



# Project Information Document (PID)

Concept Stage | Date Prepared/Updated: 25-Nov-2020 | Report No: PIDC30292

**BASIC INFORMATION****A. Basic Project Data**

Country Lesotho	Project ID P175065	Parent Project ID (if any)	Project Name Basic Education Strengthening Project (BESP) (P175065)
Region AFRICA EAST	Estimated Appraisal Date Jan 07, 2021	Estimated Board Date Mar 30, 2021	Practice Area (Lead) Education
Financing Instrument Investment Project Financing	Borrower(s) The Kingdom of Lesotho	Implementing Agency Ministry of Education and Training	

**Proposed Development Objective(s)**

To improve student retention and teaching quality in targeted junior secondary schools and pilot specific interventions to strengthen ECCD service delivery.

**PROJECT FINANCING DATA (US\$, Millions)****SUMMARY**

<b>Total Project Cost</b>	7.50
<b>Total Financing</b>	7.50
<b>of which IBRD/IDA</b>	0.00
<b>Financing Gap</b>	0.00

**DETAILS****Non-World Bank Group Financing**

Trust Funds	7.50
Education for All - Fast Track Initiative	7.50

Environmental and Social Risk Classification  
Substantial

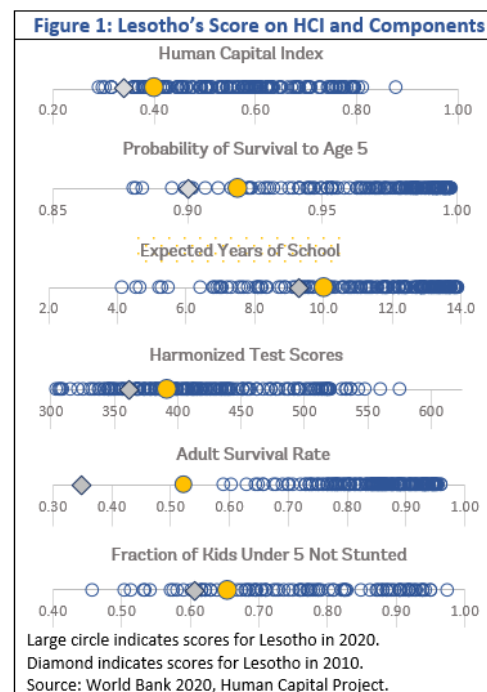
Concept Review Decision  
Track II-The review did authorize the preparation to continue

Other Decision (as needed)

## B. Introduction and Context

### Country Context

1. **The Kingdom of Lesotho is a small enclave country surrounded by South Africa.** It has a population of about 2.1 million that is growing at a modest rate of 1.3 percent annually. The country's population is youthful, with 76 percent being below the age of 36. With nominal per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$1,299, Lesotho is classified as a lower-middle-income country (LMIC) and is one of the poorest countries in its income group. The country is roughly divided into three geographic regions– the Lowlands, which are home to about 75 percent of the country's population, the Highlands, and the Foothills. Recently, Lesotho's economic growth has been slower than the average for LMICs, shrinking by about 3 percent in 2017 and growing only by 0.3 percent in 2018 and 1.4 percent in 2019. As a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the growth rate is expected to remain low and the projections for 2020 and 2021 are below 1 percent. The low rate of economic growth is likely to impact job creation and lead to the increase of the already high unemployment rate, especially among youth from rural parts of the country.
2. **Over the past two decades, Lesotho has made strides in poverty reduction, with the poverty rate declining from 56.6 percent in 2002 to 49.7 percent in 2017.**<sup>1</sup> However, improvement has not happened evenly in all parts of the country. In fact, in the Rural Mountains and Rural Senqu River Valley parts of the country, poverty increased over the same time period. For examples, in 2017, 67.8 percent of Basotho living in Rural Mountains were poor, a significant increase from 56.9 percent in 2002. Due to the slowing down of the economy combined with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that poverty rate might increase significantly, especially in already vulnerable rural areas.
3. **Lesotho is making progress in improving human development outcomes, however, outcomes in education and health remain well-below where they need.** The Human Capital Index (HCI)<sup>2</sup> estimates for 2020 show that a child born today in Lesotho will be only 40 percent as productive when she grows up as she could be if she enjoyed complete education and full health. This shows an encouraging improvement from the 2010 estimate of 34 percent. In the overall HCI score, Lesotho currently ranks 146 among the 174 countries included in the HCI in 2020. An examination of the individual components of HCI show that improvements have been made in all components of the HCI since 2010. However, the pace of progress in most



<sup>1</sup>Sulla, V., Zikhali, P. and Mahler, D.G., 2019. Lesotho Poverty Assessment: Progress and Challenges in Reducing Poverty (No. 144347, pp. 1-158). The World Bank.

<sup>2</sup> The HCI measures the amount of human capital that a child born today can expect to accumulate by age 18, measuring her productivity compared to a benchmark of complete education and full health. It is composed of 5 sub-indicators, which are presented in Figure 1. World Bank. 2020. The Human Capital Project. World Bank, Washington, DC. World Bank.



indicators has not been sufficient to equip majority of children and youth with optimal health and skills they need to be fully productive (see Figure 1). Currently, 92 of 100 children born in Lesotho survive to age 5. Children who start school at age 4 can expect to complete 10 years of school by age 18. However, when years of schooling are adjusted for quality of learning, the 10 years of schooling become equivalent to only 6.3 years. Only 52 percent of 15-year-olds will survive until age 60. Thirty five of 100 children are stunted, facing a high risk of cognitive and physical limitations that can have impacts that last their lifetime.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, HIV & AIDS continues to pose a big threat to Lesotho's human capital, with high prevalence rates of 23.6 percent among adults ages 15-49. The impact of HIV/AIDs on women has been significantly worse, with women accounting for about 59 percent of those living with the virus.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the low levels of human capital outcomes can be attributed to poor education and health service delivery, particularly relative to spending, due to challenges around quality, efficiency and equity in delivery of services.

