



1. Project Data

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| Project ID P156001 | Project Name LS Education Quality for Equality | |
| Country Lesotho | Practice Area(Lead) Education | |
| L/C/TF Number(s) IDA-58200 | Closing Date (Original) 30-Jun-2021 | Total Project Cost (USD) 25,206,490.44 |
| Bank Approval Date 26-May-2016 | Closing Date (Actual) 30-Apr-2023 | |
| | IBRD/IDA (USD) | Grants (USD) |
| Original Commitment | 25,000,000.00 | 0.00 |
| Revised Commitment | 25,000,000.00 | 0.00 |
| Actual | 25,206,490.44 | 0.00 |

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The Project Development Objective (PDO) was "... to improve basic education service delivery and student retention in targeted schools" (Financing Agreement, p. 4). This same statement is reflected in the Project Appraisal Document (PAD) (pp. iii, 15, and 36). Basic education in Lesotho comprises seven years of primary schooling (Grades 1-7) and three years of junior secondary schooling (Grades 8-10).

The 2021 restructuring altered the results framework. Two PDO level indicators, measuring improvements in teacher content knowledge in targeted primary and junior secondary schools, respectively, were deleted; and



the target for another PDO level indicator, measuring dropout rates in targeted junior secondary schools, was reduced to a less ambitious level. Because the efficacy ratings are the same under both the original and revised indicators and outcome targets, the application of a split rating methodology is not warranted.

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

Yes

Did the Board approve the revised objectives/key associated outcome targets?

No

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

No

d. Components

Component 1: Improving the teaching and learning environment in targeted primary and junior secondary schools (amount at approval: \$15.1 million; revised allocation at 2019 restructuring: \$11.4 million; revised allocation at 2021 restructuring: \$7.8 million; actual cost at project closing: \$7.8 million)

Raising the quality of classroom service delivery at both the primary and junior secondary school levels to help youth develop a strong foundation in literacy, numeracy, cognitive skills, mathematics and science, in particular:

- **1.a. Strengthening primary and preprimary school teaching and learning**, including: (a) provision of training to Grade 1-4 teachers on content and pedagogical skills for teaching numeracy and literacy, core classroom teaching skills, and subject competency test; (b) provision of training to District Resource Teachers and other staff; and (c) provision of training to Grade 5-7 teachers in subject (mathematics and science) and pedagogical content based on the new curriculum. Project activities included: the provision of teaching and learning resources, acquisition of learning materials and other goods.
- **1.b. Implementing a new math and science curriculum and assessment support for junior secondary schools**, including: (a) implementing the new curriculum in 45 targeted junior secondary schools; (b) training Grade 8-10 teachers; (c) developing the new curriculum related assessment packages for junior secondary math and science; (d) strengthening the in-service support to teachers; and (e) training support officers. Project support to this end included: technical advisory services, acquisition of textbooks, other learning materials, supervision kits, and other goods.
- **1.c. Demonstrating the progressive mathematics initiative, developed by the New Jersey Center for Teaching and Learning (NJCTL) and progressive science initiative (PMI-PSI) in about 20 junior secondary schools, and development of the new Lesotho model for teaching math and science at junior secondary school level**, with a view to improving the quality of math and science teaching in targeted junior secondary schools, including: (a) provision of training to science and math teachers and subject advisors; (b) installing solar panels in three selected schools; (c) strengthening in-service support to teachers; and (d) implementing the new Lesotho model of teaching math and science in all 65 targeted junior secondary schools for Grade 8, based



on lessons learned. Project activities included: technical advisory services, and acquisition of learning materials, interactive projectors, student polling devices, and other equipment and goods.

Component 2: Strengthening school accountability for student learning and retention in targeted schools (*amount at approval: US\$4.8 million; revised allocation at 2019 restructuring: \$4.8 million; revised allocation at 2021 restructuring: \$4.2 million; actual cost at project closing: \$4.1 million*)

Facilitating the development and implementation of School Improvement Plans (SIPs) by targeted primary and junior secondary schools, in particular:

- **2.a. School improvement planning capacity building and the development of a SIP Manual** with the support of consultants' services and goods.
- **2.b. Provision of SIP grants ranging between \$3,500 and \$4,500 per school** to a targeted group of 312 primary schools and 65 junior secondary schools to support the implementation of SIPs. Project activities included: (a) the purchase of goods and services; (b) short-term training and support to school boards and school principals; and (c) employment of an independent third-party verification agent. Fifty percent of SIP grant amounts were to be provided upon the inspectorate's approval of the SIP, and the remaining 50 percent was to be provided after the first year of SIP implementation and enhanced oversight by the District Education Officers, District Resource Teachers and inspectors.
- **2.c. Strengthening the capacity for reporting, monitoring of results, and oversight mechanisms for SIP implementation** to promote transparency, timely collection and use of information to facilitate school management, including: (a) developing school report card (SRC) format; (b) strengthening mechanisms at the school level to monitor school performance and SIP implementation; (c) training school boards, school principals, and other relevant staff on the use of the school report card; and (d) implementing school report cards at school level, all through the provision of technical advisory services and training.

Component 3: Strengthening institutional capacity and project management (*amount at approval: \$5.1 million; revised allocation at 2019 restructuring: \$4.5 million; revised allocation at 2021 restructuring: \$4.4 million; actual cost at project closing: \$4.7 million*)

Strengthening and developing the capacity of the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) to deliver their agenda and supporting project implementation and management, in particular:

- Studies/assessments on teacher supply, demand, and management, math and science teacher skills, dropouts in primary school, baseline study for Grade 9 assessments in lower secondary, review of the national assessment and curriculum audit in primary school, and studies on technical and vocational education and training (TVET).
- Consensus building by MOET on a national TVET policy linked to a national qualifications framework.
- The formulation of education policies and the monitoring of their implementation by the Department of Planning, including the strengthening of the education management information system (EMIS).
- Stepped up efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, including: (i) facilitating the finalization and dissemination of a school health and nutrition policy; (ii) establishing an information, education and communication campaign to improve HIV/AIDS awareness at the school level; and (iii) provision of training to teachers on effective strategies to deliver the curriculum on life skills and HIV/AIDS.



- Strengthening the capacity of the relevant MOET staff to implement the project, through training, technical advisory services, study tours, and acquisition of learning materials, equipment and other goods.

Revisions to Components

Project restructuring led to changes to project components as detailed below.

First, allocations to Component 1 and Component 3 activities were reduced from \$15.1 million to \$11.4 million and from \$5.11 million to \$4.5 million, respectively, at the May 21, 2019 restructuring to fund Component 4 activities (School construction) introduced during the same restructuring. Component 1 activities and allocation were further reduced at the June 28, 2021 restructuring, with the teacher strikes and the COVID-19 pandemic limiting teacher and staff training in the PMI-PSI to only one round of in-service training with the unused portion of the allocation for the in-service training activities being reallocated to Component 5 activities (Accelerated Teaching and Learning (ATL) Recovery Strategy) introduced during the same restructuring. The ICR indicates that the teacher training-related activities under Component 1, which were dropped at the 2021 restructuring, were reintroduced under the Lesotho Basic Education Strengthening Project (P175065) through a modified approach employing innovative, technology-based solutions to overcome the challenges that had risen due to the pandemic (e.g., using online teacher training).

