

Urbanisation, urban dilemmas and urban challenges in Lesotho

Summary

With a formal urbanisation rate of approximately 20%, Lesotho has an extremely low urbanisation level. This article attempts to analyse current urbanisation trends and to compare various sources of data in order to provide more insight into urbanisation trends and the urban hierarchy. This is followed by a discussion of the urban dilemmas and challenges which are bound to confront Lesotho in the decades to come. It is crucial that Lesotho develop solutions to the following: random settlement patterns which lead to occupation of arable land and ecological deterioration; the transitional nature of population and urbanisation trends; a lack of urban management and capacity; a lack of urban land tenure, and the lack of an economic income base for urban areas.

Verstedeliking, stedelike problematiek en stedelike uitdagings in Lesotho

Met 'n formele verstedelikingskoers van ongeveer 20% het Lesotho van die laagste vlakke van verstedeliking. Die artikel ontleed huidige verstedelikingstendense en vergelyk verskillende databasisse om sodoende meer insig ten opsigte van verstedelikingstendense en die stedelike rangorde te verkry. Hierdie bespreking word opgevolg deur 'n ontleding van 'n aantal stedelike dilemmas en uitdagings in Lesotho. Uitdagings waarvoor dringend oplossing gesoek moet word, is die onorderlike vestigingspatrone wat lei tot die besetting van vrugbare landbougrond en ekologiese agteruitgang; die oorgangsfase waarin die bevolking van Lesotho en verstedeliking in die land verkeer; die gebrek aan stedelike bestuurskapasiteit; asook die gebrek aan 'n inkomstebasis vir die meeste stedelike gebiede.

The Kingdom of Lesotho, with approximately two million inhabitants, is the only country in the world which is land-locked by only one other country, South Africa. It is located in Southern Africa and borders the South African provinces of the Free State, Kwazulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape. An ex-British Protectorate and Colony, it obtained independence in 1966. Political rivalry has resulted in coups and frequent changes of government since independence, leading in turn to a high level of political instability (Gay *et al* 1995: 22). Lesotho is currently under democratic rule and has had two elections during the 1990s. However, there are serious political problems in the country as the opposition parties do not accept the 1998 election results and new elections will have to be held.

Because of its location within South Africa, which was until 1994 an apartheid state, Lesotho received enormous attention and sympathy from donor countries. The result is that it now has the highest technical aid per household world-wide (Government of Lesotho 1994: 3). Large amounts of donor money and technical aid, as well as government investment, have been spent on rural development projects and agriculture. This factor and the country's low levels of formal urbanisation (approximately 20%, depending on which definition of "urban" one uses) have contributed to the neglect of the urban debate in Lesotho — an aspect mentioned by Harris (1991: xiv) within the broader African context. Harris (1991: xiv) also attributes the lack of an urbanisation debate in Africa to the high levels of donor aid in rural development projects. This lack of an urban debate differs from the situation in South Africa where, according to Drummond (1992: 265), the contrary situation exists.

While research publications on Lesotho in academic journals are limited, the available literature (mainly consultancy reports) is dominated by development literature on agriculture and rural development in Lesotho. The few documents which do address some of the urban aspects are Wilsenach 1989, the National Settlement Policy 1990a, Katona 1993, Lesale 1994, Peters 1994, Kemeng 1995, Department of Water Affairs 1996, Makhetha 1997, Rabe *et al* 1997 and Marais 1999. It is worth mentioning that the National Settlement Policy was developed during the late 1980s and was the first and only attempt to address the issue of future urbanisation and the

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urban hierarchy in Lesotho. Although it is a government document, it has limited institutional authority (Ruicon 1998a: 149).

With the preliminary data of the 1996 census now available, this article will attempt to update the information in the National Settlement Policy and debate the urban dilemmas and challenges of Lesotho. Against this background this article aims to:

- analyse urbanisation trends and patterns as well as the nature of urbanisation in Lesotho, and
- discuss the urban dilemmas and challenges which will confront Lesotho (and South Africa, where relevant) in the decades to come, in order to stimulate much-needed debate on the urban issue.

