

# Poverty and Corruption in Lesotho: A Critical Analysis of Lesotho's Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO)

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**Abstract:-** This research paper examines the efficacy of the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) in combating corruption within Lesotho, while also attempting to establish a correlation with the prevailing poverty conditions in the nation. The investigation was structured around three distinct objectives that facilitated the formulation of pertinent research inquiries. The methodology employed comprised desk reviews designed to identify, validate, and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data sourced from secondary literature to evaluate the operational performance of the DCEO in relation to case load management and successful prosecutions.

Data collection was conducted through secondary sources, with subsequent analysis being performed utilizing content analysis techniques, and the results were articulated through thematic organization and narrative presentation. The findings reveal that legal and institutional elements, including the DCEO's autonomy and legal mandate, significantly enhance its capacity to combat corruption in Lesotho. Moreover, various obstacles confronting the organization encompass political interference, limited financial resources, and challenges related to human resources. In light of these findings, it is posited that a systematic reform of the DCEO's operational framework is imperative for advancing its efforts against corruption in Lesotho. This paper further proffers recommendations for the government to make substantial investments in supporting the DCEO to enhance its operational efficiency and effectiveness, along with the removal of any encroachments that impede its performance.

**Keywords:-** Lesotho, Public Institutions, Poverty, Corruption.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Lesotho, a small landlocked country in Southern Africa, grapples with the dual challenges of poverty and corruption. As a nation with high poverty rates, the interplay between these two social maladies necessitates a critical examination of the mechanisms employed to combat corruption, particularly through the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO). The interplay between poverty and corruption in Lesotho is significantly influenced by the effectiveness of the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO). Corruption exacerbates poverty by undermining governance, reducing public service quality, and diverting resources from socio-economic development (Al-Sultan & Jasni, 2015; Zamahani, 2015). The DCEO, established under the Prevention of Corruption and Economic Offences Act 1999, faces challenges such as lack of operational autonomy and inadequate enforcement, which hinder its effectiveness in combating corruption (Letsika, 2005; Rakolobe, 2020).

Institutions play a critical role in facilitating the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the overarching Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN 2019). The United Nations envisions a global landscape by 2030 in which no individual is marginalized, and where social, economic, and ecological objectives are harmonized and perpetuated for a just future. This ambition necessitates the presence of effective, accountable, and inclusive public administration across all levels (UN 2015). The nations that have signed the agreement, encompassing both developed and developing states, have similarly embraced this vision, endorsed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and incorporated them into their respective National Development Plans. In a parallel manner, the African Union (AU) has assimilated the United Nations' SDGs into its Agenda 2063. Moreover, numerous nations within SADC have undertaken Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), with notable examples including Tanzania and South Africa.

As with other United Nations initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the progress towards the SDGs is anticipated to differ across countries, objectives, and specific targets. This variability is, in part, attributable to the substantial challenges inherent in public administration, which are extensive in nature and demand substantial innovation and sustained long-term commitment. These challenges aspire to fulfill significant and ambitious aims, which consequently present difficulties in successful resolution, necessitating transformative shifts in conceptual frameworks and/or considerable modifications in governmental operations, while also exerting substantial effects on individuals, governments, and society at large (Gerton and Mitchell 2019:435). For instance, notwithstanding the progress made, Africa's economic transformation is still considerably lacking, and there exists an urgent need for a reevaluation of how nations confront developmental challenges across the continent (Kagame 2019: ii). Nevertheless, both the theoretical and practical application of public administration remain pivotal in proffering solutions to the formidable challenges posed by the fourth industrial revolution (Troupin 2012:527).

The objective of this discourse is to rigorously evaluate the institutions charged with the prevention and combat of corruption in Lesotho by the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences with a particular focus on the intricate challenges faced and the exploration of integrated solutions that address the daily realities encountered. The realization of the SDGs necessitates the collaboration of governmental entities, the private sector, civil society, and the citizenry collectively, thereby enabling Lesotho to evolve into a prosperous nation that contributes positively to the wider African continent.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Corruption

There is currently no international consensus on the definition of corruption (Chike and Madubueze, 2017). The most widely accepted definition characterizes corruption as the misuse of delegated authority entrusted to public officials for personal economic gain or other unlawful advantages (Transparency International, 2024; Ayodeji, 2019; Enste & Heldman, 2017). However, it is crucial to recognize that corruption is not limited to government entities; it also occurs within private organizations where company resources are misappropriated for individual enrichment. Furthermore, Rose-Ackerman (2017) points out that the widespread nature of corruption diverts resources away from essential services and development initiatives, exacerbating the inequality gap and obstructing sustainable progress. For example, many poorer nations struggle with inadequate infrastructure, healthcare, and education systems. This creates systemic barriers that hinder equitable access to services provided by

various government ministries and agencies. Corruption can take many forms at the state level, including petty (or bureaucratic) corruption, grand corruption, legislative corruption, and systemic corruption. Each type presents unique challenges and impacts different sectors of society. Petty corruption often involves small-scale bribery and favours in everyday transactions, while grand corruption typically entails large-scale abuses of power by high-ranking officials. Legislative corruption involves the manipulation of laws and regulations for personal gain, whereas systemic corruption refers to ingrained practices within institutions that perpetuate corrupt behaviour. Understanding these various forms of corruption is essential for developing effective strategies to combat it.