### Sectoral and Institutional Context

- 4. The Government of Lesotho is committed to improving access to quality basic education as a core strategy for the country's socioeconomic development.** This commitment is reflected by the significant public investment the country is making in the education sector. In 2018/19 fiscal year, education spending accounted for 19 percent of total government spending, the highest among all sectors. Lesotho is also among the highest spenders in education in Africa. Education spending as share of GDP is 8.9 percent, above the recommended rate of 4 to 6 percent under the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 framework.<sup>5</sup>
- 5. Lesotho is making encouraging progress in the provision of basic education including early childhood education, however, many challenges related to access, quality and equity remain to be addressed.** Education in Lesotho is organized into four cycles consisting of Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The first cycle, ECCD, aims to serve children ages 3 to 5 while primary education covers Grades 1 to 7, starting at age 6. Secondary education is divided into two levels– junior secondary, which covers Form 1 to 3 and upper secondary, which covers Form 4 and 5. The ECCD, primary and junior secondary levels together form the basic education sub-sector. The country's progress thus far in the delivery of basic education and some of the key challenges in the sub-sector are discussed below.

#### **Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)**

- 6. Despite the increase in pre-school enrollment in recent years, access to Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) remains a challenge in Lesotho.** ECCD is currently delivered through three different modalities: (i) reception classes that are attached to primary schools provide 1 year of free, pre-primary education for 5-year-olds before they transition to primary school; (ii) private ECCD centers established by private individuals, churches or other non-governmental organizations serve children aged 3 to 5; and (iii) community-based ECCDs for orphans and vulnerable children provide free service with the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) supplying teaching and learning materials, school feeding and some in-service training. The MoET prioritized access to quality pre-primary education in the Integrated ECCD National Policy and Strategic Plan. However, insufficient budget has been allocated to implement the strategy. Only 0.3 percent of the education budget is allocated to ECCD services and only M1,950 is spent on each child enrolled in reception classes, which is about half of what is spent per child in primary education.
- 7. With just over 50,000 learners enrolled in pre-school, the enrolment represents a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 31 percent in 2018, having dropped slightly from 33.8 percent in 2015.** Pre-school enrolment increased by about

<sup>3</sup> World Bank, 2020, Human Capital Project.

<sup>4</sup> The United Nations Joint Programmed of HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). 2019. UNAIDS Data 2019. Geneva.

<sup>5</sup> Lesotho Education Sector Analysis, 2020.



only 200 children between 2015 and 2017 indicating the lack of growth in accessing pre-school. Even as the Government introduced reception classes starting in 2006 to increase readiness for primary school, the number of children aged five years and above in these reception classes has not changed significantly. This is most likely because only 243 primary schools have reception classes, compared to over 2000 private ECCD centers in the country. Nearly 60 percent of children aged 3–5 years receive no pre-school education with enrolment rates as low as 4 percent in remote and mountainous highland districts. These children lag behind their peers from the start of Grade 1 and often do not catch up.

8. **In addition to access, there are challenges related to the quality of ECCD education. Two studies assessed the quality of ECCD services in Lesotho – the Measurement of Early Learning and Quality Outcomes (MELQO)<sup>6</sup> 2019 and the 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).** In terms of learning, the MICS 2018 found that only 15 percent of children sampled were developmentally on track for the literacy and numeracy domain (i.e. only 15 percent of children could do two of the following: identify/name at least ten letters of the alphabet, read four simple and popular words, know the name, and recognize the symbols of all numbers from 1 to 10). The MELQO findings revealed that children in reception classes in public primary schools performed better in the child direct assessment compared to children attending private ECCD centers/programs. Access to materials, opportunities to use the materials, teachers' focus on specific topics during the school day in both reception classes and private centers were reliable predictors of children's performance in the direct assessment.
9. **Despite the relatively low teacher-child ratio (1:18) for pre-primary education, teacher training is limited, the ECCD curriculum is outdated, there are limited learning resources.** Limited support is currently being provided to the sub-sector under ongoing Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and World Bank funded projects. A review of the ECCD curriculum is currently taking place under the Lesotho Basic Education Improvement Project (LBEIP), however, once the curriculum has been revised, it will need to be piloted, teachers/caregivers will need to be trained, and materials that are aligned with the new curriculum will need to be developed. In addition, under LBEIP, 119 pre-primary schools will be provided with teaching and learning materials (literacy kits, numeracy/puzzle kit, a life skills kit, and a construction kit), but there is limited teacher training planned under the LBEIP.
10. **The MoET maintains a database on known pre-schools and has developed a set of requirements for pre-schools to become registered, however there is still an information gap.** Criteria for registering a pre-school with the MoET include building, health and safety, and policy requirements (such as having a constitution, a bank account, and permission from local authorities). However, only a few pre-schools in the country have registered (16), and the number that are operating without the MoET's awareness is unknown. There is a need to strengthen data collection and management systems for improved monitoring and accountability of ECCD sub-sector, including monitoring of teacher or caregiver training.

