

The impact of cross-border movement on South African towns on the Lesotho border

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This article investigates the impact of cross-border movement from Lesotho to the eastern Free State towns of Ficksburg, Ladybrand and Wepener. The many Basotho who visit these towns have a tangible impact on economic activity and service provision. The findings include, among other things, the major economic benefits for the border towns and the impact on South Africa's health and education services. Stakeholders attributed both the fast growth of informal settlements and the high rate of unemployment to the movement of Lesotho citizens, but this could not be verified. Policy recommendations include the need to facilitate the flow of people and to garner reliable information on which to base planning and decision-making.

Die impak van oorgrensbeweging op Suid-Afrikaanse dorpe aan die Lesotho-grens

In die artikel word die impak van die oorgrensbeweging van die bevolking van Lesotho na die Oos-Vrystaatse dorpe Ficksburg, Ladybrand en Wepener ondersoek. Die groot getalle Basotho's wat die grensdorpe besoek het 'n betekenisvolle impak op ekonomiese aktiwiteite en diensverskaffing. Die bevindinge sluit onder meer in die omvangryke ekonomiese voordele vir die grensdorpe en die beperkte impak op Suid-Afrikaanse gesondheidsdienste en onderwys. Alhoewel rolspelers die snelle groei van informele nedersettings en hoë werkloosheid toeskryf aan die teenwoordigheid van die burgers van Lesotho, kan dit nie bevestig word nie. Beleidsaanbevelings behels onder meer die behoefte om die vloeï van die mense te reguleer en die behoefte aan betroubare inligting vir toekomstige besluitneming en beplanning.

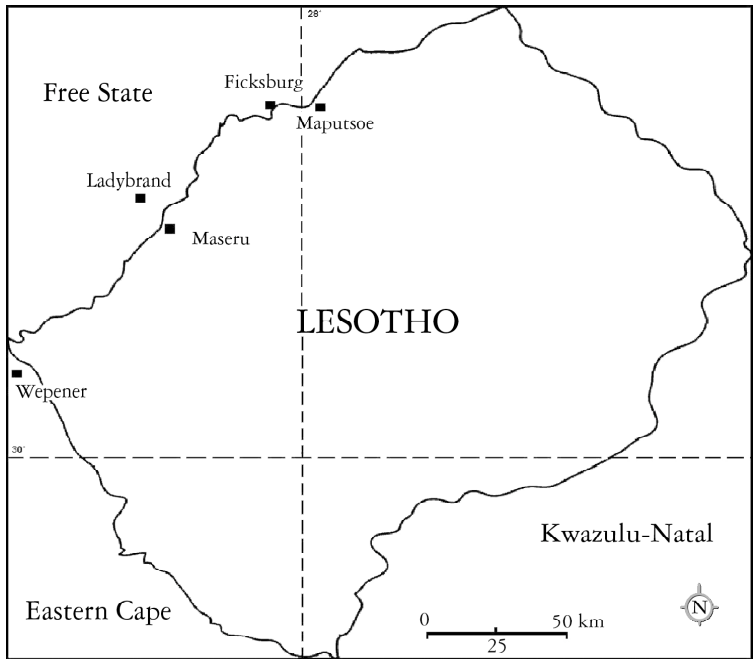
Cross-border movement between Lesotho and South Africa has occurred since the earliest times. This article investigates the impact of this movement on selected South African border towns.¹ For various reasons, Ficksburg, Ladybrand and Wepener (all in the Free State) were chosen for the study (cf Figure 1). The selected towns are situated within 15 km of Lesotho/South African border posts and form part of a region (referred to as the “conquered territory”) which has featured prominently in South Africa’s relations with its neighbour for more than a century. For historical and other reasons, the development of the region is closely tied to that of Lesotho. Border crossings between the two countries are among the busiest, with up to 1.6 million people having crossed into South Africa over a 12-month period: October 2004 to September 2005 (Statistics SA 2006). An origin-and-destination survey at the Maseru and Ficksburg border posts, conducted by Sechaba Consultants in January 2001, found that more than half of the people entering South Africa visited towns such as Ficksburg, Ladybrand and Wepener (Sechaba Consultants and Associates 2002).

