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The use of Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) initiatives to open up access to education in the context of high HIV and AIDS prevalence rates: the case of Lesotho

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SOFIE is a three year Research Project supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC). Its purpose is to strengthen open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) systems and structures to increase access to education for young people living in high HIV prevalence areas in Malawi and Lesotho. It seeks to achieve this through developing a new, more flexible model of education that uses ODFL to complement and enrich conventional schooling. It also seeks to encourage application of the new knowledge generated through effective communication to development agencies, governments, development professionals, non-governmental organisations and other interested stakeholders.

Access to education and learning is being viewed as a 'social vaccine' for HIV but in high prevalence areas orphans and other vulnerable children are frequently unable to go to school regularly and are thus being deprived of the very thing they need to help protect themselves from infection. In this context sustained access is critical to long term improvements in risk and vulnerability and it requires new models of education to be developed and tested.

The partners

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Abstract

This paper describes the extent of the national HIV and AIDS epidemic in Lesotho and identifies and analyses key Open, Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL) initiatives currently being implemented to increase access to education including those for vulnerable young people including those affected by HIV and AIDS. The paper draws on documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews conducted with stakeholders from government departments and non-governmental organisations involved in HIV and AIDS and in the Non-Formal Education Sector.

Despite the high priority attached to education and a national response to HIV and AIDS by the Lesotho Government, a key finding of the analysis is the extent of the challenges presented by the HIV pandemic and of the internal inefficiencies within the education system, leading to high drop out rates, high repetition rates and low completion rates. Several initiatives in the non-formal education sector and those drawing on ODFL are described for their possibilities to open up access to education and address the growing HIV and AIDS pandemic.

In conclusion, the paper argues for the possibilities of ODFL to improve efficiency rates in Lesotho and open up access to out-of-school youths, thus taking up the opportunity for the window of hope!

Keywords: Open, distance, flexible learning; HIV and AIDS; Non-Formal Education; low-income countries, access, inefficiency, quality equation

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The Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC) Director, Mr Sechaba Seutloali, and his staff, especially Ms Anna Maieane, contributed to this paper, sharing their own insights and providing documents relevant to the field. The Inspector for Non-Formal Education in Lesotho, Ms Monts'eng Mofokeng, was also kind enough to share valuable information on the situation regarding the Non-Formal Education Sector and was very open about the challenges facing her sector. This paper also benefited from the expertise of Dr 'Manthoto Lephoto at the Institute of Extra-Mural Studies (IEMS), who shared her experiences and passion on the field of open and distance education.

Contributions from several non-governmental organisations in the Non-Formal Education (NFE) sector were also received. These included Ms 'Matsepo Sekali, Administrator at Lesotho Girl Guides Association (LGGA), and Ms Elizabeth Dabengwa, Executive Director at Lesotho Association for Non-Formal Education (LANFE), who both added to contributions on the NFE sector, illuminating initiatives aimed at improving adult literacy and addressing the plight of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs). This phase of the project would not have been possible without the collegial support and encouragement of staff at the Institute of Education, including Ms Pulane Lefoka, Mrs Lebohang Motaung and the Director, Dr Sam Motlomelo.

¹ DFID - Department for International Development

² ESRC - Economic and Social Research Council

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List of abbreviations

ACL	Anglican Church of Lesotho
AGOA	African Growth and Opportunities Act
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CPA	Children's Protection Act of 1980
CWIQ	Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) Survey
DFID	Department for International Development
ECCD	Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development
EFA	Education For All
ESDP	Education Sector Development Plan
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan
FBO	Faith Based Organisation
FE	Formal Education
FPE	Free Primary Education
GER	Gross Enrolment Rates
GNI	Gross National Income
GoL	Government of Lesotho
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IEMS	Institute of Extra-Mural Studies
LANFE	Lesotho Association for Non-Formal Education
LAPCA	Lesotho AIDS Programme Coordinating Authority
LDTCC	Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre
LEC	Lesotho Evangelical Church
LGGA	Lesotho Girl Guides Association
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
MoFDP	Ministry of Finance, Development and Planning
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NER	Net Enrolment Rates
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NMDS	National Manpower Development Secretariat
NUL	National University of Lesotho
ODFL	Open, Distance and Flexible Learning
OVC	Orphans and vulnerable children
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RCM	Roman Catholic Mission
RECLISA	Reduce Exploitative Child Labour in Southern Africa
REFLECT	Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACMEQ	Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SRV	Senqu River Valley
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISA	University of South Africa
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand

1. The context of the study

1.1 Introduction and context

This paper reports on a review of the extent of the national HIV and AIDS epidemic in Lesotho, identifying and critically analysing key ODFL initiatives currently being implemented to increase access to education for young people. The paper represents the first step in a three year research project based in the Department of Education and International Development, Institute of Education, University of London. The project is funded by the Joint DFID-ESRC Scheme and was started on 1st of April 2007. The project is guided by the central question: How can barriers to education access and achievement presented by HIV and AIDS be overcome using open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) as a complement to conventional schooling? It will also explore the following subsidiary questions:

1. What ODFL initiatives, structures and networks are in place to deliver education to young people?
2. What are the barriers to accessing conventional schooling for young people affected by HIV and AIDS?
3. How can these barriers be addressed through expanding ODFL initiatives and strengthening existing ODFL structures to complement conventional schooling and upgrade the knowledge, skills and empowerment of affected young people?

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has identified HIV and AIDS as one of the most serious threats to its development. Speaking at the meeting of SADC Ministers of Human Resources in Mauritius, the Deputy Prime Minister, who was also at the time the Minister of Education in Lesotho, Mr Lesao Lehohla acknowledged that the SADC region 'ranks high in the incident of AIDS cases and HIV infection rates in the World'³. This human tragedy happening in a context of some serious socio-economic challenges that include recent droughts and growing unemployment is presenting a serious challenge to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals as well as the Education for All (EFA) targets were goals set for governments to ensure that they focus their resources on human development issues, including the provision of basic education, which is treated as a fundamental human right. The following quality and equity principles aimed at guiding policy actions in the fields of education and training are of particular interest for this paper:

- Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;
- Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.⁴

³ Available on the government website: <http://www.lesotho.gov.ls/article/2002/paper%20-%20Min%20Edu%20-HIV-AIDS%20>

⁴ Dakar Framework for Action 2000

These are all ambitious targets set for the attainment of quality education. Besides the challenges that the spread of HIV and AIDS present for the achievement of these ambitious targets, it is becoming evident that education itself has a lot to offer in relation to reversing the spread of the epidemic. For example, the Prime Minister in the same speech to the SADC Ministers of Human Resources notes that there is growing awareness among member countries that accompanying the spread of HIV and AIDS are high numbers of children born HIV positive; youth becoming sexually active from ages as young as fourteen, as well as continuing denials of the existence of the disease among some communities. Education can play a critical role in raising awareness and only education can ensure that nations take the opportunity presented by the window of hope indicated by evidence that infection rates are lowest in young children, particularly those between the ages of five and thirteen.

The complexity of social phenomena is most evident in the intricate relationship between education provision and our reaction to such critical issues as the spread of HIV and AIDS. The spread of HIV and AIDS is beginning to show itself up in the growing numbers of teachers and young people missing school. This means that even those countries that have made progress towards the EFA targets, through expanding provision for basic education, will find their progress being constantly reversed as a result of young people dropping out of school to take care of sick parents and teachers themselves missing classes due to illnesses. It is becoming increasingly evident from the limited progress towards education for all that continuing to pour all funding into one big pot – formal basic education – is unlikely to get us anywhere towards achieving quality education for all nor that of curbing the spread of the disease. While major development agencies and governments of developing countries continue to increase funding for basic education at a disproportionately high rate, in relation to other sub-sectors, there is very little acknowledgement that conventional methods are failing to reach millions of children and adults, especially those in contexts of difficult delivery (Edirisingha, 1999).

