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## RLLA: Surviving as a Small National Lifesaving Organisation - Progress in Lesotho: From 2004 to 2018

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RLLA: Surviving as a Small National Lifesaving Organisation  
Progress in Lesotho: From 2004 to 2018  
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The Royal Lesotho Lifesaving Association was founded in 2004 by Stephen Mabula, who at that time was Director of the Lesotho-Durham link, an outdoor activities centre in Maseru. The Centre is situated next to Maqalika Lake, which is a water supply reservoir, so it is well suited to take on aquatic activities. Lesotho is a land-locked country with no tradition of swimming. It has no natural lakes and only one large river, but dams had been built in many villages to stop soil erosion, and they produced small lakes which are a temptation to children. More recently, large lakes have been built for hydro-electric purposes, yet the people have no experience of boats. Drownings are frequent, and few people can swim at all, let alone rescue someone safely.

I was Principal of a high school and had been taking some of my students to learn lifesaving from the instructors at the Durham link. In 2008, I was invited to be President. My predecessor had been producing six-figure budgets, but with no success in raising the corresponding funds, I realised it was necessary to be realistic if we were to make progress. The obvious answer was to bring my students forward until they could become instructors themselves. John Connolly (Lifesaving Foundation) arranged for us to be visited by Pat Wilcox, who had done good work training lifesavers in Soweto. She agreed that we should affiliate to the Commonwealth and passed our first instructors, all students of my school. Once I had retired, we began visiting other towns at week-ends and inviting nearby schools to send interested students who could swim so that we could train them in rescue skills.

Lesotho is a poor country. Many parents who can't swim themselves make no attempt to teach their children to swim, but simply tell them not to go near the water. If we made our trainees pay a realistic fee for their instruction, we would drive most of them away. The Government sets strict limits on the fees which schools may charge. We ask schools to pay €25.00 per year if they send students for training, but we do not get it from all of them. Our main source of revenue has been a few local companies who have supported us, plus a number of overseas donors. One local donor owns three hotels in different parts of the country and gives a free room plus meals for me and free use of the hotel pool when we visit.

We have added the Bronze Cross and the Silver Cross to our awards to challenge our instructors to improve their skills. With the help of Lifesaving South Africa, we have started training for the ILS Pool Lifeguard certificate. This is recognised in any member country affiliated with the ILS. We now have about 24 active instructors who come from 9 different schools. We have issued a total of 636 certificates to students attending 58 different schools. We had noticed

for some time that we had a gender bias among the instructors: they were all boys. Girls have a problem swimming 400m in 13 minutes, which is necessary for the Bronze Medallion. This year, we made a concession on this, and now have two girl instructors, so hopefully we may have more success with girl trainees in the future.

To keep expenses down, we have no office and pay no salaries. We buy very little equipment, most of it being donated or improvised. We refund instructors their bus fares to the start of any expedition, and we give them a take-away lunch. I claim the cost of petrol used by my car. Our total costs last year were about €2600.

Recently some of our instructors have attended international conferences and met with influential people. They are taking a greater part in the management and planning. I think I have found the right person who can take the RLLA forward when old age finally catches up with me, so I foresee a good future.



Colin Macdonald is 83 years old. He was first awarded a Bronze Medallion in 1951 in Scotland and again more recently in 2011 in Lesotho in his role as President of The Royal Lesotho Lifesaving Association. By profession he is a retired school Head Teacher and had worked as a teacher in Africa for over 50 years in Nigeria, Ghana, and Lesotho, retiring at the age of 75 years. He built 3 swimming pools in his schools using student labour. He was honoured with an OBE (Officer of the British Empire) in 2011 for his services to education in Africa. His interests are lifesaving, sailing, mountain climbing, and messing around with vintage cars and machinery.