POLICY BRIEF:

KIX EMIS PEER REVIEW
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION | LESOTHO

INTRODUCTION

The KIX Africa 19 Hub has organized a May 2023 mission of internationally accredited Peers from GPE partner Ministries of Education – Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe and guest country South Africa – to support a review of the Ministry of Education, Lesotho's national EMIS. The review will refer to the continental EMIS Norms and Standards Framework, adopted by African Union in 2010 and SADC Ministers of Education in 2012.

More recently the KIX Africa 19 countries have updated this framework to include new standards in terms of the use of technology, cyber security, data privacy, data system integration and learner unit record keeping best practices among others. This new KIX AU EMIS Norms and Standards accommodates new norms and standards on sector wide policy, data privacy, cyber security, learner unit record systems, data storage protocols, new technology platform integration and dashboards, data warehousing, disaster recovery, integration of IDP/Refugee data, learning assessment data integration, submission of SDG 4 and CESA indicators, among others.

Member states jointly refined and reviewed the framework through various virtual engagements. The new framework produced in 2021 was then applied by national teams in the GPE partner countries to not only pilot the framework but to provide a baseline against which the international peers will conduct a review engaging with the key national players on strategies to improve standards and the overall data system.

BACKGROUND TO KIX AFRICA 19 HUB

The Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) Africa Hub is a knowledge exchange platform for the KIX program, a joint initiative between the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC). The purpose of the hub is to facilitate the effective exchange, mobilization, and utilization of evidence, knowledge, and innovation for education policy review, formulation, and implementation among 19 Anglophone countries in Eastern, Western, and Southern Africa along six thematic areas.

These themes include:

1. Improving teaching and learning
2. Strengthening learning assessment systems
3. Strengthening early childhood care and education
4. Achieving gender equality in and through education
5. Leaving no one behind; and
6. Meeting the data challenge in education

The KIX Africa 19 Hub aims to improve policies and practice that will strengthen national education systems within GPE partner countries to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 for quality, equitable education for all and expedite the implementation of the African Union (AU)'s Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA).

MEETING THE DATA CHALLENGE IN EDUCATION

Based on the May 2020 KIX 19 assessment of Developing Country Partner's (DCPs) needs, a KIX Data Challenge strategy, coordinated by the African Union's Institute of Education for Development (AU IPED), was developed in 2021.

As part of this Data Challenge strategy, AU IPED has been organizing a series of learning and capacity building events with Ministries' Directors of Planning and EMIS staff to exchange knowledge on challenges, lessons learnt, and strategies for improving practices in education management information systems needed for sector wide improvements in the delivery of education and training. In addition to ensuring an alive network, all these representatives were connected via a Whatsapp Community of Practice which linked to events, such as webinars on integrating learning assessment surveys to EMIS for use at different levels from schools upwards.

The African Union undertook missions to the Regional Economic Communities of SADC, ECOWAS EAC and IGAD to ensure high-level for support for the KIX Data Challenge Strategy and more specifically for updating their regional EMIS Norms and Standards frameworks. Additionally, the KIX EMIS focal points enrolled in an online examination which was a rigorous assessment of their knowledge of best practices, norms and standards that comply with the framework. This would qualify them as knowledgeable assessors for peer reviewing and supporting other

countries in determining their compliance with the revised continental EMIS data quality assessment framework. Eighteen KIX Ministry EMIS experts, all of whom had participated in the KIX Data Challenge on EMIS series, wrote the AU IPED examination and qualified at 70% and above as expert Assessors of Regional EMIS Norms and Standards.

AU IPED issued KIX certificates of accreditation. These 18 EMIS experts represent the cadre of Peer Reviewers who will be called upon to review and verify other member states' national EMIS assessments which are to be used in this next phase.

Task Objective of International Peer Reviews

The goal of this task is to facilitate the international EMIS Peer Reviews in the selected KIX countries by accredited KIX EMIS Assessors and experts to support a country to generate a National EMIS Norms and Standards Assessment and Action Plan that will be endorsed by national stakeholders, the relevant Regional Economic Communities, the AU IPED and KIX 19 Secretariat.

