



LESOTHO

TRANSPARENCY ASSESSMENT 2020

The citizens' analysis of government openness



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“Public bodies hold information not for themselves but as custodians of the public good and everyone has the right to access information...”

African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights

www.africanplatform.org

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The MISA Transparency Assessment is a study conducted by local researchers according to specific guidelines. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions reported are those of the researcher and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of *fesmedia* Africa or the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).

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BACKGROUND

Since 2009, the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) has evaluated the level of openness of government and public institutions in its annual Transparency Assessment. Carried out by MISA Chapters alongside local researchers, the study seeks to establish the ease or difficulty with which citizens can access public information.

The study assesses whether public institutions proactively make relevant information available via an online presence in the form of a website or social media accounts. It further evaluates to what degree information is made available to citizens upon request.

Every year, on 28 September, MISA joins the international community in commemorating the International Day for Universal Access to Information. MISA marks the occasion through:



The regional launch of the MISA Transparency Assessment



Hosting National Golden Key and Golden Padlock Awards Ceremonies

DATA ANALYSIS

Category 1:

Evaluation of government and public institution websites to determine the accessibility and presence of credible and updated public information, which includes but is not limited to: powers and functions of the institution in question, budgetary allocations, procurement procedures and contact details.

Category 2:

In this category, information requests are submitted to government and public institutions in order to determine the ease with which public information is obtained from government and public institutions.

DESCRIPTION OF ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The total number of points allocated to categories 1 and 2 is 20 points (n = 20) each.

Points are awarded based on the researcher's answer: yes (2 points); partial (1 point); no (0 points).

Public organisations fall into one of the following groups in accordance with the number of points they received:

Category 1: Website Analysis

Group 1 (0–6): Absence of a website or an extremely poor website containing no or almost no relevant public information.

Group 2 (07–13): Average website containing some relevant public information.

Group 3 (14–20): Well-organised, transparent website providing a good amount of relevant public information.

Category 2: Requests for Information

Group 1 (0–6): Denied access to reasonable information requested or acted with high levels of secrecy.

Group 2 (07–13): Displayed an average level of openness in allowing access to public information.

Group 3 (14–20): Displayed openness in allowing access to public information. The institution was helpful and transparent.

The following countries were surveyed in this 2020 MISA Transparency Assessment:
Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

TRANSPARENCY ASSESSMENT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Access to information in Lesotho remains a hard-fought battle by free expression activists and media freedom fighters. MISA Lesotho dedicates most of its advocacy work towards ensuring a viable working environment for media practitioners as far as access to information is concerned. This is against a background of archaic laws and legal instruments detrimental to the enjoyment of this right by the media, as well as the general public.

The country is a signatory to a number of regional and international treaties and conventions, such as the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. However, very little has been done to domesticate these agreements into the local legal framework. Some existing laws still impede free access to information. A number of government organisations also hamper access to information by labelling certain information and government documents as 'confidential' or 'secret'.

In an effort to realise a viable platform for unhindered access to information, MISA Lesotho advocated for an access to information law which culminated in the Access and Receipt of Information Bill of 2000. However, 20 years later, the bill is yet to be enacted into law by parliament. This is in spite of a drastic political change after the 2012 elections, that saw the country move from a single-party state to a multi-party coalition government.

To date, the country has made strides towards improving the overall legal situation through national reforms. The national reforms programme is a multi-faceted and multi-stakeholder initiative to overhaul the country's legal framework, spanning constitutional, parliamentary, security, public service sector, judicial, economic and media reforms. The initial stage of the reforms agenda, which is dialogue, was completed in December 2019. During this stage, shortfalls in the current system were identified and suggestions were made on how they should be addressed.

RATIONALE AND RESEARCH PARAMETERS

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to assess the state of access to information in Lesotho. Specifically it sought to examine the level of openness and ability to provide requested information by government/public organisations.

