



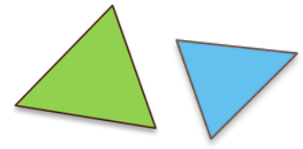
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# The State of Play of Microcredentials:

## Lesotho





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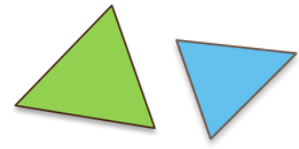
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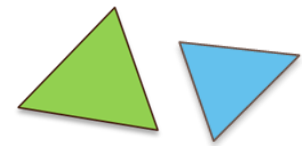




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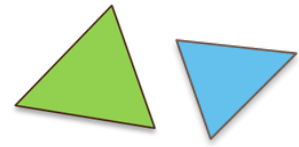
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### Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>CAT</b>	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
<b>CHE</b>	Council on Higher Education
<b>CPD</b>	Continuous Professional Development
<b>GoL</b>	Government of Lesotho
<b>LP</b>	Lerotholi Polytechnic
<b>LQF</b>	Lesotho Qualification Framework
<b>LQQC</b>	Lesotho Qualifications and Quality Council
<b>MoET</b>	Ministry of Education and Training
<b>NSDP II</b>	National Strategic Development Plan II.
<b>NUL</b>	National University of Lesotho
<b>PDA</b>	Professional Developments Awards
<b>RCC</b>	Recognition of Current Competencies
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>TVD</b>	Technical and Vocational Department
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Training and Education
<b>WIL</b>	Work Integrated Learning





*Mothae-Kimberlite Mine*

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION





# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Prologue

The PoMiSA project is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

### 1.1 LESOTHO OVERVIEW AND CONTEXT

The Kingdom of Lesotho is a small country landlocked within the Republic of South Africa. The country covers an area of approximately 30,355 square kilometres and is divided into four ecological zones – the Lowlands - home to about 75 percent of the country’s population, the Foothills, Mountains, and Senqu River Valley and has a population of about 2.1 million growing at the rate of 1.3 percent annually (UN Population Division, 2019). The population is 76 percent youth below the age of 36. Despite being a lower-middle income country, Lesotho has high unemployment rate that has led to youth susceptibility to poverty; approximately 50 percent of the youth live below the poverty line (Sulla, et al., 2019). Generally, there are various youth employment programmes initiated by the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sports and Recreation and some non-government organizations (NGOs) which are done in very small scale, “reaching between 6 and 1,000 beneficiaries per year”, are uncoordinated and thus lead to overlapping interventions (Posarac et al., 2021, p. 19).

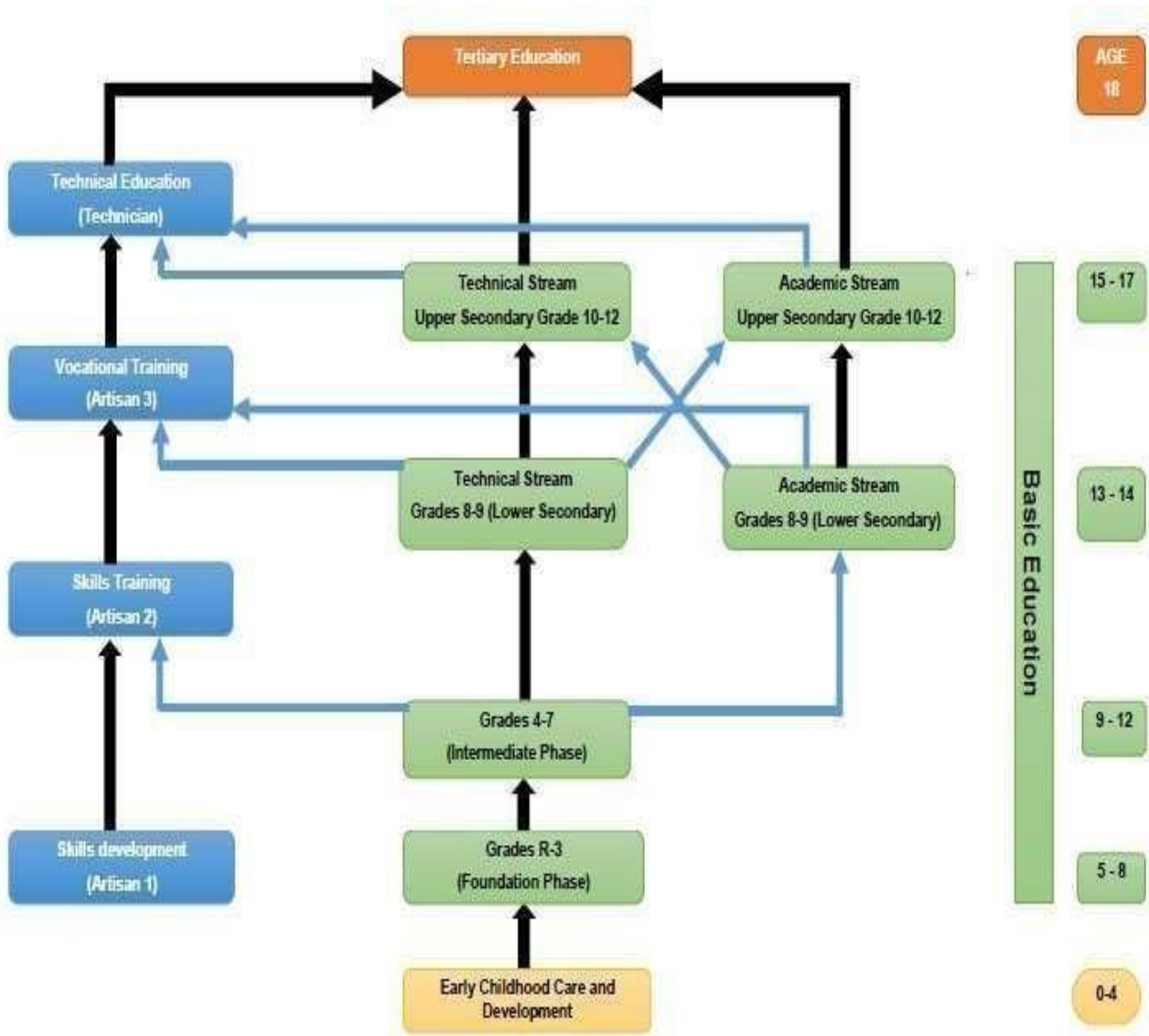
Though ICT is touted as one of the key pillars for her development, the Kingdom of Lesotho is among countries with the lowest access to technology; 34.9% of rural households have

access to grid electricity, compared to 77.7% in urban areas. In 2017 a study revealed that 78 percent of Basotho owned cell phones and 44.54 percent of the phones were “smart phones” that could browse the internet, but approximately 65 percent of the population had not accessed the internet (Lesotho Communication Authority, 2017). On the other hand, access to education in Lesotho increased drastically in 2000 when the government introduced Free Primary Education after which the government legislated free and compulsory primary education (Grade R to Grade 7) (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021). The structure of the Lesotho education system is illustrated below.

While Free Primary Education increased the literacy rates for the country, it has been established that a high wastage prevails across the Lesotho education system, which is caused by indirect costs to school attendance at primary education. This worsens at junior secondary education as the education is not free (Posarac et al., 2021). Notably, the study revealed that access and attrition both depend on the ecological zones in which children find themselves. Approximately, 50 percent of the children from urban areas access and complete primary and secondary education cycle while only 1 in 10 children from the rural mountainous areas complete senior secondary education (Posarac et al., 2021). The significance of this finding is on the fact that 63 percent of young Basotho live in rural areas, and 72 percent of them have not completed secondary education (World Bank, 2022). The situation in the rural areas include lack of exposure to direct gain/value of education, lack of financial capability for parents to see their children through secondary school education, attitude that girl children are not worth educating, and roles of rural boys to tend their family herds of cattle, sheep or goats. While it is true that more government secondary schools

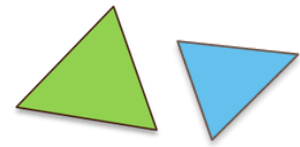


Figure 1: Proposed Lesotho Basic Education Structure (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021)



were built after the free primary education was introduced, some of these schools are still a long walking distance from the village where some children live and so walking to school is sometimes still a challenge that is sometimes coupled with lack of food at home for some children. The school feeding program has had its challenges of insufficiency but it is still better nothing.

The streams that are depicted in Figure 1 are indicative that the intentions of the government are good, from early learning for skill development towards the stream that each child may wish to follow from vocational, technical through to academic stream. This is a good foundation even for the micro-credentials as decisions will have been made early in the life of a learner and micro-credential will simply build on the primary and secondary education a learner will have acquired.



### 1.1.1 Purpose of the Report

The Potential of Micro-credentials in Southern Africa (PoMiSA) is a collaboration between Southern African and European universities and other higher education entities that are exploring the potential of micro-credentials in the respective country and regional contexts. PoMiSA is in the process of systematically developing principles, policies, frameworks and guidelines for good practice with regard to the recognition, definition, provision, quality assurance and regulation of micro-credentials, including in South Africa (University of Johannesburg & Partners 2023). PoMiSA focuses specifically on capacity building in higher education and training, which includes high-level technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and, critically, the interface with employers (Alasmari 2024).

Through PoMiSA, Lesotho universities, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), other post high school institutions wishing to explore micro-credentials for Lesotho, the relevant industries and local quality assurance authorities to jointly standardise definitions and a position on micro-credentials formally. The process would be in line with developments currently underway in many parts of the world, including across PoMiSA partner countries, and also in Australia (Australian Government 2021), Malaysia (Malaysian Qualifications Agency (2020) and the Seychelles (Seychelles Qualifications Authority 2024)

This report presents the existing ‘state of play’ of microcredential conceptualisation, policy development and implementation in Lesotho in the public and private sectors with respect to provision of, need for, interest in and effectiveness thereof. Microcredentials are an important and growing area of interest in Lesotho, just as is the case across the PoMiSA

partner countries, the African continent (ACQF 2023), the Southern African region (UNICEF 2024) and also globally (Cedefop 2022). The report aims to provide a roadmap that informs and guides Lesotho organisations, institutions and policy makers in developing a framework for the systematic inclusion of microcredentials that is relevant in the context of Lesotho. The report is, moreover, expected to contribute to groundwork for developing common Southern African guidelines for microcredentials and, more broadly, facilitating current and future compatibility and cooperation regionally and globally. The report has three sections: 1) an introduction; 2) analysis of the state of play of microcredentials in Lesotho; and 3) a summary of findings and policy considerations a roadmap that informs and guides Lesotho policy makers, organisations and institutions in developing a country-specific framework for the systematic inclusion of microcredentials.