It is not my intention to create the impression that rural development is irrelevant. This article should rather be viewed in the context of the lack of debate on urban issues in Lesotho and the global concern for sustainable development in an urbanising world. This article would like to stimulate debate in and about Lesotho, while acknowledging that one cannot really debate urban issues without understanding the rural livelihood of the inhabitants of the country.

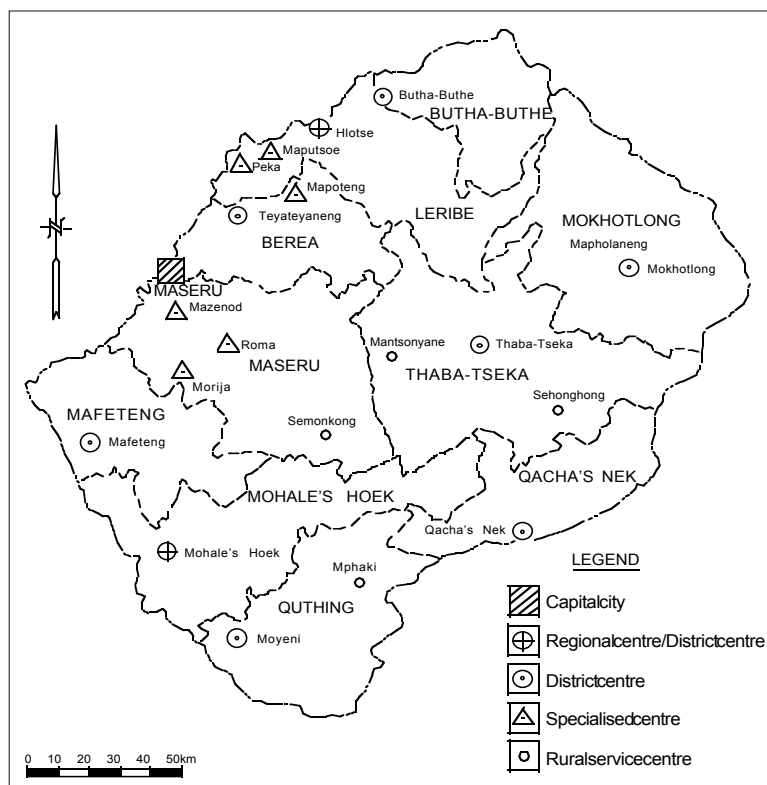
1. Urbanisation in Lesotho

Establishing the level of urbanisation in Lesotho is dependent on the definition used. This section therefore provides a description of the two definitions relevant to the Lesotho situation followed by international comparisons with the urbanisation level of Lesotho. Attention will also be paid to urbanisation trends since 1976, as well as to the urban hierarchy.

1.1 Defining urban Lesotho

To distinguish between the urban and rural populations in Lesotho is complex. Two main methods exist (Ruicon 1997b: 5). The first defines urban areas according to government proclamations. The two main proclamations are the Declaration of Urban Areas (Notice to the Land Act of 1979) (see Figure 1; the urban areas on the map are demarcated in terms of the declaration, excluding the rural service areas and the Land Act (Amendment of Schedule) Order 1986 (Legal notice

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no 7 of 1986) (see Figure 1; the rural service areas are excluded and the following areas are no longer urban: Mapoteng, Roma, Mazenod, Peka and Morija). These proclamations relate the urban population to the actual number of people residing within the legal boundaries of the proclaimed urban areas.