Second, **Component 4 (School construction -- amount at approval: n.a.; revised allocation at 2019 restructuring: \$4.3 million; revised allocation at 2021 restructuring: \$4.3 million; actual cost at project closing: \$5.8 million)** was introduced at the May 21, 2019 restructuring. This new component aimed to address urgent education access issues through construction of minimum infrastructure including furnished classrooms, separate latrines, and low-cost multipurpose playgrounds to improve learning conditions in the most deprived, poorest and lowest performing schools targeted by the project. The restructuring project paper stated that the lack of adequate classroom facilities leads to increased absenteeism and dropout of students and teachers, particularly in schools located in the higher altitude mountainous areas of Lesotho. A total of 63 disability-friendly classrooms and 57 gender- and disability-friendly latrine blocks were to be constructed as additional project activities for some of the 312 primary schools targeted under the project. Twenty schools were identified as part of the first group of schools to benefit from additional classrooms and latrines. In addition, five combined schools (i.e., combining primary and secondary schools within the same premises) (i.e., Mosiroe, Mokhorro, Masaleng, Makintane, and Amohelang) were to be provided with low-cost multipurpose playgrounds. The classrooms were to be built using a new community-based approach, with a view to informing and supporting a more sustainable school construction strategy for Lesotho.

Third, **Component 5 (Accelerated Teaching and Learning (ATL) Recovery Strategy -- amount at approval: n.a.; revised allocation at 2019 restructuring: n.a.; revised allocation at 2021 restructuring: \$4.3 million; actual cost at project closing: \$2.9 million)** was introduced at the June 28, 2021, restructuring. This component sought to support the government's ATL COVID Recovery Strategy through the deployment and training of 276 qualified yet unplaced graduate teachers (220 primary and 56 junior secondary teachers) to serve as assistant teachers in schools with high learner to teacher ratios and poor learning outcomes for a period of six months. These teachers were to serve as additional teaching staff and/or subject tutors based on the needs of the school. The MOET had extended the school day with rotational attendance of learners allowing for physical distancing measures at schools. The addition of focused assistant teaching staff was to provide relief to overstretched teachers, while also being available to



work with smaller, individualized groups of learners to help them catch up. Furthermore, funding from the new fifth component would support the development of learner workbooks and revision booklets for all Grades in the country. Additionally, compressed curriculum teacher guides were also to be developed on the ATL strategy and distributed to all primary schools for Grades 1 to 4 and secondary schools for Grades 8 to 11 in the country.

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates

Project Cost. The total project cost was \$25.2 million, almost exactly the cost estimated at appraisal. However, because of substantial restructuring of the project (detailed Section 2.d), the distribution of the actual costs across components changed significantly from original estimates. At project completion: the cost of Component 1 was 52 percent of the original estimate, the cost of Component 2 was 85 percent of the original estimate, and the cost of Component 3 was close to the original estimate at 92 percent. Reallocations largely from Component 1 financed two new Components, one introduced in 2019 to support school construction, and one introduced in 2021 to support teaching and learning approaches to address learning losses accrued during COVID-19.

Financing. The project was financed by an International Development Assistance (IDA) credit in the amount of 18.1 million SDRs (\$25 million equivalent). The IDA credit was essentially fully disbursed (an amount of 18.02 million SDRs was disbursed and the balance of 80,000 SDRs was cancelled). No Government counterpart financing was planned nor provided.

Dates. The project was approved on May 26, 2016, and became effective on July 8, 2016. The mid-term review was held on November 28, 2018. The project closed on April 30, 2023, almost two years after the original closing date of June 30, 2021. The project underwent four restructurings on May 21, 2019, October 9, 2019, June 28, 2021, and December 7, 2022. The first restructuring resulted in changes in the results framework, changes in components and cost, a reallocation between disbursement categories, the triggering of safeguard policies, a change in the Environmental Assessment category, a change in institutional arrangements, a change in procurement arrangements, and a change in the implementation schedule. The second restructuring resulted in a reallocation between disbursement categories. The third restructuring resulted in changes in the results framework, changes in components and cost, an extension of the closing date, a reallocation between disbursement categories, and changes in the implementation schedule. The fourth restructuring further extended the closing date.

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

The PDO is highly relevant to current country conditions. Lesotho aims to transition from an economic model driven by debt-financed public investment to private sector-led growth. This transition is limited by numerous factors, however, including the lack of efficient, effective, and equitable delivery of education and health services, among others. Indeed, the Human Capital Index of 40 percent measured in 2020 suggests that a child born in Lesotho today will only be 40 percent as productive in adulthood as s/he could be if s/he had enjoyed complete education and full health by the age of 18. Human capital deficiencies in Lesotho are



indeed calling for substantial and significant improvements in the delivery of education, health and social protection services to support higher and more inclusive growth.

While basic education in Lesotho remains free, children from poorer households are less likely to stay and complete basic education due to the high indirect cost of schooling, including transportation and school uniforms. Moreover, the financial burden of school fees to attend junior secondary education disproportionately affects poorer households. Mountainous regions and regions with higher poverty rates tend to have higher dropout rates for secondary education compared to non-mountainous and more affluent regions. Further, the learning outcomes of children who remain enrolled in the schooling system are inadequate, with poverty constituting a key determinant of lower learning outcomes. Poor retention rates result in only 42 percent of the student cohort entering Grade 1 completing junior secondary school and only 30 percent completing senior secondary school. The enrollment rate in higher levels of education also remains low among students who complete secondary education despite the strong correlation between the completion of higher education and labor market outcomes. Part of the problem is explained by the fact that Lesotho's social protection system is not adequately targeted to the most vulnerable segments of the population and benefit levels remain low.

The quality of basic education in Lesotho remains weak, with the country scoring third lowest among 14 countries in Southern Africa on the average score for Grade 6 student on the 2007 Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality III. Students are found to have low English reading and mathematics skills, with the country ranking third and fourth lowest amount Southern African countries. Only 65 percent of students passed the Primary School Leaving Examination in rural schools. The low quality of primary education results in a significant portion of students lacking mathematics and science knowledge when entering junior secondary schools.

The PDO is highly relevant to current development priorities in the country. Lesotho's National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) I for the period 2012/13-2016/17 included a sub-pillar to enhance the foundation for skills development by improving access and instituting appropriate curriculum and best practices in teaching from early childhood to high school. The NSDP II for the period 2018/19-2022/23 included a strategic objective to improve access and quality of early childhood care and development, and of primary, and secondary education. The mission statement of Lesotho's Education Sector Plan 2016-2026 is to enhance the system that will deliver relevant and inclusive quality education to all Basotho effectively, efficiently and equitably and its overall goals consist of: (i) improving access to quality and relevant education and training at all levels, (ii) ensuring that curricula and materials are relevant to the needs of Lesotho, (iii) strengthening leadership, accountability and governance at all levels of the education sector, (iv) promoting gender equality and ensure empowerment to disadvantaged groups, and (v) ensuring equivalence, harmonization and standardization of the Lesotho education and training system with international education goals.

