

**GOVERNMENT OF LESOTHO
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**LESOTHO OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL)
POLICY**

DRAFT

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ACRONYMS

ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
ACDE	African Council for Distance education
ADB	African Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
AU	African Union
BOCODOL	Botswana College of Distance Learning
COSC	Cambridge Overseas School Certificate
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DEASA	Distance Education Association of Southern Africa
DFID	Department for International Development
DSE	German International Development Agency
DTEP	Distance Teacher Education Programme
EDF	Department of Educational Foundations
EFA	Education For All
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ESP	Education Sector Plan
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan
FED	Faculty of Education
FIDA	Federation of Women Lawyers
FPE	Free Primary Education
GNI	Gross National Income
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunity Virus
ICDE	International Council for Open and Distance Learning
IEMS	Institute of Extra Mural Studies
IGNOU	Indira Ghandi National Open University
IRI	Interactive Radio Instruction
ISP	Internet Service Provider

JC	Junior Certificate
LMS	Learning Management System
LANFE	Lesotho Association of Non-Formal Education
LNFOED	Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled
LASED	Language and Social Education Department
LCE	Lesotho College of Education
LDTC	Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre
LP	Lerotholi Polytechnic
LQA	Lesotho Qualifications Authority
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
NAMCOL	Namibian College of Distance Learning
NAODEL	National Association of Open and Distance Education of Lesotho
NCDC	National Curriculum Development Centre
NEPAD	The New Partnership for Africa's Development
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan
NUL	National University of Lesotho
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
OER	Open Educational Resources
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADC – CDE	SADC Centre for Distance Education
SCE	Department of Science Education
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

UNISA	University of South Africa
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WADEA	West African Association for Distance Education

DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS

Blended Distance Learning	A thoughtful, strategic and systematic fusion of face-to-face, print-based, and online instruction for optimised ODL outcomes (Mokenela, 2022).
Blended learning	Involves a combination of online and face-to-face learning experiences (COL, 2021).
Distance Education	A process of teaching and learning characterised by the separation of teacher and learner in time and/or place for most of the educational transaction, mediated by digital and non-digital technology for the delivery of learning content but with the possibility of face-to-face for learner-teacher and learner-interactions, and the provision of two-way didactic communication (COL, 2021).
e-Learning	Refers to the use of any digital device for teaching and learning, especially for delivery or accessing of content and can take place without any reference to a network or connectivity (CHE, 2021).
Emergency Remote Learning	Refers to a mode of educational delivery through which contact and face-to-face delivery has either been supplemented or replaced through the enabling support of remote, non-digital and digital technology platforms under emergency conditions (Isaacs and Mohee, 2020).
Inclusive Education	Refers to a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion from education and from within education (SADC, 2012).
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	Convergence of hardware, software, networks and media for the collection, storage, processing, transmission and presentation of information (voice, data, text, images). It incorporates a widening range of digital technologies which can enable equitable access to quality learning and teaching for all (Isaacs and Mohee, 2020; Lesotho Communications Authority, 2019/2020).
Learning Technologies	Encompass a broad range of digital and non-digital technologies that enable access to learning resources, learning opportunities and learning processes. They range from print media to educational television and radio to the use of cloud-based online learning platforms (Isaacs and Mohee, 2020).
Online Learning	Refers to electronic learning with the mandatory involvement of a digital network from which a learner accesses at least part of the learning materials and services (COL, 2021).
Open and Distance Learning (ODL)	Provision of distance education opportunities through flexible approaches that seek to mitigate or remove barriers to access, such as finances, prior learning, age, social, work or family commitments, disability, incarceration or other such barriers. "Open" refers to a commitment that removes any unnecessary barrier to access learner. "Distance" education refers to teaching and learning that

temporarily separates teacher and learner in time and/or place; uses multiple media for delivering instruction; and involves two-way communication and possibly occasional face-to-face meetings for tutorials and learner-learner interactions (COL, 2021).

Open Distance and Flexible Learning (ODFL)	Refers to the flexible broadening and expansion of learning opportunities that include and transcend the boundaries of formal structured learning so that all communities can participate, especially communities who are socially, educationally and economically marginalized and excluded. (Isaacs and Mohee, 2020).
Open Education Resources (OERs)	Teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open licence that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no limited restrictions (OER Paris Declaration 2012).
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	Refers to recognition and validation of competencies obtained in formal and outside the formal education and training systems, for purposes of certification or meeting entry requirement to enrol into a programme (CHE, 2021).
Remote learning	A concept that emerged more prominently in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic which refers to learning remotely from the physical school and classroom environment when the learner and instructor are separated by time and place and do not meet face-to-face in a traditional classroom setting (Isaacs and Mohee, 2020).
Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Refers to a situation in which learners who are in need of additional support, depend on the extent to which education system adapt curriculum, teaching and/or to provide additional human or material resources so as to stimulate efficient and effective learning for these learners (MOET, 2018).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary presents an overall picture of ODL as a concept, and the benefits of ODL in opening access to education to learners in all sectors of education. The five chapters of this policy present the background, the problem statement, the policy framework, the key policy focus areas, and finally, the proposed national ODL framework and implementation strategy.

The Government of Lesotho through the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is following up on its covenant and constitution on education that is a basic human right. The Government has taken up the responsibility through its education sector to provide education to its nation. However, like many nations, the efforts to provide Education for All (EFA) were not realised because of constraints, such as, schools, teachers, teaching and learning resources, distance from schools, socio-economic conditions of learners and others.

In 2008, following a number of consultations on the situation of education, SADC realised that the region had not reached the EFA mandate and that it was necessary to explore different strategies to open access to education for all citizens in the SADC region in all sectors of education – the formal, non-formal and informal education. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) was identified as a dynamic mode of delivery that would cut across the educational boundaries and remove barriers thus increase access to learners from basic education to the tertiary level. The ODL mode of delivery would go beyond the formal education and open access to non-formal and lifelong education in order to allow not only the youth but also the working and non-working adults to access demand driven programmes based on needs assessment.

Guided by the principles which include learner-centeredness, openness, flexibility, improved quality and relevance, as well as cost-effectiveness, the ODL mode of delivery is likely to facilitate the realization of EFA goals. In addition, networking, collaboration, and partnerships across the SADC member states enhance the quality of ODL provision across the region.

The overarching framework of this policy lies in its vision, mission, goals, and objectives. The vision is direct and it envisages a good and improved ODL status which represents Lesotho as ‘a learning society with seamless equitable access to all forms of education’ (SADC 2012). The mission is to increase access to educational opportunities and lifelong learning through ODL approaches that will prepare individuals for sustainable development.

This ODL policy is aligned to numerous educational policies and regulations that govern education in the country. It is also harmonised with the international and regional policies and standards. In particular, the ODL policy aims to mainstream gender and inclusive education to ensure that no one is left behind.

The policy highlights fourteen (14) key policy focus areas with emphasis on the challenges which were identified through consultative meetings with ODL institutions and key stakeholders. Each of the key focus areas is presented under the following elements: an issue, issue justification, policy statement, and specific objectives to be pursued and achieved.