The main problem with this definition is that the proclamation of urban boundaries can easily be changed, which affects percentage calculations in such a way that what is urban today might be rural tomorrow, or *vice versa*. For example, several urban areas (Mapoteng, Mazenod, Roma, Peka and Morija) lost their urban status as a consequence of the Land Act (Amendment of Schedule) Order 1986 (Legal notice no 7 of 1986). This makes it difficult to compare urbanisation figures from different periods. Furthermore, it is astonishing that Roma, where the National University of Lesotho is situated, and Mazenod, where the international airport is located, can be considered rural areas. The second major difficulty in working with this definition is that urban boundaries do not always include the functional urban population (Department of Water Affairs 1996: 188). Ruicon (1997b: 7) provides a good example in Urban Mafeteng (the urban area in the Mafeteng district) where approximately 3000 households which are functionally part of Urban Mafeteng are defined as rural according to the boundaries.

The second, and more functional definition, defines urban households as

families living in concentrated cluster settlements of 2 500 or more at a density of at least 1 000 per km² and engaged in modern activities (non-agricultural) with a minimum (less than 0.1ha) of land at their disposal (Department of Water Affairs 1996: 188).

This definition was created in support of a more urban-like water delivery system for such areas, which, according to planning guidelines in Lesotho, are not urban. However, the definition is not formally accepted and discussions with government officials reveal it to be relatively unpopular. Nonetheless, I am of the opinion that it requires more attention from planners and other urban practitioners.

It is therefore clear from this discussion that any attempt to establish the urban population of Lesotho is a relatively difficult exercise which results in conflicting definitions for different periods, each

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with its own advantages and disadvantages. This phenomenon has to be considered with some caution if one plans to use population figures to determine the urban:rural ratio as it results in different definitions and varying estimates of the urban:rural ratio. This article attempts, among other things, to compare urban:rural ratios in terms of the different definitions and government proclamations — an approach that has not yet been attempted. The next section compares Lesotho's urbanisation rate with those of sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa by means of World Bank (1997) data.

1.2 A comparison with the rest of the world

When compared to other countries in Africa, Lesotho has one of the lowest levels of urbanisation (World Bank 1997) (see Table 1). This is also very different from the situation in South Africa just across the border.

Table 1: Urbanisation levels (percentages) in Lesotho compared to Sub-Saharan and South Africa, 1975-1996

Year/s	Sub-Saharan Africa	South Africa	Lesotho
1975/76	22	48	11
1985/86	27	48	16
1995/96	34	51	23

Source: World Bank 1997.

These figures illustrate important international differences. For example, the figures for Lesotho are in stark contrast to the averages for South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as to the world urbanisation average of approximately 50%. In the Free State province of South Africa (which borders Lesotho to the west), with a population of approximately 2.6 million, the formal urbanisation rate is 54% while 75% of the population is functionally urbanised (Krige 1995: 10). It is my opinion that the low urbanisation level in Lesotho does not reflect the real situation. These figures result from deliberate government policy, informed by a romantic notion of the rural which is inhibiting the urban and urbanisation debates. To clarify this issue, urbanisation trends since 1976 will now be analysed.

1.3 Urbanisation trends since 1976

Table 2 reports the findings on urban growth in Lesotho from 1975/1976 to 1995/96 and also makes projections until 2025, using three different definitions of the urban population. The first definition is the functional definition of the Department of Water Affairs (1996: 188), the second is derived from the definition of the urban population stated in the 1979 Land Act (Declaration of Urban Areas), while the third definition is consistent with the Land Act (amendment of Schedule) Order 1986 (Legal notice no 7 of 1986).

Table 2: The urban population, percentage of urban population and annual urban growth rate in Lesotho according to various sources, 1976-2025

Year	Urban population	% of urban population	Annual urban growth rate
1976 Department of Water Affairs	100 389	8.2	-
1976 National Settlement Policy ¹	138 625	11.4	-
1976 National Settlement Policy ²	121 042	9.9	-
1986 Department of Water Affairs	312 794	19.8	12.0
1986 National Settlement Policy ¹	219 529	13.9	4.7
1986 National Settlement Policy ²	180 754	11.5	-
1995 Department of Water Affairs	574 087	30.1	6.3
1996 Census ¹	359 535	19.4	5.2
1996 Census ²	321 243	17.3	-
2025 Department of Water Affairs projection	1 920 858	58.9	4.1
2025 Projection based on census data ¹	1 121 264 ³	34.4	4.0
2025 Projection based on census data ²	1 001 844 ³	30.7	4.0

¹ According to the Land Act, 1979 (Declaration of Urban Areas).

