



# Leave No Child Behind

Boys' disengagement from education

Lesotho case study

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Published in 2022 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France

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## Acknowledgements

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This report is part of UNESCO's work on gender equality in and through education aiming to document and further examine the root causes and nature of boys' disadvantage in and disengagement from education in different regional contexts. It was prepared for UNESCO to support the global report on boys' disengagement from education.

This case study on Lesotho was conducted by Dr Paseka A. Mosia, Senior Lecturer and Head of the Educational Foundations Department of the National University of Lesotho.

Heartfelt thanks are extended to the UNESCO Office in Harare. Special thanks go out to Mr. Lethola Mafisa, UNESCO National Programme Officer, who provided literature, advice and support for the study approval process and other logistical matters.

Credit must be given to the Ministry of Education and Training for documenting issues of exclusion of boys transparently in its annual reporting and for giving permission for the study to be conducted. The Ministry officials from Head Office, at the three districts and staff in the three schools were all cooperative and helpful. The research assistants were passionate, committed and professional throughout the data collection and processing period. Most importantly, UNESCO is indebted to all study participants who spared time to share their views on boys' disadvantage and disengagement within education.

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## Acronyms

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<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussion
<b>GER</b>	Gross enrolment ratio
<b>GOL</b>	Government of Lesotho
<b>KII</b>	Key information interview
<b>MOET</b>	Ministry of Education and Training
<b>NER</b>	Net Enrolment Ratio
<b>NPIECDD</b>	The National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development
<b>NSDP</b>	National Strategic Development Plan
<b>PIRLS</b>	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
<b>PISA</b>	Programme for International Student Assessment
<b>SACMEQ</b>	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>STEM</b>	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
<b>TIMSS</b>	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
<b>TPR</b>	Teacher-pupil ratio
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and vocational education and training
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



## Executive summary

This country case study explores boys' disengagement from education in Lesotho. It is based on a qualitative approach using a case study design. Three study sites were selected purposively and a sample of 130 participants was purposively selected to take part in the study. There were six groups that participated in individual and focus group discussions, respectively. Key informants, school principals and community members participated in individual interviews, while a group of peers, boys, girls, teachers and parents participated in a focus group interview. Ethical considerations for the study were observed and participants consented to the interviews being audio-recorded to ensure accuracy of data. Data were transcribed into text, and correspondence between the audio and textual versions of the data was verified prior to data analysis. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was adopted for analysing data, as it offered the opportunity for immersion in data and provided insight into participants' comments and views.

Our study finds that access to education in Lesotho is influenced by three dimensions, namely gender, socioeconomic status and geographical location. In 2018, out of 14,800 children aged 6-12 who are out of school, approximately 65 percent of them were boys, while a further 92 percent of 3,100 children who dropped out in that age group were also boys. Out of 2,200 children aged 13-17 age who had never been to school, 86 percent were boys, and nearly 70 percent of the 46,000 who have dropped out were also boys.

In Lesotho, being a boy from a poor background is a double disadvantage, in the same way that being a boy from a rural area is. About 65 percent of the Lesotho population live in rural areas and are poor. Research shows that women's literacy rate is 98.6 percent compared to 90.6 percent for men, while secondary enrolment is at 36 percent for girls and 22 percent for boys. For many Basotho people, secondary education is the most inaccessible level of schooling as a result of high costs for parents and boys. Boys' participation rates at this level are lower than girls, at rates not seen in primary and pre-primary school. Secondary education opportunities are skewed towards those in the upper wealth quintile, as parents from lower wealth quintiles cannot afford the fees. Secondary schools in rural areas are also far from learners' homes, making it difficult to attend regularly – especially in the rainy season.

There are critical issues that contribute to boys' disadvantage and disengagement within education, and these include the gendered nature of Lesotho's economy. The pastoralist nature of Lesotho's economy makes boys drop out to be herders. Most boys become herd boys for their own families that practice subsistence farming, or their labour is sold cheaply to farmers with large herds.

Also relevant is boys' need to conform to Basotho customs such as attendance at initiation school. Initiation is a passage into adulthood after which the young adult seeks a pathway outside formal education. This includes seeking a job or marriage or both. When these boys return from traditional initiation schools, their interest in formal schooling therefore dissipates as it does not fit with the view of what makes a man in their society. Boys who return to the formal school system from initiation school are said to be disrespectful of teachers.

Access to education is also affected by the low quality of education in Lesotho. Although Lesotho has expanded access to education, the education system has not yet ensured quality education for all due to inadequate resources in schools and low investments in early childhood education and development. Educational resources also need to be better managed. There are inadequate teaching and learning resources in schools such as books. In some cases, only 50 percent of learners have exclusive use of a textbook. It has been found that boys perform worse than girls, which may affect their motivation to learn and make them more likely to subsequently withdraw from school early. Two other barriers to accessing quality education in Lesotho are a shortage of qualified teachers and high pupil-teacher ratios at the primary school level. Data from the Ministry confirm that there are

unqualified teachers employed by the Ministry, with more at the primary level (12 percent) and fewer at secondary level (3 percent).

Retaining boys at school can benefit Lesotho, as many social problems are caused by people with lower education outcomes. Research globally shows that men who have qualifications below secondary school level commit more gender-based violence than those with a higher qualification. This is true for Lesotho, as data show that young people (especially boys) contribute to the country's high crime rate, with most crimes committed by people aged 30 years or younger with an upper secondary school qualification or lower. Young men aged 20 or younger accounted for 12.4 percent of the crimes committed nationally by men, compared to female youth who contributed 11 percent.

Interventions for those struggling to access education feature in the legal and policy framework but do not specifically acknowledge the problems of boys and the particular nature of their challenges. Generally, non-formal education is the main intervention for providing basic education for people who cannot access formal education.

At the individual level, learners' health, their engagement in romantic relationships and effects of socio-economic status on their self-concept were found to affect their experience of education and lead to drop-out. Boys are singled out as being stubborn, using drugs and showing little interest in education. Family influence is considered to include socio-economic resources, customs and views about education and the extent to which parents participate in a child's education. Although the most common experience among excluded boys takes the form of parents who cannot afford fees for secondary education, children still withdraw from primary education (which is free and compulsory). Parents' attitudes towards education play a role, as some parents assign errands to children during school time - leading to absence from school. Peer influence also contributes to boys' disengagement from education. In the rural areas, they are influenced by friends to leave formal education for initiation schools, while in the urban region a greater influence is towards abuse of drugs (which also leads to disengagement).

Communal influences overlap with influences of family and peers, as the community reflects broader norms and attitudes that inform family, peer and individual values. Children in the rural areas of Lesotho mainly disengage from education because of initiation, if they are boys, and early marriage, if they are girls. Initiation influences boys to lose interest in formal education or lose focus after it. Boys' disadvantage and disengagement from education are also linked to how communities perceive boys and their roles in society. Formal education minimally trains learners on gender, as only three teachers said they were trained in gender issues. This means children learn about gender from their communities. An idea of a good boy has no direct link with schooling, but the development of certain attributes valued by society. Social modelling for boys in rural areas is one of the key barriers to educational access, as there are limited role models to encourage them to pursue formal education. Rural communities normally have incomplete schools, and parents face the prospect of paying rent for their children to complete upper secondary in schools far away from their communities. However, learners already walk long distances to schools that are said to be closer to their homes and face further barriers when rivers are flooded.

Key issues that were raised in this study include the relevance of the curriculum, the quality of education, the policy on learner progression at primary level and teachers' professional conduct. There is a feeling that children are not taught about the realities of their lives, education does not help children understand their communities better and there is no connection between the school curriculum and everyday life. Another argument is that the current curriculum in Lesotho is relevant but lacks adequate implementation, with conditions made worse by inadequate teaching and learning resources that impact the quality of curriculum delivery. Teacher professionalism is low in rural schools, as teachers miss classes, fail to manage the behaviour of learners and continue to use corporal punishment despite it being outlawed by the Education Act of 2010.



In terms of the role of the state and society in boys' disadvantage and disengagement from education, available legislation was seen as not adequately implemented to protect boys' interests. First, learners' complaints about corporal punishment show that the enactment of the 2010 Education Act abolishing such punishment has had little effect in changing teachers' views and attitudes towards the use of such methods. Second, the principles of free and compulsory education declared by the 2010 Education Act and education as a right enshrined in the 2011 Children's Protection and Welfare Act have not yet been realized. Additionally, the Government does not yet deliver on mother-tongue education that must be the norm until Grade 3. The most excluded minority languages are found in the southern part of the country. Furthermore, the timing of initiation rites clashes with formal schooling but if the genuine practice of the custom was to be upheld, this is a passage into adulthood and it cannot be undertaken by children as young as 9. This indicates that the Children's Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 that describes a child as 'a person under the age of 18' is being undermined. Therefore, given the purpose of initiation schools, enrolling children younger than 18 years is against the law.

The main intervention for disengaged children in Lesotho is non-formal education. However, this intervention does not seek to return the child to school but provides literacy and numeracy programmes to enhance their competence in these areas. As such, the problems that cause disadvantage and disengagement are not yet addressed and the ideal of providing every child with access to inclusive and equitable quality education by 2030 is still missed.

The report concludes that boys' disadvantage and disengagement results from an education system that is inefficient for addressing learners' individual needs. It also results from social customs (initiation and herding) of what it means to be a man, which does not include acquiring a formal education. It finds that boys, especially those living in rural areas, lack role models to motivate them to complete formal education. Parents' and boys' negative attitudes towards formal education also play a huge role in boys' disengagement from education.

In terms of the response, the quality of education is not yet adequate as it does currently not meet contextual needs, does not stimulate boys' interest and is impaired by inadequate resources. The existing legal and policy framework does not address challenges relating to boys' disadvantage. For example, the Lesotho Inclusive Policy does not address all areas of disadvantage in education access. In addition, teachers are not skilled to identify and support at-risk learners, particularly boys. There is a vast disparity in physical resources at the disposal of urban and rural schools – availability of electricity, laboratories and libraries.

We also find that non-formal education is not a sufficient intervention for the attrition of boys because it is not comparably resourced and the compulsory aspect of primary education cannot be reinforced. Laws are not yet enforced. For example, parents assign their children duties that hinder children's participation in education, teachers unlawfully use corporal punishment, and boys are employed as herders in a violation of child labour laws.

It is recommended that:

- A study with a representative sample be conducted to ascertain the extent of the problem and influence policy direction.
- The Government of Lesotho enforce existing laws so that any weaknesses can be identified.
- Non-formal education be better financed to be accessible to all its recipients.
- The Government of Lesotho builds more schools that are within walking distance for the communities they serve.
- Existing school resources be improved, and new ones built where they do not exist (expanding access to libraries and science and computer laboratories) and quality be assured.
- More attention be paid to understand the gendered nature of disengagement from education, and efforts taken to ensure all children can fulfil their right to education.