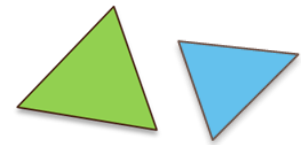
The report is expected to contribute to the foundational work for developing common Southern African guidelines for microcredentials and, more broadly, facilitating current and future compatibility and cooperation regionally and globally. It is further expected that the collaborative nature of this work employed when putting this report together; will contribute notably in enabling mobility and internationalisation of microcredential programs in Lesotho while they remain appropriate in the context of the country.

### 1.2 Methodology

The approach of this study was largely collaborative as it used Google Docs between participating countries. The study followed the qualitative approach where an online survey, interviews and stakeholder consultation were employed. There were four overarching themes upon which the study was based and these themes informed the research process







particularly the data collection. The overarching themes of the research are as follows: 1. Micro-credential Conceptualisation, 2. Public and Private Sector Microcredential

Providers, 3. Microcredential Implementation and Effectiveness and 4. Microcredential Policy Development

**Table 1 Overarching Study Themes and Research Questions**

Study Themes	Research Questions
<b>Micro-credential conceptualisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What are the key drivers and attractors for adopting microcredentials in Lesotho?</li> <li>➤ How do these align with current social, educational and workforce trends?</li> <li>➤ How are microcredentials defined and understood by various stakeholders (educational institutions, students, employers, policymakers) in Lesotho?</li> <li>➤ What impact does this have on the value and challenges of microcredentials?</li> </ul>
<b>Public and private sector micro-credential providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Who are the leading providers of microcredentials in Lesotho, and for what purposes do they provide microcredentials?</li> <li>➤ How do microcredential users and their needs differ between the formal, non-formal and informal sectors?</li> </ul>
<b>Micro-credential implementation and effectiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How effective have microcredentials been in meeting their envisaged educational and vocational objectives in Lesotho?</li> <li>➤ What are the socio-economic impacts of microcredentials in Lesotho, particularly regarding access, equity and inclusion?</li> <li>➤ What are the predominant challenges and enablers affecting the implementation, impact and long-term sustainability of microcredentials?</li> </ul>
<b>Micro-credential policy development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ How is quality assurance is managed for microcredentials?</li> <li>➤ What progress has been made toward institutional and national standards in Lesotho?</li> <li>➤ To what extent are microcredentials integrated into national and regional qualifications frameworks?</li> <li>➤ What are the challenges and opportunities in this process?</li> </ul>





The Lesotho panel was made up of two professors leading two prominent institutions of higher learning in the country Professor Kananelo Mosito, the Pro Vice Chancelor (PVC) at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) and Professor Spirit Tlali of Lerotholi Polytechnic (LP); Dr Lits'abako Ntoi and Ms Ntsoaki Mapetla of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The two researchers assigned for research from data collection, literature review, data analysis, stakeholder engagement and writing are Dr Papali Maqalika of NUL and Mr Mots'oari Lekhori of LP. This research team was being coordinated by a member from Council on Higher Education. Dr Bertha Muringane in the Department of English at NUL edited the report on behalf of the team.

### 1.2.1 Subject Selection

The participants for the study were the providers of micro-credentials constituted by the public and private academic institutions as well as the non-academic ones which usually offer on-the-job type of training. The industries that exist in Lesotho were represented and the last category of participating stakeholders were the regulating bodies such as the quality assurance practitioners and accrediting bodies, the national scholarship secretariat known as National Manpower Development Secretariat (NMDS) and other policy developers or other officers with a notable influence on the policies developed and the process thereof. Invitation to participate was sent to all the players in micro-credentials. For validation, however, participants from the capital city of Lesotho – Maseru - and the neighbouring ones such as Berea district were invited. Care was taken to ensure sufficient representation in each of the three categories of providers, regulators and beneficiaries/industries. The workshop was attended by forty (40) participants out of the fifty (50) who were invited.

### 1.2.2 Data Collection

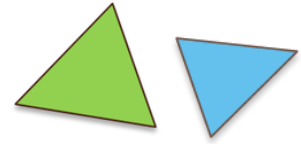
Secondary data were used to form the basis of the study. This data was searched from local literature in the form of official documents, policies, acts and other government documents. It should be noted that the literature on micro-credentials is extremely limited in Lesotho. It is believed that since micro-credentials have not been recognised as such yet, there is little or no literature on them. Generally, micro-credentials are referred to as short learning programs specific to the development of a certain skill. The lack of literature therefore posed a notable limit to the extent to which references were made.

Additionally, a survey was conducted using an online questionnaire to gather primary data from the identified participants. This type of data collecting tool also became a challenge as some participants that were invited to participate were not able to access the tool; others who accessed it did not have sufficient information as has been elaborated in the results, so could not contribute much. However, the participating respondents gave information to a point of saturation.

### 1.2.3 Analysis and Validation

A qualitative thematic approach of analysis was employed. For purposes of this study, the themes were already identified and the reporting template was used as a guide to ensure that all required responses were solicited to paint a true and clear picture about micro-credentials in Lesotho. A number of limitations were experienced during the execution of the study ranging from funding to do the basics, to participants not able to participate in an online questionnaire. Additionally, a major limitation was limited literature on micro-credentials in Lesotho. Reporting of the analysed data is done following the given template.





Learner @LP

# CHAPTER 2





## 2. ANALYSIS OF THE MICROCREDENTIALS STATE OF PLAY IN LESOTHO

### 2.1 MICRO-CREDENTIAL CONCEPTUALISATION

#### 2.1.1 What are the key political, economic, social and technological drivers and attractors for adopting micro-credentials in Lesotho?

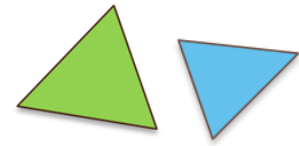
Lesotho has several political, economic, social, and technological drivers and attractors justifying adoption of micro-credentials. The impetus is evident in the background of Lesotho's development of its National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) II. Informed by research, the NSDP II clearly shows that Government took a political decision to acknowledge and validate knowledge and skills of Basotho (citizens of Lesotho) working in the textile manufacturing industry, a sector employing most people holding the secondary school leaving certificate or less. Typically, better employment opportunities and benefits, as well as career progression in Lesotho usually come for people with post-secondary qualifications. For example, data from the Continuous Multipurpose Household and the Household Budget Surveys (CMS/HBS) of 2017/18 show that employment rates for people with technical training and those with higher education are 15 to 20 percentage points higher than those of secondary school completers (Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

Additionally, the employment patterns are influenced by geographical (urban-rural) and gender patterns. For example, 21 percent of youth in rural areas are in wage employment compared to 54 percent among urban youth, thus, affirming that labour outcomes among youth are positively correlated with

educational attainment patterns in the country. On the other hand, although women in Lesotho have better education outcomes, this is not translated to the labour outcomes because unemployment is significantly higher among women than men (Posarac et al., 2021). One of the causes for the observed gender disparities is that while women account for 60 percent of tertiary education enrolment, only 37.5 percent of them enrol in natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics fields, 36.8 percent in ICT, and a mere 26.2 percent in engineering, manufacturing, and construction fields (Gebre, Moshoeshe, Thulare & Dulvy, 2023). Sixty-seven percent of women pursue programmes in Arts and Humanities which do not align with current trends in the labour market.

Therefore, given the background of unequal educational and working opportunities, Lesotho government's endorsement of micro-credentials would also serve a social interest in that it would be in a position to recognise and validate the existing skills in the labour market arising from on-the-job training and work experience. Recognising skills acquired outside of the formal education sector would be acknowledging life-long learning and awarding such learning/training credits would improve working conditions for textile manufacturing industry workers who are unpaid because of the labour market in Lesotho which mostly recognises and rewards credentials from formal education. The NSDP II shows government's commitment to support skills development of employees entering the most productive market (textile manufacturing industry) with a secondary school-leaving certificate to fulfil the need to recognise skills they gain for better financial incentives and economic inclusion (Government of Lesotho (GoL), 2018). Noting Lesotho's need for poverty reduction, a different study notes that Lesotho youth are disproportionately affected by unemployment, which the International Labour Organizations (ILO) estimates as





among the highest globally with approximately 29 percent of adolescents aged 15-19 and 44 percent of young adults aged 20-35 neither employed, in formal education, nor being trained (Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Basically, there is a huge role that micro-credentials can play in Lesotho by recognising and validating formal, informal, and non-formal learning. This is evident in some government units such as the Ministry of Education and Training developing policies to bridge gaps between formal, informal, and non-formal forms of education. These policies recognise diverse views on what constitutes credible knowledge virtues and competencies, delineating the rightful role-players imparting the recognised skills, and determining who has the right to award micro-credentials. They also acknowledge the need for the education sector to recognise all forms of learning and efforts at reskilling because of shifts in job responsibilities. For example, Lesotho is beginning to have some industries other than the textile, which have introduced that employees with experience from textile industries must be able to produce documentary evidence to new employers asserting their competencies including training and/ or experience using technologies as necessary.

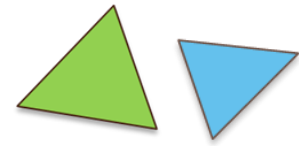
A synopsis of three policies of the Ministry of Education endorsing micro-credentials is as follows: First, the Draft Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) Policy is meant to “guide and coordinate the process of credit transfer” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2022, p.12) and recognise the life-long learning by harmonising awards of learning achievements “attained from formal, non-formal and informal settings of learning” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2022, p. 11). Second, the National Policy for Implementation of Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC) sets the basis for assessing previously acquired but uncertificated skills, knowledge, and competence through “continuous and rigorous

assessment with the purpose of enhancing employability...” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2022, p. 1). Finally, and most importantly, the National Policy for Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) seeks to validate, recognise, and certify all forms of learning to allow labour migration and mobility of learners (Ministry of Education and Training, 2022, p. 3).

Generally, existing literature shows that Lesotho government recognises the role micro-credentials can play in asserting value of formal, informal, and non-formal learning and it has developed policies to frame their adoption in the country. However, there is no literature on views of various stakeholders such as institutions of higher education and regulatory bodies for various professions, among others, on their use of micro-credentials.

