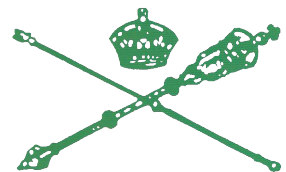


Meet your MP

A platform for citizens and parliamentarians to engage in dialogue



European Union



Implemented by:



Imprint

Published by

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(PISA)

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Design and layout

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Photography by

PISA

Date

February 2019

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Foreword

The "Meet your MP" initiative implemented by the Participatory Initiative for Social Accountability (PISA) is complimentary to Parliament's objective of working towards increasing parliamentary openness and involvement of citizens in parliamentary business; thereby fulfilling the core function of representation and being the voice of the people.

This report is being published at an opportune time when Parliament is about to reconvene.

It provides good feedback for Honourable Members of Parliament who have participated. It will also encourage others to come on board. I am confident that they will be excited to learn about the benefits of the "Meet Your MP" initiative."

PISA's approach to engage Honourable Members of Parliament and the citizenry in an apolitical and neutral dialogue is commendable. It ensures broader participation of the young and old on issues of governance for better service delivery and development.

Adv. L.F. Maema KC

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L.F. Maema', written over a horizontal line.

Clerk to the National Assembly

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1. Introduction, Rationale and Objective

PISA is a governance program that aims to contribute towards a vibrant and open democracy in Lesotho; where citizens know, demand and exercise their rights and responsibilities, and in which government representatives supply accountability and transparency. Matching the two sides through constructive dialogue will ultimately lead to a higher responsiveness of government to the needs of citizens and improved service delivery, which will then foster the citizens' trust in Lesotho's democracy. Through its findings, the citizen participation survey conducted by PISA in 2017 stipulates that citizens do not actively participate in democratic processes. The study highlights that 7.4% had met with the councillor who had come to their community, 4.9% had met with the local councillor at the councillor's office while only 4.8% had met with their member of parliament (PISA CPS, 2017). To address these gaps, PISA chooses various entry points across the social accountability-framework to stimulate positive change.

Firstly, PISA strengthens knowledge, awareness, skills and motivation of citizens (rights-holders) to participate in democratic processes and development initiatives affecting their lives. To this end, PISA provides civic education and Information, Education and Communication in the form of direct interaction with citizens (through training, workshops, public gatherings) and indirect information dissemination and awareness creation through various mass and social media.

Secondly, PISA creates platforms where citizens and state can have dialogues regarding the challenges that citizens face and together agree on measures that need to be put in place to address such, with communities taking responsibility and committing to contribute towards finding solutions. In order to increase citizen participation through dialogues, PISA in 2018 conducted the "Meet Your MP" approach aimed at creating a platform for citizens to have a dialogue with their elected MP. The main purpose of "Meet your MP" was to provide space and time for citizens to meet their respective Member of Parliament.

The two main objectives for Meet Your MP were first, to help citizens understand the roles and responsibilities (mandate) of the elected MP versus the roles

and responsibilities of Councils. Secondly, Meet Your MP also provided a platform to encourage citizens to have a discussion with their MP, as well as to give him/her a new mandate based on the understanding of their roles and responsibilities. This came as a result of the fact that, citizens showed little understanding of their elected candidates, both for representation in parliament as well as the ones representing them in community councils. The initiative facilitated an understanding of these roles and differentiating them to assist citizens to direct issues to relevant members.

The Meet Your MP approach therefore served two areas, first that of continuing to educate citizens on the roles and responsibilities of MPs and Community Councils as well as providing a platform for dialogue between citizens and their MPs.

2. Methodology

A concept note was developed indicating what will be done, how the process would unfold and who were expected to take part in the process. The concept was shared with the Clerk of National Assembly who supported the idea, shared inputs to strengthen the concept and endorsed the invitation letter which was distributed to all elected MP from 80 constituencies.

This was followed by the briefing sessions which were conducted for Members of Parliament in their respective districts. The briefing sessions were held in the PISA centres where an elaborate presentation of the initiative was made and arrangements were made on how the process would unfold. Although most MPs attended these briefing meetings in the districts, not all were able to do so. For this reason another meeting was held in Maseru, not only for Maseru district MPs but also for those MPs who were not able to travel to their districts due to varying commitments. Wherever possible, the Principal Chiefs were also part of the briefing sessions as chiefs generally play a vital role in convening the public meetings. In Berea district, the District Administrator (DA) owned the process and invited both the MPs and Principal Chiefs to the briefing session at the DA's office, where the briefing session took place.

