

The Editor
Globe and Mail

Dear Sir/Madam

Villages of the Dammed

It was gratifying to see your interest in exposing the Lesotho Highlands Water Project to your readers (Article *Villages of the Dammed* February 19 edition) but as a paper of repute I wish that you had first checked the accuracy of your sources. There is more wrong than right about the information you have portrayed as you will read below. Unfortunately you leave your readers with the impression that large numbers of communities in the highlands have been affected, and that they have been universally negatively affected. This is simply untrue. In the interests of fair play I hope that you will publish this response or at least refer your readers to the project web site (www.lhwp.org.ls) where they will find this response as well as your article together with other information about the project.

The Lesotho and South African authorities have gone to great lengths to ensure the success of this project. It is overseen by a joint Commission of experienced staff, is partly financed by and regularly supervised by the World Bank, and has two Panels of Experts - Engineering and Social/Environment – of internationally respected specialists who in total have made over 70 inspections. It has also made extensive use of a Disputes Review Board and individual internationally recruited specialists to ensure that the project is properly implemented.

Turning to the specifics of your article, I should first clarify that Anna Moepi is not an affected person. She is the daughter of Lesole Moepi and 'Mamosilinyane Moepi of Mamachipisa at Ha Thaba Bosiu. Ms. Moepi's family was never resettled or relocated and her father still resides at Mamachipisa village in the highlands.

Ms. Moepi's connection to Ha Matala is through her mother, 'Mamosilinyane, who is the daughter of 'Manthona Mokhothu. 'Manthona resettled from Maetsisa in the highlands to Ha Matala in the lowlands. Her choice of destination was influenced by her expressed need to be close to doctors due to her ailing health. Unfortunately 'Manthona passed away not long after and was buried at Masianokeng. Her inheritance was passed on to her daughter, 'Mamosilinyane. After some time 'Mamosilinyane also passed away and was buried at Ha Matala in one of LHDA's resettlement sites. Her properties were passed on to her husband, Lesole Moepi. Anna Moepi resides on this property.

No-one's relatives lie buried beneath the waters impounded by the highlands dams. All graves below maximum water supply level were relocated in consultation with the affected families. Ms Moepi's family was never resettled or relocated. Her father still lives in Mamachipisa village.

A total of 316 households have been resettled by Phase 1B of the project, constituting about 1,900 people, not 17,000 as your article claims. A further 155 have lost land but

were not resettled. Phase 1A relocated households within the same local authority area. Only properties of some approximately 1,500 households were affected.

Resettlement is never an easy matter but you are wrong to imply that families were forced to go to different locations. The participatory nature of the process allowed for families to be given the option of where to relocate and were taken to potential sites so that they could make an informed decision – their decision. In fact all resettlement was carried out in accordance with the “Resettlement and Development Action Plan,” the implementation of which is part of the legal obligations of the project. Its objective is that the “standard of living of all people affected should not be compromised and where possible improved.” Impact surveys are soon to be carried out to determine whether this objective has been met.

Likewise the article says that promised compensation has been withheld. The compensation program under the LHWP has been described as the most generous of any the World Bank has been involved in. The involvement of the Government Ombudsman illustrates that there is recourse even beyond the project if affected households have legitimate grievance. The Ombudsman has certified that 96% of his recommendations have been satisfactorily resolved.

The article says that “in Mohale, the action is hard to see. Almost six years after construction began, many of the displaced people still lack the electricity, sanitation and schools they were promised.” There is generally no electricity network in the highlands – the very low population density, remote location and rugged topography make it prohibitively expensive. However transformers that were originally used for major construction works have been used to make it possible for some villages to be connected (Thuathe, Tsolo, Nazareth, Mohale village, Ramohope, Motloang, and Boits’ireletso). The Mohale Water Supply, Sanitation, and Refuse Disposal Program is due to be completed this year. To date, 59 of 115 water systems (51%), 1,819 VIP latrines (74%), 782 refuse systems (32%), and 1,130 soakaways (46%) have been constructed in the Mohale Catchment area. Seven schools in the area, excluding two replacement schools (Likalaneng RCC & Mphakho Primary School), have been supplied with 15 additional classrooms, 7 staffrooms, 4 Headmasters Offices, 5 Kitchens, VIP latrines and a water supply system.

As you point out, the project, like many projects in Africa and around the world, was dogged by allegations of corruption. What distinguishes the LHWP project is that the authorities did not turn a blind eye. The former Chief Executive is in jail, all five cases so far taken to trial have been successfully prosecuted, and the Government has recouped millions of dollars from convicted firms – including Canada’s Acres International who has also been debarred by the World Bank. Your paper quotes a Mr. Cragg as *saying "It's entirely possible people at the World Bank knew what was going on and it's very unlikely that they didn't know that money was changing hands in those ways,"* This is akin to my saying that it is entirely possible Mr. Cragg beats his wife. The World Bank is a leading player in the international campaign to combat corruption and cooperated fully with the

Lesotho prosecutors. Such unfounded observations are uncalled for and inappropriate in a paper of your standing.

I think I have made my point although the above is by no means an exhaustive response to the inaccuracies of the article. Even glaring mistakes were not picked up (Mohale Dam is a rockfill, not a concrete arch dam). We are very proud of the Highlands Water Project. It is generating economic benefits to both Lesotho and Republic of South Africa, has made Lesotho self-sufficient in power generation, won numerous awards including the prestigious 'Project of the Century' award from the South African Institute of Civil Engineers, and has put Lesotho on the map as the first developing country to successfully respond to large scale corruption. Unfortunately such good news apparently does not sell newspapers.

Sincerely,

Etc.