The last chapter (Chapter Five) presents the proposed institutional framework and implementation of this policy. It asserts that the successful implementation of this policy will depend on the political will as well as the public support from the nation and different stakeholders who are the community of beneficiaries and professionals. It defines the different stakeholders, their roles, and responsibilities. Furthermore, the chapter presents a proposed implementation strategy which entails a national ODL coordination and regulatory body.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

1.0 Introduction

The Government of Lesotho is the main provider of education and training in the country. It is responsible for all sub-sectors of the education system, from basic education to tertiary level in terms of policy and financing (Education Act, 2004). It is also responsible for technical and vocational education and training, non-formal education and open and distance learning.

In terms of policy, the education system has been conditioned by the participation of the Government of Lesotho in various international and regional forums and initiatives. At regional and continental levels, these include the SADC Protocol on Education and Training (1997), SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework (2012), the new Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Human Resource Development Initiative and the African Union Second Decade of Education Action Plan. At an international level, the Education for All (EFA) mandate, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have had a profound influence on Lesotho's educational policies.

One very significant development in education and training provision, which is directly related to the international trends, is that the Government of Lesotho offers free primary education and has an attendant strategic plan for its implementation. The overall goal of Compulsory Free Primary Education (CFPE) is to contribute significantly to the reduction of poverty in Lesotho through the universal provision of sustainably improved, quality assured, free and compulsory primary education (UNICEF, (2010).

This policy has been developed to guide and support the planning, development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of ODL programmes in Lesotho.

1.1 International Trends in ODL development

Governments, in both developed and developing countries deeply recognize the indispensability of education in economic, social, and cultural development and are therefore committed to achieving the Education For All (EFA) Goals adopted at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal) in April 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, many countries, particularly in the developing world, face many challenges in achieving these goals. Educational development in these countries is still characterized by:

- limited access to education and training for children, young people and adults;
- low quality and insufficient relevance and inadequate financial provision;
- outdated structures for education and training.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the achievements of educational systems are further threatened by the health and social issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges make it imperative for developing countries in particular to use ODL methodologies to radically improve the provision of education as a response to diverse needs of children, young people

and the older generation. It offers some immense benefits to the learners, employers and governments (Regional SADC ODL Policy, 2012).

1.2 Regional Trends in ODL Development

Since its inception in 1980, the major mandate of SADC has been to ensure and facilitate good, healthy and prosperous life for the citizens of the member states. The main focus to achieve this goal has been envisaged as education. In their historic Protocol on Education, SADC laid out the key strategy to implement the UN EFA mandate as implementation of education in its entirety, at formal and non-formal education as well as lifelong education and technical and vocational level (SADC 2012).

When UNESCO led the transition from MDGs to SDGs, they particularly emphasized the SDG4 which aims to promote equal access to education for all, in both primary and secondary level, and further placed emphasis on enhanced access to tertiary as well as TVET. At this time the SADC family sat and agreed on a more ambitious strategy to take the education mandate forward. It agreed that the ODL strategy should be engaged in order to open access to all education levels and platforms, thus, expanding and diversifying learning opportunities (SADC, 2008).

SADC set up an extensive and ambitious strategy for the whole region and for each member state to develop an ODL policy that would guide the implementation of this initiative. At the regional level, SADC has developed wide ranging policies, strategies, guidelines and frameworks that are available for all member states to benchmark from and also to adapt to the national level (SADC, 2012).

1.3 Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Lesotho

Lesotho is surrounded entirely by the Republic of South Africa. It covers an area of 30,355 square kilometres (11,720 square miles). The total population of Lesotho was estimated at 2.1 million with an annual population growth rate of 0.76 % in 2020.

Lesotho has embraced the concept of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) to extend education access at all levels of education and training. The first ODL institution, the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC), of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), was established in 1974. Since then there has been a steady increase in the number of ODL providers and the range of programmes on offer as described below. In addition to these formal arrangements, there are collaborative efforts like the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) at the regional level and the National Association of Open and Distance Education of Lesotho (NAODEL). Both of these associations bring together ODL practitioners to cooperate and collaborate in terms of materials development, programme development, sharing of resources and generally to advance access to education through open and distance learning strategies (Lephoto, 2006).

The following ODL institutions are some of the pioneers which are still holding the ODL fort in the country:

1.3.1 Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC)

LDTC is basically an open school. It provides literacy, numeracy and skills for income generation to rural youth and adults. LDTC also provides open secondary school education to youth and adults who, for one reason or another, cannot attend formal school education. Learners write the same external examinations as those in the formal secondary schools (LDTC, 2012). LDTC was able to connect with a number of institutions to support education with some relevant learning materials and packages during the COVID-19 pandemic (LDTC, 2021).

1.3.2 The Institute of Extra Mural Studies (IEMS)

IEMS is the extension arm of the National University of Lesotho (NUL). Its purpose is to bring the University to the people (NUL, 2018). This is in line with the concept of Open and Distance Learning, to bring people who are at a distance to access education and all that it offers. Its major mandate is to democratize higher education in Lesotho by opening access through open and distance learning. It provides programmes at diploma, degree and post graduate levels. It also offers non-credit, professional and non-formal education (NFE) development programmes (NUL, 2017). As part of a dual institution, IEMS depended on the Learning Management System (LMS) and also some remote learning facility extended to NUL at the time of COVID-19.

1.3.3 Lesotho College of Education (LCE)

Distance Teacher Education Programme (DTEP), is a programme of Lesotho College of Education (LCE). It is a diploma programme specifically designed as an in-service training programme for the majority of experienced but under qualified and unqualified primary school teachers in Lesotho primary schools. The programme, therefore, aims to improve the professional competence of students and at the same time to increase their knowledge, improve their understanding of the subjects covered in the curriculum, refine their intellectual and practical skills and encourage the development of strong personal interests (LCE, 2012). LCE emerged as one success story after COVID-19. The ODL Distance Teacher Education Programme (DTEP) was able to share its ODL experiences with the rest of the college.

1.3.4 Lerotholi Polytechnic (LP)

Lerotholi Polytechnic (LP) is a dual mode institution that provides full time commercial, technical and craft programmes. It has incorporated the distance learning mode for the clientele who cannot attend on a full time basis. The intended LP clientele are the youth, especially women, workforce working in the unorganized sector of the economy, unskilled workers and physically challenged people, LP (2008). As a Higher Education Institution (HEI), LP depended on its LMS and was

also sponsored by one of the local Internet Service Providers (ISPs) during part of the disruption by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3.5 Faculty of Education (FED) National University of Lesotho

The Faculty of Education of the NUL is committed to ensuring a steady and continuing provision of high quality, efficient and effective education responsive to the massive expansion of the primary and secondary education sub-sectors. In order to open more access, the Faculty offers non-degree, degree and post graduate programmes through open and distance learning to promote teacher education (NUL, 2015). In the same manner, the FED relied on the use of the NUL LMS and was also partially financed for remote learning.

1.3.6 ODL Stakeholders in the Non-Formal Education Sector

A number of providers both in government ministries and NGOs already offer their training through ODL. In government, we have examples such as the Ministry of Law and Justice, Judiciary Department, while we also have Lesotho Association of Non-Formal Education (LANFE), Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), and Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled (LNFOD). ODL has enabled them to meet the educational needs and challenges of their clientele.

These are the institutions that were in the fore-front with their knowledge, skills and experience as well as local and regional support, collaboration and partnership with professional associations such as the Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA). The Commonwealth of Learning (COL, 2021) has also played a major capacity building role.

Commented [MR1]: Ditto.