# Introduction

Through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), countries have committed to eliminate gender disparities and ensure every girl and boy has the opportunity to complete 12 years of free quality primary and secondary education by 2030.

While the transformative role of education in tackling unequal power relations, gender stereotypes and restrictive social norms holding girls back is well-recognised by governments, civil society organizations and development partners, how these same gender norms and expectations in society, reproduced in schools and classrooms, affect boys' participation, learning achievement and continuation in education, is an area less well-explored.

At the same time, there is increasing evidence that boys are at greater risk than girls of repeating grades, failing to complete different education levels and having poorer learning outcomes in school (UNESCO 2018), with important implications for progress towards gender equality in education and the wider society.

To further understand these trends, UNESCO commissioned five country case studies across four regions sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States, Latin America and Asia-Pacific). Lesotho is the case study undertaken in sub-Saharan Africa.

## Study objectives

This study aims to:

- Review the current situation related to boys' educational participation, learning achievement and completion, with an emphasis on national and subnational contexts and overlapping disadvantages or intersectionality of features;
- Identify the structural and gender-related factors that hinder or facilitate boys' educational participation, learning achievement and completion at the level of the individual, family and peers, community, school and broader society;
- Document promising policy and programme initiatives, assessing what makes certain strategies work in particular contexts, and potential implications for other settings.

## Study questions

The study questions are as follows:

- What is the current situation of boys' access to, performance in and completion of education, with an emphasis on national and, if possible, subnational contexts? Which boys are disengaging from or disadvantaged in education (examining intersectionality including ethnicity, location and class)? At what level of education do gender disparities and boys' disadvantage appear?
- What are the underlying factors for boys' disengagement and disadvantage in education at the level of the individual, family and peers, school and broader society? To what extent does this differ depending on ethnicity, location, class or other parameters?
- To what extent has boys' disengagement from and disadvantage in education been addressed at the national and subnational levels through policy and programme interventions by government, community or NGO-led interventions? If so, what have been the process, reach and impact of these interventions?

- What are the specific factors in these policies and approaches that appear to have worked, and what elements can potentially be replicated across contexts? What are the preconditions of success? What have been the failure points that others need to consider in the process of adaptation or replication?

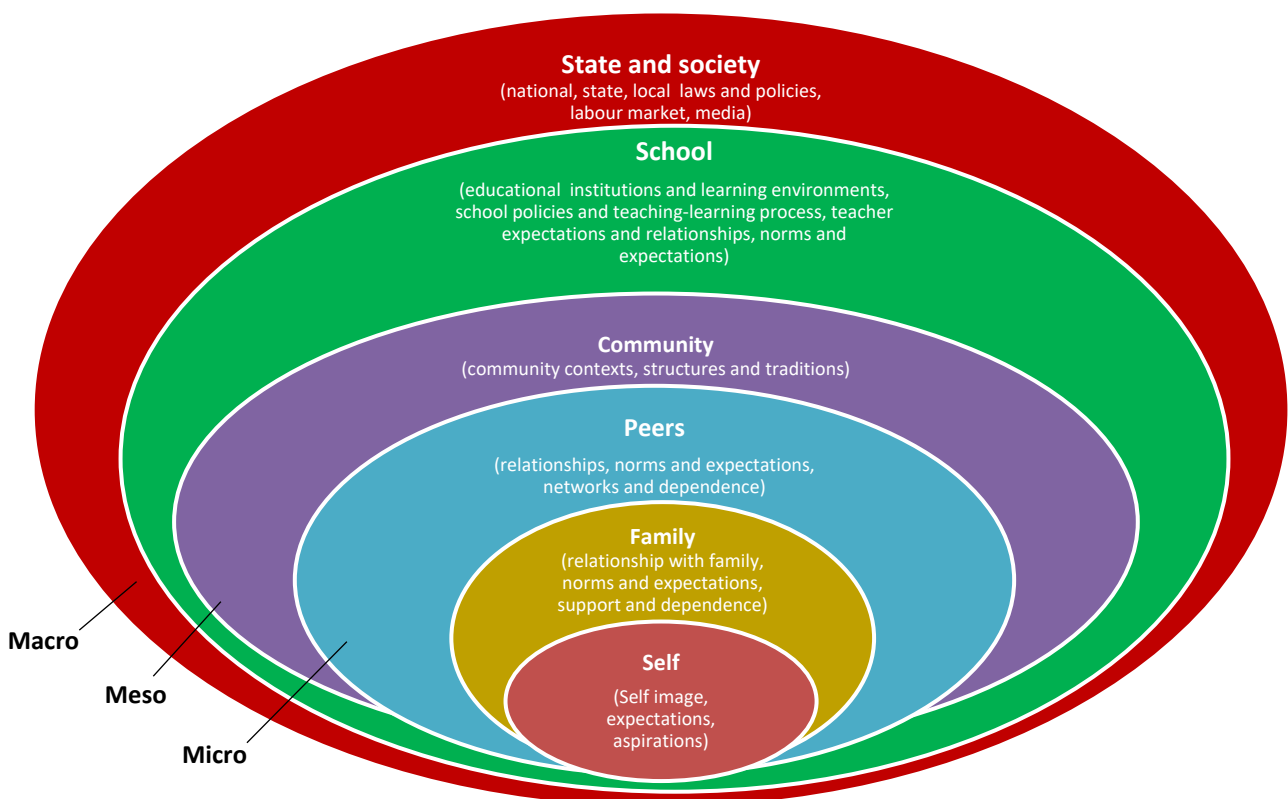
## Methodology

### Study conceptual framework

This country case study adopts the framework suggested by UNESCO, which borrows from the ecological systems theory approach originally developed by Bronfenbrenner (1989, 1995). This approach considers the multifaceted and interrelated factors that influence a child's development. It has been used widely in behaviour change interventions, including those addressing education and health, and considers the risk and protective factors that exist at the level of the individual, family and peers, community, school and the broader environment.

While the study's design borrows the model's notions of systems and their interconnectedness, it adapts these concepts for the research framework used (**Figure 1**), considering the individual, the microsystem (those closest to the individual, in this case family and peers), mesosystem (the systems in the individual's environment, in this case educational institutions) and the macrosystem (the larger system including policies, state functioning and culture).

**Figure 1: Ecological model**



Source: UNESCO (2019b, p. 6).

## Data collection instruments

Data for the study were collected through various instruments. The instruments were verified and validated by UNESCO for their acceptability and relevance in collecting data for this study. The instruments include two unique questionnaires for collecting community profiles and school profiles, respectively; three different interview guides for individual interviews with key informants, school principals and community leaders; and five interview schedules for focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents, peers, teachers, boys and girls.

## Study sites

The education system in Lesotho is managed in ten administrative districts, but the country has unique defining features such as the topography that is segmented into four regions, namely the Highlands, Senqu Valley, Foothills and Urban. Three out of four regions were selected for this study.

In selecting regions and schools/communities, purposive sampling was used. Purposive sampling identifies data sources that have unique qualities and are central to addressing the aim of the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Being qualitative in nature, the study adopted non-probability sampling as ideal for recruiting participants that would provide relevant data for the study (Guest, Namey and Mitchel, 2013). After receiving clearance from the Ministry of Education and Training to conduct the study, the purpose of the study was explained to the District Education Managers in three districts/regions, then the Managers purposively selected communities/schools where the study could access rich data. This included one urban primary and upper secondary school in Leqele, a Highlands primary and secondary school in Mabuleng, and a primary and secondary school in the Mpapa, in the Senqu Valley.

Below is a brief description of the three sites in which data were collected:

- Leqele is an urban community in Maseru district, located in a densely populated area. It has access to public services such as clean water, roads and electricity, and is located about 10 km away from the town centre. Services such as the national referral hospital, Queen Mamohato Memorial Hospital, and the country's main army training camp, Makoanyane Barracks, are situated in the vicinity. The urban population is diverse by nature, but there is no unique feature of this community such as ethnicity or language diversity that was considered by the study. The local government does not use demographical data as it has no independent budget to disburse for the community. As such, two community leaders were unable to estimate the total population. One stated that the community has 3,891 families, but the information could not be verified. The leaders gave different numbers of schools within the community: with one listing three primary schools and one secondary school, while the other mentioned four primary schools and three secondary schools. It was possible they were referring to different territorial lines (as one was a community councillor leading a number of wards within the broader constituency).
- Mabuleng is in Mokhotlong, a district in the eastern highlands, bordering the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. Many of its communities are rural, have inadequate basic services and are mostly pastoralist. Their livelihood is heavily reliant on subsistence crop and animal farming (rearing sheep, goats and cattle). An exit junction to Mabuleng community is approximately 40 kilometres away from Mokhotlong town, while the gravel road from the junction to the community is approximately 20 kilometres long. The gravel road is not well maintained, so traveling to the community and school takes longer than is normal for the distance. Two community leaders were interviewed to gather the community profile data for Mabuleng. While both agreed that the total population of people in the community is 200, they disagreed on other dimensions of population descriptors. One member said there were 60 male community members while the other said 55, making the total of women 140 and 145 respectively. Similarly, they differed in stating the number of families; one stated 80

while the other said there were 50 families. One community leader did not know the exact age of youth out of school, but stated that 40 male and 20 female youths were out of school. However, the other stated that there were only 3 boys younger than 18 years known to be out of school, and no girl aged 18 or below was out of school. The community had one primary school and one secondary school.

- Mpapa is in Quthing, a district that lies in the southern part of Lesotho and borders the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. This community is in the region known as Senqu Valley, which is unique for ethnic and language diversity that is uncommon in any other parts of the country. It has Basotho, the country's ethnic majority, as well as the Xhosa and Phuthi tribes that are the dominant ethnic groups of the Eastern Cape in South Africa. No community data were available here as the only community leader could not provide any estimates.

Below is a brief description of the schools in which data were collected:

**The school for the urban research site** was a combined mixed public school established in 2007. At the time of data collection (2019), the primary school had a total enrolment of 1,132 learners accommodated in 13 classrooms. The enrolment breakdown in numbers is as follows: Grade 1 (175); Grade 2 (153); Grade 3 (138); Grade 4 (176); Grade 5 (131); Grade 6 (189) and Grade 7 (170). The school has 20 teachers with the least qualified teacher having a primary teacher's certificate. At least two teachers are assigned for one grade level and this gives a teacher-pupil ratio (TPR) of 1 teacher for 88 learners. Each of the two Grade 2 teachers has 77 learners; one teacher has 46 learners in Grade 3 as there are three teachers for the level; there is one teacher for 59 Grade 4 learners (with three teachers). Similarly, Grade 5 has three teachers and has a TPR of 1:44. The TPR for Grade 6 is 1:63. Finally, Grade 7 has four grade teachers with a TPR of 1:43. A critical look at the school enrolment, in the light of the available human and physical resources, shows that the primary school urgently needs additional resources. At the time of data collection, two additional classes were under construction.

