



DATA DISSEMINATION POLICY LESOTHO

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Bureau of Statistics, P.O. Box 455, Maseru 100, Lesotho
Tel: +266 22323852/22326393, Fax: +266 22310177
Website: www.bos.gov.ls

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Acronyms

ASS	African Statistical System
BOS	Bureau of Statistics
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DDI	Data Documentation Initiative
GDDS	General Data Dissemination System
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MIS	Management Information System
NSDS	National Strategy for the Development of Statistics
NSS	National Statistical System
PUFs	Public Use Files
SDC	Statistical Disclosure Control
SHaSA	Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa
SUF	Scientific Use File

1.0 Background

The Bureau of Statistics (BOS) is mandated by the Statistic Act of 2001 to produce and disseminate quality, reliable, accurate, timely and accessible official statistical data. Statistical data is a general name given to the different types of data which are micro, macro, administrative and geo-spatial data. This mandate is executed through continuous data collection, analysis of censuses, surveys and the use of administrative data from different stakeholders. The BOS has not fully implemented the dissemination mandate as stipulated in the Act. Under the Statistics Act 2001 the Director of BOS has the authority to share all data as long as the Director is convinced that it is for genuine research purposes, and that the respondents' confidentiality is assured. The Act requires that a copy of the findings of the research, for which the data was required, is shared with BOS. The lack of sharing of microdata poses a challenge to various institutions, organizations and individuals who require such microdata. Access to microdata is required by researchers, policy and decision-makers to effectively and efficiently research, assess and evaluate issues and develop effective policy. Providing users access to microdata has multiple advantages which include:

- raising the profile and credibility of official statistics;
- supporting research;
- improving the reliability and relevance of data through better user feedback;
- reducing data collection duplication and reducing the cost of data dissemination.

To date, macro and geospatial data have not been a cause for concern as their dissemination is straight forward, the main challenges encountered are with regard to the anonymization and dissemination of micro data, hence the need to formulate a policy which, while dealing with all statistical data, places particular focus on the anonymization and dissemination of micro-data. This policy seeks to bring transparency, clarity and dependability on the anonymization and dissemination of microdata which will in turn afford all the stakeholders and or users the opportunity on various situations thus enabling informed decisions by the decision makers.

It is in light of this background that the Bureau of Statistics through the support of the World Bank has taken the opportunity and undertaken the task of formulating and developing a Data Dissemination Policy. The implementation of this policy will benefit the Kingdom of Lesotho and other stakeholders to the fullest capacity while maintaining the strictest level of confidentiality. The proposed dissemination Policy will address in detail, the what, how, when and why of anonymization and data dissemination. This Policy will provide the direction on how to achieve excellence in disseminating official statistical data to inform decision-making, planning and budgeting, monitoring and evaluation process for various demographic, social, economic and development projects and programmes in the country.

1.1 Policy Statement

The Bureau of Statistics commits to making data, and other information products relating to the country available in accordance with recognized standards. This data dissemination policy emanates from the demand of users and is based on the following factors:

- Official statistics is a common property of the society, so it should be disseminated autonomously, transparent and without interference from political processes;
- Dissemination formats and channels should be user friendly and made easy with use of the latest technology and innovation;
- Data file structures are developed that ensure confidentiality of respondents.

1.2 Policy Objective

The objective of this policy is to define the nature of data and more specifically the anonymized statistical data files that will be disseminated, how they should be used and the conditions under which they will be disseminated. It is further intended to define principles and guidelines for sharing data and making it available and accessible to all stakeholders equally, subject to confidentiality constraints.

1.2.1 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this policy are to provide guidelines for disseminating data emanating from the official statistics process, including but not limited to:

- The promotion of data dissemination system and coverage.
- Lessening the difficulties which users face in accessing microdata files;
- The promotion of a wider use of data in research and in decision making;
- Provision of partial support to researchers.
- Adoption of new technology applications to be used for data dissemination.
- The improvements of standards to effect timely and quality data provision to all users
- Insuring the security of data by maintaining confidentiality

1.3 Policy Scope and Data Typology

This policy defines the principles of dissemination of Official Statistics. It also provides specific guidance on the dissemination of data generated through surveys and censuses. These include unit level data collected from households, individuals and establishments.