Ten organisations were surveyed between 22 June–15 July 2020.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To determine which organisations (both government and public) provide information to citizens upon request, timeously and with relative ease.
- To determine which organisations (both government and public) utilise online platforms to promote access to information.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, and seeks to evaluate the level of public access to information held by government and public organisations. Each MISA Chapter conducts research by evaluating the websites of government and public organisations along with submitting written requests for information. This method seeks to establish the transparency and efficiency of government and public organisations in providing information to the public.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Most public organisations have, for decades, treated public information as though it is a right to be enjoyed by only a few elites and not the general public.
- This research was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many public organisations were reporting positive cases amongst staff members or their families. This caused service disruption as these organisations were forced to close their offices in order to test staff and disinfect their establishments against COVID-19.

ORGANISATIONS SURVEYED

The following public organisations were surveyed:

1. Land Administration Authority
2. Lesotho Electricity Company
3. Lesotho Highlands Development Authority
4. Lesotho Revenue Authority
5. Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology
6. Ministry of Health
7. National Manpower Development Secretariat
8. National University of Lesotho
9. Office of the Prime Minister
10. Water and Sewage Company

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Category 1: Website analysis

- All surveyed public organisations have active websites, most of which contain basic information about the organisation including their business hours.
- Most websites (especially those of government ministries) contain out-of-date information. The Ministry of Health's website still states their goals for the year 2000. A few websites have a 'News' section, which sometimes carries information over three years old.
- It appears that most government websites are only updated when a new minister assumes office.
- Most websites contain no financial information about the organisation.

Category 2: Requests for information

- All surveyed public organisations have designated information officers.
- Most information officers do not respond timeously to requests for information.
- Many information officers, especially those from government ministries, are reluctant to provide written responses.
- Most information officers, especially from government ministries, were reluctant to respond to questions on record, preferring instead to have the minister speak for their ministry, even on non-policy issues.

DETAILED FINDINGS

1. LAND ADMINISTRATION AUTHORITY

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.laa.org.ls

The website is interactive, comprehensive and offers up-to-date information as well as insight into the organisation. The organisation is active on social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter) and frequently posts information and updates.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
Does the website contain the following:				
1. Up-to-date information?	X			
2. A description of the organisation's powers and structure, as well as its functions and responsibilities?	X			
3. A list of laws, acts, etc, issued within the scope of its powers?	X			
4. Copies of reports, policies or programmes?	X			
5. Information on budget and expenditure?	X			
6. Information about procurement procedures or signed contracts?	X			
7. Information about vacancy and employment procedures?		X		
8. The address, telephone number, and working hours of the organisation?	X			
9. The contact details of specific public officials?	X			
10. A mechanism to request and receive responses to electronic messages and requests for information?	X			

Total score: 18/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

A request for the following information was sent to Land Administration Authority (LAA):

- Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, what has been its impact on:
 - The daily or basic functions of your organisation?
 - The information dissemination?
 - Have there been any reported cases amongst members of staff or their close contacts?
 - To what extent could you say that LAA is responsive to the public's access to information needs?
 - Do you have a public response/feedback platform through which to assess the public's views about your organisation?
 - Do you have active cyberspace platforms – website, social media (such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram), for people to access information about your services? If so, how effective are they? If not, why?
 - Do you have a sense of, or idea as to whether, the public is satisfied by the service received from LAA?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how efficient is LAA in serving the public?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
1. Is there an official, who is designated to take and respond to information requests?	X			Public Outreach Manager
2. Did the organisation reply within 21 days?		X		
3. Did the organisation respond to the request for information?		X		
4. Does the organisation publish their procedures for handling information requests?		X		
5. Did the organisation provide all of the requested information?		X		
6. Did the organisation provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		X		
7. Did the organisation disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure, etc.		X		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		X		
9. Did the organisation acknowledge the request for information within 7 days?		X		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		X		

Total score: 2/20

2. LESOTHO ELECTRICITY COMPANY

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.lec.co.ls

The website is up-to-date and contains relevant information about the organisation's history as well as recent news.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
Does the website contain the following:				
1. Up-to-date information?			X	Some of the information needs to be updated as it refers to unavailable links.
2. A description of the organisation's powers and structure, as well as its functions and responsibilities?	X			
3. A list of laws, acts, etc, issued within the scope of its powers?		X		
4. Copies of reports, policies or programmes?	X			
5. Information on budget and expenditure?	X			
6. Information about procurement procedures or signed contracts?	X			
7. Information about vacancy and employment procedures?	X			
8. The address, telephone number, and working hours of the organisation?	X			