There is urgent need to investigate alternative modes of reaching the many young people not reached by conventional education and of finding means of supporting conventional education. Evidence from South Africa and Mozambique has been used to argue that:

ODFL can be used to deliver the national curriculum more flexibly, so that young people do not have to fall behind with their lessons when they cannot attend school and can more easily re-enter schooling if they have dropped out

(Pridmore and Yates, 2005)

In countries with low efficiency rates in school such as Lesotho ODFL can also provide an opportunity for innovative pedagogic approaches that can also be used to support conventional delivery modes. Although there is much to learn about the possibilities of ODFL in developing countries such as Lesotho, we are in the fortunate position that we do not have to invent the wheel. There are already some significant initiatives addressing this growing need and there is also historical evidence of the success of radio and print projects and life skill programmes administered in the countries.

The first level of analysis in this initial phase of the project was with policy directions that Lesotho took to shape the provision of education, both in education and around the challenges posed by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The importance of this is that while not discounting the importance of other factors such as individual character, family backgrounds and country characteristics, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2004) argues that such policies explain human development to a large extent. Within the deep regard for education spending and the measurable trends that indicate progress towards the MDGs and EFA goals such as enrolment growth rates, underlying this analysis was an acknowledgement that quick wins are not enough. A more comprehensive approach that includes a focus on some long term, harder to measure gains such as teacher

quality are also indicators used to evaluate progress towards attaining accessible quality education and response to the epidemic in this study.

1.2 Method

This paper draws on a review of existing information and knowledge on education and on HIV and AIDS in Lesotho. Most of the data on education in Lesotho was sourced from reports published by the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Publications on the state of education in Lesotho were obtained from key researchers and research institutions, including the Institute of Education's Documentation Centre and Sechaba Consultancy, and references cited followed up. The paper also drew on an electronic search using key words such as HIV and AIDS and education or schools, including a review of articles available through search engines and websites of the Ministry of Education and Training, UNICEF and the World Bank. The focus of the review was largely on barriers to education and initiatives attempting to open up access to education in developing countries, and especially Lesotho. The paper also drew on interviews and discussions held with key stakeholders in the Non-Formal Education Sector and especially those involved in initiatives focusing on opening up access to vulnerable groups such as children affected by HIV and AIDS were also interviewed. This version of the paper benefited from several presentations in seminars, and particularly a workshop involving key researchers in the project.

1.3 Government's priorities and policies on HIV and AIDS

The Government of Lesotho has demonstrated the highest political commitment in response to the impact of HIV and AIDS on its population, including at the level of the King and the Prime Minister. On launching the government's official response to the crisis, in a document entitled 'Turning a Crisis into Opportunity: Strategies for Scaling Up the National Response to the HIV and AIDS Pandemic in Lesotho' (2004), the Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Pakalitha Mosisili acknowledged the high priority the United Nations Millennium Development Goals places on responding to HIV and AIDS as a major development challenge for Africa, and particularly for Southern Africa. A key challenge outlined in the document is making every Mosotho HIV and AIDS competent thus acknowledging that, in addition to poverty and hunger, a major factor in the spread of the pandemic is lack of education and awareness about the disease. The document outlines some of its strategies for the education of the nation on HIV and AIDS, with a view to changing risky behaviours, as well as the promotion of awareness and the reduction of the stigma attached to the disease.

Assisted by UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and Training developed a manual on HIV and AIDS, Gender and Life Skills aimed at educating teachers about the impact of the disease and how those infected and affected may be supported. In addition, the Government of Lesotho formed the Lesotho AIDS Programme Coordinating Authority (LAPCA) in 2001 in response to the growing and profound effect of HIV and AIDS. In addition, Lesotho has formulated a three-year rolling national strategic plan, beginning 2000/2001 – 2003/2004. The aim of the plan is to control the spread of HIV and AIDS and mitigate its impact, particularly on vulnerable groups. With assistance from the World Health Organisation, Lesotho has now developed a plan for roll-out of Anti-Retroviral-Treatment and an increase in the number of treatment points.

1.4 Government's priorities and policies on Education

The Government of Lesotho has well articulated declarations on education through two of its key documents, the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2005 – 2015 and the Medium

Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF⁵) for the Education Sector in Lesotho, April 2007 – March 2010. The mission for the Ministry of Education and Training as stated in the ESSP is

To develop and implement policies which ensure acquisition of functional literacy among all Basotho and development of a productive, quality human resource base through education and training.

(Ministry of Education and Training, 2005a)

Also consonant with the principles and declarations is Lesotho's Vision 2020 (MoFDP, 2004), a major planning document cited by the Minister of Finance and Development Planning and the Minister of Education and Training in their planning documents:

By 2020, Lesotho shall be a stable democracy, united prosperous nation at peace with itself and its neighbours. It shall have a healthy and *well-developed human resource base*. Its economy will be strong, its environment well managed and its technology well established [emphasis added in both documents]

(Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 2004; Ministry of Education and Training, 2005a)

Education's response to the drive for human development and dignity

It is important to note that the MoET's response to the drive for human development and human dignity is supposed to be comprehensive and includes the following:

1. The making of primary education free and compulsory from January 2007;
2. The influx of an additional 23,000 students entering secondary education after completion of the first free primary education (FPE) cycle;
3. The need to improve curriculum and assessment system in Lesotho;
4. The reform of the inspectorate as a catalyst of improving quality and efficiency in the education system;
5. Teacher education and training; and
6. Making technical and vocational education and training (TVET) responsive to the needs of the labour market.

Formal education in Lesotho comprises seven years of primary, three years of junior secondary, two years of senior secondary and four years of tertiary education. There is also a parallel technical vocational education and training leading to a certificate (primary + 3 years) or a diploma (senior secondary + 2 or 3 years). Although the government funds education, including salaries for teachers, the majority of schools (90%) are historically owned by churches. Although the 1995 Education Act was not entirely welcomed by church leaders, who traditionally controlled all that went on in schools without accounting for anything, it set the framework for broader participation by providing for community involvement⁶ in the management of schools. The Ministry of Education and training is

⁵ The MTEF involves the preparation of an integrated annual plan and budget covering three financial years. Among the key aims of the MTEF is to achieve aggregate fiscal discipline by setting realistic, achievable and sustainable resource envelopes.

⁶ There have been some studies suggesting that not enough capacity was built into the practice of involving communities in school management and so their involvement is not really significant in many instances according to The World Bank (2005) Building on Free Primary Education, Primary and Secondary Education in Lesotho: A Country Status Report. *Africa Region Human Development Working Paper Series*, Washington, The World Bank.

responsible for the management of education in Lesotho and is headed by a minister, with the principal secretary as the chief accounting officer and the sub-sectors headed by chief education officers and directors.

1.5 Organisation of the paper

This paper is divided into five sections. This first section has described the context of this study, outlining the focus of this project and its rationale. I have also described the priorities that drive the provision of education internationally and locally; and how these priorities are linked to the need to respond to the growing HIV and AIDS epidemic. The importance of detailing these priorities is to lay the context under which education is provided in Lesotho and how Lesotho has interpreted this global emphasis on human development within its situation as well as the gaps that still exist. In the next chapter, I will provide an account of the historical background of Lesotho and also detail the current socio-economic challenges that make this project such a pertinent one in the situation of Lesotho. Section 2 provides further context of Lesotho. Section 3 looks in detail at the education sector. Section 4 identifies education initiatives addressing the needs of the vulnerable and the final section draws out the implications of the review for the future development of the SOFIE project.

2. The context of Lesotho

2.1 Introduction

This section provides an account of the historical background of Lesotho, detailing some of the socio-economic challenges that face service deliveries such as the provision of education and training. In particular, the high dependency ratio and the growing vulnerability are putting a strain on the resources of the country. This growing vulnerability is evidenced by growing numbers of orphans as well as households headed by females and grandparents. All these groups are economically vulnerable in Lesotho and their ability to sustain the cost of schooling especially in secondary education has been reported to be under a lot of strain (Bureau of Statistics, 2002). This chapter gives a context to the high drop out rates and low efficiency rates in Lesotho.