In executing the study on micro-credentials, the researchers from NUL and LP developed an open-ended questionnaire and administered it to representatives of these stakeholders followed by a validation workshop on the findings of the study. The study found that micro-credentials address the workforce needs leading to increased employability; they bridge the skills gap in the world of work. It is also found that rapid changes brought by technological advancement have led to staff needing reskilling to adapt to the infusing of artificial intelligence at work. That is, staff retention depends on compatibility/ alignment of staff skills to current labour demands and micro-credentials can boost employability as those unemployed at the time of training acquire up-to-date skills relevant to the job market. Additionally, micro-credentials are a more affordable form of education compared to formal education; program offerings may focus the teaching and learning only on required skills and by so doing reduce the costs of pursuing the entire program which is more expensive and requires time. Notably, results indicate that micro-credentials may assist



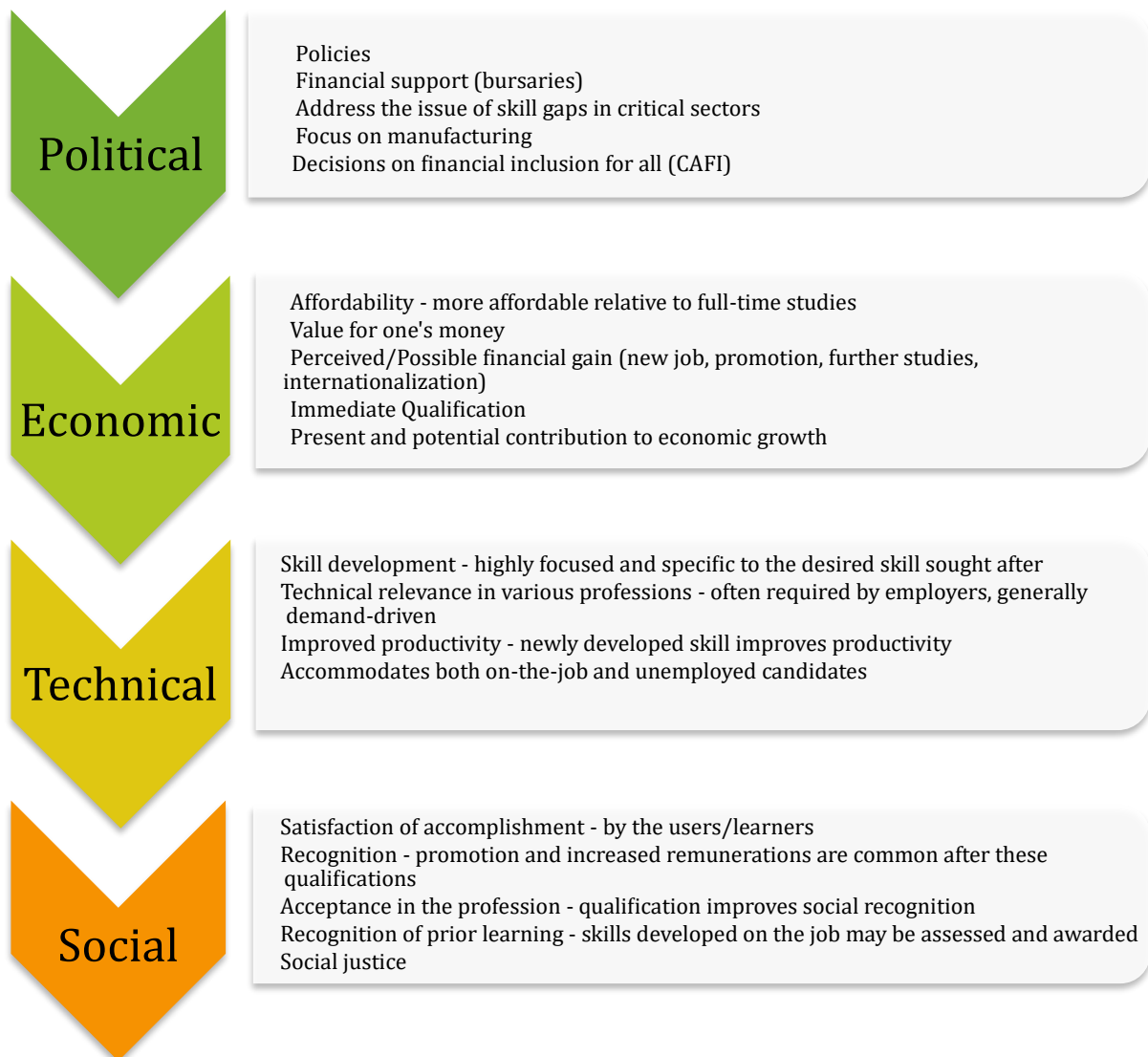


towards self-employment as aspiring entrepreneurs in Lesotho are funded for their projects only after receiving training on certain skills required by funding agencies.

The micro-credentials are directly influenced from the four angles, namely political,

economic, technical and social. As thus, these were seen as the inevitable drivers of the micro-credentials that any country wishing to implement micro-credentials cannot ignore. Figure 2 gives a summary of those key drivers in their various categories as the stakeholders perceive them.

Figure 2: Micro-credential Drivers in Lesotho





A clear recognition and thorough consideration of the drivers illustrated in Figure 2 will be advantageous and actually enhance the proper implementation of such programs that the stakeholders proved to be appropriate, relevant and highly sought after in this day and age. Micro-credentials are believed to be a potential game changer in the economy and, in turn, improve the livelihoods of most potential users who may be poverty stricken at the time as productivity is improved in favour of the industries. Mounting these programs in the learning institutions will also benefit the schools as they have learners to teach and make some income while improving the workforce through skill development.

### **2.1.2 How do these drivers and attractors align with current educational and workforce trends?**

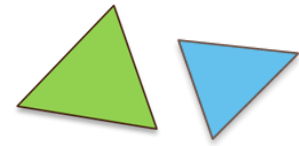
According to Gebre et al. (2023), women in Lesotho have significantly lower employment rates compared to men and huge inequalities in labour market results from the “intersection of gender and rurality” p. 25. Thus, educational and workforce trends account for some of the changes that require adoption of micro-credentials in the country. Within the higher education space, regulation of the institutions and accreditation of their programmes were massive changes which required readjustments. For example, the enactment of the Higher Education Act in 2004 and the subsequent establishment of Council on Higher Education (CHE) meant that post-secondary education and training ought to be regulated, and credence given to labour-related skills acquisition outside the formal sector. The Higher Education Policy (HEP) states that CHE must ensure that “all programmes of education and training are subject to uniform and rigorous vetting procedures before they are approved/accredited and prospective students/trainees are allowed to enrol” (Council on Higher Education, 2013, p. xviii).

As such, the policy enables an interface between higher education and skills acquired from other forms of post-secondary education and training as well as alignment between skills output from the HE subsector and demands of the labour markets (Council on Higher Education, 2013, p. 19-20).

Similarly, the Government has reiterated a concern with the mismatch between formal education and workforce demands. For example, the NSDP II refers to the national concern on youth unemployment due to inadequate skills, dropping out of school and most importantly, skills mismatch between “labour market needs and skills” acquired from formal education (GoL, 2018, p. 159). Evidently, literature cited in one national survey explores various forces that warrant the need for micro-credentials to balance the current educational provision and workforce trends, namely skills mismatches, skills gap, and skills shortages (KESI Business Solutions, 2022). The study found various challenges in Lesotho which call for retraining of employees in various organisations, namely over or under-education of staff, length of service, technical skills, inability to perform etc., all of which require staff to be capacitated and retrained, but most importantly high unemployment which requires reskilling the unemployed for available job opportunities (KESI Business Solutions, 2022). Furthermore;

*“The analysis of the results pointed out that there is a high prevalence of skills gaps in Lesotho, particularly in professional positions. This is clear in sectors in varying degrees. In the sectors that mostly require non-professional workers such as retail and wholesale, manufacturing and hairdressing, salons and beauty parlours, acquirement of skills was confirmed to be high. On the other hand, it was noted that professionals in sectors such as ICT, energy, professional, scientific, and technical services, finance and insurance, management of companies, and enterprises and agriculture, education services,*





*forestry and fishing had shown attainment of skills is lower.” (KESI Business Solutions, 2022, p.191).*

The study further states that the leading causes of skills shortage in Lesotho is due to lack of collaboration between the government, industry and HEIs, unresponsive courses, inadequate remuneration and corruption (KESI Business Solutions, 2022, p. 192).

The effort to regulate these various forms of education and training is evident in the Ministry of Education’s development of the Lesotho Qualifications Framework (LQF) to provide a structure that streamlines qualifications into levels allowing the application of the CAT, RPL and RCC policies (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). The LQF enables assessment of learners’ “knowledge and skills to gain access into programme or obtain formal credentials for what they know and can do” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019, p.24). Evident in the NSDP II and workforce survey is a myriad of needs that Lesotho must address through developing micro-credentials. These include validating skills of a large working population in manufacturing and informal sectors but without formal qualifications; high youth unemployment whose current qualifications do not meet skills requirement for available vacancies and the shift in technology and other conditions that require reskilling of the labour force.

Literature points to political, social and policy imperatives aligning to support recognition of micro-credentials. In exploring how the drivers and attractors for adopting micro-credentials relate to current educational and workforce status and trends, the following are some of the findings:

- New trends in knowledge, high unemployment among graduates, filling knowledge gaps between formal education and labour needs, addressing issues of poverty and high unemployment, aligning Lesotho education needs to global

standards and workforce needs in the 21st century, etc.

- Diversity of views that align with existing trends in literature on a mix of political, economic, social, and technological developments necessitating adoption of micro-credentials as a viable alternative to formal education.
- Micro-credentials are viewed as cheaper than formal education, address specific needs in the labour markets, address poverty and unemployment by offering skills leading to innovative ideas on making businesses or increasing productivity for those already employed.
- Critical to the findings is a consistency across participants’ views of an idea that knowledge is evolving, and that technology infusion requires retraining and upskilling.

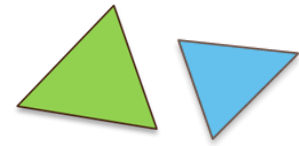
In summary, there is a gap existing in the workforce and the required skill, and micro-credentials are at an advantage to bridge that gap by retraining and upskilling the current workforce. Simply put, micro-credentials are specialised and flexible enough to offer what the workforce requires. The fact that micro-credentials are demand driven is not an exaggerated statement. The challenge, however, is that the LQF does not have a place for them. This is also an area that needs attention to ensure proper implementation of the micro-credentials hereby considered.

