PARTNERING FOR PROGRESS: TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN LESOTHO

June 2025



A student at Maimoeketsi Community Primary School in Lesotho.
World Bank/John Hogg

Lesotho and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) have worked together since 2005 to strengthen the country's education system. To date, GPE has provided US$52 million in grant support to Lesotho. Under the current strategic period (2021–2025), Lesotho is leveraging multiple GPE funding mechanisms:

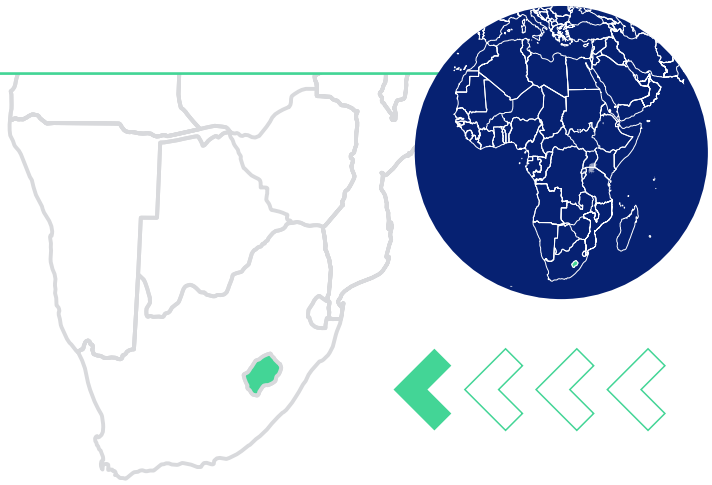
1. System transformation grant:[1]	$5 million
2. System capacity grant:[2]	$1.6 million
3. GPE Multiplier:[3]	$5 million

These grants are being used to support Lesotho's priority reform of enhancing quality of teaching and learning for improved learning attainment in basic education, focusing on highly marginalized learners. The government, together with its national and international education partners, identified this reform as a priority because it has the potential to catalyze systemwide change in education and established Lesotho's Partnership Compact outlining how the country plans to collaborate with others and align resources behind its implementation.

What stands out in Lesotho's compact is that it was able to build on and further harness innovative partnerships between the government and private sector partners to advance its goals and education system strengthening more broadly.

> **The partnership efforts in Lesotho across public and private actors are to be commended. This collective effort demonstrates the opportunity that government, businesses and philanthropy have to work together to strengthen education systems. I hope this inspires others in exploring how partnerships can ambitiously break silos and go stronger in one same direction: children learning now, to thrive tomorrow."**

—Laura Frigenti, Chief Executive Officer at GPE



The Need for Transformation: Progress and System Challenges

Lesotho, a landlocked nation encircled by South Africa and with a population of 2.3 million people, has made significant strides in transforming its education system. Since 2010, the country has made primary education for children ages 3 to 12 free and compulsory and is close to achieving universal access that also includes provision of school meals.

However, key challenges remain:

- Despite progress at the primary level, secondary education enrollment remains low because of insufficient school infrastructure, the cost of school fees and supplies, and limited interest in schooling in some geographic areas. Typically, learners complete only about 10 years of education before dropping out. Boys drop out of school more often to work, while girls drop out because of early marriage and teenage pregnancies.

- Limited access to school-based quality early childhood education also affects children's readiness for learning. A 2018 assessment found that only 2 in 10 children (ages 3 to 4) were developmentally on track for literacy and numeracy.[4]

- The allocation of resources within the education sector is problematic with a significant portion of the budget directed toward teacher remuneration, leaving limited funds for pedagogical materials and training, infrastructure development and the modernization of educational facilities.

- While there is broad-based political and policy support for quality education provision, there is a discrepancy between the development of policies and their implementation as well as between the budgetary commitment to education and the results emerging from the sector. Since 2018, Lesotho has allocated a significant portion of its gross domestic product to education (7%–8% on average, which is higher than average for the region); however, spending efficiency is low, with high costs per year of schooling compared with other countries.

> **We are a nation that deeply values partnership. Collaboration is a cornerstone of our approach in the education sector, and we have been fortunate to engage with a range of longstanding and committed partners across public, private and philanthropic sectors. Having both local and global champions as well as mechanisms and incentives to engage and align partners has been essential to our success."**

—H.E. Prof. Ntoi Rapapa, Lesotho Minister of Education and Training

Innovative Solutions:
Mobilizing Partnerships and Funding

Recognizing these challenges, Lesotho is embracing creative approaches and partnerships to mobilize resources and drive reform. In 2022, the Ministry of Education and Training began to strengthen partnerships across public, private and philanthropic sectors, including with GPE, UNICEF, the Lesotho Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), and private sector and philanthropic entities. This approach has been instrumental in attracting new and additional resources to support the country's education goals. It has also led to an emerging coalition of national private sector actors and foundations, working in alignment with the government's plans.