2.2 Lesotho's historical background and economic challenges

With an area of just over 30,000 square kilometres, Lesotho is completely landlocked by the Republic of South Africa. Its population has been estimated to be 2 million with a historic growth rate of approximately 2.6% (Bureau of Statistics, 1996). It is a very mountainous country with much of the population concentrated in low-lying areas close to the border with South Africa. Over 70% of the population is rural and life expectancy is put at 59 years, though this could now be lower due to AIDS (Lewin, 1999). The majority population is Basotho and the official languages are Sesotho and English.

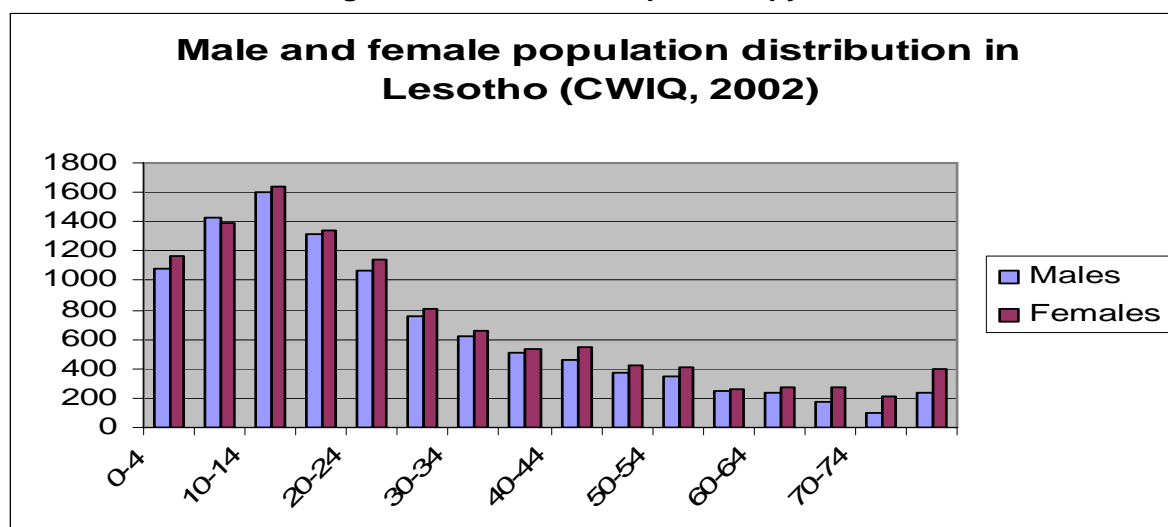
Lesotho's economy has historically been dependent largely on the Republic of South Africa (RSA). Until 1990, the remittances from Basotho mine-workers employed in RSA contributed almost 50% of the Gross National Income (GNI). However, there was a sharp decline in mining opportunities for Basotho in the 1990s and less than 20% of the GNI is now generated in RSA, largely through migrant labour. The garment industry, which sprung up to take advantage of preferential access to the US market under the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA), has typically provided low-wage employment to Basotho, most of them women. However, this industry also shed 15,000 jobs in 2005, squeezed by competition from high-volume Asian producers.

Drought and unemployment have rendered more than half the population dependent on food assistance. Like many countries in Southern Africa, Lesotho has been badly affected by the

HIV and AIDS pandemic, with 28.9% of the country's adults aged between 15 and 49 said to be living with HIV and AIDS. As a result of the pandemic, the number of vulnerable people in need of emergency food aid rose from 448,000 to nearly 700,000 or one-third of the population between 2002 and 2004, with the number of orphans estimated to be about 180,000 in 2005 (UNICEF, 2007).

Adult Literacy is estimated at 81.8 percent nationally, with urban literacy rates (92.1 percent) much higher than rural literacy rates (78.4 percent). The female population is more literate 89.6 percent, than the male with 73.2 percent literacy (Bureau of Statistics, 2002). However, the greatest challenge to service delivery such as education provision is as a result of the population distribution. Figure 1 below illustrates Lesotho's population which poses major challenges for state-funded services and programmes.

Figure 1: CWIQ 2002 Population pyramid



Source: (Bureau of Statistics, 2002)

Figure 1 shows the population resident in Lesotho by male and female persons. The shape of the population pyramid resembles that of third world countries with a very large base. The number of children aged 0 – 19 years, represents 38% of the sampled population and is almost double the number of adults aged 20 - 39 years. The 2002 survey distribution is similar to the 1996 population pyramid (Bureau of Statistics 1996) and even more importantly to the recent 2004 Demographic and Health Survey (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 2005a). Although the complete 2006 population census is yet to be made public, the preliminary indicators are that there is not going to be much change to the shape of the pyramid, except for the slowing down of the population growth due to declining fertility rates as result of the impact of HIV and AIDS (Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

2.3 Formal Education in Lesotho

The formal (Western) education system in Lesotho has benefited from the friendliness of Moshoeshe the First, the founder of the nation, with the French missionaries. Among the missionaries' first formal structures was Morija Training College, established in 1868, and Leloaleng Technical School. The English Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Missionaries followed and the latter are accredited with the birth of the only university in the country, having established the then Pius XII University College in 1945. Until 1870 the missionaries bore the sole responsibility for education, providing it mainly free (Mohapeloa, 1982). Towards the end of the 19th century a commission reported the weaknesses of Lesotho's education system as being large classes, poor education infrastructure and wastage of time

and person power (Khalanyane, 1995). Several commissions followed this one, including one by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), all of which recommended a more intimate involvement by government, rather than the then detached attitude of leaving control completely in the hands of missions (Sibisi, 1962).

So, on independence in 1966, the Lesotho government inherited an education system that was largely controlled by the churches, in which the government had made very little developmental investment and the community had very little participation in its management. In 1966, UNESCO provided Lesotho with a planner to help address educational needs. The recommendations that followed included making education more relevant and more centralised. But it was not until 1975 that government policy explicitly focused on 'relevance' and 'efficiency' through what became known as the First Five Year Plan:-

- To gear the development of the education system to the requirements of manpower for economic development by lessening the academic bias of the system
- To improve the efficiency of the educational system in terms of numbers and the quality of its output and in relation to the money spent on it.
- To use scholarships as a means of channelling individuals into those fields of training needed for economic development.
- Through appropriate educational planning to strengthen government control and supervision over all educational activities.

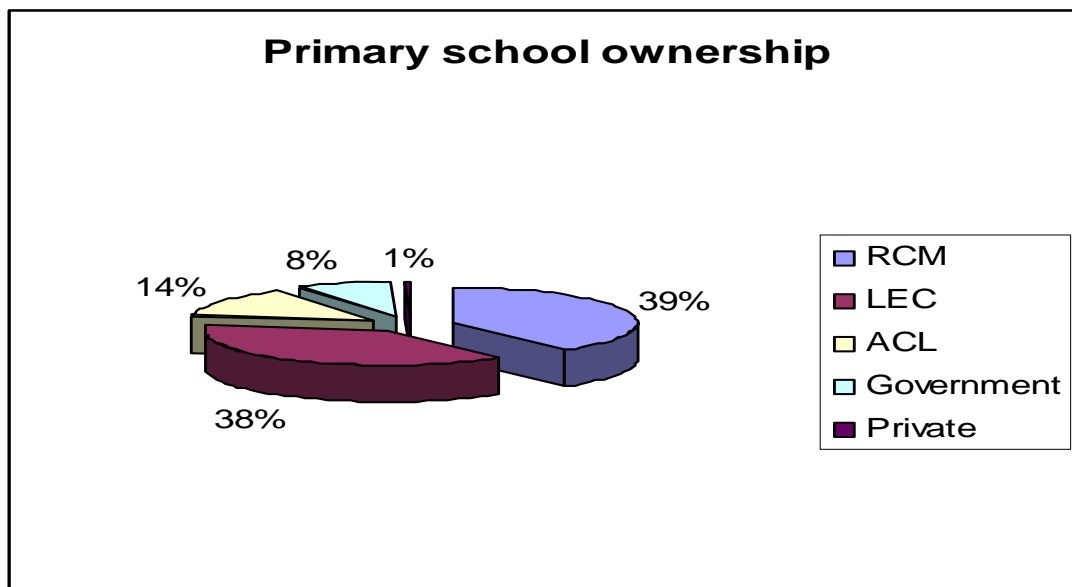
(Ministry of Education and Training, 1975)

In order to redress the irrelevance and inefficiency of Lesotho's education, the First Five Year Plan envisaged the inclusion of agriculture and home economics in the secondary schools curriculum. Some vocational schools would also be established in order to cater for those pupils who could not get into schools. A Curriculum Development Centre was also set up at the National University of Lesotho. The seven teacher training colleges, run by churches, were scrapped in favour of one National Teacher Training College. Mathematics, science and one practical subject were included in the secondary school curriculum as part of the core curriculum (Letseka, 1992).