Recent studies focusing on Lesotho have mainly considered the country’s relationship to South Africa in terms of socio-political relations, cross-border crime, migration motivation, Lesotho mine-workers, the presence and status of Lesotho farm-workers, women’s migration, the brain drain and the nature and implications of large-scale movements through border posts.²

A description of the methodology used will be followed by a summary of the historical background, a discussion of the various catego-

- 1 This study formed part of a larger HSRC study on cross-border migration between South Africa and its neighbouring countries. Interviews were conducted with the following people: officials from the local town councils of Ladybrand, Ficksburg and Wepener; officials from local and provincial clinics in Ladybrand, Ficksburg and Wepener; principals of primary and secondary schools in Ladybrand, Ficksburg and Wepener; officials from the Department of Home Affairs at the Maseru Bridge, Ficksburg Bridge, and Van Rooyen’s Gate border posts; government officials in Maseru, Lesotho; representatives of the United Nations Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation in Lesotho, and academics at the National University of Lesotho.
- 2 Cf Crush *et al* 1991, Sechaba Consultants 1997 & 2002, Mather *et al* 2000, Wentzel 2001, Bosman 2001, Coplan 2001 & 2006, Marais 2001, Kynoch *et al* 2001, Ulicki & Crush 2002.

Figure 1: Location of Ficksburg, Ladybrand and Wepener in relation to Lesotho



ries and causes of movement of people between Lesotho and South Africa. Issues relating to the impact of cross-border movement on health services, housing, education, employment and business will be explored.

1. Methodology

In this study a qualitative approach was taken, supplemented by a literature review. This approach was used because it is an unstructured, exploratory research methodology based on small samples, and provides insight into and understanding of the problem setting. Other reasons for selecting this method were related to the general purpose of the research, the research questions and objectives, and the kind of data which had to be collected in the field.

Qualitative methods were employed to establish the impact of Lesotho citizens on service delivery and economic activity in the respective border towns.³ Here, various types of service providers and other role-players were involved in semi-structured individual interviews in order to identify the types of impact. The rationale for this choice was to embrace a range of perspectives from a diverse group of people on a range of subjects. The interviews started off as semi-structured but as they developed they tended to become more in-depth and unstructured — to the extent that the interviewers responded to the interviewees' comments.

For this study, interviews were conducted in the South African border towns of Ladybrand, Ficksburg and Wepener during November 2002, March 2003 and August 2003. In November 2003 interviews were also conducted in Maseru and Roma. In the border towns the following role-players were interviewed: officials from the town councils (six interviewees), local and provincial clinics (five interviewees), principals of primary and secondary schools (four interviewees), and business people (six interviewees). Furthermore, four officials of the Department of Home Affairs at the Maseru Bridge border post near Ladybrand, the Ficksburg Bridge border post and the Van Rooyen's Gate border post near Wepener were also interviewed. Interviews were also conducted in Lesotho with officials of five selected government departments, four academics at the National University of Lesotho, and representatives of international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation. The length of the interviews varied, depending on each interviewee's expertise or relevant experience. On average, an interview lasted about 60 to 90 minutes. All interviewees were volunteers, since the emphasis was on informed consent. They were briefed on the nature and objectives of the study by telephone, with a follow-up fax. At the start of the interviews these aspects were reiterated. Notes were taken with the permission of the interviewees.

Where feasible, the results of this study are contextualised by way of comparison with findings by Sechaba Consultants and Associates (2002), Wentzel (2001), Coplan (2001 & 2006). These studies have

3 The researchers are aware of professionals from Lesotho working in South Africa. No such individuals were included in this study, however, since none could be located in the selected border towns.

been identified as of particularly relevance to the possible impact of Lesotho migrants on South African border towns. Sechaba Consultants and Associates (2002) conducted a quantitative study utilising data from a national survey on attitudes towards migration conducted in Lesotho. The Wentzel (2001) study features data obtained from a survey consisting of a representative sample of adult Lesotho residents in respect of a range of socio-political, economic and other issues. The Coplan studies (2001 & 2006) are based on qualitative interviews with officials from the Department of Home Affairs, South African school principals, business people, private individuals and Lesotho government officials. It should, however, be noted that reliable statistical information on the direct impact of Lesotho migrants on South African border towns is limited — indeed, in most cases, absent.