The total enrolment divided by the number of teachers gives a TPR of one teacher to 57 learners. However, the distribution across classes shows a possible compromise of quality – especially in the early grades. The TPRs for all classes are higher than the national ratio of one teacher to 33 learners at primary school level and the 1:38 ratio for qualified teacher-learner ratio (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). This negatively affects chances of teachers identifying learners' needs and providing intervention, particularly in Grades 1 and 2 that have ratios above 75 pupils per teacher. Other resources for the primary school include pit latrine toilets for staff and learners, separated by gender. The school had sports grounds including a soccer pitch, netball and volleyball grounds, which are shared with the secondary school. The sports grounds were not well-constructed and maintained to create interest for learners to play on them.

At the time of data collection, the secondary school had a total enrolment of 1,456 learners in 16 classrooms. Learners are assigned to classes as follows: Grade 8a (107), Grade 8b (100), Grade 8c (101), Grade 8d (111); Grade 9a (99), Grade 9b (102), Grade 9c (105); Grade 10a (96); Grade 10b (97), Grade 10c (97); Grade 11a (78), Grade 11b (81), Grade 11c (78); Grade 12a (69), Grade 12b (66) and Grade 12c (66). The school has a staff of 36 teachers, with 24 teachers full-time or contracted on a permanent and pensionable basis by the Government, while 12 are paid by the school. The least qualified teacher at the school has a Diploma in secondary education. Fifty six percent of the staff is female. The total number of learners divided by the number of teachers gives a teacher-pupil ratio of 1:40. This compares negatively with the national acceptable teacher-learner ratio of 1 teacher for 26 learners and a 1:27 qualified teacher-pupil ratio (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). Using national averages for TPR at secondary can also be misleading because there this level involves subject teaching that results in imbalances in the number of teachers in one subject area per school.

There is limited classroom space at the school, which negatively affects the quality of teaching and learning. The classes are full and leave inadequate space for a teacher to walk around or organize the class for learner-centred teaching. According to the principal, 'There is congestion in the use of infrastructure because there are too many learners enrolled ... It is difficult for a teacher to give each and every learner attention...' Identifying and addressing individual needs can be a challenge in classes where there are too many learners in a congested space. Data from the school show that the survival rate for boys at this level ranges from an average of 3.6 percent over nine years in Grade 12 to an average of 7.6 percent in ten years at Grade 9 level. The lowest and highest for girls are 3.1 percent (Grade 12) and 4.6 percent (Grade 9). Generally, there are fewer learners who drop out in Grades 11 to 12 (upper secondary) than in Grades 8 to 10 (lower secondary) for both genders.

**The secondary school selected in the Highlands** as the second site for this study is a mixed school that provides education for Grades 8 to 10. It is an incomplete secondary school, as learners would have to find another school to enrol into upper secondary education. It was established in 1987. In 2019 the enrolment was 57 learners for three grades namely Grade 8 (18 learners), Grade 9 (27 learners) and Grade 10 (12 learners). There were five classrooms, with each grade having its own classroom. There were five teachers, three males and two females, including the principal: four are permanent staff and one is employed by the school. The lowest qualification in the secondary school is a Diploma in Secondary Education (2 teachers), Bachelor of Education (2 teachers) and Bachelor of Science in Education (1 teacher). Unlike findings from previous research that point to overcrowding as the cause for failure (Moloi, et al. 2008; Kingdom of Lesotho, 2016), there are fewer learners in this school but they do not perform well. For example, results of the 2019 Junior Certificate show that 10 learners sat their final examination and only 2 passed while 8 failed.

**The third research site selected in Senqu Valley** is a combined (primary and secondary) school. It is a mixed-gender school offering education for Grades 1 to 10. The primary school was established in 1952, while the secondary school was established in 2007. Data for the enrolment of primary school students are incomplete, as they capture learners up to Grade 5. The total enrolment from Grades 1 to 5 is 113 learners. Similarly, data for the secondary school could not be collated. It is an incomplete secondary school that requires learners to move away from the community to complete upper secondary education. It was established in 2007. Of the 14 learners who registered for the Junior Certificate, one was absent from the examination while none of the 13 who sat their examination passed. The quality of education provided at these two rural schools is therefore in doubt, and may result from low learner motivation, inadequate teaching and learning resources or even the insufficient number of teachers, as this often leads to teachers teaching subjects outside their own specialization to make up for staff shortages.

### Study participants

Within each study site, the school principal was asked to select parents, community members, teachers and learners who would provide relevant data for the study. **Table 1** gives a summary of the participants in the three research sites excluding key informant interviews.



**Table 1: Sample at the three study sites (number of people)**

Study sample	Site 1: Urban primary and upper secondary school	Site 2: Highlands primary and secondary school	Site 3: Senqu Valley primary and secondary school
Individual interviews – Community members	4	5	3
FGDs – Peers	0	9	8
FGDs – Teachers	8	7	7
FGDs – Parents	8	9	5
FGDs – Boys	5	8	10
FGDs – Girls	5	9	10
Individual interviews – Principals	2 (Primary and secondary)	1 (Secondary)	2 (Primary and secondary)
<i>Note: This excludes key informant interviews; further information for those provided below.</i>			

Source: Authors

The sample for the study consists of 130 participants made up of six groups that participated in individual and focus group discussions. First, five people participated in key informant interviews (KIIs) as representatives of organizations/institutions that collaborate with the Ministry of Education and Training to facilitate access to education for all. The oldest participant in the KII was 54 years of age, while the youngest was 34. The average age of participants in the KIIs was 46 years of age. The highest educational qualifications of the KII participants were a certificate (1), a diploma (1), a postgraduate diploma (1) and a Master's degree (2). The shortest work experience in the role relevant for the study was one year and four months while the longest was ten years. Thus, the average related work experience of the KII participants was three years.

Second, a group of teachers took part in three focus group discussions: one per school. A total of 22 teachers (excluding five principals) took part in the study; they participated in three focus group discussions (FGD). At a secondary school in Senqu Valley, seven teachers took part in the study; two of the seven teachers were co-opted from the primary school level as the secondary school has only five teachers. The youngest teacher participant in the study was 26, while the oldest was 45 (giving an average age of 35 years of age). The work experience of the teachers ranges from 2 (lowest) to 17 years, and they had average work experience of nine years. The lowest qualification for the teachers was an upper secondary school certificate, Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (1), then a secondary teacher's certificate (1) and a diploma in education (1), while the highest was a Bachelor's degree (4). Similarly, seven teachers took part in the FGD in the Highlands. The youngest was 25 years of age and the oldest was 60, with the average age being 44. Work experience ranged from one to 25 years, giving an average of 15 years. Just as in Senqu Valley, there were only four secondary school teachers and three were co-opted from primary level. The lowest certificate for the teachers was a secondary Junior Certificate, diplomas (3), and Bachelor's degrees (3). Of the eight teachers interviewed in the urban school, the youngest was 27 years old and the oldest 51; this makes the average age of 38. The work experience ranged from four to 25 years, averaging out at 14 years.

Their academic qualifications were a diploma in Education (1), Bachelor of Education (5), a postgraduate diploma (1) and lastly a B.Ed. Honours (1). Although some teachers at Senqu Valley and the Highlands taught at primary level, there is a notable discrepancy in qualifications.

Most of the teachers who participated in the study were female (12), while there were 10 males. Only 3 of the 22 teachers had previously participated in gender equality training. Three teachers were part-time employees, while the rest were employed permanently. Part-time employment in this context was explained as receiving a salary from the school and not having a contract with the government. Five participants can be said to be unqualified teachers because two held only secondary school qualifications (teaching at primary school level), while three held degree qualifications without training as teachers. Unqualified teachers may negatively affect the quality of education the school provides to learners, and it is worth noting is that all unqualified teachers were in the Highlands and Senqu Valley. Urban teachers seem to hold higher qualifications and are all qualified teachers compared to their counterparts in rural areas. This has a bearing on the quality of education that the schools provide for their learners.

Third, a group of five principals participated in individual interviews: two were from the urban region, one from the Highlands and two from the Senqu Valley region. Their age ranged from 30 to 50, with the average age of the principals being 41. The lowest qualified principal had a Diploma in Education (2), then a B.Ed. (1) and B.Ed. Honours (2). Both principals with the highest qualifications were in the urban region. The years of experience of the principals ranged from 2 to 17 years.

Fourth, a total of 64 learners participated in focus group discussions as boys only, girls and peers. The ages of the learner participants ranged from 9 (Grade 3 pupil in the Highlands) to 21 (Grade 9 learner in the Highlands). Of the learners, 52 percent were girls and 48 percent were boys. There were seven primary school learners in the Highlands who participated in a peer group discussion with two secondary school learners. This was because those two were the only secondary school learners to participate in youth groups or organizations. Of the total primary school learners who participated in a focus group discussion, four were in Grade 7, two were in Grade 5 and one was in Grade 3. In the Urban region, both boy and girl participants were in Grade 11 (Form D) while the Highlands and Senqu Valley participants were a mixture of Grade 8 and 9 (Forms A and B) learners.

Next, twenty-two parents participated in three focus group discussions of eight, nine and five parents in the Urban, Highlands and Senqu Valley areas, respectively. Five participants were male and seventeen were female. The youngest parent/guardian who participated in the study was a 26-year-old male, while the eldest was a 75-year-old female. Two participants were in their twenties (26 and 28), while three were in their 70s (72, 72 and 75). These age groups are normally outside the range of parents of secondary school learners.

Lastly, 12 people participated in individual interviews as community members. In each district, a senior education officer was selected and, at each school, a teacher representative from the school board participated. Then, a village chief or his/her representative who was a member of the school board was interviewed. In the Urban region, a community councillor also participated. Other community members included parents who were board members, and an official in an organization that deals with youth programmes at the community level.

### Data collection and management

Interviews with key informants were conducted first. The dates for the interviews were organized with each participant, with slots well-spaced out. The interviews were held during November 2019. All participants but one spoke mainly English with codeswitching of a word or two. All data for this study were audio-recorded with permission from all participants. The interview in which a respondent spoke Sesotho was transcribed in Sesotho, then translated into English. The Sesotho version was reread several times and compared with the audio to assess whether the translation captured the essence conveyed by the participant.

