at no fees.

Given the unique challenges experienced in urban Lesotho, the revision of the LVAC's vulnerability framework should therefore build on three main pillars: 1) the use of a multi-dimensional approach beyond the traditional food security focus and the introduction of the Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB)/ Economic Capacity to Meet Essential Needs (ECMEN) indicators,¹¹ 2) the incorporation of labour-related questions that can help better characterise livelihood activities, and 3) the impact of people's exposure to hazards on their overall vulnerability.

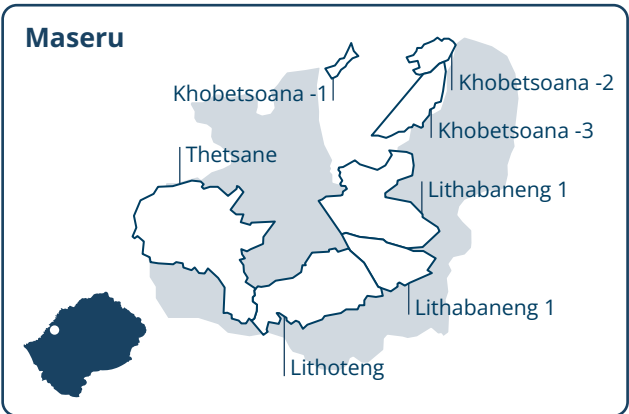
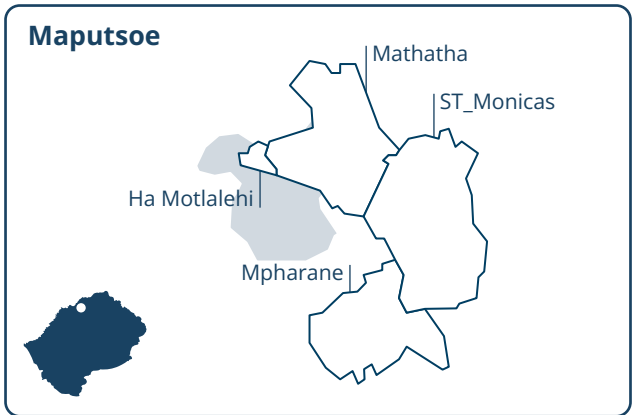
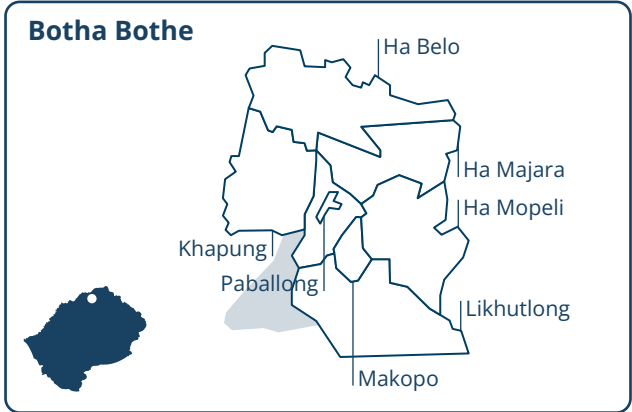
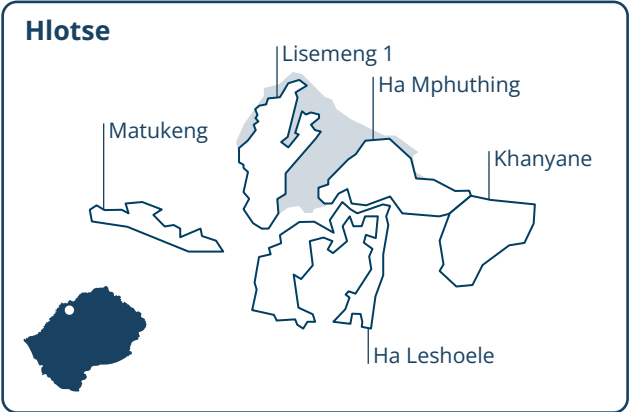
WHO ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE?

Dimensions of urban vulnerability in Lesotho

	EXTREMELY VULNERABLE						VULNERABLE	
DEMOGRAPHICS	Orphans and vulnerable children	Chronically ill household heads	Older household heads (65+)	Households headed by persons with disabilities	Single women headed households	Households with 6+ members	Nuclear households with no working member	
LIVELIHOOD	Begging	Casual labour	Street vending & recycling	Traditional beer brewing	Pension & social grants	Dependent on gifts	Small scale urban farming	Formal employment with low paid jobs
HEALTH	Has chronically ill household members	Lacks access to healthcare services	Living with disabilities	Default on treatment (ART)	Drug addiction	Malnourished	Access free public health care services	Adhere to treatment (ART)
EDUCATION	Cannot cover school fees and supplies	Children not completing primary education	Poor school attendance	Children join gangs			Children complete free primary education	Children attend school up to secondary school but struggle with school supplies (stationery, uniforms)
WASH	Inadequate pit latrines	Not access to piped water	No pit latrines				Improved pit latrines	Have access to drinkable water
ASSETS & FOOD STOCKS	No productive assets	No food stocks	No arable land				Few assets	Low food stocks and make frequent daily purchases
HOUSING	Inadequate housing in informal areas	No electricity					Rent proper houses	Own well built houses



WHERE ARE THE MOST VULNERABLE?





