

## Communities' interests take centre stage in Phase II social development master planning

Bigen Africa Services, the consultant leading the social development master planning process, in September 2021 kicked started community consultations to finalise the identification and prioritisation of social development projects in the Phase II area.

Communities in each of the 39 electoral divisions within the Project area are being consulted to prioritise sustainable development projects that will address their social and economic needs, improve livelihoods and benefit the wider community. This is part of the LHWPII social development master plan preparation process.

“The participation of key stakeholders, especially the affected communities, is crucial throughout the social development master planning process. We need to develop a plan that will provide sustainable solutions that are responsive to the needs of the communities,” confirms Nts’oli Maitetso LHDA Phase II Divisional Manager.

The process requires each electoral division to prioritise one development project based on their current and future needs and interests. Different groups of community members engage in discussions on sustainable development solutions that will meet the needs of most members of the communities before reaching consensus on the project that should be included in the master plan.

The consultant’s role in the process is to assist communities to understand their challenges, to identify solutions that match the challenges and to advise and make recommendations on relevant priority development projects. The final decision is made by the communities, however. Meeting minutes and community views are documented to inform further stages of the master plan preparation.



**Mr Morena-ke-mang Mathaba, Councillor, Tšepong Electoral Division, “hailed the prioritisation process as transparent and fair confirming it will ensure community ownership of the projects”.**

On 23 September, the Ha 'Mei community in the Seate community council, Mokhotlong was united in making a decision on the desired development project. "We need many developments in our area such as access roads and electricity supply. But we are experiencing serious challenges due to lack of basic services like reliable clean water, and as a community that heavily relies on crop and vegetable farming, our means of livelihood is slowly deteriorating," Mrs 'Matsotang Letsika and 'Makananelo Foloko stated during the community meeting.

The community consultations to identify and prioritise development initiatives commenced in March 2021. This was followed by a validation process which entailed transect walks and consultations with community leaders and vulnerable groups in individual villages within each electoral division.

Engagements to establish planned development programmes in the Project area have been initiated with the different government departments, parastatals, and private sector organisations facilitating programmes and providing services which are aligned to social development projects identified as priorities by communities. These include: Ministries of Education and Training, Development Planning, Local Government, Commissioner of Water and Roads Directorate, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusa (GIZ), a German development agency, Lesotho National Development Corporation, Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation World Vision and the Wool and Mohair Growers Association.

LHDA appointed the South African-based Bigen Africa Services (Pty) Ltd in October 2020 to develop the Phase II Social Development Master Plan. The consultancy is partnering with the Lesotho-registered firm, Inspire Innovation Business Consultants (Pty) Ltd and Canadian-based Cowater Sogema International Inc. Work on the stakeholder engagement activities commenced in January 2021 with Phase I stakeholders including the affected communities, to draw lessons from the implementation of social development programmes during the first phase of the LHWP.

With the final decision on what development initiatives are most needed by their communities in their court, Phase II communities are vital to shaping the social development master plan.