At least two days were set aside for data collection at each research site. The Urban site received follow-up visits beyond the two days because it was accessible. While district education offices helped identify schools to participate in the study, parents, learners, community members and teachers for participation in the study were identified by the schools themselves. In the Urban area, the logistical arrangements included facilitating the transportation of parents to school as the parents were not living close by. In both the Highlands and Senqu Valley, where people mainly walk, principals used proximity as their selection criteria. There was no selection of teacher participants at the two non-urban research sites because the number of teaching staff was small. All secondary school teachers participated and a request for additional teaching staff from the primary school level was made so that the number could be acceptable for a focus group discussion.

Data collection dates for the urban site were in November 2019, and there were several issues involving absence of participants. The greatest challenge at the Urban site was access to students as they were sitting the end-of-year examinations, as well as teachers' struggles to identify learners who participated in out-of-school youth clubs and/or organizations (hence the reliance on a community leader as a source of that information).

The data collection process for the Highlands site was arranged for November 2019. All five focus group interviews and six individual interviews were completed within the set dates. Unlike the Urban area, it was not possible to arrange follow-up visits to this site as it is 290 kilometres from the city. The attendance rate for parents and other community leaders was higher than for the other three sites (except for the chief and counsellor, who sent representatives).

The dates for data collection in the Senqu Valley were set for November 2019. Although it was the last week before the Christmas break, this did not affect the data collection with teachers and learners. Despite an inauspicious start to the interviews, participants were rallied at the last minute and the process could go ahead.

Individual interviews took approximately 60 minutes each, while the focus group discussions lasted approximately 120 minutes. All data were audio-recorded and transcribed word for word. For quality checks, phrases and words that did not read well or were misspelled were verified. Emphasis was placed on capturing the mood and tempo of the conversation so that the punctuation marks could be accurately included. All interviews with parents and some community leaders were done in Sesotho, transcription was done in Sesotho and then translated into English. The audio data were used to assess the quality of the translation from Sesotho to English and to determine whether meaning was not lost in back translation.

## Data analysis

### Data analysis methods

Data analysis captures key findings as evidence provided by research participants. Babbie (2014, p. 409) describes data analysis as a process of deriving codes that are '...patterns that point to a theoretical understanding of social life'. The analysis was influenced by phenomenology and interpretative approaches. Phenomenology seeks an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon (Hays and Singh, 2012). Basically, phenomenological analyses begin with a single unit of analysis, such as an individual, and gradually constructs an assessment that shows a group that shares characteristics (Kawulich and Holland, 2012). Then, the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis moves beyond understanding participants' subjective reality to allow a researcher's interpretation of participants' reality in context (Kawulich and Holland, 2012).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis is an approach that evaluates participants' stories or narration of their experiences in their unique contexts (Smith, 2011). It deals with the close assessment of an individual case and the subsequent search for comparable or distinctive patterns across cases (Smith, 2011). Interpretative phenomenological analysis portrays the participant's world in the way he or she sees it to explain the first-hand experience, and the same data are further

scrutinized within the social and cultural lenses to describe what it means to be in participants' shoes (Larkin, Watts and Clifton 2006). Using the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach, data were presented verbatim (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008) to capture the key messages or themes from the data. These are included in the main report and in the Annex.

### Data analysis process

The key issue in processing qualitative data is coding, a process carried out to establish individual patterns in the data (Babbie 2014). Baxter and Jack (2008) state that, in qualitative research, data collection and processing are done concurrently. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and data analysed qualitatively. Emerging thoughts and comments were written in the margins, and later transformed into themes that matched participants' actual words (Chapman and Smith, 2002). Palmer et al. (2010) see interpretative phenomenological analysis as an iterative and recurring process that deals with diverse issues such as participants' 'experiential claims, concerns and understandings' and the researcher's interpretation of participants' understanding.

Palmer et al. (2010) used eight steps in their study, which are: 1. finding participants' objects of concern and experiential claims; 2. identifying the roles played by the researcher and participants in generating data; 3. finding further roles and relationships, that is, taking note of any role players, besides participants and researchers; 4. identifying any social systems and organizations mentioned by participants as well as the roles they play; 5. an examination of stories participants tell and their purpose, and the extent to which the stories unite or divide group voice; 6. examining how language is used and if it has any effect on the message participants intend to pass; finally, steps 7 and 8 focus on organizing and comparing themes in the entire analysis so as to arrange related themes appropriately for a coherent picture. The eight steps were carefully followed and helped assess different layers of meaning in the participants' responses.

Data presentation was aligned with key focus area of the ecological model used for the study, namely micro-, meso-, and macrosystems. Participants' perceptions of boys' disadvantage and disengagement from education are presented in this study using verbatim quotes of their words to allow readers to interpret participants' views and rid the data of interpretations from the researcher.

# Background and overview of boys' disengagement in education in Lesotho

## Background and country context

The formal education system of the Kingdom of Lesotho is organized into a 3-7-3-2 system from pre-primary to the end of secondary education. Beyond secondary is tertiary education, which is the apex of the formal education system. In summary:

- Pre-primary education runs for three years from an official entry age of three to age five.
- Following pre-primary, usually known as early childhood care and development, primary education runs for seven years. It has an official entry age of six and learners complete it by approximately age 13.
- Secondary school is divided into two levels, namely lower secondary and upper secondary. Lower secondary, known as junior secondary, starts in grade 8 and culminates in the Junior Certificate examination at Grade 10. Upper secondary consists of grades 11-12 ending with the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education: O-level examination. The secondary education qualification is the basis for admission into tertiary education. Running parallel with secondary education is technical and vocational education and training (TVET) offering practical skills in various areas of specialization, while non-formal education cuts across all levels of education.

The education system in Lesotho is managed in 10 administrative districts that are also organized into four ecological zones, namely Lowlands, Foothills, Senqu River Valley and Highlands. The topography of the country is worth mentioning because it enables or restricts access to education. Although there is evidence of boys' disadvantage and disengagement from education, the education system of Lesotho is anchored in a sound legal and policy framework that must support inclusive growth for all citizens (see more in Section on legal and policy frameworks).

## Education trends in Lesotho

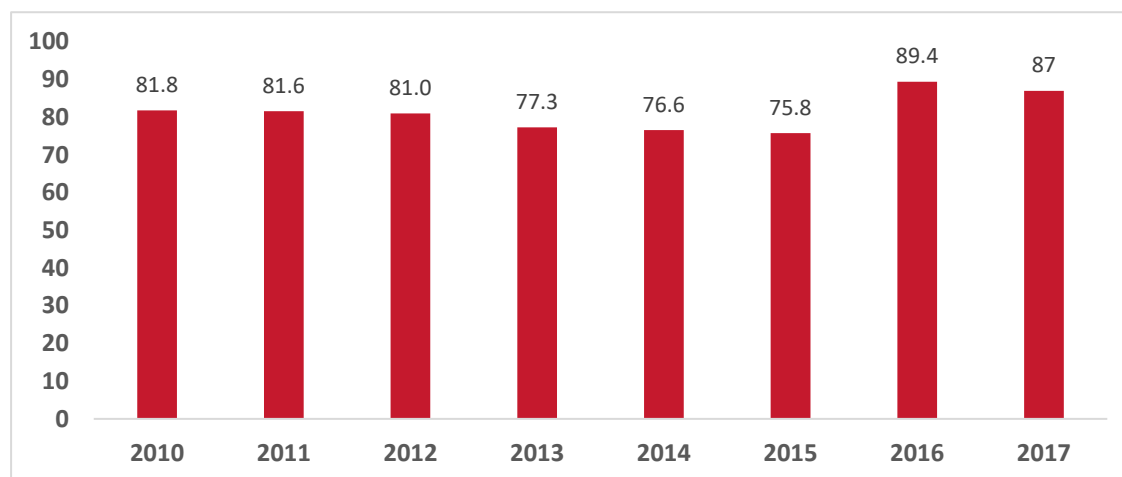
### Educational participation at different levels of education

Gender disparity in accessing education is a symptom of the poor quality of education in Lesotho. Reflecting on the implementation of the Education for All (EFA) initiative in Sub-Saharan countries, Taylor and Spaul (2015) conclude that, although EFA led to the massification of education, it did not assure quality as many African countries, including Lesotho, continue to lag behind in international assessments of educational achievement such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ). It calls for countries to go beyond the provision of just educational access to ensure quality participation.

In the context of Lesotho, Ntho (2013) states that some of the factors affecting quality include lack of teaching and learning spaces; overcrowding in primary schools leading to high learner-teacher ratios; and employment of unqualified teachers at the start of free primary education in 2000. Additionally, the Government of Lesotho has not been able to build adequate secondary schools within an acceptable walking distance for some communities (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2017). Generally, access to secondary education remains a challenge, with UNDP (2017) stating that only 8 percent of the population in Lesotho receives a secondary education (a finding

disputed by other research reports). **Figure 2** shows the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) at primary level in Lesotho (showing that the great majority of children aged 6 to 12 years attend school). Despite notable participation, an equally high number (at least 20 percent) of school children did not attend school between 2013 and 2015.

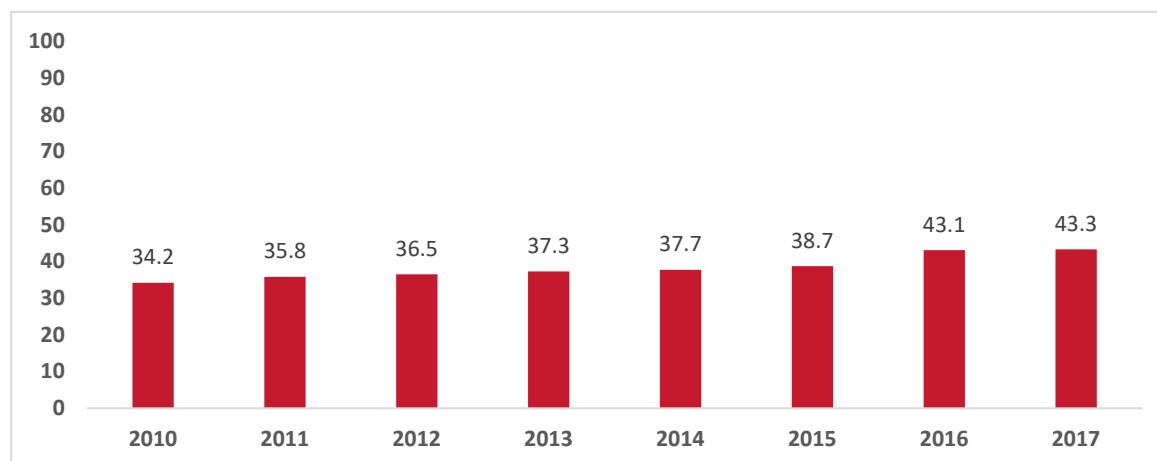
**Figure 2: Lesotho primary net enrolment ratio, 2010-2017**



Data Source: Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2010-2017).