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
9. The contact details of specific public officials?		X		
10. A mechanism to request and receive responses to electronic messages and requests for information?		X		

Total score: 13/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

A request for the following information was sent to Lesotho Electricity Company (LEC):

- Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, what has been its impact on:
 - The daily or basic functions of your organisation?
 - The information dissemination?
 - Have there been any reported cases amongst members of staff or their close contacts?
 - To what extent could you say that LEC is responsive to the public's access to information needs?
 - Do you have a public response/feedback platform through which to assess the public's views about your organisation?
 - Do you have active cyberspace platforms – website, social media (such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram), for people to access information about your services? If so, how effective are they? If not, why?
 - Do you have a sense of, or idea as to whether, the public is satisfied by the service received from LEC?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how efficient is LEC in serving the public?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
1. Is there an official, who is designated to take and respond to information requests?	X			Public Relations Manager
2. Did the organisation reply within 21 days?		X		
3. Did the organisation respond to the request for information?	X			
4. Does the organisation publish their procedures for handling information requests?		X		
5. Did the organisation provide all of the requested information?		X		
6. Did the organisation provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		X		
7. Did the organisation disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure, etc.		X		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		X		
9. Did the organisation acknowledge the request for information within 7 days?		X		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		X		

Total score: 4/20

3. LESOTHO HIGHLANDS DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.lhda.org.ls

The website is one of the best surveyed. It is up-to-date and contains information about the organisation, covering topics such as history, policies, legal framework, and tendering and employment procedures. It is active on social media sites (Facebook, Google Plus and Twitter) and regularly posts information and updates.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
Does the website contain the following:				
1. Up-to-date information?	X			
2. A description of the organisation's powers and structure, as well as its functions and responsibilities?	X			
3. A list of laws, acts, etc, issued within the scope of its powers?	X			
4. Copies of reports, policies or programmes?	X			
5. Information on budget and expenditure?	X			
6. Information about procurement procedures or signed contracts?	X			
7. Information about vacancy and employment procedures?	X			
8. The address, telephone number, and working hours of the organisation?	X			
9. The contact details of specific public officials?		X		
10. A mechanism to request and receive responses to electronic messages and requests for information?	X			

Total score: 18/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

A request for the following information was sent to Lesotho Highlands Development Authority (LHDA):

- Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, what has been its impact on:
 - The daily or basic functions of your organisation?
 - The information dissemination?
 - Have there been any reported cases amongst members of staff or their close contacts?
 - To what extent could you say that LHDA is responsive to the public's access to information needs?
 - Do you have a public response/feedback platform through which to assess the public's views about your organisation?
 - Do you have active cyberspace platforms – website, social media (such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram), for people to access information about your services? If so, how effective are they? If not, why?
 - Do you have a sense of, or idea as to whether, the public is satisfied by the service received from LHDA?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how efficient is LHDA in serving the public?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
1. Is there an official, who is designated to take and respond to information requests?	X			Public Relations Manager
2. Did the organisation reply within 21 days?		X		

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
3. Did the organisation respond to the request for information?		X		
4. Does the organisation publish their procedures for handling information requests?		X		
5. Did the organisation provide all of the requested information?		X		
6. Did the organisation provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		X		
7. Did the organisation disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure, etc.		X		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		X		
9. Did the organisation acknowledge the request for information within 7 days?		X		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		X		

Total score: 2/20

4. LESOTHO REVENUE AUTHORITY

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.lra.org.ls

This website is very comprehensive and contains a wealth of information about the organisation. It has interactive features enabling users to submit feedback. The site is linked to various social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Youtube) which contain comprehensive information and are updated frequently.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
Does the website contain the following:				
1. Up-to-date information?	X			
2. A description of the organisation's powers and structure, as well as its functions and responsibilities?	X			
3. A list of laws, acts, etc, issued within the scope of its powers?	X			
4. Copies of reports, policies or programmes?	X			
5. Information on budget and expenditure?	X			
6. Information about procurement procedures or signed contracts?	X			
7. Information about vacancy and employment procedures?	X			
8. The address, telephone number, and working hours of the organisation?	X			
9. The contact details of specific public officials?		X		
10. A mechanism to request and receive responses to electronic messages and requests for information?	X			