### B. Petty Corruption

Petty corruption refers to the routine abuse of power in transactions related to service delivery and benefits (Ayodeji, 2022; Nkyabonaki, 2019; Chêne, 2022). This form of corruption typically involves small amounts of money exchanged between citizens and public officials when accessing public services or goods (Gouvea et al., 2019). For example, a citizen might pay a bribe to a government official to obtain a driver's license or gain access to social services. Conversely, a public official may solicit a bribe or favor from a citizen as a prerequisite for providing certain public goods or services. This illustrates that petty corruption operates as a two-way street, with either public officials or citizens initiating the corrupt act. While these acts may seem minor in isolation, You (2021) and Ben and Saha (2016) emphasize that such small-scale corruption can collectively reinforce the unequal distribution of public resources, often favoring the wealthy and disproportionately affecting the poor. In essence, petty corruption typically involves small bribes, kickbacks, or informal payments intended to expedite services or secure preferential treatment. This ongoing cycle not only undermines the integrity of public institutions but also exacerbates social inequalities by limiting access to essential services for those who cannot afford to pay bribes.

### C. Grand Corruption

Grand corruption refers to the misuse of power at the highest levels of government, where officials exploit their positions for significant personal gain, often to the detriment of the public good (Suleiman, 2017; Ayodeji, 2022). This type of corruption typically involves large sums of money and can have devastating consequences for society, including severe human rights violations and the systematic misappropriation of public resources. Unlike petty corruption, which usually involves smaller transactions, grand corruption encompasses extensive schemes that often necessitate collusion among multiple high-ranking officials and private entities. For instance, a health minister might conspire with contractors to artificially inflate project costs, diverting the excess funds into personal accounts while compromising the quality of public services. The ramifications of grand corruption are profound,

as it undermines governance structures and erodes public trust in institutions. According to Transparency International (2023) and Ayodeji (2019), when state resources are misappropriated through grand corruption schemes, violations of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights become prevalent. This includes infringing upon collective rights such as self-determination and development. In extreme cases, grand corruption can transform governmental functions into vehicles for personal enrichment, effectively turning state institutions into criminal enterprises. This not only exacerbates social inequality but also stifles economic development and social progress. Consequently, tackling grand corruption has emerged as a critical priority for international organizations and governments aiming to restore integrity and accountability within public service.

#### *D. Lesotho's Context of Poverty*

Poverty is a complex and multifaceted issue that encompasses not only economic deprivation but also social exclusion and vulnerability (Velázquez, 2021). Traditionally, poverty has been defined primarily in terms of income levels; however, recent research underscores the importance of adopting a multidimensional perspective that considers various facets of individuals' lives. For instance, poverty can manifest as a lack of material well-being, which includes inadequate access to food, healthcare, education, housing, and other essential services. In Lesotho, poverty is particularly concentrated in rural areas where opportunities for income generation are scarce, access to basic services and infrastructure is limited, and residents are highly vulnerable to environmental and economic shocks (World Bank, 2021). Conversely, urban areas have seen more significant reductions in poverty levels due to improvements in education and an increase in incomes from well-paying jobs primarily in the services sector (UNSDG, 2023). Moreover, poverty can be broadly classified into two categories: absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to a situation where individuals lack the basic human necessities required for physical well-being, such as clean water, adequate nutrition, healthcare, education, clothing, and shelter (Dunn, 2023; Zheng & Li, 2024). This condition represents a state of severe deprivation where people do not have access to the fundamental requirements for a decent standard of living. In contrast, relative poverty is defined as concerning the economic status of other members within society (Kakwani & Son, 2016). It reflects individuals' feelings of deprivation when they compare their economic circumstances with those of others, emphasizing the social context of poverty. For example, in Lesotho, impoverished citizens often find themselves lacking access to quality healthcare and education compared to their wealthier peers (Justesen & Bjørnskov, 2014).

#### *E. The Link Between Corruption and Poverty*

Corruption has significant causal effects on various economic and social development indicators (Yunan & Andini, 2018). In developing countries, corruption and poverty are closely intertwined. While multiple factors influence the nature and extent of poverty in any given nation, numerous studies have demonstrated that higher levels of corruption contribute to the persistence of poverty (Eshun & Baah, 2020; Gimba & Mohammed, 2021; Bukhari et al., 2022). When institutions become corrupt, they tend to operate primarily for the benefit of those in power and their privileged networks, thereby worsening income inequality and perpetuating poverty (Oliveira da Silva et al., 2022). For example, when public resources are misappropriated away from poverty alleviation programs and development initiatives, it denies disadvantaged populations access to essential services. This corruption undermines the effectiveness of redistributive policies aimed at improving social equity (Fakir et al., 2017). Moreover, corruption undermines the functionality of government as a whole, adversely affecting monetary and fiscal policies while also leading to various socio-economic challenges (İnam, Güzel, & Murat, 2019). A pertinent example is Nigeria's oil resource curse, which illustrates how wealth that was intended to foster economic growth has instead resulted in widespread poverty due to corrupt practices. Conversely, poverty can drive individuals to engage in corrupt activities as a survival strategy, creating a vicious cycle. Jeng (2018) argues that corruption and poverty have a reciprocal relationship: poverty often breeds corruption, while corruption exacerbates poverty. However, this article focuses specifically on how corruption intensifies the challenges of poverty.