With participation in primary education so high, it would be expected that at least 50 percent of children who participated in primary education would form part of children aged 13 to 18 in secondary school. However, **Figure 3** shows that less than 50 percent are at school. In 2010 to 2012, about a third of secondary school children were attending school. While it may be true that those not reflected in the NER may still be in primary, the gross enrolment ratios (GER) for these years are not high either. This indicates that many secondary school children are out of school.

**Figure 3: Lesotho secondary net enrolment ratio, 2010-2017**



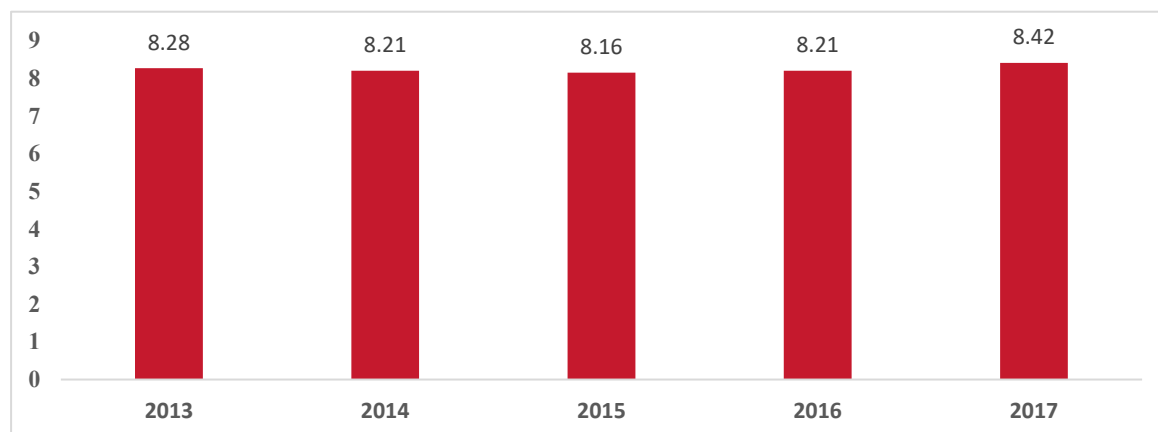
Data Source: Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2010-2017).



It should be emphasized that the number of learners at both primary and secondary school levels only shows presence. The quality of their participation in the schools is one of the key determinants of retention, and lack of quality is blamed for high wastage rates in the Lesotho education system.

**Figure 4** shows primary school life expectancy from 2013 to 2017. Although children are supposed to spend seven years at primary school level, they take more time due to grade repetition. This reflects an unnecessary cost on the Government and parents, as that money could have been used for other development activities.

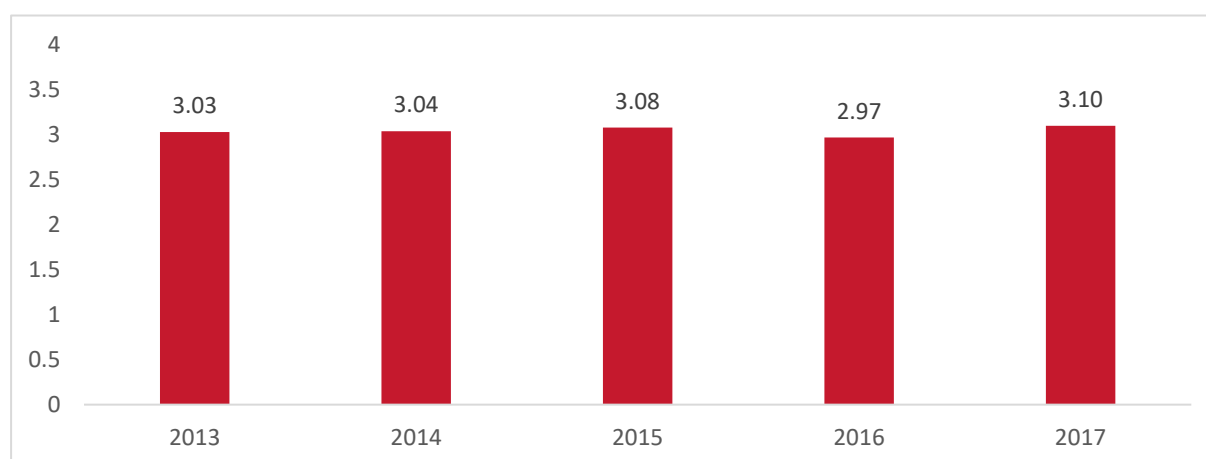
**Figure 4: Lesotho primary school life expectancy (years), 2013-2017**



Data Source: UNESCO UIS (2013 – 2017).

A similar picture emerges when examining school life expectancy at the lower secondary school level. **Figure 5** demonstrates that lower secondary school learners spend more than the expected three years at this level of education. Grade retention at secondary school level could be disastrous, as it may discourage learners who have not found value in formal education and is burdensome on parents who incur additional costs for education.

**Figure 5: Lesotho secondary school life expectancy (years), 2013-2017**



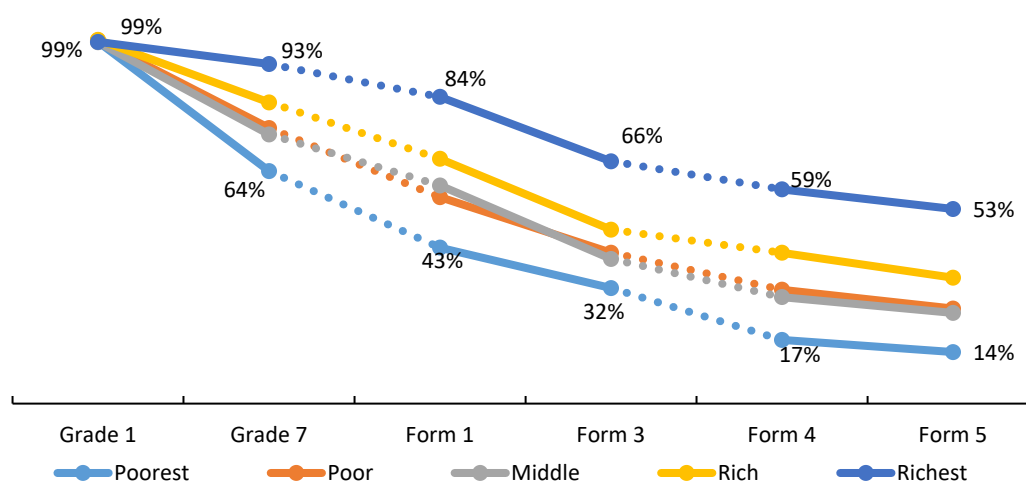
Data Source: UNESCO UIS (2013 – 2017).

The data suggest that further efforts are needed to improve access, quality and retention in education and to address inefficiencies, as demonstrated by school life expectancy. The inefficiencies result in grade repetition, as it takes learners longer to attain basic literacy and numeracy skills. Secondary education in Lesotho seems to be the most inaccessible, and this affects certain categories of the population more than others.

## Educational participation by wealth status and location

Students' socio-economic background is a predisposing factor for inequality, as is geographical location (particularly in terms of rural areas). The disparity and socio-economic disadvantage in accessing education in Lesotho is undisputed. Although education opportunities are open for all learners at the beginning of primary school level, those from low socio-economic backgrounds begin to fall out. **Figure 6** shows that, by Grade 6, there is a 30 percent difference in participation between children from the poorest and the richest wealth quintile. The gap widens in the transition to secondary education, where costs are mainly paid by parents. Districts in the Highlands such as Thaba-Tseka and Mokhotlong have many people in the poorest wealth quintile and the majority lack any formal education (UNDP, 2017).

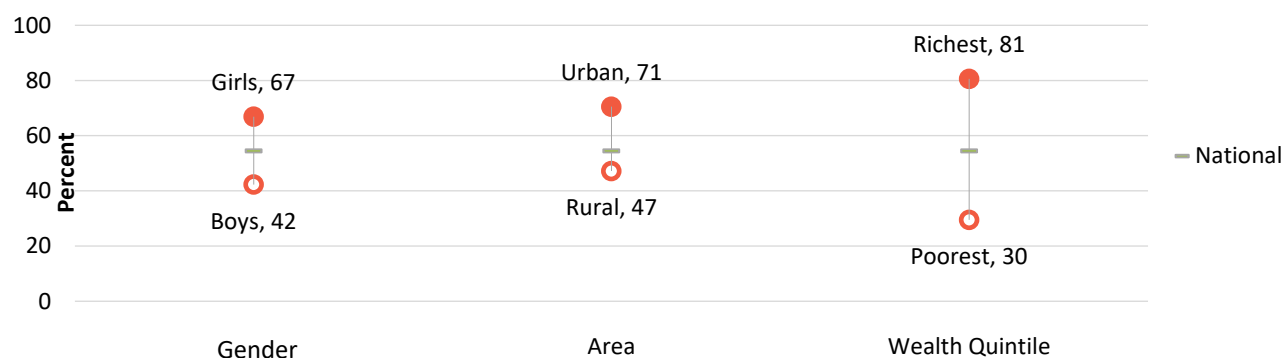
**Figure 6: Access and retention by wealth status**



*Data Source:* Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2019d).

Similarly, **Figure 7** illustrates the extent of disparity in accessing lower secondary education opportunities by comparing three dimensions: gender, location and wealth quintile. As seen in the Figure, at Form 1-3, 25 percent more girls participate than boys, up to 24 percent more children from urban areas participate than from rural areas and, finally, a staggering 51 percent more children from the richest wealth quintile participate in secondary education than those from the poorest quintile. Further data are needed to review the intersections of these characteristics. This is, however, a clear call for the Government of Lesotho to equalize education opportunities to ensure that all learners access an inclusive and equitable quality education, especially at secondary level. This would allow boys to have the necessary skills and values to open up opportunities for them to participate meaningfully in society.

