CEO DECISION MEMO

DATE 2/8/2024

TO: Laura Frigenti, CEO		
FROM: Kirsten Majgaard, Padraig Power, Margarita Focas Licht, Jo Bourne, Fazle Rabbani		
SUBJECT: Lesotho Multiplier Grant Application		
Country: Lesotho	**Grant Agent:** UNICEF	**Co-financing:** Roger Federer Foundation US$2.5Million
Grant Type: Multiplier	**Agency fee % (+US$ amount):** 7% (US$)175,000	Expected Start Date: 1/1/2024
Amount: US$2,500,000 **GA Support cost:** 13%, $335,478	**Grant duration:** 2 years	**Expected End Date:** 12/31/2026

Action request

Approve the pre-compact Multiplier (Phase 1) application from Lesotho.

Grant Summary

This Multiplier grant program, *Laying the Foundations of Learning in Lesotho*, will support the Government of Lesotho's ambitions to enhance provision and quality of early childhood care and development (ECCD) by targeting pre-primary and primary level girls and boys in disadvantaged school districts in Lesotho. The program, which will be implemented by UNICEF, is in alignment with Lesotho's Education Sector Plan (2016-2026) and Lesotho's Operational Plan (2012-2023) which recognize the need for quality ECCD in vulnerable and hard-to-reach areas and for increased investment in the subsector. Also, Lesotho's draft partnership compact prioritizes ECCD and school readiness as a key outcome to deliver their priority reform, *Enhancing Quality of Teaching and Learning for Improved Learning Attainment at Basic Education*.

The grant also reflects the strength of the Multiplier to leverage co-financing from new partners. The co-financing for this Multiplier program is from the Roger Federer Foundation which supports the School Readiness Initiative (SRI) through their Lesotho based implementer, the Network of Early Childhood Education of Lesotho (NECDOL). The SRI has involved supporting improved teaching and learning in pre-primary/reception classes which are embedded within primary schools. The SRI trains Grade R teachers using digital tools, with manuals, and guides, and promotes parental and community engagement to enhance learning through play.

The Multiplier program design benefits from an independent evaluation of SRI and ongoing lesson learning. The program will align with RFF funded SRI initiatives and targets to support 300 Grade R classes in five disadvantaged districts by improving existing

infrastructure (including water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities), providing play-based teacher training, encouraging community involvement, and ensuring data driven decision making using digital tools. The program will also provide teacher training and learning resources to 250 community ECCD centers and will support children's transition to primary by providing teacher training and learning resources to 800 primary educators teaching grades 1-3. The program recognizes the importance of leadership for ECCD and proposes to train school principals, District Resource Teachers and Inspectors in the targeted areas.

The five districts have been targeted because of the low levels of student performance in literacy and numeracy. The program is gender hardwired, with focus on more professional development opportunities for female teachers, employing gender sensitive methodologies to narrow the performance gap of girls in STEM subjects, and sensitizing communities through engagement activities about gender based violence.

Current Portfolio

Lesotho has an active system capacity grant (SCG) with UNICEF as grant agent. Total amount of the SCG is US$1.6M. Lesotho has an active ESPIG with World Bank as grant agent. The total amount for the grant is US$7.5M. The grant will close on 9/30/2024. Lesotho is in the process of revising its draft partnership compact with the priority reform: 'enhanced quality of teaching and learning for improved learning attainment at basic education, focusing on the most marginalized learners'. The grant agent selection process for the system transformation grant will soon commence. Lesotho recent submission of a second Expression of Interest to secure the remaining $2.5 million balance of the Multiplier (referred to as Multiplier Phase 2) was recently approved by the Secretariat. This EoI involves co-financing from national private sector organizations and foundations in Lesotho, with UNICEF proposed as the Grant Agent.

Enabling Factors Assessment

Lesotho has undertaken an assessment of the enabling factors, with Data and Evidence and Volume, Efficiency and Equity of Domestic Financing, identified as high priority challenges. Country partners are in the process of finalizing the partnership compact, however, the response on how the country will overcome identified challenges has not been finalized.

Under GPE 2025, prior to recommending approval of a multiplier grant application, it is expected a country would have submitted a satisfactory response to high priority enabling factors. In rare cases (i.e., Rwanda and South Sudan) the Board has agreed to approve Multiplier grant applications prior to completion of the enabling factors step, with the safeguard that a later step, access to Board approved system transformation grant

financing, could be used to ensure countries provide a satisfactory response on high priority enabling factors.

Lesotho presents a similar case: the government response on high priority enabling factors has not yet been finalized and assessed by the Secretariat, but access to the system transformation grant allocation is still outstanding and can be used as to incentivize an adequate response from the country.

In the area of data and evidence, the draft compact proposed sound responses to key challenges, including to strengthen MoET EMIS systems, improve government capacity to gather and use data at decentralized levels and learning assessment implementation. On domestic financing, the updated compact is expected to clarify government's nationwide ambition to expand financing for ECCD, improved equity focus of tertiary education bursaries by introducing means testing, and commitment to improve efficiency through more effective and decentralized approaches to teacher management and deployment, as well as revised approaches to filling vacancies and reduce teacher absenteeism.

Significant Opportunities:

This program, working in both public primary schools and community ECCD demonstrates the government's ambition to provide a more effective regulatory and support framework for ECCD provision. The program to be implemented by UNICEF will contribute to a broader umbrella of support for ECCD through a range of partners – Government of Lesotho, The Roger Federer Foundation and the World Bank and it will add to and strengthen coordination on ECCD at country level.

Through the co-financing from RFF, this program demonstrates the potential of the Multiplier to address equity concerns in a small country like Lesotho. This partnership set the stage for Lesotho's second Multiplier (phase 2) EoI application which has involved national private sector and foundations coming together, under government leadership to unlock the remainder of Lesotho's Multiplier. Lesotho's experience provides lesson learning for other countries in the GPE.

Significant Issues and Risks

The program will select reception classes to support in vulnerable communities within five disadvantaged districts that also have available infrastructure and deployed ECCD teachers. It may be challenging to find schools within the targeted marginalized areas which also reach the minimum criteria for selection by the program. The mapping to determine the school selection is ongoing and this risk, associated with appropriate targeting, was flagged as part of the Quality Assurance process for this program, to be watched closely.

Various partners and projects in the subsector, including RFF, BESP program, and an anticipated new World Bank program, will rely on strong coordination from the ECCD Technical Working Group (TWG). There is a risk that without strong coordination from the ECCD TWG, this program will not contribute to sufficient system change. The Program Steering Committee will aim to mitigate this risk by giving close attention to coordination.

The government of Lesotho has committed to implementing and supporting this program through more effective teacher deployment, committing to school inspections, and post-program provision of teaching and learning materials. However, given the long-known financing challenges for ECCD in Lesotho, it may not be possible for this program to be sustained. To mitigate this risk, the program proposes to build and strengthen institutions responsible for monitoring and supervision during the lifetime of the program and help to demonstrate resulting improved outcomes.

Recommendation

The Review Meeting (RM) concluded, based on the Secretariat's quality assurance review, that the RM recommends to the CEO the approval of an allocation of US$2,500,000 plus an additional US$175,000 in agency fees to UNICEF as the grant agent.

RECOMMENDED DECISION
Grant: Multiplier
Country: Lesotho

CEO/2024/08-02–2024 Approval of Lesotho's Multiplier grant: The CEO in her delegated authority from the Board of Directors approves the Multiplier Grant request for Lesotho in the amount of US$2,500,000 plus an additional US$175,000 in agency fees to UNICEF as the grant agent.

Date: February 8, 2024



Laura Frigenti, CEO