

# SUCCESSFUL DECENTRALIZATION: THE ROLES AND CHALLENGES OF DEOs IN LESOTHO

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## List of abbreviations

<b>ACL</b>	Anglican Church of Lesotho
<b>AME</b>	African Methodist Epistological Church
<b>DA</b>	district administrator
<b>DEO</b>	District Education Office
<b>DRT</b>	District Resource Teacher
<b>ECCD</b>	early childhood and care development
<b>EPDF</b>	Education Programme Development Fund
<b>EO</b>	education officer
<b>FPE</b>	Free Primary Education
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>GER</b>	gross enrolment ratio
<b>HRO</b>	human resources officer
<b>IFMS</b>	Integrated Financial Management System
<b>JST</b>	Joint Scheming and Testing
<b>LEC</b>	Lesotho Evangelical Church
<b>LSL</b>	Lesotho loti
<b>MoET</b>	Ministry of Education and Training
<b>NER</b>	net enrolment ratio
<b>PSC</b>	Public Service Commission
<b>RCC</b>	Roman Catholic Church
<b>SEO</b>	Senior Education Officer
<b>SMC</b>	school management committee
<b>TSC</b>	Teacher Service Commission
<b>TSD</b>	Teacher Service Department

## Executive summary

In recent years, decentralization has become a popular way of reforming educational management. Many countries with different characteristics have decided to take the path of decentralization in a number of areas, including education. Regardless of the form these reforms take, they are often implemented with the belief that decentralization will lead to a more effective administration and schools of higher quality.

However, this has not automatically been the case, and decentralization has created new challenges. It is therefore essential to carry out an in-depth analysis of the implementation of these policies, so as to examine their main successes and challenges, and identify strategies for their successful implementation.

IIEP has been conducting research for that purpose since 2002, with a focus on the impact of decentralization policies on local level actors, in particular the District Education Office (DEO). This actor is indeed in a position to play a strategic role in a decentralized framework, as it interacts with the Ministry of Education, with schools, and with the district level, and as it is responsible for implementing the education policy and monitoring its quality in the district.

In-depth research was conducted by IIEP in 2008–2009 in three countries of Eastern and Southern Africa with different decentralization policies: Kenya, Lesotho, and Uganda.

The research aimed to examine the roles and challenges of DEOs in these different contexts. It focused on four areas playing a key role in the effectiveness of this office, namely staff management, the management of financial resources, quality monitoring, and the relationship of the DEO with the central authorities and the local administration.

The research was mainly qualitative, interviews being carried out with a wide range of actors at the local level. The research was coordinated by IIEP and implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in Lesotho and the National University of Lesotho. The research was conducted with the support of the Education Programme Development Fund (EPDF) of Global Partnership for Education (GPE), formerly the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI).

The national team prepared a set of four monographs on the DEOs and this national synthesis, which analyses the main lessons learned from this research in Lesotho.

The range of activities of the DEO had widened these past years with the transfer of some areas of responsibilities to the district level such as early childhood and distance education. This had strengthened the position of the DEO as a key actor in overseeing the implementation of the education policy in the district.

However, the research established that a lack of staff, inadequate transport facilities for the difficult terrain of many districts, and occasional urgent time-consuming tasks delegated by the central ministry, had hampered the effective role of the DEO in the implementation of their tasks. In particular, DEO-level actors insisted that their supervision and monitoring tasks had been affected.

Despite these constraints, DEOs were found to be active and taking initiatives in certain areas of their work, for instance in providing pedagogical support to schools. A key initiative to fulfil this role, observed in several districts, had been to establish resource centres, where staff from the DEO could meet with groups of teachers on a regular basis. At these meetings, Education Officers (EOs) and District Resource Teachers could advise teachers on problems they encounter in schools, and teachers who had developed an expertise in certain areas were invited to share their achievements with their colleagues.

In terms of recruitment, deployment, and management of teachers and principals, school management committees (SMCs) and the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) played a more important role than the DEO, which substantially weakened the ability of DEOs to address staff and professional issues in schools. The research established that the power of the DEO in these areas was particularly limited in private schools.

At the DEO, effective management of staff by the Senior Education Officers (SEOs) was thwarted by strong control of the ministry level in the functioning of the DEO. Not only were all DEO employees appointed by the ministry, but most DEO level staff felt that their direct supervisors were at the ministry level and opted to report to them as opposed to senior DEO personnel.

As for relations with the local authorities, at the time of the research, in all but one of the districts, there was little collaboration between DEOs and district administrators. The main reasons for this were the lack of mechanisms and structures for such collaboration, poor communication between offices, and a lack of a clear understanding of each other's role. When asked about their relations with the ministry level, a common request among staff at the DEO level was for more regular contact and communication with the centre, as the planned monthly meetings with ministry staff did not always take place.

The present weak position of the DEO in Lesotho indicates that the core constraint resided in the lack of recognition of the strategic role that district education staff can play in shaping national policy, and supporting and monitoring local action.



# Introduction

Decentralization is a complex set of policies, which have an impact on a plurality of actors. Different governments have implemented different models of decentralization, but mainly with the focus on increasing management autonomy for local governments, local education offices, and schools. There has been much discussion about the origins of these reforms in different countries, but there has been rather little field research on their local implementation, on the constraints which local actors face and on the strategies to overcome these constraints.

There is a growing need to understand the process of decentralization with a focus on its implementation. Against this background, UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) has been conducting in-depth research on this topic since 2002, with the aim of answering a key question: what role should the state play to ensure the successful implementation of the decentralization policy? Specific attention was thus given to two main actors responsible for implementing education policies and monitoring education quality at local level, namely the school and the District Education Office (DEO).

While an intensive research programme had been carried out by IIEP on these two actors in four francophone countries of West Africa in 2002–2004 (Lugaz and De Grauwe, 2010), a new research programme was implemented in 2008–2009 in three Eastern and Southern African countries, characterized by different models of decentralization – Kenya, Lesotho and Uganda – so as to examine the mandate of DEOs in these different contexts and the challenges they face in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The research was coordinated by IIEP and conducted with the support of the Education Programme Development Fund (EPDF) of Global Partnership for Education (GPE), formerly the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI).

## The research programme

### ***Three countries with different models of decentralization***

The three countries, Kenya, Lesotho, and Uganda, were purposely chosen to be included in the research programme. The intention was to examine the differential impact of contrasting decentralization policies. Kenya, Lesotho, and Uganda, while being different countries, are sufficiently similar for such a comparison to make sense: their administrative structures and traditions are strongly influenced by their colonial past, which is partly shared, and they have similar economic and social challenges. However, the models of decentralization in each of these countries are varied. In Kenya, there is a mixture of trends (deconcentration, devolution, and school autonomy); Uganda has opted for a policy of devolution, while Lesotho is characterized by both deconcentration and devolution. Comparing the experiences of countries with different policies contributes to identifying key conditions and lessons that can be used to improve education policies and systems. However, the purpose of this research project was not to identify the 'best' model of decentralization, but rather to detect good practices for building a better system.

Specifically, the research aimed to:

- identify the different models of decentralization that countries in Eastern and Southern Africa have implemented;
- examine the constraints and challenges faced by the DEO under the different models;
- identify good practices and, on this basis, the strategies that could accompany decentralization policies to increase their chances of successful implementation.

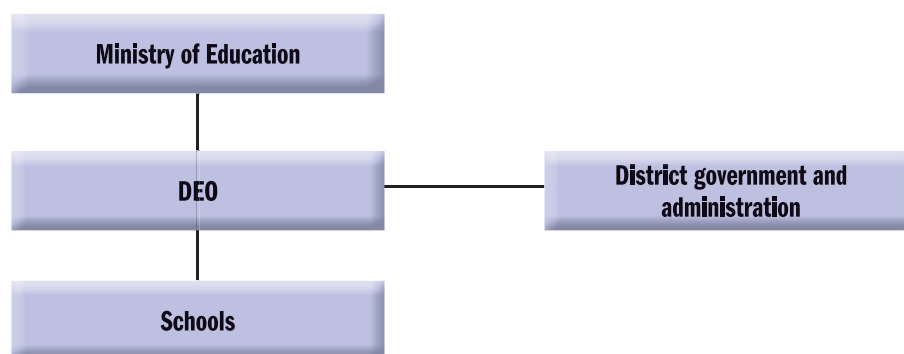
### **A focus on the DEO**

The research focuses on one actor, namely the DEO, for three specific reasons. *Firstly*, the DEO is in principle a strategic actor in a decentralized context because of its position at the local level:

- It is the link between the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and schools: as it is the administrative unit closest to schools, it is responsible for implementing national policies and monitoring school quality while at the same time informing the ministry of what goes on in schools.
- It also links the district administration (the municipality, other district offices, etc.) to the Ministry and to the schools as in *Figure 1*.

*Secondly*, most literature focusing on decentralization has paid little attention to the role of the DEO. *Thirdly*, the role of the DEO changes significantly between the different models of decentralization (especially between deconcentration and devolution), which strengthens the comparative aspect of this research.

**Figure 1. The DEO in a strategic pivotal position in the decentralization framework**



### **Four key themes of analysis**

While district offices are in charge of several domains, their effectiveness in three particular fields is fundamental to the success of the governance reform: staff management, the management of financial resources, and quality monitoring. Their relationship with the central authorities and the local administration has an impact on its effectiveness in these three areas. The research was therefore aimed at analysing the DEO's action on these four key issues by addressing a set of questions under each theme.