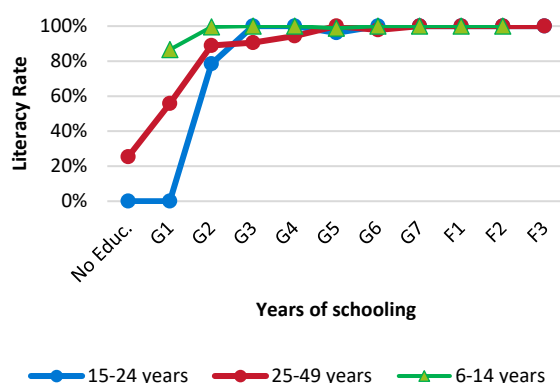
**Figure 7: Adjusted net attendance rate in lower secondary school (form 1-3)**



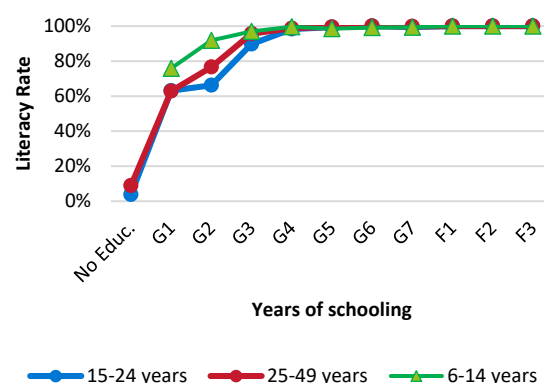
Data Source: Lesotho Bureau of Statistics (2018).

**Figures 8 and 9** shows differences in youth and adult literacy in urban compared to rural areas. It takes urban children approximately two years to acquire literacy skills, while it takes two more years to acquire the same skills in rural areas. This could be attributed to inadequate exposure to multimedia and other resources among people in rural areas, and also more limited opportunities for quality education in rural areas.

**Figure 8: Youth and adult literacy in urban households**



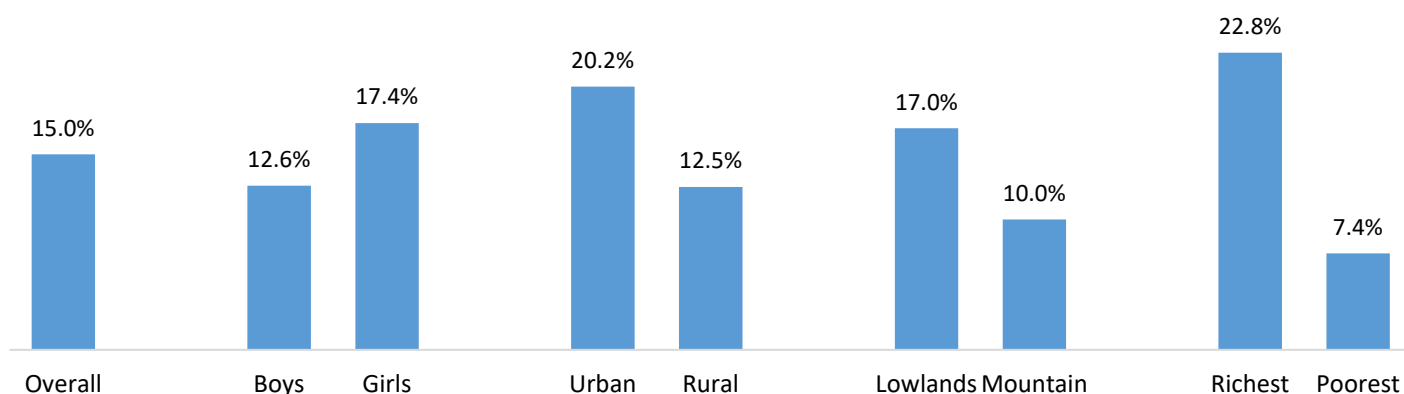
**Figure 9: Youth and adult literacy in rural households**



Data Source: Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2019d).

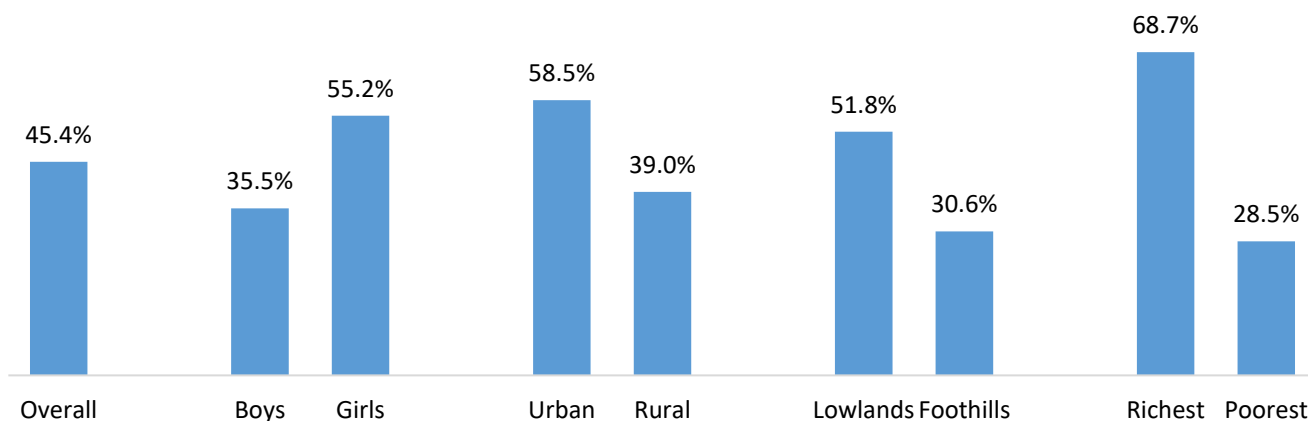
**Figures 10 and 11** also demonstrate differences in literacy and numeracy skills for between children in urban and rural contexts. Again, key differences emerge by gender, location/region and socioeconomic background. As seen above, boys are disadvantaged and achieve lower educational outcomes.

**Figure 10: Acquisition of foundational numeracy skills for 7-14 year olds (2018)**



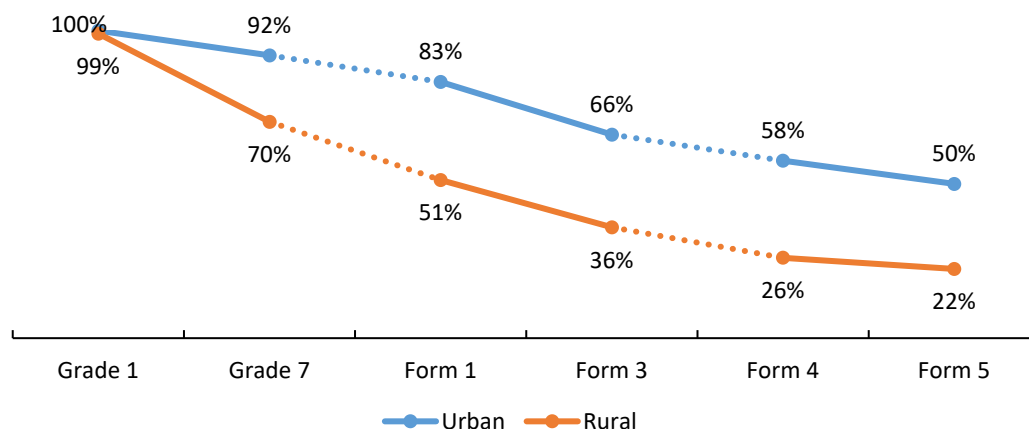
Data Source: Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2019d).

**Figure 11: Acquisition of foundational reading skills for 7-14 year olds (2018)**



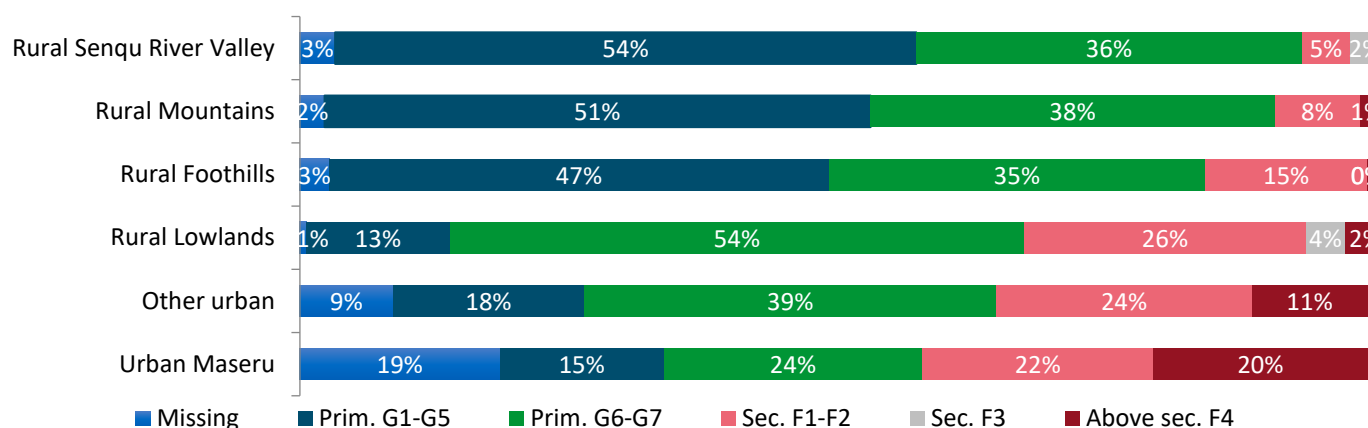
Data Source: Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2019d).

The literature shows a strong link between educational disadvantage and living in the rural parts of Lesotho such as Thaba-Tseka and Mokhotlong (towns that are home to the poorest people in the country) (UNDP, 2017). These districts also have the highest number of people who have not attended school (Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Apart from poverty, the landscape in Lesotho is a challenge, as Lefoka et al. (2012) notes that the distance between a child's home and school makes it difficult to attend regularly. This leads to a higher attrition of learners in the mountains than in the lowlands, as noted in **Figure 12**. Although nearly all children enrol in Grade 1, over 20 percent fewer rural children are enrolled than urban children by Grade 7. The differences widen with education levels.

**Figure 12: Access and retention by location**

Data Source: Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2019d).

**Figure 13** shows that children in all three of the country's ecological zones except Urban drop out early, with Senqu Valley and rural mountains showing the highest disadvantage. An exit by Grade 5 in the rural areas means that children would have not gained sufficient literacy and numeracy skills to help them make a better contribution to their communities and lives.

**Figure 13: Education level of school dropouts by ecological zone for ages 13-17**

Data Source: Lesotho Bureau of Statistics (2019).

## Boys' disengagement in education

There is a high proportion of the male population (boys) out of school in Lesotho, and most of them are in rural areas. The Ministry of Education and Training, through the Education Statistics Bulletin, has documented this gender bias in access consistently over the years. An education progress review document of the Ministry of Education and Training notes, "Out of the 14,800 children aged 6-12 who are out of school, two thirds are boys while for the 3,100 from the same age group who have dropped, 92% are boys. In the 13-17 age group, out of the 2,200 children who have never been to school, 86% are boys and nearly 70% of the 46,000 who are dropouts are also boys" (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019d, p. 27).