Using the revised KIX framework, the international team will review the national assessment drafted by the targeted Ministry's Planning/EMIS unit and develop supporting evidence, provide knowledge exchange on dealing with common challenges by engaging with key producers and consumers of data in the Ministry and local education groups of key stakeholders.
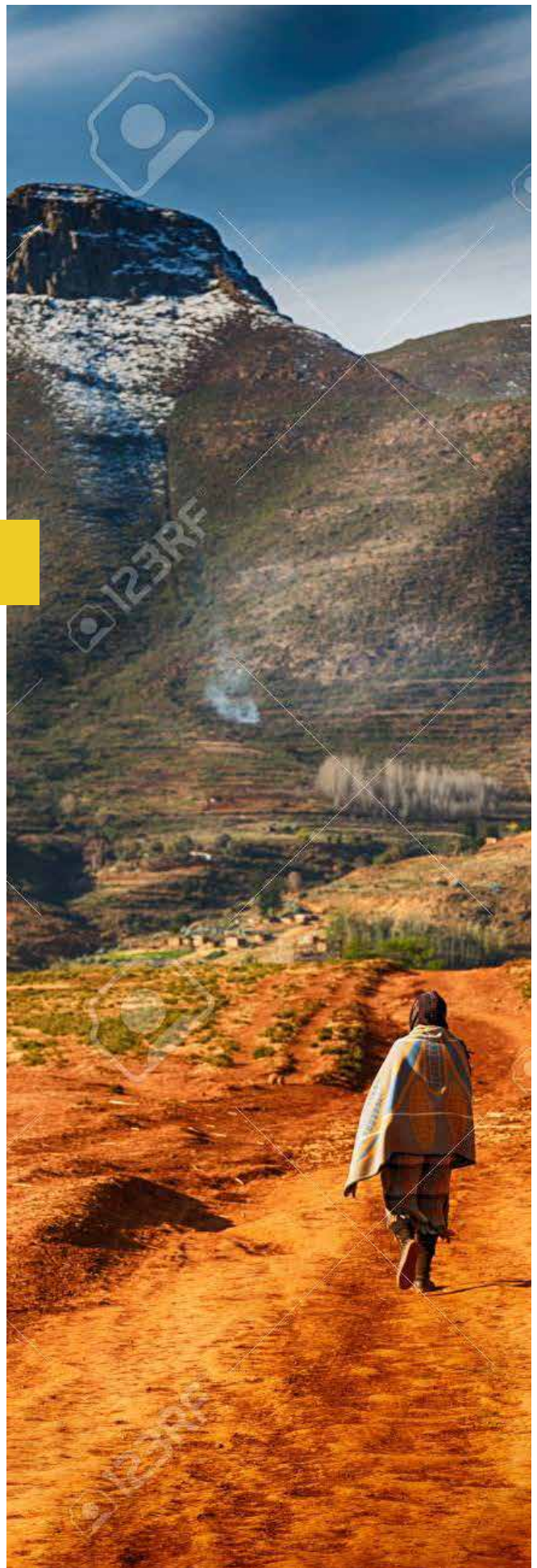
Lesotho

South Africa

THE PROFILE OF LESOTHO

The Kingdom of Lesotho is a small, landlocked country in southern Africa, completely bordered by South Africa. Geographically, it is the only country in the world where more than 80% of the country lies above 1,800 metres. It is divided into 10 districts and subdivided into 129 community councils.

In 2022, Lesotho had a small population of 2,17 million with 70% of the population living in rural areas and 30% in urban centres. The country's population is youthful with 76% of its population below the age of 36 (United Nations Population Division. World Population Prospects: 2019 Revision).

The country is classified as a lower middle income country, with approximately 31% of the total population living below the international poverty line of USD1.90 a day in 2020. The Human Capital Index (HCI) for Lesotho is very low (0.37), ranking 148 out of 157 countries (World Bank 2020). This means that a child will only be 37 percent as productive as a child who had access to complete education and full health. The unemployment rate remains high and is estimated at 24%. Approximately 40% of Basotho households earned below M1,000 (USD58) a month (Govt of Lesotho 2022). About one in four adults are infected with HIV/AIDS in Lesotho, making it the second most infected population in the world (GPE 2021).

EDUCATION SECTOR

Lesotho's education sector faces a number of challenges, including a lack of qualified teachers, inadequate widespread access to learning materials, and the affordability of secondary education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the access and delivery challenges in this sector, highlighting the need for innovative educational technology models, such as OpenEMIS and DHIS2 for Education, as a way to improve the information flow to support the management, the administration and governance of education at all levels ensuring all children and young people access quality teaching and learning in its institutions.

The government's vision of ensuring a literate and productive society is grounded in its 10-year National Education Sector Plan (NESP). The 2016– 2026 National Education Sector Plan aims to improve access, quality and equity in order to enhance the relevance and applicability of skills, institute an appropriate curriculum and best practices in teaching at all levels and transform institutions in the sector to be world class. With funding from GPE, a new education sector analysis (ESA) was completed in 2020. Based on the new data from the ESA, the Lesotho Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2016-2026 is being updated and a multiyear action plan covering 2021/22-2023/24 has been developed.

According to various sources, Lesotho's limited fiscal capacity saw a 7% cut in education spending (in real terms) between 2019–2020 (UNICEF 2019) but now is showing growth. There was a slight increases in proportion of government spend on education from 14,8% in 2020 to 16,6% in 2021 (GPE 2022). Overall education spending as a percentage of total government expenditure is low in Lesotho as compared to regional partners such as Swaziland (15%), South Africa (19%), Botswana (22%) and Namibia at 24% (UNICEF, 2018).