The themes are as follows:

1. **Quality monitoring.** One key task of DEOs is to monitor the quality of schools. The supervision visits are the main tool accompanied by other monitoring tools such as examinations, indicator systems, and the analysis of school evaluation reports. The effectiveness of supervision depends on several issues such as planning of work, visits to schools, reports, and follow-ups. The questions asked under this theme were as follows:
  - How do local offices monitor the quality of the education system and of the schools in their area? How effective are school supervision and support services? What information on schools and what indicators are available? How does this information guide the intervention by the local office?
2. **Staff management.** The autonomy of the DEO in management of its own staff is a key issue in debates around decentralization. Staff management includes staff recruitment, deployment, development, and evaluation. Teacher management is also important in a decentralized context. The role of the DEO in these two fields was examined in order to respond to the following questions:

- What autonomy do heads of local offices have in the management of their own staff and in teacher management? What is the profile and what are the competencies of local education officials? What part do they play in recruitment, deployment, and evaluation of teachers?
3. **Management of financial resources.** The distribution of financial and material resources from the central level to other local levels, the availability of these resources at the local level, and the actors' autonomy in using them are core aspects of decentralization. Decentralization of financial resources management is commonly supposed to make resource utilization more efficient and appropriate.
- What financial resources are available to local offices? What are the sources? How are central funds distributed between offices? How are district funds distributed between schools? For what purposes are these funds used and who controls their use and their impact?
4. **Relations with national and local authorities.** While studying the role of the DEO in the decentralized system, it is important to examine the relationships between the DEO and the national and local authorities:
- What is the role of the DEO in policy-making? How does exchange of information happen between the DEO and the ministry? What is the role of the local authority in education and what are the areas of collaboration between the local administrators and the DEO? How does the DEO collaborate with other actors in the district for education management?

## Research methodology

In order to find answers to the above set of questions in the case of Lesotho, a research project was implemented in 2008–2009, in collaboration with the MoET and the National University of Lesotho.

The fieldwork was carried out by a research team led by a senior researcher, under the overall coordination of IIEP. In Lesotho, Pulane Lefoka from the National University of Lesotho coordinated the research, in collaboration with Mathabo Tsepa from the same institution.

Four DEOs were studied respectively in Kenya, Lesotho and Uganda, selected based on various criteria as outlined below:

- (1) In Kenya, the districts were selected based on several characteristics including geographical and topographical, population size, number of schools, and economic activities;
- (2) Districts in Lesotho were selected based on population size;
- (3) In Uganda, the criteria used were regional representation, economic and geographical factors, and the representation of newly created districts under the decentralization system.

The research was primarily qualitative, consisting of in-depth interviews with key actors. These included the DEO head, supervisors, accountants, human resources officers, school principals, teachers, and locally elected officers/councillors. The objective of interviewing a wide range of people was to get as complete information as possible on the mandate of the DEO and the challenges it faces in a context of decentralization. The research provides quantitative data wherever possible to validate some arguments.

After an initial pilot exercise organized by IIEP in Lesotho in November 2008, the field visits were carried out in each country during the first half of 2009. Monographs were drafted by the research teams on each DEO. A total of 12 monographs and three national syntheses, as well as one comparative regional analysis (De Grauwe and Lugaz, 2011) were

prepared on this basis and discussed during the Uganda regional Policy Seminar organized by IIEP, in collaboration with the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports, from 10 to 12 February 2010.

### **This booklet**

This document analyses the information collected in Lesotho through the field visits conducted in the Phuthiatsama, Mohokare, Senqu, and Maliba-Matso DEOs.<sup>1</sup> After this introduction, *Chapter 1* presents the profile of the country and of the four districts studied within this research, while *Chapter 2* synthesizes the lessons learned concerning the mandate and challenges faced by DEOs.

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1. The names of the DEOs visited by the researchers have been replaced with fictitious names to maintain anonymity.

# 1. Presentation of Lesotho and of the four DEOs studied during the research

## 1.1 Presentation of Lesotho

### **General information**

Lesotho is completely landlocked inside the Republic of South Africa and has an area of just over 30,000 square kilometres. It is a very mountainous country, which is divided into four ecological zones: Lowlands, Foothills, the Senqu River Valley, and Mountains. There is one District Education Office (DEO) in each of the 10 districts. Land demarcations, population size, number of schools, and economic activities are the major features that distinguish one district from another. With the exception of one district, which is purely mountainous, other districts have at least three ecological zones, namely: lowlands, foothills, and the mountains.

Lesotho ranked among the countries with the lowest Medium Human Development Index in 2009 and had a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of \$466 in 2008. The population in the country is essentially rural and the share of agriculture in the GDP was 8 per cent in 2008. The average annual population growth has decreased in Lesotho since 2005 to reach 1% in 2008, owing to the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Below are some of the general statistical figures for Lesotho (*Table 1*).

**Table 1. General statistics on Lesotho**

Population (in millions) - 2008	2.12
Annual population growth rate (%) - 2008	1.01
Population in rural areas (%) - 2008	75.00
Adult literacy rate ages 15 and older (%) - 2010	89.60
Life expectancy at birth (years) - 2008	46.00
GDP per capita (current USD) - 2008	465.69
GDP per capita growth (%) - 2008	4.34
Agriculture, value added (% GDP) - 2008	8.01

Source: Author's calculations based on World Bank Indicators, 2011.

### **Education system**

In Lesotho, more than two-thirds of the population are literate and the adult literacy rate, nearly 90 per cent in 2010,<sup>2</sup> is relatively high (*Table 1*). Concerning access to education at primary level, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) increased from 106 in 1999 to about 120 per cent in 2008 (*Table 2*). This increase is linked to the implementation of the Free Primary Education (FPE) programme in 2000. Components of the FPE programme in Lesotho include the school feeding programme, which ensures that all learners are provided with a meal at school and a utility grant, of approximately LSL 8 (Lesotho loti) per pupil (about \$1), provided to all schools to cover school costs such as electricity or water bills.

2. Data collected by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics using the Global Age-Specific Literacy Projections Model.

**Table 2. Evolution of gross and net enrolment rates in primary education in Lesotho, 1999–2008**

Years	Gross Enrolments			Net Enrolments			Pupil-teacher ratios
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	
1999	102.3	110.7	<b>106.5</b>	56.6	63.8	<b>60.2</b>	44:1
2000	118.1	122.6	<b>120.3</b>	78.7	85.3	<b>82.0</b>	48:1
2001	120.6	123.2	<b>121.9</b>	79.5	85.4	<b>82.7</b>	47:1
2002	122.7	124.9	<b>123.8</b>	81.1	87.0	<b>84.0</b>	47:1
2003	123.8	125.9	<b>124.9</b>	82.0	88.1	<b>85.0</b>	46:1
2004	126.2	127.0	<b>126.6</b>	81.0	86.0	<b>83.0</b>	44:1
2005	126.0	126.3	<b>126.1</b>	80.6	85.7	<b>83.1</b>	42:1
2006	127.3	127.5	<b>127.4</b>	81.6	86.3	<b>83.9</b>	41:1
2007	120.8	120.2	<b>120.5</b>	79.5	83.4	<b>81.4</b>	37:1
2008	119.1	118.8	<b>118.7</b>	79.7	83.8	<b>81.8</b>	35:1

Source: Ministry of Education and Training of Lesotho (MoET), 2008a.

However, as shown in *Table 2*, from 1999 to 2008, the net enrolment ratio (NER) for female learners was higher than that for male learners. More recently, there has also been a significant increase in secondary enrolment with GER standing at 40% in 2007 (*Table 3*).

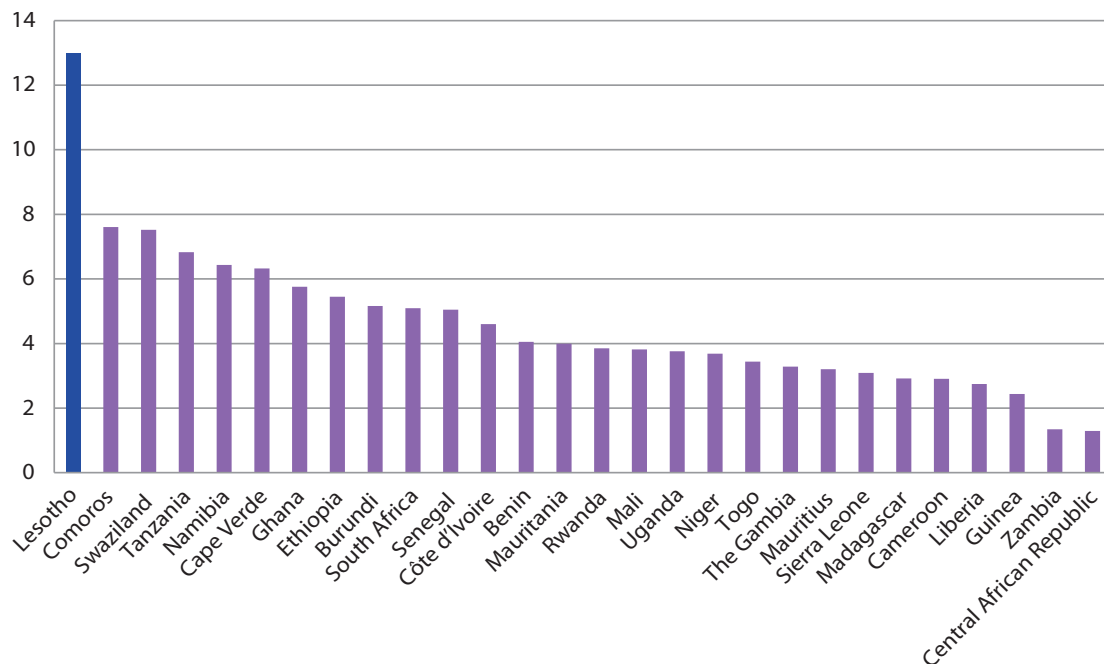
**Table 3. Evolution of GER and NER in secondary education in Lesotho**

Gross enrolment ratio secondary (GER), %		Net enrolment ratio secondary (NER), %	
1999	2007	2002	2007
31	40	21	24

Source: MoET, 2006a.