The gender influence on educational access is also reinforced by the geographical location of a child. Depending on where they live, boys may never attend school or may drop out of school. **Table 2**

demonstrates the extent of boys' disadvantage and shows that, while huge numbers of boys drop out, an equally large number never attend school.

**Table 2: Distribution of out-of-school children by age, gender and location**

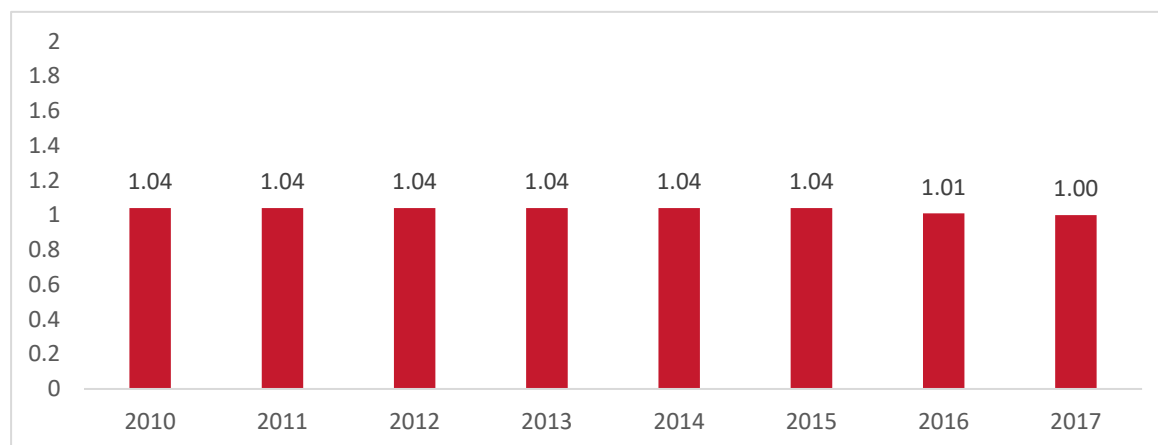
	6-12 Years		13-17 Years	
	Never attended	Dropped out	Never attended	Dropped out
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	67%	92%	86%	69%
Female	33%	8%	14%	32%
<b>Location</b>				
Urban	25%	6%	8%	12%
Rural	75%	94%	92%	88%
<b>Gender and Location</b>				
Urban - Male	13%	6%	0%	6%
Urban - Female	12%	0%	8%	5%
Rural - Male	54%	86%	86%	62%
Rural - Female	22%	8%	6%	26%

*Data Source:* Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2019d).

Some of the effects of non-attendance and drop-out rates for boys are evident in skewed adult literacy and school participation rates. For example, women's literacy rate is 98.6 percent compared to 90.6 percent for men, while secondary education enrolment is 36 percent for girls and 22 percent for boys (United Nations Development Programme, 2017). Boys' disadvantage is known to be caused by irregular attendance and subsequent failure to attain the requisite skills or complete grade levels on a par with their female counterparts (United Nations Development Programme, 2017).

Generally, research reveals that the tipping scale of gender parity in favour of girls in Lesotho starts early and continues unabated throughout the education system. Gender parity in early childhood care and development is skewed towards girls by four percentage points (Mosia et al., 2019). Furthermore, **Figure 14** shows that girls participated in primary education for six years in larger numbers than boys, with parity reflected only in 2017.

**Figure 14: Lesotho primary school gender parity index, 2010-2017**

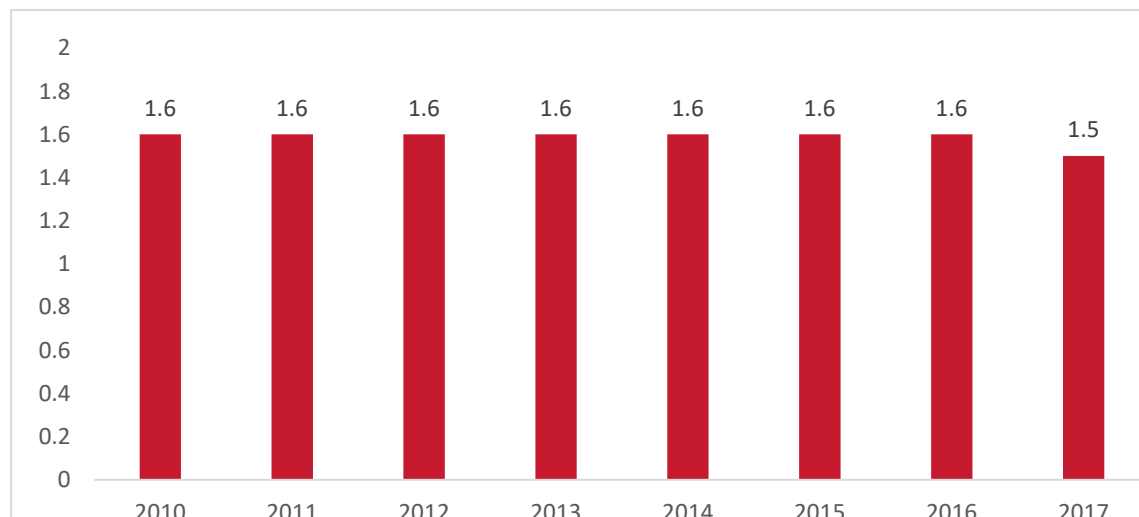


*Data Source:* Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2010-2017).



**Figure 15** shows that gender disparity is tilted in favour of girls in secondary education level too, to a larger extent. This supports the data reflected in **Table 2** suggesting that a large number of boys drop out at secondary school level.

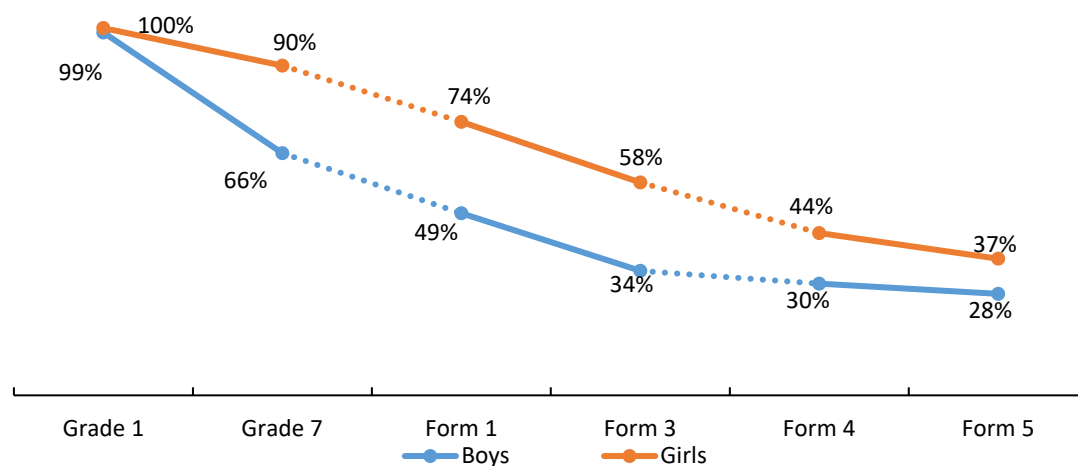
**Figure 15: Lesotho secondary school gender parity index, 2010-2017**



*Data Source:* Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2010-2017).

The steep decline in boys' participation across ascending grade levels is also displayed in Figure 16. Although at the beginning of primary school all children access education equally, boys are disadvantaged by the timing of their exit. **Figure 16** shows that, by Grade 6, there is almost a 30 percent difference in participation rates between boys and girls. The participation of boys continues to drop dramatically until the end of lower secondary, after which the rate of drop-out reduces. However, participation of a third of the eligible school population in upper secondary demonstrates low access of secondary education generally. Only 51 percent of girls and 36 percent of boys were enrolled at this level in 2017 (UIS, 2021).

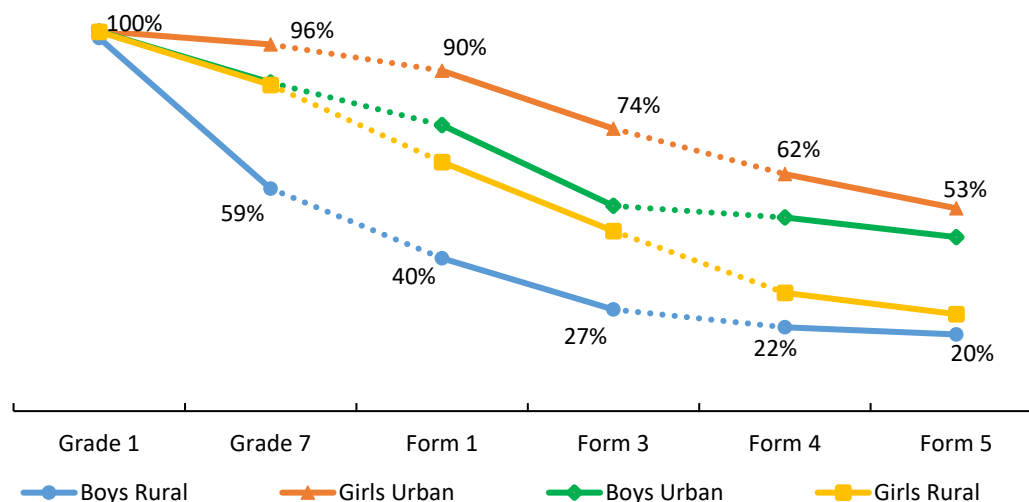
**Figure 16: Access and retention by gender**



*Data Source:* Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2019d).

As shown in **Figure 17**, boys are at a disadvantage irrespective of their location. The scale is tipped in favour of girls in both urban and rural regions but, as discussed below, living in either rural or urban regions in Lesotho determines one's prospects of educational access and success.