2. Historical overview

The movement of people across international borders is by no means a new phenomenon in southern Africa. Because the colonial powers divided Africa and created borders that cut across ancestral tribal land, the Basotho were separated by an artificial boundary between present-day South Africa and Lesotho. Close family and cultural ties account for regular cross-border contact, while labour migration has long constituted the bulk of such movement. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the discovery and mining of diamonds and gold, along with industrialisation, lured thousands of migrant labourers from elsewhere in the southern African region to the mining and industrial centres of South Africa.

Lesotho is more dependant on migrant labour for employment and income creation than any other country in the region. Since 1977 Lesotho has been the main foreign supplier of labour for the South African mines. In 1990, about 108 000 Basotho workers were employed on South African gold mines. However, since the early 1990s the numbers of miners overall, and from Lesotho in particular, have fallen fairly rapidly due to mine closures and retrenchments (Wentzel & Tlabela 2006: 75). Thus by 2005 the number of workers from Lesotho on South African mines was estimated to be about 52 000 (Masupha 2006: 5). The mine-workers' remittances constitute a significant proportion of Lesotho's foreign exchange earnings. In the 1980s remittances from Basotho labourers working in South Africa accounted for about half of Lesotho's

gross national product (GNP). In 1997 the figure for mineworkers' remittances was 32% of Lesotho's GNP (Wentzel & Tlabela 2006: 76-7). In 2004 such remittances were estimated to account for 26% of Lesotho's gross domestic product (GDP) (World Bank 2006: 90).

Moreover, even before the discovery of diamonds and gold, Basotho workers were employed as seasonal farm labour in the then Orange Free State (Wentzel & Tlabela 2006). Today many Basotho continue to be employed on farms in the eastern Free State.

Until 1963 there were no legal restrictions on Basotho travelling to South Africa from Basotholand (the present Lesotho). Basotho thus worked, migrated and settled freely in South Africa as they could easily move back and forth over the Caledon River boundary (Sechaba Consultants and Associates 2002). However, since 1963 people from the former British High Commission Territories (the present Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland) have had to carry passports and enter South Africa via border posts (Wentzel & Tlabela 2006).

From the earliest times there was conflict over land issues between the Basotho people and the inhabitants of the present-day Free State. In 1869 the current borders of Lesotho were established by the Second Treaty of Aliwal North (Eloff 1984: 47), which deprived the country of much of the western part of its erstwhile territory. Today the Basotho are still of the opinion that this was an injustice, and sometimes refer to the region as the "conquered territory" (Marais 2001: 3-4).

To a great extent, the challenges and benefits typical of border districts set up patterns of movement during the early years of existence of both the Orange Free State Republic/Orange River Colony and the Basotholand Protectorate that would continue well into the twentieth century (Bosman 2001). Improved relations were conducive to improved trade between them. The towns in the eastern border districts, in particular, benefited from increased traffic, improved roads and communications systems, the export of agricultural products from Basotholand, and increased movement of people to Free State farms and industrial areas further afield. Trade with Basotholand became an important aspect of the economic development of the eastern border region and during the twentieth century wholesalers and general dealers opened branches in the towns of Ficksburg, Wepener and Ladybrand.

Lesotho reinstated parliamentary democracy in 1993 and South Africa underwent its democratic transformation in 1994. Since then, the interaction between Lesotho's government and that of its larger neighbour has assumed a more familial quality, but the legalistic and diplomatic forms of cross-border relations have remained largely the same (Coplan 2001).

3. Causes of cross-border movement between South Africa and Lesotho

An analysis of the causes of cross-border movement between South Africa and Lesotho is probably best undertaken by identifying the factors associated with the area of origin and the area of destination. These factors will be discussed together since factors in the area of origin (Lesotho) usually have consequences in the area of destination (South Africa). Facilitating factors are also discussed.

4.1 Factors associated with areas of origin and destination

The widespread poverty in Lesotho is perceived to be the most important "push" factor motivating people to seek employment in South Africa. Harsh climatic conditions, making food supplies scarce during the winter months, worsen this situation (Bosman 2001). It is estimated that 58% of the Lesotho population lives below the national poverty line (UNDP 2006).

