



Concept Note

Data Science and Innovation Ecosystem Workshop

Maseru, Lesotho

November 2022

“The world’s most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data.”

- The Economist

“Without innovation there is no way we can overcome the challenges of our time.”

- United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

Introduction

The ability to collect and analyse data, glean insights from it and then apply that knowledge to solve problems or overcome challenges has been the engine of progress throughout history and the most important catalyst of innovation in recent times. Everything from healthcare and transportation to agriculture and protecting the biosphere is now driven by data and data-driven insights. Data is also the foundation of the kind of innovation that is critical to realising the goal of inclusive and sustainable development for all, achieving greater efficiencies for governments and ensuring value-for-money for the tax payer. However, the ability to collect good data, the capacity to derive insights from it and the skills to turn those insights into policies, programmes or legislation are spread unevenly across countries. The World Bank measures the statistical capacity of countries on a scale of 1- 100, 100 being the highest. The average statistical capacity of Commonwealth countries is 57.1.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for timely and accurate data for governments to make rapid and informed decisions. There will no doubt be more unforeseeable crises and shocks in the future. Data science can find linkages or hidden patterns that may not otherwise be easy to observe or detect. And in turn, data ecosystems can drive the creation of ‘recombinations’, or the combining of a diverse set of existing technologies and data sets in a new way that can empower governments with the power of ‘predictive data analytics’. Harnessing the full potential of data requires capacity building through partnership, knowledge sharing and co-creation between the public and private sectors, between institutions and individuals and between facilitators and implementers. It is critical for Commonwealth countries to adopt a ‘whole-of-government’ approach to data science - a strategic shift in mind-set and work modes that the Commonwealth Secretariat is committed to support. Analysis done by the Commonwealth Secretariat highlights that many Commonwealth countries, find it a challenge - due to capacity, resource and skills constraints - to collate, analyse and utilise data effectively in order to develop, deliver and monitor more evidence-led policies and programmes.

In order to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, harnessing data to inspire bold and impactful innovation in government, business and society will be critical for Lesotho as well as other Commonwealth countries in Africa, especially as it is now clear that a ‘business as usual’ approach will not be enough for developing countries to meet and overcome the socio-economic and environmental challenges they face such as climate change.

According to the data on the [Commonwealth SDG Tracker](#), progress on the SDGs slowed significantly across Africa in the last couple of years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The SDG Tracker indicates that Lesotho lags other Commonwealth countries the most on SDG9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality). The [Commonwealth Innovation Index](#) for 2021 also shows that Commonwealth countries in the Africa region have a need to strengthen and improve their capacity to become ‘innovation nations’.

In order to strengthen the data and innovation ecosystem in Commonwealth countries in the region, the Commonwealth Secretariat, in partnership with the Government of Lesotho and the National Statistics Office, proposes to convene a 3 day regional workshop in Lesotho in November 2022.

Key Partners



Key Objectives / Outcomes

1. Knowledge of data science and skills to use data science and open data tools and technologies to enhance statistical processes, innovation ecosystems and policy outcomes strengthened.
2. Senior government officials will have increased knowledge and skills to apply data science methods and solutions in their individual policy areas, programmes and projects.
3. Capacity for the development of regional and national innovation ecosystems enhanced.
4. Commonwealth Data Science and Innovation Network strengthened.

5. Valuable cross-sectoral and regional / international partnerships critical to accelerating knowledge sharing, innovation and co-creation formed.
6. Innovative capacity-building projects such as the Commonwealth Data Science Programme for Commonwealth countries in Africa will be discussed

Workshop Participants

1. Senior government officials (from Science, Technology and Innovation/ Trade/Commerce/Education/Environment/Youth/Agriculture /Health/Policy Planning Ministries and National Statistics Offices) and key innovation stakeholders (regulators, private sector, young entrepreneurs and changemakers, academia and civil society) from Lesotho and other Commonwealth countries in the region.
2. Selected key stakeholders from across the region.
3. Representatives from partner organisations.

Feedback from government officials in countries that have benefited from similar workshops

“The areas covered in this workshop are vital for the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and especially vital for Small Island Developing States like ours where resources for data collection are limited. The workshop has highlighted areas of further capacity building between the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, the Commonwealth Secretariat and partners who have joined together to make this workshop possible”.