In 2023, a $2.5-million pledge from the Roger Federer Foundation unlocked an additional $2.5-million from the GPE Multiplier, a mechanism that incentivizes through match funding new and additional funds in support of nationally identified education priorities. These resources support essential interventions in pre-primary education, teacher training and school readiness. Implemented by the Network of Early Childhood Development of Lesotho and UNICEF, **these interventions will benefit more than 57,000 learners across five of Lesotho's 10 administrative districts and enable training of 1,350 pre-primary and primary grade teachers**.

In May 2023, Roger Federer, staff from his foundation and a delegation from GPE visited Lesotho. Together, they advocated for the engagement of Lesotho's business community to provide longer-term support to the education sector. Mr. Federer emphasized that quality education, including early childhood interventions, was a shared responsibility across government, business and development partners, and that these actors must collectively prioritize and pool resources toward a unified vision for the future.



Grade 7 students in class at Maimoeketsi Community Primary School.

World Bank/John Hogg

Mr. Federer's remarks, as well as increased and more inclusive dialogues led by the education ministry within the country's local education group, an educational coordination and policy dialogue platform which expanded its membership to include the Chamber of Commerce and Vodacom in 2023, also galvanized the private sector to take further collective action.

In 2024, the private sector, including Econet's Higherlife Foundation, Vodacom Lesotho Foundation and Standard Lesotho Bank, committed more than $3.6 million over three years, leveraging another $2.5 million from the GPE Multiplier, to enhance equitable and inclusive access to quality primary and lower secondary education for disadvantaged children in Lesotho. Interventions include support to gender-sensitive teacher training and digital learning, 21st-century skills development as well as scholarships for vulnerable secondary school–age children.

More than 90,000 learners across five of Lesotho's 10 administrative districts will benefit.

Building on Results

Thanks to these innovative partnerships, Lesotho has secured more than $11 million for education reforms in support of its partnership compact. These efforts have also laid the groundwork to establish the Private Sector Alliance for Education in Lesotho. Discussions are also underway, with engagement from the Chamber of Commerce, the education ministry and other key partners, to establish a private sector–financed trust fund for education. This would be administered by the alliance and serve as a sustainable mechanism to consolidate future contributions from businesses and align them to national education priorities.

The effort to consolidate and harmonize private sector engagements and contributions was novel for Lesotho and has already generated many lessons learned. According to the Ministry of Education and Training, these factors have been critical to Lesotho's success:

- A shared sense of collaboration for impact among all partners across public, private and philanthropic sectors
- A recognition that different actors bring unique assets and expertise that can be complementary when brought together to address education system gaps
- Financing mechanisms like the GPE Multiplier, which incentivize greater and more aligned investment between partners behind government priorities
- A focus on data and evidence, which helps guide resource allocations toward areas with the greatest need and potential for systemic impact.

1. Using the system transformation grant, partner countries make focused, evidence-based investments in programs that unblock system bottlenecks and drive systemwide change.
2. The system capacity grant builds national capabilities to develop, implement and monitor education sector plans and policies.
3. The GPE Multiplier crowds in investment for education by securing new and additional funding at a ratio of US$1 from the Multiplier for every US$3 from development partners and dollar-for-dollar from businesses and foundations.
4. Bureau of Statistics, *Lesotho Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018*: Survey Findings Report (Maseru, Lesotho: Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

PARTNER TESTIMONIALS

Every human being has the right to inclusive and quality education to make the most of their potential. The creativity and collaboration amongst the government and its partners to deliver on this human right for Basotho children is inspiring. We should hold up this collaboration as an excellent example for the power that working across public, private and philanthropic sectors can have to positively impact communities, particularly those most vulnerable."

—Maya Ziswiler, Chief Executive Officer at Roger Federer Foundation

Our engagement with the government of Lesotho, GPE and its Multiplier has emphasized the critical role that partnership, collaboration and funding play in propelling positive educational outcomes worldwide. This experience has served as a strong reminder of the power that united efforts can yield in transforming educational landscapes and uplifting communities. The combined expertise and commitment exhibited by various stakeholders has truly inspired us to strive for excellence and make a meaningful impact in the education sector."

—Mohale Ralebitso, Chief Executive Officer at Vodacom Lesotho

We have learned that successful educational reforms require the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including government, civil society and the private sector. We have also learned that each context requires tailored solutions that consider local challenges and opportunities rather than a one-size-fits-all model."

—Dennis Plaatjies, Chief Executive Officer at Econet Telecom Lesotho

At Standard Lesotho Bank, our purpose says, 'Lesotho is our home, we drive her growth.' We understand that one of our key roles is to make a meaningful impact on the lives of our people and that impact can be driven by affording our young people an opportunity to get an education."

—Anton Nicolaisen, Chief Executive Officer at Standard Lesotho Bank

The collaborative spirit in Lesotho is truly inspiring. Through innovative financing mechanisms like the GPE Multiplier, we are harnessing the power of partnerships across public and private sectors. Together, we are committed to transforming education and ensuring that every Mosotho child has access to the quality learning opportunities they deserve."

—Deepak Bhaskaran, Country Representative at UNICEF Lesotho