The high unemployment rate of up to 45% (2003 estimate) is viewed as a particularly strong motivation for Lesotho citizens to seek employment beyond the borders of their country (UND, 2006). Most of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture, which is plagued by climatic extremes (UNDP 2006).

In comparison with Lesotho, the economic and infrastructural development of the neighbouring Free State took place at a much faster rate over the past century. Apart from job opportunities, border towns such as Ficksburg, Ladybrand and Wepener developed more sophisticated businesses and services, offering a greater variety than can be found in Lesotho (Bosman 2001). An origin and destination survey conducted by Sechaba Consultants and Associates in January 2001 at the Maseru and Ficksburg border posts revealed that a large proportion of

border travellers (36%) came to South Africa for shopping purposes. Only 7% of people crossing the border were commuting to work, with 4% coming for medical reasons and 3% for education. It was also noteworthy that Ficksburg and Ladybrand attracted most Lesotho visitors: 50% and 13% of the total, respectively (Sechaba Consultants and Associates 2002: 20).

Relatively low levels of access to social services in Lesotho also provide an incentive to people to access South African services such as free medical care for pregnant women and young children. According to the Commonwealth Education Fund (2006), the implementation of a system of free primary education in Lesotho was relatively successful but led to the overcrowding of already under-resourced schools. This made the better-resourced and relatively affordable education offered across the border in South Africa an important attraction.

Until 2004 no state pensions were paid in Lesotho (Masupha 2006: 4) and a number of informants mentioned that the prospect of an old-age pension motivated people to attempt to obtain South African identity documents.

4.2 Facilitating factors

Various factors support the movement of Lesotho citizens to South Africa. Of these, the ethnic bond between people in South Africa and Lesotho is probably one of the most important reasons why Lesotho citizens find it easy to visit or even to stay for prolonged periods in South Africa (Bosman 2001). A national survey conducted by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) in 1997 on cross-border movement between Lesotho and South Africa indicated that 34% of respondents came to visit friends and relatives in South Africa (Sechaba Consultants and Associates 2002: 20). Findings from a survey conducted in 2000 by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in Lesotho were very similar, with 30% of respondents visiting friends and family in South Africa (Wentzel 2001).

The nature of the border between the Free State and Lesotho is such that it does not really form a physical barrier between the two countries. This is particularly true of Lesotho's western border. It is relatively easy for people to cross over through any of eleven official border posts,

numerous partial border posts (staffed by only one country), local border crossings where people are allowed to cross to access stores to purchase goods, and illegal crossing points. It is also easy to obtain the necessary documentation to enter South Africa. Sechaba Consultants and Associates (2002: 33) reported that most Basotho cross the border legally, with the exception only of those who want to sidestep import duties or are in possession of illicit goods such as narcotics.

According to Bosman (2001: 5) people have moved between the high-lying areas of present-day Lesotho and the low-lying areas of what is now the Free State since time immemorial. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the border between the two was the scene of intermittent conflict. Although the border disputes were eventually settled, many Basotho still felt that they had a right to the so-called “conquered territory” and many instances of border-crossing violations took place (Bosman 2001: 5).

A culture and history of working in South Africa exists in Lesotho, resulting in a pool of experience, knowledge and popular lore about South Africa that not only motivates young men (in particular) to venture into the larger country, but also makes it easier for others to follow (Bosman 2001: 9). As indicated earlier, large-scale labour migration from Lesotho to South African mines has been occurring since the earliest times, although it now takes place on a smaller scale. The mining tradition often inspired the sons and grandsons of former Lesotho mine-workers to seek employment on the South African mines.

From the late nineteenth century labour shortages compelled farmers in the border districts of the Free State to employ workers from Lesotho on a semi-permanent basis, as the Basotho often preferred to return to their own country during the planting season. Eastern Free State farmers have a positive perception of Lesotho workers and often prefer them to South African workers, who are reportedly more “politicised” (Bosman 2001: 6).

Although Lesotho citizens are covered by the same South African immigration legislation as those of any other country, in practice quite different regulations, permits, concessions and arrangements are in place to accommodate local realities (Sechaba Consultants and Associates 2002). This facilitates movement between South Africa and Lesotho.