Lesotho has two GPE education sector program implementation grants, largely focused on improving student retention and reaching quality in junior secondary schooling and providing support to ECD integration with funding of $7.5 million and $2.3 million. They are both classified as not harmonized and instead use a stand-alone funding modality. They are on track towards meeting their intended objectives with the overall grant implementation status rating satisfactory, and funds utilization rating is on track (GPE 2022). Additionally, GPE provided a US$3.47 million COVID-19 grant to Lesotho in June 2020 with UNICEF as the grant agent (GPE 2021).

In June 2022, the World Bank Group approved a $26.5 million loan to the Government of Lesotho to strengthen the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable households in selected communities. This significant funding should enable improvements in the livelihoods of vulnerable communities and impact on the resilience and health of children. Some $7.1 million is specifically targeting three areas of education, namely improving student retention in junior secondary education, System strengthening to improve ECCD service delivery and project management, capacity building and technical assistance (World Bank 2022).

The majority of schools in Lesotho are owned by faith-based organisations. In 2017, there were 1,478 registered primary schools and agencies in Lesotho, most of them church-owned (Global Partnerships, 2016). The Catholic Church has the majority (34%), followed by the Lesotho Evangelical Church (32%) and the Anglican Church of Lesotho (12%). Some 11% of registered primary schools and agencies are government-owned, whereas 4% are community owned and only 1% are private (Bureau of Statistics Lesotho, 2018).

In addition to the primary schools there are approximately 2,500 early childhood development (ECD) centres, largely non-governmental and supported partially by MOET through feeding programmes and minimal caregiver training. Although just over 100% gross enrolment (GER) is seen in primary schools, only 31% GER is at the ECD level (3-5 years) and 50% of appropriately aged students in the 350 secondary schools (World Bank 2020).

In Lesotho, the Government's school fee policy makes primary education free, resulting in high enrolment at primary school level (more than 80%). For secondary school, however, annual fees can range from USD41 to USD157, which represents around one-tenth of the average annual income (USD1,300) of the majority of households in Lesotho.

Unlike the trend in rest of Africa, there is gender enrolment disparity against boys in schools which may be attributed to local livelihood imperatives in particular the traditional herding activities of the boys. A similar pattern is found in participation of children with disabilities. There were more girls with special needs enrolled in secondary compared to boys at parity of 1.50 in 2018. Learners with special needs account for 5% and 8% of students in primary and secondary respectively (Finmark Trust 2021).

Basic school infrastructure is lacking, thereby deterring continuous school participation. More than half of the schools nationally operate in informal and ill-equipped spaces such as huts, church halls, tents, or outside. Moreover, only 50% of schools have access to electricity (World Bank, 2020).

The lack of appropriate and enclosed classroom spaces arguably contributes to absenteeism and the high dropout rates of learners, especially during winter months when the high altitude means that temperatures in Lesotho reach uncomfortably cold levels.

Lesotho lags behind average regional learning outcomes in critical learning areas such as reading and mathematics (Global partnerships, 2016). Alongside this, and perhaps a contributing factor, the number of teachers in Lesotho has declined. Some 51% of primary school teachers in mountain areas were unqualified (without a teaching certificate), compared to only 24% in the lowlands.

This increases the rural–urban divide in education quality. Challenges in attracting and retaining qualified teachers in remote areas persist, and the recent COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the situation, having caused delays in the physical onboarding of teachers (Finmark Trust (2021).

The high poverty levels as mentioned above makes affordability a serious constraint to secondary school access, despite a national cap on school fees (Lesotho Times, 2011).

EMIS CAPACITY

As a member of the Knowledge Exchange and Innovation (KIX) programme under Africa 19 Hub, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) representatives participated in a series of EMIS training webinars and seminars, and in updating the 2012 African Union's EMIS Norms and Standards Assessment Framework on which they assessed their own system in November 2021. Based on the 5-point scale national self-assessment on 17 EMIS Norms and 84 standards, Lesotho achieved a total score of 313 (77%) out of a total of 404 points (AU KIX 2021)This is relatively high as compared to the other 17 participating GPE KIX Africa 19 countries which averaged 306 points (75%) on their national self-assessments of their EMIS. .

The 2021 EMIS Assessment indicates that the MOET's **enabling policy and regulatory framework** needs updating. There are no consequences for institutions failing to either register with MOET or provide requested data. The EMIS policy is not finalized or a formal written understanding with the NSO and as such needs to clarify stakeholder roles and responsibilities across the data value chain, requirements for planned database integrations, cybersecurity measures, data storage protocols, safeguarding of individual data privacy and usage for statistical purposes that are compliant with international standards, among other things. Additionally, a policy and procedures review on data quality and systems is needed. Data sharing across multiple government agencies and with development partners is weak (African Union 2021).