### **2.1.3 How are micro-credentials defined and understood by various stakeholders (educational institutions, students, employers, policymakers) in Lesotho?**

As the relevant Ministry overseeing issues of education and training in Lesotho, the Ministry of Education has various policy frameworks to regulate provision of education and training as well as guide stakeholders on understanding of micro-credentials. The Ministry developed Lesotho Qualifications Framework (LQF) as a comprehensive system for the maintenance,







qualification design, quality assurance of education and training provision, classification and registration of qualifications and part-qualifications (Ministry of Educations and Training, 2019, p. 36). The LQF further defines a part-qualification as “an assessed unit, module or course of learning that is registered as part of a qualification”. The inclusion of part-qualifications, industry based vocational qualifications and modern technical and professional apprenticeship awards seek to address the need for skills and competence development to reduce unemployment and poverty levels (Ministry of Educations and Training, 2019, p.13). The Draft Credit Accumulation and Transfer Policy (CAT) talks to inclusion of professional developments awards (PDAs) track in the LQF as “... a conscious attempt to validate all forms of additional continuous professional development (CPD) in the form of short courses...” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2022, p. 15). It further indicates that credits shall be granted for completed courses or part-qualifications.

In addition, a Draft National Policy for Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) “...has been recognized as a key instrument to implement the Lesotho Qualifications Framework by validating and recognizing prior learning and awarding credits at an LQF level that can then be used to access a qualification or in the awarding of a qualification” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2022, viii). RPL considers previously earned credits, part-qualifications, short courses, work experience and portfolio of evidence through an environment that has clear, transparent, and coherent procedures that accurately and consistently assess candidates’ evidence.

To clarify the role of relevant actors in the higher education space on provision of micro-credentials and their understanding of existing policy frameworks, representatives of the institutions were asked to explain their understanding. Results revealed that the participants perceived micro-credentials as formally recognised or certificated forms of knowledge and/ or a set of skills, shorter than but, complementing formal education. This finding touches on the duration but also emphasises that micro-credentials should be recognised. Results also highlight that the need for learning modules or courses is derived from participant of a training or from industry. This finding also explains micro-credentials as required or relevant or useful forms of knowledge and skills, a targeted training informed by gaps in knowledge and skills required by the labour market.

The study further indicates that micro-credentials are a form of evidence for learning or a means to show current competencies. This observation aligns with the purpose for which the ministry developed the RPL, RCC and CAT policies as explained above. It acknowledges lifelong learning as embedded in career development. Emphasis is also made on micro-credentials not as a theoretical form of knowledge, but practical skills needed to advance a certain task or job. Other qualities for micro-credentials notable in responses are that they promote flexibility of learning, upgrade knowledge, are not general but specific, are certified and that these credentials must be recognised by employers, etc. It must be noted that some participants openly declared that the micro-credentials are a new concept to them altogether, which aligned with the finding that in Lesotho micro-credentials are referred to by various names such as short learning programmes, short courses etc.



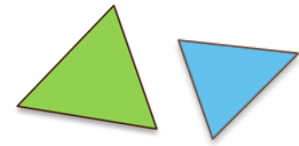


Table 2: Concepts and Attributes in the Definition of Micro-credential

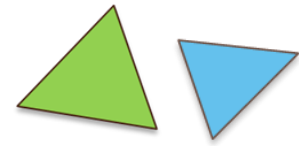
DESCRIBING CONCEPT	ATTRIBUTES
<b>Time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short time - from a few weeks to a maximum of two years.</li> <li>• Workable to the schedule of the users – weekends or evening</li> <li>• Can block classroom experience to a convenient time for all</li> </ul>
<b>Advantage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand driven</li> <li>• Responsive</li> <li>• Usually affordable</li> <li>• Do not require fulltime schooling</li> <li>• Admissions usually not complicated</li> <li>• Recognise prior learning</li> <li>• Possibility of continuity</li> <li>• Promote life-long learning</li> <li>• Flexibility of learning in “manageable chunks”</li> </ul>
<b>Nature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on specific skills</li> <li>• Designed to be flexible in offerings</li> <li>• May be offered virtually, physically or in a hybrid mode</li> <li>• Most are practical and may be one on the job</li> </ul>
<b>Recognition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certified – the certifying authorities require revisiting</li> <li>• Accreditation not done for most</li> <li>• In the case of those that are accredited, the process is not as rigorous as it is the case with academic institutions (degrees)</li> </ul>

As can be seen in Table 1, there is an array of concepts and attributes that the stakeholders used to describe the micro-credentials in the context of Lesotho. The classification in the table gives a picture of the stakeholders’ understanding of micro-credentials at a glance.

### 2.1.4 Stakeholders’ views on micro-credentials impact their practical implementation

Information to address this question was generated from 26 representatives of various institutions who noted a variety of ways in which adoption of micro-credentials may impact their practical implementation. As noted earlier, the Ministry of Education has developed various policies from the LQF which describe level descriptors to help developers to design modules addressing the right knowledge and skills, to policies enabling their implementation such as the RPL, RCC and CAT.





However, it appears that despite existence of the policies, not much is known about how these policy frameworks should guide development of the short learning courses. Recognition of the programmes or the exact and appropriate value they will hold in relation to or compared to formal qualification is unknown to institutions offering higher education in Lesotho. Thus, formal qualifications remain dominant as they seem to be the only ones recognised by Lesotho industries. Participation of representatives of industry was limited; there were a few representatives from professional regulatory bodies for one profession and another from banking. Both participants already had regulations in which professionals registered with them had to mandatorily serve certain hours per year to improve themselves as part of Continuous Professional development (CPD).

Industries may respond to the use of micro-credential beyond the simple recognition and regulation but may have to find ways of financing them. For example, if employees are expected to pay for themselves in these mandatory CPD, this may sustain socioeconomic disparities which typify formal education, as the most economically vulnerable may not see their value against competing needs. However, if costs for such skills development are absorbed by employers, even if it is done by collaborating with the institutions offering such the micro-credentials – (providers), the majority, if not all the staff, would benefit. It would even go a long way in continuity if policy were developed with implementation procedures to ensure that even the successors will carry the baton on to life-long learning and skill development for improved productivity.

Additionally, on the impact of micro-credentials, the participating stakeholders highlighted that their implementation will necessitate robust and continuous engagement of providers and industry as beneficiaries. Also, healthy relationships need to be forged

between the providers and the beneficiaries – industry. It will be essential that all stakeholders buy into the concept of micro-credentials; it is also acknowledged that there is some extent of resistance expected from some of the stakeholders.

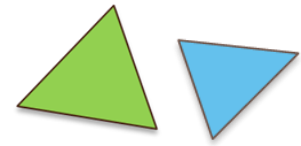
### 2.1.5 Summary and Implications

Micro-credentials are understood to mean short-term training which is demand driven, shorter than formal education programmes, flexible and promote life-long learning. The government of Lesotho has identified adoption of micro-credentials as strategic because they will equip a large population of low-skilled labour with opportunities to recognise and validate their learning and/ or training. Government also acknowledges huge unemployment in the country, some of which is caused by a misalignment between formal education and the labour market. Unemployment, similar to access to education in Lesotho, is gendered and affected geographically as context. One of the key initiatives of government through the Ministry of Education and Training has been developing policies that address application of micro-credentials within the current education and training framework. However, despite the policies developed, most tertiary institutions have not developed much in adopting the policies to inform their programmes.

### 2.1.6 Recommendations

Based on the results on the conceptualisation of micro-credentials, it is hereby recommended that more stakeholder engagement should be prioritised and campaigns be established on micro-credentials. The campaigns should pivot on ensuring common understanding of micro-credentials nationally for application regionally and internationally. The campaigns should take an educational direction which all stakeholders can take part in. The collective common understanding will reduce misconceptions and reduce disappointments since all Basotho will know what to expect from the micro-





credentials. These campaigns should also include roles played by each stakeholder which they are already involved in. It is believed that this shall instil a sense of ownership of the concept as all will understand benefits of

micro-credentials. That way, stakeholders will ensure success.



Maliba Lodge

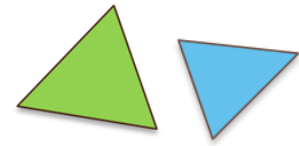
## 2.2 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR PROVIDERS OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS

### 2.2.1 The role providers of micro-credentials play in Lesotho

To establish the role of public and private sector providers of micro-credentials, 26 representatives of these institutions were asked to explain the role of their institutions and the following were their perceptions: members of the traditional public and private academic institutions predominantly focus on formal and long-term programmes and not micro-credentials; they occasionally offer

micro-credentials when requested to do so by users in dire need. Even in this instance, only a handful of the potential providers actually offer them. In most cases, only the providers whose training programmes focus on continuous professional training and already have practical skill developing programmes offer these micro-credentials. However, some institutions offer 'internships' and 'learnerships' where assessments may give rise to assessing competencies and providing validation of professional "standards". One participant noted





that their institution provides skills updates for clinical officers but provide no certification. This speaks to provision of a form of micro-credentials which are not structured mainly because the institution has not yet recognised the value of micro-credentials.

Most importantly, one participant noted that their institution provides short courses as new skills (and not CPD) in areas such as permaculture and solar technology while another informed the team that they offer artificial insemination in cattle and sheep. As already mentioned before, the latter already have among their offerings, a full degree in animal Science and have been engaged in community service in the same field of study. It was from the community engagement and scholarly research that the need for a skill in artificial insemination was identified. Notably, these areas of focus are niche target for government in its effort to be environmentally friendly and produce green energy and improved flocks of cattle respectively; thus, the examples point to micro-credentials serving political, economic, technical, and social as well as contextual challenges of Lesotho. Another example was that of a participant whose institution uses micro-credentials as one

central pillar of its core business and collaborates with international organisations sharing similar interest to gauge relevance and efficiency of its offerings.

Finally, some participants represented regulatory bodies for some professions such as nursing and have keen interest in what skills are acquired from the nursing academic institutions. They play a major role of quality assurance to ensure that the knowledge and skills imparted by the institutions align with industry needs and meet basic requirements of the target profession. Generally, the institutions were different and provided various possibilities for their possible roles in offering micro-credentials. While some were yet to identify the place of micro-credentials along the provision of formal programmes, others already served both formal programmes with longer duration and short courses. Given the uniqueness of each institution, which no other may be credible to offer short courses in its niche area, all have roles to play in the development and provision of micro-credentials in the country.