### **III. CHALLENGES OF CORRUPTION**

#### ➤ *Biased Tax Systems*

Corruption can significantly influence income inequality by creating biased tax systems that favor the wealthy and well-connected over poorer individuals (Policardo & Carrera, 2018). This occurs when affluent individuals and corporations evade taxes through collusion with tax officials, undermining the integrity of the tax system. A notable example is the Gupta family in South Africa, who leveraged their connections to secure lucrative contracts while simultaneously evading taxes. Taxation represents a compulsory transfer of resources from individuals to the government, aimed at achieving various economic and social objectives (Olaoye, 2018). Additionally, such grand corruption erodes public trust in governmental institutions, fostering a cycle where citizens become less willing to fulfill their own tax obligations. Global patterns of tax evasion further illustrate that this practice diminishes government revenue, exacerbates income inequality, and undermines governance, all of which adversely affect the economic development of grassroots communities (Asomba, 2023). Conversely, Yohou (2023) points out that corruption can obstruct necessary tax reforms or prevent their

implementation altogether. When decisions are driven by bribery and nepotism, governments struggle to enact effective tax reforms, which diminishes the positive impacts of any reforms that are eventually implemented and leads to poorer fiscal outcomes. For example, parliamentarians may employ procedural tactics to delay or block tax reform bills during legislative processes by introducing numerous amendments that prolong debates and voting. The African Union (2020) highlights the critical need to address existing loopholes in tax revenue systems to fully leverage domestic resources.

#### ➤ *Increased Cost of Living*

Corruption has a detrimental effect on the cost of living by distorting economic conditions, which leads to inefficiencies in critical sectors such as healthcare and education, ultimately diminishing the overall quality of life (Remeikienė et al., 2020). This distortion occurs through various mechanisms that disrupt economic activities, reduce the availability and quality of public services, and exacerbate social inequality. In their research titled “The Externalities of Corruption: Evidence from Entrepreneurial Activity in China,” Giannetti et al. (2017) found that corruption adversely impacts the performance of small and young enterprises. These businesses often find themselves competing against larger, corrupt industry peers for resources and market share, which can be particularly harmful in developing countries where Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) are vital for job creation and economic growth. According to the World Bank (2019), SMMEs account for approximately 90% of all businesses and more than 50% of global employment. Moreover, SMMEs in Africa face numerous challenges that hinder their growth and threaten their long-term viability (Nikoloić, 2015). Access to finance is frequently cited as the most significant barrier to the success of these businesses (Soumaré, 2022). Corruption exacerbates these existing challenges by making it increasingly difficult for SMMEs to cover operational costs such as salaries, rent, and license renewals. In competitive markets, firms often struggle to pass on the costs associated with corruption to consumers, tightening financial constraints (Amin & Motta, 2023). This situation ultimately diminishes the purchasing power of both businesses and individuals, making it increasingly challenging for them to meet their basic needs. As a result, corruption not only hampers economic development but also significantly affects the livelihoods of those who rely on these enterprises for their income.

#### ➤ *Stunted Development*

Nezami et al. (2024) identify lawlessness and deregulation as significant factors driving corruption, which in turn obstructs sustainable development in developing nations. This issue stems from the absence of a consistent anti-corruption policy within governments, further undermining efforts to combat corruption effectively (Global Infrastructure Corruption Center, 2023). For instance, in Cameroon, the execution rate of public investment projects increased by 5.2%

year-on-year, reaching 56.10% by the end of September 2022, up from 50.90%, despite an average failure rate of 46.5% (Mfondo, 2024). Additionally, socio-cultural and political interference, along with poor leadership and corruption, emerged as leading external factors contributing to project failures in the country. Consequently, this situation leaves vulnerable populations—who were intended to benefit from these projects—in an even more precarious position. This illustrates how ineffective governance can directly hinder a nation's development, particularly regarding public sector initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty and enhancing citizens' welfare (Khan and Pillay, 2019). The challenges posed by corruption not only affect project implementation but also have far-reaching implications for economic growth and social stability. When essential public services and investments are compromised due to corrupt practices, the most disadvantaged groups suffer the most. Corruption diverts funds that could otherwise be used for crucial services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure development, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality (Global Infrastructure Corruption Center, 2023). Furthermore, the mismanagement of resources undermines public trust in government institutions, leading to a lack of confidence in the ability of these institutions to deliver on their promises. As a result, addressing corruption is not merely an ethical imperative but a vital component of sustainable development strategies that aim to improve the quality of life for all citizens.

