The Education System in Lesotho comprises different levels viz, pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary. There is also non-formal education that cuts across primary, secondary and tertiary. Each level has a minimum duration: pre-school is three years except for a reception class which is one year; seven years for primary; five years for secondary and a minimum of one year for tertiary depending on a type of programme – a certificate, diploma or degree programme. The policy and legislative environment for education is conducive for improved learning outcomes, however it is not without challenges. Unlike previously, there is a growing recognition of the importance of early childhood care and development across the sects of the nation due to continued advocacy efforts by various players such as UNICEF, civil society organisations, faith-based organisations and individual advocates. There is evidence generated locally (from biannual National Assessment Surveys 2012 and 2014) on early childhood care and development (ECCD) being able to improve learning outcomes in primary schools.
ECCD in Lesotho is offered in three categories/approaches: a) Home-based where children aged 3-5 years old are enrolled and are taken care of by volunteers who are not paid. They use the same national curriculum and there are no fees paid, these are meant for disadvantaged children. b) Centre-based approach is normally privately owned ECCD centres that are in majority (more than 80%), fees are paid and teachers are paid, and are not normally accessed by children from disadvantaged households. c) Reception Classes are meant for only 5 year olds to be prepared for entry into primary school, no fees are paid and teachers are paid by government. Reception Classes are also meant for disadvantaged children and are attached to primary schools. There is free school feeding.

- Children under 5 years of age constitutes 43% in 2014 (DHS).
- 33% of children under 5 years were stunted (DHS 2014) and more than half of children aged 6-59 months were anaemic – all these conditions usually, if unattended, make it difficult for young children to develop and learn.
- 13% of children aged 2-4 years were orphaned (DHS 2014) while 6.1% of orphaned children aged 2-5 attended an ECCD centre in 2015 (Education Statistical Report, p.8).
- 23.6% of children aged 2-14 years (of ECCD and primary school going age) were orphaned in 2014 (calculations based on 2014 DHS data).
- 1.7% of 53,530 enrolled children in ECCD was with disabilities, majority (32%) being those with intellectual disability (Education Statistical Report [ESR] 2015, p 8).
- With only 2,204 ECCD centres (Reception Classes, Centre-based and Home-based ECCD centres together) in 2015 there were 53,530 children aged 2-5 years enrolled in ECCD centres translating into just 33% GER in 2015 (ESR 2015, p.6).
- 49.3% of children aged 6 years got to primary education with some preschool experience (Education Sector Diagnostic Study 2015, p.49).
- Grade 6 children who attended ECCD education performed better in English Literacy (Yes ECCD 50%, No ECCD 46.5%) and Mathematics (Yes ECCD 52.0%, No ECCD 51.5%) than those who did not (National Assessment Survey 2014, p.39).
- Total recurrent budget for ECE is less than 1% of the Ministry of Education and Training’s budget.

PRIMARY EDUCATION, SECONDARY AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

- 39% of population (about 741,000) is under 15 years (ECCD and Primary age) – DHS 2014.
- 361,637 is total enrolled children in 2015 and enrolments have been declining since 2011.
- Net Enrollment Rate was 75.8 – Male 74.4, Female 77.2 (ESR 2015, p.18) while for secondary it was 38.7 (Male 30.4, Female 47.3) in 2015.
- Gender Parity Index: 0.98 for primary and 1.6 for secondary education.
- Cohort survival rate for 2015 was 72 for primary and has increased from 61 in 2008.
- Repetition rates at primary in 2014 was 8.3 (Male 9.5, Female 7.1) decreased from 19.4 in 2012 while for secondary it was 12.5% (16028 learners).
- Qualified Teacher- Pupil Ratio: 42 in 2015 although disparities are observed for Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka with 53 and 56 respectively.
- 74.6% (269,933 – 138,021 Male, 131,912 Female) enrolled children live in rural areas while 25.4% live in urban areas (ESR 2015, p. 12).
- 26% (94,333) of total enrolled (361,637) in primary is orphaned (ESR 2015, p.20) while for secondary it was 39% (50,149 out of 128,701) learners (ESR 2015 p. 39).
- 5.2% of total enrolled children had a form of disability, a decrease from 5.4% in 2014 (ESR 2015, p.19) in primary while in secondary it was 6.4%.
- 100 % of public schools have a school feeding programme to cater for children who are orphaned and vulnerable and are from poor wealth quintile, schools provide two meals a day and for some children, those are often the only meals for the day.
- In primary school, repetition rate is high: 8.6% (2015) however has reduced from 19.4% in 2012 (ESR 2015).
- 1,113 primary schools out of 1478 have toilets-365 schools still practise open defecation – girls at puberty miss school every month during their menses due to lack of toilets.
- Only 988 primary schools have reliable source of water.
- Boys in the rural/mountainous areas have limited access to formal education compared to girls, due to factors such as herding – there are 66,836 male 3,551 female herders.
- 128,701 (Male 55, 095; Female 73,606) enrolled in secondary education in 2015 (ESR 2015 p.37).
- A total of 10,521 learners enrolled in 2015 of which 6,924 were male and 3,597 were female 22.8% were below the age of 18 years.
- Learners with disabilities totalled 378 (Male 263, Female 115) in the NFE enrolment.
- 917 NFE learners were orphaned; out of which 85% of them were male orphans while 15% were female orphans.
PAST ACHIEVEMENTS