Formal education in Lesotho follows a 7-3-2-4 structure with 7 years of primary schooling, 3 years of secondary, 2 years of senior secondary, and 4 years of tertiary education. Pre-school which is supposed to provide early childhood care and development education, varies both in the number of years and the quality of services provided, and is largely operated by private individuals, local communities and non-governmental organisations. There is also a parallel system to formal education offered by technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions leading to an award of either a certificate (primary + 3 years) or a diploma (senior secondary + 2 or 3 years). Tertiary education is offered by the Lesotho College of Education (LCE) (teacher training) and the National University of Lesotho, the only university in the country.

As Figure 2 below illustrates, the majority of schools in Lesotho are owned by churches.

Figure 2: Primary school ownership

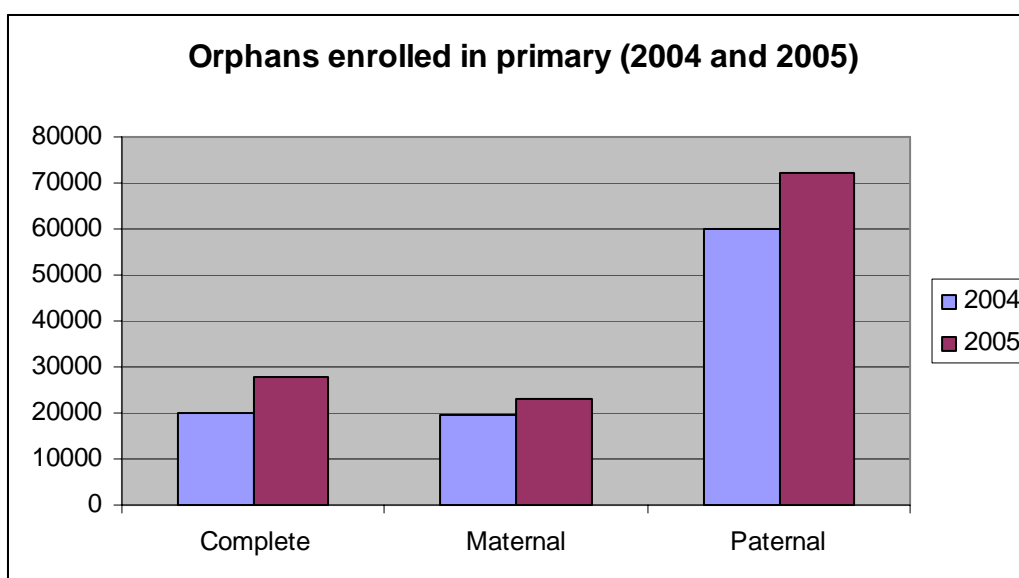


Both at primary and secondary level, the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), the Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC), and the Anglican Church of Lesotho (ACL) jointly own about 90% of the schools. These church schools are under the management of their respective church authorities, with some participation from elected school committees from a variety of stakeholders including parents. However, teacher salaries are paid by the government. There is also a small number of private schools funded entirely from fee income.

2.4 The growing vulnerability

Estimates about prevalence rates in Lesotho vary according to source, sometimes 23.4%, sometimes as high as 28.9%. Sources generally place Lesotho third behind Swaziland and Botswana although figures differ depending on source. What is certain is that Lesotho has one of the highest HIV and AIDS prevalence rates in the world and a much higher rate of people living with the disease than the 7.5% average of Sub-Saharan Africa. However, a combination of drought and the pandemic has resulted in the number of vulnerable people, especially orphans, growing considerably in recent years (UNICEF 2007). According to the 2004 and 2005 education statistics, orphans enrolled in primary schools grew by almost a quarter from 99243 to 122769.

Figure 3: 2004 - 2005 Enrolled orphans



Source: Planning Unit (Ministry of Education and Training, 2004; Ministry of Education and Training, 2005b)

The challenges facing Lesotho's education system are massive and increasing. It has been noted that the social gains made have begun to stall or reverse as a result of HIV and AIDS, famine and droughts, and low food production (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 2007). As a result of these major challenges, orphans enrolled are growing at a rate of 24%, and complete orphans are growing at a rapid rate of 38%. The rapid growth of complete orphans and the high rate of paternal orphans present a particularly serious challenge for holding on to the progress made through the policy of Free Primary Education (FPE). The 2002 survey indicates that the most cited reason for not attending school is school expenses, accounting for more than 90% of all learners not attending school in the period of the survey (Bureau of Statistics, 2002). This is not surprising as the situation of poverty and neediness appears to be growing rapidly and is likely to further reverse the progress made through FPE. Moreover, as female-headed and child-headed households continue to grow at a rapid rate in Lesotho the dependency ratio estimated to be particularly high in female headed households and amongst the rural poor, is likely to grow even further.

According to the Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) Survey report, orphans in Lesotho are situated in families that are unable to fully take care of them and are therefore dependent on outside help (Bureau of Statistics, 2002). Moreover, orphans in Lesotho are based in families that are not economically active and are unlikely to have information about access to alternative funding. As orphanhood reaches crisis proportions in Lesotho, several studies have raised concerns about the high rate of abuse of children in foster care in Lesotho (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 2001; Kimane, 2004, 2005).

2.5 Synthesis and conclusions

This section provided a background regarding the historical, economic, and social background of Lesotho. Although like most post-colonial contexts there are concerns about the relevance of the education system that Lesotho has inherited, there are also some benefits derived from the colonial history, and especially the high literacy rates. However, the overwhelming finding from this chapter is that Lesotho faces serious challenges as a result of the phenomenal increase of the vulnerable groups associated with poverty and HIV and

AIDS. Having provided this picture of the challenges that face social provision in Lesotho, in the next chapter I focus more specifically on education provision and the gaps that persist in Lesotho's provision especially to the orphaned and vulnerable children.

3. The State of Education in Lesotho

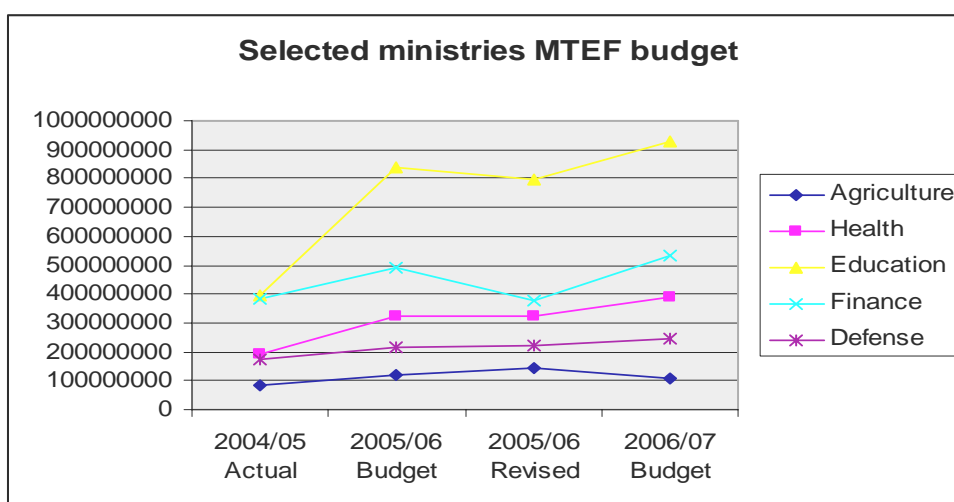
3.1 Introduction

Initial analysis points towards some progress in relation to opening up access as well as a growing focus on quality issues such as teacher supply, support and development. However, there are some worrying indicators of process issues such as poor teaching and learning experiences reported on in such data as the CWIQ survey and the Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) study. The Ministry of Education and Training data on finances and enrolments as well as the two surveys (CWIQ and SACMEQ) provide very useful initial indications of the state of primary education in Lesotho both in access and quality dimensions. As indicated in the conceptual framework, these dimensions will be reported on in terms of access, quality, efficiency, equity and relevance. In addition to those important indicators of the state of Lesotho's education system, inputs, and particularly allocation to education are important indicators of Lesotho's progress towards the MDGs.