### **Primary and Junior Secondary Education**

#### ***Access and retention in primary and junior secondary education***

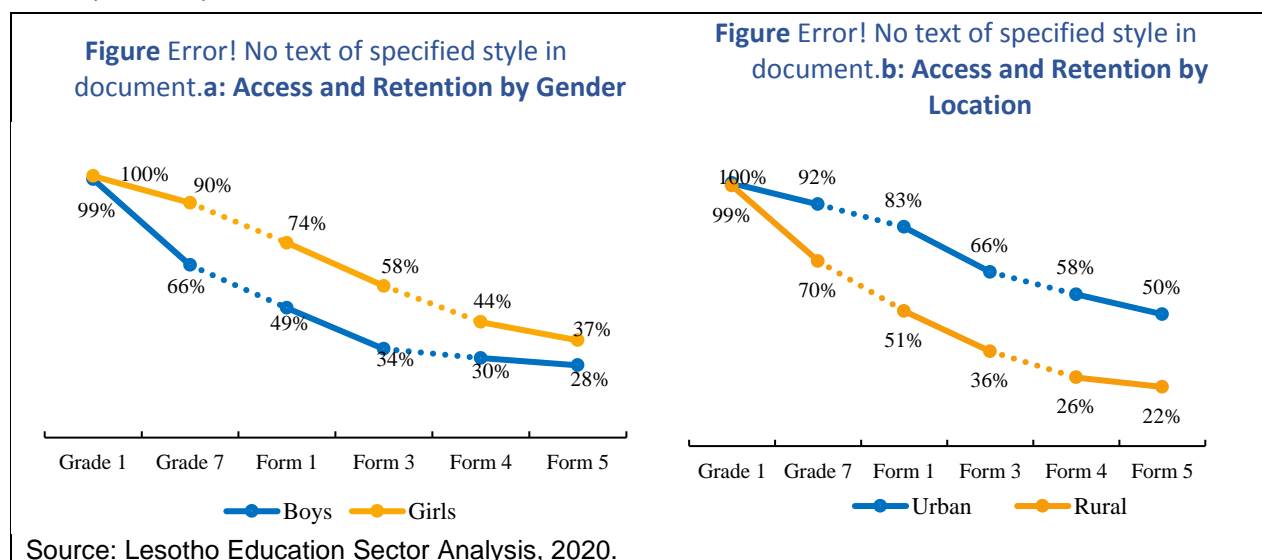
11. **Enrollment in primary schools is almost universal, with a gross access rate of 100 percent in Grade 1 for both boys and girls and in both rural and urban areas.** However, the primary education system is characterized by high inefficiency with students dropping out across. The dropout rate across primary grades is particularly high among

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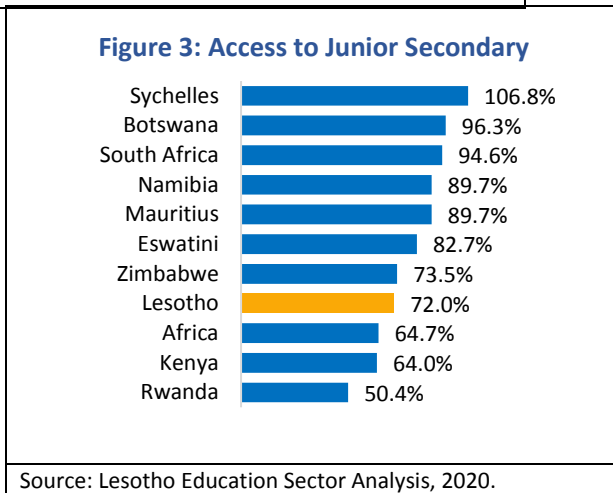
<sup>6</sup> MELQO is a tool designed to generate data on children's learning and development at the start of school, and pre-primary learning environments with specific relevance to inform national ECD policy and inform global monitoring. It consists of two parts: (i) Measure of Development and Early Learning – which measures children's learning and development through direct assessment and a teacher/caregiver survey and (ii) Measure of Early Learning Environments – which assess quality in early learning environments. UNICEF, 2017. Overview: MELQO: Measuring early learning quality and outcomes. UNESCO Publishing.



boys and in rural parts of the country.<sup>7</sup> While data on primary school completion is not available, the intake rate in the last grade of primary shows that 90 percent of girls access Grade 7 compared to 66 percent of boys, a proxy for primary completion rate. Moreover, at Grade 1 children from both urban and rural parts of the country start with universal or almost universal level of enrollment. However, by Grade 7, the intake rate in rural areas drops significantly to 70 percent compared to 90 percent in urban areas. The low retention rate among rural boys is even more concerning. Like all other groups, they have near 100 percent enrollment rate at Grade 1, however, fewer than 6 out of 10 rural boys enrolls in Grade 7. Patterns of disparities in access and retention at the primary level are also apparent across geographic regions of the country as well as socioeconomic groups, with children from the rural mountainous parts of the country and from the lowest wealth quintile being the most marginalized. Ninety three percent of children from the richest wealth quintile complete primary school compared to 2 out of 3 for children from the poorest quintile.



12. **Lesotho is far from ensuring universal access to junior secondary education.** While access to junior secondary education is better than the average for the Africa region, the country underperforms compared to countries in the Southern Africa region. There is a significant drop in the enrollment rate as students transition from primary to junior secondary level, with the access rate for junior secondary education reaching 72 percent nationally. There are significant disparities across gender, income and locations. Boys from rural areas and children from the poorest households are the most disadvantaged. Only 40 percent of boys from rural areas enroll in junior secondary compared to 90 percent of girls from urban areas. The disparities at the junior secondary level persist in to upper secondary, with 2 out of 3 girls from the wealthiest

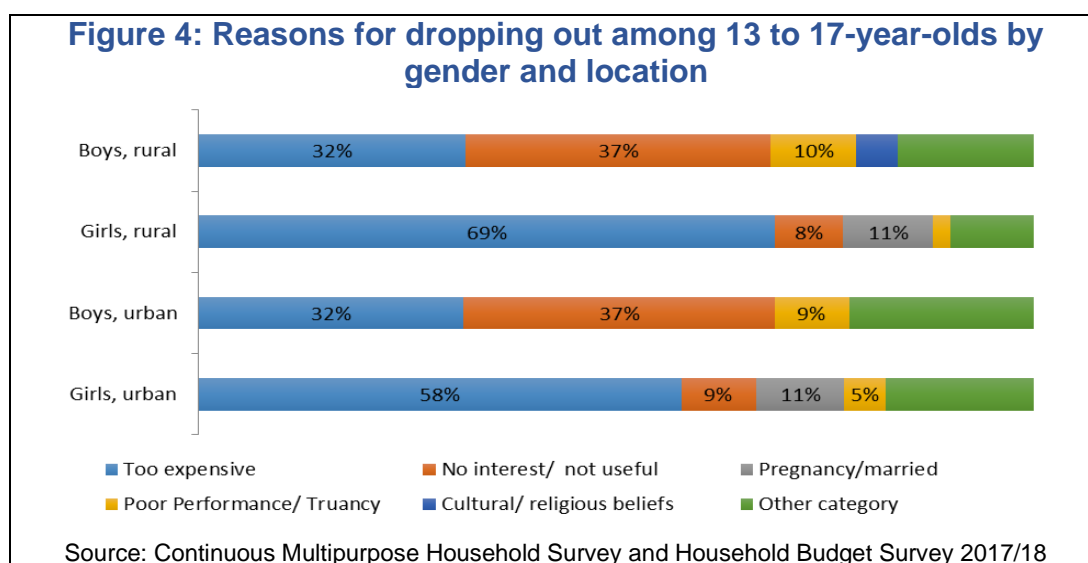


<sup>7</sup> Each trend line in Figures 2a and 2b illustrate the retention/schooling profile in 2017 school years computed based on non-repeaters in each grade and the theoretical population for the same grade, each point on the line being the access rate for respective grade.