Total score: 18/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

A request for the following information was sent to Lesotho Revenue Authority (LRA):

- Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, what has been its impact on:
 - The daily or basic functions of your organisation?
 - The information dissemination?
 - Have there been any reported cases amongst members of staff or their close contacts?
 - To what extent could you say that LRA is responsive to the public's access to information needs?
 - Do you have a public response/feedback platform through which to assess the public's views about your organisation?
 - Do you have active cyberspace platforms – website, social media (such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram), for people to access information about your services? If so, how effective are they? If not, why?
 - Do you have a sense of, or idea as to whether, the public is satisfied by the service received from LRA?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how efficient is LRA in serving the public?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
1. Is there an official, who is designated to take and respond to information requests?	X			Director of Information
2. Did the organisation reply within 21 days?		X		
3. Did the organisation respond to the request for information?	X			
4. Does the organisation publish their procedures for handling information requests?		X		
5. Did the organisation provide all of the requested information?		X		
6. Did the organisation provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		X		
7. Did the organisation disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure, etc.		X		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		X		
9. Did the organisation acknowledge the request for information within 7 days?		X		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		X		

Total score: 4/20

5. MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.gov.ls/ministry-of-communications-science-and-technology

The website offers a brief overview of the ministry's aims and objectives. The only updated information seems to be that of the current minister. There are no links to social media sites specific to this ministry, just a general link to Facebook for COVID-19 updates.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
Does the website contain the following:				
1. Up-to-date information?		X		

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
2. A description of the organisation's powers and structure, as well as its functions and responsibilities?		X		
3. A list of laws, acts, etc, issued within the scope of its powers?		X		
4. Copies of reports, policies or programmes?		X		
5. Information on budget and expenditure?		X		
6. Information about procurement procedures or signed contracts?		X		
7. Information about vacancy and employment procedures?		X		
8. The address, telephone number, and working hours of the organisation?	X			
9. The contact details of specific public officials?	X			
10. A mechanism to request and receive responses to electronic messages and requests for information?		X		

Total score: 4/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

A request for the following information was sent to Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology:

- Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, what has been its impact on:
 - The ministry's daily or basic functions?
 - The information dissemination?
 - Have there been any reported cases amongst members of staff or their close contacts?
 - To what extent could you say that the ministry's strategies and plans are responsive to the public's access to information needs?
 - What has influenced the recent plan to centralise government's information management by ensuring that all ministries' information officers are answerable to the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology?
 - When did this initiative start?
 - What will be its advantages and/or disadvantages?
 - How is it being received by respective ministries as well as the information officers themselves?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how efficient is the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology in serving the public?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
1. Is there an official, who is designated to take and respond to information requests?	X			Director of Information
2. Did the organisation reply within 21 days?	X			
3. Did the organisation respond to the request for information?	X			
4. Does the organisation publish their procedures for handling information requests?		X		
5. Did the organisation provide all of the requested information?	X			
6. Did the organisation provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		X		

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
7. Did the organisation disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure, etc.	X			
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?	X			
9. Did the organisation acknowledge the request for information within 7 days?		X		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?			X	Some responses were vague and repetitive.

Total score: 13/20

6. MINISTRY OF HEALTH

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.gov.ls/ministry-of-health

The website of this ministry is shallow and lacks information and structure, although it does contain a few news articles. The most up-to-date information is about office bearers. It does not have linked social media accounts.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
Does the website contain the following:				
1. Up-to-date information?			X	Most of the recent information on the site is about office bearers, such as the Minister.
2. A description of the organisation's powers and structure, as well as its functions and responsibilities?		X		
3. A list of laws, acts, etc, issued within the scope of its powers?		X		
4. Copies of reports, policies or programmes?	X			
5. Information on budget and expenditure?		X		
6. Information about procurement procedures or signed contracts?		X		
7. Information about vacancy and employment procedures?		X		
8. The address, telephone number, and working hours of the organisation?	X			
9. The contact details of specific public officials?	X			
10. A mechanism to request and receive responses to electronic messages and requests for information?		X		

Total score: 7/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

A request for the following information was sent to Ministry of Health:

- Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, what has been its impact on:
 - The ministry's daily or basic functions?