The PDO is highly relevant to the priority constraints identified in the World Bank's Lesotho Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD) Update published in 2021 and the Lesotho Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for the 2024-2028 period. The SCD emphasized the need to support children's access and retention in the school system, as well as improved learning outcomes to equip children with skills that can meet the requirements of the labor market. It also focuses on the need to address vulnerabilities largely stemming from poverty, such as gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health and substance abuse. The Lesotho CPF for the 2024-2028 period included a high-level



goal of improved human capital outcomes and the objectives of improved quality of primary and junior secondary education, enhanced retention of students, and improved quality of early childhood education.

The World Bank has a comparative advantage in supporting a project of this nature given its significant experience in developing countries, including Lesotho, in delivering projects which support equitable improvements education quality and access. The project draws on a number of diagnostic studies of the education system, a study on non-formal education, the Skills for Competitiveness study, a pilot assessment of early grade literacy and numeracy, a 2014 Education Service Delivery Survey, a study on Teacher Qualifications Framework, and the 2015 Lesotho Systematic Country Diagnostic. The project builds on two previous World Bank-financed operations: the Second Education Sector Development Project (P056416) and the Second Education Sector Development Project Phase 2 (P081269).

The PDO statement was somewhat ambiguous, which might have undermined the project’s theory of change and the measurement of its success. The first objective – to improve basic education service delivery in targeted schools – could have expressed more explicitly the goals of quality improvements and equitable access, which are well captured in the component descriptions, as well as in the project’s title, “Education Quality for Equality.” In the absence of these specifics, the first objective does not convey clearly the project’s intent. This became especially apparent when the two PDO indicators chosen to assess Objective 1 (teacher competencies) were dropped and not replaced. The second objective – to improve student retention in targeted schools – also had an underlying goal of improved equity, which might also have been made more explicit and tracked. While somewhat linked to the project’s supply-side interventions, this outcome is also very dependent on changes in a number of critical demand-side factors not addressed by the project, especially unaffordability of basic education – both direct and indirect costs coupled with an inadequate social protection system.

Rating

High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Improve basic education service delivery.

Rationale

Three intermediate outcomes supported progress toward the achievement of Objective 1. **The first intermediate outcome – improved quality of the teaching and learning environment in targeted schools** – focused on quality improvements to classroom service delivery at the primary and junior secondary school levels to develop a strong foundation in literacy, numeracy, cognitive skills, science and mathematics. Outputs included: primary school teachers trained and supported, junior secondary math and science teachers trained and supported, improved curriculum and teaching methods for junior secondary math and science, and schools with readers and other supplementary learning materials. Additional outputs



under 2019 and 2021 restructurings included: classrooms built and furnished, toilet blocks constructed (under the 2019 restructuring) and primary and junior secondary schools, which benefited from the ATL teacher training and deployment and supplementary ATL learning materials, designed to address learning losses accrued from COVID-19 school closures.

The second intermediate outcome – strengthened school management and accountability in targeted schools – focused on the empowerment of schools and local-level actors to identify and address local level priorities for enhancing student learning and retention in targeted schools. It involved the building of school capacity to undertake school improvement planning, the provision of school grants, and the strengthening of results monitoring, oversight and transparent reporting of school performance through school report cards. Outputs included: school boards trained, schools with approved SIPs, schools submitting report cards (including data on dropouts, teacher and student absenteeism, and improvements to the learning environment), and schools spending 50 percent or more of the total school grant.

The third intermediate outcome – strengthened capacity of MOET – focused on the enhancement of evidence-based sector stewardship, with a particular emphasis on policy refinement, supported by studies and student assessments, and the strengthening of the EMIS. Outputs included: studies to better understand and address challenges (teacher supply, demand, management; math and science teacher skills, dropouts in primary schools), Grade 9 student learning assessment, strengthened EMIS network and strengthened capacities at central, regional and district levels.

Outputs and intermediate outcomes.

In all, a total of 91,450 individuals were estimated to have directly benefitted from the project, **surpassing the target** of 86,500. Of this number, 52 percent consisted of female beneficiaries **as targeted (100 percent achievement)**.

Intermediate Outcome #1: Improved quality of teaching and learning environment

A total of 1,683 primary teachers were trained, **surpassing the target** of 1,400. This was achieved through the first round of training conducted by the project, with subsequent rounds of training cancelled as discussed under Section 2.d above.

A total of 202 mathematics and science teachers were trained in the new mathematics and science curriculum, **achieving the target** of 200.

The PMI-PSI—designed to increase student engagement in K-12 science and mathematics, by including relevant course materials, as well as innovative and effective recommendations for curriculum, teacher methods, environment, scheduling, policies, and practices—was piloted along with the new mathematics and science curriculum. The pilot consisted of an online, asynchronous teacher training program in 24 schools. The ICR (p. 10) stated that project support included subject advisor visits to schools where possible and specific subject teacher cluster meetings. It also indicates that the NJCTL was to accompany MOET on visits to schools to ensure that the PMI-PSI courses would be implemented by the teachers in full compliance with the program. The results of an assessment revealed that trained teachers in the PMI-PSI performed as well as trained teachers in classroom settings. The PMI-PSI was expanded under the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)-supported Lesotho Basic Education Strengthening Project (P175065) approved on February 17, 2022. While the ICR states that the pilot, along with the exploration of other models, would ultimately lead the MOET to develop the new Lesotho model for teaching mathematics and science at junior secondary for



implementation in 2021 and that the project would support the implementation of the new model for Grade 8 in the targeted 65 junior schools, the ICR does not provide details as to whether this was effectively implemented.

As part of the ATL COVID Recovery Strategy, a total of 220 qualified primary teachers and 56 junior secondary teachers were recruited by the MOET to serve as assistant teachers in targeted schools. These teachers were trained on: the narrowed ATL curriculum, their roles as supporters of teachers and learners, and the basics of classroom management under the ATL program. The teachers were dispatched to targeted schools upon completion of their training.

A total of 377 readers—i.e., learners' literature books to promote their reading—and supplementary reading materials were distributed to primary school students through the project, **as targeted (100 percent achievement)**.

More than 60,000 copies of mathematics and science textbooks were distributed to Grade 9 and 10 students.

A total of 1,479 targeted primary schools benefited from ATL supplementary materials, **surpassing the target** of 376.

A total of 350 targeted secondary schools benefited from ATL supplementary materials **as targeted (100 percent achievement)**. The ICR indicates that the teaching materials included: (i) learner packs for Grades 1-4 for Sesotho, English, numeracy/mathematics and science; (ii) revised booklets for Grades 5-7 for six subjects (Sesotho; English; mathematics; personal, spiritual and social; science and technology; and creativity/entrepreneurship); and (iii) supplementary learning materials for Grades 8-11 in 16 subjects.