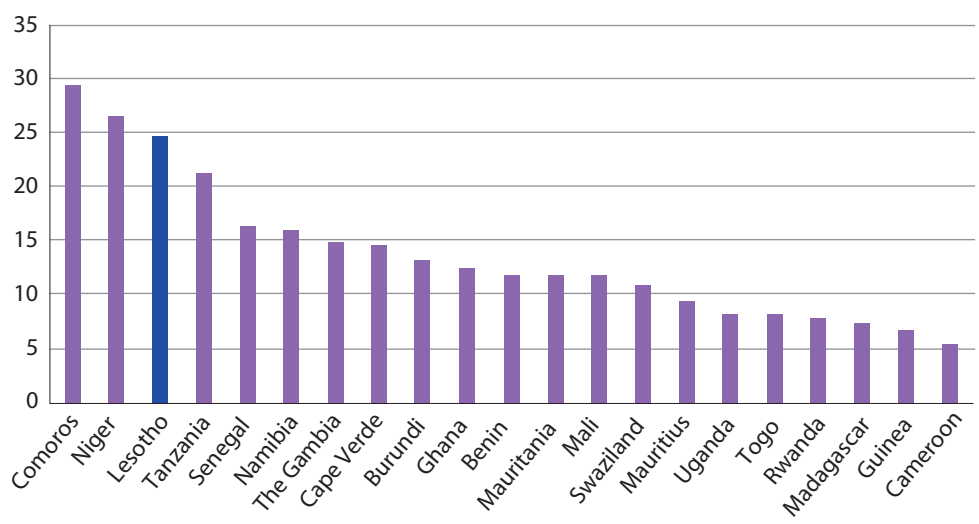
Public spending on education in Lesotho accounted for about 13 per cent of the GDP in 2008 (World Bank, 2011). As *Figures 2* and *3* reveal, Lesotho's expenditure on education is amongst the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Figure 2. Total public spending on education (% of GDP) in 2008**



Source: Author's calculations based on World Bank Indicators, 2011.

**Figure 3. Expenditure per student in primary education (% of GDP per capita) in 2008**

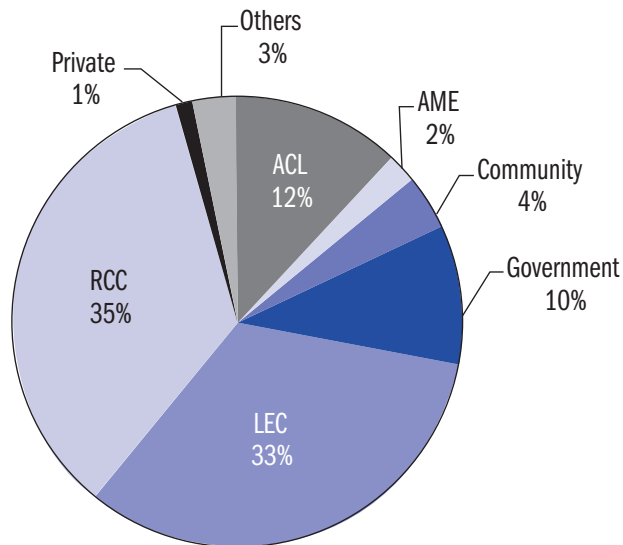


Source: Author's calculations based on World Bank Indicators, 2011.

Lesotho has a large number of education providers, both governmental and non-governmental. The non-government schools are owned by private businesses, churches and even communities. Figure 4 shows that a large percentage of primary schools are owned by churches.



**Figure 4. Percentage distribution of registered primary schools by proprietor in 2007**



Notes: ACL – Anglican Church of Lesotho; AME – African Methodist Epistological Church; LEC – Lesotho Evangelical Church; RCC – Roman Catholic Church.

Source: MoET, 2007.

### **Decentralization policy in Lesotho**

Lesotho became an independent constitutional monarchy from England in 1966. In 1993, a new constitution was adopted, anchoring the principle of local self-administration. The implementation of this reform was a long process and it was only in 2005 that the first local election was held, after the amendment of the 1997 Local Government Act.

The current government considers the introduction of local government as a ‘pivotal strategy to implementing the poverty reduction strategy and thus the realization of the national vision’ (Government of Lesotho, 2004).

The ongoing decentralization reform in Lesotho is characterized by both devolution and deconcentration. Devolution led to district governments elected by the population, and deconcentration brought about the establishment of a district administration.

#### **Positive opinions of the decentralization process in Mohokare District**

Overall, the analysis of the functioning of the DEO in a context of decentralization in Mohokare shows somewhat mixed feelings on the theme of decentralization. On the one hand, there is a shared belief that decentralization is an appropriate policy for Lesotho. The district administrator (DA) for instance said that, ‘the decentralization policy is the best policy for our people. For a long time, the central government has tried to reach out to our people. Decentralization allows the people to conceive their own projects and the people start seeing the fruits of this.’ He argues that parliament, although they represent constituencies, cannot play this role because they are overloaded and have specific interests.

Concerning decentralization in the education sector, the major change consists of the replacement of the district inspectorates – the only MoET staff based in the district – by the DEOs, which have more responsibilities and therefore more staff. Concretely, responsibilities in education are shared as follows:

- At the central level, the mission of the MoET 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’ (MoET, 2005).



- At the district level, the DEO is in charge of the provision of quality education; it must also ensure access to education, implementation of education policy, and the proper management of schools fund.
- The DA or district councils represent the central government at the local level. They are responsible for overseeing the implementation of national policies in the district. The power of district councils has been reinforced with the devolution process. They have some autonomy in decisions concerning land use and are expected to receive more decision-making power in education.
- At the school level, the management of schools and equipment has to be done by principals and teachers. The board of governors or the school management committees (SMCs) are responsible for the recruitment of teachers, along with the central ministry.

## 1.2 The districts studied during this research

Four DEOs were studied in Lesotho in the framework of this research: Phuthiatsama, Mohokare, Senqu, and Maliba-Matso.

There are disparities in all the districts with regard to economic activities and to their levels of development. In addition, while Lesotho is known to be a homogeneous nation, there are pockets of ethnic groups in some districts. In particular, the Phuthiatsama district has Indians while Maliba-Matso and Senqu respectively have pockets of Batlokoa, Bakhalahali and Bathepu, and Xhosas and Baphuthi. In all districts, teaching at all levels of the education system is conducted in only two languages: English and Sesotho. *Table 4* presents the differences in terms of population size by district.

**Table 4. Population size of the four districts**

Districts	Population
Phuthiatsama	300,000
Mohokare	436,000
Senqu	120,502
Maliba-Matso	129,137

*Source:* Monographs from Lesotho.

As mentioned previously, primary and secondary schools in Lesotho are owned by various education providers, including the government, churches, businesses and even communities. Technically, the role of the DEO remains the same for all primary schools regardless of proprietorship. However, since some of the non-governmental schools have not implemented the fee-free primary education policy, the DEOs are less involved in their supervision and monitoring activities. Monitoring beyond classroom observation may include, for instance, monitoring the implementation of the school feeding programme and of the use of funds transferred by the government to schools to compensate for the abolition of school fees.

In practice, learners are not restricted to attending schools in their own districts or catchment areas. The level of mobility of learners from district to district is very high. Learners may choose schools that appear to be performing well, especially in national examinations. Parents being transferred for work, herd boys being hired to look after livestock, and HIV and AIDS – which causes children to be orphaned, to have to care for sick parents and/or to move closer to medical facilities – are all examples of factors contributing to high mobility in the Lesotho education system.

## 2. Roles and challenges of DEOs in Lesotho: Main lessons learned from the research

This section presents the main lessons learned from the research conducted in four districts education offices (DEOs)<sup>3</sup> of Lesotho.

The chapter begins with a brief presentation of the structure, role, and functions of the DEO, documented during the research period. It then analyses the main mandate and the challenges faced by the DEO within the context of decentralization in the education system. The analysis is done along four main themes, which are:

- quality monitoring,
- staff management,
- financial management,
- relations with local and national authorities.

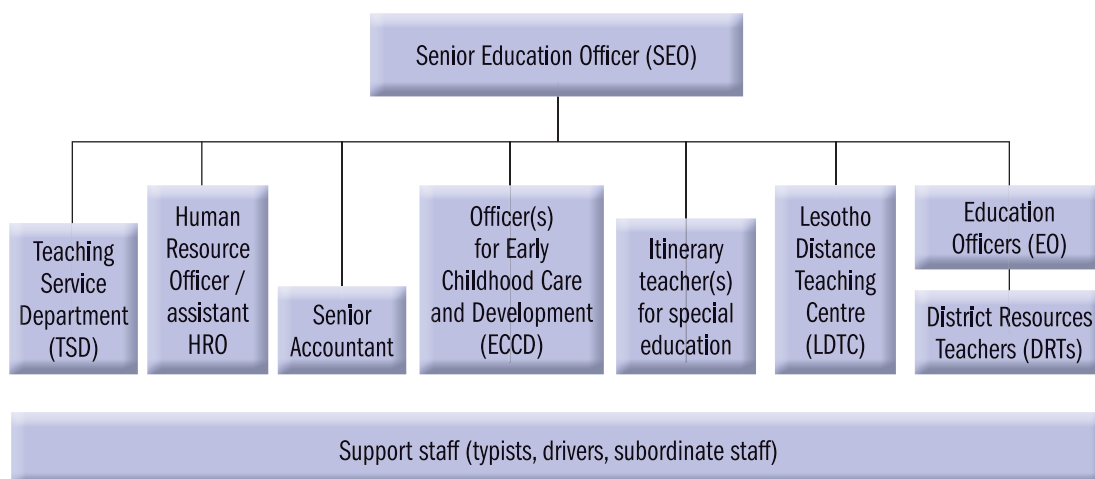
Finally, the conclusion presents an overview of the responsibilities and difficulties experienced by the DEO with the implementation of decentralization policies in Lesotho.