households’ complete upper secondary education while only about 1 in 10 boys from the poorest households in rural areas complete upper secondary education.

- 13. **Poverty and cost of schooling are the key factors that affect access to basic education, especially at the junior secondary level.** Even though primary school is free in Lesotho, poverty remains a key factor for the dropout rate, as there are still associated costs to school attendance households must bear. Unlike primary education, junior secondary education is not free and the burden of paying for education is disproportionately high on the poorest households. Spending on primary education as a share of household consumption is similar across the five wealth quintiles accounting for 3 to 5 percent of household consumption. However, household spending on junior secondary education accounts for 17 and 16 percent of household consumption for the poorest and poor households respectively compared to 7 percent for the richest households. Beyond the cost of schooling, lack of interest among adolescent boys and pregnancy among adolescent girls are factor that contribute to the high dropout rate. Figure 4 shows some of the main reasons for dropping out of school among adolescent boys and girls.



**Quality of primary and junior secondary education**

- 14. **Beyond challenges in access and efficiency, learning outcomes are low both at the primary and junior secondary levels.** At the primary level, fewer than half of children aged 7-14 have foundational reading skills. Urban children have better achievement over rural children by 50 percent. The link between poverty and poor learning outcomes is even more staggering– children from the richest families had better results compared to children from the poorest households with 68.7 percent meeting competency standards compared to only 28.5 percent of children from the poorest families. At the junior secondary level, learning outcomes in Sesotho are encouraging with over 76 percent of students demonstrating competency. On the other hand, learning outcomes are weak in mathematics, science and English, with only 26.3 percent of junior secondary students meeting the competencies for secondary mathematics, 32.4 percent of students meeting competencies in science and 51.6 percent met the competencies for English.
- 15. **Low capacity of teachers is a factor that contributes to the poor learning outcomes. There is extensive literature showing that quality of teachers is the most important factor that influences learning outcomes.**<sup>8</sup> In Lesotho’s

<sup>8</sup> Villegas-Reimers, E., 2003. Teacher professional development: an international review of the literature. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.



context, the limited available data and evidence on teachers shows that there is significant capacity gap. In recent learning assessments, teachers perform slightly better than students, however the results still point to low levels of competency. For example, among primary school teachers, only 51.4 percent demonstrated competency in literacy. Among junior secondary school teachers, the average correct-score rate was 49.5 percent in mathematics, 41.7 percent in Biology, 66.3 percent in Chemistry and 52.3 percent in Physics. Lack of high quality continuous professional development support is a key issue that affects the quality of teachers. The MoET capacity to develop and provide structured and effective in-service training and follow up support for teachers is very weak. Most in-service trainings provided at scale tend to be one-off and there are serious concerns about the quality of the program, the materials and capacity of trainers.

- 16. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating many of these challenges in the education sector and threatens to undo gains that have been made thus far.** The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant negative impact on Lesotho's education system at all levels. The pandemic has forced school closures since March 2020 and is negatively impacting learning across the country. An estimated 511,318 learners are affected nationally, with most coming from rural parts of the country. The more prolonged school closures are, the more likely students are to dropout permanently and the larger the learning loss even for those who may come back. Children from marginalized and poor communities are at a greater risk of dropping out and falling behind as they have limited access to distance learning opportunities. Unemployment and loss of income due to disruptions to livelihoods as a result of the lockdown will make it challenging for many households to keep their children in school, even when schools reopen. As a result, it is likely the student dropout rate could rise and learning outcomes could deteriorate, unless targeted mitigation measures are put in place.

#### **Box 1: Lesotho's Education Sector Response to COVID-19**

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant negative impact on Lesotho's education system. The pandemic has forced school closures since March 2020 and is negatively impacting learning of all students in the country. An estimated 511,318 learners are affected nationally, with most coming from rural parts of the country. Without targeted interventions, many may never come back to school. To respond to the ongoing crisis, the MoET has prepared the Education Sector Response Plan, which is aligned with the national response plan and reflects the importance of a multi-sectoral approach to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. The MoET has also developed the School Reopening Strategy and Operating Guideline for Schools During COVID-19. To help implement the COVID-19 response plan, Lesotho has successfully mobilized US\$3.5 million GPE grant for COVID-19 response activities in June 2020. The response plan consists of short-term, medium-term and long-term responses. The GPE COVID-19 response grant is currently being managed by UNICEF.

In the short-term, the response focuses on strengthening awareness on COVID-19 in education institutions, developing radio and television learning materials and learner packs and early childhood development (ECD) resources. It also includes developing COVID-19 guidelines and protocols, provision of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools and restructuring school feeding to allow continuation during the pandemic.

The medium-term responses focus on provision of take-home rations to vulnerable learners' households, establishment of online platform for curriculum and learning modules, provision of solar radios in hard to reach areas, child protection and psychosocial support and back to school campaign. The long-term response will focus on identifying learning gaps, implementation of accelerated learning programs, monitoring of re-enrolment and support to children that have dropped out, and monitoring and evaluation of COVID-19 responses in the education sector.

Through the restructuring of LBEIP, support is being provided to schools, including through the provision of soap, sanitation materials, face masks and water using existing tanks, to enable them to safely reopen in line with the





Operating Guidelines for Schools.