This policy covers data generated by BOS, Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the private sector within the National Statistical System. Data is categorized into the following categories:

- I. Micro-data and its output: The primary data generated through Surveys and Censuses at unit level of observations from households, establishments and individuals. The dissemination of such micro-data files and its related metadata outputs shall be through the BOS Microdata Catalog.

- II. Macro-data and its outputs: The data includes all available information collected and aggregated from households, firms and institutions.
- III. Administrative data: The secondary data collected by the public institutions in the course of rendering service to the public.
- IV. Geo-spatial data: All Geo referenced data used to generate electronic maps, map prints outputs at the national, regional or district levels.

2.0 Data Dissemination Principles

In accordance with the provisions of United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, African Charter on Statistics, Strategy for the Harmonisation of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA), General Data Dissemination System (GDDS), the Statistics Act of 2001, and the implementation of the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS), Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs) engaged in the compilation and dissemination of data and statistics will adopt the following principles for disseminating data:

1. *There will be full and open exchange of data, metadata, statistics and other products among government ministries and agencies and other stakeholders/users, recognizing relevant national policies and legislation as well as applicable international instruments and standards.*
2. *All data, metadata and other information products shared among government ministries and agencies will be made available with **minimum time delay and at NO COST for certain products while others shall attract a NON-MARKET COST.***
3. *All data, metadata and statistical products published as official statistics shall be **FREE to ALL Users or no more than applicable cost recovery amount to cover reproduction or distribution.** Such costs will be communicated in a posted bulletin by the ministry or agency in advance.*
4. *Statistical usage will be encouraged for other uses including research and education, however the source should be acknowledged.*
5. *For enhanced coordination of official statistics dissemination, data producers in government are encouraged to subscribe to or publish their information on the BOS website, or other available statistical dissemination tools.*

3.0 Data Dissemination Mechanisms

The Lesotho Bureau of Statistics shall make official statistics available under the terms of the Statistics Act 2001. The Director shall approve release of all official statistics before dissemination. The main channels through which statistics results and data shall be disseminated are through hard copy publications, electronic publications, web-based databases and the microdata catalogue as follows:

- i. The Lesotho Bureau of Statistics library
- ii. The Lesotho Bureau of Statistics Website;
- iii. The Lesotho Open Data Portal (Key Indicators);
- iv. The Microdata Catalogue (Anonymized unit level microdata from surveys and censuses);
- v. Electronic media;
- vi. E-mail and telephone;
- vii. Workshops and seminars;
- viii. Newspapers and news releases.
- ix. Community gatherings

4.0 Dissemination Time of Official Statistics

- i. High Frequency Data:
 - a. Monthly - The report is published 1 month after the reference period. Microdata will be released 2 weeks after the release of the report.
 - b. Quarterly – The report is published 3 months after the reference period and the microdata will be published 2 months after the release of the report.
- ii. Census Data: The report is published 6 - 15 months after the release of the census reports and microdata will be released within 3 – 6 months after the release of the reports.
- iii. Survey Data: The report is published nine months after the reference period and microdata will be released within 3 months after release of the survey report.

4.1 Dissemination of Microdata

As previously explained in the introduction hereof, there are different types of official statistical data but the type which has proven to be challenging with regard to anonymization and its dissemination is microdata. To reiterate, microdata is defined as: a set of records containing information on individual respondents or on economic entities. Such records may contain responses to a survey questionnaire, a census or administrative forms. Microdata are released in line with the Sixth United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics which states that:

“Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether or not they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes.”

