

PROPOSED COST-SAVINGS STRATEGY BY THE GOVERNMENT OF LESOTHO ON PRIMARY EDUCATION 2005 - 2007

Introduction

The introduction of Free Primary Education in Lesotho from 2000 signalled the beginning of unparalleled investment in public primary education by the Government of Lesotho (GOL) since independence. Following an analysis of the main cost drivers for school fees at primary level in 1999, in exchange of abolishing school fees in all government supported schools, the GOL identified a number of services that would be paid for from the public resource under Free Primary Education (FPE). These included:

1. Construction of additional facilities in existing schools and establishment of new schools where needed;
2. Provision of teaching and learning materials including textbooks and stationery;
3. training and recruitment of additional teachers;
4. and provision of school meals.

While the government of Lesotho has shouldered the bulk of these costs, development partners who provided valuable assistance are the International Development Agency (IDA), The African Development Fund (ADF), the Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI), the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Much progress has been made in the mentioned areas of government intervention in primary education since 2000 but plenty still need to be done in each area.

1. School Construction

The construction of schools includes provision of classrooms and associated infrastructure such as water and sanitation facilities; kitchens for school meals; administration facilities including office; staffroom and store rooms. The GOL uses competitive bidding procedures for all procurement of civil works for schools, and as such the costs are market priced to the government specifications. Besides ensuring durability and user friendliness of facilities, the main cost drivers for school construction unique to Lesotho, include the difficult mountain terrain, the unique climatic conditions and the geo-economic position of Lesotho.

Given that part of the Lesotho population dispersed in the remote mountain areas with some of the highest altitudes on the continent, schools have to be built for small communities in parts of the country inaccessible by road. These communities, mainly involved in animal husbandry, are the most disadvantaged in terms of access to education and other social services. The costs for construction in these areas are up to 20% higher than the rest of the country.



Motati Primary School in Leribe: Lower-cost, community-built school roof blown off

Lesotho has some of the widest annual temperature ranges with sub-zero temperatures and snow in winter and up to 36 degree Celsius in summer. Wind storms in spring and torrential rains in autumn/fall are also a common occurrence. All these factors mean that the specifications for construction have to ensure that school buildings can withstand these factors and still be habitable.



Rapokolana Primary School in the Mountains of Maseru District, snow in the Mountain.

Lesotho's geographical position – completely landlocked and surrounded by the Republic of South Africa – has an effect on the market prices of construction materials, most of which are imported. All these notwithstanding, the GOL is exploring other options of lowering the costs of school construction including the community participation approach.

2. Primary Teachers' Salaries

The Lesotho labour market is generally skewed by the historical economic interdependence with the Republic of South Africa which has as much higher per capita GDP, and offers a much higher salaries in the public and private sector. This has always put pressure on Lesotho to provide salaries for its employees than countries of similar economic status. Primary school teachers in Lesotho are generally paid lower than other public servants of equal level of responsibility and qualification. This competitive job market has made it difficult to attract and retain quality profession into the teaching profession. Despite the relatively higher wages earned by qualified teachers, this is more a consequence of rapid declining per capita Gross National Income in recent years USD 667 in 1997 to just about USD 406

in 2002¹. It would therefore, take a while for the teachers' salaries to be reflected favourably with the GDP per capita and the basic living wage.

Occupation	Minimum Annual Salary of Diploma Holder (Maloti)	Maximum Annual Salary of Diploma Holder (Maloti)
Primary School Teacher	28,872	34,272
Secondary School Teacher	28,872	34,872
Nurse	34,068	47,244
Civil Servants (Grade E)	34,068	47,244
Police Service	28,680	37,248

Comparison of salaries for Diploma (High School + 3 years) level qualification in the public service

3. School Feeding

Given the long distances that children have to travel to schools in Lesotho, school feeding has been part of school life since the 1960s. The school costs survey conducted by the Ministry of Education and Training in 1999 ahead of the introduction of FPE revealed that the costs of school lunch were one of the main barriers to access to primary education. While the WFP has been assisting in school feeding for the past half century, the GOL took over the bulk of school feeding costs under FPE. A baseline survey conducted by the WFP in 2004 on school feeding revealed that in the majority of schools especially in the mountain areas 76-100% of students receive their only meal in the entire day from school, particularly during the lean periods².



Lunch time is an important part of school life for most children in Lesotho

While school feeding is in interim measure to mitigate poor household food security and attract orphaned and vulnerable children to schools, the GOL is committed to continue pro-

¹ Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, 2005 - 2007

² WFP School Feeding Baseline Survey: Lesotho Country Data Report, May 2004

viding this service as long as it is needed. This social service will gradually be handed over from the education sector to the newly established Local Government authorities. The current WFP School feeding assistance due to end in 2007 is under midterm review. The overall school feeding will be evaluated along with other FPE interventions in 2006/07 if funding is secured.

4. Sustainability of the Primary Education Component of ESSP

Of the targets set out to achieve Education for All, the one that the GOL cannot help but achieve is that of Universal Primary Education by 2015. Should the financing gap identified in the Education Sector Strategic Plan not be bridged, either due to insufficient domestic revenue or inadequate foreign assistance, the best has to be made out of available resources. Should external assistance be available in the three years of the Midterm Expenditure Framework (2005/6 – 2006/07), and not beyond the bulk of the biggest cost drivers such as infrastructure development and teacher development will have been achieved. An improved macroeconomic environment, as envisioned in the Poverty Reduction Strategy, should also improve the average family income, food production and public revenue by 2009. This will in turn reduce allocations to interim intervention measures in education such as feeding and bursaries to more affordable levels with greater targeting.

Cost saving measures referred to in the plan, which may marginally compromise the quality of service delivery, will be intensified during the plan period, including the use of multi-grade teaching to minimize the costs on teachers' salaries; double shift classes to optimize the usage of existing classrooms, engaging teachers of lower qualifications; retaining a higher pupil-teacher ratio; a higher pupil classroom ratio; and a lower textbook-pupil ratio. While there is a risk of failing to sufficiently raise the quality of provision and achievement of education through these measures, they will ensure that by 2015 all children will have access to at least an acceptable level of quality basic education.