**PIMS-5367: Lesotho Development of Cornerstone Public Policies and Institutional Capacities to accelerate Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) Progress** **- COVID-19 MITIGATION PLAN DURING 2021-2022**

Lesotho like the rest of the world and the region has been impacted by COVID-19 in 2020 into 2021. As a result, the Government of Lesotho (GOL) in its response to manage COVID-19 pandemic established a National COVID-19 Secretariat (NACOSEC). In 2020, at the start of the global COVID pandemic, the Government of Lesotho undertook a pre-emptive closure in March to reduce the country’s risk of exposure, the first case confirmed in May leading to reinforcement of lock-down until October 2020. In 2021 Lesotho experienced an exponential increase of confirmed cases from 2,577 as of 21st December 2020 to 8,644 by 31st January 2021 (over a 50% increase within a month). As a result of this exponential increase of confirmed COVID-19 cases, the GOL had to re-impose COVID-19 restrictions that among others restricted movements and public gatherings including meetings. Community engagement which is a key enabler of this project for successful establishment and operationalization of mini-grids and energy centres could not be undertaken and a Companies selected to develop mini-grids and establish energy centres could not deploy their technical teams to continue with their work in the project sites.

The project highly dependents on both expert services and inputs from out of the country which were not available during the lockdown periods particularly equipment for establishment of mini-grids and energy centres that has to be imported from abroad. However, the project working together with the implementing partners have developed mitigation plan in consultation with local authorities including the National COVID-19 Secretariat (NACOSEC) to support continuity of ongoing works and to counter anticipated 3rd wave and ensure seamless project implementation.

The project outcomes are expected to be affected as follows:

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| **Project Outcomes** | **Anticipated COVID-19 IMPACT** | **MITIAGATION PLAN/ACTIONS** |
| **Outcome 1:** SE4All cornerstone policies and strategies facilitating (increased) investment in RET deployment, particularly in isolated mini-grids. | Most of work towards creating enabling environment to promote private investment in renewable energy has been finalized. It is anticipated that COVID-19 will have minimal impact on the finalization of the remaining work to facilitate final approval of some policy documents by Government. | The project will continue to engage with its key stakeholders through virtual meetings to carry out the remaining consultations and advocacy work aimed at finalizing final approval of policy documents. |
| **Outcome 2**: Improved capacity of energy stakeholders and government officials for decentralized clean energy planning and decision-making on the basis of quality energy data. | Most of project`s outputs towards improving capacity of energy stakeholders was finalized in 2020. |  |
| **Outcome 3**: Successful establishment of a village-based energy service delivery model for replication nationally. | A significant progress has been made towards achievement of this crucial outcome of the project as the GOL has already signed Concession Agreements for project mini-grids locations with private energy developer (OnePower) and this facilitated signing of Capital grants agreements and disbursement of grants for development of eight (8) mini-grids. The capital agreements were also signed with three companies selected to establish energy centres (KESI, RSDA and Solar Lights) in 2020 for the on-going development of mini-grids. The capital agreements for establishment of energy centres most of which will be operational before end second quarter of 2021 were also signed was done The work towards this critical  Lesotho heavily rely on South Africa for supplies. The restrictions on cross-border movement affected a number of supply-chains hence goods and services obtain from local supplier that rely on imports from South Africa. | The project is working together with Department of Energy and project energy developers consulted with NACOSEC that facilitated exemption of works related to mini-grids and energy centres and critical supplies and services that may be needed for from South Africa such as equipment and renewable energy technology supplies. With regard to community mobilization during the COVID restrictions the project will continue to liaise with local authorities and community representatives and ensure compliance of COVID protocols and preventive measures. |
| **Outcome 4:** Outreach programme and dissemination of project experience/best practices/lessons learned for replication nationally and throughout the region. | The COVID-19 restrictions will impact on the stakeholder engagements particularly community mobilization. | The project will continue to apply approaches, lessons learnt and capacities built in 2020 to engage with stakeholders during COVID-19 including used virtual platforms. |

Protecting the project`s stakeholders particularly technical teams and communities will continue to be paramount in 2021 and 2020 to ensure that the project ultimately achieves its main objective to catalyze investment in renewable energy-based mini-grids and Energy Centres to reduce GHG emissions and contribute to the achievement of Lesotho Vision 2020 and SE4ALL goals. While, the COVID-19 will continue to impact project implementation, the project had built on the lessons learnt and capacity built in 2020 to ensure continuous engagements with its key stakeholders such as use of virtual platforms and existing community structures such as local authorities and community representatives to disseminate information critical for supporting implementation. In 2020, the project raised awareness and trained local authorities on COVID-19 protocols that both project teams and communities are expected to adhere to during construction of mini-grids. This includes ensuring that people taking part in works are screened for temperature, have properly put on appropriate PPE, recommended social distancing is maintained and hand washing facilities are put in place and used.