3.2 Educational Inputs

The first level of analysis is the congruence of education spending with the expressed national priorities of human development and poverty alleviation. Figure 4 below illustrates projected expenditure over the MTEF period (2004/05 – 2006/07) in a selected number of ministries, including the usually controversial Ministry of Defence.

Figure 4: Selected ministries allocations



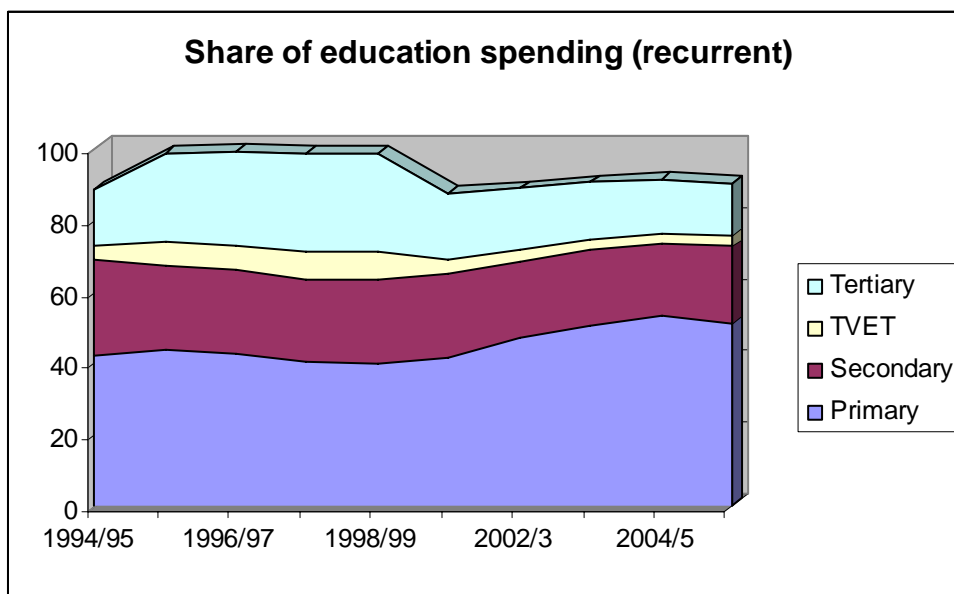
Source: Revenue and Recurrent Expenditure Estimates 2005/2006 (MoFDP, 2004, 2005)

There has been an increase in the allocations to the Ministry of Education and Training and that of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and that of Ministry Finance and Development Planning. Therefore, at the level of projected allocation, there is congruency in priority and budgeting both in terms of the human development need and the concern to respond to the growing incidence of poverty and the HIV and AIDS pandemic. From

2004/2005 to 2006/2007 education expenditure allocation was projected to grow from 13% to 21% of the total government recurrent expenditure. It will be important to analyse whether the projected growth was maintained in the latest budget figures.

The next level of analysis would be the actual education sub-programme allocation. Lesotho's education budget makes important revelations about the government's priority areas and indicates notable progress towards pro-poor spending. As Figure 5 below illustrates, this has not always been the case and it is worth noting that prior to 2000, education in Lesotho was generally anti-poor.

Figure 5: Share of education spending (recurrent)



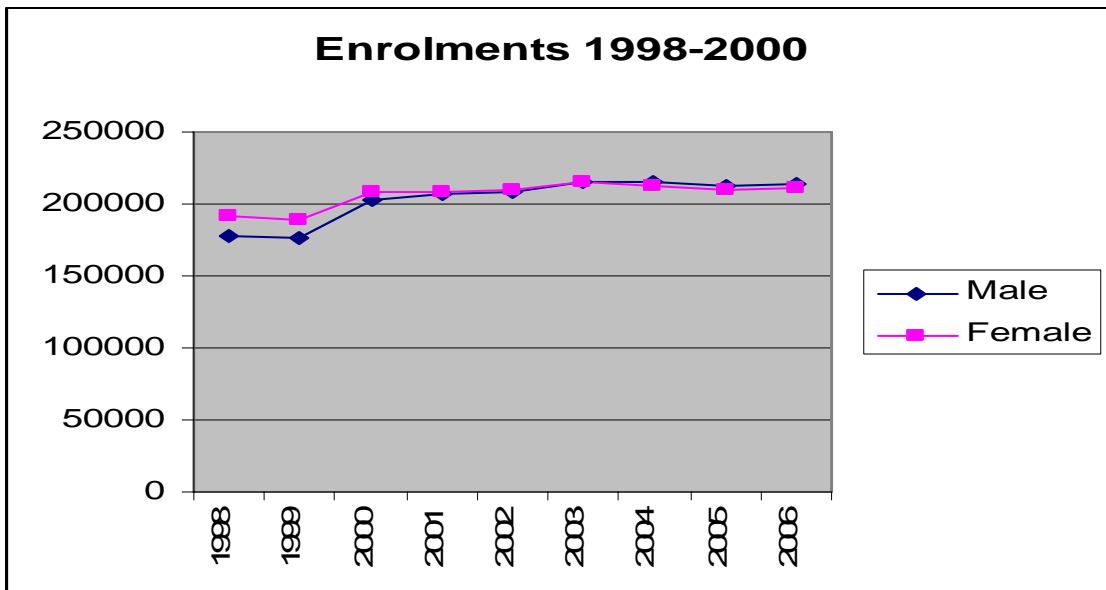
Source: Education Statistics (MoET, 2004)

There is a clear prioritisation of basic education through funding since the advent of free primary education (FPE) and over the 2004/5 – 2006/7 MTEF period. The growth in primary education significantly outpaces other education sub-programmes over the MTEF period. Although we can moan about the low allocation to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), a skills-based programme that somewhat caters for the poor more than does tertiary, the shift towards primary education indicates an important pro-poor shift in policy.

3.3 Educational Access

As was expected Free Primary Education (FPE) resulted in increases in enrolments at primary level in Lesotho, particularly in 2000.