- The information dissemination?
- Have there been any reported cases amongst members of staff or their close contacts?
- To what extent could you say that the ministry's strategies and plans are responsive to the public's access to information needs?
- Do you have a public response/feedback platform through which to assess the public's views about the Ministry of Health?
- Do you have active cyberspace platforms – website, social media (such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram), for people to access information about your services? If so, how effective are they? If not, why?
- Do you have a sense of, or idea as to whether, the public is satisfied by the service received from LRA?
- On a scale of 1-10, how efficient is the Ministry of Health in serving the public?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
1. Is there an official, who is designated to take and respond to information requests?	X			Chief Information Officer
2. Did the organisation reply within 21 days?		X		
3. Did the organisation respond to the request for information?	X			
4. Does the organisation publish their procedures for handling information requests?		X		
5. Did the organisation provide all of the requested information?		X		
6. Did the organisation provide written reasons for the refusal of information?			X	The information officer was out of office until August 2020.
7. Did the organisation disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure, etc.		X		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		X		
9. Did the organisation acknowledge the request for information within 7 days?		X		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		X		

Total score: 5/20

7. NATIONAL MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT SECRETARIAT

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.scholarships.manp.gov.ls

The website is a user-specific platform primarily meant to serve the needs of existing and potential students. The website has no links to social media sites. It does, however, carry up-to-date information relevant to its target audience.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
Does the website contain the following:				
1. Up-to-date information?	X			
2. A description of the organisation's powers and structure, as well as its functions and responsibilities?		X		

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
3. A list of laws, acts, etc, issued within the scope of its powers?		X		
4. Copies of reports, policies or programmes?		X		
5. Information on budget and expenditure?		X		
6. Information about procurement procedures or signed contracts?		X		
7. Information about vacancy and employment procedures?		X		
8. The address, telephone number, and working hours of the organisation?	X			
9. The contact details of specific public officials?		X		
10. A mechanism to request and receive responses to electronic messages and requests for information?	X			

Total score: 6/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

A request for the following information was sent to National Manpower Development Secretariat (NMDS):

- Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, what has been its impact on:
 - The daily or basic functions of your organisation?
 - The information dissemination?
 - Have there been any reported cases amongst members of staff or their close contacts?
 - To what extent could you say that NMDS is responsive to the public's access to information needs?
 - Do you have a public response/feedback platform through which to assess the public's views about your organisation?
 - Do you have active cyberspace platforms – website, social media (such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram), for people to access information about your services? If so, how effective are they? If not, why?
 - Do you have a sense of, or idea as to whether, the public is satisfied by the service received from NMDS?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how efficient is NMDS in serving the public?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
1. Is there an official, who is designated to take and respond to information requests?	X			Information Officer
2. Did the organisation reply within 21 days?		X		
3. Did the organisation respond to the request for information?	X			
4. Does the organisation publish their procedures for handling information requests?		X		
5. Did the organisation provide all of the requested information?		X		
6. Did the organisation provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		X		
7. Did the organisation disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure, etc.		X		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		X		

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
9. Did the organisation acknowledge the request for information within 7 days?		X		
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		X		

Total score: 4/20

8. NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.nul.ls

The website contains up-to-date information about the organisation and its operations. It has various interaction and feedback features, although it does not have linked social media sites.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
Does the website contain the following:				
1. Up-to-date information?	X			
2. A description of the organisation's powers and structure, as well as its functions and responsibilities?	X			
3. A list of laws, acts, etc, issued within the scope of its powers?	X			
4. Copies of reports, policies or programmes?	X			
5. Information on budget and expenditure?		X		
6. Information about procurement procedures or signed contracts?	X			
7. Information about vacancy and employment procedures?		X		
8. The address, telephone number, and working hours of the organisation?	X			
9. The contact details of specific public officials?	X			
10. A mechanism to request and receive responses to electronic messages and requests for information?	X			