To maintain confidentiality in compliance with the above, the following principles apply:

- Principle 1: It is appropriate for microdata collected for official statistical purposes to be used for statistical analysis to support research if confidentiality is protected.
- Principle 2: Microdata should only be made available for statistical purposes.
- Principle 3: Provision of microdata should be consistent with legal and other necessary arrangements that ensure that confidentiality of the released microdata is protected.

- Principle 4: The procedures for researcher`s access to microdata, as well as the uses and users of microdata should be transparent, and publicly available.¹

Taking into account the abovementioned principles, microdata are to also be aligned with known principles and with Section 20(4) of the Statistics Act 2001 which stipulates:

The Director may release unit records with identifiers removed, if:

- *“He/she is satisfied that unit records so released are to be used for genuine research purposes;*
- *He/she obtains from the recipient of the records a written undertaking that the records shall not be released to any other person without the written consent of the Director;*
- *He/she obtains from the recipient a written undertaking to make available a copy of the research findings to the bureau; or*
- *He/she is satisfied that the unit records cannot be identified as relating to any person or business enterprise.”*

5.0 Legal and International Frameworks Governing Statistical Data Dissemination

A strong statistical legislation is a fundamental prerequisite for an effective National Statistical System (NSS) as it underpins the institutional arrangements for the collection, management and dissemination of official statistics. It also ensures professional independence of a national statistical agency and other agencies within the NSS to enhance the integrity, impartiality and credibility of official statistics as well as data confidentiality.

While the relevant legal instruments have been mentioned in preceding sections, in this section each legal instrument together with the relevant provisions are recited and quoted for ease of reference.

a. United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

- Principle 1: Relevance, Impartiality, and Equal Access Official statistics provide an indispensable element in the information system of a democratic society, serving the Government, the economy and the public with data about the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation. To this end, official statistics that meet the test of practical utility are to be compiled and made available on an impartial basis by official statistical agencies to honour citizens’ entitlement to public information.
- Principle 6: Confidentiality Individual data collected by statistical agencies for statistical compilation, whether they refer to natural or legal persons, are to be strictly confidential and used exclusively for statistical purposes
- Principle 7: Legislation, the laws, regulations and measures under which the statistical systems operate are to be made public.

b. African Charter on Statistics

Principle 4:

Dissemination

- Accessibility: African statistics shall not be made inaccessible in any way whatsoever. This concomitant right of access for all users without restriction shall be guaranteed by domestic law. Micro-data may be made available to users on condition that the pertinent laws and procedures are respected, and confidentiality is maintained.
- Dialogue with users: Mechanisms for consultation with all African statistics users without discrimination shall be put in place with a view to ensuring that the statistical information offered are commensurate with their needs.
- Clarity and understanding: Statistics shall be presented in a clear and comprehensible form. They shall be disseminated in a practical and appropriate manner, be available and accessible to all and accompanied by the requisite metadata and analytical commentaries.
- Simultaneity: African Statistics shall be disseminated in a manner that ensures that all users are able to use them simultaneously. Where certain authorities receive advance information under embargo, to allow them time to respond to possible questions, public announcement shall be made indicating the nature of such information, the identity of the recipients and the set timeframe before its public dissemination.
- Correction: Statistics authorities shall correct publications containing significant errors using standard statistical practices or, for very serious cases, suspend dissemination of such statistics. In that event, the users shall be informed in clear terms of the reasons for such corrections or suspension.

c. Strategy for the Harmonisation of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA)

Strategic Theme 3:

Develop sustainable institutional capacities of the African Statistical System (ASS). Building the institutional capacity of the ASS lies at the heart of the Strategy. Without sufficient capacity, members of the ASS will not be able to produce and disseminate the harmonized quality statistics that are necessary for the development and integration process.