4. The nature of cross-border movement

The border posts between South Africa and Lesotho are among the busiest in southern Africa. Basotho mineworkers, mostly employed in the gold mining areas of the Free State and Gauteng, form a significant proportion of the large number of people crossing the border. Casual visitors, business people, school children and tourists comprise the remainder of the frequent travellers between the two countries. Bosman (2001: 7-11) identifies six types of cross-border movement between Lesotho and South Africa:

4.1 People staying for a lengthy period in South Africa

This category consists mainly of contract workers (mineworkers) and permanent farm workers. Small numbers of people employed in other sectors are also included, for example medical personnel and academics at tertiary institutions and research institutions. Most of the migrants in this category work inland, mainly in the mining areas of the Free State, Gauteng and North-West provinces. Most farm workers are employed in locations near the border.

4.2 Seasonal workers

The eastern Free State is well known for its labour-intensive agricultural activities, including cherry and asparagus production. These farm products are usually harvested and processed over a relatively short period. For decades migrant workers from Lesotho have been employed during cherry-harvesting seasons. The production of asparagus, which is just as labour-intensive, is a more recent farming activity. Large numbers of Lesotho citizens thus take part in the harvesting of cherries and asparagus over relatively short periods. Seasonal labour is a vital component of Lesotho peasants' survival strategies during lean periods in their own country. However, recent changes in South Africa's labour policy have made it more difficult for farmers and other employers in agriculture-related industries to obtain permission to recruit and hire "foreign" workers (Bosman 2001: 8).

4.3 Casual visitors

The largest category of people crossing the Lesotho/South African border is usually casual visitors: visiting friends or relatives, conducting business, or shopping in South Africa. Many of these visitors cross the border by foot after having been transported to the border posts by bus or taxi. The relatively few visitors seeking medical attention in South Africa also fall into this category (Bosman 2001: 8). At the border posts, casual visitors are granted concessions to enter South Africa for shopping or other business. These concessions are only valid for a “same day return trip” between 6 am and 10 pm.

4.4 Commuters

It is mostly business and professional people who either live in Lesotho but work in South Africa, or live in South Africa but work in Lesotho. Most of them commute on a daily basis between Lesotho and towns such as Ladybrand and Ficksburg. Interestingly, some South African citizens were found to be living in Lesotho and travelling to South African towns on a daily basis (Bosman 2001). Since the SADC’s military intervention in Lesotho in 1998 many Maseru business and professional people have moved their residences to Ladybrand and also commute to Maseru on a daily basis. Most of those who commute between the two countries obtain renewable six-month border concessions, which considerably expedite their daily travels (Sechaba Consultants and Associates 2002: 35).⁴

4.5 Schoolchildren

Learners who need to cross the border on weekdays obtain special study permits for this purpose. They are required to wear school uniforms and are allowed in towns such as Ficksburg for a restricted period of time. Special study permits are reportedly easy to obtain but relatively expensive. Migration officials admitted that irregularities occurred because permits are issued at border offices where it is impossible to establish the true *bona fides* of applicants (Bosman 2001: 9).

4 The purchase of a house in South Africa automatically qualifies a Lesotho citizen or other foreign passport holder for a six-month border concession.

4.6 Undocumented migrants

According to Bosman (2001: 9), this group can be subclassified into three groups: people who cross the border without any legal documentation; people crossing the border with a Lesotho passport but remaining for longer than the stipulated period in South Africa, and people who use false documents.

The first subgroup consists of people entering South Africa at a point other than an official border post. The absence of any significant physical barriers to the west of Lesotho creates opportunities for easy border crossings without legal documentation. Poor border policing also makes illegal crossings a regular occurrence.

Lesotho citizens are exempted from visa requirements for 30 days, but despite this leniency a considerable number overstay the legal period, and must be repatriated. Relatively few cases of fraudulent or false documentation have been reported as most Lesotho citizens can easily obtain passports (Bosman 2001: 9-10).

5. The impact of cross-border movement

5.1 Health services

Policies for the treatment of foreigners are not uniform in the various border towns. According to the interviewees, the municipal clinics at Ladybrand and Wepener provide free primary health care to all patients. Although a South African identity document is requested from patients visiting the clinics at Wepener and Ladybrand, patients without the necessary documentation are also treated. According to the personnel at the clinics it is thus highly likely that Lesotho citizens are also treated.