**Gender Based Violence**

17. **Both boys and girls are susceptible to violence and sexual exploitation within their schools and communities.** Approximately, 15 percent of girls and 5 percent of boys in Lesotho report experiencing sexual violence,<sup>9</sup> though it is known that reporting rates do not reflect the reality due to prevailing social norms of shame and stigma.<sup>10</sup> Of the girls that have sex before the age of 18, 18 percent do so because they are forced or coerced and of the girls whose first sexual experience is forced or coerced, 69 percent are 16-17 years old, 23 percent are 14-15 years old, and 8 percent are 13 years old or younger.<sup>11</sup> Perpetrators of sexual violence against children are most often known to the child and sexual violence often occurs in familiar places.<sup>12</sup> Services that are available to child survivors of sexual violence are of low quality and there are barriers to their access, with a notable absence of psychosocial support, legal processes that are not survivor-centered, and poor quality or unavailability of healthcare, including post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent the transmission of HIV. Drivers of new HIV infections in adolescence include Gender Based Violence (GBV) risky sexual behavior (for example, transactional sex, multiple and concurrent sexual partners, and early sexual debut), insufficient sexual health education, and limited access to appropriate health services.<sup>13</sup> With the high prevalence of GBV, high rates of HIV infection, poor quality and limited access to GBV services, and the lack of specific policies or initiatives to address sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), children may find school unsafe and choose to drop-out.
18. **There is evidence in the Lesotho context, which shows that education is strongly and positively correlated with women’s empowerment in the household.** Data from the Demographic and Health Survey (2014) shows that over 90 percent of women with post-secondary education and 67.5 percent women with secondary education report participating in decision making in the household, while the corresponding figures for women with no education or some primary education were 47.9 percent and 58.7 percent, respectively.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, 41.7 percent of women with no education and 52 percent of women with some primary education report that spousal violence is justifiable compared to 29.4 percent of women with secondary education and 5.4 percent of women with post-secondary education. The same pattern is observed among men, with more educated men being less likely to report that spousal violence as justifiable (17.1 percent among men with post-secondary education, compared to 32.7 percent, 50.1 percent and 52.2 percent among men with secondary, some primary or no education, respectively).<sup>15</sup> This suggests that increased education for both boys and girls, especially at the secondary and post-secondary level is an important factor to empowering women in the Lesotho context.

Relationship to CPF

1. At the policy level, the proposed project aligns to Provision of Education in the Constitution of Lesotho, 1993, which states that the country “shall endeavor to make education available to all and shall adopt policies aimed at securing that education is directed to the full development of the human personality and sense of dignity and strengthening

<sup>9</sup> Together for Girls (2019) Violence Against Children and Youth Survey High-level Priority Indicators summary <https://www.togetherforgirls.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-5-22-TfG-Lesotho-1.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Levy *et al* (2013)

<sup>11</sup> Together for Girls (2019)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> Participation in decision making is proxied by decision on their own healthcare, major household purchase and visit to relatives

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Health/Lesotho and ICF International. 2016. Lesotho Demographic and Health Survey 2014. Maseru, Lesotho: Ministry of Health/Lesotho and ICF International



- the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (Section 28(a)). It also responds to one of the key objectives of the National Strategic Development Plan (2018/19-2022/23), which is to strengthen human capital development. The strategic priorities under this objective include improving access and quality of ECCD, primary and secondary education and promoting an inclusive and equitable education system. Other policies, which the sector is also governed by and the project will respond to, include the Education Act (2010), the National Policy on Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (2017), the Inclusive Education Policy (2018), the Lesotho Education Language Policy (2019) and the Curriculum Assessment Policy (2009). In particular, the Education Act (2010) seeks, among other things, to make provision for free and compulsory education at the primary level.
2. The proposed project is also aligned with World Bank Group (WBG) strategic priorities, particularly the WBG’s mission to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity, by supporting the development of human capital in Lesotho. The proposed project is aligned with the Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) FY2016-2020 (Report No. 97823-LS) and the human capital agenda which is a prominent priority in the CPF. The project will contribute to Focus Area II of the CPF: Improving Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Public Sector and more specifically towards improved basic education outcomes through expanded ECCD, improvements in professional development, and reducing dropout rates, particularly in junior secondary education.
  3. The proposed project also builds on ongoing projects support by the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). Currently the MoET is implementing the LEQEP (US\$ 25 million IDA financed project) and LBEIP (US\$2.3 million GPE financed project). Jointly, these two projects support about 172 primary and junior secondary schools and 119 associated pre-primary schools. The proposed BESP project complements these two projects by focusing on areas that are currently not covered under the two projects. Currently under LBEIP and LEQEP, support to pre-primary education is limited (e.g. provision of some teaching and learning materials under LBEIP and revision of the ECCD curriculum under LEQEP). At the junior secondary level, both LBEIP and LEQEP focus on supply-side interventions (e.g. support to development and implement School Improvement Plans (SIPs), provision of school grants, provision of some teaching and learning materials, limited teacher training, and COVID-19 response support under LBEIP). The proposed project will complement the two projects and will help address critical gaps especially at the ECCD and junior secondary levels. Annex 1 shows in more detail the complementarity across the various projects.
  4. The proposed project will also collaborate with the Public Sector Modernization Project (P152398), which is doing a review of the wage scale and staffing structure in the Teaching Service Department of the MoET. This review will provide policy options to redefine the pay policy for teachers and will review the human resource staffing structure and develop a Performance Management System for teachers to improve the quality of teaching services. The project will also work closely with the existing Social Assistance Project (P151442), since this will link to the expanded National Information System for Social Assistance (NISSA) database used to target households to provide cash transfers for secondary education.

### **C. Proposed Development Objective(s)**

To improve student retention and teacher quality in targeted junior secondary schools and pilot specific interventions to strengthen ECCD service delivery.