A total of 73 additional classrooms were built and equipped by the project **as targeted (100 percent achievement)**. A total of 72 toilet blocks were constructed **as targeted (100 percent achievement)**. These activities were in response to a growing body of evidence indicating that student retention and teacher attendance may be affected if schools: (i) have access to basic services, such as water and sanitation, (ii) provide a good indoor environment, (iii) have sound infrastructure able to withstand natural disasters; and (iv) properly maintain their infrastructure (Barnett et al., *The Impact of School Infrastructure on Learning: A Synthesis of the Evidence*).

Intermediate Outcome #2: Strengthened School Management and Accountability

A total of 377 school boards were trained on SIP preparation, grant management, procurement and financial management, and reporting required by the SIP operations manual **as targeted (100 percent achievement)**. The training and support to school boards (comprised of the school principal, the local counselor or his/her designate, as well as nominees of school owners, teachers and parents) targeted their weak capacity, inability to understand roles and responsibilities, and lack of leadership and accountability. The evaluation of the SIP found that school boards and school principals were knowledgeable on these key functions, with SIP facilitators considered to have been crucial to developing this knowledge and to supporting the implementation of SIP activities.

A total of 377 schools had approved SIPs, consisting of a three-year action plan on the priority actions needed to address key problems constraining school performance based on the problems identified through a participatory approach led by the school principal and an SIP facilitator **as targeted (100 percent achievement)**. The overall criteria for developing the SIPs were to improve school performance in terms of



quality, retention, and equity of access, and its preparation was guided by the SIP operations manual and supported by SIP facilitators. SIPs were subject to the MOET's approval, and schools were required to publicly disclose their SIPs and to report to the Inspectorate on an annual basis on their implementation progress through a school report card, providing data on absenteeism, repetition, dropout rates in targeted schools. The results of the 2022 SIP evaluation reveal that this improved the sense of community ownership of schools, leading communities to take greater care of school assets, which was confirmed at the district and school level by SIP facilitators, teachers, and community representatives.

A total of 377 schools submitted report cards **as targeted (100 percent achievement)**. The 2022 SIP evaluation confirmed that the school report cards tracked schools' performance by reporting data on dropout rates, student and teacher absenteeism, and the overall learning environment, allowing school principals to monitor teachers' attendance, identify problems in real time and make needed adjustments. Further, the evaluation found that school report cards were submitted to the MOET to be included in their data gathering and reporting system, but that data utilization by the MOET for evidence-based policymaking is in early stages and would benefit from continuous training from SIP facilitators. The SIP evaluation also noted that school report card data was incomplete, thus undermining its use at local and aggregate levels.

A total of 377 schools spent 50 percent or more of the total school SIP grant for the provision of consultants' services and goods **as targeted (100 percent achievement)**. The SIP evaluation revealed that items purchased through the SIP grants were consistent with the criteria established in the operations manual. Still, the evaluation indicated finance committees had difficulties understanding the procedures and reporting requirements for the procurement of goods and services, and could have benefited from additional support and training from SIP facilitators.

Intermediate Outcome #3: Strengthened Capacity of MOET

The project supported the development of assessment strategies for Grades 1-4 to inform project activities related to the introduction of the new science and mathematics curriculum.

The national assessment in Grade 9 was developed and administered in 2018 to assess student knowledge in science and mathematics **as planned**. The results pointed to achievement rates in mathematics and science of 25 percent and 32 percent, respectively. Results were lower among schools targeted by the project, with achievement ratings in mathematics and science standing at 23 percent and 25 percent, respectively.

In addition, the project strengthened the capacity of the MOET by: (i) completing a baseline study to benchmark assessment of project impacts; (ii) developed an English and Sesotho SIP manual and school report cards; (iii) deployed SIP facilitators to participating schools; (iv) refined and finalized the Non-Formal Education Policy; (v) deployed staff to the Project Facilitation Unit; (vi) developed the Education Language Policy; (vii) completed a Curriculum and Assessment Audit, and (viii) developed the Communication Platform on Assessment for teachers. The ICR (p. 61) stated that, while studies were completed, the implementation of policies was challenging due to resource constraints. The ICR (p. 57) also stated that the project supported analytical work and technical assistance supporting the development of a school construction strategy, the dissemination of a TVET policy, the development of an implementation plan for the School Health and Nutrition Program, HIV/AIDS, the training of school boards on IEC material, IPDET training, information and outreach. Also, while the project supported the transition to a new open EMIS, the EMIS was not tested or



piloted prior to its utilization, hampering data processing and analysis, which, combined with capacity constraints, has undermined reliance on data for evidence-based policymaking.

Outcomes.

While the ICR reported on outputs and intermediate results indicating contributions to the goal of improved basic education service delivery, the evidence that service delivery has indeed improved is somewhat weak, because there are no outcome data to this effect. The ICR noted the decision taken during the 2021 restructuring to drop the two outcome indicators initially meant to measure achievement of this objective – a five percent improvement in teacher content knowledge in targeted primary and junior secondary schools, respectively. This decision was taken when it was understood that the majority of activities under Component 1, especially teacher training, could not be carried out under the project because of the prolonged teacher strike as well as extended school closures and other restrictions due to COVID. No other outcome indicators to assess the achievement of Objective 1 were added.

The ICR also noted the decision taken during the 2021 restructuring that the remaining two outcome indicators (declines in dropout rates in primary and junior secondary schools) would serve as an adequate measure of Objective 1 (improved service delivery) as well as Objective 2 (increased student retention). For the purposes of this ICRR, IEG uses dropout indicators as an appropriate measure of Objective 2 only. While IEG recognizes that supply-side investments in improved service delivery may have an impact on dropout rates, as the ICR points out based on selected literature, it is important first to assess whether service delivery was indeed improved, before attributing changes in dropout rates to improved service delivery. This ICRR thus seeks evidence that the three above-cited intermediate results (and contributing outputs) did indeed culminate in improved service delivery in the classroom. The following is the evidence IEG found to this effect. (Under Objective 2 the same logic is followed, exploring the extent to which these same three intermediate results (and relevant contributing outputs) culminated in a decline in dropout rates.)

- Drawing on an analysis of quantitative data mainly from the EMIS, interactions with respondents who participated in project implementation, and further reliance on secondary data, the 2022 endline Evaluation of the SIP reported the following findings:
 - The SIP program has been perceived by respondents (a sample of actors and stakeholders) to have improved the learning environment, noting positive changes such as: acquisition of learning materials, the acquisition of heating facilities in classrooms, which were reported by respondents to have reduced teachers' and learners' absenteeism during cold weather, and fencing of schoolyards. However, the desired outcomes of reduced teachers' and learners' absenteeism could not be adequately assessed due to the unavailability of the data in electronic form (i.e., uncaptured data from SRC cards, indicative of challenges of program monitoring, and other data issues, noted below). Specifically, the 2022 SIP evaluation indicated that 92.7 percent of those surveyed believed that SIPs reduced teacher absenteeism, 92.5 percent believed that SIPs had reduced learners' absenteeism, and 96 percent agreed that the SIPs had contributed to improved learning environments, IEG notes that these results do not constitute unequivocal evidence, given issues of incomplete data, unavailable data, and inconsistency between SRC and EMIS data, reported in the SIP endline evaluation.
 - Noted improvements and improved learning environments did not translate into improved learner enrollment in SIP schools.
 - EMIS data analysis reveal that learner-toilet ratio gradually improved from 26:1 to 20:1 for boys and 27:1 to 20:1 for girls.