1.3.7 New trends in ODL

Consultative meetings with various stakeholders indicated that institutions such as those in the nursing profession were offering part-time programmes which could be developed into ODL programmes. Furthermore, the findings reverberated that, following the onset of the COVID-19, numerous institutions resorted to strategies such as emergency remote learning and mobile learning for continuity of educational activities. Although these initiatives were not ODL, they are a step towards appreciation of the ODL concept and motivation towards development of appropriate ODL practice.

1.4 Development of a draft policy on Open and Distance Learning

The present initiative to develop an ODL policy in Lesotho follows the background work developed by SADC. The first leg of policy development came after a National Dialogue on Education in Lesotho in 2006. At the time, Basotho urged the Government to set in motion a process to develop ODL policies at national and institutional levels to facilitate and guide ODL growth and development in Lesotho. This was in recognition of the important role of ODL in addressing the challenges of education and training provision in the country (SADC, 2021).

After the COVID-19 experiences in 2020, MOET convened a process to resuscitate the ODL draft policy work. A task team was convened to review the 2014 draft policy, with the new mandate to review, refine and finalise in order to resubmit the draft to the Ministry. The process involved consultations with ODL institutions as well as key stakeholders within MOET and other line ministries and the private sector. The purpose was to find out the extent to which ODL was being used or understood, as well as the challenges faced, if any. The purpose was also to explore the extent to which ODL can be implemented as a key delivery mode to mitigate against any present or future emerging issues such as COVID-19. Finally, it was to propose a coordinating structure under which all ODL institutions could be registered and regulated, guided by the ODL principles, criteria and standards.

The consultations revealed a number of different experiences from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. All in all, during the time when the education system closed, a number of strategies were used in order to open schools and maintain continuity of learning. While there were a few success stories of ODL, action taken was unplanned. Much more could have been realized if institutions were familiar with the ODL mode of delivery, and if appropriate ODL strategies were applied, especially under such challenging situations where not only education institutions were closed, but lives were also in danger.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic was a “real catalytic moment for ODL” (SADC, 2021:04) and the most disruptive period of our time, it also became the greatest eye opener for most of the world, especially in terms of education and the important role education plays in the promotion of sustainable development. For Lesotho, COVID-19 became critical as it literally opened doors to a clearer understanding of ODL as a key strategy to open access to education at all levels. COVID-19 dispensed of the myth that ODL was only for adult learners and those who were latecomers into the education field. At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic most education institutions, especially the higher education institutions, resorted to remote learning, online learning and blended learning modes for continuity of learning. Education providers and various stakeholders reached a consensus that ODL is the most viable strategy to open access to different forms of education. Not only has ODL literally opened doors during the pandemic, but experience clearly proves that ODL is the long predicted and awaited vehicle to open access to Education for All (EFA).

During the period 2008 and 2012, SADC facilitated studies to map out the situation of ODL in the region and followed up with consultative research – a four sector study on the four key subsectors of education: secondary; teacher; technical and vocational education; and training and higher education. The findings of the study reflected almost the same results for the region. For instance:

- There were no institutional or national policy frameworks to regulate and monitor ODL provision;
- There was limited funding to drive the ODL process;
- Most ODL programmes were run by unqualified and inexperienced teaching staff;
- Some of the programmes offered were not relevant to the demands (SADC, 2012).

- i. Since the above study, SADC embarked on various other studies and prepared instruments to guide this important field of ODL to provide support, frameworks and policy guidelines for development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. These have provided the necessary background for studies in the region to be adapted and adopted to the local and institutional level. In particular, all work on ODL would mainstream gender and inclusive education to ensure increased access to quality and relevant education for all;
- ii. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy (2005) – provide a solid framework for utilization of ICTs in ODL to facilitate education and lifelong learning;
- iii. Curriculum and Assessment Policy (2009)
- iv. National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2018/19-2022/23
- v. Lesotho Qualifications Framework (LQF) (2019)
- vi. Higher Education Act 2004
- vii. Lesotho Education Sector Plan 2016-2026
- viii. Lesotho Education Language Policy (2019)
- ix. Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (2018)

The ODL policy would also be aligned to all key education policies at continental, regional and national level. All of these shall be domesticated to the national and institutional level.

1.5 National Policy Environment

The following international, regional and national policy and legal frameworks have informed and guided this ODL policy:

- x. National ODL Policy and Practice in the Commonwealth
- xi. African Union Agenda 2063: The Africa we want
- xii. SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework (2012)
- xiii. SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (GAD) (2008)
- xiv. SADC Protocol on Education and Training in SADC (1997)
- xv. SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP).
- xvi. The Constitution of Lesotho – the Government of Lesotho recognises education as a basic human right;
- xvii. Lesotho Vision 2020 - Education is central to national development, and Lifelong Learning, Vocation, Technical and Entrepreneurial Education will be the main focus in the education system. The Education system will produce a competent, skilled and productive labour force;
- xviii. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) (2006) - Develop and expand Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to cater for economic needs of the country;
- xix. Non-Formal Education (NFE) Policy (2018) – promotion of the culture of lifelong learning and **SADC ODL Frameworks**

SADC (2007): Regional Education and Training Implementation Plan.

SADC (2012): Regional Open and Distance Learning Policy Framework.

SADC (2013): Regional Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Strategic Plan 2012-2017.

CHAPTER TWO: PROBLEM STATEMENT AND ANALYSIS

2.0 Statement of the problem

The Government of Lesotho provides the necessary human, material and financial resources to the education sector every year. However, the magnitude of what needs to be accomplished in education and training provision necessitates strengthening the three, mutually supportive and supplementary dimensions of education for all (EFA) namely; formal, non-formal and informal education. Perhaps more importantly, the enormity of the task of providing education to all children, young people and adults makes it imperative to develop a variety of education delivery systems that maximize the cost-effective utilization of educational resources, including ODL.

The problem is that the current educational provision and delivery does not meet the educational needs of all learners. This calls for investing in other modes of delivery in order to meet the needs of learners from the wide variety of contexts including those whose circumstances do not allow them to attend conventional schooling.

2.1 Justification for ODL

Lesotho has had ODL programmes for more than 40 years but has lacked policies to guide their development and implementation, at national and institutional levels. For example, LDTC which is one of the first ODL institutions has been in operation since 1974 but has no policy. Other ODL institutions which were also first comers such as IEMS and LCE (DTEP) also operated without the benefit of ODL policy guidelines. In some countries in the region there are general statements in education or education policy documents and/or education sector strategic plans. In Lesotho, the ESSP (2005), and later ESP (2016) do not sufficiently nor explicitly provide for the development of ODL.

Consequently, the use of ODL has not always been properly coordinated with other efforts such as the provision of adequate resources, the development of adequate supporting infrastructures, education and training of users of distance education. ODL provision remains the same as similar structures in the conventional education system. Within this same regrettable perspective, ODL still contributes significantly to the implementation of socio-economic policies and in addressing the challenges.

According to the PRSP (2006) consultations, the Basotho identified major challenges in the provision of education and training which include:

- Inadequate and limited education opportunities at all levels especially for the poor and disadvantaged children.
- Lack of diversity in education systems
- Poor retention in schools especially at high level and high dropout rates especially among girls;
- Overcrowding in primary schools and poor quality of education;

- Limited access to technical and vocational training, which is caused by the schools that are few, offer only limited openings and are not adequately decentralized;
- Increasing levels of illiteracy and ignorance.