Figure 6: Primary school enrolments 1998 - 2000



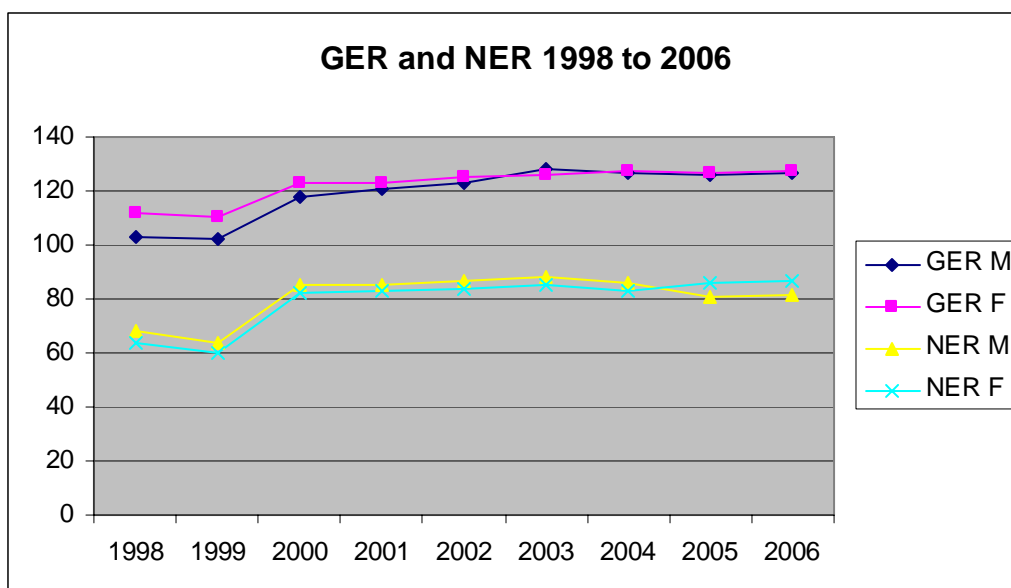
In 2000, overall primary school enrolment in Lesotho rose by 12.5% (45,794) from 410,745 in 1999 to 456,539. However, a closer look at the impact of FPE reveals that the removal of fees and other measures attracted more learners into Standard 1, with numbers growing by almost 75% between 1999 and 2000.

Figure 7: Primary school entrants 1999- 2000



The highest net growth was from boy learners who grew by a massive 82%, compared to 68% amongst girl learners. Because it was phased in from Grade one, the introduction of FPE has had greater impact on new entrants, with a great number of overage learners being attracted to school since the removal of fees (Hua, 2007). Both the gross enrolment rates (GER) and the net enrolment rates (NER) were significantly impacted upon by the introduction of free primary education in 2000, with the GER jumping by more 13.9% and NER by 21.7%.

Figure 8: Primary school GER and NER trends 1998 - 2006



Apart from the female NER which have been relatively sustained in its growth, the male growth (both NER and GER) has not shown any consistent growth especially between 2003 and 2006.

- In 2001, 2002 and 2003, the increases in overall enrolment were by 1.1%, 0.9%, and 2.6% respectively.
- Enrolment in entrance grade in 2001 and 2002 was down by 18% and 12% respectively.
- Overall pupil enrolment has been going up slightly over 6 years from 414,964 in 2001 to 426,257 in 2006 (overall increased by 2.7%).
- It is evident that the biggest increase happened during the 3 years from 2001 to 2003, then the enrolment dipped somewhat in 2004 and 2005 and back up again in 2006.

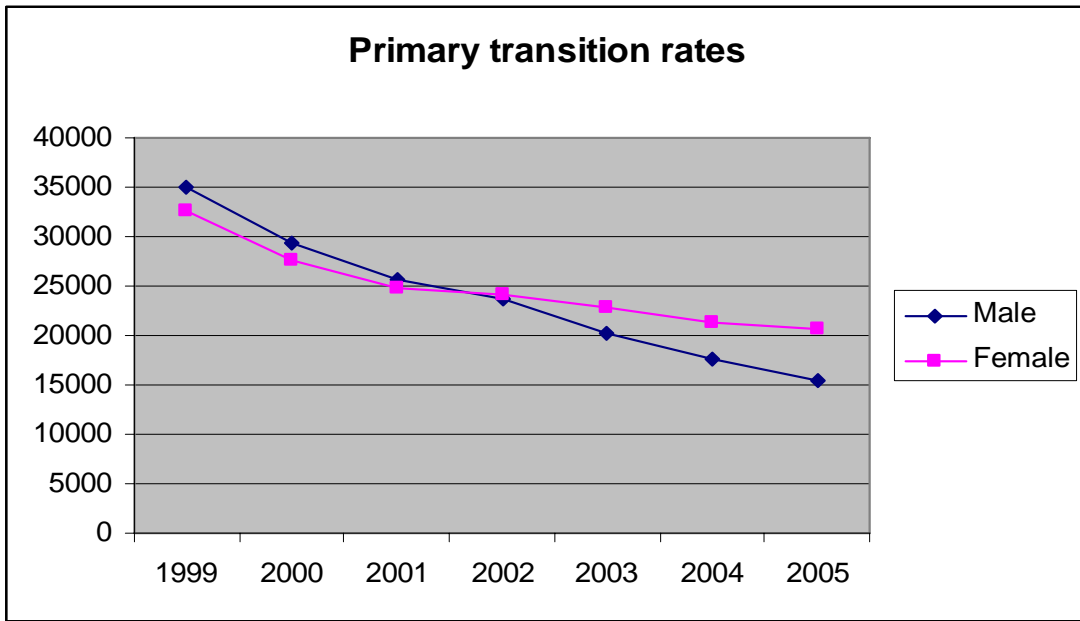
(Hua, 2007)

In general the impact of FPE appears to have worn off after the first three years of massive increases, with enrolments dipping somewhat in 2004 and 2005.

3.4 Efficiency Rates

In spite of the high spending in education and the increased focus on primary education, the situations regarding the enrolments in schools and student flow profiles in Lesotho indicate some cause for concern in particular, there is evidence from this analysis that even as we tackle the issue of access to school for the most vulnerable, we need to equally take into serious consideration issues of quality. Lesotho has always struggled with very poor efficiency rates within its education system. Figure 9 below illustrates the transition rates for the cohort of learners for the period 1999 to 2005.

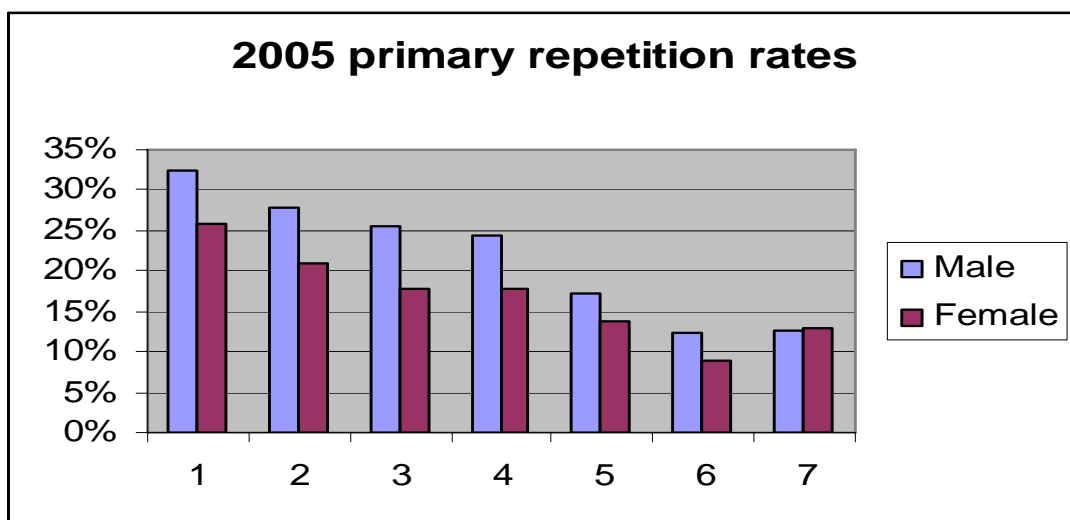
Figure 9: Primary transition rates



Source: Planning Unit, Education Statistics 2004 and 2005 (MoET, 2004)

Indeed in the period between 1999 and 2005, more boys than girls started school but far fewer boys were enrolled in Standard 7 by the end of their primary schooling. A matter requiring further analysis is the observation by the senior official in charge of primary education that the low completion rates are more a result of the extremely high repetition rates in Lesotho rather than increased drop-out rates, and that this feature is not necessarily new nor solely a result of FPE (Phamotse, 2008). Indeed repetition rates have always been unacceptably high in Lesotho, and in the absence of policy on promotion are likely to have increased rather than decreased since FPE as parents no longer have to bear the cost of children repeating.