#### Key Results (From PCN)

19. The following key result will be used to measure progress towards the PDO:
  - Reduction in dropout rate (Grade 8–Grade 9) in targeted junior secondary schools



- Improvements in content knowledge of math and science teachers in targeted schools
- Piloting and evaluation of the revised ECCD curriculum

**D. Concept Description**

20. The proposed project will focus on key activities that are priorities for the MoET within the context of its Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) and build on lessons learned and opportunities arising from the current LEQEP and LBEIP projects. These include: (i) improving the retention of students in junior secondary education; (ii) scaling up online teacher training program for junior secondary teachers in Mathematics and Science; and (iii) strengthening the delivery of ECCD services, including by piloting innovative approaches to expanding reception classes in existing primary schools and piloting the revised ECCD curriculum.
21. There are several reasons why these intervention areas are identified as priorities in the scope of the project. Within the the basic education system, the dropout rate is the highest at the junior secondary level. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is likely to worsen the situation due to the disruptions to schooling as the result of the extended school closures. The impact of the pandemic is expected to be worse at the junior secondary level as the economic impact of the lockdown is likely to make junior secondary education unaffordable for many students (junior secondary education is not free). Without addressing these constraints, especially on the demand side, Lesotho’s ambition for ensuring universal access to basic education will not be realized. At the pre-primary level, participation remains low (GER is estimated at 31 percent). As discussed earlier, there are significant access and quality related gaps that are affecting the delivery of early childhood education. While this project will not tackle these gaps at scale, it will provide system strengthening support to identify innovative and cost-effective options to expanding access and to meet the necessary first steps to address quality gaps (e.g. a revised curriculum). In doing so, the project will lay a strong foundation to improve the delivery of pre-primary education in the country.
22. The specific components and sub-components of the project are listed below.

**Table 1: Proposed project Components and Sub-Components**

<b>Component 1: Improving the retention of students in targeted junior secondary education</b>	<b>1.1. Expand the cash transfer scheme to junior secondary students from poor households</b>
	<b>1.2. Scaling up support groups/clubs for girls and boys</b>
	1.3. Strengthening online training models in Mathematics and Science for junior secondary school teachers
<b>Component 2: Piloting innovative models to explore options to strengthen ECCD service delivery</b>	2.1. Piloting various construction models to improve access to reception classes in targeted primary schools
	2.2. Piloting and evaluating the new curriculum in reception classes and ECCD centers
<b>Component 3: Project management, capacity building and technical assistance</b>	Project management, capacity building and technical assistance in selected areas

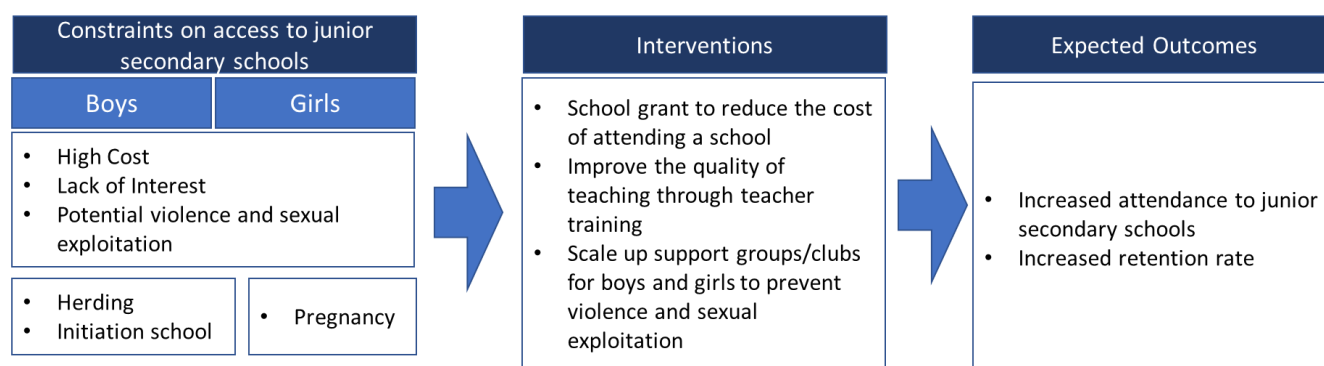
**Component 1: Improving the retention of students in junior secondary education**

23. This component will focus on improving the retention of students in junior secondary education. The ongoing LBEIP and LEQEP projects sought to do this through the transfer of finances to schools (i.e. through school grants) to support



implementation of their School Improvement Plans (SIPs) that were supposed to target interventions aimed at improving retention of students. However, initial data and anecdotal evidence from the target schools show that while the interventions financed under the SIPs improved the learning environment in schools (such as the purchase of heaters for the schools during the winter months, some basic renovations and refurbishment of schools), the drop-out rate has actually gotten worse in junior secondary education during the implementation period of the two projects. The Education Sector Analysis (ESA) results indicate that the main constraints to attending junior secondary school in Lesotho are: (i) the high cost of junior secondary education (fees and indirect costs of travel, uniforms, textbooks etc); (ii) lack of interest in school or that school is not considered useful; and (iii) for girls, pregnancy. This component aims to address these three critical barriers.

Figure 5: Framework for improving student retention in junior secondary education



**Sub-component 1.1: Expand the cash transfer scheme to students from poor households**

24. The Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho recognizes that cost is a barrier for many students in junior secondary education. In response, the Government has launched the Orphans and Vulnerable Children’s (OVC) bursary program in 2000 to subsidize school fees for students from poor households. The OVC Bursary program, administered by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) makes an annual payment in the name of each bursary student directly to secondary schools. This is intended to cover tuition, registration, books and supplies and fees. The program currently reaches 23,000 students which is about 11 percent of the total number of students enrolled in secondary education, and 1.5 percent of the total number of households in Lesotho. However, a recent analysis of all social protection schemes in Lesotho found that the OVC grant, unlike other grants, is more likely to benefit non-poor households than poor households<sup>16</sup>. Only 28 percent of households receiving the grant are in the bottom two quintiles of consumption<sup>17</sup>. It is also not clear if the spending per beneficiary (approximately M2700) is sufficient to cover the majority of costs of schooling for poor households.

