

## Bringing Shine to Basotho Communities



North of Lesotho's capital Maseru, in a town called Ha Ramonaheng, a group of women gather around a paraffin burner and a room full of supplies to start their work. Together, they produce a floor and furniture polish that they developed using locally sourced materials.

**Mashapa Kopaneng Society** was founded in 2012 to economically empower its 13 female members and other members of their community. In 2012 they had the opportunity to take part in training initiatives run by the Millennium Challenge Corporation as part of the first Compact implemented in Lesotho. The training, provided by the Gender Equality in Economic Rights Program, provided the women with knowledge about their rights and business skills.

Using these skills, the group developed the idea of a floor polish income-generation project that would provide each member a significant source of income and further enhance their socio-economic status and access to their rights. Following training, the group was awarded a **\$8,200 PEPFAR Gender Challenge Grant** (approximately M100,000), funded through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), to develop and market their floor and furniture polish business **Shine Shine**.

The profits they make from Shine Shine are re-invested back into the business and distributed across group members to provide them with more economic opportunities to support their family and community.

They also regularly set aside project proceeds for other projects as a way of giving back to their community. For example, the group presented Basali 'Moho Support Group from nearby Ha Bale village with 15 bags of feed for their layers project which supports people living with HIV and AIDS and orphans and vulnerable children in their community. The group also gave food and toiletries to 16 orphans from their village.

Together the group works hard to make a difference not only in their own lives but in their communities.

"My mother used to tell me that men build houses, but women build families. This inspired me to get together with other women in Ha Monaheng village and start producing and selling furniture and floor polish. We are so very grateful to MCA and U.S. Embassy Maseru for providing Mashapa Kopaneng Society with the skills and training which enabled it to flourish and the funding to make it happen."

*'M'e Mamats'eliso xxx, Chairperson of the Mashapa Kopaneng Society*

The PEPFAR Gender Challenge Fund, funded by the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), is a gender-based program that provides capacity building and grants to small female-operated businesses. This program supports and builds upon the work accomplished by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) through the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA Lesotho) gender-based activities. For more information about this and other small grants, please contact the Special Projects Office on +266 2231 2666 x4119 or by email at [GrantsMaseru@state.gov](mailto:GrantsMaseru@state.gov)