

### LESOTHO - Floods

Date: February 9-10, 1985

Location: Drakensberg area, as well as western lowlands

No. Dead: None reported

No. Affected: 3,000 to 80,000

Damage: 70 houses damaged, major bridges washed out

#### The Disaster

On February 9 and 10, the entire southern half of Lesotho was battered by heavy rains and high speed, tornado-like winds. The force and sudden onset of the rains caused flooding in many areas, washing out bridges and isolating large segments of the population.

In the Mokhotlong District, approaches to the bridge crossing the Khubelu River were washed out on both shores. Three thousand men, women, and children were stranded in the flooded area. The swift moving waters of the Senku River near the village of Sekokong hindered efforts to repair the bridge and allow access to the area.

In the western lowland area of Mhales Hoek, high speed winds tore the corrugated tin roofs from houses and scattered them over surrounding fields. The roofs of both the medical clinic building and the police headquarters were also blown off. The final tally in this area was 70 homes damaged and between 350 and 400 people left homeless.

#### Action Taken by the Government of Lesotho (GOL)

Within two days of the flooding, the Ministry of Public Works had road crews at the Khubelu and Senku rivers attempting to repair the approaches to the bridges. However, even when the approaches were repaired with gravel and rock fill, the rivers remained impassable until the waters receded to their normal levels.

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On February 13, the Foreign Ministry called a meeting of the diplomatic community to describe the damage and appeal for aid and assistance to meet the national emergency. At the same time, the GOL requested assistance directly from the United States Government through its embassy in Washington.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government

U.S. Ambassador S. O. Abbott toured the Khubelu River disaster area by helicopter with the Minister of Works and subsequently inspected damage to the western lowlands. Based on his observations and the GOL's request, the Ambassador declared that a disaster existed in the Kingdom of Lesotho of a magnitude warranting U.S. assistance.

The USG provided \$25,000 to assist the GOL with the repair of the Khubelu River crossing, the only access to the isolated population of Mokhohlong district. Materials and equipment necessary to repair the bridge, including gabions and cement valued at \$12,972, were purchased locally by the GOL. The remaining funds were used to rent dump trucks, flat bed trucks, and a front-end loader to be used in the repair efforts.

TOTAL                    \$25,000

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

None reported

Assistance Provided by the International Community

The Federal Republic of Germany provided funds totaling \$3,250 to replace the roofs of two medical clinics.

TOTAL                    \$3,250