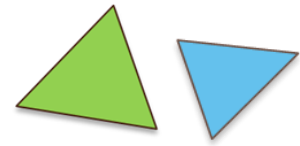
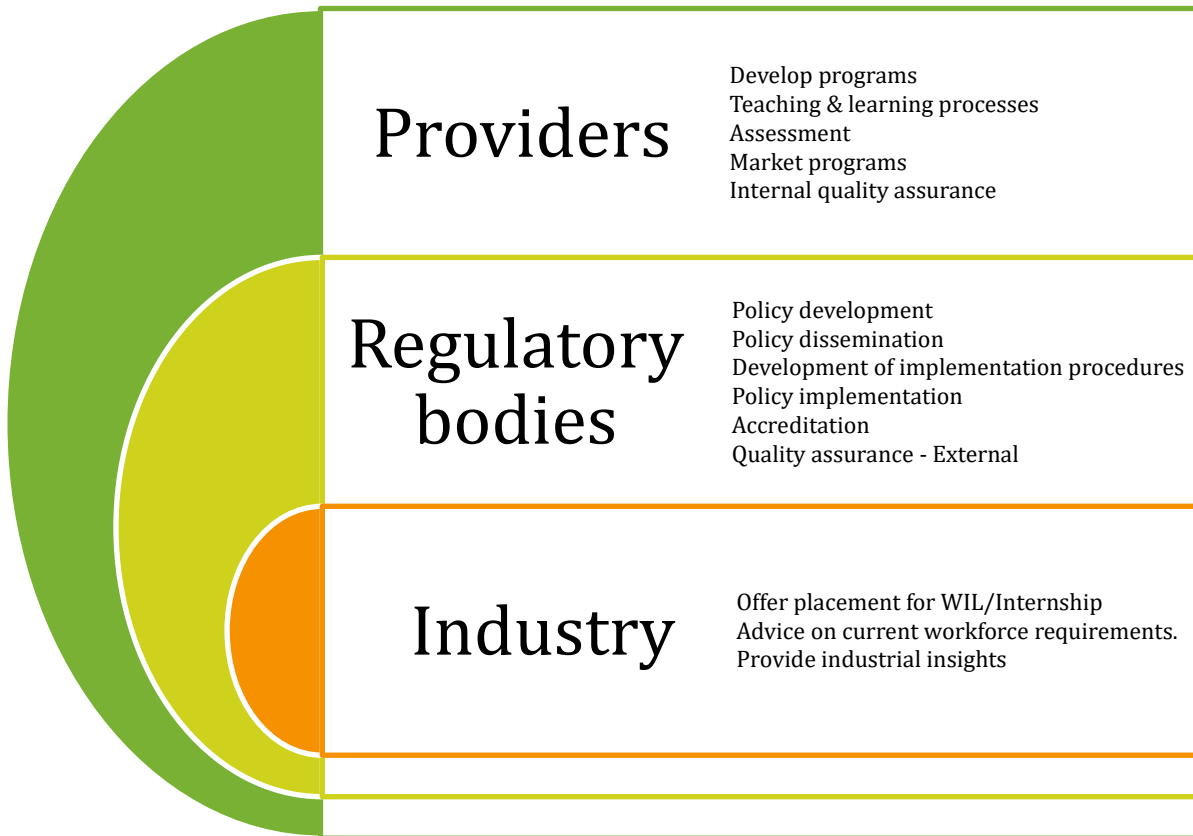


Figure 3: Roles of the Players in Micro-credentials

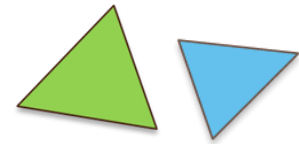


The stakeholders identified the roles of the players in micro-credentials from program development, accreditation, implementation, assessment, WIL/Internship, relevant policy development, quality assurance and marketing the programs. Figure 3 gives the summary of the roles at a glance. There is a set of players identified as supporters by the stakeholders; these are financing bodies like the National Manpower Development Secretariat (NMDS) responsible for facilitating the awarding of scholarship funds and collection thereof upon completion of studies and resumption of employment. The other financial institutions like banks, public or private/commercial, also form part of this group of players in micro-credentials as they may be granting loans to the users for their enrolment into the programs.

### 2.2.2 The users' benefits from micro-credentials

As previously explained, micro-credentials are need or demand driven. Therefore, they usually add valuable skills which enable efficiency of the employees and can enhance high productivity. Participants from various institutions felt that micro-credentials have potential to enhance resumes of trainees, enable continuous skills transfer, provide accelerated learning – thus saving time, build competence in provision of relevant services and improving industry-relevant professional development. Participants also noted that beneficiaries of micro-credentials are easily absorbed by the labour market. In addition, one of the participants observed that some trainees undertake short learning courses as a requirement for a regulatory body to ensure



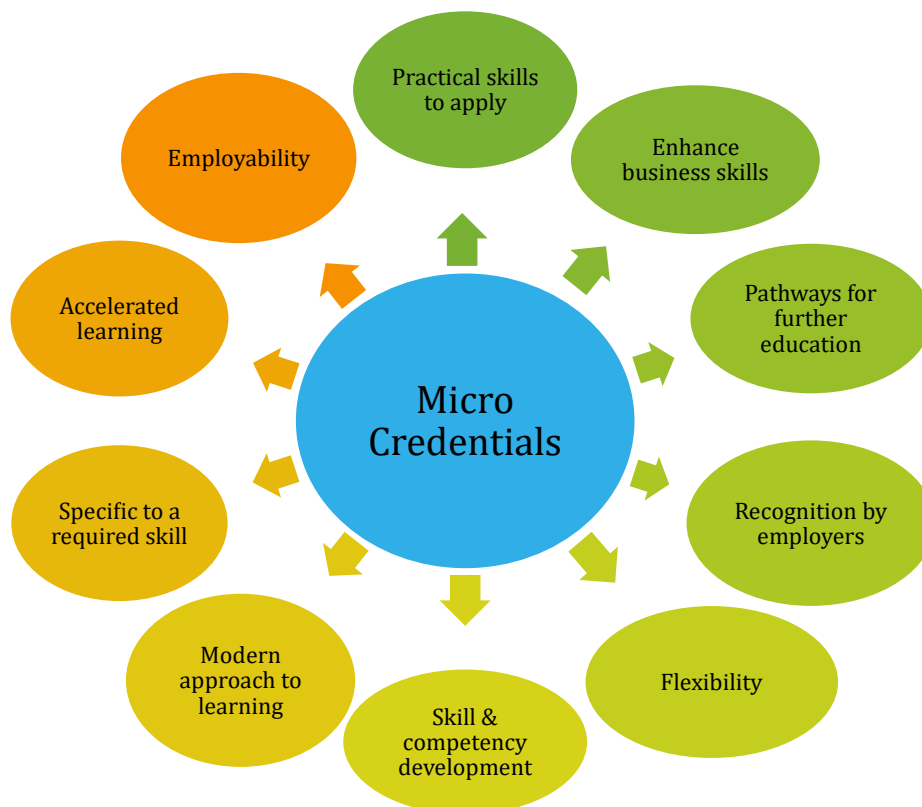


continuous professional development (CPD) and efficiency of staff professional services to clients. Generally, participants felt that micro-credentials allow compatibility of the human resources with industry needs and enable their upkeep to fast-paced developments in labour markets. Lastly, short learning programmes

allow seamless balance of work and studies or CPD.

The benefits of micro-credentials as perceived by the stakeholders are summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Benefits of Micro-credentials



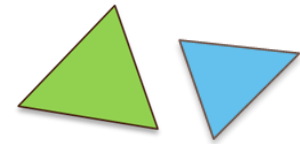
It is indeed encouraging to realise that the stakeholders found the concept of micro-credential beneficial in a number of ways. These benefits appreciated were all working towards personal development and improved productivity as well as service delivery. While recognition was also acknowledged, it also enhanced satisfaction due to the perceived improved productivity by the industry or employer. As can be seen in Figure 4, micro-credentials are also found to be enhancing employability and favoured over the usual

fulltime studies for their flexibility and specificity of skill development.

### 2.2.3 Variations in the needs of micro-credential users across education sectors

In responding to reasons beneficiaries of micro-credentials prefer them, the following were key observations: they are affordable; they offer flexible learning models including online; they provide flexible learning hours and are a viable mode for upskilling; and they are a





core requirement for keeping professional licenses, etc. Basically, there is a general agreement that micro-credentials are core to CPD and career progression across professions. They support career development for professions which are hands-on and rely on evidence-based practices. Most of the short

learning programmes are not abstract but are tailored towards practical needs of specific industries, thus indicating that designers engage relevant industries to identify gaps and address such needs and promote life-long learning.

Figure 5: The Variation of Needs of the Users



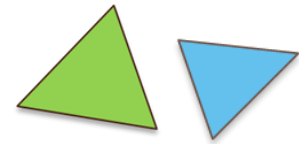
The needs of the ultimate user/learners expected to enrol in the micro-credentials are illustrated in Figure 5. The flexibility of access was explained to be referring to the accommodative nature of the programs regarding the mode of study where users can enrol virtually and only be onsite when practical exercises are to be conducted, and in cases where the users are employed they may conduct their practical exercises at their workplaces. The requirements are also to be flexible, offering a vast choice rendering the program accessible, recognition of prior learning which take Work Incorporated Learning (WIL) into consideration as well as cost effectiveness.

## 2.2.4 Summary and Implications

It has been noted that most public and private providers offer traditional formal education and long-term education and put less emphasis on micro-credentials. A few Institutions seem to be offering micro-credentials of varying expression such learnerships and internship. However, the learnerships and internships do not seem to follow predetermined sets of standards and are not evaluated. Regulators seemed to play a role of a quality assessor to institutions and trainees to uphold professional standards. Generally, micro-credentials offer the needed training that helps users in the adaptation to their job demands, most likely to







lead to increased productivity and better job satisfaction. The ease with which the micro-credentials are accessed, their flexibility, relevance and affordability, among other things, make them be the kind of qualifications that are sought after.