- EMIS data indicate that 11 percent of teachers left SIP primary schools in 2021, compared with 22 percent for non-SIP primary schools; and teachers leaving SIP secondary schools at the rate of 29 percent, compared with 38 percent for non-SIP secondary schools.
- The SIP program provided financing in the form of grants to schools that were used appropriately for the most part to support their plans to purchase eligible items and services to strengthen service delivery. These funds were used, with 371 of 377 schools having spent 50 percent or more of the first tranche, and 343 of 377 schools having spent 50 percent or more of the second tranche).
- Data issues undermined the assessment of the SIP program effect. The SRC data set was only updated to 2018, containing data for 50 percent of the schools. Moreover, the data lacked key variables such as teacher and student absenteeism. While EMIS data was a complementary source to the SRC, the two datasets had inconsistencies warranting data cleaning and cautious interpretation and still were not comparable. These challenges made it difficult to draw conclusions on the impact of the SIP program. There remain challenges to the monitoring and improvement of service delivery, including: capacity building and transport for district level technical support staff, the need to decentralize EMIS into the district and school information systems, simplification of monitoring tools and activities of inspectors, and capacity building for new school boards and principals and refresher training.
- MOET officials could not carry out oversight monitoring of SIP schools as was intended due to transport constraints. In addition, in some cases monitoring reports were not adequately shared with communities, undermining the goal to strengthen accountability.
- No other outcome information is reported that would have indicated improved basic education service delivery, such as on: teacher effectiveness, academic performance, inspectors' reports/evaluations of school performance and follow-up actions, evaluation of teachers and school leaders and follow-up actions, among others.
- The targeting of schools with higher poverty rates, more difficult accessibility (especially mountainous areas), and lower student performance was an important step on MOET's efforts to improve the equity of basic services, although improvements in equity were not measured.

Rating
Modest

OBJECTIVE 2

Objective

Improve student retention in targeted schools.

Rationale

The three intermediate outcomes outlined under Objective 1 also may have contributed to the achievement of Objective 2. This section highlights possible contributions of each of these intermediate outcomes that addressed possible underlying reasons for dropouts. It is notable that, although the project set an improvement in retention at the level of a PDO, it largely addresses supply-side factors (physical access, quality of teaching and learning), and not demand-side constraints, especially poverty-related constraints, such as: affordability and young boys leaving school to take on jobs as herders.



Outputs and intermediate outcomes.

IO#1: Intermediate Outcome #1 Improved quality of the teaching and learning environment: The construction of classrooms cited above may have had a positive effect on student retention, but the ICR does not present data to validate this outcome. Similarly, improved student-toilet ratios, achieved through the construction of toilet facilities may also have had a positive effect on student retention, and a more engaging curriculum may have also affected student retention. However, the ICR does not present evidence to link these contributions to improvements in retention. There are no data to suggest that student-teacher interactions improved and that students were more engaged following the adoption of an improved curriculum.

IO#2: Intermediate Outcome #2 Strengthened school management and accountability: The results of the SIP Evaluation Note reveal that respondents believed that the introduction of heated facilities reduced students' and teachers' absenteeism. However, as indicated in the SIP Evaluation Note, challenges with the EMIS and the School Report Cards (incomplete and conflicting data, not always shared with communities and other stakeholders) make it difficult to document findings and conclusions on the impact of the SIP programme on the reduction in dropout rates, and students' and teachers' absenteeism. Furthermore, it is not clear whether or how these results were used to implement changes in schools to improve retention rates.

IO#3: Intermediate Outcome #3 Strengthened capacity of MOET: One of the key factors of school dropouts is that children attend school at a later age, because of late enrollment and many students also repeat Grades. There are, consequently, many older students in lower Grades. The project, however, does not address this problem fully. While community outreach activities promoted school enrollment and attendance, no remedial support targeted to older, lower performing students was envisaged. A study on dropouts was planned under the original project design, but not implemented. It could have shed light on supply- and demand-side constraints to student retention and how they might effectively be addressed, including poverty (unaffordability of indirect costs of primary school, such as transportation and uniforms, and direct/tuition and indirect costs of junior secondary school), the tendency of boys to drop out to take herding jobs, among others.

Outcomes.

Grades 1 to 6 dropout rate in targeted primary schools fell from a baseline of 16 percent on December 30, 2016, to 11 percent by April 30, 2023, **exceeding the target** of 13 percent. The ICR reports that this impacted 86 percent of project beneficiaries.

The dropout rate for Grades 8 and 9 in targeted junior secondary schools increased from a baseline of 21 percent on December 30, 2016, to 26 percent by April 30, 2023, **not achieving the original target** of 16 percent or **the revised target** of 20 percent. This result is due to exogenous factors related to a prolonged teacher strike during the 2018/19 school year that disrupted schooling, halted teacher training and hampered schools in implementing their respective SIPs. COVID-related school closures and lockdowns also disrupted project activities. Moreover, COVID lockdowns in Lesotho and South Africa led to unemployment, loss of income and financial challenges for many households, keeping many families from sending their junior secondary school children back to school when they reopened, because of increased unaffordability of junior secondary school fees and other expenses. Consequently, the dropout rate in project junior secondary schools rose to 37.9 percent by August 2020. However, by project closing, as a result of new efforts made under the project, particularly the implementation of the ATL/COVID Recovery Strategy, the junior secondary dropout rate was reduced to 26 percent, representing an 11.9 percentage points drop from the 2020 level, a



substantial improvement in light of circumstances. In the absence of the project, the decline in junior secondary dropout rate from the high level at the time of COVID to the level achieved at project completion may have been considerably less.

The ICR (paras. 6-7) is clear in noting a number of factors underlying dropout rates that the project's three intermediate outcomes do not address fully: poverty and unaffordability of costs (indirect costs of primary school, such as transportation and uniforms), the high concentration of dropouts among overage students, due to late entry and high repetition rates; and the tradition of boys leaving school to become herders, among others. However, the ICR does not assess attribution of the changes in dropout rates to other projects and other sources of support that may have had an effect, especially those that might have addressed the above-cited, demand-side factors.

Rating

Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale

Overall efficacy is rated Substantial, but with moderate shortcomings, with the efficacy of Objective 1 (Improve basic education service delivery) rated Modest, because of insufficient evidence on outcome, and the efficacy of Objective 2 (Improve student retention in targeted schools) rated substantial.