25. The Government has established the National Information System for Social Assistance (NISSA), which is a single registry system for all social assistance programs going forward. This presents an opportunity for the project to support the MoSD and MoET to ensure better targeting, coverage and effectiveness of the OVC grant so that it serves as a mechanism for improving student retention in junior secondary education.

**Sub-component 1.2: Scaling up implementation of support groups/clubs for girls and boys**

<sup>16</sup> World Bank, forthcoming, Lesotho Social Protection Assessment

<sup>17</sup> Ibid



26. Globally, programs that target youth through peer groups/clubs have shown success in retaining learners in school and empowering them, including by enabling them to make informed decision as they transition into adulthood. In Lesotho, in addition to the regular Life Skills Education Program, which is implemented in all secondary schools, there are extracurricular activities such as the 'Herd Boys', 'Help Lesotho' and 'Skills Share' programs as well as work done by 'Hub' that support interventions to keep students in school. While many of these programs exist, few have been rigorously evaluated to ascertain their effectiveness in improving student retention. The project will support the evaluation of some of the existing initiatives as well as strengthen and potentially scale up these programs in selected schools with low junior secondary retention rates. These support clubs will also serve as platforms to empower adolescent girls and boys including by raising their GBV/SEA awareness (e.g., approaches to prevent, mitigate and respond to GBV/SEA and linkages to a referral system for additional social services) and equipping them with relevant reproductive health knowledge. In addition, the project will adopt a comprehensive framework to address GBV/SEA risk that might emerge due to project intervention. See Annex 2 for preliminary analysis of risks and proposed actions, which will be refined further during project preparation.

**Sub-component 1.3: Strengthening online training models in Mathematics and Science for junior secondary teachers**

27. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the digital divide that exists between the rich and the poor in Lesotho. Access to the internet is low in Lesotho with only about 27 percent of the population connected using the internet. It is important to learn from current experience and use the opportunity to build a system where all students have access to the devices and internet they will need to learn, whether schools are open or closed. The use of technology to provide effective teacher training is a first step in leverage digital technology for improved basic education service delivery.

28. Given the better access to electricity in secondary schools, and building on the experience from the online teacher training program for junior secondary school teachers under the Progressive Mathematics Initiative and Progressive Science Initiative (PMI-PSI), which was implemented in 41 schools under the LEQEP<sup>18</sup>, the proposed project will strengthen online teacher training leveraging existing models. One model is to scale-up the online, asynchronous, teacher-training program under PSI-PMI, with support from the New Jersey Center for Teaching and Learning (NJCTL). The other model is to assess and scale up the training model delivered through Camara Lesotho, which was responsible for a significant portion of the online learning programs for students during the COVID-19 lockdown in Lesotho. Options that build on international COVID-19 education response interventions, such as the Learning Passport, could also be considered for implementation on a pilot basis with junior secondary teachers, along with the evaluation of the pilot. The various options for online teacher training will be considered during project preparation, taking into account the availability of teacher training materials, costs, and benefits.

29. Implementing an online teacher training program at scale will entail the following: (i) working with the Ministry of Communication, Science and Technology (MCST) and the private sector to connect a selected number of secondary schools that are serving poor communities to digital infrastructure (ICT-enabled buildings, reliable power supplies and broadband); (ii) working with the MCST and private sector to develop zero-rate websites supporting online teacher training programs; (iii) procurement of affordable laptops and communications tools for teachers and educators and training them on how to use the ICT tools; (iv) providing mobile data and/or wifi hot spots for teachers and educators so that they can access the training remotely; (v) monitoring the performance of teachers in the online teacher training programs; and (vi) rigorous evaluation of the online teacher-training program.

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<sup>18</sup> Experiments in Lesotho, in which a subset of teachers at the training site learned online rather than in the classroom, have confirmed that online learning, when supported in the same way as face-to-face training, is at least as effective as face-to-face training.



## **Component 2: Piloting innovative models to explore options to strengthen ECCD service delivery**

30. This component will pilot innovative interventions to improve access to and the quality of ECCD programs in a selected number of schools. The component will focus on the following activities: (i) piloting various construction models to improve access to reception classes in targeted primary schools; and (ii) piloting and evaluating the new ECCD curriculum in reception classes and ECCD centers.

### **Sub-component 2.1: Piloting various construction models to improve access to reception classes**

31. In Lesotho, early childhood education is mainly provided by communities and the private sector. There are 243 reception classes attached to existing primary schools, fully supported by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), compared to more than 2,000 private ECCD centers<sup>19</sup>. Realizing the importance of early childhood education and school readiness, the former Minister of Education and Training committed to scale up reception classes (which is essentially one year of pre-school for children before they enter primary school) to cover all 1,486 primary schools. The project will help test different options for construction and renovation of reception classrooms in primary schools serving some of the poorest communities in Lesotho, on condition that the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho commits to increasing its recurrent expenditure for pre-primary education to cover the costs of teachers, materials and operations and maintenance of the new reception classes.

32. The proposed project will build on the existing designs for reception classrooms used by different implementing agencies in Lesotho, to develop standard designs and specifications for pre-schools in Lesotho. Different construction modalities including the community-based classroom construction model being implemented under LEQEP and contracting out classroom construction to third parties will be considered. The selection of target primary schools will be done prioritizing schools that are serving poor communities (building on the work already done the under LEQEP and LBEIP projects). The designs and specifications for the classrooms in each school and the modality for implementation will all be agreed between the MoET, including the Early Childhood Education (ECE) technical working group and the World Bank during the preparation of the project.

### **Sub-component 2.2: Piloting and rolling out the new curriculum in reception classes and ECCD centers**

33. There is an Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) curriculum, developed in 1998, that is used in some pre-schools and ECCD centers for children between 3 and 5, while a set of guidelines developed in 2015 is being used in reception classes. The Ministry has embarked upon a revision of the ECCD curriculum under the existing LBEIP project. However, the new/revised curriculum will need to be piloted in a set of reception classes and some private pre-schools/ECCD centers, before it can be scaled up.