Consultative meeting with relevant ODL stakeholders have indicated that these challenges have not been adequately addressed. In addition, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the need for ODL provision, not only in the education sector, but also in sectors such as health, agriculture and other socio-economic sectors.

The ODL policy will help to gain public support and political will, which is an essential pre-requisite to the development and success of ODL programmes, at national and institutional levels. Education is expected to increase understanding and knowledge about the potential and limitations of ODL in Lesotho.

The policy of Free Primary Education (FPE) (2001) brought about a need to produce more teachers to cater for increased numbers in primary schools, opening more access at secondary and post-secondary levels. In addition, there is a growing need to provide education to meet the ever changing and increasing learning needs of adults and extend lifelong education.

It is recognized that an ODL policy is an indispensable pre-condition for successful ODL programmes. It is becoming clear that where there are clear and unambiguous policy directives governing the application of ODL, sustainability and success have been remarkable; and where these have been absent, failures have been recorded.

Invariably, ODL institutions in Lesotho experience a lot of operational problems such as inadequate/insufficient physical facilities, financial and human resources and shortage of qualified staff in all areas of ODL. An ODL policy will help to provide a framework for coordination and sharing of resources and facilities.

CHAPTER THREE: POLICY FRAMEWORK

3.0 Introduction

The successful achievement of the ODL policy, goals and objectives depends on the development of an integrated implementation strategy that identifies priority areas and is anchored on strategic synergies and partnership between the government, relevant institutions, the private sector, civil society, communities and individuals.

3.1 Vision

Lesotho will be a learning society with seamless and equitable access to all forms of education through the provision of quality and relevant ODL programmes.

3.2 Mission

To increase access to educational opportunities and lifelong learning through ODL approaches that will prepare individuals for sustainable development.

3.3 Goals of ODL Policy

- i. To increase seamless and equitable access to quality and relevant education for all, including disadvantaged and marginalized groups in order to eradicate ignorance and poverty through provision of relevant ODL programmes.
- ii. To provide occupational, managerial and entrepreneurial knowledge and skills to all Basotho for the purpose of promoting and enhancing high quality work as well as active and productive participation in socio-economic activities.
- iii. To sustain environmental and social conditions which enhance the quality of life.
- iv. To enhance self-reliance and self-sufficiency at individual and national levels.
- v. To implement more specific interventions to manage current and emerging issues through ODL programmes.
- vi. To mainstream gender and environmental concerns in ODL programmes and provision.
- vii. To align the ODL policy to various relevant national policies.
- viii. To promote a culture of lifelong learning.
- ix. To incorporate ICT and multi-media approaches into the development and delivery of ODL programmes.
- x. To advocate enabling ODL environment in the country.
- xi. To strengthen management, collaboration and coordination of ODL programmes for cost-effective utilization of ODL and relevant educational resources.

3.4 Objectives of ODL Policy

- i. To promote quality educational programmes at all levels to create human resource for the world of work;
- ii. To provide opportunities for continuous professional development and lifelong learning for improved livelihoods;
- iii. To promote functional literacy and life skills education on current and emerging issues;
- iv. To expand functional literacy programmes;
- v. To promote awareness about the importance of ODL in socio-economic development;
- vi. To extend ODL delivery mode to all levels of education using various technology;
- vii. To enhance use of ICTs and multi-media to increase access to quality ODL programmes;
- viii. To promote gender-sensitivity and inclusion of environmental issues as well as any emerging issues through ODL;
- ix. To promote participation in activities of NAODEL, DEASA and other regional, continental and international ODL associations;
- x. To promote and support cultural diversity and values as part of sustainable development;
- xi. To develop ODL institutional policies aligned to the national policy; and
- xii. To develop institutional Quality Assurance Policy.

3.5 Guiding Principles

In order to achieve the above goals and objectives ODL will be underpinned and guided by the following principles:

- i. Learner-centeredness: the learner is at centre of all activities, ensuring that the learning environment is conducive and basic learning resources are at learner's disposal;
- ii. Openness: implementation of ODL facilitates reduction or elimination of barriers to entry or access to learning;
- iii. Improved quality and relevance of programmes;
- iv. Promotion of continuous professional development and life-long learning;
- v. Integration of ICT;
- vi. Flexibility in the provision of ODL ensures that ODL structures are dynamic and respond to the ever-changing demands and needs of learners;

- vii. Cost-effectiveness, promote cost effectiveness in the development and deployment of available resources;
- viii. Partnership and collaboration is promoted in the areas of materials, learner support, quality assurance systems, credit transfer, development;
- ix. Efficiency in delivery;
- x. Professionalism, integrity, transparency and accountability;
- xi. Needs-based and demand driven programmes;
- xii. Harmonization and standardization of ODL programmes; and
- xiii. Equity in provision of ODL programmes.

CHAPTER FOUR: KEY POLICY FOCUS AREAS

4.0 Introduction

The following key policy focus areas have come out of the consultations conducted, and the 2014 draft policy. The focus areas have been aligned to the SADC Regional ODL Policy Framework (2012), the Republic of Botswana Draft National Policy on ODL (2015), and the Lesotho Open and Distance Learning Policy Final Draft (2014). These are:

- 1) National ODL Policy Framework;
- 2) Governance and Management;
- 3) ODL Staffing, Training and Development;
- 4) Public Perception on ODL;
- 5) Institutional Capacity;
- 6) Curriculum Development;
- 7) Application of ICT in ODL;
- 8) Learner Support;
- 9) Quality Assurance;
- 10) Monitoring and Evaluation;
- 11) Collaboration, Networking and Partnership;
- 12) Research Development and Dissemination;
- 13) Funding, Budgeting and Resources Mobilization;
- 14) Open Educational Resources (OERs).

These key policy focus areas are presented under the following elements:

- (a) *Issue*: An issue is the discrepancy between the prevailing situation and the most desirable situation;
- (b) *Issue Justification*: This element describes why the issue is important enough that it deserves to be included in a national policy framework on ODL;
- (c) *Policy Statement*: This mandates the undertaking of a specified action and clearly spells out the entity that is accountable for ensuring that the specified action is undertaken;
- (d) *Specific Objectives*: These are specific activities that must be undertaken to ensure that the defined issue is adequately addressed.

4.1 National ODL Policy Framework

4.1.1 Issue

Two attempts at establishing a national ODL policy in Lesotho could not go through the Government structure. Consequently, the ODL mode of delivery is not coordinated or regulated.

4.1.2 Issue justification

Due to the lack of policy to coordinate ODL delivery mode, it is difficult to ensure effective and efficient implementation of formal ODL and non-formal ODL programmes in Lesotho. The challenges related to the lack of policy were magnified during the COVID-19 where educational institutions in Lesotho were forced to close and later to adopt some form of ODL delivery with no tool to guide the needed innovation. The existence of a policy gives direction and confidence to the education providers and practitioners and underscores Government commitment to ODL delivery mode. In particular, the citizens have trust that the Government will promote what is good for the country. The existence of a policy also allows for the mobilisation and allocation of resources needed to support and accelerate the provision of ODL.

A clear ODL policy at national level is a necessary condition for creating an enabling environment to support the development and implementation of institutional ODL policies. This policy should be strongly aligned to gender mainstreaming, inclusivity and all current and emerging issues to facilitate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

4.1.3 Policy Statement

Lesotho shall create an enabling policy environment that promotes the development and effective implementation of ODL programmes to promote EFA initiative.