### 2.2.5 Recommendations

The research team recommends establishment of regular and clearer information dissemination systems. Through these systems and their regulated procedures, the

stakeholders will be kept abreast with the newest developments regarding the regulation of micro-credential providers, and the best practice in the offering of micro-credentials. Relevant policies will also be shared and readership of the same be encouraged. Among the policies, the categories of providers shall also be made understood by the providers and requirements for each category with specific attributes clearly stipulated



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## 2.3 MICRO-CREDENTIAL IMPLEMENTATION & EFFECTIVENESS





### 2.3.1 Criteria for assessing effectiveness and relevance of microcredential to - educational and vocational objectives in Lesotho?

In recognition of the role played by micro-credentials in bridging training needs, their potential role in poverty eradication through aligning training with labour market, the government of Lesotho, through the Ministry of Education, made notable steps in developing the regulatory frameworks for awarding micro-credentials. The development of the LQF and subsequent policies such as CAT, RCC and RPL collectively provide the basis for public and private education and training providers to develop programmes that would meet benchmarks set by the policies. The following are some of the methods of assessing effectiveness of micro-credentials in Lesotho.

Micro-credentials must influence programme designs at all institutions of higher learning to ensure that programme goals and objectives align with and articulate priorities of the country and profession, and are relevant for employment and further education opportunities, learning outcomes as well as instructional and assessment strategies (Council on Higher Education, 2019, p. 10). Institutions ensure maintenance of high academic standards with authentic awards, giving students expected learning outcomes that meet requirements of the Lesotho Qualifications Framework as guided by the labour market needs and industry (Council on Higher Education, 2019, p. 16).

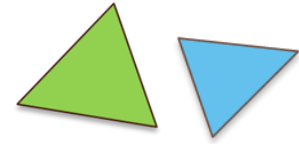
Additionally, the standards provide for the Teaching and Learning Strategies which must be adequately benchmarked against best practices, appropriate for the type of programme offered, and in line with the context for teaching, types of students served, and available resources. It must also be

sufficiently monitored and evaluated, and the teaching staff have access to continual professional development and support (Council on Higher Education, 2019, p. 20).

As such, institutions offering micro-credentials must actively engage with industry, conduct tracer studies, provide work-integrated learning opportunities within their programmes, take responsibility for adherence to own quality and academic standards using internal instruments such as internal quality assurance policy, system, and procedures. Evidently, participants from various institutions agreed that micro-credentials are intended to be responsive to demands of the industry and address emergent social issues. One response states that, due to the training, some Basotho have become producers and not just consumers of global markets. As such, the design of a Programme or micro-credentials should focus on the analysis of learning needs and contexts with a view to making informed decisions about the selection and sequencing of content, learning outcomes, teaching and learning, assessment strategies as well as the overall distribution of credits and levels.

In summary, the micro-credentials will be deemed to have met their educational and vocational objectives when the providing institutions are appropriately equipped with human and material resources, thus better capacitated to offer the programs. The users who go through them are rendered employable or enabled to establish enterprises and generate jobs. Additionally, the workforce is enhanced for improved productivity and the employers are satisfied to an extent of encouraging and supporting their employees to take the micro-credential courses.





### 2.3.2 To what extent are the socio-economic impacts of micro-credentials being considered, particularly regarding access, equity, and inclusion in Lesotho?

A policy of the Ministry of Education on technical and vocational education and training addresses issues of access and participation of various groups for purposes of initial entry and re-skilling of the labour force. Council on Higher Education Standards on institutional and programme accreditation also puts a requirement in institutions of higher learning to regulate admission of candidates through RCC, RPL policies. These policies and guidelines advocate for inclusion and upskilling of young people who were excluded from formal education because of socioeconomic challenges and thus intends to open access and participation by creating open and flexible admissions, engaging all stakeholders in different forms of dialogue and contribution. This can lead to expansion and strengthening of existing TVET institutions and infrastructure and development of centres for skills development for capacity building and provision of mobility within the TVET system (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019, p. 4-5).

Participants from various institutions were of the view that micro-credentials mainly bridge the socioeconomic barrier and brings about socioeconomic opportunities and inclusion. Participants also felt that adoption and proper recognition of micro-credentials could lead to a high uptake of the programmes by masses of the working class with possibilities of better financial recognition after their training. This was evident in that the primary users of micro-credentials (learners) pointed out that some of them were able to secure employment while others ventured into business after going through the micro-credentials. According to these primary users, the micro-credentials are inclusive as they had failed to secure placement

in the main stream of education due to entry requirements that disqualified them and the exorbitant costs if one does not secure the scholarship. Results also refer to the potential contribution of relevant knowledge and skills to large population of working-class Basotho who were denied formal education by their socioeconomic background.

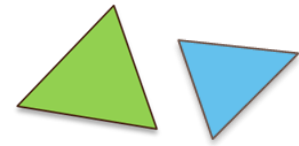
However, there are possible barriers to a full-scale implementation of such programmes because of limited IT infrastructure as noted by some participants. Besides the poor IT infrastructure, it was also found that the cost of internet may deny opportunity for many due to unaffordability of data to do online training. Additionally, it was noted that the cost of the programmes could be a barrier as most targeted individuals may not afford training especially if employers would not absorb payment for the training.

The extent to which the socio-economic impacts of micro-credentials are being considered can be summarised this way; the recognition of prior learning is inclusive even to those who were not initially counted; the provision of scholarships even for micro-credentials shall enhance the accessibility; subsidising the providing institutions through subventions will also enhance implementation. The policies in place are indicative of the good intent and the responses of the participants in relation to engagement and expressed interest in the micro-credentials by all stakeholders will also work in favour of the anticipated success of the micro-credentials.

### 2.3.3 How do industries respond to and/or recognise micro-credentials, and what challenges and opportunities does this present?

Results from the survey revealed that adoption of micro-credentials has possibilities of broadening skills set for Basotho to also take up opportunities beyond Lesotho's borders.





There will be skills that meet industry needs, increased productivity, and likely financial rewards for employees. The programmes could enable Basotho's mobility between various sectors because of diverse skills sets – notable among growing sector in Lesotho which might benefit is the mining sector. However, while there were possibilities, some reservations were noted. Some participants felt that, currently, micro-credentials are recognised and existing companies only acknowledge formal qualifications and stating the need to market and promote the value of such programmes once they have been adopted. Presently, the industry has not yet warmed up to the micro-credentials as a form of qualification, rather they perceive them as enhancers as opposed to replacement of the traditional formal education. They may therefore require some convincing if the level of micro-credentials gets to a point where they will not so much become a replacement but advanced so that they can offer candidates/users all the education they require to enhance productivity.

#### **2.3.4 What key factors are most likely to positively or negatively influence the implementation, impact and long-term sustainability of micro-credentials?**

The key factors most likely to influence the implementation of micro-credentials in Lesotho are many and varied. They include new economic trends influenced by globalisation and digitisation, recognition and rewards for credentials, employers' zeal and requirement for CPD from staff, young people's view of long-term formal qualifications as a

waste of time. On the other hand, there could be challenges such as limited infrastructure and inadequate regulation affecting quality of programmes, dichotomy between the need for applied skills and use of theoretical knowledge, and absence of binding requirements to upgrade and be up to date.

Notably, Lesotho already has employers who require certain CPD points from employees, thus creating an uptake of micro-credentials. However, the offering of micro-credentials by various institutions is yet to be properly regulated and awarded appropriate credentials or recognition or publicity.

As such, many possibilities are open depending on how tertiary institutions and other sectors providing such are regulated and how the training would be recognised. The industry expressed a concern regarding micro-credentials by highlighting the challenges that could become a hindrance in the implementation of the micro-credentials in Lesotho if they are not addressed.

The challenges and opportunities foreseen as brought about by the implementation of micro-credentials in Lesotho are summarised in Table 2. The industry also indicated that there has to be clear efforts towards inclusion of the physically and visually impaired. Otherwise, when the challenges have been addressed the industry indicated a satisfaction and noted that the implementation could then be expected to succeed.





**Table 3: Challenges and opportunities with a bearing on the implementation of micro-credentials**

CHALLENGES MICRO-CREDENTIALS FACE	OPPORTUNITIES OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS
<p><b>1. ACCREDITATION ISSUES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accreditation process and pricing are exorbitant prohibiting economically challenged institutions to comply.</li> <li>• Too many institutions are unaccredited (the predicament is with government /regulating bodies)</li> <li>• Accreditation is already a challenge in terms of bridging the gap between high schools and higher levels; accreditation of micro-credentials will surely be a challenge</li> </ul>	<p><b>1. Ensure supply of in demand skills</b></p>
<p><b>2. Can be used by employers to avoid compensating higher salaries (based on qualification)</b></p>	<p><b>2. Opportunity to update the curriculum</b></p>
<p><b>3. Not easily accessible based on the terrain of the country – this can make them expensive to access</b></p>	<p><b>3. Continuous professional development</b></p>
<p><b>4. Conflict between formalised education and micro-credentials – clarity of each qualification and its role is required</b></p>	<p><b>4. International recognition, assist in acquiring recognition needed</b></p>
<p><b>5. People are not aware of micro-credentials offered locally</b></p>	

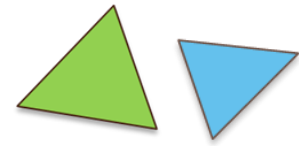
**2.3.5 Summary and Implications**

Lesotho has developed relevant policies which provide the basis for developing and recognising micro-credentials. The policies and guidance from regulatory providers are likely to result in extensive engagement of institutions, development of new programmes and revision of existing ones. Micro-credentials require educational institutions that develop and maintain direct and continuous contact with the industry for which they train, and the institutions must develop robust quality

assurance mechanism for their programme offering – that is, adhere to internal and external quality assurance standard.

There are several benefits for development of micro-credentials; they can bridge the education and training gaps which reflect socioeconomic disparities in society; they may result in a high uptake of programme; beneficiaries may get better financial incentives because of the training; and some may get opportunities beyond Lesotho borders. The sector that is most likely to benefit from adoption of micro-credentials in





Lesotho is the mining sector, which is relatively new and having limited formal programmes on mining from Lesotho. Agriculture, textiles and apparel sectors are not new but are affected by the advancement in technology. The industrial revolution 4.0 requires that players in the industry be constantly kept informed and be able to function in a fast-advancing technology driving functionality in the industries, failing which one may become obsolete as infrastructure will be foreign and this will render such a player unable to function and productivity hampered as quality is affected negatively, thus products and services not internationally competitive.