The 2021 EMIS Assessment indicates that the MOET has challenges with **adequate resource availability and utilization** for effective EMIS. Qualified staff at headquarters and districts are insufficient in number and those in post need further training and updated technical skills, particularly in database management and reporting tools. The funding flows to support EMIS from internal and external sources are not consistent and hence interrupt the supply of timely data. COVID 19 lockdown on schools also affected the EMIS functions which delayed the capture and processing of 2020 and 2021 Annual School Census. It is not clear what measures are in place for a disaster recovery mitigation should the database fail or fall over.

The 2021 EMIS Assessment raised concerns about the MOET's **statistical processes and EMIS methodologies.** Lesotho scored 45/68 (66%) on achieving expected standards in the terms of reaching the norms and standards of Statistical Processes. The score is lower than the average KIX Country scores 53.75/68=79% which indicates Lesotho has some challenges in this area, particularly in pilot testing new data tools and questionnaires, adopting rigorous data verification processes, updating survey methodologies, using data warehousing, and rapid assessments for humanitarian crises.

On **education information reporting,** the 2021 EMIS Assessment viewed the Ministry's achievements as above average in providing the sector statistics, which are relevant, accurate and reliable, timely, coherent, comprehensive, comparable, over time, and readily accessible by users (AU KIX 2021). This is despite the MOET's challenge in reporting on the last three years of census data. This is why its important for the MOET's Planning Directorate to own this self-assessment which will be validated by a Peer Review in 2023. Additionally, Lesotho reports on 6 of the 12 key international education indicators to UIS, and this is below the benchmark of 10 indicators defined by GPE. The international standard is that a higher number of education indicators reported to UIS reflects a country's commitments to improved availability, quality and timeliness of data reporting (GPE 2022).

Currently education data is collected by institution through paper-based annual survey forms. This process is time consuming and burdensome and the data is seldom shared with districts and schools. The current system also lacks analysing and reporting tools which are key to making evidence based decisions intends to bring about which is to drive the process toward better education outcomes through the availability of better data in Lesotho:. The MOET's adopted the UNESCO's open source OpenEMIS database

system in 2017 based on an overall desire to change its system and produce more timely, accurate and sub-national data for decision-making. The intention was to track individual learners or teachers at school, regional, and national level but the Ministry soon recognized that it did not have the necessary resources in place to implement this level of disaggregated data.

Status of OpenEMIS in Lesotho

After an initial pilot in 2017-2018, the Ministry adopted the OpenEMIS data system which has huge analytic and reporting potential. However, currently the OpenEMIS system is only being used for data capture of the Annual School Census survey.

The data generated is then downloaded to be manipulated manually by the Statistics Unit to be cleaned and produce excel tables for inclusion in statistical reports. Although the COVID 19 halted the work of the Statistics Unit for most of 2020 and 2021, the lack of available Ministry education statistics prior to 2019 cannot be solely attributed to this lockdown. There are many reasons behind the sub-optimal implementation

of the OpenEMIS system which could be attributed to a lack of internal technical skills, insufficient training and support, inadequate time on task, technological challenges such as poor internet connectivity, old equipment, among others. Further the original OpenEMIS is designed as a learner unit record system with a wide range of analytic capabilities and features. However, Lesotho's Ministry faced with insufficient resources (even districts lack statisticians and equipment) decided to revert back to school level aggregated data. Earlier this year, the Ministry finalized the 2020 The Ministry's Annual Statistical Report and is in the process of inputting and cleaning 2021 and 2022 data.

Given the data system stalemate the Ministry has experienced and the huge need to accelerate the turnaround time on these information cycles, the Ministry is about to shift to a new data system, DHIS2 for Education. This decision is based on the successful experiences of its sister Ministry of Health who has used this system since 2015. It is also pursuing a new approach to planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation which will increasingly rely upon districts to take a more active role in the information cycle.

EXPECTED IMPACT

The outcomes of this mission, in addition to a report produced by the expert peers, are the following:

- An enhanced relationship between the national education actors in Lesotho and the KIX Africa 19 Hub, in particular other Ministries of the same Regional Economic Community, in this case SADC

- A renewed commitment to knowledge and innovation exchange between the Ministry of Education, Lesotho and other Hub countries on common challenges and solutions;

- An internationally supported data quality assessment, based on regional norms and standards by which the Ministry of Education, Lesotho can use as a roadmap to inform management information policy development and narrow the gap between policy and practice;

- A consensually agreed KIX EMIS national Action Plan addressing data quality systems which will guide the country's engagement in the Hub.