FINDINGS #3

Cash-based responses in urban areas. In Lesotho, a National Cash Working Group¹² is present but not very active. In the Country there is no estimation of a Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB), defined as what a household requires to meet their essential needs, on a regular or seasonal basis, and its cost. Estimation of urban food insecurity is based on the Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security (CARI),¹³ and there are no livelihoods baseline profiles. In the absence of the MEB, there is no method for estimating the cash transfer values for urban assistance. Consequently, the estimation of these cash transfer values has been ad-hoc and largely based on rural-centric methodologies. However, if urban social assistance programmes are to make a meaningful impact, clear methodologies for estimating the essential needs of urban populations are required. In line with this, there is a need to strengthen the national inter-agency Cash Working Group, which facilitates cash programming collaboration between organisations.

Through the project, an urban MEB was determined, tailored to the essential needs and costs associated with urban living with respect to housing, healthcare, transport, energy, etc. Lessons learned from the Covid-19 response show that urban dwellers prefer cash-based assistance over other modalities and that conditions are favourable for successful implementation.

Econet, the largest telecommunications company in the country, has already standing agreements with the Ministry of Social Development to deliver mainstream social protection. Econet showed availability and interest in expanding the collaboration with the Ministry and WFP, in order to increase the coverage of urban safety nets in response of shocks.



The average monthly MEB for a household is **USD\$ 66.0** and **USD\$ 16** per person to be able to meet food and other essential needs.

The average (food and non-food) gap is set on 38%, being the percentage of the basket that vulnerable households cannot meet. The project has identified a theoretical Transfer Value for an urban response in Maseru to be corresponding to this percentage, equivalent to **USD\$ 33** per household.



WAY FORWARD

The project has built a better understanding amongst stakeholders of how urban vulnerability is experienced in Lesotho, and what are people's essential needs.

The review of institutional arrangements and urban vulnerabilities has placed a spotlight on existing gaps that will require establishing new institutions and procedures, including the strengthening of the National Cash Working Group. Project outcomes, therefore, include tools and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for emergency coordination, urban vulnerability assessments, and cash-based programming.

WFP has been working in Lesotho for over 50 years, and since 2021 the organization continued to work with the government and partners to distribute cash through the Vodacom-Mpesa mobile money platform, allowing for flexibility and choice amongst recipients.

The transfer value was determined and standardised across emergency interventions by the LVAC. WFP has also been working with the Ministry of Social Development, in collaboration with UNICEF and FAO, in the elaboration of the scalability framework for shock-responsive social protection, using the NISSA social registry.

Following the results of this project, WFP foresees three entry points for further advancing capacity strengthening of national and local government in tackling urban vulnerability. First, providing technical support to the LVAC for revising the current urban vulnerability framework. Second, supporting the Ministry of Social Development, in partnership with UNICEF, in adapting and expanding the NISSA for more shock-responsive social protection in urban areas. And third, supporting city councils to integrate DRR plans into policies at the local level.

COUNTRY-LED OPPORTUNITY UNDER THE THEME OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated efforts to increase the coverage of social protection systems in urban and peri-urban areas, resulting in the further expansion of the NISSA. Initially updated back in 2014 to achieve national coverage, the NISSA was once again expanded in 2020, this time to cover 12 urban

councils. While the targeting methodology employed requires further improvement for its effective application in urban areas, the expansion of the NISSA has set the foundation to facilitate greater and more adequate NISSA registration in urban areas of Lesotho.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

WFP is implementing a Regional Urban Preparedness Project in **Lesotho, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe**, focusing activities in 12 urban areas. Funded by the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), the project, titled “Fostering Community Resilience through Preparedness Activities in Southern Africa,” aims to build a common understanding on the specific characteristics of urban vulnerability and essential needs, and provide partners, local governments, and national institutions a set of tools to better prepare for responding to shocks in urban areas.

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For more info on the project

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Photo credits

Photos page 1, 3, 5, 7: WFP/Arianna Francioni
Photo page 2: Unsplash/Tatenda Mapigoti
Photo page 6: WFP/Mokotla Ntela

Endnotes

- 1 World Bank, 2021
- 2 UN-Habitat & WFP (2021). Life Amidst a Pandemic: Urban Livelihoods, Food Security and Nutrition in Sub-Saharan Africa. Available at: <https://unhabitat.org/life-amidst-a-pandemic-urban-livelihoods-food-security-and-nutrition-in-sub-saharan-africa>
- 3 World Bank, 2021
- 4 UNDESA
- 5 UN-Habitat, 2018
- 6 World Bank, 2020
- 7 LVAC, 2021
- 8 World Bank, 2020
- 9 World Bank, 2020
- 10 The Lesotho National Early Warning Strategic Action Plan, 2020
- 11 The economic capacity to meet essential needs (ECMEN) is a measure of the economic vulnerability of a population. It is defined as the percentage of households whose economic capacity is sufficient to meet their essential needs, as measured through the minimum expenditure basket (MEB)
- 12 National Cash Working Group aims to support the coordination, harmonization, and development of an effective approach to implementation, delivery, and quality Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) for the humanitarian response
- 13 The CARI is a harmonized WFP method used to analyse primary data from a single household's food security survey, and to classify individual households according to their level of food security