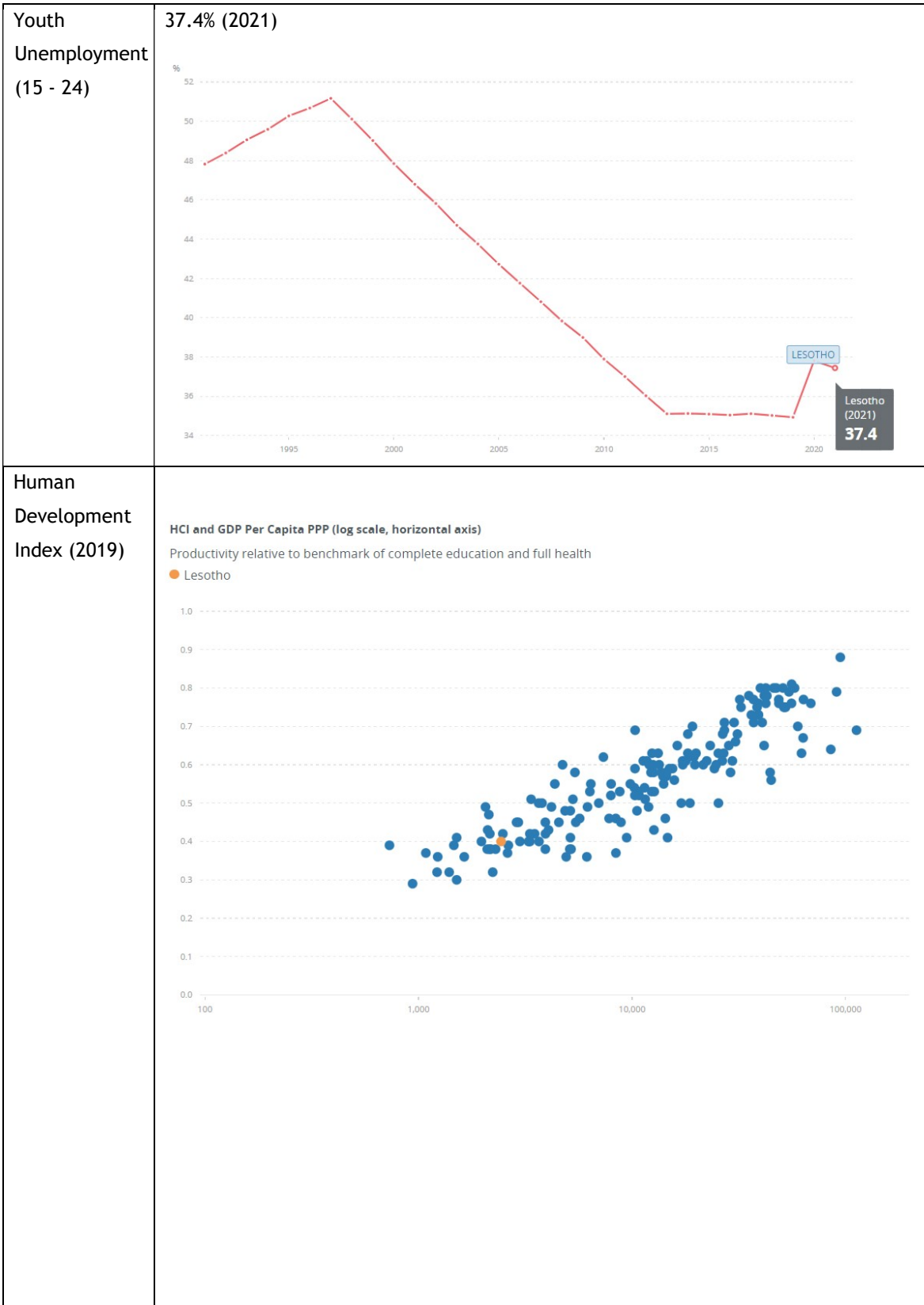
“We can now start initiating the collaborations needed to address our challenges using data. We need to utilise the data we have across different government departments and share within the public sector and the wider national statistical system”.

‘It was particularly helpful for me to hear about Digital Agriculture. The workshop has presented opportunities to enhance our data infrastructure and provide legislation to support the framework’.

Commonwealth Data

Lesotho data from the Commonwealth SDG Data Portal:

Lesotho snapshot	
Indicator	Data point



Regional comparison