### 2.1 Presentation of the DEO

#### **Structure of the DEO and the responsibilities of the different actors**

Overall, the interviewees met with during the field studies of the four districts envisaged the roles of the DEO as provision of quality education, ensuring access to education and fostering efficiency in the management of education. The critical element of the role of the DEO is however to monitor quality in the school system, through supervision of schools. In this context, the DEO has to draw plans, facilitate communication and disseminate information among stakeholders. DEOs in all four districts are similar to the structure presented in *Figure 5*.

**Figure 5. Organizational structure of the DEO in Lesotho**



Source: District monographs of Lesotho.

The responsibilities of several of the positions shown in *Figure 5* were established as follows:

3. The terminology 'DEO' will be used throughout in this document when referring to the district office; while SEO (senior education officer) will be used to refer to the head of the office.

1. The SEO heads the DEO and reports directly to the Chief Inspectorate of the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET).
2. The human resources officer (HRO) represents employees in the DEO.
3. The Teacher Service Department (TSD) deals with human resource matters related to teachers, in particular process payments and leaves.
4. The senior accountant manages the financial resources allocated to the DEO.
5. Education officers (EOs) (equivalent to inspectors) are responsible for quality monitoring through supervision and pedagogical support. They report directly to the SEO.
6. The Officers for Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) oversee pre-school education, recruit teachers for reception class, and equip reception class teachers with necessary skills to pursue their education.
7. The itinerant teacher(s) for special education handle the special education section for schools.
8. The Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre provides basic education through correspondence and visits to 'learning posts'<sup>4</sup> and administers basic literacy and numeracy lessons. Officers working in this unit also prepare learners to sit for the primary and secondary examinations and the Cambridge Overseas Learning Examinations.

#### **Reception of the DEO in Mohokare District by school principals**

Discussions with the school principals showed that they were not well aware of the specific tasks performed by the DEO and of the recent change in this regard. Two of the principals indeed commented that, *'The office is very new to us. We don't understand their role'*. There were wide differences of opinion between the different school principals.

Three were quite negative when commenting on the role played by the DEO, while one was much more positive. The difference could be explained by the different proprietorship which characterizes these four schools. The negative judgements came from the three non-government schools, namely two church schools and one community school, while the one government school among the four offered the more positive point of view. The three non-government schools have also decided that they will continue to charge school fees, despite the national policy to abolish these fees. This undoubtedly helps to explain the lack of interest shown by the DEO, which these schools complain about. The principal of the community school was in this regard the most critical and explicit: *'My school is neglected. I don't see how the DEO is connected to my school. The government is not doing anything for my school. It seems as if we are being punished for not having accepted the fee-free policy'*.

A somewhat more positive response came from the principal of the public school visited. She said, *'When this office was set up [i.e. in 2005], we were told to get in contact with the DEO. They helped us in processing newly assigned teachers. The process is quicker now than before. When we have teachers' problems, we can go to them. We were also told that we could get grants'*. Precisely because the school gets these funds, they need to make financial reports on their use and this intensifies the contacts between the public schools and the DEO. For the non-government schools, the rare times they enter in contact with the DEO is when they demand permission for excursions and when they ask for an officer from the DEO to come and inspect a teacher who wants to be promoted.

Units such as the ECCD and the LTDC are additions made to the DEO as a result of decentralization, when these were moved from the central to the district level for better service delivery. Staff in these units report to the SEO, and, at times, to their superiors in the ministry, which – as will be presented later – creates confusion in the lines of authority. All districts also have district resource teachers (DRTs) who work in the schools on a day-to-day basis, and report to EOs. While there is a TSD at central level in the MoET,

4. A learning post is a place where learners, mainly headboys or shepherds, gather for evening classes. It is made up of a cluster of villages and there is a facilitator. The learners generally meet at the facilitator's residence.

there is also a TSD at district level, which is part of the DEO. However, the Teaching Service Commission (TSC), in charge of teacher recruitment, is based at central level and it may intervene at the district level in the teacher recruitment process through the TSD.

Other specific services provided by the DEO include the Bursary Office, the decentralized management of supplies for schools (school calendars and syllabuses), and dissemination of information from headquarters.

Subject advisers are responsible for supervising secondary schools. These units are not a part of the DEO. Supervision of secondary schools used to be (and still is in some districts) a responsibility of the central ministry. They still report to the Chief Inspectorate headquartered in the ministry.

#### **Lack of available staff in Maliba-Matso DEO**

One of the major challenges in the Maliba-Matso DEO is instability of staff. Staff either spend most of the time out-of-office and in the capital city or accept several posts to the extent that one of the interviewees indicated that *'officers spend more time travelling between home and the districts than being in offices'*. A concrete suggestion was that the central ministry should consider employing people whose homes are in the same district to ensure that the services are provided effectively.

The principals of secondary schools observed that education officers are overloaded and that there is a shortage of staff because some posts have been vacant for a long time, and it appeared to be difficult to fill the positions of the officers who have resigned, been redeployed to other districts, or absconded.

#### **Number of staff**

Any effective education system requires a good pool of professionals to provide services. A common feature in all the DEOs was related to staff profiles. Each DEO is supposed to have a pool of 25 employees serving in the various programmes and in administrative positions. However, with the exception of the Mohokare DEO, the major challenge in all districts is inadequate staffing (Table 5). It seems that, because it is located in the city, the Mohokare DEO is the only district without a shortage of staff. The lack of staff members in the other DEOs undermines

the proper functioning of the DEO, particularly with regards to the supervision of teaching and learning.

Failure to employ officers has had a negative impact on the most crucial roles of DEOs, namely quality monitoring of the education system. It would appear that the practice of visiting and monitoring schools is being abandoned because, as pointed out by one of the principals in Maliba-Matso DEO, *'Officers are virtually never available in the district'*.

The limited funding resources at the DEO have also blocked recruitment as the DEO budget is already under strain to cover the salaries of current personnel.

#### **Working conditions**

During the research it was observed that there are reasonable working conditions in the four DEOs. For example, each district has Education Resource Centres, which are well furnished, although the office space is very small. These resource centres have been introduced recently for teachers, supervisors, and subject advisers to meet on a regular basis and discuss various issues. All offices have telephone connection, computers, photocopying machines and vehicles.

However, some challenges remain; in some DEOs, the photocopier needs to be repaired, while in the majority of the DEOs, inadequate or unsuitable mode of transportation remains a challenge. At the Maliba-Matso DEO, in particular, the officers have to resort to hiring horses whenever they have to visit schools that are situated in the most difficult terrain, which sometimes are not budgeted for. Supervision of teaching and learning can be hampered by some of these problems.

**Table 5. Number of personnel by designation in the four DEOs**

Designation	Number of personnel by DEO			
	Phuthiatsama	Mohokare	Senqu	Maliba-Matso
SEO	1	1	1 (acting)	1 (acting)
Subject adviser	4	none	none	none
EOs	4	4	3	3
Senior Accountant	1	2	vacant	1
Bursary scheme	vacant	1	vacant	not mentioned
ECCD	3	1	1	vacant
DRTs	7	10	5	2
School Feeding Programme	1	1	vacant	not mentioned
TSD	vacant	-	1	not mentioned
HRO	vacant	1	1	missing
Typist/secretary	vacant	not mentioned	1	1
Reception	vacant	not mentioned	1	not mentioned
Clerk	1	not mentioned	vacant	not mentioned
Cleaner	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned	1
Attendant officer	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned	1

Source: Cases studies on DEOs in Lesotho.

#### ***Inadequate means of transport for the DEO in Senqu District***

All interviewees in Senqu mentioned transport as a major constraint. The problem according to the acting SEO is one of shortage of transport and/or drivers where transport is available. She concluded that since the purchase of vehicles was done at the central office, they didn't receive the model they had asked for. *'When we were eventually provided with two vehicles, those were not of the type we needed as they were both "singles" meaning they could only carry a driver and one official. The two vehicles are to serve all the field workers. We feel uncomfortable that we have "singles" and there is only one driver for the two vehicles'*.

The conditions in the DEO affect schools. The principals pointed out that a lack of transportation can cause shortages in terms of resources and materials and cheques can be delivered late because the office is not able to collect them on time. He explained, *'They do not distribute materials such as textbooks in time and we collect them ourselves'*. The principals felt there was a solution to the problem. The DEO should establish a small depot/call centre. The depot could be used for two purposes. Firstly the principals could collect textbooks and other technical subject materials. Secondly, the depot could be used for consultation and accessing information.

## **2.2 Quality monitoring**

### ***Supervision***

The central ministry expects supervision to improve the quality of education, which implies that the inspectorate should undertake regular and high quality inspections in all schools. In this context, inspections should help schools identify and prioritize necessary improvements in classroom practice, and school and resource management that will result in higher pupil achievement.



