

Lesotho

“Sitting together at home without a breadwinner made us reach a decision for me to go and fend for the family”

Lehasa is 42 years old and has been a migrant for two years, ever since her husband became too sick to continue working in the South African mines. Until she was 40, she had stayed in Lesotho and looked after the household and children while her husband was away. They have four children: two boys aged 21 and 16, and two girls aged 8 and 4. Last year her oldest son, who has a secondary school education but could not find a job in Lesotho, went to South Africa to work as an unskilled labourer. Lehasa believes that it is better for women to go to work in South Africa these days “because every time you hear stories from men that there is no money, no work, or the job they were doing is finished.”

Lehasa says she migrated because her husband was unable to work anymore and “sitting together at home without a breadwinner made us reach a decision for me to go and fend for the family.” However, she had an additional motive: “I wanted to earn some more money so that I could come back home and start some small business (a spaza shop).” She was told of an employment agency north of Pretoria that was placing Basotho domestic workers with South African employers. She went there and got a job. As a domestic worker, like many of her fellow female migrants from Lesotho, she earns R12,000 a year. She is able to remit R10,000 a year which last year went primarily toward food (R7,000), clothing (R1,000), fuel (R1,500), hiring a tractor to plough their field (R500) and “a small packet of seed to sow in my field.” Around 60% of the household income goes toward food purchase. She has two “remittance channels”:

“I post the money home or bring it myself after two months. This money is received by my husband. I do not make the decisions as to how the money I send is to be used. I send it to him because he is the one taking care of the children. I think this money makes a difference in providing food, for without it my children would die of hunger. One of my sons has to repeat Standard 7 (in high school). He only got a third class pass but I do not know if the money I send will be enough to send him to school.”

Lehasa says she wants to save money but is unable to do so, simply because there is not enough. And when she does, she anticipates that her savings will not go towards the business she had planned to start and AIDS: “There are many deaths these days and the money saved would help in the burial of members of my household or me.”



Lesotho is one of the most migration-dependent countries in the world. Of a population of 2 million people, over 240,000 are estimated to be abroad. South Africa, which completely surrounds the Kingdom of Lesotho, is the primary migration destination. Traditionally, Basotho migrants have been male miners. However, mine retrenchments, combined with the collapse of apartheid, wider sociodemographic changes due to HIV/AIDS, and an increase in female heads of household, have led to increased female migration for domestic work. Migrants' remittances are the country's major source of foreign exchange, accounting for 25% of GDP in 2006.*

This Life Story was published in March 2010 and pertains to the project "Gender and Remittances: Constructing Gender Sensitive Development" produced by UN-INSTRAW and UNDP, with funding from Japan WID.

*Source: Crush J., Dodson B., Gay J. and Leduka C. (2010), Migration, Remittances and Gender-Responsive Local Development: The case of Lesotho, Santo Domingo.

