



UNV inaugurates a new computer lab in the Butha-Buthe Youth Resource Centre in Lesotho. (UNV Lesotho, 2016)

Building job skills of young people across Lesotho through volunteer-led youth centres

Young people in Lesotho, as in many parts of the world, are facing challenges. High rates (35%) of unemployment, lack of access to quality education, gender inequality, and significant threats from the HIV/AIDS pandemic have left a generation of young people in Lesotho with limited opportunities.

In order to improve conditions for young people in Lesotho, a groundbreaking partnership between the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, [United Nations Population Fund](#) (UNFPA), [German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation](#) (BMZ), Lesotho National Youth Council, Office of the Director of Youth at the Ministry of Youth, and youth-focused VIOs in Lesotho, builds the employment skills of young people, provides them with greater access to information on health and gender issues, and provides them with spaces to network and learn.

In a unique innovation, this initiative is almost entirely volunteer-run. Both

international and local volunteers are tasked with designing and implementing the project, thus ensuring that it is locally-relevant and responsive to local youth needs. It also helps harness the energy and enthusiasm that volunteers bring.

Throughout 2016, the project established ten youth centres across Lesotho. The centres cater to youth from the local community, and ensure an even distribution of youth from urban and rural areas, from various educational backgrounds, and social backgrounds. Crucially, the youth who engage directly in the centres are then deployed in the wider community to support other young people – this ‘cascading effect’ ensures a wide reach into communities.

Key activities included training for more than 400 community youth volunteers and youth leaders on community engagement, civic awareness, the Sustainable Development Goals, and comprehensive sexual health education (CSE). Through a workshop on social media and civic engagement, the project empowered 50 community youth leaders to establish their own social media platforms to engage other young people.

“ *The platform created by UN Volunteers here in Lesotho opened doors and massively facilitated the role of volunteers in the development of young people, especially adolescents.* ”

The project also helped strengthen Basotho youth organizations through the creation of a database of relevant organizations in the country aimed at improving coordination and networking. UNV also hosted a three-day retreat for 30 youth-led volunteer-involving organizations (VIOs), creating a coordination mechanism for VIOs, subsequently used to develop a country-wide talent acquisition platform and entrepreneurship support network.

“Beyond the Resource Centre, this was, amongst others, through facilitating the creation of community youth focal health groups that help cement social norms and instill a sense of civic responsibility and belonging on the part of the young people” – Mr. Mckenzie Thamae, National UN Youth Volunteer, UNFPA, Leribe District Youth Resource Centre

One of the most profound effects of the project was to greatly increase awareness about the value of volunteerism among Basotho youth as a means to participate in civic life, gain hard and soft job skills, and engage in national development. This led to a significant growth in young people seeking volunteer opportunities, with more than 1,000 young people registering to volunteer in the UNV database in 2016 alone. UN agencies present in the country have also used this opportunity to engage youth volunteers on short-term assignments

“When I joined UN in 2015 I never imagined that I can make an exceptional difference to the community of Quthing... Through the programme I have learnt conflict management skills, how to organize an event and how to exercise patience when working with young people”. – Ntheosi Patience Makara, National UN Volunteer, UNDP/DDP, Quthing District

The strong collaboration of the government, youth organizations, and the youth community in general was critical to the success of this project, as it helped establish proper management mechanisms, systematic consultation with appropriate stakeholders, and collaborative solutions to challenges.

For UNV, this highly successful project can be viewed as an easily replicable model for other countries seeking to build the skills and experience of their young people while harnessing their potential for national development.

 **East and Southern Africa**

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Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 3: Good health and well-being](#) [SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth](#) [SDG 10: Reduced inequalities](#)