The clinics at Ficksburg, however, only provide free primary health care services to South African citizens with identification documents. On a patient's first visit to a municipal clinic at Ficksburg, primary health care is provided free of charge whether an identification document is provided or not, but thereafter a fee has to be paid in the absence of a South African identity document. The Ficksburg town council adopted this policy because many patients from Lesotho were visiting Ficksburg clinics for free primary health care services. For example, during the period 1994-1995 between 900 and 1100 Lesotho women visited family planning clinics every month.

The reasons why Lesotho citizens cross the border to use South African medical facilities include the following:

- some of the South African clinics in the border region are much closer to the Lesotho citizens than their own facilities;
- Lesotho's medical services are in some instances also perceived as inferior in quality to those provided in South Africa, and
- Lesotho citizens who live and work in the South African border towns obtain medical services at local clinics.

In some instances patients from Lesotho may consult private medical practitioners in South Africa and be referred to hospitals in Bloemfontein for treatment. Follow-up treatment for illnesses such as tuberculosis is usually received at border-town clinics.

The provincial hospitals in the border towns render services to all foreigners paying the specified fees. According to the respondents, not many Lesotho citizens go to provincial hospitals for treatment. The provincial mobile clinics provide free primary health care services to farm workers and their families. Among these are Lesotho citizens working on farms in the border area.

The informants at the clinics in the border towns agreed that it was difficult to estimate the number of Lesotho citizens treated there every month. However, they were of the opinion that the number was not high and thus did not have a significant impact on the provision of health services in the border areas. Wentzel (2001: 170) reported that 4% of respondents indicated that the purpose of their most recent visit to South Africa was to receive medical treatment. The survey by Sechaba Consultants and Associates (2002: 35) also found that only 4% of respondents travelled to South Africa for medical purposes. However, these two surveys did not distinguish between public and private medical facilities, or whether the medical services utilised were in one of the border towns or elsewhere in the country. However, these two surveys do provide evidence that a significant number of Basotho from Lesotho seek medical attention in South Africa.⁵

5 Medical services provided to Lesotho citizens by mobile clinics in farming areas are not accounted for in the data given here.

5.2 Education

Interviews with principals at schools in the towns of Ladybrand, Wepener and Ficksburg indicated that some children of Lesotho nationality were enrolled at four primary and secondary schools in those towns.⁶ Lesotho children with student permits comprised between one and fourteen percent of the total number of students. Lesotho students originated mainly from urban areas such as Maseru and Mafeteng.

The information provided by schools showed that the parents of most of the Lesotho children were professionals, business people, or government-employed. South African school tuition and boarding fees were affordable to these mostly middle- and upper-income citizens of Lesotho.

Coplan (2001: 102) noted that “a process of educational migration may well be occurring from Lesotho into the townships of post-apartheid South Africa”. While the better schools in South Africa are more expensive, schools in the African townships are more heavily subsidised and charge less than urban schools in Lesotho. According to Coplan (2001), there has been an even more significant change in the belief that schools in Lesotho were better than those in South Africa’s black residential areas. South African education is currently seen as more progressive and in tune with international trends. Coplan (2006: 17) also reported that the number of Lesotho children and guardians who have moved to Free State border towns as “educational migrants” has increased dramatically since the SADC intervention of 1998, and shows no sign of abating.

Although the provincial ministries of education have issued directives that only children who are permanent residents are to be accepted in South African schools, and that foreign learners are to be charged extra fees, these are rarely enforced by school administrations. Coplan (2001: 103) noted that the principals of eastern Free State schools allowed Basotho children at their schools because they knew that Lesotho citizens in South Africa on contract, including many ordinary migrant workers who have managed to bring their families to the workplace, require schools for their children. Furthermore, the local officials in the eastern Free State do not regard people from Lesotho as foreigners, or the border as a meaningful social boundary.

6 The researchers visited all the former Model C schools in Wepener, Ladybrand and Ficksburg. School principals of township schools refused to be interviewed on the subject.

Reportedly, a significant number of Lesotho students with study permits are accommodated at school boarding hostels. Other students are ferried daily from Lesotho or stay with relatives in South Africa. At the schools visited, the main entrance requirements for foreign students were age and language, with an entrance examination being required in some instances.