Figure 10: 2005 Primary repetition rates



Source: Planning Unit, Education Statistics 2005 (MoET, 2005b)

In general, a learner is likely to repeat at least one grade in Lesotho, and many repeat as much as twice during their primary schooling. While the repetition rates are high (over 22%) throughout Lesotho, the repetition rates for girls vary vastly across regions. In urban areas girls' repetition rates are much lower than in the rural areas (including Senqu River Valley – SRV) (Hua 2007). These social disparities reflect a more complex gender inequality situation than is generally considered to be the case in developing countries. In general, Lesotho appears to have a situation where boys are unable to benefit from the education system as much as girls evidenced in their high drop-out and repetition rates. However, it is worth noting that in both the drop-out and repetition rates, girls appear to lose the edge they have over boys as they progress, indicating a very subtle reversal of the disparity, a situation requiring much deeper analysis.

3.5 Synthesis and conclusions

The macro-level analysis provided in this section reveals some progress towards opening up access which is likely to have benefited a number of disadvantaged groups, including children affected by HIV and AIDS. However, the analysis also points towards poor efficiency rates, including high drop-out and repetition rates. These poor efficiency rates indicate that while conventional education has expanded, it may not be serving the most marginalised groups in society in terms of retention and progression. The boy child, especially in rural areas appears to be the most vulnerable in terms of retention and progression. However, while girls are more likely to be in school, they also drop out of school at a much higher rate than boys at higher primary and secondary level. These vulnerable groups and the high inefficiency rates implore a more comprehensive approach than just providing free access to primary education and leaving it to them to take up this opportunity in spite of their increasingly difficult circumstances. As is discussed in the next chapter, there are already some innovative responses to the growing vulnerability in Lesotho and these responses need to be strengthened.

4. Educational initiatives addressing the needs of the vulnerable

4.1 Introduction and structure of chapter

This section considers some of the initiatives currently being implemented in Lesotho in order to address the challenges posed by growing vulnerability and the spread of HIV and AIDS in Lesotho. It looks particularly at initiatives within the non-formal education sector and some of the opportunities presented by open, distance and flexible learning modes.

4.2 National response to the growing vulnerability

Traditionally, responses to poverty and vulnerability have been strong within the Sesotho culture and practices. Persistent droughts, the growing poverty and the rapid spread of HIV and AIDS in the country have all eroded such institutions as extended family, which used to adopt orphaned relatives readily, as well as such cultural practices where chiefs would set aside a field to be ploughed by the community in order to cater for the needs of orphans and vulnerable persons in the community (*ts'imo-ee-lira*) (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, 2005b). The increase in orphans and destitute persons as a result of unemployment, poverty and HIV and AIDS has made the burden too much for communities to bear. As a result of this distressing situation, children have become highly vulnerable and Lesotho is seeing a growing number of street children as well as child labour practices at a scale not known before (Kimane, 2004).

Particularly prior to 2000, Lesotho's response to the pandemic was described as full of inadequacies in terms of the data available; beleaguered by a collapse of traditional practices of caring for orphans and vulnerable children as a result of increased poverty, unemployment and HIV/AIDS; and lacking in harmony regarding national law and policy (NGO Coalition for the Rights of the Child and Save the Children UK, 2000). The report notes poor implementation of the health policy favouring child survival and development and lack of progress in the finalisation of the draft policy on Non-Formal Education (NFE) as evidence of the sluggishness of the Lesotho Government prior to 2000. A number of attempts were made after 2000 to coordinate efforts aimed at addressing the plight of the OVCs. These include the National HIV/AIDS policy, the three-year Rolling Plan, and the Lesotho AIDS Programme Coordinating Authority all aimed at mitigating the negative impact of the pandemic.

Since 2000 and especially after 2005, the Government of Lesotho has sought to provide a number of strategic directions and initiatives in order to address the plight of orphans and vulnerable children. The inadequacies of legislation for the protection of orphans and vulnerable children have been discussed in detail by Kimane (2005), outlining plight of OVCs in Lesotho and legislation culminating in the Lesotho Children's Protection and Welfare Bill 2004 that replaced the Children's Protection Act 1980. For a long time the plight of OVCs in Lesotho was at the mercy of the Children's Protection Act of 1980, which focused on children's protection when in conflict with the law and very little about social problems such as child labour and abuse. The new Lesotho Children's Protection and Welfare Bill of 2004 is meant to more comprehensively protect children, including enshrining their rights to parental property. And only very recently has the Government provided several policies that would improve the situation of the OVCs and especially children affected by HIV and AIDS. These policies, most of them formulated after 2005, have yet to have the positive impact they are meant to have on the OVCs and the affected children.

4.3 Current NFE responses to growing vulnerability in Lesotho

There are various literacy and adult education programmes offered in the area of Non-Formal Education. For example, the Lesotho Association for Non-Formal Education (LANFE) runs literacy programmes for both herd boys and child domestic workers and has benefited from support from the Reduce Exploitative Child Labour in Southern Africa (RECLISA) funded through the American Institute for Research based in Pretoria. The organisation is one of the oldest NGOs and has trained other member organisations from a wide variety of areas such as burial societies, popularly known as *mpate-sheleng*, and has been able to use funding through a project known as Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques (REFLECT), funded by the World Bank. Apart from working on literacy programmes, another NGO, the Lesotho Girl Guides Association (LGGA) has also attempted to work with street children trying to place them in families. There is a lot of overlap in the work done by these NGOs, including projects focusing on awareness campaigns, and education programmes on HIV and AIDS and sexually-transmitted infections (STI).

Non-formal education (NFE) role-players interviewed in this study generally argue that the sector has played an important role in mounting a response to the growing vulnerability in Lesotho. Other significant players in the response to HIV and AIDS are faith-based organisations (FBOs) some of which provide service, largely based on abstinence. A key advantage of these NFE programmes, according to stakeholders, is the flexible delivery mode they often adopt in order to accommodate learners from a wide range of age spectrum and economic backgrounds. ODFL has the potential not only to extend access to education for out-of-school children but also to reach communities which are already engaged in economic activities. In general, although not fully explored, there is anecdotal evidence from these initiatives that ODFL can play a crucial role in supporting both formal education (FE) and NFE, including in increasing access to schooling, improving efficiency rates at school

and contributing to the quality of teaching and learning through the employment of a wider variety of flexible modes.

Although there is growing coordination within the NFE sector, many of these initiatives remain largely unmonitored and generally lack external evaluation. For example, a faith based organisation, focusing on promoting abstinence in an attempt to curb the spread of HIV and AIDS based its success on numbers of youth reached and self-report data. No formal evaluation of the level of awareness was made to evaluate the impact of the project. And although there is ever-growing funding for the response to HIV and AIDS, particularly from development partners such as UNESCO and international organisations such as the Clinton Foundation, institutions in the non-formal sector face huge challenges of declining funding. This decline in funding can be attributed to the growing focus on basic education. Even members of tertiary institutions such as the National University of Lesotho's Institute for Extra-Mural Studies (IEMS), which have played an important role in promoting open and flexible learning, bemoan the poor leadership in relation to their focus.

But it is particularly the oldest distance education centre in the country, the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC) that most starkly evidences the lack of commitment to the non-formal sector in general, and distance education in particular. The centre continues to offer much needed tuition to out-of-school youth and opportunities to drop-outs in areas such as functional literacy and numeracy as well as awareness campaigns in pertinent issues such as environmental conservation and HIV and AIDS. The centre continues to offer correspondence courses to private candidates wishing to retake their examinations through materials and some face-to-face sessions. However, the centre has not grown much in terms of facilities since it was set up in 1974, especially in this electronic age when most distance education institutions are taking advantage of internet and other sophisticated modes of delivery. The lack of e-mail and internet facilities for the staff members at the centre is but one proof that the centre has remained stagnant, unvalued and is likely to become obsolete if not attended to.