The research revealed that planning for supervision, which is important in determining the activities of the DEO, is a common phenomenon in all the DEOs that participated in the study. Analysis of documents from the DEO points to main types of supervision visits, namely:

- ‘Full inspection’: as the name suggests, this includes inspection of the whole school from checking lesson plans, scheme, and record of work done; actual classroom observations; and observations of school premises including toilets.
- ‘Management inspection’: this entails inspection of how management of financial and other resources is being carried out in the school.
- ‘Spot checking’: this is a visit in which the officers establish the extent to which schools are functioning and make sure that everything is in order. This type of visit is often made at the beginning of the school year.
- ‘Aspect inspections’: they focus on a particular aspect of the school and are done based on previous observations or complaints issued by either the school or the community.
- ‘Follow-up inspection’: this is done as a follow-up to previous inspection reports.

However, our interview data emphasized that mostly three types of inspections are carried out: full inspection, aspect inspections and spot checking.

#### **Resource centres set up by the DEO in Maliba-Matso District**

All principals see the DEO, popularly known as a resource centre, as a place where information and reading materials such as policy documents can be accessed. They felt it was unfortunate that there were no library facilities in this DEO. Perhaps this view is justified given that this district is far from the central ministry and accessing documents from the capital is therefore difficult. Although the DEO is situated in the Maliba-Matso town, the services of the office that concern the teachers are facilitated in the 10 centres that are strategically located in various parts of this district. It is in these centres where training on topical issues is run for teachers. Teachers have the opportunity to discuss and prepare tests together at the centre.

As mentioned previously, another feature of quality monitoring in Lesotho is the establishment of resource centres and the allocation of a cluster of schools to a particular centre. Each EO is allocated a centre to manage. The purpose of establishing centres is to enable the EOs and the DRTs to meet teachers more often, to discuss the problems that they may be experiencing and to suggest how to tackle them. At the centre, teachers who have expertise in certain areas have the opportunity to share with colleagues their achievements or help them solve problems they might be encountering in their teaching.

Teachers’ and EOs’ meetings, discussions, and collegiality are a significant feature of decentralization reforms in Lesotho. Presence of staff at the DEO focused on convening these meetings which ensure that schools can be supported locally particularly in assisting teachers and running capacity building workshops.

#### **Obstacle to school visits in Mohokare District**

One of the reasons why schools are not regularly visited in Mohokare District is that inspectors are regularly asked to do other work. In principle, their planning is as follows: Monday: visit preparation; Tuesday – Wednesday – Thursday: visits; Friday: report writing. However, all inspectors complained about the fact that they are regularly disturbed, especially by teachers, and that they need to pay attention to their demands. In addition, there are other unexpected responsibilities, which included recently the preparation of the festivities around the King’s birthday, which takes their time from their main tasks

It is mandatory for each DEO to engage in supervision through actual visits to schools. Regarding the number of supervision visits, the research established that there is a general dissatisfaction with the regularity of this exercise. In practice, the EOs are expected to undertake at least 10 full supervision and 20 aspect supervision visits per school per year. A number of

reasons are advanced for the failure to keep to this amount. While the main challenge is the lack of staff, other problems include the difficult terrain of some of the districts,

inadequate transport facilities and occasional time-consuming tasks delegated by the central ministry. As pointed out by one of the subject adviser's from Phutiatsama district, 'We have to drop planned activities and attend to the central ministry's demands'. While a number of strategies are employed to compensate for this discrepancy, supervision of quality monitoring is in practice marginalized.

As mentioned before, there are different types of supervision visits that the EOs are expected to carry out. All the DEOs claim to follow a 'clinical' supervision model when undertaking supervision of teacher instruction. Most significantly the model is aimed at helping teachers improve their teaching. However, the document used for inspection, developed by a team of experts from New Zealand, *Criteria for Inspection and Self-Evaluation: A Manual for Inspectors, Head teachers and School Managers* (MoET and Drake, 1993) appears to be too complex for supervisors. The EOs were trained on how to use the manual and they were responsible for training school principals but the research showed that the manual not only focused mainly on classroom supervision, it also appeared too technical for the officers. As mentioned by an EO, 'This instrument has some limitations. It looks mainly at classroom instruction. It doesn't include parents' involvement or facilities. When we are in a school, it is best to look at everything, but the instrument does not allow us to do so' (EO, Mohokare DEO).

### **Reporting and follow-up**

The analysis on reporting after school visits indicates that the DEO staff regarded this exercise as mandatory. The Phuthiatsama interviewees shared the view that reporting adds value to the process for all the stakeholders. The DEO staff also indicated that reports are presented verbally to SEOs immediately after supervision visits and that, in many cases, though not always, the written documents are shared with all stakeholders, including school principals, once they have been produced.

#### **Confusion in Mohokare DEO regarding school visits**

Interviewees in Mohokare District noted that there is a lack of clarity about the norms under which inspections should operate. The acting SEO mentioned that, 'We are supposed to give every school a full inspection at least once every three years and the norm for the number of school visits by each inspector is 40'. According to two other inspectors, 'Each inspector should visit 30 schools in a year', and 'The expectation for this year is that each DEO will undertake 26 aspect inspections (of one day) and 16 full inspections (of three days)'.

At the same time, there is also a staffing norm related to the number of inspectors per district: each DEO has the right to four inspectors. As was pointed out, this norm is in contradiction with the expectation that each school will receive a full inspection every three years, as four inspectors cannot do this many alone.

A second source of confusion is the discrepancy of opinions between the principals and the education officers. The EOs claimed that they generally succeed in visiting some 30 schools per year, or more. However, the impression we got from our discussion with the four principals was different. Three of the four principals complained harshly about the absence of inspections in their schools. The comments by the principals of the two church schools are particularly blunt: 'I am a teacher in this school since 1996 and a principal since 2000 and I didn't see a single inspector in my school. There was a problem in my school and I came to this office to ask for support from the DRT. But the DRTs told us they could not come; they had too many things to do. I don't know the reason why they did not come. I even wrote to the office but the DRTs said their superior told them there were other priorities' (Principal).

#### **Following up on the implementation of recommendations in Phuthiatsama District**

As pointed out by the DEO, the schools respond differently to the inputs provided by the supervisors. Some schools implement the recommendations and improve their work, others never change their practice, and some may implement the recommendations at first but then relapse. The DEO gave an example of time-tabling problems the district once experienced. In practice, teachers tend to schedule all subjects to be taught, but never teach all of them. He said, 'Most schools were experiencing this problem and some still have not resolved it, even though all schools have to teach all subjects. Teachers tend to budget time for all subjects that are offered at the primary school but will teach those in which they have expertise or feel comfortable teaching'. The DEO provided advice on how to time-table appropriately and monitored this in subsequent visits to the school.

In this same district, those responsible for supervision visits indicated that the follow-up activities are of various types and include workshops, returning to the school to study the extent to which schools have implemented the recommendations, and helping schools that seem to be struggling. The SEO indicated that the DRTs and EOs may jointly have to follow up on schools that are found to be struggling and find out whether what had been agreed upon is actually being addressed.

However the school principals who participated in the interviews across all the DEOs expressed that the written reports produced after school visits by the EOs are not disseminated at the school level. Data also reveal that though follow-up of supervision visits is valued by all, in practice, and across all DEOs, this activity is rarely undertaken.

### **Other monitoring tools**

#### **Examination results as a multi-purpose monitoring tool in Senqu District**

The practice at the Senqu DEO is to analyse the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) results at school and district levels. The DEO analyses examinations by centre and by proprietor. One secondary school principal commented that, *'There are lists for all other schools as well, which provides us an opportunity as individual schools to compare ourselves with other schools, or compare the present results with those of the previous year'*. The primary school principals indicated that the comparison provides them with an opportunity to compete amongst themselves. Most significantly, the purpose is to study how one school has performed, discuss whether a school has improved and, as pointed out by one principal, *'Engage in an in-depth analysis of performance and have an opportunity to reflect how this was achieved'*.

Another equally important benefit of analysing the examination results is to determine subject performance by schools. The purpose is to help schools identify teachers who need the most support from the DRTs to focus on the identified subject. The analysis also helps the DEO to design subject workshops that will address identified problems.

In practice, examinations and other similar assessment tools are the most frequently used ways to monitor performance. The analysis of these examinations intends to identify poorly performing schools and assist them in particular. Furthermore, particularly in the Phuthiatsama DEO, analysis of school results helps to motivate learners, teachers, and schools that perform extremely well through the offering of trophies at district-level celebrations awarded for high academic achievement. Another equally important form of monitoring is Joint Scheming and Testing (JST), which is carried out at the centres across all the DEOs. This exercise provides an opportunity for collegiality among teachers in the different centres as they share expertise and experiences. In practice, teachers guided by the EOs and the DRTs jointly plan and set internal tests. Bringing together various

stakeholders such as teachers and district level officials through the JST system is in itself a support strategy to teachers.

#### **Self-evaluation practices encouraged by the DEO in Phuthiatsama District**

The DEO sets up the training of the principals on how to come up with a development plan. The plans serve as a guide for schools' activities and provide schools with a means of self-evaluation. One of the primary school principals said, *'In my school I sit with teachers according to their subject areas. After meeting with members of staff we critique each other's programme. Then we draw up a school plan, which is a compilation of each grade's plan. We submit the consolidated school plan to the DEO. The DEO will advise us about things/activities. We then finalize our plans'*.

The idea of school self-evaluation appeared to be known in all four districts. However, putting the theory into practice presents some challenges. In some DEOs, primary school teachers were aware of the idea. In some DEOs, there is an expectation that schools should draw their own action plans, which should facilitate self-evaluation. The questions that DEOs then tend to ask when visiting the school is on the extent to which schools have been able to implement plans, what has been

achieved, what was not achieved, and then provide reasons for failure to put plans into practice. In this context, schools are in a position to reflect on their plans and subsequently achievements or failures.