Generally the MPs seemed interested in the initiative, some committed right

away and set aside dates for the dialogues. However, some were reluctant to accept the proposal right away as they cited they may need to think about it more while others rejected the concept immediately after it was presented. From the briefing sessions, the MPs shared their availability dates and continued to approach PISA for dates in cases where they did not commit dates immediately.

As part of preparation for the dialogues, guidelines were developed highlighting major considerations while facilitating the dialogues. This was done in the form of rules of engagement. These are highlighted in the table below:

Rules of Engagement

- a. The dialogue will be facilitated in a neutral and apolitical manner, no one will be allowed to discuss party politics
- b. Each and every citizen will be given equal opportunity to participate and their opinion will be respected by all
- c. Every citizen has the freedom to participate; women, men, elderly, youth, disabled, etc.
- d. The purpose of the dialogue is to understand the roles and responsibilities of MPs and differentiate them from those of Community Councils
- e. Each citizen will be allocated three minutes to present their views (opinion, issue)
- f. A yellow card will be shown as warning against time and political issues
- g. A red card will be shown to indicate that the participant stops either because time has elapsed or because he is getting into discussion that is not part of the dialogue
- h. The guidelines apply to all including the MP

The guidelines were translated into Sesotho and printed in a flyer. At the back of the flyer, there was space offered for citizens to write issues that they feel the MP should follow up on after the dialogue, indicating from which constituency the issues were raised.

3. Citizen Mobilisation

Mobilisation of citizens to participate in the dialogues was conducted through the offices of the Principal Chiefs and Area Chiefs. Chiefs played a critical role in supporting mobilisation and convening the meetings for the dialogues; without their support the dialogues would have been futile. Some Principal Chiefs went further to accompany PISA staff to the community radio stations to talk about the work of PISA within the districts and encourage citizens to participate in the dialogues.

The areas, within the constituencies, where dialogues were to be conducted from were jointly agreed on and confirmed with the Chiefs and the MPs. This was mainly based on the number of citizens and how they are dispersed across the constituency. The dialogues were conducted from constituency centres and in varying Electoral Divisions (ED) within the constituencies. Depending on the availability and interest of the MP, more than one dialogue was held within a single constituency to reduce the walking distance for citizens while trying to reach out to as many citizens as possible.

The community councillors also participated in the events. Their roles and responsibilities formed part of the agenda for the dialogue. The platform helped to clarify the roles and responsibilities of MPs from those of the community councils. In some constituencies, community councillors were not cooperative and they inhibited the dialogues by not working together with chiefs. However, in the majority of the constituencies this was not a problem, and dialogues went on smoothly.

Citizen mobilisation continued as new dates were set with MPs, this was done through media where the dates were publicised over radio stations in Maseru and out in the districts where there are community radio stations. Additionally social media was utilised through social media on the PISA Facebook page, where dates and schedules were shared and to some extent brief discussions made and answers provided to citizens. These contributed to increasing the number of citizens attending the dialogue forums.

4. Coverage

The aim was to conduct Meet Your MP dialogues in all **80** constituencies across the country, this therefore meant that the dialogues were targeting the 80 elected members of parliament. However, this was highly dependent on the level of interest of the MP as well as their availability. In all constituencies where there were Proportional Representation MPS, they were also invited to the dialogue. They remain key to the constituency and they also claim a certain percentage of citizen followership, but mainly they are also citizens within the constituencies and their input in the dialogues was considered valuable as they work together with the elected MP in parliament.

In some constituencies more than one dialogue was conducted thus making the number of dialogues not tally with the number of constituencies. A total of **50** constituencies were reached with **66** dialogues. In total **8,849** citizens were reached out of which **4,401** were males while **4,448** were females. These numbers are inclusive of youth and other groups of people within communities constituting the constituency. The dialogues were conducted in nine of the ten districts. The table below gives an insight of the coverage by district:

Coverage by district

District	Constituencies	Lipitso	Females	Males	Total
Maseru	10	10	867	747	1,614
Mafeteng	5	5	290	240	530
Mohale's Hoek	5	8	504	408	912
Quthing	3	4	181	194	375
Thaba-Tseka	5	7	359	396	755
Mkg	2	2	66	76	142
Botha-Bothe	4	7	599	626	1,225
Leribe	7	8	480	415	895
Berea	9	15	1,102	1,299	2,401

5. Citizen issues

To conclude the dialogues, citizens raised some of the issues that they requested MPs to follow up on as they went back into parliament. Some of the issues raised by citizens are highlighted below:

- Facilitation of the implementation of Decentralisation Policy – This seemed to be the most pressing need for citizens as it kept coming out in most constituencies. Citizens indicated that although they now understand the distinction between the roles and responsibilities of MPs versus those of community councils, they strongly felt that without implementation of the decentralisation policy, councils will face challenges in undertaking their duties as they are still highly centralised. This delays provision of services as they have to rely on the approval of the central ministry which takes too long considering that the ministry deals with many requests from across the country. As a result citizens appealed to central government to decentralise authority to local or community councils to perform their duties as expected
- The community councillors seemed to understand the roles and responsibilities of their offices (community councils), however they showed much concern that they are not yet able to undertake their responsibilities due to the centralised services.
- Citizens suggested that while awaiting implementation of the decentralisation policy, community councils funding should be improved to enable councils to execute their existing implementation plans
- MPs to initiate and contribute to the revision of obsolete laws such as the grazing laws and others
- Allocation of budget for construction of roads connecting towns (e.g. Thaba-Tseka and Qacha's Nek and Mokhotlong, Thaba-Tseka and Mafeteng, etc.)
- MPs to convince government to ascertain that all citizens have access to safe water supply before supplying South Africa with water from within the country
- Construction of schools, health facilities, electrification, foot bridges, and other service related issues were raised

- As dialogues happened during the time when wool and mohair regulation was actively discussed, citizens requested to be informed and updated on the regulation
- Reduction of pension age from 70 to 60 years was raised by citizens citing that this was promised before elections
- It was learned during the MP-citizen dialogues that for a long time, citizens thought the constituency offices are the MP offices meant only for the people who elected them. This was clarified by the MPs who indicated that the offices are constituency offices and serve all citizens within the constituency not just those of the political party to which the MP belonged
- Citizens requested MPs to facilitate establishment of schools for the disabled as this seems to be an obstacle for access to education for children and/or people with disabilities
- Citizens requested MPs to follow up with the Ministry of Health on the village health workers incentives as they seem to be irregular
- In some constituencies, citizens requested the MPs to assist with the business people who benefit from the natural resources with neither levy nor development plan for the affected communities. Although this falls within the mandate of the councils, the citizens felt that the MP should somehow support/enhance the process
- MPs were given a mandate to follow up on the unfinished road construction projects in other areas
- Citizens highlighted the need to revise the community councils demarcation as they indicated that the councils are too big and some citizens are not able to access service due to the fact that they are too far and hard to reach
- Citizens asked MPs to facilitate the dual citizenship laws
- A request was extended to MPs to have regular dialogues with citizens to update them on parliamentary proceedings, share how funds are used and also to take issues that they can present in parliament

6. Citizens' feedback on the “Meet Your MP”

Citizens highlighted that they found the initiative valuable as it afforded them a platform to have contact with their MP. The main concern here was that normally after elections MPs do not go back to the constituencies but the MP-citizen dialogues managed to bridge that gap.

Citizens felt this effort will contribute towards uniting citizens as it was open to all citizens not only the ones who elected the current MP. According to the citizens they have never found an opportunity to have an open meeting with the MP, as in most cases only party related citizens would be invited to the MP meetings. They therefore highlighted that they found the platform useful and served as a unifying actor for them as citizens.

Citizens appreciated the knowledge shared which helped them to differentiate between MPs' and Councils' roles and responsibilities. This meant that citizens will no longer mix the responsibilities and they will direct issues to the relevant offices. In some constituencies they asked about the MPs role



where there are issues affecting orphaned children or needy people, such as, where they are not able to bury their dead. To this, citizens were guided that when such cases occur, they should request their MP to approach the Ministry of Social Development for support.

The platform allowed citizens participation to a certain extent as they shared their concerns and issues with their MPs. Citizens indicated appreciation for the platform as they were able to first know their MPs, have dialogues with them and present their issues freely to their MPs.

Some citizens showed appreciation by reciting poems (lithoko) after the meeting.

7. What did PISA learn from “Meet Your MP”?

While the MP-citizen dialogues have generally been a success, there have been challenges encountered. In some cases the MPs were not interested to take part in the dialogues and as such dialogues could not continue in all constituencies as they had initially been planned.

MPs who participated in the dialogues liked the process and appreciated the manner in which it was facilitated. They also liked the idea of using yellow and red card to give direction to the discussions.

While the dialogues were political in nature and MPs expected them to be, they did not align with party politics. The discussions were apolitical and neutral, allowed free flow of the dialogues which became beneficial for both citizens and MPs.

The red card helped to regularise the dialogues and should be upheld in future dialogues of similar nature.