4.4 Conclusions

This sections has examined NFE and ODFL initiatives in Lesotho indicating some of the innovative projects within education that aim to respond to the challenges posed by poverty and the spread of HIV and AIDS. There is a lot of innovative work within non-governmental organisations and faith-based entities. Current initiatives within government to coordinate efforts are likely to lead to a more coherent and significant response in general. However, it is clear that there are many more challenges to a more meaningful response to the pandemic, not least of which is government funding of non-formal education and open, distance and flexible learning initiatives. In general, it is clear that both NFE and ODFL have a lot to offer in a more significant response to the spread of HIV and AIDS and the apparent reversal of the progress towards EFA targets and MDGs. However, more knowledge and more resources need to be invested in this important possible response to this growing pandemic.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

5.1 Discussions and conclusions

The paper has provided an analysis of the socio-economic challenges facing Lesotho. These challenges include declining revenue as traditional sources such as migrant labourers' remittances and the garment industry diminish. The challenges facing Lesotho are most evident in the growing number of orphans, a situation largely driven by the state of HIV and AIDS in Lesotho. A number of initiatives responding to the challenge resulting from the growing vulnerability in Lesotho have been noted in this paper. These have included Faith-

Based Organisations (FBOs) working from a religious perspective as well as NGOs that have undertaken commendable work improving the situation of herd boys and girl domestic workers in Lesotho. Institutions such as the LDTC have also continued to run programmes focusing on out-of-school youth as well as campaigns aimed at raising awareness of emerging issues such as HIV and AIDS and environmental degradation.

The strength of the NGO initiatives lies in the commitment of the members of organisations running these programmes when one visits them. However, while some information is available on how the programmes are run, there is very little empirical evidence on their impacts as most are neither monitored nor evaluated. In proposing funding for support to the empowerment of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) in Lesotho, one European Union document describes the response as 'fragmented' and characterised by:

A mosaic of local initiatives for caring for OVCs in different ways, as exemplified by the list of more than 60 organisations and governmental bodies contained in the Directory of Service Providers for Orphans and Vulnerable Children issued by UNICEF in December 2005.

(European Commission, n.d.)

It can be argued from a review of policy documents and initiatives that until the year 2000, and even as recently as 2005, the response to the spread of HIV and AIDS in Lesotho had not only been slow, but was generally inadequate and highly fragmented (European Commission, n.d.; NGO Coalition for the Rights of the Child and Save the Children UK, 2000; Kimane, 2004). Kimane (2005) noted that until recently legislation meant to protect children was not comprehensive enough and that there was ample research evidence pointing towards widespread child abuse. However, the overwhelming finding from this initial analysis is that, until recently, little has been done to coordinate the efforts of the different organisations and some of the messages have the potential to produce confusion with some FBOs understandably neglecting to drive aspects of HIV awareness campaigns that they view as contrary to their religious ideals.

There have been some notable efforts aimed at coordinating the response to the growing vulnerability in Lesotho. The 2000 National AIDS policy was updated recently with the aim of strengthening the coordination of the AIDS response, including a focus on guiding a multi-sectoral response. The government of Lesotho has recently passed a Lesotho Children's Protection and Welfare Bill 2004 that is meant to comprehensively protect children against abuse and enshrine their rights to parental property in law, replacing the obsolete Children's Protection Act of 1980. It is also hoped that recent initiatives such as these as well as the three-year Rolling Plan, and the Lesotho AIDS Programme Coordinating Authority will take hold as part of government support for efforts at mitigating the negative impact of the pandemic.

Education, it is generally agreed, has the potential to reverse the impact of HIV and AIDS and even improve the situation of people in developing countries like Lesotho, including the OVCs. Having benefited from the involvement of churches, a feature that continues to define the ownership of schools, Lesotho has a higher than average literacy rate. This benefit is especially notable amongst the female population, a situation dissimilar to most developing countries. In spite of these high literacy rates, education in Lesotho has remained an exclusive commodity, particularly at secondary level, not least because school owners had the freedom to set fees as they wished and without accounting for how they are spent (Lerotholi, 2001) and continue to have the autonomy to select learners into schools according to different criteria including denomination (Nyabanyaba, 2002). Therefore, the most significant response to the pandemic and the growing vulnerability to date is the increased education budget relative to other sectors, a response that has seen both gross and net enrolments that were in the decline prior to 2000 begin to increase, albeit inconsistently. The phased removal of fees, the provision of meals and the support towards

learning materials in primary schools in Lesotho have all indicated a very clear prioritisation of the primary education sub-sector and a pro-poor focus.

It can be argued that this move is a pro-poor turn away from the tertiary education sub-sector that has traditionally consumed the bulk of Lesotho's education budget (Nyabanyaba and Letete, 2007). However, the analysis also raises a number of inefficiency challenges that continue to face Lesotho's education system: 'continue' because it can be argued as well that these challenges are not new. These inefficiencies have been aggravated not only by the increased pressure brought about by the growing enrolments at primary as well as the extremely limited access to secondary schooling in Lesotho, but also and most importantly by the impact of emerging and overwhelming socio-economic conditions that include growing unemployment, increasing poverty and the high HIV and AIDS prevalence rates. While more needs to be done to analyse the feature of these low completion rates, some recent anecdotal evidence points towards increased repetition rates rather than drop-out rates being the main source of the low completion rates. This means that with the removal of fees and many teachers unable to cope with large classes of learners of different ages and abilities, teachers' only strategy is simply to make learners repeat grades. As noted in a recent regional conference, the prevalent practice of repeating learners is ineffective, especially when such learners' needs are not addressed in any distinctive manner when they repeat (Phamotse, 2008).

A finding that is quite worrying is the lack of prioritisation of the non-formal education sector and the lack of innovation and progress in distance education in Lesotho. Although many role-players interviewed in this study expressed passion about both NFE and ODFL modes, it was difficult to miss the low morale expressed about the future of this sector. Although understandably the most critical phase in education, exclusive focus on the primary sub-sector is unlikely to enhance the provision of a good quality education system in Lesotho. The balance needs to be considered in terms of, for example, teacher supply and development so that teachers are able to attend to the learners that come through the schools affected by the pressures of growing poverty and HIV and AIDS. Attention to other sectors such as secondary education, which itself is essential for the supply of teachers, as well as the expansion and restructuring of technical and vocational sector necessary for skills development in the country, needs to be visible in terms of resources to these sectors.

5.2 Implications for the project

Given the reported high internal inefficiency of the formal education system characterised by high dropout rates, there are a number of policy issues that require thorough investigation in order to unearth underlying factors constraining policy effectiveness. One of these areas has to do with the continuing, and apparently worsening, efficiency rates since the introduction of FPE. A related issue to this is the high rate of boy dropouts at the early years of schooling, something that may have to do with educational relevance, quality of education, or even cultural barriers peculiar to the Basotho society. These aspects are essential to interrogate as they may have implications on the nature of interventions to be used in this project. But an issue that the Government of Lesotho needs to consider seriously is a policy on progression and repetition informed by research. The current practice in Lesotho, where teachers much too easily repeat learners could have to do with their inability to cope with the growing pressure brought about by expanding enrolments and very little to do with any educational benefit for the learners.

For the project it does imply a focus on exploring very subtle barriers to education in order to inform an intervention that can target orphans and vulnerable children more effectively in Lesotho. Given the traditionally poor access to secondary education in Lesotho, the sector faces particularly serious problems as FPE is bound to lead to increased demand for places in secondary schools. The approach has to be comprehensive as many young people continue to face serious socio-economic challenges even as they seek to access the limited

places in secondary schools. Therefore, without playing down the impact of the inefficiencies that continue to beset the primary education sub-sector, it is urgent to look at how secondary education can be made more accessible to the many orphans and vulnerable children that are unable to benefit from schooling. The intervention would need to be specially formulated to consider education that is most relevant and accessible to such children, given that many will not have the luxury to attend conventional schooling with its very inflexible demands and low returns. In that way the project would inform policy and practice on overcoming barriers to education access and achievement presented by HIV and AIDS through the use of open, distance and flexible learning (ODFL) as a complement to conventional schooling.

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