However, the level of understanding of the concept of school self-evaluation, and of what is expected, varies among the various schools. It seems to be clearer at the secondary school level. Although the principals did not follow the same procedures as those in the primary school level, several of those which the researchers met with indicated that the requirement is to plan and to assess their own progress specifically by looking into areas of weakness. It was therefore observed that to some secondary school teachers this was the norm, while in primary school many principals met with have never engaged in such an exercise.

There seems to be a need to familiarize all schools with the expectations and the benefits that are likely to accrue from engaging in self-evaluation, regardless of whether they are primary or secondary.

#### ***Underutilization of alternative monitoring tools in Mohokare District***

Alternative tools such as examination systems, indicators, and school development plans are not used by the Mohokare DEO for quality monitoring. There are various reasons behind this. Firstly, the existing tools have some inherent weaknesses. The Educational Management Information System (EMIS) for instance does not feed back data by schools to the district. Secondly, there are financial factors. One officer claims that, *'We used to have the mock exam from class 5 onwards, but because of the lack of funds (fee-free education) we had to stop'*. In our interviews, questions about the use of exam results or of indicators for quality monitoring were generally met with a silence caused by a lack of skills. The risk is that the office relies almost exclusively on the inspection system, which is unable to conduct in all schools regularly.

### ***Initiatives and challenges***

The four monographs bring to light positive remarks concerning quality monitoring as well as a clear frustration on behalf of schools that monitoring is too infrequent. Most staff at the DEO, principals, and teachers were in agreement that monitoring is helpful in increasing the effectiveness of schools.

Two interesting initiatives in particular emerged from the research. In Senqu district, the DEO advises principals on how to check the teachers' preparation books, lesson plans, scheme and record of work done, registers, and timetables. The emphasis in the training was also that teachers' lesson plans or schemes should be reflected in the learners' books. The principals considered checking learners' exercise books along with teachers' books as important for the purpose of establishing consistency; they admitted that in the past they had never taken the time to check learners' books.

Another recent initiative, also in Senqu District, is that, at the primary school level, EOs are invited to the primary school principals' meeting. Issues such as school improvement, personal relationships, etc., are discussed in such meetings. This development seems to have a positive effect on

#### ***Challenges in planning monitoring work in Phuthiatsama District***

In Phuthiatsama District, all interviewees agreed on one thing concerning the planning of monitoring activities: the plans are drawn up but can never be fully carried out owing to the central ministry's demands. The SEO in referring to this lack of fruition indicated that *'The plans tend to be affected by numerous activities that we engage in. For example, we help the Minister respond to questions raised in Parliament by members of the House. As soon as a question is sent to the DEO we respond immediately, putting aside a planned activity and investigating the matter'*. Some of the requests are directly from the ministry itself. During the research team's visit the ministry had just instructed the DEO to collect information on the school feeding programme and to forward it to the central office.

The secondary subject advisers confirmed the existence of this pressure caused by central ministry demands. Although they schedule school visits, they hardly manage to spend 60% of the time commonly set aside for providing service to the schools. One of the advisers mentioned, *'We plan for workshops but do not always observe our plans. The situation tends to force us sometimes to go to schools that are located along the same route'*.

quality improvement. However, the principals mentioned that sometimes the DEO is unrepresented in these meetings.

However, the effectiveness of quality monitoring in all of the DEOs seems to be thwarted by numerous constraints. Inadequate staff and transport, engaging in additional central ministry demands, poor communication facilities, the complexity of the manual that is used for inspection purposes, and slim avenues for teachers' professional advancement were all mentioned as factors which hamper quality monitoring. One SEO said, *'The inspectors should be left alone to do their job. We are not always able to do what we have to do and want to do, because of other factors that we do not control'* (SEO, Mohokare district).

The fact that some of the recently decentralized service departments retain a centralized mindset poses a challenge to the healthy functioning of the DEO. In Phuthiatsama in particular, officers and programmes such as the 'subject advisers' continue to draw their mandate from the central inspectorate.

## 2.3 Staff management

### **DEO Staff**

**Recruitment.** The central government is still responsible for staff recruitment, appointment, and deployment; in each sector, the human resource personnel are in charge of advertising vacant positions. In the education sector, the Public Service Commission (PSC) in consultation with the DEO is responsible for staff recruitment. Therefore, staff recruitment is still highly centralized.

**Professional development.** The research team was not able to gather clear information about staff development programmes, personnel responsible for their organization and

implementation, the role played by the DEO in this regard, and evolution of such programmes in recent years. The criteria used for selecting officers to participate in professional programmes were unknown to the majority of people interviewed. However, it appeared clearly that, occasionally, staff may participate in refresher courses, often covering identified topical issues. Sector staff training issues remain the responsibility of the central ministry. Individuals who are keen to undergo further training are free to apply on their own and, according to senior staff, would be fully supported, on the condition that the training is relevant to their position.

### **Staff management and appraisal.**

Actors at the DEO level shared with researchers that they feel there is a lack of clarity about the autonomy of the district office in staff management. This leads the assistant HRO to say that, *'We are like highly paid messengers'*.

#### **Unclear lines of authority in the DEO in Mohokare District**

According to the acting SEO, the current structure of the DEO creates two problems. Firstly, most staff under the education officers (who are the inspectors) choose not to report to them but directly to the SEO. This creates an overload of work on the shoulders of the SEO. The second problem is maybe more severe and it was mentioned not only by the acting SEO but also by the accountant and the HRO. Many of the officers who were posted to the district office since the 2005 reform work under two chiefs, namely the SEO and the head of the relevant department in the central ministry. According to the accountant, *'I have two superiors: administratively, it is the SEO; functionally it is the financial controller in the ministry'*. The accountant feels that the second person is much better placed to assess his work, as the SEO has no expertise in financial matters. The assistant HRO also complained that, *'Decentralization by the Ministry of Education has failed up to now. The SEOs don't even know that they are our immediate supervisors. They are used to working with inspectors'*. From the discussions with this individual, it became clear that she has, to some extent, three bosses: the SEO (who appraises her); the head of the department of Human Resources in headquarters (though she points out that she does not have much contact with this direction) and the HRO of the TSD. The last relationship is not a formal one, but it seems to be the most regular and fruitful one for this particular officer: the fact that much of her work deals with teachers and that the TSD is based in the building next to the DEO facilitates this relationship.

In spite of efforts to improve the DEO's competence by assigning staff to specific programmes, effective management of staff is thwarted by the strong control of the centre in the functioning of the DEO. The management of officers by multiple supervisors is prevalent in all the districts. This results to some extent from the nature of the reform and its recent character. The deconcentration reform consists of the replacement of the 'district inspectorates' by DEOs. While until a few years ago the only Ministry of Education staff based in the district were inspectors, in recent years the district office has been strengthened but the SEO continues to have the profile of a senior inspector, rather than a decentralized decision-maker in education.

Another managerial problem several DEOs suffer from is lack of availability of their superiors to work with and lead their team. The Maliba-Matso DEO is in particular restrained by staff members who hold certain positions but who are hardly available in their offices.

This study has revealed that staff evaluation and/or appraisal, although a well-known concept, is still a new practice. However, the idea of staff appraisal through the use of an appraisal scheme was applauded as an improvement in comparison to the previous staff evaluation strategy, where the government used a confidential reporting system. The current appraisal scheme is preferred mainly because the appraised employee and the appraiser play a significant role in the evaluation. In particular, the appraised employee has the opportunity to give his/her input on the appraisal form. However, there is a generally adopted assumption that certain aspects still need to be reviewed. In one incident, for example, it was proposed that the SEO should be evaluated by his/her subordinates given that they work more closely with the SEO compared to the chief inspector of primary education based at the central ministry. It is clear that the scheme needs time and adjustments before becoming fully functional.

#### ***Innovation in staff appraisal in Maliba-Matso***

Staff at the DEO appeared pleased that staff evaluation has changed from the *Confidential Reporting System* to the new more participative staff appraisal system. As one explained, 'In the confidential report the superior reported on the subordinates and the subordinates would never know what the superior said about him/her. The confidential report mode of evaluating staff performance has since been replaced by performance appraisal management'. This new mode of evaluating staff allows for an appraisee to be part of the evaluation. Procedurally, discussions are held between the appraiser and the appraisee, prior to completing the performance appraisal form. The discussions mainly cover the extent to which an officer performs or undertakes his or her responsibilities. The acting SEO views the new staff evaluation strategy as aiming to discipline staff and to facilitate decisions that are made on promotions.

### ***Teacher/principal management***

**Recruitment and deployment.** A positive development regarding teacher and/or principal management is the establishment of school management committees (SMCs). This initiative intends to devolve teacher and principal management to the stakeholders at the local level. However, their involvement is in reality quite limited and the key concern expressed in this regard is that people on the panel may not be suitable for the role.

Legally, the DEO does not have a role to play in the recruitment and deployment of teachers. This is a direct responsibility of the SMCs and the TSC based at the central ministry. The employing body is the TSC, which advertises posts, employs and pays teachers, and is therefore the key player in the recruitment of staff. The small but influential role of the SMC is conducting interviews with applicants.

#### ***Limited involvement of the DEO in recruitment of teachers in Mokohare District***

As the assistant HRO in Mokohare explained, the DEO can only intervene at certain points in the recruitment process. She said, 'When the SMC conducts the interviews, I help them develop the questions and with the analysis of the interviews. In government schools, I sit on the recruitment interview panel, but I don't talk. In church schools, I am absent. We may assess the various candidates but afterwards the TSC takes over. If our assessment of a teacher is negative, that can stop the process or it can slow it down but if the SMC insists on the same teacher, they can keep him or her on the shortlist for recommendation to the TSC'.