Strategic Objective 3:

Establish an effective technological environment. Developing a Management Information System (MIS) for the monitoring of the integration agenda, building a statistical Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa – SHaSA xvi data warehouse, and standardizing dissemination tools and platforms will help achieve this objective. The expected outcomes of these initiatives include: the effective monitoring of integration efforts; better evidence-based decision-making; consistent dissemination of data; and accessible statistical information for better decisions.

d. Statistics Act No. 8 of 2001

Has provision for dissemination of statistical information under Section 20:

“The Director shall ensure that any statistical data collected, after appropriate processing and ascertaining its accuracy, and also after ensuring confidentiality with respect to any individual who provided any statistical information to which section 20 relates, is released for general dissemination”.

e. General Data Dissemination System (GDDS)

The General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) has proved to be a robust and flexible framework with the following expected outcomes:

- Sustainable improvements in the quality, coverage, and dissemination of key statistics in all active countries;
- Participating countries develop a plan to improve their NSS; GDDS plans for improvement are implemented;
- Information about data – “metadata”– is developed, updated, and disseminated; Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa – SHaSA 6
- Effective coordination is achieved nationally and within the region; and
- Awareness of data statistical practices among data users is improved.

6.0 Accessibility of Official Data

Due to the previously identified different types of official statistical data (highlighted in Section 1.3), four levels of accessibility have been formulated and considered these are:

1. Open access (no restriction),
2. Direct access or Public Use Files (some restrictions on use, but no screening of users),
3. Research Use Files (or Scientific Use Files, or Licensed Files), availability only in an enclave, and
4. No access authorized.

General data, which is macro, administrative and geo-spatial data will be freely available and accessible to the public through BOS electronic channels while the following pertains to microdata:

- BOS shall release microdata sets for public access within 3 months after the release of survey report; Census micro data files shall be released within 6 months after the release of the census results.
- Public Use Files (PUFs): These can be accessed freely through the website once the user has registered online and agreed to the terms and conditions of use to the data set provided in the registration form.
- Licensed files: This requires an agreement between users and BOS to permit them to access data that is more detailed. The files may be transferred to users online or through DVDs.
- On-site Access files: BOS shall, in some cases, permit users to work on-site within the BOS premises to access sensitive data which could not be adequately anonymized for release outside of the organization. All outputs to be removed from the BOS premises shall be reviewed by an officer of BOS to ensure that confidentiality is not breached. When requesting for this data, researchers shall be asked to outline their research objectives, for approval to be granted by the Director.

7.0 Terms and Conditions Governing Breach of Use of Public Data

Countries with established microdata dissemination practices have confirmed that breaches of data file confidentiality are very limited. The research has shown that it is not in the best interests of users to breach the terms and conditions as this would tarnish their reputations as well as their organizations. Breaches do however from time to time occur therefore the terms and conditions governing the use of public data are expected to be adhered to.

- If a breach is identified, it will be dealt with promptly.
- If a legal offence has occurred, legal action will be considered.
- If researchers violate their undertaking with regard to the terms of the licenses in section 9.0 and 10.0 of this policy, the Lesotho Bureau of Statistics shall consider suspending their access rights and those of their organization.
- If the undertaking is made by an organization on a researcher's behalf, that organization, and not the Bureau of Statistics, may be instructed to consider the sanctions it should take towards one of its own.
- Loss of access as reflected above by an individual, could lead to a similar penalty for the whole organization.
- If necessary, the Bureau of Statistics shall take steps to ensure further breaches do not occur; and, if the breach is minor, a warning shall be considered as the only action necessary
- The Bureau of Statistics is committed to broad access by users to its statistical products e.g. publications and data.
- Some data will be made available at no cost through the Lesotho Bureau of Statistics Website while the cost for special requests will be determined by the Director.

8.0 METADATA

Statistical metadata describes or documents statistical data, i.e. microdata, aggregate data, or other metadata. It facilitates sharing, querying, and understanding of statistical data over the lifetime of the data. Metadata dissemination shall be in line with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics which are relevant to data management. These principles include:

- i. To facilitate a correct interpretation of the data, the statistical agencies are to present information according to scientific standards on the sources, methods and procedures of the statistics.
- ii. Metadata produced for microdata will comply with the Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) international standard.
- iii. The release of anonymized microdata should be accompanied by the usual metadata needed by an analyst to understand and use the data correctly (survey weight, strata, survey methodology etc.)

