



MILLENNIUM
CHALLENGE CORPORATION
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



April 5, 2011 | www.mcc.gov

Promoting Gender Equality in Lesotho: Maleribe's Story

On March 10, 2010, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) published a *success story* about Maleribe Leleka, who lives in Pitseng, a village in northern Lesotho, and is benefiting from the passage of the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act.

Maleribe separated from her husband and raised her children on her own. After struggling to secure a job, she saved enough money to buy property. But at that time – prior to the 2006 enactment of the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act – women like Maleribe held the legal status of minors, limiting their economic, financial, and social rights. So when she went to her village chief, he did not allow the property purchase to go forward. As a married woman, Maleribe had no decision-making power and her husband had resurfaced to claim his right to the land. She needed her husband's permission and signature on formal financial transactions, even though she did not live with him and he had not supported the family in many years.



On March 7, 2011, Maleribe Leleka received a grant of US \$2,900 to start a small business in her hometown of Pitseng, Lesotho.

In 2009, Maleribe attended a community council meeting where MCA-Lesotho, the Government entity implementing the MCC Compact, was conducting training on the newly passed Married Persons Act, which repealed the laws that made married women in Lesotho second-class citizens. Maleribe learned that under the new law, she and thousands of other Basotho women no longer needed their husbands' permission to apply for a loan or purchase property. Maleribe immediately went to her village chief to show him she no longer needed her husband's approval to purchase land from a private individual. In accordance with the new law, Maleribe now owns property in her name. She immediately began purchasing rocks, cement and windowpanes to build a stable, safe house on her new property.

Building Dreams

On March 7, 2011, Maleribe officially received a grant of \$2,900 from Brian Baltimore, the MCC Deputy Resident Country Director based in Maseru, Lesotho. Brian won the 2010 MCC Gender Integration Award, and gifted the money to Maleribe to help her start a business.

After receiving the grant, Maleribe smiled and through a translator stated, “My life will go smoothly now... With the money from the business I will be able to build my house and I can send my son to Lerotholi Polytechnic to study science.” Maleribe had been praying for an opportunity to start her own business for years, but she didn’t know when it would happen or how she would get the money. She had explored other options—such as creating a savings group among a number of local women—but none of them came to fruition. Now that she has purchased property and can use the land to create a business, she will finally gain control over her family’s future. She hopes to use the award to start a poultry and piggery project on the land she purchased, and to someday sell pork and eggs to local companies in bulk. However, her business plan will be flexible and the development of her project will mirror the process of MCC compact development.

Since Maleribe will face a number of challenges, the MCA-Lesotho Gender Coordinator and Public Outreach head will work with her to develop a strategic proposal that will be refined for technical feasibility, costs and sustainability. Maleribe will also undergo business skills training provided by MCA-Lesotho under the Gender and Economic Rights project, as well as additional project-specific skills training based on her business plan. All of this training is supported by the \$2,900 grant, and money will be disbursed from the account for specific goods and services relevant to the project.

Maleribe said she has already seen progress among women in her community—they are asking each other about MCA-Lesotho public announcements on the radio and want to know more about their right to buy land. While gender-equitable land titling will take time to implement in Lesotho, Maleribe believes MCA-Lesotho’s outreach programs are making a profound impact through education and training on women’s rights under the new law. Well over 50 percent of the titles to be issued under the MCA-Lesotho land regularization program will go to women individually or jointly with their spouses.

The MCC-funded Gender Activity

The Gender Equality team at MCA-Lesotho is carefully building awareness, knowledge and acceptance of gender equality in the economic rights of both men and women as part of the \$1 million Gender Activity. They are conducting training on the new laws for government agencies and other institutions such as the civil and customary law judiciary and the banking industry. They also have a country-wide outreach program to reach deeply into rural society and institutions, including chiefs and community councils, to advocate and teach the benefits of gender equality for the development of the Basotho people. Thanks to this training, thousands of women in Lesotho are now aware of the rights and services they can access without a husband’s permission.

In a country where traditions, religion, and culture have, in the past, defined gender roles and limited women’s rights, opportunities made available to women like Maleribe through the passing of this legislation and MCA’s training and outreach program are leading the process of change. Because gender equality

strengthens a country's opportunities for economic growth and poverty reduction, it is encouraging to know that MCC is contributing to gender equality in Lesotho.

The \$36 million Private Sector Development Project is increasing private sector investment and economic activity in Lesotho by improving access to credit, reducing transaction costs, and increasing the participation of women in the national economy.

- The passing of the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act was a pre-condition set by MCC before moving forward with the Lesotho Compact.
- By the end of the second year of the MCC Compact, the Gender Equality team trained 2,032 men and women on gender equality and economic rights. 6,000 people are expected to be trained by the end of the compact.
- The land activity complements the gender efforts underway. Registration of long-term leases for housing plots now include joint title to both husbands and wives, as well as allowing leases to be issued to women individually.
- It is anticipated that women will have titles to more than 50 percent of the first tranche of leases expected to be issued in 2011.