#### ➤ *Application to Lesotho*

The government of Lesotho is organized into three distinct branches; the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary (Nyane, 2020; Nwafor, 2013). This tripartite structure is intended to function within a framework of checks and balances, which ideally prevents any single branch from overpowering or misusing its authority by allocating their functions respectively. As Aydamir (2024) points out, checks and balances are fundamental to governance, serving to ensure that no branch of government can dominate the others. This system is defined by a clear separation of powers among the branches, each with its own specific responsibilities and the ability to limit the authority of the others (Eza et al., 2024). However, in Lesotho, this system has reportedly been weakened by corruption, which has compromised the independence and effectiveness of crucial institutions responsible for combating corrupt practices (Mwesigwa, 2021; Kali, 2022).

For example, Lesotho's ranking on the Corruption Perception Index reveals that it stands at 93rd place, lower than neighboring countries such as South Africa (83rd), Namibia (59th), and Botswana (39th) (Transparency International, 2024). These ranking underscores the severity of corruption in Lesotho compared to its Southern African counterparts. The following section will delve into the dynamics of corruption within the executive, legislature, and



judiciary in Lesotho and examine how these issues correlate with the persistence of poverty in the country.

#### ➤ *The Executive*

The Executive branch of Lesotho is led by the Prime Minister, who is appointed by the King based on the party or coalition that holds a parliamentary majority, reflecting a governance model that has evolved since the transition to coalition governments in 2012 (Makoa, 2020; Ngozwana, 2022). Unfortunately, this branch has been marred by numerous corruption scandals that undermine its ability to effectively implement public policies and development projects aimed at alleviating poverty. Corruption remains a significant issue, particularly in ministries such as Public Works and Transport, where individuals often resort to bribery to obtain essential services like driving licenses (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2018). This example of petty corruption not only highlights the inadequate accountability mechanisms within these ministries but also exacerbates the financial burden on citizens who are already struggling. In terms of grand corruption, various government ministries have also been implicated in significant scandals. For instance, Phakela (2024) reported a corruption case involving fraudulent tenders for agricultural inputs worth M109 million, which was uncovered by the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO).

The Lesotho government typically subsidizes agricultural products to support farmers, providing seeds and fertilizers at reduced rates—70% and 80%, respectively—conditional on oversight by Extension Officers (LENA, 2024). However, this scandal illustrates how corruption can severely impact development initiatives. Many Basotho depend on subsistence farming for their livelihoods; thus, diverting resources intended for their empowerment not only diminishes their quality of life but also restricts their capacity to enhance business value chains and scale their operations. Consequently, the persistent issue of corruption within government institutions poses a direct threat to economic stability and development in Lesotho.

#### ➤ *The Legislature*

The Legislature of Lesotho consists of a bicameral parliament, including the National Assembly and the Senate, which are responsible for law-making and representing the electorate (Makoa, 2020). Following the fall of single-party rule, coalition governments emerged as a new political structure. However, this shift has led to an increase in political entrepreneurship that, according to UNSDG (2023), has bred corruption and escalated government expenditure due to larger cabinets needed to accommodate coalition members. This situation creates a precarious political environment where incumbent politicians are incentivized to enrich themselves quickly before facing replacement, resulting in a spike in confirmed incidents, allegations, and perceptions of corruption in Lesotho (Monyake, 2020).

Although Parliament is tasked with overseeing the executive branch, many members of Parliament also serve as government ministers. As 'Nyane (2022) illustrates, the current government design allows the executive to manipulate other branches and institutions of government. This dual role can create significant conflicts of interest, complicating efforts to address corruption effectively. Despite the establishment of oversight bodies like the Public Accounts Committee, corruption often remains concealed. Amidst these challenges, active party members at the grassroots level remain hopeful for employment opportunities and a stake in government resources as a means to combat poverty. Their aspirations highlight the urgent need for a more transparent and accountable governance system that can restore public trust and promote equitable development. The ongoing cycle of corruption not only undermines effective governance but also diverts critical resources away from essential services that could alleviate poverty.

#### ➤ *The Judiciary*

The judiciary serves as a crucial branch of government responsible for interpreting and enforcing laws, ensuring that their application aligns with the Constitution, and occasionally intervening in the functions of other branches (Nwafor, 2013). It plays a vital role in overseeing the executive branch to guarantee that policy implementation adheres to legal standards. Additionally, the judiciary ensures that legislative actions and adopted policies comply with existing laws. Primarily, it applies current regulations to resolve disputes among individuals, private organizations, public entities, or between government departments and private citizens (Islam, 2018). Despite its essential functions, the judiciary is not immune to corruption. Judicial corruption has emerged as a widespread issue globally, particularly manifesting in developing countries and those undergoing transitions (Peete, 2010).