All statistical publications which are eligible for archiving shall be digitally archived. This includes all

microdata files, reports, questionnaires, manuals and technical documents that have been disseminated as well as the master files from which they were created.

9.0 Copyright and Citation Requirements

All products of the Lesotho Bureau of Statistics are copyright protected. Users may make copies of statistical reports for their own use but shall not use them for commercial purposes. Users of such material shall acknowledge the source of information as the Lesotho Bureau of Statistics. The copyrights and citation/acknowledgement are provided for in the Lesotho Copyright Order of 1989.

10.0 Disclaimer

The Lesotho Bureau of Statistics or the original collector of the data, and the relevant funding agencies bear no responsibility for any use of the data or for interpretations or inferences based upon such uses.

11.0 Target groups

All types of data (quantitative or qualitative) are intended to target users. Target groups are typically different with various data needs. Official data sets should be disseminated to all users at the same time, with comprehensive metadata. The users of statistics produced by BOS and other producers are the following:

- i. Government agencies
- ii. International agencies
- iii. Researchers and Academic Institutions
- iv. Private Enterprises Sector
- v. Civil society
- vi. Media (Radios, local TVs and Newspapers)

12.0 Anonymization of Micro Data

With reference to section 4.1, the aim of anonymizing microdata is to transform the datasets to achieve an “acceptable level” of disclosure risk. This involves the removal of direct identifiers and the appropriate treatment of indirect identifiers prior to dissemination through anonymization procedures. The process of anonymization should prioritize the goal of protecting respondents, while at the same time keeping the data users in mind to limit information loss. All statistical data shall be anonymized before sharing with users.

12.1 Anonymization Procedures of Micro-data Files

Direct and indirect identifiers shall be removed from files prior to dissemination through various anonymization procedures. Two main types of anonymized files will be produced under the terms of this policy. The major differences among these files are the levels of geographic and characteristic details.

(i) **Public Use Files (PUFs):** Microdata files are disseminated by BOS for general public use. These files shall be made available from the Central Statistics Department website. Individuals are requested to identify themselves by name, provide their email addresses and other detail information as per request form and agree to abide by the set terms and conditions defined by Central Statistics Department. Such data files shall be made available to users free of charge.

(ii) **Licensed files:** To permit users to access data files that are less highly anonymized and/or more sensitive than PUFs, the users shall have a signed agreement with BOS. For these files, all individual identifiers shall be removed and some characteristic details may be collapsed or removed. Licensing agreements shall only be entered into with users working for registered organizations, and unidentified individuals. The primary and secondary data researchers shall be identified by name and the institution. Such files shall be available free of charge.

(iii) **Data Enclave Files:** are used for particularly sensitive data or for more detailed data for which sufficient anonymization to release them outside the Statistics Office premises is impossible.

12.2 Micro data Access

Public Use Files (PUFs)

These can be accessed freely through the website once the users have registered online and agreed to the terms and conditions of use to the data set provided in the registration form provided in Annex 2.

Licensed files

These require an agreement between users and BOS to permit them to access data that is more detailed through a request form provided in Annex 2. The files may be transferred through DVDs, hard-drive, etc.

Data Enclave Files

BOS shall, in some cases, permit users to work on-site within the BOS premises to access sensitive data which could not be adequately anonymized for release outside of the organization. All data to be shared shall be reviewed by an officer of BOS to ensure that confidentiality is not breached. When requesting for this data, researchers shall be asked to outline their research objectives, for permission to be accorded.

13.0 Monitoring and Evaluation of Data Dissemination Policy

13.1 Monitoring and Evaluation

The BOS will be responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of this policy. The M&E framework will be used to get opinions from various data users regarding different aspects of data production, quality, dissemination practices, etc. This will help the BOS improve where needed. BOS may also conduct users' perceptions surveys to know what types of data users may need and the dissemination standards.