4.1.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To integrate ODL into the national formal and non-formal education and training systems;
- ii. To align the ODL policy with other relevant policies in line with education commitment in particular, gender, inclusivity, as well as the current and emerging issues;
- iii. To facilitate development of ODL institutional policies;
- iv. To create ODL coordinating structures at the national and institutional level;
- v. To monitor the implementation of ODL institutional policies;
- vi. To develop a national ODL strategic plan;
- vii. To mobilize and allocate resources to ODL institutions.

4.2 Governance and Management of ODL

4.2.1 Issue

Although there are a number of ODL institutions operating as such, their governance and management structure do not have capacity to adequately respond to the development and delivery mode of ODL, their structures are those of the conventional education which do not allow the flexibility of ODL.

4.2.2 Issue Justification

ODL is a unique vehicle to extend quality of education to all since it can reach out to a diverse clientele across numerous sub-sectors and levels. As a result, it has many stakeholders, involves more separate activities and players, large scale programmes, diverse clientele, structures, administrative tasks and management arrangements. In this regard, ODL programmes, including those that are housed in dual-mode institutions, must be given some degree of autonomy which enable them to uphold and adhere to ODL standards. For instance, in a dual-mode institution, two sets of regulations (one for conventional and one for ODL) should operate. An ODL institution can only function effectively and efficiently within an appropriate ODL governance and management structure (Makoe 2018).

Other than the LDTC, numerous ODL programmes in Lesotho are housed in dual mode institutions. Furthermore, the governance and management structures of ODL institutions and programmes are generally guided by the conventional education systems. Such structures do not afford these institutions the autonomy and flexibility to respond as expeditiously as they are required by contemporary ODL systems.

4.2.3 Policy Statement

All ODL institutions should strengthen their governance and management structures to deliver their programmes and services through appropriate ODL governance and effective management systems. The status of autonomy allows such ODL institutions to function efficiently.

4.2.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To develop responsive and efficient governance structures and management systems for ODL institutions;
- ii. To develop human resource capacity in governance, leadership and change management for ODL programmes and services;
- iii. To promote autonomy of ODL institutions to enhance flexibility for the ODL delivery mode;
- iv. To provide effective institutional policy frameworks.

4.3 ODL Staffing, Training and Development

4.3.1 Issue

ODL institutions have inadequately trained personnel.

4.3.2 Issue Justification

ODL institutions in Lesotho employ categories of staff to facilitate various ODL functions. However, few of these have been adequately trained for such specialised ODL functions. As a result, these institutions are unable to meet the education demands of many of the learners who are keen to enrol.

When some staff are enrolled and exposed to training and development, they are attracted by other jobs that are better paying, as a result, fewer and less qualified staff are left to deal with the ODL high demand programmes. The use of untrained part-time staff from conventional institutions only serves to transfer the culture of the conventional system to the ODL institutions.

Although more ODL learners are keen to register for ODL programmes, this increased enrolment is often not met by corresponding recruitment, training and development of staff.

4.3.3 Policy Statement

ODL institutions shall ensure recruitment, training and development of staff that are key to promoting learning for sustainable development in various forms. ODL institutions should also ensure that staff recruitment, training, development, motivation, and retention are commensurate with enrolments and diversity of programmes. The Government should support these efforts through an appropriate budget.

4.3.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To develop national and institutional human resource plans that support a strong staff development capacity;
- ii. To institutionalise continuing professional staff development programmes in ODL institutions;
- iii. To facilitate recruitment and retention of sufficient number of qualified and experienced staff;
- iv. To utilize ICT to facilitate the process of capacity building;
- v. To incorporate ODL as a course or module in teacher training institutions.

4.4 Public Perception on ODL

4.4.1 Issue

Although ODL is not a new phenomenon, many Basotho perceive ODL as weak and producing second rate products. The lack of political will further exacerbates the poor public perception of ODL.

4.4.2 Issue justification

ODL programmes are viewed as second best because of the history that quality schooling happens within the four walls over a certain period of time, led by a teacher within a face-to-face situation. Secondly, students in the conventional systems are favoured by the Government with financial support. Certificates from ODL institutions tend not to be given equal recognition as conventional education certificates. During the COVID-19 period when all was at a standstill, it was the

unplanned and uncoordinated ODL mode of learning that facilitated continuity in learning.

As long as the ODL delivery mode is well formulated, aligned to quality standards and guided by the principles of ODL, the product of ODL programmes is as good as the formal education and will play an important role to promote EFA and SDG4.

4.4.3 Policy Statement

The Lesotho Government shall promote a positive image of ODL and ensure that ODL programmes are aligned to the ODL minimum standards and guiding principles to ensure that ODL mode qualifications are accepted.

4.4.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To increase awareness and advocacy for ODL and its benefits;
- ii. To develop strategies for promoting recognition of qualifications from ODL mode;
- iii. To promote recognition of nationals who are champions from the ODL delivery mode;
- iv. To ensure acceptance of qualifications from ODL mode of delivery;
- v. To expose teachers and other practitioners to ODL training.

4.5 Institutional Capacity

4.5.1 Issue

ODL institutions are not able to meet the present and growing demand for programmes and services due to their insufficient capacity in terms of infrastructure and facilities.

4.5.2 Issue Justification

Capacity development involves strategies in which resources and operational capabilities of institutions are improved to perform priority functions better. While before 2015 Lesotho could not meet the MDG4 – to educate all basic, tertiary and adults, today the mandate for education includes not only formal education but also non-formal education in all its ramifications, and for all continuing and lifelong learning. This means that the scope of ODL has more than doubled. The situation means ODL mode operates in an environment with inadequate resources – financial, physical, and technical infrastructure.

4.5.3 Policy Statement

Government shall improve the capacity of ODL institutions so that they can be able to meet the increasing demand for education and training at different levels of education.

4.5.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To mobilise appropriate physical facilities, infrastructure and resources for ODL institutions;
- ii. To develop sustainable public and private partnerships for expanding ODL provision;
- iii. To increase utilization of appropriate media and instructional resources in ODL;
- iv. To ensure adequate efficient connectivity in all parts of the country;
- v. To support collaboration and partnership across ODL institutions to enable sharing of resources and best practices.

4.6 Curriculum Development

4.6.1 Issue

Most ODL programmes do not respond to the diverse needs of potential and current ODL learners. Some of the programmes are out-dated and not responsive to the current needs of the learner since they are not reviewed periodically.

4.6.2 Issue Justification

Curricula are founded on strong needs assessment and programme review. The international, regional and national mandates indicate what constitutes the visions and missions for ensuring initiatives for a good, healthy and prosperous life. The ODL curriculum should be aligned to the national education curriculum with emphasis on flexibility in the design and structure, as well as the total learning experiences, opportunities and facilities. It should include assessment system to achieve the vision and mission of ODL. The curriculum should also integrate cross-cutting issues such as gender, inclusivity, and other current and emerging issues. A clear policy on curriculum development will ensure that Lesotho becomes a learning society and that the ODL guiding principles play a critical role in contributing to a responsible citizenry.

4.6.3 Policy Statement

ODL institutions shall promote the expansion and diversification of ODL programmes and service delivery in order to meet the development needs of the country and the diverse needs of learners.