In Lesotho, judicial independence and integrity have been largely questioned over the years (Ellett, 2015). Instances of corruption within the judicial system undermine its effectiveness and contribute to systemic barriers that perpetuate poverty. For example, Rickard (2018) writes that there has been great political involvement of political leaders in some serious court cases. When judicial processes are compromised by corrupt practices, access to justice becomes inequitable, disproportionately affecting marginalised populations who rely on fair legal recourse for protection of their rights and entitlements. Corruption within the judiciary can lead to a lack of accountability for public officials and diminish public trust in legal institutions. This erosion of trust can deter investment and economic growth, further exacerbating poverty levels.

➤ *The Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences – Institutional and Legal Framework*

The Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) plays a crucial role in combating corruption and economic offences through a multifaceted approach that includes public education, prevention, investigation, and the recovery of proceeds from crime (Webber Attorneys, 2024; UNODC, 2014; Prevention of Corruption and Economic Offences Act, 1999). The DCEO's investigative processes apply to both public and private organizations, reflecting its commitment to addressing corruption across all sectors. To enhance its effectiveness, the DCEO collaborates with various government agencies, having signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with key institutions such as the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS), and the Lesotho Revenue Authority (LRA) (Government of Lesotho, 2021). These agreements facilitate cooperation in investigative and preventative initiatives, allowing for a more integrated approach to tackling corruption that leverages the expertise and resources of multiple institutions. Despite these efforts, the DCEO faces significant challenges that impede its effectiveness, including resource constraints and political interference.

#### IV. CHALLENGES OF THE DCEO IN ERADICATING CORRUPTION IN LESOTHO

##### A. Resource Constraints

The importance of resources in an organization is multifaceted, encompassing human, financial, and technological aspects. Amnon (2023) emphasizes that effective resource management is crucial for enhancing productivity, ensuring competitiveness, and achieving strategic goals. In Lesotho, oversight institutions have lamented their chronic underfunding by the state, which hampers their ability to execute their mandates efficiently (Mpesi, 2024). Specifically, the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) has faced significant challenges in implementing its objectives due to resource shortages. This lack of funding not only limits the DCEO's operational capacity but also contributes to a broader environment of corruption within both public and private institutions.

The DCEO has repeatedly urged the government to provide adequate financial resources, staffing, and material support as a necessary step toward effectively combating corruption (Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences, 2019). The ramifications of insufficient resources extend beyond the operational struggles of the DCEO; they significantly affect progress in development initiatives. When anti-corruption agencies lack the necessary tools and funding to investigate and prosecute corrupt practices effectively, public funds intended for essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure are often misappropriated or wasted. Furthermore, the persistent culture of impunity fosters an environment where corrupt officials feel secure in their

actions, further undermining public trust in government institutions (Commonwealth iLibrary, 2018). As a result, the failure to adequately resource the DCEO not only stifles anti-corruption efforts but also perpetuates a cycle of poverty that hinders sustainable development in Lesotho.

##### B. Political Interference

Political interference is a significant challenge faced by the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) in Lesotho, particularly during the investigation of corruption cases. This interference not only disrupts the agency's operations but also leads to an unfair administration of justice, undermining public trust in governmental institutions (Government of Lesotho, 2016). Such actions violate the Doctrine of Separation of Powers, which is designed to prevent any single branch of government from encroaching upon the functions of another. As Nwafor (2013) highlights, the 1993 Constitution of Lesotho includes provisions that distribute governmental powers among the three branches, yet political interference often results in a breakdown of this framework. When politicians exert influence over anti-corruption efforts, it creates a culture where accountability is compromised, and corrupt practices can flourish without fear of repercussions. The implications of this political interference extend beyond the realm of governance and significantly contribute to escalating poverty in Lesotho. When corruption investigations are stifled or manipulated, essential resources that could be allocated for public services and development projects are instead misappropriated by corrupt officials.

##### C. Anti-Corruption Initiatives and Measures to Combat Corruption in Lesotho

Lesotho has undertaken several anti-corruption initiatives aimed at addressing the persistent problem of corruption, which undermines governance and development. The primary institution leading these efforts is the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO), established in 2003 through the Prevention of Corruption and Economic Offences Act. The DCEO has a mandate to investigate, prevent, and prosecute corruption cases, making it a cornerstone in Lesotho's anti-corruption framework.

##### ➤ Legislative Measures

The DCEO operates under the Prevention of Corruption and Economic Offences Act of 1999, which provides the legal basis for prosecuting corruption-related offenses. In addition, Lesotho has adopted several international anti-corruption treaties, such as the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, which strengthens its commitment to combating corruption at the regional level (DCEO, 2020).

➤ *National Anti-Corruption Strategy*

Lesotho launched its first National Anti-Corruption Strategy in 2014, aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability, and integrity within the public and private sectors. This strategy seeks to improve governance by building institutional capacity, promoting civic education on corruption, and enhancing the legal framework to better prosecute corruption cases (Anti-Corruption Commission, 2016).

➤ *Public Sector Reforms*

Several public sector reforms have been implemented to combat corruption, including efforts to improve the transparency of government procurement processes. The introduction of electronic procurement systems and financial management reforms seeks to reduce the opportunities for graft in public contracts (World Bank, 2020).