According to the school principals interviewed, the total number of foreign students allowed to enroll at their schools is usually determined by local demand. Local schools have to accommodate all South African applicants, whereafter foreign students may be accommodated.

South African universities do not recognise school qualifications obtained in Lesotho for admission. Consequently, Lesotho students prefer to enroll at South African schools to obtain the required entrance qualifications for South African universities.

The school principals interviewed highly valued their students from Lesotho. They were generally perceived to have strong leadership abilities. Most belonged to the higher socio-economic categories. Their high rate of contribution towards school fees was regarded as invaluable.

5.3 Business and employment

Due to retrenchments in the South African mining industry during the 1980s and 1990s fewer Lesotho workers have been employed recently. The declining number of Lesotho mineworkers has had a negative impact on businesses that traditionally benefited from remittances spent in border towns.

Historically, the success of commerce in towns bordering on Lesotho was dependent on mutual goodwill and co-operation with Lesotho. For example, the closure of the Van Rooyen's Gate border post by Lesotho during the political strife in the 1970s impacted severely on retail businesses in Wepener. This caused a significant number of large retailers to relocate to Lesotho. Since most large-scale retailers had moved out of Wepener, small retailers from Lesotho also stopped buying stock in Wepener. This had a devastating effect on the local business sector. Today Wepener is afflicted with a high unemployment rate, worsened by the multitude of Lesotho citizens looking for employment on the South African side of the border.

In recent years Ladybrand and Ficksburg have experienced an increase in business opportunities. This has mainly been a consequence of the political unrest in Lesotho during 1998, which caused the closure of numerous retail outlets in that country. Despite this recent economic upsurge, unemployment in South African border towns remains high. Some of the locals viewed Lesotho citizens as the cause of their unemployment problems and complained that “Lesotho illegals” are taking their jobs because of their willingness to accept lower wages. On the other hand, women traders from Lesotho complained that local South African traders had reported them to the authorities because they competed successfully in the market place. Local women, in turn, accused the women from Lesotho of stealing their husbands (Coplan 2001: 104). Lesotho citizens do not generally enroll with trade unions and seldom complain about unfair labour practices. They are usually employed in low-skilled jobs, for example domestic service, gardening and informal trading. The survey conducted by Sechaba Consultants and Associates (2002: 30) revealed that 5% of Lesotho travellers to Ficksburg were commuting to their work in South Africa. (There were no records of travellers to Wepener and Ladybrand.) Although this figure does not include those who live in South African border towns, it does show that a significant number of Lesotho citizens are employed in border towns.

In the recent past many South African and foreign businesses have moved to Lesotho due to more favourable circumstances, such as few or no organised trade unions, few work stoppages, cheap labour, and some government incentives. Today most of the shops in Ficksburg and Ladybrand have branches in Lesotho. However, many customers from Lesotho still do their shopping in the border towns. According to municipal officials and business people, Ficksburg and Ladybrand benefit greatly from business from Lesotho and would hardly survive without Lesotho’s buying power. This is supported by the results of the Sechaba (2002: 20) survey, which showed that 19% of respondents reported having shopped in South Africa during their last visit. According to Coplan (2006: 13), officials of the Department of Home Affairs noted that Ficksburg businesses were losing out to the new shopping outlets springing up in Mafutsae. An official was also recorded as saying, “If it were not for the Lotto, Basotho would no longer come to Ficksburg to shop”.

5.4 Housing

It was difficult for the interviewees on the local town councils of Ladybrand, Ficksburg and Wepener to comment on the Lesotho citizens' impact on housing in the border towns because they did not know how many people were involved. However, they commented on the establishment and high growth of townships and informal settlements close to the border areas and ascribed this, *inter alia*, to a perceived increase in cross-border movement between Lesotho and South Africa.

Some interviewees were of the opinion that a number of Lesotho citizens, who had qualified for the mineworker amnesty in 1995 and the SADC amnesty of 1996, have settled in the townships close to the South African border. It was also reported that undocumented Lesotho citizens could be found in townships bordering on Ladybrand, Ficksburg and Wepener. It was noted that the poorer residents of the townships housing Lesotho citizens were often unable to pay for basic services. This placed additional financial constraints on local councils, which were unable to upgrade basic service provision to informal settlements. Interestingly, in the recent past many of the Lesotho citizens who used to live in informal settlements around Ladybrand have left the area. Unemployment may be considered the most likely explanation.