4.6.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To ensure that ODL curriculum is aligned to the national curriculum policy;
- ii. To ensure that programmes are informed by needs assessment surveys;
- iii. To periodically review and revise curricula at different levels in order to offer relevant and responsive programmes;
- iv. To provide appropriate instructional strategies to meet diverse learning needs;
- v. To link curricula to the national and regional qualification frameworks.

4.7 Application of ICT in ODL

4.7.1 Issue

The 21st century education has put ICTs at the forefront of innovation in educational delivery. However, there is limited availability, capacity and use of ICT in the development and delivery of ODL programmes in Lesotho.

4.7.2 Issue Justification/challenges

Most ODL institutions have, to some extent, adopted ICT in the development and deployment of ODL. However, utilization of ICT is limited by factors such as inadequate national and institutional ICT infrastructure, limited human resource capacity, low digital literacy of the learners, limited involvement of key stakeholders such as parents, low technology uptake, and lack of relevant policies and strategies to increase access and enhance the quality of ODL delivery mode.

4.7.3 Policy Statement

The Government of Lesotho shall facilitate availability, capacity and utilisation of ICT in the development and delivery of ODL programmes.

4.7.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To advocate for the establishment of appropriate national and institutional ICT infrastructure to support the delivery of ODL programmes and services;
- ii. To equip staff and learners with requisite ICT skills;
- iii. To facilitate the development of ODL institutional ICT policies for promoting effective and efficient utilization of ICTs;
- iv. To advocate for use of appropriate mix of technologies to cater for diverse needs of learners;
- v. To promote the design and implementation of contextually relevant blended distance learning.

4.8 Learner Support

4.8.1 Issue

Most ODL institutions in Lesotho have limited capacity to provide comprehensive and adequate learner support services.

4.8.2 Issue Justification

Learner support is a critical element of any successful ODL delivery package because of the special characteristics of this mode of learning. ODL learners have special needs and experience a variety of problems related to their studies. Learner support can be in a form of services related to teaching and learning needs; access to information, as well as social and personal needs of the learners. These needs and problems can be

addressed through implementation of cost effective and responsive learner support systems to enhance quality and success in ODL delivery. ODL institutions should collaborate and form partnerships for the sharing of effective learner support services.

4.8.3 Policy Statement

ODL institutions shall ensure that there are efficient and effective learner support systems.

4.8.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To establish appropriate structures for providing learners support services;
- ii. To establish and implement effective and efficient learner support systems;
- iii. To build human resource capacity to provide learner support services;
- iv. To adapt innovative approaches to learner support that are aligned to policies such as gender, inclusivity and all current and emerging issues;
- v. To promote and support networking, collaboration and partnerships in learner support.

4.9 Quality Assurance

4.9.1 Issue

Most ODL institutions in Lesotho do not have effective quality assurance systems.

4.9.2 Issue Justification

Quality assurance is the lifeblood of an educational initiative. It should transcend all educational activities at all levels. For instance, ODL materials development, content delivery, assessment, and learner support. However, quality assurance mechanisms for some of these activities are not in place in some of the ODL institutions. The Government should have different sets of policies, rules and regulations governing the establishment of standards for ODL development and delivery at various levels. There has to be a harmonised national quality assurance framework to support development and delivery of ODL programmes and support services. Although the CHE has developed Minimum Accreditation Standards for Open Distance and Learning (ODL) in higher education, there are no standards in place for basic education, secondary education, and non-formal education. These need to be developed and aligned to the national and regional frameworks.

4.9.3 Policy Statement

MOET shall promote and support the development of national and institutional ODL quality assurance frameworks to enhance the quality of ODL programmes.

4.9.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To develop an ODL national Quality Assurance Framework that is aligned to the National Quality Assurance Framework;
- ii. To facilitate the development of institutional quality assurance framework to guide the development and delivery of quality ODL programmes;
- iii. To promote the culture of quality assurance in all educational institutions;
- iv. To develop the minimum standards for ODL for NFE, basic education and TVET.

4.10 Monitoring and Evaluation

4.10.1 Issue

Most ODL institutions do not have comprehensive monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems.

4.10.2 Issue Justification

Monitoring and evaluation are critical to the success of any institution. It is a resource that will enable clear reporting on the work done. These functions ensure that implementation of educational programmes is done in accordance with their original design, and where deviations from the plans are detected alternative and practical solutions can be suggested.

Monitoring and evaluation provide information for decision-making and are a part of a recognised process of judging effectiveness, efficiency and any other outcomes. These can be addressed effectively through harmonisation of ODL indicators, aligned to the Regional ODL Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and domestication of such at national and institutional levels.

4.10.3 Policy Statement

ODL institutions shall domesticate, track and report on the core indicators in the Regional ODL Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

4.10.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To develop national Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks aligned to the Regional ODL Framework;
- ii. To develop institutional Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks aligned to the national ODL Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks;
- iii. To track and report national progress on the delivery of ODL programmes;
- iv. To facilitate information sharing on the development and deployment of ODL across Lesotho;
- v. To promote a culture of Monitoring and Evaluation within ODL institutions in Lesotho.

4.11 Collaboration, Networking and Partnership

4.11.1 Issue

These are key strategies for ODL practice, however, there is very limited collaboration, networking and partnership among ODL institutions in Lesotho and within the rest of the region.

4.11.2 Issue Justification

Lesotho comes from a situation where collaboration, networking and partnership existed in the form of associations such as the National Association of Distance Education in Lesotho (NAODEL), Distance Education Association of Southern Africa (DEASA) and the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE). However, participation in these has become very limited.

Collaboration, networking and partnership are not only part of the ODL mainstay but strategies that can lead to sustainability of this mode of delivery. Amid varying levels of ODL across the country, the element of bringing the institutions together in order to share the educational resources and facilities, scholarship, and best practice through collaboration, networking and partnerships is lacking. Collaboration, networking and partnerships would also eliminate unnecessary duplication of programmes and increase promotion of quality and access to education to all. These strategies also contribute to advocacy and therefore more information and knowledge about ODL.

4.11.3 Policy Statement

ODL institutions shall promote and support collaboration, networking and partnership of ODL institutions at all levels.

4.11.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To facilitate collaboration and partnership in the development and delivery of ODL programmes locally and in the region;
- ii. To enhance sharing of information and best practice not only within and across the country, but also regionally and globally;
- iii. To promote and support resuscitation of professional associations as a strategy to enhance collaboration, networking and partnership within ODL;
- iv. To promote activities such as meetings, conferences, workshops that bring international, regional and local ODL practitioners together.

4.12 Research Development and Dissemination

4.12.1 Issue

Some ODL institutions have research and evaluation units, but not much research development or dissemination is carried out.

4.12.2 Issue Justification

For any educational institution, research is a sine qua non. Research is directed towards understanding processes and outcomes so that more relevant and demand-driven programmes and services can be designed.

Research contributes significantly to what educators do in designing programmes, in curriculum, in methods of instruction, etc. For ODL institutions, research is particularly essential because ODL is a growing field and ODL educators should always be looking for new ways of dealing with and addressing current and emerging issues and improving ways to provide quality education for all.

ODL institutions should cultivate and promote a culture of research for learners and for various practitioners to link research to national sustainable development. Research is also a key strategy to personal and professional development.

4.12.3 Policy Statement

The Government of Lesotho and the ODL institutions shall invest in research and development and ways to improve innovation in this field.