² According to the Land Act (amendment of Schedule) Order 1986 (Legal notice no 7 of 1986).

³ Estimated at a growth rate of 4%.

It is evident from Table 2 that many people who are functionally urban do not reside within the current urban boundaries. In actual fact, more than 200 000 people (approximately 11% of the total po-

pulation or 37% of the functional urban population) do not currently reside in formal urban areas.

The percentage of people who are functionally urban will increase by a factor of 3.3 from 1995 to 2025. A growth rate of 4% is expected in the formal urban areas, which means that the urban population will increase to approximately 1.2 million people by the year 2025 (on the understanding that urban boundaries will be expanded and that the current border arrangement between South Africa and Lesotho will remain intact).

The possible consequences of these comments are debated later in this article. The next section will focus on the hierarchy of formal urban areas.

1.4 The urban hierarchy in Lesotho

The National Settlement Policy (1990a: 5) distinguishes the following types of urban settlements: capital city (Maseru), regional centres (which could also be district centres), district centres, and specialised centres. It also identifies rural service centres which are not proclaimed urban areas and have not been so at any stage in Lesotho's history (see Figure 1 and Table 3). As noted earlier, the following specialised centres are no longer considered urban areas: Morija, Roma, Mazenod, and Mapoteng. Peka is not regarded as an urban area either.

Maseru, which already houses approximately 60% of all dwellers within the boundaries of formal urban areas, will be the prime centre of urbanisation, and it will grow at an annual rate of approximately 6%. This growth is due to the presence of a highly centralised government service in Maseru (despite current decentralisation initiatives), as well as a number of textile industries.

The majority of urban areas in the lowlands will double their population between 1996 and 2010. This will place enormous pressure on the cost-effectiveness of providing services and infrastructure, as well as on land identification (although infill development might be prominent), as the majority of these new urban dwellers will be work-seekers. A growth rate of approximately 3%-5% per annum is expected for district centres in the lowlands. One aspect which is already critical, and certainly will be increasingly so in the future, is the need

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to stimulate growth in these areas by means of the current process of government service decentralisation (Ruicon 1998b: 129; 1998a: 27).

Among the specialised centres with a relatively large number of textile industries, Maputsoe in particular will attract those people in search of employment. This industrial area flourishes because of the relatively low wages demanded in Lesotho and the fact that company tax is 10% lower than in South Africa. On the South African side, Ficksburg which is separated only from Maputsoe by the Caledon River, the border between the two countries, will also benefit from developments in Maputsoe. Krige *et al* (1994: 43) and Krige (1995: 17) have previously noted the interrelatedness of these two border towns.

In conclusion, it therefore seems as if large-scale urbanisation is to take place in Lesotho. In order to understand the underlying issues which will play a role, urbanisation trends and patterns in Lesotho will now be considered.

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Table 3: Population per urban settlement type in Lesotho, 1976-2010