Total score: 16/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

A request for the following information was sent to National University of Lesotho (NUL):

- Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, what has been its impact on:
 - The daily or basic functions of NUL?
 - The information dissemination?
 - Have there been any reported cases amongst members of staff or their close contacts?
 - To what extent could you say that NUL is responsive to the public's access to information needs?
 - Do you have a public response/feedback platform through which to assess the public's views about you as an organisation?
 - Do you have active cyberspace platforms – website, social media (such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram), for people to access information about your services? If so, how effective are they? If not, why?
 - Do you have a sense of, or idea as to whether, the public is satisfied by the service received from NUL?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how efficient is NUL in serving the public?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
1. Is there an official, who is designated to take and respond to information requests?	X			Director of Communications and Marketing
2. Did the organisation reply within 21 days?			X	They agreed to attend to request for information almost instantly.
3. Did the organisation respond to the request for information?			X	The officer promised to attend to the questions sent.
4. Does the organisation publish their procedures for handling information requests?		X		
5. Did the organisation provide all of the requested information?		X		
6. Did the organisation provide written reasons for the refusal of information?			X	Officer claimed to be alone in the office and was overloaded with work, although said he was willing to supply the information requested.
7. Did the organisation disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure, etc.		X		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?			X	Motive for information request was not questioned although the information did not come through.
9. Did the organisation acknowledge the request for information within 7 days?	X			
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		X		None received.

Total score: 8/20

9. OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.gov.ls/prime-ministers-office

The website is basically a link to the main government site, on which various government ministries are linked. It therefore has limited specific information but has many links to other departments and ongoing government projects. It is linked to a government spokesperson Facebook page which addresses general federal issues, most of which are actually a duty of the Office of the Prime Minister.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
Does the website contain the following:				
1. Up-to-date information?			X	Most of the most recent information on the website concerns office bearers.

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
2. A description of the organisation's powers and structure, as well as its functions and responsibilities?	X			
3. A list of laws, acts, etc, issued within the scope of its powers?	X			
4. Copies of reports, policies or programmes?	X			
5. Information on budget and expenditure?		X		
6. Information about procurement procedures or signed contracts?		X		
7. Information about vacancy and employment procedures?		X		
8. The address, telephone number, and working hours of the organisation?	X			
9. The contact details of specific public officials?	X			
10. A mechanism to request and receive responses to electronic messages and requests for information?		X		

Total score: 11/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

A request for the following information was sent to the Office of the Prime Minister:

- Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, what has been its impact on:
 - The daily or basic functions of your office?
 - The information dissemination?
 - Have there been any reported cases amongst members of staff or their close contacts?
 - To what extent could you say that the Office of the Prime Minister is responsive to the public's access to information needs?
 - Do you have a public response/feedback platform through which to assess the public's views about the Office of the Prime Minister?
 - Do you have active cyberspace platforms – website, social media (such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram), for people to access information about your services? If so, how effective are they? If not, why?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how efficient is the Office of the Prime Minister in serving the public?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
1. Is there an official, who is designated to take and respond to information requests?	X			Communication and Publicity Coordinator
2. Did the organisation reply within 21 days?	X			
3. Did the organisation respond to the request for information?	X			
4. Does the organisation publish their procedures for handling information requests?		X		
5. Did the organisation provide all of the requested information?		X		
6. Did the organisation provide written reasons for the refusal of information?		X		They promised to respond each time they were reminded.
7. Did the organisation disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure, etc.		X		

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?			X	They appeared willing to cooperate, however no information was received.
9. Did the organisation acknowledge the request for information within 7 days?	X			They did, however no information was received.
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		X		No information was received.

Total score: 9/20

10. WATER AND SEWAGE COMPANY

CATEGORY 1: WEBSITE

www.wasco.co.ls

The website is up-to-date and contains information relating to the organisation and its operations. It has interactive features. The organisation has active social media sites, which are regularly updated (their Facebook page in particular).