It is difficult to estimate the impact of Lesotho citizens on housing in the border towns since the various local municipalities were not able to quantify the number of them living in the townships and informal settlements in the border areas. The perceived impact of the presence of Lesotho citizens also seems to differ from town to town. Town officials were nevertheless adamant that government-sponsored housing was only provided to South African citizens and that one would be more likely to find Basotho in informal settlements, where little or no control is exercised by local government.

6. Summary, conclusion and policy implications

Short-term cross-border movement for shopping or visiting friends and relatives in South Africa was recognised as the major reason for daily border crossings. Widespread poverty in Lesotho was also identified as a significant factor leading people to cross the border for prolonged periods of time. Other reasons include high unemployment,

insufficient social services in Lesotho, and economic and infrastructural development in the Free State border towns. Factors facilitating movement include ethnic bonds, the penetrability of the border, the history and tradition of labour migration, official concessions and border arrangements, and labour shortages on farms in the border areas.

The impact of cross-border movement on South African health services in the eastern Free State border area is not insignificant, with up to 4% of travellers reported to have used such services. Considering that 1.6 million people cross the Lesotho border to South Africa annually, this percentage represents a reasonably significant number.

Schools in the border towns of Ladybrand, Ficksburg and Wepener experience different impacts. Legal school attendance generally has a positive influence on the sustainability of schools in the border areas, whereas the poorer, overcrowded schools do not derive the same benefit from the presence of the Basotho learners. Other authors also point out that the number of Lesotho learners and their guardians has increased dramatically since the SADC intervention of 1998, and shows no sign of abating (cf Coplan 2006).

The fast growth of informal settlements in the border areas had created backlogs in service delivery and housing, which were blamed in part on the presence of Lesotho citizens. The real impact could not be reliably established due to a lack of empirical evidence on the number of Lesotho people residing in these areas.

The success of commerce in the border towns depends on the mutual goodwill and co-operation between them and Lesotho. The purchasing power of Lesotho citizens was perceived to be of significant value to businesses in the border towns. Most of these towns reported relatively high unemployment levels, in line with most other rural Free State towns. Despite the unavailability of official or other statistics on the impact of Lesotho citizens on unemployment levels in the border towns, the perception exists that the presence of foreigners has a negative impact on local employment opportunities. However, low-paid jobs on cherry and asparagus farms were generally viewed as "migrant" jobs, with few local people being interested in them.

This analysis of the interrelationship between Lesotho and neighbouring South Africa has demonstrated the major economic benefit that

accrues to South African towns such as Ficksburg and Ladybrand. Without Lesotho, the Free State border towns would be less prosperous. Nonetheless, this economic gain is not without accompanying costs, due to the impact of poverty and the high rate of unemployment in Lesotho. Further retrenchment of Lesotho mineworkers on South African mines could worsen the situation.

Various policy implications can be drawn from this study. South African immigration policy should not only control the movement of people between Lesotho and South Africa but also facilitate their effective movement. In the Free State border towns, South African businesses would be the major beneficiary of liberalised border regulations between Lesotho and South Africa. The economic development of the entire Caledon River valley depends upon such rationalisation. More stringent border control would impact negatively on the economic situation in the border towns. Liberalised border regulations would also be mutually beneficial for commuters and government agencies on both sides of the border.

Better information is required on Lesotho citizens' destinations and reasons for travel in order to assess the possible impact on South Africa and on the eastern Free State towns in particular. The information currently collected at border posts is inadequate.

Research has shown that citizens from Lesotho access services such as education and primary health care in the three selected towns. Demand for these services has not been particularly high, but it is likely that more resources may be required to provide adequate services for both South African and Lesotho users. This additional demand should be taken into account in planning and implementing services at both the local and the provincial levels.

The historical seasonal presence of Basotho labourers on farms in the eastern Free State is likely to continue despite the fact that South Africa's most recent immigration regulations attempt to discourage low-skilled foreign labour from entering the country. Attempting to end this practice would be difficult and impractical, and unlikely to contribute significantly to the lowering of local unemployment levels since eastern Free State farmers allege that South Africans are not interested in employment on farms. More research is needed on this topic to establish the true state of affairs.

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