



## SUCCESS STORY: LESOTHO

# Connecting communities with health care facilities to prevent malnutrition

At the Litsoeneng Health Centre, a small clinic in a remote area of Lesotho, Adelina, a nurse, and Mabeata, a community health worker in the nearby village of Kho-polo, proudly tell the story of Tsepo. Tsepo is a healthy 17-month-old boy who is learning how to walk and loves playing with other children. Mabeata and Adelina meet monthly to monitor his growth and make sure he stays healthy.

But good health wasn't always the case for Tsepo. When he was 8 months old, Mabeata visited his home to monitor his growth and discovered that he wasn't gaining weight at a normal rate. Immediately, she encouraged his mother, Malehloa, only 16 years old, to take him to

the health center for evaluation and nutrition support. After participating in a training workshop conducted by the Infant & Young Child Nutrition (IYCN) Project, the community health worker knew that it was critical to send babies with growth problems to the health center as soon as possible. She even accompanied Malehloa and Tsepo on their visit to the facility.

"I was very concerned about Tsepo. I wanted to be there to help Malehloa understand the problem and coordinate with the nurses to follow up after the visit," Mabeata explained.

## Improving infant feeding after six months

Malehloa, who stopped going to school once she was pregnant, had practiced exclusive breastfeeding since Tsepo was born. As a result, in his first six months, he was hardly sick and he grew normally. It was after six months that his growth began to falter. Malehloa didn't know that her young child needed complementary foods (other foods and fluids) in addition to breast milk to keep him well nourished after the age of 6 months.

To improve Tsepo's nutrition, Mabeata and Adelina helped the young mother identify foods she already had at home that would be good for Tsepo, like enriched porridge and fruits. They encouraged her to continue to breastfeed in addition to feeding him enough nutritious complementary foods at the right frequency. To help



Photo by PATH/Christine Demmelmaier

Tsepo (with his mother, Malehloa) is thriving, thanks in part to Mabeata's quick actions and persistent follow-up, which prevented him from becoming severely malnourished.

him catch up on his growth as quickly as possible, Adelina also gave Tsepo a nutritional supplement.

“I learned that breastfeeding alone does not satisfy the baby after six months, so I have to add other foods that are good for Tsepo,” said Malehloa.

Mabeata makes frequent home visits to check Tsepo’s growth and ensure that Malehloa is feeding him enriched porridge and other appropriate foods several times a day. She smiles when she talks about how happy and healthy Tsepo is, now that his growth rate has improved.

“I am very proud. It gives me strength to see how Tsepo is growing,” Mabeata said.

## A critical link

Mabeata’s quick actions and persistent follow-up prevented Tsepo from becoming severely malnourished. In Lesotho, many babies do not receive adequate complementary foods—putting them at risk of malnutrition and making them more susceptible to severe childhood illnesses, stunted growth, developmental delays, and death. Volunteers like Mabeata are the critical link between communities and the life-saving prevention and treatment available at health facilities.

To prevent malnutrition, the IYCN Project is working to improve the links between health facilities and communities like Khopolo. IYCN provides infant and young child feeding training workshops for community health workers, which emphasize increased collaboration with health facilities. Following IYCN’s workshop at the Litsoeneng Health Centre for Mabeata and 30 other community health workers (one for each village in the area), clinic staff have seen an increase in referrals for growth-faltering from community health workers.

Adelina believes that community health workers are vital to improving the health of mothers and children



Photo by PATH/Christine Demmelmaier

Mabeata (left) and Adelina meet monthly to monitor Tsepo’s growth and make sure he stays healthy.

served by the clinic. She says it is not always easy to convince families to visit the facility. They often prefer to go to traditional healers in their villages, or they do not have time to walk—sometimes more than six miles—to the clinic.

“We cannot afford to go house to house. If we need to get information to the villages, the community health workers are there on our behalf,” Adelina said.

Learn more about IYCN activities  
in Lesotho at [www.iycn.org/Lesotho](http://www.iycn.org/Lesotho)

## ABOUT THE INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD NUTRITION PROJECT

The Infant and Young Child Nutrition Project is funded by the United States Agency for International Development. The project is led by PATH and includes three partners: CARE, the Manoff Group, and University Research Co., LLC. For more information, please contact [info@iycn.org](mailto:info@iycn.org).



Photos (left to right) by PATH/Mike Wang; PATH; Philippe Blanc; Aurelio Ayala III.