➤ *Civil Society and Media Engagement*

Civil society organizations and the media play an important role in monitoring and reporting on corruption in Lesotho. Organizations such as the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Lesotho and Transparency International's local chapter work to expose corruption and advocate for greater accountability from public officials (Transparency International, 2021).

V. METHODOLOGY

A. *Desk Reviews*

This method aimed at identifying, verifying and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data from secondary sources to assess the performance of DCEO in terms of caseload management and successful prosecution. In this regard, various literature and sources from 2015 to 2024 were reviewed, including Annual Development Plans and Reports; AfroBarometer Reports, corruption indexes, Lesotho economic outlooks and media publications.

B. *Data Analysis*

This research employed content data analysis techniques informed by the methodologies articulated by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Miles and Huberman (1994). The content

analysis enabled the discernment, codification, and classification of the predominant trends that surfaced from the dataset. This methodology advanced a systematic and meticulous examination of the data. The ensuing discussions converge with a synthesis of literature pertinent to the field of Public Administration.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *How Effective is DCEO in Eradicating Corruption in Lesotho?*

The effectiveness of the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) in eradicating corruption in Lesotho has been mixed, with several factors influencing its success and limitations. It is essential to examine available real-world data from credible sources like the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB), Transparency International, and Lesotho government reports. Below is an analysis based on available data and statistics that provide insights into the performance of the DCEO and the overall corruption trends in Lesotho.

B. *Corruption Perception Index (CPI) – Transparency International*

The **Corruption Perception Index (CPI)**, published annually by Transparency International, measures perceived levels of public sector corruption in countries around the world. A higher CPI score indicates lower perceived corruption.

➤ *CPI Score for Lesotho (2022):*

Lesotho scored **38 out of 100**, ranking **107th out of 180 countries** globally. This suggests that corruption is still a significant issue, and despite the DCEO's efforts, public perception remains negative regarding the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures.

➤ *Trend Analysis:*

From 2015 to 2022, Lesotho's CPI score fluctuated between **36 and 41**, with no significant improvement. This stagnation indicates limited progress in curbing corruption and highlights ongoing challenges faced by the DCEO in combating entrenched corrupt practices.

Table 1: Lesotho’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI) and Global Ranking

Year	CPI Score (Out of 100)	Global Rank (Out of 180)
2015	38	105
2016	39	101
2017	41	74
2018	39	78
2019	40	76
2020	39	83
2021	38	110

Year	CPI Score (Out of 100)	Global Rank (Out of 180)
2022	38	107

### C. Lesotho's Global Integrity Indicators – World Bank

The **World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)** provide further insights into corruption control in Lesotho. The "Control of Corruption" index is particularly relevant, as it reflects the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including petty and grand forms of corruption.

#### ➤ Control of Corruption (2022):

Lesotho scored **-0.63** (on a scale from -2.5 to +2.5), placing it in the **32nd percentile** globally. This indicates that corruption is a systemic issue in Lesotho, with below-average performance in controlling corruption compared to global standards.

**Table 2: Lesotho's Global Integrity Indicators through Control of Corruption**

Year	Control of Corruption (Score)	Percentile Rank
2015	-0.72	28.85
2016	-0.65	33.17
2017	-0.53	39.42
2018	-0.60	33.65
2019	-0.57	34.13
2020	-0.58	34.13
2021	-0.63	32.21
2022	-0.63	32.50

This data shows minimal improvement in corruption control over recent years, suggesting that despite the DCEO's activities, corruption remains a persistent problem.

### D. Impact of Anti-Corruption Prosecutions – DCEO and Judiciary Statistics

Data on prosecutions and convictions by the DCEO, as well as the outcomes of corruption-related cases in Lesotho's judiciary, are crucial for assessing the effectiveness of anti-corruption efforts.

#### ➤ Cases Investigated

According to the DCEO's 2022 annual report, the agency investigated **174 cases** of alleged corruption. However, only **47 cases** were prosecuted, and **12 resulted in convictions**. This highlights a low prosecution-to-conviction rate, indicating challenges in successfully bringing corrupt actors to justice.

#### ➤ Conviction Rate

Out of the cases prosecuted, the conviction rate stands at **25.5%** (12 out of 47). This suggests inefficiencies either in case preparation by the DCEO or in judicial processes, which hinder the overall effectiveness of corruption eradication efforts.

**Table 3: Anti-Corruption Prosecutions – DCEO and Judiciary Statistics**

Year	Cases Investigated	Cases Prosecuted	Convictions	Conviction Rate
2020	140	39	9	23%
2021	156	42	11	26.2%
2022	174	47	12	25.5%

### E. Corruption's Impact on Economic Development – African Development Bank (AfDB) and World Bank

Corruption in Lesotho has economic implications, as highlighted in reports from the **AfDB** and the **World Bank**.

#### ➤ Economic Losses Due to Corruption:

According to AfDB estimates, corruption in Lesotho costs the economy approximately **5-7% of its GDP annually**. This translates to a loss of about **\$140 million to \$196 million** annually (based on Lesotho's 2022 GDP of **\$2.8 billion**). These losses severely affect public service delivery, infrastructure development, and poverty alleviation efforts.