Overall Efficacy Rating

Substantial

5. Efficiency

Economic Efficiency. An economic analysis was performed on an *ex-ante* basis at project appraisal and on an *ex-post* basis at project closing. The results of the economic analysis performed on an *ex-ante* basis point to a net present value (NPV) of US\$25.9 million using a social discount rate of 10 percent and an internal rate of return (IRR) of 15.5 percent. The results of the economic analysis performed on an *ex-post* basis point to an NPV of US\$11.6 million and an IRR of 12.2 percent. The ICR did not, however, specify the discount rate used to compute the NPV of the project at closing. In an email to IEG dated March 26, 2024, the Bank indicated that the ICR author relied on a financial discount rate rather than a social discount rate to compute the NPV of the project. Given that the economic analysis measured benefits at the societal level rather than at the private individual level, the economic analysis might have instead relied on a social discount rate, which would have resulted in a higher than estimated NPV. The economic analysis performed at project closing considered the anticipated benefits from Component 1, 2 and 5 activities, which accounted for 58 percent of total project cost, and relied on key data from the 2017 Household Budget Survey, which indicated that the average monthly wage of individuals with any upper secondary school attendance was 2,961 LSL, or 80 percent more than individuals



with only primary school education who were earning 1,644 LSL. The ICR explains that differences in NPV and IRR results across the PAD and the ICR stem from more optimistic projections on PDO level indicators at appraisal, as well as differences in methodology.

Implementation Efficiency. Unaudited interim financial reports and external financial audits, which were submitted to the Bank in a timely manner, revealed that the use of funds disbursed through the project was adequately monitored and appropriately used during implementation. Changes in components and costs at the 2021 restructuring allowed for the efficient response to the urgent needs triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ICR reveals that there were no cost overruns and that the closing date extensions did not adversely impact operational efficiency. Lengthy procurement processes delayed somewhat project implementation (see Section 10 b on Fiduciary Compliance).

Efficiency Rating

Substantial

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

| | Rate Available? | Point value (%) | *Coverage/Scope (%) |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Appraisal | ✓ | 15.50 | 0 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable |
| ICR Estimate | ✓ | 12.20 | 58.00 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable |

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

Overall outcome is rated Moderately Satisfactory. **The relevance of the PDO** – to country conditions, the development priorities of Lesotho and the Bank’s CPF – is **rated High**.

Overall efficacy is rated Substantial but with moderate shortcomings. While the project invested in various improvements to the teaching and learning environment, the establishment and financing of locally managed school improvement programs, and MoET capacity building, there is insufficient evidence to verify that these culminated in the achievement of Objective 1 (to improve the delivery of basic education services). Lack of reliable data and the absence of relevant outcome indicators were significant factors. **Efficacy in achieving Objective 1 is, therefore, rated Modest.** The project’s achievement of Objective 2 (to improve student retention in targeted schools) was **substantially achieved**. Reduction in dropout rates at the primary level exceeded targets. Dropout rates at the junior secondary rates increased substantially as a result of COVID: many students did not return when schools reopened because of the economic hit of households of lost employment/income, making school fees at the secondary level unaffordable. Although the original and revised targets of 16 and 20 percent dropout rate were not achieved against a baseline of 21 percent, the dropout rate declined substantially from a post-COVID high of 37.9 percent to an end-of-project level of 26 percent – representing an 11.9 percentage points drop against the initial reduction of 5 percentage points and



the revised reduction of 1 percentage point which were envisaged in the RF. This result may have been achieved through the implementation of the ATL (COVID) Recovery Strategy adopted by the government and supported by this project, and possibly other project interventions aimed at improving teaching and learning quality. **Efficacy in achieving Objective 2 is therefore rated Substantial.** The ICR mentions (in its Risks to Development Outcome section) that conditional cash transfers provided to students from poor households under the Basic Education Project (P175065), may have mitigated dropout rates in the aftermath of COVID. But IEG's review of the December 2023 ISR on this project reveals that these transfers were disbursed to 1,683 students sometime during mid- to late 2023, around the time of the closing of the Education Quality for Equality project that is the subject of this ICRR. **The project's economic and implementation Efficiency is rated Substantial.**

*Taken together, these ratings indicate that there were moderate shortcomings in the project's preparation, implementation, and achievement, resulting in an Outcome rating of **Moderately Satisfactory**.*

a. Outcome Rating
Moderately Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

The project supported institutional strengthening, including, the introduction of local community construction committees, the adoption of the PMI-PSI which introduced a new approach to teaching mathematics and science, and the SIP which was intended to promote student retention and transition. The Bank further added in an email to IEG dated March 26, 2024, that the project also minimized the risk of political interference by establishing an objective criterion for identifying the lower performing schools, which relied on metrics such as the student flow, the examination success rate, resources available per student, and the poverty level. Finally, the potential risk of teacher unions resisting the project's interventions pertaining to improved classroom instructional time and teaching quality was mitigated by: an extensive public information campaign reaching out to all education stakeholders, major investments made to upgrade teacher competencies, and the introduction of school accountability mechanisms.

The ICR identifies increased financial constraints on poor households in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic as a key risk to sustaining development outcomes, which may lead to increased dropout rates. The ICR indicates, however, that the risk is partly mitigated by the support provided to poor children under the Basic Education Project (P175065), which is currently being implemented. Another source of risk to sustaining development outcomes relates to the fact that not all of the teachers' grievances have been addressed, which may lead to other teacher strikes.

The School Improvement Planning Technical Evaluation Report produced in April 2023 identifies additional risks to sustaining development outcomes as it pertains to the SIP. First, the report finds that while political will for the SIP remains strong, the poor implementation and low absorptive capacity of donor-funded projects may threaten sustainability. Second, the lack of a funding model for the SIP beyond the project cycle may also threaten the sustainability of development outcomes. With regard to the first risk, the report finds that capacity building in planning, budgeting and procurement planning, which may be transferred to other projects, could support the sustainability of development outcomes. The report also notes that the



sustainability of program activities will also depend on the availability of funds for operating costs (heating classrooms, photocopying, among others).

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

Project Design. The Bank's team ensured that the project was strategically aligned with Lesotho's sectoral needs, its national and education development strategies and goals, and the Bank's CPF, in place at the time of design (See Section 3). It supported government's policies, particularly those related to ensuring continued and improved delivery of basic education services and a focus on at-risk children to curb dropout rates. The original design included critical actions to improve learning, including those aimed at: improving teaching, providing quality learning materials, ensuring community involvement, and strengthening school management. The choice of an IPF instrument with traditional indicators was deemed appropriate given reservations regarding Lesotho's limited preparedness for results-based financing and disbursement-linked indicators. A Project Preparation Advance was requested to fund: (i) various studies (teacher supply and demand projections and teacher management, baseline for math and science teacher skills; and baseline for Grade 9 assessment); (ii) consultant services to prepare the SIP manual; and (iii) technical assistance to support other preparation activities. M&E design included the establishment of outcome indicators to measure achievement of each of the project's two objectives. The collection and use of project data envisaged the reliance on school report cards and EMIS, both to be strengthened under the project, and their use at decentralized levels. (Section 9. M&E).

Technical aspects of design were informed by lessons from successful education projects and evaluations globally, on the importance of improving teacher effectiveness in the classroom and enhancing school leadership for greater accountability and results. In an email to IEG dated March 26, 2024, the Bank's team noted that Component 1 draws extensively on lessons from the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI)-III project, especially on curriculum development, teacher training and assessment. The new math and science model is based on the successful Gambian experience. Component 2 is informed by international evidence on the importance of community engagement and empowerment for improving school accountability for student learning. Component 3 also draws on lessons from FTI-III on the importance of capacity building, especially in planning and coordination, with provision of technical assistance to this end. Component activities were selected in close collaboration with Government to ensure their relevance and complementarity with other support.

