

## SHARP4SDG6 - Addressing Lack of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Infrastructure and Education in Sekameng, Lesotho (June 8, 2020 – June 28, 2020)

Drexel University

Project Team: **J'Anna-Mare Lue (Leader)**, Leila Nzekele, Stephanie Shosanya, Balkirat Sidhu, Linford Smith, Chanyeong Park, Jagoda Jedrzejek, Julia Langmuir, Napalya Dewar, Sarah Wetzel, William Aniagoh

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**Background:** The UN recognizes access to clean and affordable water and sanitation as a human right. Therefore, the inability to meet this basic need in states or communities can further deteriorate conflict or pose a threat to existing peace. The 2015-2016 Southern African drought dramatically affected the citizens of Lesotho while the government exported water to South Africa. During the latest El Niño-induced drought, residents of Lesotho, especially those living in rural areas, struggled with access to clean drinking water, food security, illness, and loss of livelihood. Lesotho is touted as the water engine of Southern Africa, but there is not enough water infrastructure to mitigate the effects of drought. Therefore, the onus is on the community members to survive any future droughts. Research previously collected by members of the project team in partnership with World Vision Lesotho concluded that Sekameng is extremely vulnerable to drought. The research conducted in 2018 surveyed five communities in Sekameng. In these communities, in-door plumbing was but a dream; the water infrastructure consisted of communal taps that pumped water from boreholes. Two communities had no functioning communal taps, and in some communities that had functioning taps getting to them might take hours on foot. On the sanitation side, the most common type of sanitation facility is a pit latrine, a basic toilet that is characterized by a pit or hole in the ground, where excrement is collected. In three of the five communities, only a marginal fraction of households had access to their own latrine. Even then, some of the latrines were not built correctly and posed a threat of people falling into the pits, excreta getting into waterways, and the spread of bacteria. Regarding menstrual hygiene management, the women in one community were fortunate enough to afford sanitary pads. The women and young girls in the remaining communities sat on old clothing when they were menstruating, causing school-aged girls to miss up to seven days of school per month. It was also determined that communities did not have a working knowledge of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), but they were willing to learn more about WASH and drought preparedness. However, they are aware that they do not have the resources to do so.

**Project Overview:** The members of the project team are the co-founders and executive council of the Drexel Sanitation Health Aid Relief Project (SHARP), a student organization that aims to raise awareness about WASH issues faced by marginalized populations locally and globally. SHARP's inaugural project is titled 'SHARP4SDG6', a campaign to fund the creation of a communal sanitation space in Sekameng, Lesotho, equipped with three communal latrines and a handwashing station. This initiative is being funded through crowdfunding efforts as well as on and off-campus fundraisers. SHARP's fundraising events seek both monetary contributions and donations of toiletries and sanitation items such as soap, sanitary pads, and water purification tablets. As a Project for Peace, SHARP4SDG6 can be a much more effective and sustainable effort.

The objectives of the bolstered project would include:

- Construction of ten (10) communal latrines and a handwashing station
- Construction of a disposal site for laundry water
- Implementation of two educational workshops on the following topics:
  - Sustainable Menstruation - Cloth pads
  - Water Purification and Drought Preparedness

**Project Details:** A key feature of this project is that it utilizes community-based research conducted in 2018. It is crucial to the team that this project is in partnership with the community to not only foster a sense of stewardship in community members but also show our respect for the community and its opinions. As the project relies heavily on community buy-in, emphasis will be placed on getting community approval and input in all aspects of the project. Experienced World Vision Lesotho field personnel working with WASH and Disaster Preparedness will also be consulted.

*Communal WASH station:* Every household deserves its own toilet. However, this is not always the case. In communities across the world, and throughout Sekameng, people who have latrines are sharing them

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with those without one. If they do not share, people without are left with one option: open defecation. Therefore, in communities like Sekameng with limited resources and little stakeholder buy-in, one solution is a communal WASH space where a three (3) families share a toilet. This space supplements the existing infrastructure and is designed with consideration of the shared toilet model. The shared toilet model is different from a public restroom because these families will have a sense of stewardship, and in turn, this practice is more sustainable than a public latrine as these families would be responsible for the upkeep of the facilities. In addition to the latrines, methods to safely dispose of laundry water will be explored. A safe laundry water disposal site would decrease eutrophication caused by laundry detergent run-off in water. Reducing eutrophication would increase water quality and the community's access to clean water.

**WASH & Sustainable Development Workshops:** Education is, by far, the most effective tool to change behaviors. Research has shown that the people of Sekameng are aware that most of them do not have a working knowledge of WASH and would like to learn. Therefore, these workshops, led by the project team and WASH specialists, would be a community effort, utilizing public health theory, innovation, and community input. Young girls in Sekameng are especially vulnerable to the impacts of poverty and a lack of WASH knowledge. Menstruation sometimes signifies the end of formal education; therefore, workshops, how to make cloth pads will be held in high schools and community gathering places serving women and girls in and outside of school. This workshop will also be a platform to introduce the idea of social enterprise. The incidence of diarrheal diseases is significantly higher in times of drought in Sekameng; in children, these diseases are one of the leading causes of death. Water Purification workshops will not solve this issue but could alleviate it, given that unsafe drinking water is a cause of diarrhea. This workshop will focus on purifications that can be done at home and are relatively inexpensive, such as the addition of chlorine and boiling water.

### **Project Timeline:**

- April 2020 – June 2020
  - Formalizing partnership with World Vision Lesotho & local agencies
  - Finalize contracts with construction vendors
  - Final contracts for workshop lead
  - Contact village chiefs and community leaders to discuss the project – goals, results, and expectations
- June 8 – June 28, 2020
  - Construction of community WASH space
  - Hosting WASH & Sustainable Development Workshops

**WASH & Peace:** Although WASH and Peace do not seem interrelated, studies show that WASH-related issues are often a by-product or factor of conflict. It is also of note that access to clean water and adequate sanitation is a human right. The Institute for Water Education reports that *"One quarter of the world's population lives in fragile states, yet account for 65 % of people without access to clean water. Moreover, more than half of those lack access to improved sanitation."* Therefore, sustainable WASH initiatives, though unconventional, can promote peacebuilding and the sustaining of peace, especially in fragile states.

**Sustainability of Project:** This project utilizes community resources and fosters a sense of stewardship in residents, resulting in community buy-in and maintenance of infrastructure. The project team hopes to further involve and inform stakeholders from different NGOs, municipal government, and area leaders to raise awareness of the project and possibly further propagate similar ideas and projects in affected communities. The project team intends to promote the dissemination of WASH knowledge discussed at the workshop by educating young children, parents, and elders who may pass on information through word of mouth and with translated literature.