• UNICEF supported the development of ECCD curriculum and a syllabus for Reception class.

• UNICEF commissioned studies e.g. Out of School Children, the Extend of a herd-boyship phenomenon in Lesotho, Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of child rearing in Lesotho.

• Supported the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to develop guidelines for teachers to teach learners with disabilities and are being used in schools.

• Supported MOET to develop CFS standards which have a monitoring tool for each pillar.

• Supported the non-formal education sector to establish 100 more NFE learning centres.

• Assisted the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC) to improve its print shop so that the Centre is able to produce more materials for the NFE sector.

ACHIEVEMENT AT A STRATEGIC LEVEL BY END-2016

• National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Development and its costed Strategic Plan being implemented – 5 Specialists dedicated to implementing it.

• Rolling out of the new curriculum which is child-centred.

• Real time monitoring in the pipeline.

• Progress made towards innovation in learning and teacher development through mobile technologies.

SUMMARY OF TRENDS IN THE PROGRAMMING ENVIRONMENT

• Early childhood care and development is gaining currency and this is evidenced by approval of the sector’s policy.

• MOET was supported to develop Education Sector Plan 2016-2026 – the process completed in August 2016.

• The new curriculum which has caused a decrease in repetition rates in the early grades where they were as high as 28%.

CHALLENGES

• HIV and AIDS resulting in morbidity, attrition and absenteeism of teachers.

• Low recurrent budget for ECCD – less than 1%.

• Accurate education data and timely availability of education data remains a concern.

• Quality in both primary and ECCD is a huge challenge.

• Increasing access/coverage for ECCD especially for the low wealth quintile households.

• Curbing decreasing enrolments at primary school.

• Learners’ achievement in literacy and numeracy in national and regional assessments is generally poor – stagnating at 50% achievement although there is an improvement from SACMEQ III to SACMEQ IV – from 467.9 and 476.9 to 530.8 and 558.7 on reading and numeracy scores, respectively.

• Increasing enrolments and retention in secondary schools for both boys and girls.

• Lack of classrooms or infrastructure as a whole – no toilets, no safe water sources, no kitchens for school feeding for some schools of which many are in the remote rural areas.

• High repetition and dropping out especially for boys.

• Lack of capacity to enforce legislation e.g. Education Act 2010 that makes primary education free and compulsory.

• Emergency unpreparedness for the sector – when emergency strikes, it totally catches the sector off guard and learning and teaching are affected.

UNICEF’S CONTRIBUTION

The Basic Education programme component will support efforts by both government and civil society organisations to improve learning achievements through:

• Increased access to integrated early childhood care and development;

• Improved and safe environment for learning in schools;

• Effectively implemented integrated curriculum;

• Improved quality of non-formal education especially for herd-boys.
KEY PRIORITIES FOR 2017

EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT

• Implementation of the National Policy on Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development.

• Finalisation of early learning and development standards (to conduct age validation) so that a review of ECCD curriculum could be started.

QUALITY EDUCATION

• In-service training for about 200 ECCD teachers on child development and related issues following the ECE curriculum; 245 primary school teachers on Child Friendly Schools Standards and 300 on the new integrated curriculum; 400 non-formal education teachers on effective teaching of functional literacy and numeracy, vocational practical skills and psycho-social life skills.

• Testing and rolling out of real time monitoring using EduTrac to track attendance of both teachers and learners, and drop-out of learners.