The project's targeting of the lowest performing schools in deprived areas was an important element of its poverty focus and its aim to improve equitable access and quality of basic education service delivery. However, the design/theory of change does not address the affordability issue, especially among the poorest and most vulnerable households, which stands to undermine equitable access to basic education, both at the primary level (unaffordability to some of indirect costs, especially transportation and uniforms, even with the policy of no fees) and at the junior secondary level (both direct and indirect costs). Even if the project chose not to address the issue, the theory of change might have included an assumption about how this issue would be addressed or mitigated by other partners or initiatives.



Implementation arrangements were integrated into the government's institutional structure for managing basic education. A Coordination Committee, responsible for overall project coordination and quarterly reviews of performance, was established. Chaired by the Principal Secretary, its members included the Chief Education Officers of MOET, with participation from Ministries of Finance and of Development Planning. Quarterly reviews were to be issues-focused culminating in corrective measures to improve performance. A Project Implementation Manual clarified roles and responsibilities of the Coordination Committee and the PFU's reporting responsibilities. Reporting to the Director of Planning, the PFU was responsible for day-to-day coordination (of central and district level actors and activities) and reporting of project performance. Responsibilities for implementing various components and subcomponents were delegated to a range of MOET departments in line with their respective mandates (details outlined in ICR, para. 50). These turned out to be too complex, challenging coordination efforts, and were later simplified during restructuring.

Risks and Mitigation Measures were identified during preparation. The ICR (para. 51) notes that overall risk was assessed as substantial, particularly in light of: (i) implementing agency capacity constraints; (ii) fiduciary management capacity constraints; (iii) limited sectoral policies; (iv) teachers unions resistance to project interventions; and (v) limited diagnostic studies to inform and address sector challenges, undermining a coherent policy framework. Mitigation measures included: (i) capacity building at central and local level (training and technical assistance); (ii) training in procurement and financial management; (iii) public information campaign to inform stakeholders about the project; (iv) PPA-financed studies; and (v) SIP program facilitators. Although it was raised as an issue in the PAD, the risk assessment did not include the risk of persistent or increasing unaffordability of school costs, especially to the poorest, most vulnerable households, which could undermine efforts to improve student retention.

Quality-at-Entry Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

b. Quality of supervision

Supervision missions were composed of education specialists, fiduciary and safeguards staff, as well as consultants providing needed technical expertise. A total of 13 internal supervision reports were issued between effectiveness in mid-2016 to end-2022, averaging one every six months. The project team was regularly and actively engaged in supporting government in project implementation. In the face of significant challenges to implementation and to the achievement of objectives, especially the teachers' strike and the COVID-19 epidemic, the Bank was proactive, working with government to restructure the project to shift its focus to other, more potentially impactful activities. The project's new post-COVID focus on Accelerated Teaching and Learning, involving the allocation of new teacher graduates for a period of six months to poorly resourced schools in rural and hard-to-reach mountainous areas, supported students in need of remedial support to keep them from dropping out.

Supervision teams consistently monitored and reported on financial management, procurement and safeguards progress during supervision mission and undertook capacity building of the PFU and other implementing agencies in these areas. The Bank's implementation support also involved onsite capacity building in other areas, including community construction and school-level SIP implementation. Aide-memoires and implementation status and results reports documented project progress, which kept World Bank management informed of progress, informed corrective action, and provided the foundation for the



ICR analysis. During COVID-19 lockdowns and restricted travel, the Bank undertook virtual missions to ensure continued implementation and on-track completion. To ensure regular interaction with implementing units, the Bank team held weekly meetings with the Principal Secretary, and other MOET officials to ensure that implementation was progressing. The Bank also introduced the Mobile Monitoring System (MMS) to support rapid data collection and monitoring, which informed Implementation Status and Results Reports on time, despite challenges encountered with the EMIS data. This approach, allowed multiple units within MOET to receive feedback directly from beneficiaries in the context of geographical challenges and COVID-19 travel restrictions.

A moderate shortcoming of the project restructuring was the failure to replace the dropped outcome indicators (measuring teacher competencies in primary and junior secondary schools) with new indicators for assessing the achievement of Objective 1 improved basic service delivery.

Quality of Supervision Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

The original M&E design included four outcome indicators: two (measuring teacher competency) to assess achievement of Objective 1 (improve basic education service delivery in targeted schools) and two (measuring dropout rates in primary and junior secondary schools) to assess achievement of Objective 2 (improve student retention in targeted schools). It also included a number of output and intermediate outcome indicators enabling, for the most part, the assessment of the various activities and inputs of the projects and their plausible links to the achievement of objectives. M&E design also included: (i) utilization of school report cards and the EMIS for data gathering (both of which were to be strengthened and further institutionalized under the project); (ii) a Grade 9 baseline assessment of science and mathematics; (iii) an endline evaluation of the SIP program; and (iv) an evaluation of the PMI-PSI activities. The design envisaged the use of data and studies by central, district and school level stakeholders. An M&E specialist within the PFU was charged with M&E implementation. The quarterly reporting of the PFU to the Coordinating Committee was expected to inform MOET, and Ministries of Finance and of Development Planning, about project performance and to identify and address any issues undermining implementation and outcomes. M&E design also envisaged the use of data collected: (i) by schools at the local level to inform progress, enhance accountabilities, and influence the design, implementation and evaluation of school improvement plans; and (ii) at the district level to enable the monitoring of performance and the targeting of their technical and pedagogical support to schools through supervisions and training.



b. M&E Implementation

The reporting of data tracking indicators in the results framework was carried out throughout project implementation, although with some delays. The ICR (para. 58) reports that, in general, M&E data was collected and analyzed in a methodologically sound manner. MOET had an experienced M&E specialist with the capacity to undertake sound data analysis. Nevertheless, the remoteness of schools posed problems to the timely collection and reporting of data for the Education Management Information System (EMIS). This was further challenged when MOET introduced the new Open EMIS, which had not yet been tested or piloted prior to utilization, and consequently hampered data processing and analysis. Moreover, restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic prevented MOET and World Bank from undertaking field visits to monitor progress. The Bank resorted to drones and the Mobile Monitoring System (MMS) for the monitoring of progress in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Drones monitored classroom construction. A phone-based survey conducted as part of the MSS and covering 400 schools targeted by the project, collected data and information from principals, teachers, parents and other beneficiaries through text messages at no cost to the user on their experiences with the project interventions while also confirming project provision of goods and learning materials delivered. School report cards, introduced under the project, were used for gathering data at the school level. The SIP assessment was completed with the support of a consulting firm. The Grade 9 mathematics and science assessment, as well as an assessment of the PMI-PSI were also completed.