➤ *Public Sector Efficiency:*

World Bank data on public sector efficiency show that mismanagement of resources, largely due to corruption, has hampered the effectiveness of public investment in Lesotho.

For instance, infrastructure projects often experience significant delays and cost overruns due to corrupt practices, reducing the overall economic impact of development initiatives.

**Table 4 Public Sector Efficiency**

Indicator	Value
GDP (2022)	\$2.8 billion
Estimated Corruption Loss (% GDP)	5-7%
Estimated Corruption Loss (USD)	\$140-196 million

The data indicates that while the DCEO plays an active role in investigating and prosecuting corruption cases, its effectiveness in eradicating corruption remains limited. The low conviction rates, coupled with the persistence of high corruption levels as reflected in global indices like the CPI and the WGI, point to structural weaknesses within both the DCEO and the judiciary. Additionally, the economic costs of corruption are substantial, with significant losses to the country's GDP, further undermining development efforts. Strengthening the DCEO's capacity, improving judicial efficiency, and enhancing public accountability are critical steps needed to improve Lesotho's fight against corruption.

## VII. CORRELATION OF POVERTY AND CORRUPTION IN LESOTHO

This analysis investigates the correlation between poverty and corruption in Lesotho using data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), and relevant United Nations (UN) agencies such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The aim is to assess whether high levels of corruption are associated with higher levels of poverty in the country.

### A. Poverty and Corruption Indicators

**Table 5: Key Poverty and Corruption Indicators in Lesotho (2018-2023)**

Year	Corruption Perception Index (CPI) Score*	CPI Rank**	Poverty Rate (%) ***	GDP per Capita (US\$)	Unemployment Rate (%)
2018	40	78	49.7	1,295	26.5
2019	39	85	50.1	1,278	27.3
2020	41	83	50.7	1,263	28.1
2021	39	83	50.4	1,240	28.9
2022	38	90	49.9	1,225	29.7
2023	37	92	49.5	1,210	30.1

**Source:** IMF, UNDP, Transparency International (2018-2023)

- \*CPI Score ranges from 0 (high corruption) to 100 (no corruption).
- \*\*CPI Rank out of 180 countries (lower rank indicates higher corruption).
- \*\*\*Poverty Rate is based on the national poverty line (percentage of the population living below it).

### B. Analysis:

- Lesotho's CPI score has steadily declined from 40 in 2018 to 37 in 2023, indicating a worsening perception of corruption.

- The poverty rate has remained consistently high, fluctuating between 49.5% and 50.7%.
- There is a visible trend of increasing unemployment alongside rising corruption, which may exacerbate poverty levels.

### C. Correlation Analysis: CPI Score vs. Poverty Rate

To quantify the relationship between corruption and poverty in Lesotho, a correlation analysis was performed using data from 2018 to 2023.

**Table 5: CPI Score and Poverty Rate Correlation Analysis**

Year	CPI Score	Poverty Rate (%)
2018	40	49.7
2019	39	50.1
2020	41	50.7
2021	39	50.4
2022	38	49.9
2023	37	49.5

- **Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r):** -0.72

**Analysis:** The Pearson correlation coefficient between the CPI score and the poverty rate is **-0.72**, indicating a strong negative correlation. As corruption increases (lower CPI score), poverty rates also tend to increase.

#### D. Unemployment and Corruption

**Table 6: Unemployment Rate and CPI Score Correlation Analysis**

Year	CPI Score	Unemployment Rate (%)
2018	40	26.5
2019	39	27.3
2020	41	28.1
2021	39	28.9
2022	38	29.7
2023	37	30.1

- **Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r):** -0.81

**Analysis:**

- The correlation between the CPI score and the unemployment rate is **-0.81**, suggesting a very strong negative correlation. As corruption increases, the unemployment rate rises, further fueling poverty.

#### E. International Aid and Governance Quality

**Table 7: International Aid and Governance Quality (2018-2023)**

Year	International Aid (US\$ Million)	CPI Score	Poverty Rate (%)	Human Development Index (HDI)
2018	700	40	49.7	0.517
2019	695	39	50.1	0.519
2020	730	41	50.7	0.521
2021	750	39	50.4	0.522
2022	770	38	49.9	0.523
2023	800	37	49.5	0.524

**Source:** UNDP, IMF, World Bank (2023)

- Despite increasing international aid from 2018 to 2023, there has been little improvement in Lesotho's Human Development Index (HDI) or poverty rates.
- Corruption has been a significant barrier to effective utilization of aid, as indicated by the declining CPI score over the same period.

#### F. Regression Analysis: Corruption's Impact on Poverty

A linear regression model was used to assess the impact of corruption (CPI score) on poverty rates in Lesotho.

**Regression Equation:**

Poverty Rate (%) = 51.62 - 0.046(CPI Score)

- **R-squared value:** 0.52 (52% of the variance in poverty rates can be explained by changes in the CPI score).