Notably, there are a few challenges likely to limit the benefit of micro-credentials in Lesotho amongst which are the country's IT and ICT infrastructures, which would limit the uptake of micro-credentials. The challenges that may pose a threat in the implementation are indicated in Table 2.

### 2.3.6 Recommendations

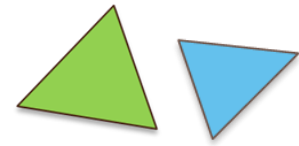
Consequent to the results, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- Establishment of WIL procedures that will keep the institutions and the industry in contact particularly for decisions in program reviews and

assessment. It is believed that this will ensure relevance of the micro-credentials offers to the industry.

- Robust quality assurance mechanism that uses both the internal and external standards which should be working together. It is worth noting that the external quality assurance should not be seen as an assessor who determines everything but as a partner to ensure that micro-credentials offered are at a required standard.
- Development of policies and procedure with clear guidelines for accreditation of micro-credentials as an enhancement to the quality assurance and control.
- Clear periodic training plans for the industries to ensure that the workforce remains abreast with the advancement of technology and stay relevant in the Industrial Revolution 4.0. to enhance globally competitive productivity.
- Identification of the industries that require enhancement particularly those with potential for more job creation and contribution to the national economy. Data from here will be foundational for the development of relevant micro-credential in the time they are offered.





Lesotho Parliament

## 2.4 MICRO-CREDENTIAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT

### 2.4.1 Quality assurance for micro-credentials in Lesotho and the management thereof

The Higher Education Act has legally established Council on Higher Education (CHE) in Lesotho. The Council on Higher Education regulates how higher education institutions must develop and offer programmes, including relevant staffing for programmes offered, how they must be managed, and the institutions must be financed among other responsibilities.

The two levels at which quality is assured are believed to be ideal, namely internal and external quality assurance practices. They work well for both the institutions and education system in the country, so it should be maintained even for the micro-credentials. Care will need to be taken to ensure that both internal and external quality assurance authorities understand and attach the same

meaning to the process as well as work towards the same objective and avoid the connotation of one being assessed by the other. The process of quality assurance as far as micro-credentials are concerned should be a concern for the players in the offering of such.

### 2.4.2 Progress toward institutional and national standards in Lesotho

Lesotho Qualifications Framework (LQF) is in place and provide a framework for guiding the development and recognition of micro-credentials. The LQF has been benchmarked and aligned with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Qualification Framework and the African Qualification Verifications Network (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019, 26). LQF has paved way towards integrating micro-credentials with national and regional frameworks. For example, paragraph 7.4 of the LQF states that:





it makes it possible for learners to demonstrate their knowledge and skills to gain access into programmes or obtain formal credentials for what they know and can do. This will require a comprehensive range of mechanisms that can include site visits, observations, challenge tests, references, and testimonials from line managers (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019, p. 24).

Additionally, Lesotho has developed the RPL, CAT and RCC policies which can facilitate recognition and stacking of micro-credentials. Although some higher education institutions have started recognising prior learning and articulating amongst themselves through application of the RPL, CAT and RCC, a pathway that will also facilitate recognition of micro-credentials, Lesotho is yet to develop national guidelines for the implementation of these policies. The RPL, CAT and RCC policies apply across all qualifications whether academic, TVET, etc.

Participants from various institutions had different views on how the country fared on quality assurance management of its education system. Three views dominated, namely (1) the role of CHE in assuring quality at tertiary institutions level, (2) the Inspectorate department in assuring quality at the basic education and (3) internal quality assurance mechanism. At the basic education level, it was noted that various role-players are involved including the National Curriculum Development Centre and the Examination Council of Lesotho, each having a role in ensuring quality of the basic education. Then, the Technical and Vocational Department is dedicated to ensuring quality of artisan studies.

While the responses made no mention of collaborations in ensuring that the micro-credentials are developed and implemented effectively, it is apparent that no institution can afford to operate in isolation. In some cases, sectors of the same institution “operate in silos” and this can lead to duplication of efforts

as well as substandard delivery of services provided.

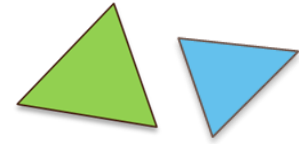
In an ideal situation, the institutions with curriculum development capacity can be engaged by all who require such services; some are already practicing this strategy: engagement of specialized skilled human resource; freedom of movement that permits using the workforce to their capacity; externalizing of assessment nationally with the experts within the local workforce. This will prevent importation of experts. The environment painted here would facilitate using the local experts for accreditation of such programs’ evaluation, implementation policy development along with the implementation procedures, monitoring and evaluation during the pilot stage, work incorporated learning for candidates/users to get practical application of the learned skills. When conducted, tracer studies and skills database updated regularly would enable identification of relevance and placement of the candidates when need be. Lesotho is currently not functioning like the scenario painted above but has a potential to succeed should a conducive environment be created and maintained.

#### **2.4.3 The extent to which micro-credentials are integrated into the national and regional qualifications frameworks**

Following from the guidelines of the LQF, the Ministry of Education and Training developed three policies in 2022, namely the Draft Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) Policy, the National Policy for Implementation of Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC) and the National Policy for Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). The three policies can be argued to guide the implementation of the LQF within the ministry and provide the basis for adoption of micro-credentials by institutions.







Participants from various institutions had different views including lack of knowledge about the development of micro-credentials. Some felt that there is little progress and others were of the view that Council on Higher Education is better placed to give an assessment to those who gave elaborate responses. Among the elaborate responses, participants noted that the LQF, RPL, RCC and CAT policies provide a basis for asserting that Lesotho has integrated micro-credentials into its national frameworks. The policies give way for a regulatory body that would oversee their implementation and ensure compliance by the institutions offering the programmes. These responses are sufficient to communicate that there is limited knowledge about the current status of micro-credentials and their management in the country.

In simple terms, micro-credentials are already being offered in Lesotho though the frameworks of qualifications and education standards do not include them directly. There are however, educational policies that speak directly to the micro-credentials even though the integration of micro-credentials in itself has not been done yet. But with the already existing LQF and RPL, it should not be far-fetched taking into consideration that the micro-credentials have already been accepted

nationally and are being offered by different institutions: private, public, formal, non-formal as well as some non-academic institutions that found need to offer some specialised skill oriented trainings on regular basis or when need arises like acquisition of new technology. This is evident in that some institutions of higher learning (Colleges and Universities) do offer micro-credentials over and above their usual fulltime programs as a result of identified gaps and existing demand by the society.

#### **2.4.4 What practical steps should be taken in developing national and regional micro-credential policy frameworks?**

Lesotho needs to develop national framework for micro-credentials that will facilitate their credibility and recognition and protect stakeholders from bogus providers. Based on the respondents' views, the implementation will primarily hinge on the policies and relevant frameworks. It is key for the micro-credentials to be placed on the LQF for mobility and internationalisation. This is because once placed on the LQF, the micro-credentials can be equated with ease and be recognised at the correct level of qualification for appropriate placement and remuneration of such qualification holders.



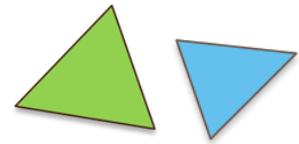
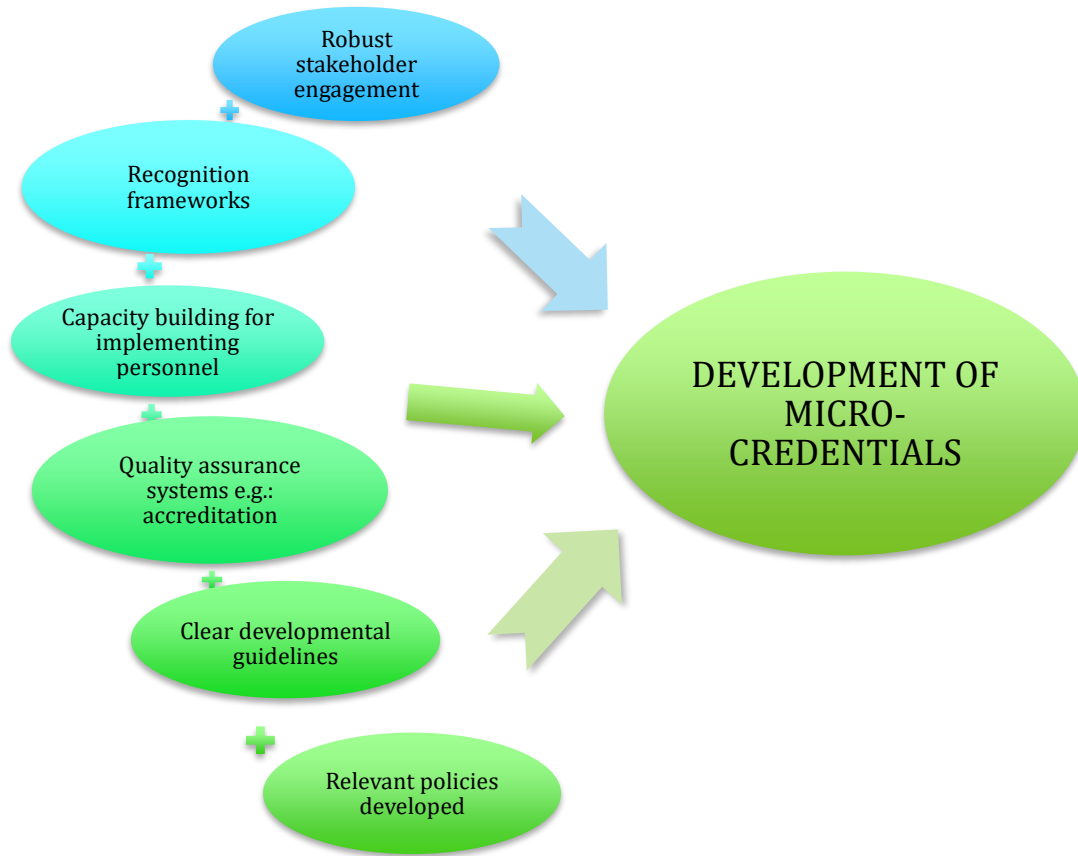