### **Involvement of DEO in recruitment and deployment of teachers/principals in Maliba-Matso District**

The acting SEO indicated that, *‘Since the establishment of government schools, the teachers are jointly recruited and employed by the Central Inspectorate and the District Education Office’*. However, as pointed out by one staff member at the DEO, *‘The churches still follow their own procedures and government schools follow government regulations’*.

teacher recruitment. The role of the DEO is therefore supportive in public schools but non-existent in non-government schools, where the SMCs are the key decision-makers in terms of teacher recruitment.

### **Limited power of the DEO in teacher management in Phuthiatsama District**

One of the DEO interviewees shares a scenario to illustrate some authority-related problems: *‘The churches are protective of those teachers serving in their schools. There was a case of a teacher who was problematic and when assessing her, we felt we could not confirm her. The priest insisted that we should and when we could not agree, the priest pretended he had forgotten about the issue. One has to fight with them in order to have things done properly’*.

which enable it to reprimand teachers or principals. However, the power to implement them rests with officers in the central office or with the management committees. Yet, as pointed out by the DEO officers, most members of the management committees are

### **Teacher/principal development in Senqu District**

The EO and acting SEO in Senqu DEO acknowledged that a strategy for teachers’ and principals’ capacity building was in place. They explained that the DEO contributes regularly towards professional development of teachers and principals, which is done through workshops. The workshops are held during June and December vacations, and they focus on several areas including core teaching subjects, administration, financial management, HIV and AIDS, and life skills education.

**Professional development.** Data from all the DEOs clearly indicate that the only mode of professional development for teachers and principals is through workshops. Workshops that focus on the teaching of the core subjects usually target teachers.

### **Key roles in staff management out of hands of DEO in Senqu District**

In Senqu, the DEO plays an insignificant role in the management of teachers and principals. DEO staff said they felt there was a need to speed up decentralization of this service so that the DEO can take up full responsibility of managing school staff. Otherwise, as observed by one of the staff members of the DEO, *‘Decentralization is only decentralization by name. We are still being controlled at headquarters, so I don’t understand what kind of decentralization we have here in Lesotho with respect to education’*.

A post is advertised with requirements and candidates apply to the SMC, which recommends a shortlist to the TSC. The TSC office is not represented in the DEO, and the DEO gets involved only in some situations.

However, the DEO is involved in the establishment of new government schools and therefore has a say in their

The same disparity existed in terms of continual teacher management by the DEO. In Phuthiatsama for instance, DEO staff were of the opinion that churches uphold their own ways of addressing matters. According to the SEO and the EOs, even in situations where a teacher’s or principal’s behavior is unacceptable, the DEO does not have the powers to reprimand such an individual. The TSD is the actor with legally binding powers

which enable it to reprimand teachers or principals. However, the power to implement them rests with officers in the central office or with the management committees. Yet, as pointed out by the DEO officers, most members of the management committees are illiterate or have very little education. They pointed out that these are ordinary men and women with little or no formal education. *‘The problem is that because of the school management committee members’ very little education, the principals tend to manage themselves. There are very few instances whereby a chairperson of a school committee will refuse to do things that he may feel are not acceptable in the law’*.

There was also evidence of workshops for administrators, such as principals, which focus on the statistical return forms, for instance. The correct filling of the statistical return forms is critical, as it is the only document that helps the ministry to establish the extent to which the sector is addressing the issue of the number of unqualified teachers. The statistical return forms also ensure that the DEO is well informed on progress made in the implementation

of the *multigrade teaching*, which is still a very real issue in the district. For example, as pointed out by the acting SEO, *'There is a school in which all the five grades are taught by one teacher. In a case such as this one, we establish that there is need to equip the teacher with multigrade teaching skills'*.

However, beyond the workshops facilitated, planned, and funded by the DEO, individuals are free to apply for further training on their own. This is seen as a way through which teachers and principals can upgrade their knowledge and skills. There seems to be a need for a comprehensive human resource plan for the education sector drawing on the analysis of the DEO and schools' staffing needs.

**Staff management and appraisal.** Staff management powers technically belong to schools' management committees (SMCs), the Teaching Service Department, and the Teaching Service Commission. As explained previously, the practice is compounded by the fact that schools are managed by various proprietors, namely churches, the government, and private individuals. The different proprietors each have their own demands and expectations. These various management styles can affect the effectiveness of management in the education system.

A significant finding regarding teacher evaluation and/or appraisal is that none of the DEOs studied had a role to play in it. The DEO only intervenes in the teacher evaluation process when the teacher applies for a position as principal. *'There is no appraising scheme for teachers. It is only in situations where a teacher applies for promotion to the level of principal that the office is involved; otherwise it is a principal's office that is involved in the evaluation of teachers'* (DEO Head, Senqu DEO).

#### ***The problematic centralized nature of teacher management in Mohokare District***

This centralization of teacher management leads to feelings of frustration among both principals and DEO staff. When principals were asked the one or two things that should be improved to make the system work better, the response was that, *'Matters of teacher discipline should be solved more quickly. Now, this can take two years. This should be decentralized: a greater role and more powers should be given to the boards and to the DEO'*. The DEO staff also felt that there was a need to strengthen their role, for instance by reinforcing inspectors' power over teachers. The assistant HRO expressed in strong terms a frustration, which others shared, *'when it comes to disciplining teachers, we are totally incapacitated by law. Sometimes we are helpless. We are just barking dogs. We want this to be changed'*. At the same time, some DEO staff members also mentioned that, *'The SMCs do not work well. They don't know what to do in schools and how to select good teachers'*.

## **2.4 Financial resources management**

### ***DEOs' financial resources***

Financial resources across all the DEOs are supplied by the Government of Lesotho. The DEOs' budget is allocated according to their number of schools and pupils. They are expected to cover running costs of the offices, purchase of equipment and furniture, and operational activities. However, the Phuthiatsama DEO also collects donations from the business community for one specific activity, the award celebration innovation.

A description of the four districts' budget is presented in *Table 6* for the 2008/2009 fiscal year. Mohokare, despite being the largest district, had a

#### ***Limited autonomy in financial management in Mohokare District***

On the whole, Mohokare DEO staff's involvement and autonomy in financial management, though not inexistent, is very small. Firstly, when it comes to preparing the budget, their involvement seems limited to the SEO going to the ministry for budget meetings and making suggestions. Secondly, the DEO cannot directly go to donors and mobilize resources. According to the acting SEO, *'It is not even allowed to hold petty cash'*. Thirdly, the DEO has limited leeway in using its finances but can apply to exceptionally change one budget line to another. According to the accountant, *'We can transfer funds from one department to another and from some lines to others, but some lines (e.g. salaries) are protected. To do so, the SEO writes a letter of request. This is quite a simple procedure, which does not take much time'*.

smaller budget than the Phuthiatsama DEO. The significant increase from one year to the other might reveal an effort to compensate for the 2008/2009 fiscal year.

Most of the monographs reveal that although the SEO and the accountant should make decisions concerning financial matters collaboratively, the accountant plays more of a symbolic role: *'The SEO makes all the decisions, although there are set procedures that govern decision-making on financial resources'* (Senior Accountant, Phuthiasama DEO).

It is evident that full autonomy of the DEO for the management of its resources has not yet been implemented in Lesotho. The budgets are prepared at the highest levels of the decision-making chain, including their overall amount and their allocation. The DEO's expenditure is restricted to the different budget items; but in some cases it appeared that the DEO nonetheless has some leeway in managing its own finances.

**Table 6. Total budget by DEO**

Name of district	Total budget for the years 2008/2009 & 2009/2010 fiscal years	
	2008/2009 fiscal year actual expenditure	2009/2010 fiscal year approved
Phuthiatsama	1,904,520	2,472,153
Mohokare	1,853,645	3,069,260
Senqu	1,491,830	2,191,361
Maliba-Matso	1,458,857	2,175,541

Source: MoET, 2008c.

However, the participation of SEOs in education sector budgeting through meetings held by the government is a growing trend. All SEOs who participated in the interviews perceived their presence in the sector budget meetings as a means to equip them to better manage financial resources, as they often have to decide on how to spend this budget ahead of such meetings. The district staff also prepares budget requests, which may not be fully adhered to, but reflect the actual needs of the district.

#### **Key problems in financial management in Maliba-Matso District**

The senior accountant in Maliba-Matso sees the following as key problems in financial management:

1. Under-budgeting;
2. Failure to involve the senior accountant in the budgeting process and in the presentation of the budget to the centre;
3. Understaffing, which implies that the office of the senior accountant is not accessible if the incumbent is out of the office on official engagements;
4. Lack of resources (to the extent that the office of the senior accountant does not have a computer);
5. Lack of professional training for both the SEO and the senior accountant with the latter needing continuous professional training in her discipline;
6. The service providers, such as cooks' claims, take a long time to process because of weather impediments (such as snow in the winter and floods in the summer) and the fact that the roads are bad.

Control mechanisms for resource use are also in place in certain districts. According to the acting SEO in Senqu District, there are three in its district. Firstly, the budget has to be based on the plan and activities of the office; it has to be approved by the central office

and all activities for which the fund is used have to be implemented according to the DEO's plans. Secondly, the office of the SEO is accountable for providing the government with detailed reports on a regular quarterly basis. For example, as pointed out by the SEO, *'In a situation in which we run workshops for teachers, I have to attach a list of participants to my reports to enable government to release a warrant. We always have to apply for the release of funds and we are then allocated an equivalent amount'*. Thirdly, there is also a new financial control system, known as the Integrated Financial Management System (IFMS), which has been introduced by the government during the current financial year. This is a new development. The SEO believes that IFMS will reduce manual work such as vouchering. Subsequently, the system will ensure that there is quick payment of service providers and that misappropriation of funds is eliminated.