During the 2021 post-COVID restructuring culminated in the deletion of the two PDO level indicators (assessing teacher competencies) intended to assess the achievement of Objective 1 (improve basic education service delivery). There was a missed opportunity to add one or more new PDO level indicators, which would have enabled the measurement of the substantially changed results framework supporting Objective 1, due to both to the substantial changes in the kinds of activities undertaken to this end – essentially the dropping of most teacher training/capacity building because of teacher strikes and COVID-19 closures and travel restrictions, and the thrust of new activities focused on supporting government’s post-COVID response focused on addressing and mitigating learning losses during school closures. This is considered to be a significant shortcoming, given that IEG has found insufficient evidence to properly assess the achievement of Objective 1 (see Section 4. Efficacy).

c. M&E Utilization

The ICR reports that M&E supported the MOET teams’ decision-making and led to Component 4 and 5 activities being added at restructuring. The ICR also reports that the SIP program, which led to the training of 377 school boards, will lead to more community engagement in monitoring school activities and will be continued in the Lesotho Basic Education Strengthening Project (P175065) as school boards will be required to monitor students’ attendance to determine eligibility for the cash transfer program supported by that project. The PMI-PSI assessment was used by the Bank team to expand the program in the Lesotho Basic Education Strengthening Project (P175065). Data gathered through the MMS and school report cards were transferred to the EMIS.

M&E Quality Rating

Modest



10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

The project was classified category C on environmental safeguards at appraisal as there was no construction or rehabilitation work planned at the time that would trigger safeguards policies. The May 2019 restructuring introduced school construction activities, triggering OP/BP4.01 (Environmental Assessment) and OP/BP4.11 (Physical Cultural Resources) and leading the project to be classified category B on environmental safeguards. An Environmental Social Management Framework was consequently developed and environmental safeguards began to be monitored during implementation and were reported in Implementation Status and Results Reports (ISRs), with environmental safeguards being consistently rated Moderately Satisfactory or Satisfactory. The key problem pertained to the payment of wages to community laborers at construction sites and the complaints it triggered, which were ultimately resolved. The project established a Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM), which was accessible to all stakeholders, including Community Construction Committee members and laborers. The GRM process was included in the Environmental Social Management Framework and the training of individuals for the GRM was led by the Education Facility Unit (EFU). Stakeholders' concerns could be raised through the GRM boxes erected onsite, or reported directly to the chief, the headmaster or the chairperson of the school board. Staff members of the MOET's Project Facilitation Unit (PFU) regularly visited school construction sites and spoke to the chief, head teachers and community leaders to resolve GRM issues. The Bank support capacity building at the EFU and the PFU.

b. Fiduciary Compliance

Financial management. The project relied on the MOMPRO software for financial management and the quality of reporting was deemed acceptable. The project's performance on financial management was generally rated Satisfactory, but was downgraded twice to Moderately Satisfactory due to delays in submitting annual audited reports. The auditor's opinion was unqualified (clean). The ICR reports, however that the project closed with a lapsed credit due to abrupt changes in the MOET PFU financial management staffing requirements, but that the MOET submitted the reconciliation document in the system, which was signed by the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning on November 29, 2023.

Procurement. The PFU migrated to the Systematic Tracking of Exchanges in Procurement (STEP) for uploading procurement documentation and procurement performance was monitored through regular assessment missions. The PFU experienced problems with: (i) weak capacity, (ii) consistently entering procurement steps in the STEP, and (iii) lengthy procurement processes. These problems were addressed through the Bank's procurement staff providing training and carrying one-on-one capacity building sessions to the PFU and the EFU to support compliance with guidelines. The Procurement Strategy for Development and procurement plans were prepared on time and approved by the Bank, with the country executing activities in compliance with standards and regulations. Procurement performance was monitored through regular assessment missions. The P-RAMS ratings, which is an instrument tool used to analyze content, trace trends, or correlate risk management and procurement outcomes, were consistently rated Moderately Satisfactory or Satisfactory in ISRs.



c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

None noted.

d. Other

None noted.

11. Ratings

| Ratings | ICR | IEG | Reason for Disagreements/Comment |
|------------------|--------------|-------------------------|---|
| Outcome | Satisfactory | Moderately Satisfactory | Shortcomings in measuring progress toward achievement of objective 1. |
| Bank Performance | Satisfactory | Moderately Satisfactory | Moderate shortcomings in project design and supervision. |
| Quality of M&E | Substantial | Modest | Insufficient evidence to assess Objective 1 efficacy. |
| Quality of ICR | --- | Modest | |

12. Lessons

The ICR Review included the following ICR lessons:

1. Reliance on Community Construction Committees in remote areas can support improved access to local school infrastructure if potential challenges are addressed. In this particular project, delays in salary payments and the provision of construction materials, which initially led to implementation delays, were later resolved and allowed school constructions in remote areas to be completed on a timely basis;
2. The introduction of SIPs can promote a sense of community ownership, with the results of the SIP assessment indicating, among other things, that communities had increased their level of awareness of what happens in schools, and their concern over protecting the school facilities and materials; and
3. Complex institutional arrangements necessitating interagency coordination within the context of high government staff turnover can impede implementation. In such instances, identifying a focal point for each sub-component may prove beneficial.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No



14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The quality of the ICR is rated Modest. The quality of evidence presented in the ICR is weak, with much of the results framework indicators consisting of output/process indicators rather than outcomes indicators, making it difficult to measure progress toward the achievement of the objectives. Moreover, the quality of data to track various trends the project aimed to affect (dropout rates, teacher absenteeism, learner absenteeism...), collected from school report cards and the EMIS, was inadequate, with significant data gaps, and inconsistencies between the two sources, which undermined its use to assess project performance and outcomes. These were acknowledged in the ICR and in the SIP endline evaluation.

The quality of analysis is also weak. The ICR considered the two PDO indicators tracking dropout rates in primary and junior secondary schools to be appropriate for assessing achievement of Objective 1 (improved basic education service delivery in targeted schools), as well as Objective 2 (improved student retention in targeted schools). While IEG considered dropout indicators to be appropriate for assessing Objective 2, it considered them to be insufficient, especially as the only outcome indicators, for assessing Objective 1. The ICR noted that the literature reveals that improvements in teaching and learning environments and in school management and the provision of school grants – all project interventions – positively affect dropout rates. But evidence on the extent to which service delivery was improved is lacking to sufficiently link this outcome to the consequent outcome of improved retention. The analysis did not delve sufficiently into the assessment of attribution (or contribution). While the ICR notes that dropout rates are significantly affected by poverty/unaffordability of direct and indirect costs of schooling, there is no analysis of the extent to which declines in dropout rates were attributable to supply-side support provided by the project, and/or to interventions outside of this project, financed by other sources, aimed at addressing the affordability issues, which were exacerbated during COVID. In short, the report's assessment didn't always trace and establish the linkages underpinning the theory of change and the results framework to highlight how activities contributed to outputs, outputs to intermediate outcomes, and intermediate outcomes to outcomes, in other words, what occurred as a consequence of the project. Nor did it document other contributions to outcomes that were made outside of the project.

The ICR's lessons are based on the findings and experience of this project.

a. Quality of ICR Rating

Modest