Figure 6: Requirements for Developing the Micro-credentials

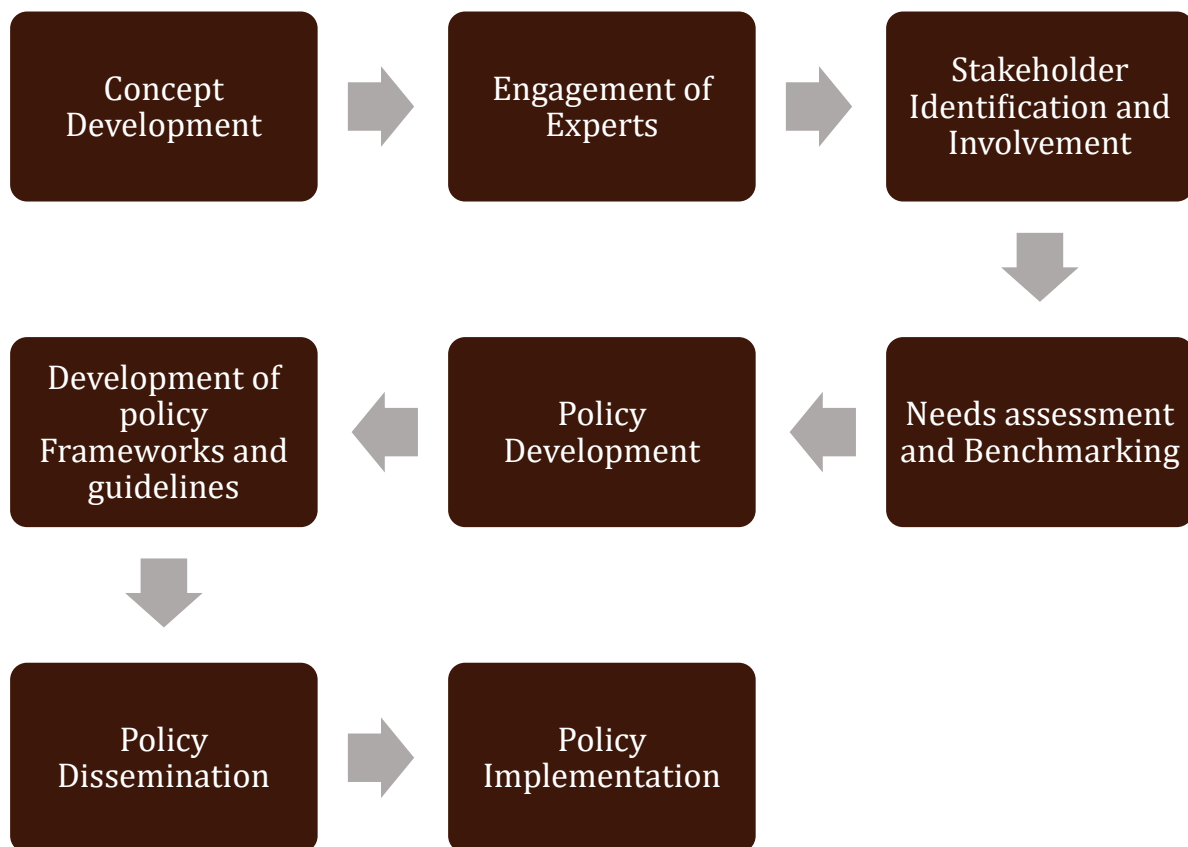




Some of the requirements for proper development of micro-credentials are highlighted in Figure 6. The stakeholders were of an opinion that the best way to develop and implement the micro-credentials is to have the frameworks ready first. The development and implementation procedures need to be identified and documented first.

There seemed to be a will to learn from past mistakes and previous experience from the full-time learning programs. Regarding the policy development issues that were regarded as essential even before the micro-credentials could be implemented, Figure 7 lists the requirements proposed by the stakeholders.

Figure 7: Policy Development Process Proposed by the Stakeholders

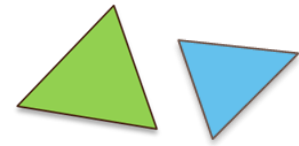


### 2.4.5 Summary and Implications

Development of policies for micro-credentials operationalisation in Lesotho is an established process. As policies that regulate post-school education, the Higher Education Act is one such policy which establishes Council on Higher Education to quality assure education

provision at tertiary level. The CHE quality assures institutional processes and accredits programmes to ensure that they comply with LQF requirements. The LQF provides standards for formal long-term programmes and part-programmes and has given way to development of three other policies, namely CAT, RPL and RCC. Given that CHE's standards





and LQF are benchmarked with SADC and AU frameworks, these provide a good basis for

### 2.4.6 Recommendations

Informed by the results from the study, it is hereby recommended that:

- Establishment of LQQC as stipulated in the LQF as the council herein mentioned shall oversee the proper implementation of the LQF without burdening the CHE to do so as this is outside its mandate. The LQQC shall, in collaboration with the four bodies reporting directly to LQQC, establish appropriate standards for each sector, namely Higher Education, TVET, Basic Education and Policy development.
- Recognising the LQF and the national policies on RPL, CAT and RCC policies

making micro-credentials that would be acceptable locally and regionally.

existing as foundational, the national framework for micro-credentials must be developed for better management of micro-credentials and to facilitate their credibility and recognition. This shall protect the stakeholders from counterfeit providers of micro-credentials.

- Development of the standards the micro-credential providers need to adhere to in their offering which should maintain the unique flexibility of micro-credentials.
- Development of strategies to communicate newly developed policies in an educational manner that will unpack the policy and procedures for the stakeholders to understand, own up and be encouraged to participate in the implementation.





Phase 2 Lesotho Highlands Water Project

# CHAPTER 3

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



## 3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The report on "State of Play Report" in Lesotho's micro-credentials provides a comprehensive examination of the urgent necessity to address the skills gap in the region. This report highlights the critical need to integrate the unemployed and unskilled population into the workforce, while also addressing the increasing demand for advanced skills in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its rapidly evolving technological landscape. The explorative approach taken in this report underscores the importance of swift action to bridge this gap, ensuring that Lesotho's workforce is equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by modern technological advancements. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and skills development, the report aims to contribute to the socio-economic growth and development of the nation.

Bridging the skills gap through flexible education and training can have a profound economic impact. By equipping the workforce with the necessary skills, countries can significantly boost productivity and innovation. This, in turn, can lead to higher economic growth, increased competitiveness in the global market, and the creation of new job opportunities in the era of advanced technology. Additionally, addressing the skills gap can reduce unemployment rates, particularly among the youth, and help alleviate poverty and inequality. Furthermore, new skill improvement can help the current workers stay relevant particularly with technology applied in their work space, this practice is referred to as re-skilling and up-skilling for relevance.

Investments in education and training programs tailored to market demands with appropriate time and financial requirements can unlock significant potential, fostering entrepreneurship and stimulating economic growth. Public-private partnerships can play a crucial role in developing relevant curricula and training initiatives, ensuring that the workforce is prepared for the evolving job market.

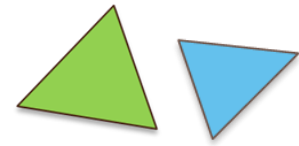
In summary, bridging the skills gap is not just about improving individual employability; it's about driving sustainable economic development and building a resilient economy capable of adapting to future challenges.

The initial paragraphs of this report focused on the conceptualisation of microcredentials. This part explored microcredentials in the context of Lesotho as understood by the stakeholders constituted by the various industries in existence in Lesotho, microcredential providers, users and policy developers. The conceptualization looked at the political, economic, social and technological drivers and the impact they have on microcredentials at different stages. The second part focused on the stakeholders mentioned above; with interest in the roles of the providers, the varying needs of users and the relevance of microcredential offerings from the industrial perspective. The third section dealt with the effective implementation and the fourth and final part focused on policy consideration.

### 3.2 CONCEPTUALISATION OF MICROCREDENTIALS

From the findings it can be deduced that stakeholders have an idea, though it may not be thorough; about the micro-credentials and they appreciate them for different reasons. There are however, some common grounds that the team brought together as a working understanding in the context of Lesotho. It was





encouraging to realise that stakeholders acknowledging the roles played by the various players indicating awareness of interdependence. While some offer microcredentials inhouse to their employees for continuous development and progression, others commercialise them highly upon realisation of the demand, still others are concerned about the quality of such offerings. This then is indicative of interdependence for successful implementation of the microcredential for Lesotho.

### 3.3 STAKEHOLDERS

The positive fact is that micro-credentials are being appreciated by users, providers, industry and public service. It has also come to the realization of the team that there are more potential providers already offering short learning programs than it is recorded. While this is not ideal, it is indicative of the appreciation and need of micro-credentials. Most of the micro-credentials offered in Lesotho are demand driven and as such can only get better if proper structures are put in place to support the running and governance of such. There is an appreciation that micro-credentials can open doors for job acquisition, promotions and further studies.

### 3.4 IMPLEMENTATION OF MICROCREDENTIALIAL

Sadly, some of the structures that are intended to enhance the development, implementation, evaluation and sustenance of these micro-credentials are not well known, let alone understood by the ultimate consumers. Construed from the responses, there is also a high possibility that the ones who understand them had to learn about them because their business of mounting programs as well as the actual teaching and learning depended on them, so they followed them religiously for the purpose of qualifying the programs they intended to mount. There is still some work to do in preparation for the micro-credentials, but

on a positive note, these have been identified and the stakeholders expressed interest of engagement to ensure success.

### 3.5 IMPLICATIONS ON POLICIES

Education in Lesotho is governed by different bodies of authority depending on the type, intention, nature and level of education. There are acceptably sufficient policies regulating these governance structure of education at national level. Given the fact that microcredentials have not been formalised in Lesotho, they are also not regulated. This could have contributed to the unrecognised and unaccredited short learning programs offered by commercial educating institutions mushrooming notably in recent years. The need for new and appropriate policies is inevitable for successful implementation of microcredentials. Stakeholders are in agreement with this need to an extent that some of them volunteer their involvement in areas where they may be able to make a contribution. Regulatory policies to include but not limited to quality assurance and control, most importantly making room for acknowledgement of both internal and external measures to ensure quality. This set of policies would among other be constituted by policies governing accreditation of institutions and programs based on the national, regional and international standards to enhance internationalisation, employability and mobility. Policies that make room for government support while granting the process of offering microcredentials a semi-autonomous status to avoid the stifling bureaucracy that not allow the initiative to see the break of day.



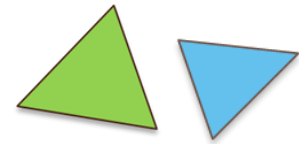
*The Iconic Qiloane Mountain*

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The Massive Lesotho Diamond