Type of settlement	Name of urban area	Urban 1976 ²	Urban 1986 ²	Urban 1996 ³	Urban 2010 ⁴
Capital city		55 301	107 536	185 934 ¹	349 822
% of urban population ⁶		46	59	58	61
% growth per year		-	6.9	5.6	6.5
	Maseru	55 031	107 536	185 934	-
Regional centres		11 573	15 742	29 647	50 883
% of urban population ⁶		9.5	8.7	9.2	8.9
% growth per year		-	3.1	6.5	5.5
	Hlotse	6 297	8 076	12 837 ⁵	23 915
	Mohale's Hoek	5 276	7 676	16 810	26 968
District centres		38 615	46 889	77 711	114 487
% of urban population ⁶		31.9	25.9	24.2	20.0
% growth per year		-	1.9	5.2	4.0
	Butha-Buthe	7 472	8 340	12 416	17 746
	Teyateyaneng	8 589	12 934	21 000 ¹	33 774
	Mafeteng	8 278	12 171	20 673	32 056
	Moyeni	3 528	4 306	9 843	13 738
	Qacha's Nek	4 837	4 595	4 778	6 297
	Thaba Tseka	4 427	2 149	4 436	5 724
	Mokhotlong	1 484	2 394	4 262	5 152
Specialised centre		15 823	10 577	27 951	57 243
% of urban population ⁶		13.1	5.9	8.7	10.0
% growth per year		-	-3.9	10.2	8.6
	Maputsoe	15 823	10 577	27 951	57 243
Current urban areas:	Total	121 042	180 754	321 243	572 435
Areas previously considered urban		17 584	38 773	52 105	76 695
	Mapoten	2 423	3 921	5 269 ⁷	7 755 ⁷
	Mazenod	-	21 848	29 361 ⁷	43 218 ⁷
	Roma	5 668	5 358	7 200 ⁷	10 598 ⁷
	Morija	4 915	1 992	2 677 ⁷	3 940 ⁷
	Peka	4 577	5 654	7 598 ⁷	11 184 ⁷
Total		138 626	219 527	373 348	649 130

¹ According to Gay *et al* (1995), certain areas of urban Maseru are located in the Berea district (in which Teyateyaneng is the main urban centre). Although the Bureau of Statistics considers this to be part of the urban population of Berea for comparison purposes, it is in this table considered as part of the population of Maseru. Maseru's and Teyateyaneng population have also been adjusted from the official figure provided by the Bureau of Statistics' using the estimates of the Department of Water Affairs (1996).

² According to the National Settlement Policy (1990a).

³ According to unofficial statistics from the Bureau of Statistics as determined from the 1996 census.

- ⁴ Projections based on a 5% annual urban growth rate for Lesotho between 1996 and 2010, derived from projections made by the Department of Water Affairs (1996). The growth rate is applied to the total urban population before the implication for each settlement group is determined. This is why different growth rates are applied to different settlement types.
- ⁵ The figure for Hlotse provided by the Bureau of Statistics was adjusted on the basis of an investigation into the map of urban areas used during the 1996 census.
- ⁶ Calculated in terms of the current urban areas (the Land Act Amendment of Schedule) Order 1986 (Legal notice no 7 of 1986).
- ⁷ Based on an annual growth rate of 3% between 1986 and 1996 and 2,8% between 1996 and 2010. These assumptions are based on the assumptions made for these areas by the Department of Water Affairs (1996).
- * It should be noted that the two regional centres are also district centres.

1.5 Urbanisation and migration trends and patterns

To understand the changing migration patterns of Lesotho, one needs to know that topographically the greater part of the country consists of mountains. Only a small section in the west, next to the border with South Africa, is not mountainous. It is called the lowlands (albeit more than 1000 m above sea level). The major migration trend over the past 30 years has been from the mountainous areas to the so-called lowlands (Department of Water Affairs 1996: 186). Households with relatives who work in South Africa (mainly as migrant workers in the mining sector) have settled closer to the South African border, especially in those areas close to the main roads (Ruicon 1997a: 59).

Evidence of this trend is clear from the 1996 census, which suggests that population enumeration areas close to the South African border, with access to a border post and a tarred road, have the highest percentage of absentee residents (mainly in South Africa) (Ruicon 1997a: 60). This trend is the result of major improvements in long-distance commuting, the mini-bus taxi industry in South Africa, increased salaries, and more relaxed employment conditions on South African mines, which make it possible for a miner to visit his family every fortnight or for the family to visit him (Department of Water Affairs 1996: 186). Approximately 50% of Lesotho miners are employed on the Free State Goldfields (Ruicon 1997b: 41), which means that most miners and their families are only three hours apart (some even only two hours).