### **Schools' financial resources**

In practice, primary schools are allocated utility grants according to the school population. They also receive funds for the implementation of school feeding programmes, in particular to pay caterers. At the secondary school level, the government budgets for a bursary scheme, which targets learners in need, particularly orphaned and vulnerable children.

Distribution of resources to schools is guided by certain regulations and norms. All the SEOs who participated in the study shared the view that the major challenge remaining is monitoring the appropriate use of funds. This is especially true in the current context, where schools receive grants that can be used autonomously. DEOs are aware of the existing control mechanisms and of the fact that they are expected to provide reports on school expenditure to the government. This situation no doubt explains why the government decided to create an accounting section in the DEO, in order to help with the management of financial matters. Additionally, training programmes focusing on financial management organized by DEOs for primary school principals also reflect this trend.

## **2.5 Relations with national and local authorities**

### **National authorities**

The DEO is an arm of the MoET at the district level. The understanding is that the DEO is therefore a body responsible for implementing policies formulated at the ministry and/or government level. This understanding explains the justification for the involvement and consultation of the DEO's top officials whenever a policy is reviewed or a new policy is developed. Their experience on the field is usually of great use in these processes. The SEO and the EOs in Phuthiatsama District explained for example that recently the ministry revised the 1992 Education Act and the DEO staff participated fully in its deliberations. During the revision process, the then minister and officials from both the headquarters and the DEO participated in the national dialogue forums that were held in each district. The understanding therefore is that the DEOs' inputs have been included in the revised version of the Education Act.

#### **Role of DEO in contributing to policy-making in Phuthiatsama District**

The SEO gave an example of a situation where some elements of the school feeding programme have been revised and the field-based reports were valuable in making decisions related to the revision, *'we reported that there were too many caterers for the FPE school feeding programme in various schools. The fact is that the schools were free to have as many caterers as they felt were necessary. As a result there were too many cooks in one school. Working on their claims or processing their vouchers was very tedious and contributed to delays in issuing payments'*. Although the actual FPE documented policy might not have been revised, in practice, certain activities have been revised based on the inputs submitted by the DEOs.

The districts' EOs also contribute to the making of policy by way of submitting field-based reports. When the reports are studied and found to provide relevant information they can



be used when policies are being revised. Since the SEOs hold monthly meetings in which they share their experiences, their inputs can feed into policy-making decisions.

A system for information sharing is in place throughout the four districts. One part of this system is the meetings organised at the central level for the SEOs which are supposed to be held monthly. Most significantly, it is during these meetings that common or particular problems can be discussed and advice provided. The SEOs participate in critical meetings, such as sector budget meetings. One SEO confirmed the importance of these meetings: *'I find attending these meetings useful because we have an opportunity to submit quarterly reports to the Chief Education Officer Field Services. The reports include SEOs' activities; common concerns, how problems were tackled and sometimes training may be offered'* (SEO, Maliba-Matso DEO).

However, as observed by the Senqu DEO, the opportunity to share information is negatively affected by the fact that meetings are only organized when there are new policies or new developments and by the fact that the DEO receives little feedback on its reports. On the other hand, the ministry's website is an active facility, but the absence of Internet facilities at the DEO level limits the usefulness of this tool.

### **Local authorities**

Our data on the DEOs' relations with other local authorities indicate that there are wide disparities between the four districts. Some DEOs are working in collaboration with the district authorities while some are completely cut off from them. The actual involvement of the district administrator (DA) may differ as it depends to some extent on their location and their personality. The Phuthiatsama DEO in particular has established very good working relations with the DA and other local ruling bodies. On the other hand, the Mohokare DEO, perhaps because of its proximity with the central ministry, bypasses the DA. The DA in this district, who is in his third year in this post, recognized that his role in education was very limited at present, *'I do not have a specific technical role to play in education. The DA is an overseer of the functions in the district, including education. It is our responsibility to ensure that things are running smoothly, but this is only administratively, not technically'*. The examples which he gave of his involvement in education were indeed of a fairly minor nature, for example the DEO staff consult him when they want to organise a study tour or a function with a minister. He is never consulted in staff management issues such as appointment or transfers concerning DEO staff, but he can play a role in the appointment of the chairperson of the board of a school if the SEO asks the DA for approval. An interviewee from Mohokare district confirmed this distant relationship and explained, *'We don't get much support from local government. Local government is in its infancy. The local councils are only just being put in place'*.

## **2.6 Main innovations, challenges, and recommendations**

### **Main innovations**

The MoET's decision to have sub-sectoral programmes and units or departments represented in the DEO, notwithstanding certain challenges, has strongly contributed to service provision at the district level and has eased the decision-making and management process by providing DEOs with a certain autonomy and their own resources. Additionally, the MoET involves the DEO in the planning and budgeting processes. The DEO is mandated to develop and present its annual plans, including budgets to the central ministry. Presumably, participation in these high-level budget meetings is an indirect strategy for equipping the DEO with the required skills for developing a budget. SEOs can use what they have learned in these sessions to train primary school head teachers on how to deal with the funds allocated to schools.



Financial control mechanisms are in place. There are a number of financial guidelines, which are applicable to all ministries and are aimed at ensuring that proper procedures and regulations are adhered to for efficient management of financial resources. The MoET spells out the primary purpose of budgeting as follows: budgeting is intended to aid the planning of annual operations, coordinate and control financial activities as well as facilitate the financial administration of the schools (MoET, 2006b). In this regard, the ministry has developed a *Primary school financial administration procedure manual*.

Additionally, the presence of accountants in the DEOs, the disbursements of the budget quarterly according to planned activities, and the establishment of a procurement bureau located in the DA's offices are some of the devices in place to ensure proper financial management at the district level.

One of the most recent initiatives in quality monitoring has been with regard to instructional supervision. The primary school principals from one district mentioned that they received training on instructional supervision, which has equipped them with skills on how best to improve learners' academic performance.

The establishment of resource centres at each DEO serves a number of purposes. In these centres, the DEO assists teachers in engaging in joint scheming, joint setting of local tests, and runs capacity building workshops. This cooperation seems to build collegiality among teachers and facilitates the DEOs' contribution towards quality monitoring.

In each DEO, the analysis of examination results does not only provide information for improving the schools' performance, it also enables the DEO to hold celebrations in which both learners and teachers receive awards. This seems to be a healthy competition, intended to motivate both pupils and teachers.

Finally, although there are mixed views about the extent of the decentralization process, some steps in the right direction have been taken in Lesotho. However, one cannot deny that the country faces significant challenges in this process and needs to address them to make sure that decentralization has the best possible effect on management systems, quality of education, and on learning in general.

## **Challenges**

This study has identified a number of challenges facing the implementation of decentralization at the DEO level:

1. The current level of resources affects the completion of its own mandate. While there are stipulated ways to monitor quality and specific tools/manuals to use while undertaking supervision visits, the DEO is experiencing significant difficulties in this field. Challenges include:
  - inadequate transportation,
  - a low number of education officers to respond to demands from the central ministry,
  - the weak professional development of DEO staff.
2. Officers who have been deployed to serve their departments, programmes, or units at the district level still consult with their offices in the central ministry and appear to disregard the fact that they are meant to be managed at the DEO level.
3. The fact that SMCs play a more important role than the DEO in addressing staff and professional matters causes several issues, particularly with regards to recruitment and deployment of teachers
4. At the moment, except for Phuthiatsama District, there is little collaboration between DEOs and DAs, the main reasons being the lack of mechanisms and structures for such collaboration, poor communication between offices, and a lack

of a clear understanding of each other's role. Relations, to this day, repose heavily on individuals.

5. Focusing on examination results as an indicator of school performance limits quality monitoring of schools, as other reliable monitoring tools such as supervision visits and school self-evaluations can be overlooked. These other monitoring activities are more useful to develop training programmes for teachers, which may have an impact on quality of teaching and, consequently, the performance of learners during examinations.

One of the critical questions that was asked during this research was related to the level of autonomy that the DEOs have in their actions. All the DEOs, with the exception of one, expressed the view that they are not fully autonomous. Lack of power on staff-related matters was an important area considered to hinder the DEO's independence. However the Phuthiatsama DEO felt that there was still a certain degree of autonomy. In the words of one staff member: *'This office is autonomous. In this regard it is free to initiate activities that work towards improving the education system in the district'*.

### **Recommendations**

The following are the recommendations based on this study:

1. The demands of the central ministry appear to affect the DEO's capacity to fully and effectively engage in quality monitoring. It is necessary to restructure the DEO in such a way that specific officers are responsible for handling central ministry's requests, in order to release other staff members from this task, while still facilitating the provision of field-based information to the central ministry. While this might mean expansion of personnel, it is necessary to reduce the workload of DEOs, in order to enable them to focus fully on their quality monitoring mandate especially in the areas of supervision, follow up visits, and relevant reports.
2. The services provided by the DRTs and the subject advisers must be enhanced. The services provided by these groups of officers and advisers are valued by teachers in particular.
3. Devolve staff recruitment, deployment and appraisal of all staff to the DEO to ensure control and proper staffing. Failure to do so would further undermine the efficiency of staff management in DEOs.
4. The selection criteria of personnel in schools' management committees should be reviewed. Inviting and engaging retired teachers or educators is a possible solution to enhance the quality and professionalism of such committees.
5. Expansion of the DEO, especially of its staff and financial resources should go along with the reconsideration of other resources, such as office spaces.

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