Ministry
Q&As



Sr. Victoria Mota, a member of Holy Family Sisters of Bordeaux-Lesotho, poses with students in the sewing room at the sewing center located at Holy Family High School in Leribe, a town in the northeastern part of Lesotho. She started the sewing project in 2015 to empower youths and ensure they come out of poverty. (GSR photo/Doreen Ajiambo)



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Leribe, Lesotho — June 7, 2022

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In this northeast town, Sr. Victoria Mota is changing the lives of young people. She started a sewing center at Holy Family High School in 2015 to empower youths and ensure they come out of poverty.

The World Bank classifies the mountainous country surrounded entirely by South Africa as "a lower-middle-income country," with a poverty rate of 30.1% in 2021. The country's unemployment rate, which is currently 22.5%, is projected to remain high because of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Lesotho's population of 2.2 million.

"I have always wanted to serve my community and the people," said Mota, a member of the Holy Family Sisters of Bordeaux-Lesotho. "I decided to start this sewing project to help young people come out of poverty. It also gives me a chance to live my charism and dream, which is service to the poor and the vulnerable."

The center offers free skills training to young people who have dropped out of school and are unemployed, orphaned or vulnerable. Some youths who graduate from the center are employed or retained to help the sister with the work.

"Apart from training the youths, I make uniforms for the Holy Family High School students, which is run by my congregation," she said. "I also empower people in the surrounding community with dressmaking skills and employment."

Mota said most youths in the country, especially young men, are uneducated and without any skills and learning. Traditionally, boys in Lesotho have been culturally barred from accessing formal education and instead tend to livestock while girls go to school, she said.

The situation has left many boys with no formal education and life skills to help them fend for themselves and their families, she added.

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Tlotliso Koloko, 21, is one of the beneficiaries of the sister's project. He was recruited to the center early this year after graduating from grade 12.

"My parents didn't have money to help me proceed to higher education," he said, thanking the sister for offering him an opportunity to take an 18-month sewing course. "After the training, I will start my own business. While I train here, I also earn some money. I'm saving this money to help me when I start my business in the future."

The 51-year-old nun said her project has trained hundreds of youths since it began, adding that the majority of the young people have started businesses in different parts of the country while others have been employed by already-existing companies.

"I'm proud to say that I have made a significant change to the youths of this country," Mota said. "Many who have gone through my hands can now take care of themselves and live a decent life. They can sustain their families and pay school fees for their children through their earnings."

***GSR:* Can you tell us about yourself and your work?**

Mota: I took my first vows as a religious sister in 1996 at 25. My religious journey has had many ups and downs. Just like what's expected of life, the good thing about it is that Christ and purpose have kept me going. The work I am doing now is to teach people how to stitch clothes to earn income and support their families.



Holy Family High School sign, Lesotho: The sewing project that Sr. Victoria Mota started is located at Holy Family High School in Leribe, Lesotho. She started the sewing project in 2015 to empower youths and ensure they come out of poverty. (GSR photo/Doreen Ajiambo)

What motivated you to start this project?

I learned sewing in South Africa in 2005 but never used my skills because of some other engagements I was doing. When I moved from South Africa to Lesotho after my studies, I joined one of our schools as a boarding mistress. During this time, I realized that students in the four schools owned by our congregation didn't have uniforms and had to order from outside, which was very expensive. However, since I had skills in how to sew, I decided to offer myself to help the children and serve my congregation.

This project was also a way of me giving back to the community by employing and training people on these skills, especially jobless people. I started this project with the help of my congregation. However, the project has grown over the years, and now, I'm able to earn money for my congregation and pay salaries without depending on the congregation like before.

What are some of the challenges you face while doing this project?

The biggest challenge I have is that we don't have the sewing materials. We therefore have to import from South Africa, which is expensive. I have to drive long hours to South Africa to get materials, which makes me very tired.

However, recently, to save time and money, I had to look for people who regularly go to South Africa so that I could send them to buy me materials. I was successful, though this had a challenge of its own. Sometimes you don't get the value of the things you buy. They steal from you. Now, I am grateful to technology because I can now pay via the internet after I order, and they are shipped to me via bus, so I get it while I am here.

How did the outbreak of COVID-19 affect you?

COVID-19 was also another challenge on its own. The schools were closed, which meant we were out of business since most of our uniforms, for now, we make and sell to the four schools run by our congregation. It was difficult for me because the

staff didn't go, and I didn't know how to tell them to leave, but as the effects got severe, I had to release them, which was disheartening because this is where they earn an income. Those leaving meant they were going to suffer. It was very difficult for us to pay the workers.

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What is the future of this project?

My vision is to expand this project from just making uniforms for our schools to a company that can make uniforms for all schools in Lesotho. I started making uniforms for one school, and now we have expanded to the four. I see a bright future for this project with hard work and dedication.

How do you see the Holy Spirit working in this ministry?

As a religious sister, God must come first in everything you do. The Holy Spirit has been working in this ministry since it has given me the strength to continue despite the challenges. Every day is a new day, and after prayer, I walk into the unknown future with courage.

What advice would you give to your fellow sisters who would like to venture into this ministry?

You have to trust God and have courage. Be ready to learn and take risks, since it's business. You must know that not everything you do must succeed, so you have to get up and try again if you fail.