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However, it is interesting, and somewhat alarming, to note that the people who have settled in the lowlands have not necessarily done so within the official urban boundaries. For example, in the formal urban area of Urban Mafeteng (Mafeteng district), the percentage of people absent outside Lesotho (6.9%) is lower than the district average (8.5%), while in the Qalabane constituency next to the South African border the percentage is 11.6% (Ruicon 1997a: 62). This pattern has serious consequences, and will be discussed later.

In conclusion, it seems as if the shift in the population has caused an accumulation of migrants in the area near the Free State border. In a certain sense, the “damming up” of people on the Lesotho side of the border can be compared with Tomlinson & Krige’s (1997: 694) description of the “damming up” of black people within the homeland boundaries during South Africa’s apartheid era. The comparison of Lesotho with the ex-homeland areas of South Africa is not surprising. According to Edgar (1987: 375) there is very little difference between the two. Although there has already been a spillover of Lesotho residents into South Africa (Ruicon 1997b: 67), and specifically into the Free State (where the majority of people share the same culture), the “dam wall” has not yet collapsed.

2. Urban dilemmas and challenges in Lesotho

The previous section focused on the process of urbanisation in Lesotho and although some urban dilemmas and challenges were mentioned, no in-depth analysis was made. The next section attempts to analyse the urban dilemmas and challenges which will confront Lesotho (and South Africa, where appropriate) in the decades to come. Although this analysis does not claim to discuss all the major dilemmas and challenges, it is an attempt to stimulate the debate.

2.1 Unorderly settlement patterns throughout Lesotho

Despite some efforts to control land allocation by means of village development councils (in which the traditional leaders play an essential role), the government of Lesotho (1997: 125) acknowledges that a system of *ad hoc* settlements exists, with the result that migration from the mountains to the lowlands is not directed to formal urban

areas. Furthermore, as is the case in other parts of Africa (Simon 1990: 6), the hierarchy of urban areas is vague (due to a lack of government commitment to this as well as to *ad hoc* settlement) and does not contribute to the facilitation of development.

Why is the random settlement system in the non-urban areas a problem? Although there may be some good arguments in favour of the view that the current traditional land-allocation system provides a social safety net for poor people (Cross 1988: 10), the following three aspects are problematic. First, there is increasing evidence of landlessness (Clarke 1985: 21; Ruicon 1998c: 12). The main reason for this is the growing population in non-urban areas, while the amount of land available remains static. Therefore, the argument that the traditional land-allocation system provides easy access to agricultural land is not entirely valid. Secondly, according to the National Settlement Policy (1990a: 22), human settlements are encroaching on arable agricultural land. Settlements are also putting pressure on the rural environment, which should facilitate agricultural production. Although no official statistics exist, a study by Ruicon (1997c: 13) estimates that at least 5% of land in the Mafeteng district has been lost due to gully erosion (not including top-soil erosion). Gay *et al* (1995: 50-2) are of the opinion that 1 000 ha of arable land is lost annually to gully erosion. Although ineffective agricultural practices are probably the main contributors, the high population density (up to 120 persons per km²) on low intensity rural agricultural land worsens the situation. The presence of more people implies that there will be more animals and ploughing in marginal areas. Thirdly, the provision of services in non-urban areas is more expensive than in the urban setting. In other words, a more formalised settlement system might reduce the cost of providing services (for example, water provision, which is a high priority in rural areas).

Against this background, the challenge seems to be to exert stricter control over rural land allocation and to make the urban areas more attractive for settlement. Although peri-urban settlement is not necessarily a negative phenomenon, I would like to argue that a proper strategy to accommodate urbanisation could have channeled it to areas where the impact on the physical environment would be less severe and where people could be provided with services in a

more cost-effective way. The fact that much of the evidence shows limited involvement in agriculture on the part of these peri-urban dwellers suggests that their settlement in these areas is, in the main, the result of linking with relatives in South Africa. Settling in an urban area where provision would have been made for them in advance would not have hampered their economic situation or their dependence on income from agriculture, since this is mostly absent from where they currently reside. Without a policy of this nature, current migration patterns will contribute to landlessness, loss of agricultural land, ecological deterioration, and relatively expensive investment in providing infrastructure and services. It is against this background that consideration could once more be given to the hierarchy of urban settlements, as well as to the national settlement pattern which was proposed by the National Settlement Policy (1990a).