34. Under this sub-component, a pilot of the new curriculum will be conducted, and the results will be evaluated to make final modifications and prepare for the scale up. The pilot will require; (i) selecting the pilot public and private pre-schools/ECCD centers through a transparent process; (ii) communicating the new curriculum to participating public and private pre-schools/ECCD centers and communities; (iii) developing and printing instructional materials that aligns with the curriculum; (iii) developing of teacher-training manuals that aligns with the curriculum; (iv) training teachers and administrators in targeted preschools and ECCD centers; (v) evaluating the outcomes of the pilot and amending the materials, teacher training and other processes as required; and (vi) developing an implementation plan to roll-out the new curriculum across pre-schools in Lesotho.

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<sup>19</sup> Based on data from the Education Statistical Bulletin 2018. Reception classes are attached to primary schools and offer 1 year of free, pre-primary education for 5 year-olds ECCD Centers usually offer a variety of services, including early education, for children between 2 and 5 years old



### Component 3: Project management, capacity building and technical assistance

35. The objective of this component is to strengthen key management capacities of the MoET, regional and local education offices as well as the Project Facilitation Unit (PFU), which will support the Ministry with procurement, financial management, supervision of project activities and monitoring and evaluation.
36. Support related to project management and monitoring are aimed at ensuring that project activities are implemented on time and in a satisfactory manner, using an implementation mechanism that promotes ownership and capacity building within the MoET. The project will be implemented by the MoET, supported by the PFU which will be responsible for the daily management, administration and coordination of the project, including project accounting, procurement and disbursement, preparation of progress reports, and ensuring timely audits and monitoring activities. The component will support and finance activities of the MoET and PFU relevant to the project management, supervision activities and recurrent incremental expenditures associated with the project implementation and supervision. In key technical areas where the MoET is lacking capacity, technical assistance and consultancy service will also be supported with a strong emphasis on transferring capacity to the MoET staff.
37. The project will also support the provision of technical assistance to the MoET to strengthen its database on pre-schools and ECCD service providers in the country. The project will support a mapping exercise to capture information on all pre-schools and ECCD centers providing services for children with the aim of developing an ECCD data system that can be consolidated into the overall Education Management Information System (EMIS) of the MoET.

#### 2. Overall Risk and Explanation

38. **The overall risk rating is Substantial.** The political and governance risk was rated as Substantial,<sup>20</sup> given the political fragmentation and instability, frequent elections (2015,2017) and high turnover of Ministers and Principal Secretaries (PSs) between elections. There was a recent change of Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers in June 2020. This risk may be partly mitigated by the consistent presence of technical staff within the PFU, that supports implementation of the World Bank and GPE financed projects, as has been the case under LBEIP and LEQEP. The PFU reports to the Director of Planning within the MoET and at the Director level, there are not as frequent changes. The high turnover of Ministers and PSs requires adequate communication and feedback provided by the technical team to the new appointees to ensure the project stays on track. Since the PS is supposed to Chair the Coordination/Oversight Committee of the project, it is important that the Deputy Principal Secretary (DPS) be the co-Chair to ensure consistency and continuity in the management of the projects.
39. **The macroeconomic risk is rated Substantial as the country's fiscal trajectory continues to be an area of concern.** As revenue streams have reduced due to economic slowdown in the sub-region<sup>21</sup> and the COVID-19 crisis, and the deficit has been partly financed by drawing down deposits at the central bank, there is an urgent need for fiscal adjustment in the country. This macroeconomic risk could affect the sustainability of the project intervention after the GPE grant is over. The proposed project will focus on building institutional and individual capacity, providing appropriate incentive mechanism, improving data on ECCD management system and identifying efficient and effective use of resources through piloting several models on ECCD to sustain the impact.

<sup>20</sup> This is consistent with the Systematic Country Diagnostic (No. 892010-SZ) and the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) rating.

<sup>21</sup> The shock of a sharp fall in Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU)-related revenues over 2016-2017 (a fall of 8 percent of GDP compared to the most recent peak in 2014) was not met with an adjustment in expenditures, resulting in a widening of the fiscal deficit and an accumulation of budgetary arrears.



40. **The risk rating for institutional capacity for implementation and sustainability is Substantial.** Lessons from the existing projects point to several issues of technical and implementation capacity within the MoET. Firstly, despite the existence of full-time staff under the PFU to support the project, there is weak project management and weak accountability for achieving results as well as and insufficient collaboration between departments in the MoET. Given the frequent changes in Ministers and PSs, oversight at a higher level in the MoET has been fragmented, which has resulted in the weak accountability, characterized by insufficient contract management and poor quality of several deliverables. The technical capacity of the MoET is also a concern given the quality of the teacher training program implemented under LEQEP and LBEIP thus far. The project will seek to address these risks by ensuring that the Coordination/Oversight Committee of the project, chaired by the PS and co-chaired by the DPS, meets every month to address bottlenecks in implementation and develop an action plan with deliverables to be achieved before the next meeting. Technical capacity constraints will be addressed through the project hiring the necessary technical experts/firms to provide support in areas such as under the teacher training, the ERG program and the Girls and Boys clubs in schools, while the key aspect of the external technical assistance will be building the MoET’s capacity in these intervention areas.

Legal Operational Policies	Triggered?
Projects on International Waterways OP 7.50	No
Projects in Disputed Areas OP 7.60	No
Summary of Screening of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts	

The anticipated environmental and social risks are currently considered to be moderate and are associated with construction and rehabilitation of schools. These civil works are expected to be relatively small-scale construction activities, the potential adverse risks and impacts on communities and the environment are anticipated to be minor and can be managed/mitigated. The following instruments will be prepared and disclosed prior to project appraisal: (i) Environmental and Social Commitment Plan, (ii) Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP). (iii) Resettlement Policy Framework (if schools are to acquire land) (iii) Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) document that includes Chance Find Procedures; OHS measures and Labor Management Procedures for project workers. The ESMF will include all potential risks and mitigation measures, as well as possible risks associated with locations of new schools. The SEP will outline the project’s grievance redress mechanism (GRM) which will enable stakeholders to raise project-related concerns and grievances.

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