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
Does the website contain the following:				
1. Up-to-date information?	X			
2. A description of the organisation's powers and structure, as well as its functions and responsibilities?	X			
3. A list of laws, acts, etc, issued within the scope of its powers?		X		
4. Copies of reports, policies or programmes?	X			
5. Information on budget and expenditure?	X			
6. Information about procurement procedures or signed contracts?	X			
7. Information about vacancy and employment procedures?	X			
8. The address, telephone number, and working hours of the organisation?	X			
9. The contact details of specific public officials?		X		
10. A mechanism to request and receive responses to electronic messages and requests for information?		X		

Total score: 16/20

CATEGORY 2: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

A request for the following information was sent to Water and Sewage Company (WASCO)

- Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, what has been its impact on:
 - The daily or basic functions of WASCO?
 - The information dissemination?
 - Have there been any reported cases amongst members of staff or their close contacts?
 - To what extent could you say that WASCO is responsive to the public's access to information needs?

- Do you have a public response/feedback platform through which to assess the public's views about you as an organisation?
- Do you have active cyberspace platforms – website, social media (such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram), for people to access information about your services? If so, how effective are they? If not, why?
- Do you have a sense of, or idea as to whether, the public is satisfied by the service received from WASCO?
- On a scale of 1-10, how efficient is WASCO in serving the public?

n = 20	Yes	No	Partial	Additional information
1. Is there an official, who is designated to take and respond to information requests?	X			
2. Did the organisation reply within 21 days?		X		
3. Did the organisation respond to the request for information?	X			
4. Does the organisation publish their procedures for handling information requests?		X		
5. Did the organisation provide all of the requested information?		X		
6. Did the organisation provide written reasons for the refusal of information?	X			Officer responsible said she was not in office, and hence could not attend to the questions.
7. Did the organisation disclose information about its operations, budgets, structure, etc.		X		
8. Did the authority provide information without questioning the aims and motivations of the applicant?		X		Information was not provided.
9. Did the organisation acknowledge the request for information within 7 days?		X		They did respond, but no information was provided.
10. Was the information received clear and understandable?		X		The request for information was turned down on the basis that officer responsible was away.

Total score: 6/20

SUMMARY

Organisation	Website	Request for information	Total score
1. Land Administration Authority	18	2	20
2. Lesotho Electricity Company	13	4	17
3. Lesotho Highlands Development Authority	18	2	20
4. Lesotho Revenue Authority	18	4	22
5. Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology	4	13	17
6. Ministry of Health	7	5	12
7. National Manpower Development Secretariat	6	4	10
8. National University of Lesotho	16	8	24
9. Office of the Prime Minister	11	9	19
10. Water and Sewage Company	16	6	22

RESEARCH CONCLUSION

This year's edition of the MISA Transparency Assessment was done against the backdrop of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the already unfavourable situation regarding access to information in Lesotho worsened.

It seems as though many government ministries have taken advantage of the situation and several responses to requests for information were declined. There is therefore a need for legal framework to enforce access and receipt of public information, which will hopefully come to pass during the multi-stakeholder national reforms programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Public and government organisations need to accept that information in their custody does not belong to them, and realise that they are merely custodians of this information on behalf of the public whom they serve. Organisations need to improve their information sharing efforts in order to ensure that anyone seeking information receives it.
- It is further recommended that organisations frequently update their websites with accurate and relevant information.



THE MOST SECRETIVE PUBLIC ORGANISATION IN LESOTHO

Although it recorded similar scores to the Ministry of Health, the National Manpower Development Secretariat is the most secretive organisation, because its website contains no information about the organisation. Regarding the request for information, the secretariat confirmed receipt of the request, but there was no further communication. No information was received from them.

Therefore, the 2020 Golden Padlock Award goes to the National Manpower Development Secretariat.



THE MOST OPEN PUBLIC ORGANISATION IN LESOTHO

The website of the National University of Lesotho contains relevant up-to-date information as well as interactive features. Although they did not supply the information requested, they were very prompt in responding to the information request. The reason given for non-supply of information was the officer was alone in the office and was overloaded with work.

Therefore the 2020 Golden Key Award for goes to the National University of Lesotho.