Lesotho

African Library Project

About the Country
Lesotho, also known as the Mountain Kingdom, is a small country encircled by South Africa. Founded as a kingdom in the 1820s, Lesotho was a British protectorate for almost 100 years (1868-1966) before regaining independence in 1966. It has since been a constitutional monarchy, ruled by King Moshoeshoe II and his son, Letsie III.

Lesotho is known for its diverse terrain of mountains, plains and plateaus, allowing for exquisite hikes and horseback rides, fishing and other outdoor activities. The country's economy is based primarily on subsistence agriculture and textile production. Lesotho exports more garments to the US than any other sub-Saharan nation; American companies like the Gap, Levi-Strauss and Wal-Mart have factories there.

Lesotho's natural resources include diamonds and water, which generates income both as a commodity and through hydroelectric power production. Many Basotho rely on employment in South Africa to support their families. Sesotho is the primary official language, but English is also spoken.

Lesotho has the second highest prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in the world with roughly a quarter of the adult populations being HIV positive; there is also a tuberculosis co-epidemic.

Education
In general, public schools in Africa charge tuition at all levels of schooling but since 2000, primary school education in Lesotho has been free and as a result, enrollment has increased. Unfortunately, students and parents face many issues paying tuition at the high school level. Only about a third of high school-age children attend school due to lack of funding and space. With almost 85% of Basotho adults able to read, Lesotho has one of the highest literacy rates in Africa

The African Library Project
Lesotho is the home of the first African Library Project in Malealea Valley, begun in 2005. Since then, ALP has partnered with the U.S. Peace Corps, the Ministry of Education, and local citizens to start/improve more than 471 libraries; this includes libraries in schools, health clinics, and prisons.

In 2009, Lesotho hosted the 2nd ALP African Partners Summit. Among other activities, the Summit featured library tours of Lesotho's innovative classroom libraries in primary schools. Lesotho will host the African Partner Summit again in 2020.

Quick Facts

- Lesotho's colorful, traditional blankets inspired costume design in the Marvel film, *Black Panther.* Corn in the patterns signifies wealth and fertility.
- Lesotho is home to the highest ski resort in Africa: Afriski, located 3050 meters above sea level.
- The currency is called the Basotho Loti. It is pegged 1:1 to the South African Rand.
- When you visit Lesotho and come across any craft market, notice the conical shaped hat or *mokorotlo.* This image is on the national flag meant to represent mountains.
- Lesotho is pronounced "le-soo-too".