13.2 Review of the Policy

The Director of BOS, will convene and organize a stakeholders' workshop every three years to review the policy, after which appropriate steps shall be taken to revise it if need be. This policy document may be revised according to new demands that may arise from time to time. However, if need arises the Director BOS will recommend to relevant authority for its revision. Changes necessitating revision shall include changes in technology, statutory regulations and any other reasons as may be determined.

Annexes:

Annex 1: Definitions of key concepts

Anonymization	Use of techniques that convert confidential data into anonymized data/ removal or masking of identifying information from datasets.
Census	A Census is a survey conducted on the full set of observation units or objects belonging to a given population or universe. It is the complete enumeration of a population or groups at a point in time with respect to well-defined characteristics.
Confidentiality	Data confidentiality is a property of data, usually resulting from legislative measures, which prevents it from unauthorized disclosure. ²
Confidential data	Data that will allow identification of an individual or organisation, either directly or indirectly. ¹
Direct identifier	A variable that reveals directly and unambiguously the identity of a respondent, e.g., names, social identity numbers.
Disclosure risk	A disclosure risk occurs if an unacceptably narrow estimation of a respondent's confidential information is possible or if exact disclosure is possible with a high level of confidence. ² Disclosure risk also refers to the probability that successful disclosure could occur.
Dissemination	Dissemination refers to the act of making microdata files, with supporting metadata, available for access and use.
End user	The user of the released microdata file after anonymization. Who the end user is depends on the release type.
Identifier	An identifier is a variable/ information that can be used to establish identity of an individual or organisation. Identifiers can lead to direct or indirect identification.
Indirect identification	Indirect identification occurs when the identity of an individual or organisation is disclosed, not using direct <u>identifiers</u> , but through a combination of unique characteristics in key variables. ²
Information loss	Information loss refers to the reduction of the information content in the released data relative to the information content in the raw data. Information loss is often measured with respect to common analytical measures, such as regressions and indicators. See also Utility.
Metadata	A description of the data for the users to understand the data in detail. This includes, among others, description of the source, compilation, methodology, time of dissemination, institution and persons responsible for the compilation.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.nsf/pages/Confidentiality+-+Glossary>

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, <http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.nsf/pages/Confidentiality+-+Glossary>

Microdata	A set of records containing information on individual respondents or on economic entities. Such records may contain responses to a survey questionnaire or administrative forms.
Original data	The data before SDC/anonymization methods were applied. Also called “raw data” or “untreated data”.
Privacy	Privacy is a concept that applies to data subjects while confidentiality applies to data. The concept is defined as follows: "It is the status accorded to data which has been agreed upon between the person or organisation furnishing the data and the organisation receiving it and which describes the degree of protection which will be provided." ⁵
Public Use File (PUF)	Type of release of microdata file, which is freely available to any user, for example on the internet.
Raw data	The data before SDC/anonymization methods were applied. Also called “original data” or “untreated data”.
Release	Dissemination – the release to users of information obtained through a statistical activity. ⁵
Respondents	Individuals or units of observation whose information/responses to a survey make up the data file.
Scientific Use File (SUF)	Type of release of microdata file, which is only available to selected researchers under contract. Also known as “licensed file”, “microdata under contract” or “research file”.
Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC)	Statistical Disclosure Control techniques can be defined as the set of methods to reduce the risk of disclosing information on individuals, businesses or other organisations. Such methods are only related to the dissemination step and are usually based on restricting the amount of or modifying the data released. ³
Survey	Survey is a scientific statistical collection of data on individuals, households, establishments or other organisational units where only a sample of units in the population is enumerated.
Utility	Data utility describes the value of data as an analytical resource, comprising analytical completeness and analytical validity.

³ OECD, <http://stats.oecd.org/glossary>

Annex 2: Standard request forms for accessing microdata

2.1 Application for Access to a Public Use Dataset

2.2 Application for Access to a Licensed Dataset

Annex 3: Data Release Calendar

Annex 4: Template for the policy monitoring and evaluation