2.2 The transitional nature of population trends in Lesotho

A second dilemma confronting urban planners, policy makers and managers in Lesotho, as well as those in South Africa, is the fact that for a relatively large number of people, population movement inside Lesotho is only the first step in gaining access to the South African economy for a relatively large number of people. Gay *et al* (1995: 49) summarise this phenomenon succinctly when they state that

it is not yet possible for families to move to the true cities, those in South Africa, because Basotho are considered to be foreigners.

However, it has been claimed that approximately 150 000 Lesotho citizens (excluding the approximately 100 000 legal migrant workers) reside illegally in the Free State province (Ruicon 1997a: 23). Officials at the Bureau of Statistics are searching for 200 000 people who, according to fertility trends, should be in Lesotho, but are probably in South Africa. The argument is not that each and every Lesotho citizen is waiting for a chance to leave Lesotho permanently. However, if only 10% of Lesotho's working population want to or have already moved to South Africa, legally or illegally, the impact on both Lesotho and South Africa will be considerable.

During 1995 the South African government offered Lesotho migrant workers permanent residential status which could be upgraded to full South African citizenship after five years (Ruicon 1997b: 25). To date, approximately 30 000 migrant workers have made use of this opportunity. Estimates are that at least 50% of such workers will settle permanently in South Africa with their families, which implies that approximately 75 000 Lesotho citizens will probably move to South Africa or have already done so.

The above dilemmas pose the following challenges across the border with the Free State:

- What level of services does one provide and where in Lesotho does one locate these services if many families intend to leave Lesotho in the next couple of years?
- How does the Free State plan for this trend and what will be the financial burden on resources (housing, infrastructure, health care, and pensions) for the province? It is claimed that a high percentage of Lesotho citizens illegally receive old-age pensions and free health care in South Africa (Ruicon 1997c: 30).

The challenge is therefore to develop a policy which will take account of the population and settlement patterns existing between Lesotho and the Free State province in South Africa.

2.3 Lack of urban managerial capacity

Swilling (1997: 6) mentions the ineffectiveness of urban management systems in Africa. Lesotho seems to be no exception in this regard. The fact that Lesotho has an urbanisation level of approximately 20% also has an impact on the experience of urban managers in accommodating newly-urbanised people. Furthermore, the lack of urban management capacity is negatively influenced by the emphasis on rural development. While urban services are better than rural services, services in general in Lesotho, compare well with those in sub-Saharan Africa (see Table 4). Agriculture (to which 6.8% of Lesotho's budget is allocated, in comparison with approximately 2% in South Africa) is also over-emphasised. Furthermore, urban research is not seen as an important aspect of study at the National University of Lesotho. Instead, an outreach programme aimed at "making people

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content with rural life” is one of main emphases of community service at the University. Discussions with Lesotho government officials and planners revealed that urbanisation is viewed in an extremely negative light. The National Settlement Policy (1990b: 1) even creates the impression that urban growth in Maseru should be controlled. Moreover, there is no urban housing policy in place.

Table 4: A comparison of selected development indicators: Lesotho, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Africa

Service/indicator	Lesotho	Sub-Saharan Africa	South Africa
Access to safe water (1994/95) (%)	35	-	46
Health care (% of people within an hour's walk of a health facility)	80	51	-
Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) (1994/95)	76	92	50
Life expectancy (1993)	61	52	63
Male adult illiteracy (1994) (%)	35	54	18
Female adult illiteracy (1994) (%)	19	35	18

Sources: World Bank 1997; Ruicon 1997a.

Maseru, the only city with its own local government, was given this status only in 1994 although this has been possible since the 1960s. The process of decentralising local government is currently under way in Lesotho, yet the question of local capacity is not mentioned at all. I agree with Cohen's (1996: 430) argument that there is no sense in debating and initiating local decision-making if this does not coincide with a debate on capacity building.

