

The Seinoli Legal Centre

The Seinoli Legal Centre is the first public interest legal centre in Lesotho. It was founded by Protimos in 2010 in response to direct requests for help from communities that had been involuntarily resettled in the wake of a huge dam infrastructure programme, Phase One of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP). The SLC legal team have successfully negotiated settlements and undertaken strategic litigation for these communities.

Your donations will help Seinoli Legal Centre achieve its objectives – to secure further compensation for communities affected by iniquitous development projects in Lesotho, and to educate these communities on their rights under the rule of law.

Seinoli Legal Centre's impact so far

Two major battles have been won so far. In 2012, the Legal Centre obtained a court order that obliged the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA) to provide access to clean water for the villagers of Mapeleng, after the supply had been interrupted by the construction of the dam in 1996. This victory came after more than ten years of the Authority refusing to take any action. The Mapeleng precedent has allowed and will allow many other communities to pursue similar claims against the LHDA.

In 2015, the Seinoli Legal Centre represented the Ha Lejone Co-operative. By law this community was entitled to compensation from the LHDA for their lost brushwood, fodder and medicinal plants which had been submerged at the newly-constructed Katse Dam. After a Lesotho High Court battle the judge ruled that the Co-operative was indeed entitled to this compensation. This ruling has opened up the opportunity for many other similarly neglected communities to seek compensation and, therefore, a pathway out of the poverty imposed by unjust development outcomes.

Seinoli Legal Centre's future strategy

The successes achieved by the SLC over the past few years represent substantial progress for the communities negatively affected by the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. However, the SLC has further objectives:

The SLC is looking to apply the precedents established by the 2012 and 2015 cases to new contexts. There are several rural communities in the Lesotho Highlands who are suffering as a result of heavy mining nearby. Here, the precedents set in 2012 and 2015 offer a productive route to securing community compensation from the mining companies.

Furthermore, the Phase Two of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, the Polihali Reservoir, is in its preliminary stages. Five villages will disappear entirely. And 72 Villages (3,312 households and 16,560 people) stand to lose land.

As Phase Two of the LHWP gets underway, the Seinoli legal team has already started meeting with community members in the many villages that stand to lose out. During these meetings, the SLC gives paralegal training to community representatives and teaches them about their rights, the obligations of the LHDA, and the legal redress mechanisms available. Two bouts of training, with representatives of 17 communities, have already taken place. This targeted training sits alongside SLC's other education projects, which involve teaching local communities about the rule of law through interactive workshops.

The SLC is also seeking to negotiate with implementers of development projects (such as LHDA and mining companies) to draft Memoranda of Agreement. These MoAs will ensure that the social, economic, and environmental rights of local communities are upheld as development projects are carried out.

The Seinoli Legal Centre has substantial ambitions that reflect its significant successes. Yet the SLC relies on your support to achieve these goals.

What can you do to help?

Donate to Protimos

With further funding, Protimos will help Seinoli Legal Centre fulfil its strategic ambitions – to strive for just compensation for many communities in Lesotho, and to teach these communities about the rule of law. Your donations will also help Protimos reproduce the successful and sustainable Seinoli model in other parts of the world, empowering many more voiceless communities through the rule of law.

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