

CEF Country Presentation Lesotho

Primary Education in Lesotho

Formal Education in Lesotho was developed in the nineteenth century and it is the responsibility of the churches and the government. The churches own 97 % of schools in terms of facilities and management and they determine the basic education values, while the government pays the teacher's salaries and sets the education standards, including designing of curriculum.

Up to 1970 primary school education had been eight years and was reduced to seven years in 1971. It ends with Primary School Leaving Examination which acts as the entrance exam for secondary school. The number of girls in school has always been higher than that of boys, the reason being that boys have to do herding.

Traditionally all schools used to charge fees although the primary school fees have been comparatively low. For example, according to 1996 statistics primary school fees contribution to the total expenditure was 11%. In the year 2000 Free Primary Education (FPE) was introduced starting with standard one and rolling annually standard by standard until the whole primary education will be free by 2006. There is also a complementary Targeted Equity-Based Programme (TEBP) which waives school fees for vulnerable children which are not included in the FPE. As a result the Ministry of Education's budget has substantially increased in recent years.

However, most vulnerable children are still unable to access education and there are still problems in the implementation of the two programmes. For example, the standard of education is deteriorating drastically as classrooms are now over crowded. The pupil-teacher ratio which has been as high as 60 to 1 even before the introduction of FPE is expected to rise even higher as the enrollment increases with the FPE. Age disparity has also proved to be problematic after the introduction of FPE since those children and even adults who missed out because of lack of school fees are now back in school. Some school proprietors are still resistant to the FPE.

The education system in Lesotho in general has not been preparing children for life. It has been the adaptation of the British system and not relevant to the needs of Basotho children. Many children who drop out or complete primary school or even secondary school still cannot make living out of skills acquired from school. However, the Ministry of Education has recently made a policy that secondary schools introduce at least one practical subject such as Agriculture. In addition, primary school curriculum has recently been reviewed to include life skills.

Government Education Policy

The Ministry of Education operates with Education Sector Plan (2002 - 2015). The highest proportion of Government budget goes to education every year. In the year 2003/04 the budget allocation is 24%. This has contributed in opening doors for Basotho children to access education as it is now free in the first four classes of primary school.

In the past, consultations with key stakeholders in the process of education planning was never as extensive as it has been with the current Education Sector Plan (2002 – 2015). However, consultation with the civil society is still very unsatisfactory. The few NGO representatives who were involved in the process only participated in certain parts of the process.

Information from the Education Sector Plan has fed into the Government Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (PRSP) through the education sector PRSP working group. The plan was guided by the Government Vision 2020 which was developed in 2001.

The plan is also aimed at establishing linkages between the provision of early childhood care and development (ECCD) and primary education, primary education and secondary, technical and vocational education as well as higher education. Additionally the plan consolidates all education activities within the context on national education policy and commitments that the government has made to both international and regional forums.

World Bank is playing an important part in loaning the government of Lesotho money for education in the country. While other international organisations and agencies such as USAID, UNESCO, UNICEF, IRISH AID, British Council, Save the Children UK and many others have assisted in different forms. For example, in the building of schools, provision of bursaries to children, and in school feeding programmes.

Education policy players are Ministry of Education Officials from different sectors. From ECCD sector to higher education. Curriculum developers and Examination Council also form part of the team which develops policy and plans. Civil Society has only been represented in a very limited way. School Proprietors also contribute towards policy development. All the sectors are consulted and contribute their views before and during the process of policy development.

Civil Society

Civil Society or NGOs are linked to grassroots and most of them are representative of Basotho at both village and national levels. However, most of them are still very weak in terms of demanding their involvement in policy development process and making their voice heard. One of the reasons being that they have been working individually despite the existence of the umbrella body called Lesotho Council of NGOs which has not been much active in the area of education. The newly formalized NGO Coalition on the rights of the Child (NGOC) is very keen to address education issues in a much meaningful and

consolidated manner. It works at national level to coordinate NGOC, CBOs, FBO as well as government departments which work with and for children.

CEF Intervention

With the assistance of CEF and Save the Children UK, the NGOC has developed a proposal with a three year plan. It has further developed an implementation plan for the year 2003 and in December a strategic plan for the next two years will also be developed. CEF has helped a great deal in the process of the NGOC formalization. It has funded the establishment of the office and the NGOC Director is now on board to facilitate the coordination role of the NGOC. The main education priority of the coalition is to advocate for access and inclusion of vulnerable children such as orphans, children with disabilities, children in the street, herd boys, children in detention and teenage mothers.

Although the two year strategic plan is yet to be developed, the NGOC envisage working with the Ministry of Education through the Ministry's EFA committee to push their course forward. The coalition is also intending to approach school proprietors and lobby them to fully accept and support free education programme. On the other hand it will be sensitizing the community at grass roots about EFA and the role of the community in education.