Together with the lack of urban managers and urban thinking there is the so-called “brain drain” to South Africa. This results mainly from the higher salaries paid on the South African side of the border (professionals can earn three times more than in Lesotho). Wereko (1997: 17) reports that at least 40 non mine-related managers and professionals from Lesotho worked in South Africa between 1994 and 1997. If Lesotho has already lost this number of skilled people, there will be a major effect on professional services (one of which is urban management).

The issue in the Lesotho context is not whether urbanisation is actually good or bad, but how urban managers will plan within the reality of growing urbanisation. The government of Lesotho and its officials do not yet seem to have realised the opportunities offered by urbanisation. The declaration of existing urban areas as rural areas in 1986 is a case in point. As in most areas of Africa, the rate of urban growth has outstripped the capacity of management and not even simple information on the urbanisation process itself is available. The challenge is therefore to develop a more pro-urban policy within the Southern African context and to build urban management capacity in order to facilitate the urbanisation process in the country. Such an urban policy framework could even be extended to include the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

2.4 Lack of urban land tenure

There is no individual land tenure system in Lesotho. This influences urban development in a number of ways. In the first place, it inhibits the role of the private sector in urban development as there is not enough security for private initiative. It also results in money from insurance policies and banks in Lesotho being invested in developments in South Africa.

The Land Act of 1979 provided for leases to be registered. However, only 504 leases have been registered in the Mafeteng district and no more than 3000 in the rest of Lesotho (Ruicon 1998b: 63). This indicates the ineffectiveness of the Act.

The challenge seems to be to develop an urban policy with greater emphasis on the role of the private sector. To facilitate this, a land tenure system is required which will provide enough security for development. The provision of such a system in urban areas would enhance in all probability private sector investment.

2.5 Lack of an income base in urban areas

Due to the role of the central government in the provision and subsidisation of urban services, as well as the lack of land tenure, there seems to be no real income base for urban areas. The traditional

sources of local government income, namely land tax and the provision of services at a profit, are either absent or highly subsidised.

Furthermore, no culture of payment for services has been developed, probably because of the high subsidies. The Water and Sanitation Authority sells water at 50% below the production price. The result is that people are not paying what they are supposed to pay, which makes any proposed increase dangerous. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of land tenure, which means that no land tax can be raised. Discussions with government officials in the Mafeteng district of Lesotho revealed that they were unhappy about paying land taxes if they already owned the land (in terms of leases). Their argument was that it was unfair to own land and still be expected to pay for ownership. If this is the attitude of the “urban elite”, any attempt to normalise the situation and create sustainable local authorities (a process currently under way) is bound to be problematic.

3. Conclusion

It is clear that the influx into urban areas and their surroundings will continue. The debate should not focus on whether this is good or bad, but rather on how Lesotho's planners should attempt to accommodate this increase in the urban population, within the southern African context.

For too long, the debate in Lesotho has focused on the methods of and approaches to rural development and on agriculturally related development investments. In the process, attempts to achieve romantic aims such as “food self-sufficiency” and “subsistence farming” have not had high rates of success in ensuring economic sustainability in Lesotho. Although I do not think that a pro-urban policy approach would have greater success I believe that the lack of debate and the refusal to acknowledge the reality of urbanisation and the dearth of urban management capacity are major concerns. The time has come for urban managers, academics, donor agencies and government officials to open up the debate on urban management and to integrate urban and rural planning in order to formulate an integrated urban-rural development strategy for Lesotho. Swilling's (1996: 2) comments are especially relevant to Lesotho:

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the notion that Africa's future may well be an urban future if present urbanisation rates continue has yet to make an impact on policy-makers inside and outside of government.

The urban debate will also have to be broadened from only considering urbanisation in Lesotho to studying urbanisation in Lesotho within the broader Southern African perspective. It is by means of such an approach that the debate on the future of the formal frontier between Lesotho and South Africa should be revisited.

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