4.12.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To support ODL related national and regional research;
- ii. To facilitate collaborative research, partnership development and delivery of ODL within Lesotho and outside;
- iii. To develop national and institutional ODL research agenda;
- iv. To build and support research capacity in ODL;
- v. To encourage and support interdisciplinary research, collaboration and partnerships;
- vi. To create strategies for research resource mobilization to support research and development.

4.13 Funding, Budgeting and Resources Mobilization

4.13.1 Issue

ODL institutions are not adequately funded. This has led to inadequate service delivery.

4.13.2 Issue Justification

The funding, budgeting and resource mobilization of ODL should be done under the ODL model, which caters for ODL functions. An ODL mode of delivery is essentially different from a conventional educational structure and supports sustainability of ODL initiatives. ODL institutions are designed to function effectively under the management structure of ODL, where they can have allocated budgets for the various ODL functions. ODL institutions cannot function as government structures or dual mode institutions. In such situations, the only way they can function is when they are

given an autonomous status. Autonomy of ODL institutions will enable the flexibility to partner with other institutions in the region and globally, and increase opportunities to attract funding for growth and development of ODL.

4.13.3 Policy Statement

Lesotho Government should allocate ODL institutions adequate budgets for the development and delivery of ODL provision and to also facilitate and support resource mobilization.

4.13.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To create separate budget lines for ODL provision;
- ii. To graduate ODL institutions from units of the Ministry into autonomous ODL institutions which can function effectively and efficiently in order to promote EFA;
- iii. To develop appropriate funding formulae for ODL provision;
- iv. To develop and implement mechanisms for resource mobilisation aligned to the ODL management structure;
- v. To develop strategies for financial resource mobilization;
- vi. To promote collaboration and partnerships for resource mobilization with the public and private sector;
- vii. ODL institutions should outsource their business, which is education, to complement a budget allocated by the Government.

4.14 Open Educational Resources (OERs)

4.14.1 Issue

Although OERs are a valuable resource to support teaching, learning and research, there is insufficient use and knowledge of OERs in the field of ODL.

4.14.2 Issue Justification

Not many ODL institutions are aware of the availability of OERs. In addition, the ODL practitioners are not adequately skilled to access the OERs. COL has raised awareness of OERs through training courses and awareness raising conventions. Some of the efforts raised were for institutions to develop national and institutional policies to guide the use of OERs for inclusive, effective and equitable access to quality education. On the other hand, professionals in ODL should also contribute to the development of OERs for capacity building and professional development. Where possible, these resources should be availed in different media, such as audio and video in order to enhance inclusivity.

4.14.3 Policy Statement

There should be development of policies for the effective use of OERs at both the national and institutional level.

4.14.4 Specific Objectives

- i. To develop and implement the use of OER policy at national and institutional level;
- ii. To raise awareness of the importance and usefulness of OER in ODL;
- iii. To encourage and support membership to OER Dynamic Coalition for collaboration and partnership in the use of OERs;
- iv. To promote and support collaboration and partnerships for development and use of OERs at institutional, national and regional level;
- v. To promote access to OERs;
- vi. To promote participation in the development of OERs by ODL practitioners.

CHAPTER FIVE: INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

5.0 Introduction

The Government of Lesotho faces many challenges in the provision of education and training particularly the implementation of the EFA mandate. The opportunities that ODL provides in the country's efforts to scale up education and training, requires mainstreaming of ODL as a mode of educational delivery. Lessons learned from the COVID-19 experiences present the ODL mode of delivery as a potentially robust way of ensuring continuity of learning and therefore education for all.

The successful achievement of the ODL policy goals and objectives will depend on the development of an integrated implementation strategy. This should identify priority areas and be anchored on strategic synergies and partnership between the government, relevant institutions, the private sector, civil society communities and individuals. This entails the functions, roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders. It should be clearly defined and coordinated to facilitate networking, partnership and collaboration.

In addition, there should be a forum or opportunities for broad based consultations, which ensures active participation of all key stakeholders in not only defining the role of ODL in national development but in making decisions that are directly related to policy implementation. There should also be mechanisms for ensuring that the policy is reviewed periodically through wide and active participation of stakeholders. The following institutional arrangements are therefore proposed:

5.1 Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders

The role of various stakeholders is critical in facilitating the coordination and implementation of the ODL policy. The Government should provide leadership and create the right environment to encourage and support wide and active participation of all key stakeholders in achieving the goals and objectives of the ODL policy. The following stakeholders are recognized for their key role in this area:

- i. The Government
- ii. Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology
- iii. Other line Ministries
- iv. Private Sector/Industry/Employers
- v. Communities
- vi. Civil Society
- vii. Professional Associations
- viii. Development Partners
- ix. Media

- x. Internet Service Providers
- xi. ODL institutions
- xii. Education and Training regulators

5.1.1 The Government

The major factor making for success and sustainability or failure and marginalization of ODL is political will. Such political commitment must be sustained and applied to details such as recognition of ODL qualifications for career purposes, for educational equivalency and progression purposes. The Government of Lesotho, through MOET and other relevant line Ministries, shall:

- (a) Provide strong and visionary leadership in the implementation and review of the ODL policy.
- (b) Promote capacity-building of ODL practitioners through short-term, medium-term and long-term professional development and training.
- (c) Ensure that the necessary legal framework is provided for the implementation of the ODL policy and programmes.
- (d) Mainstream ODL delivery mode in all formal and non-formal education initiatives to promote flexibility and robustness in opening access to education.
- (e) Mainstream ODL in all socio-economic development plans and programmes.
- (f) Encourage the private sector, employers and cooperating partners to support and mainstream ODL in their programmes and projects.
- (g) Mobilize resources for ODL.
- (h) Create an enabling environment for the development of ODL through the provision of necessary legislation, financial and human resources.
- (i) Facilitate the autonomy of ODL institutions to enable them to implement flexibility which makes ODL a unique and dynamic mode of delivery.
- (j) Promote advocacy and awareness raising on ODL.

5.1.2 The Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology

ODL programmes use a variety of ICTs to promote learning. The use of new technologies for ODL in Lesotho is dependent on closer cooperation between providers of ODL programmes and MCST which plays an important role in the development of ICT policy and its periodic review. The Ministry shall ensure that the ICT policy is aligned to all education policies to facilitate efficient implementation of quality education.

5.1.3 Other line Ministries

Apart from MCST, there are many other line ministries that play an active role in using and promoting ODL in lifelong education and in responding to current and emerging issues for sustainable development. This is achieved through the use of printed materials, radio broadcasts, and television while others are involved in educating and training the masses through the use of 'appropriate technologies'.

5.1.4 Private Sector/Industry/Employers

These are the recipients of the ODL products/graduates. Their role should be:

- a) To collaborate with ODL providers in identifying courses and programmes or projects that are market-driven and socially and economically important;
- b) To promote private investment in ODL programmes;
- c) To provide information on human development resource needs and expectations on standards and quality of ODL graduates;
- d) To support the use of ICTs and infrastructure development for ODL provision.

5.1.5 Communities

Local communities have an important role in identifying and prioritizing development needs in their localities. These needs shall inform appropriate ODL programmes.

5.1.6 Civil Society

The development of ODL in general and the implementation of the policy in particular will crucially depend on the participation of non-government organizations, professional associations, unions, community and faith-based organizations. These will be expected to participate in decision-making and development of needs based ODL programmes, promoting recognition of ODL programmes by employers, and in enhancing the public perception of ODL as an integral part of socio-economic development. The civil society will also contribute to capacity development, provision of learning facilities and resources, and in monitoring the performance of relevant ODL programmes.