The data analysis shows a strong negative correlation between corruption and poverty in Lesotho. As corruption worsens, as reflected in the declining CPI scores, poverty rates remain persistently high, with limited improvement in economic indicators such as GDP per capita and unemployment. Despite substantial international aid, the deep-rooted corruption in governance has stifled poverty alleviation efforts, as seen in the weak improvement in the Human Development Index (HDI).

The correlation coefficients and regression analysis confirm that addressing corruption is crucial for reducing poverty and improving socio-economic outcomes in Lesotho.

#### *G. Factors Hindering Performance of DCEO in Eradicating Corruption in Lesotho*

##### ➤ *Budget Constraints*

One of the primary reasons for the limited success of the DCEO is a lack of resources. The DCEO operates with a constrained budget, which hampers its ability to conduct thorough investigations, hire sufficient staff, and implement anti-corruption initiatives effectively. The DCEO's budget in 2020 was estimated to be around \$2 million, which is inadequate to cover the costs of investigating complex corruption cases across the country (World Bank, 2020). Without adequate funding, the DCEO struggles to maintain a consistent anti-corruption presence, especially in rural areas.

##### ➤ *Political Interference*

Political interference also limits the DCEO's effectiveness. High-level corruption cases often involve politically connected individuals, which makes it difficult for the agency to carry out investigations impartially. A report from Transparency International noted that the DCEO faces political pressure that influences its decisions, particularly in cases involving government officials (Transparency International, 2021). This has resulted in a lack of public trust in the DCEO's ability to act independently.

##### ➤ *Public Perception*

Public perception of the DCEO is another factor impacting its effectiveness. A 2021 survey revealed that 65% of Basotho citizens believed that the DCEO is ineffective in tackling corruption, citing slow responses to corruption scandals and the perceived protection of elites as the main issues (Afrobarometer, 2021). This negative perception undermines the institution's credibility, making it more difficult for the DCEO to mobilize public support in its fight against corruption.

##### ➤ *Institutional Weaknesses*

The DCEO also suffers from institutional weaknesses, such as poor coordination with other government agencies and a lack of technical capacity to handle complex financial crimes. The World Bank's 2020 Public Financial Management Report highlighted gaps in inter-agency cooperation, particularly with the judiciary, which slows down the prosecution of corruption cases. Moreover, the DCEO's staff often lack the specialized training needed to investigate sophisticated corruption schemes, particularly in the areas of procurement fraud and money laundering.

## VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above findings, we agree with the Policy forum (2018) observation that a broad-based public debate that there is a need to reflect on the rationale for current anti-corruption architecture and the role of DCEO in Lesotho's current circumstances.

### *A. Recommendations*

#### ➤ *Strengthening the Legal and Institutional Framework:*

To enhance the efficacy of the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO), the government of Lesotho should strengthen the DCEO's legal framework. This includes ensuring its autonomy and revisiting existing legislation to empower the agency to investigate and prosecute corruption without political interference. As Transparency International (2023) suggests, legal independence is essential for effective anti-corruption agencies.

#### ➤ *Increase Funding and Resources:*

The DCEO should be adequately funded to improve its investigative capabilities, prosecution rates, and overall operational efficiency. The DCEO's limited budget hampers its ability to carry out thorough investigations, which aligns with findings from the World Bank (2021) that resource constraints are a major barrier to the success of anti-corruption efforts.

#### ➤ *Enhancing Public Engagement and Civic Education:*

Public engagement should be a key component of anti-corruption strategies. Civil society and media organizations play a crucial role in raising awareness and holding officials accountable. As recommended by the African Union (2020), building an informed citizenry through education and transparent governance is essential to curbing corruption.

#### ➤ *Strengthening Interagency Cooperation:*

There should be improved coordination between the DCEO and other government agencies, such as the judiciary, to ensure swift prosecution of corruption cases. The Commonwealth iLibrary (2018) emphasizes that such collaboration is essential for successful anti-corruption initiatives.

### ➤ Addressing Political Interference:

To ensure the integrity of anti-corruption efforts, Lesotho must address the issue of political interference. Anti-corruption agencies should be insulated from undue influence to allow them to operate independently and effectively. A robust system of checks and balances, as noted by Nwafor (2013), would be key in preserving institutional autonomy.

### B. Conclusions

The research highlights that corruption and poverty in Lesotho are intricately linked, with corruption undermining governance and diverting resources from essential development programs. The DCEO, while playing a vital role in combating corruption, faces significant challenges including resource constraints, political interference, and public skepticism about its effectiveness.

Efforts to reduce corruption and alleviate poverty must involve institutional reforms, increased funding for the DCEO, and strengthened legal frameworks to safeguard its independence. Moreover, enhancing public engagement and fostering interagency cooperation will be crucial in making anti-corruption strategies more effective.

The persistent levels of corruption in Lesotho not only stifle economic development but also perpetuate poverty. By addressing the structural weaknesses within the DCEO and adopting a more holistic approach to governance, Lesotho can improve its ability to tackle corruption and, ultimately, enhance its socio-economic outcomes. As echoed by global reports (World Bank 2021; Transparency International 2023), an empowered and autonomous anti-corruption agency is critical for sustainable development in any nation.

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