One MP said: *“I thought you are bringing me here to expose me in front of the people and let them crush me, but I really like the way your program works as it is neutral and handles issues with great care.”*

As part of preparation for similar dialogues in future, PISA should engage in intensive discussion with the MPs to clarify the concept, the methods and approaches well ahead of time to ascertain that all MPs fully understand the process before the actual dialogues.

It was noted during these dialogues however that while majority of citizens in the most remote hard to reach areas are eager to learn, they still do not know anything about the work of PISA nor governance issues. This is a clarion call for PISA to continue to market and extend its services even more to meet the democratic needs of such citizens.

Generally citizens were impressed with the work that PISA does and appreciated a lot that the program has been able to bring to their areas the MP. They appealed to the MP to organise regular dialogues with them. They already pinned PISA down by saying that they will approach PISA centres to organise this kind of feedback / accountability meetings with their respective MPs. It was however not clear how the dialogues with MPs will be regularised. In some constituencies citizens suggested that they happen on a quarterly basis, others said once or twice in a year while others wanted the dialogues as regular as once in two months. Some MPs already pointed out that they agree with the suggestion although the dialogues may not be as frequent due to other commitments they have.

Another major lesson for PISA is that it is possible to engage in dialogues that matter to citizens when the programme remains neutral and refrains from party politics. Only when an impartial approach is followed, results can be achieved.

The dialogues served to provide civic education for both citizens and members of parliament.

8. MPs Reflection Meeting

A reflection meeting with MPs was held during the first week of November where they were given a report on what has been achieved, number of constituencies covered and citizens reached. 57 MPs attended the meeting



and were impressed as they applauded PISA for the good initiative which they found valuable.

Some of their reactions to the initiative are as follows:

MPs know about PISA and like the work that PISA does in the constituencies. They asked PISA to continue its work especially in the most remote areas where citizens have little or no access to information. This they indicated was due to the fact that there was no access through either radio stations or any other form of extending news and useful information by citizens.

They applauded PISA for clarifying their roles to citizens highlighting that this gesture will help them deal with multiple challenges they face in their respective constituencies. They mentioned that they sometimes find themselves burying the dead because of the level of expectation by citizens.

While at this they also reflected and said maybe they also over-promise citizens during the election campaigns.

In the constituencies where MPs did not take part in the dialogues, the PR MPs also did not take part. The PR MPs raised concern that in future this should be revised as they would have liked to have these dialogues in their constituencies even without the elected MPs.

The MPs further said that the initiative has helped them especially those who had not had any contact with citizens yet, to meet the citizens and engage in a dialogue with them. They encouraged other MPs who did participate in the dialogues to use the platform as an opportunity to go back to the people who have elected them as their voice in parliament. From this most MPs pledged their participation in future engagements with PISA.

MPs suggested that due to the size of constituencies and the terrain in Lesotho, more than one dialogue per constituency should be planned for going forward in an effort to reach out to many citizens. They said that some constituencies are remote and dispersed/scattered over big areas. Some MPs already suggested that in their constituencies they would need at least four dialogues to satisfactorily cover all areas.

It was clarified in this meeting that the constituency offices are NOT party offices and all citizens have the freedom to visit the offices to seek services and guidance despite their political differences / affiliation.

The MPs pinpointed that in some constituencies they have more than one Principal Chief. For this they recommended that all the Principal Chiefs should be informed so that they are able to convene community meetings. They also indicated that there are constituency offices which are open to all citizens and this is part of the information they as MPs should share in the citizen dialogues.

A suggestion was made by MPs that since some constituencies are in the highlands while others are in the lowlands, the dialogues should be conducted in summer in the highlands constituencies and in the lowlands the dialogues could continue in winter. This was mentioned as the dialogues were conducted between the months of June and August, 2018.

A recommendation was made that the initiative should be continued to enforce citizen information. However they suggested that there should be an improved communication and coordination between MPs, PR MPs, Chiefs and Councillors as this will improve the capacity to handle citizen issues when everyone understand their role in enhancing democracy.

It was further recommended that in future, the Senators should be included to participate in the dialogues.

In his closing remarks during the MPs reflection meeting, the Deputy Prime Minister, who is also the MP for Machache and Leader of the House, applauded PISA for maintaining a neutral position in leading the citizen-MP dialogues and in its other activities. He highlighted that he has been reluctant to take part in the dialogues even though he knew about them, because he thought PISA would try and play a political role. He pointed out that he was convinced after he got reports from other MPs, and after the reflection meeting that PISA is unique in its approaches. He committed to support PISA initiatives going forward, and that he will also attend the citizen-MP meeting in the next round of the dialogues.