5.1.7 Professional Associations

Professional associations shall play an important role in creating awareness on the importance of ODL in increasing access to quality education. They shall also:

- a) Contribute in enhancing collaboration in materials development, capacity building, sharing resources and expertise locally and regionally.
- b) Participate actively in resource mobilization for ODL and capacity building for the ODL profession.
- c) Resuscitate NAODEL and actively participate in DEASA.

5.1.8 Development Partners

Development partners should support and facilitate ODL programmes through funding, expertise and institutional capacity building.

5.1.9 Media

Increasing the public perception, understanding and acceptance of the role of ODL in national development will require involvement of the media. This will be achieved through collaboration in programme development, delivery and utilization of media houses and advocacy/sensitisation programmes. The media will also be expected to disseminate information on ODL programmes, research results and general achievements in the provision of ODL in the country as well as publicising the ODL policy itself. The media shall also publicise best practises as well as promote successful ODL role models.

5.1.10 Internet service providers

The MOET shall partner with internet service providers in promoting (and funding) the use of internet and mobile learning for education initiatives. Zero rating facility shall be promoted in all education programmes.

5.1.11 ODL institutions

- Develop appropriate supportive policies
- Ensure compliance of programmes and services with educational quality criteria and standards.

5.1.12 Education and training regulators

- Oversee and monitor the implementation of the National Policy on ODL;
- Provide leadership to ensure that institutions adhere to the provisions of the National Policy on ODL;
- Advise the MOET on implementation of the National Policy on ODL;
- Regulate ODL institutions and ensure their adherence to educational quality criteria and standards.

5.2 Operational Plan

a) Advocacy

ODL professionals and practitioners shall:

- Embark on country-wide ODL awareness raising to familiarise practitioners and other stakeholders with the ODL policy;
- Resuscitate the DEASA – Lesotho Chapter as a way to motivate and facilitate the implementation of this ODL policy;

- Galvanise the ODL community into the four critical sectors:
 - i. Open schooling
 - ii. TVET
 - iii. Tertiary
 - iv. NFE

b) Transformation of LDTC

The transformation of LDTC, as proposed in the Education Sector Plan (ESP 2010-2026, p.76) should be implemented in order to pave way for the establishment of the proposed ODL Coordination Unit as follows:

- i. The Continuing Education unit of LDTC, which deals with basic education, be converted into an open school;
- ii. Based on the educational developments and demands, the proposed open school can be upgraded into a college;
- iii. The NFE unit of LDTC should be transformed into the NFE Inspectorate responsible for all NFE provision.

c) ODL Coordinating Unit

Develop operational structures and systems to ensure wide and active participation of stakeholders by creating a Unit responsible for overseeing and regulating ODL programmes and activities. Under the MOET, the unit shall be structured as follows:

- The head of the unit shall be an official at CEO level with four (4) sub-units of: Open Schooling, TVET, Tertiary, and Non-formal Education (see Figure 1);
- Each sub-unit shall be responsible for developing regulatory guidelines aligned to the national ODL standards, education policies, and other related and relevant policies;
- Each sub-unit shall be responsible for registration of its sector and the development of ODL standards. In the case of the tertiary sub-unit, the standards developed by CHE shall be applicable;
- The sub-units shall be under the supervision of the CEO – ODL as follows:
 - i. Open schooling
 - ii. TVET
 - iii. Tertiary
 - iv. NFE

5.3 Appointees to the ODL Coordination Structure

It is critical that the appointees to the proposed ODL coordination structure are qualified ODL professionals or practitioners to ensure that all the management and administration follows the set ODL policy, guidelines and standards, thus, giving direction as an ODL leader.

5.4 An ODL advisory body

Establish an ODL Advisory Board for coordinating the development of ODL in the country and provide necessary legislation to achieve this. The ODL Advisory Board shall not be an implementer but an overseer and advisor composed of different ODL stakeholders.

The Board shall be serviced by the CEO as its secretary (See Figure 1).

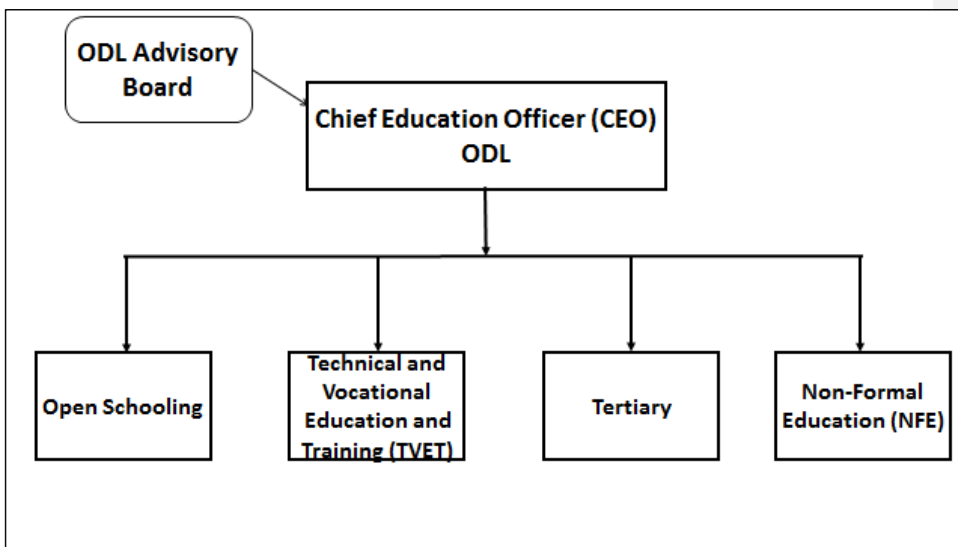


Figure 1: Proposed ODL Regulatory and Coordinating Unit in MOET

5.5 Implementation plan

The ODL policy implementation will cut across line Ministries and Education and Training institutions as well as other sectors of socio-economic development. These will be encouraged and supported to develop annual activity/work plans specifically related to the achievement of ODL objectives or integrate relevant/appropriate ODL activities in their annual work plans.

Relevant ministries and education and training institutions will be required to develop institutional ODL policies and strategic plans directly related to the national policy. The Ministry of Education and Training, will, through the proposed Unit, play an important role in building capacity for developing action plans in partnership with stakeholders (see Figure 1).

5.6 Resource mobilization in its annual budget

The Government shall include in its annual budget funds for ODL. In consultation with relevant stakeholders and all interested parties, it shall solicit funds nationally, regionally and internationally to develop and sustain ODL programmes.

ODL providers or institutions shall have explicit budgets for ODL activities, raise and manage funds in accordance with their mandate and through their own legal means.

5.7 Monitoring and Evaluation of policy implementation

The Government, through MOET, shall undertake to monitor and evaluate the implementation of this policy and shall develop monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that will include:

- a) Developing monitoring indicators into key ODL activities, e.g. learner support, effectiveness of instructional materials and other media.
- b) Ensuring establishment of internal evaluation structures within ODL institutions that will assess and monitor the effectiveness and impact of the policy.
- c) Developing reporting systems.
- d) Undertaking regular reviews of the policy to reflect new and emerging issues in ODL in Lesotho.

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