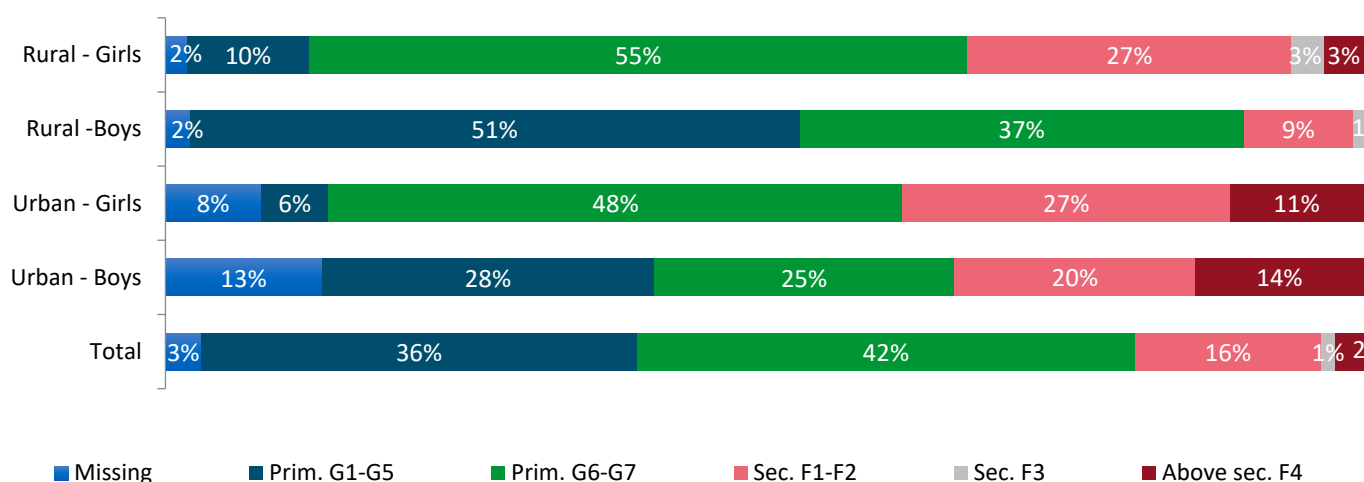
**Figure 17: Access and retention by location and gender**



Data Source: Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2019d).

The effects of boys' inequal participation in education are exacerbated by the timing of their exit from the education system. **Figures 16 and 17** show that a great number of boys drop out at primary school level, and **Figure 18** adds that 51 percent of boys in rural locations drop out before they reach grade 5. An exit in Grade 5 or earlier suggests that they mostly drop out before acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019d). An early exit from the education system therefore means that most males in rural areas have no skills to be absorbed by the labour market, thus affecting their livelihoods and that future generations of Basotho.

**Figure 18: Education level of school drop-outs by gender and location for ages 13-17**

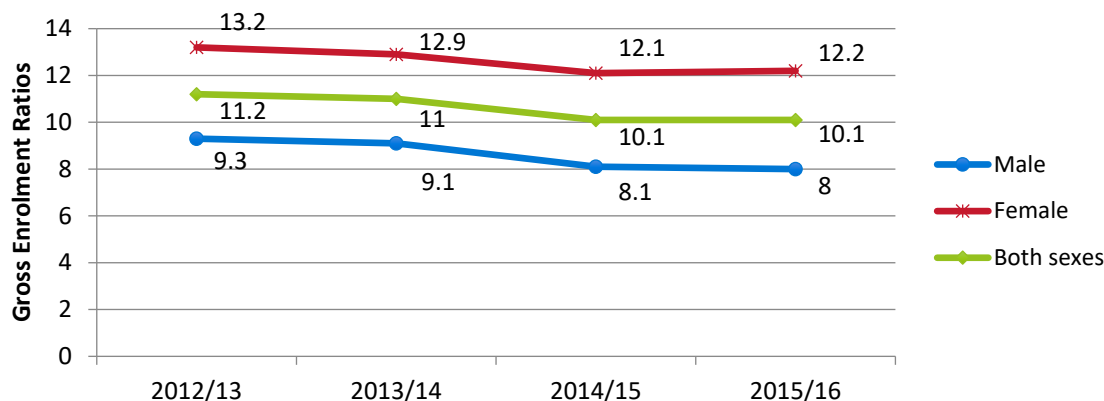


Data Source: Lesotho Bureau of Statistics (2019).

Unequal access to education in Lesotho starts in early childhood and continues in primary education through to secondary education, where it peaks. Inequality in access to tertiary education would

therefore be expected. Although access to tertiary education dropped between 2012 and 2016, **Figure 19** shows that girls' participation remains high compared to boys. In 2015-2016, 12 percent of young women were enrolled in high education compared to only 8 percent of young men. Although policies at this level can still promote access for male students, this cannot be attained without undoing boys' disadvantage at lower levels of education.

**Figure 19: Gross enrolment ratios in higher educational institutions, 2012/13-2015/16**



Data Source: Lesotho Council on Higher Education (2016).

While young women participate at higher rates than young men in tertiary education, the key advantage for men at this level is their greater participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects (as shown in **Table 3**). This provides the lower number of men studying at this level with a great opportunity for accessing better paid jobs than their female counterparts.

**Table 3: Distribution of students by gender and field of study, 2015/16**

Field of Study	Male	Female	Total	% Total	GPI
Social Sciences	2,745	4,516	7,261	33.6	1.65
Education	1,730	3,814	5,544	25.7	2.20
Health and Welfare	557	1,484	2,041	9.5	2.66
Engineering and Construction	1,407	343	1,750	8.1	0.24
Humanities and arts	331	764	1,095	5.1	2.31
Tourism and Services	227	632	859	4.0	2.78
Agriculture	449	317	766	3.5	0.71
Computing	502	229	731	3.4	0.46
Sciences	360	246	606	2.8	0.68
Journalism, Broadcasting and Information	96	397	493	2.3	4.14
Law	121	220	341	1.6	1.82
Manufacturing and Processing	7	92	99	0.5	13.14
<b>Total</b>	<b>8532</b>	<b>13054</b>	<b>21586</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1.53</b>

Data Source: Lesotho Council on Higher Education (2016).

## Learning Outcomes

Given the absence of a national measure for quality in the country's educational provision and national assessments of learners transitioning from one level to another and certification (Ntho, 2013), some research suggests that there is gender disparity in attainment of learning outcomes in Lesotho. Boys may have unexplained poor performance compared to girls, which makes them lose motivation and become vulnerable to early withdrawal from school (subsequently assuming the social stereotype of becoming income earners to sustain families) (Erasmus et al., 2019). Another study by Taylor and Spaul (2015) notes that, at Grade 6 level in Lesotho, there is evidence of boys' cross underachievement as girls have a grade completion rate of 90 percent compared to 65 percent for boys. That is, girls perform better than boys in most subjects, possibly due to cultural tradition and boys' responsibilities. The Examination Council's 2016 national assessment of educational outcomes found that, on average, girls in Grade 4 outperformed boys in Sesotho (45 percent to 37 percent), English (51 percent to 43 percent) and in mathematics by 40 percent to 38 percent (Examination Council of Lesotho, 2016). However, an earlier study by the Acer Centre for Global Education Monitoring (2014), monitored by the Examination Council of Lesotho, found no gender effect on the overall educational outcomes. If noted gender disparities were true to every learning situation in Lesotho, boys' motivation to learn and remain in schools could be impacted.

## Overview of boys' disengagement in participating schools

Certain observations can be made about the educational participation of learners in the Urban, Highlands and Senqu Valley regions. First, learners in the urban region are at an age-appropriate study level, while their counterparts in rural areas seem to be two or more years behind. Grade repetition is observable in some, while others could have started school late or have been in and out of the system. Second, school attendance is not regular for most learners and may affect the quality of their learning. Last, boys are not weak academically. In fact, they outperform girls in mathematics and science subjects.

### Learner demographics and age-appropriate progression

Data collected show that learners in the urban region progress well in their studies, as most are within the expected level of study. For example, five boys and five girls from the Urban region who participated in the study were either aged 16 (6) or 17 (4) and were in Grade 11 (form D). The number of years they have been at the school also correspond with their level of study. However, discrepancies between a learner's age and their level of study exist in the other sites.

In the Senqu Valley, four girls have been in the secondary school for 3 years but are in Grade 9, which means they have each repeated at least one class in secondary. Only one boy seems to have repeated a class. One 17-year-old and five 16-year-old girls are in Grade 9, as opposed to their peers in the urban region, who are in Grade 11. Similarly, boys in the same school were old for their grade level; two 15-year-olds were in grade 8, three 16-year-olds were in the same grade, and one 17-year-old was also in Grade 8 to repeat the year. There were two 17-year-olds in Grade 9 and two 18-year-olds in a similar grade, with one 18-year-old having repeated either Grade 8 or 9.

Similarly, most students in the Highlands were too old for the grade level in which they were enrolled. Only one learner, a 14-year-old girl, seemed to be studying at the right level (Grade 9). The outliers were two 18-year-old girls in Grade 9, one 18-year-old boy in Grade 8, a 19-year-old boy in Grade 9 and a 21-year-old male in Grade 9.

It appears that the age for participating in formal education is different between urban and rural parts of Lesotho and that grade repetition is particularly of concern in rural areas. An exit from the education system before the completion of Grade 12 may result from the inability of the education system to support learners' progress. The presence of three 18-year-olds, one 19-year-old and a 21-year-old at the two schools and in early secondary grades presents a unique case of perseverance, as literature shows that boys in these regions drop out at an early age.

Evidence of grade repetition even at primary school level is seen in seven primary school students who participated as peers in the Highlands. Two girls, aged 14 and 16 respectively, had been in the primary for eight years and were in Grade 7. Another learner seemed to have started school late as he is a 12-year-old boy who has been in primary for five years and is in Grade 5. Each of the rural schools has five teachers who were stretched to teach subjects they were not qualified to teach (resulting likely in poor educational outcomes).

### School attendance

Learners had to respond to a question, 'How often do you go to school?'. Of the 64 learners who participated in the FGD as girls only, boys only and peers, 31 claim to attend schools every day or always, 23 learner participants attend regularly while 10 sometimes attend. Twenty parents responded to the same question, 12 responded every day or always, 7 said regularly, while 3 said their children sometimes go to school. This shows that both learners and parents attest to learners missing some school days.

Long distances to school were reported by many to be a factor: 'I face a problem of the distance to walk to school, it is too long and when I get to school, I am already tired and I fail to concentrate in class' [Learner9-Highlands, 14 years, Female]; 'I have to walk to school especially when it is rainy, I do not go to school because I am unable to cross the river near the school' [Learner3-Highlands, 18 years, Female]. One parent also shared concurring views, 'Sometimes he does not go to school because he walks a long distance to school, and on rainy days he is not going to school because he cannot cross the river nearby the school' [Parent3-Senqu Valley, 65 years old, Female]. The cost of education at secondary school level was also reportedly influencing school attendance, and the distance a child walks to school has negative effects on their regular attendance, especially when they are still young.

While the rural south faces inaccessible school resources, urban students simply play truant, 'He left home going to school, but he was not seen in the school campus' [Parent8-Urban, 52 years old, Female]. Parents from the Highlands outline three reasons why children miss school. This first is sickness, 'He always goes to school except when he was sick from the injury, he got this year and it was for few days' [Parent2-Highlands, 75 years, Female]. The second is a teachers' strike, 'He was only absent during teachers strike' [Parent3-Highlands, 72 years, Female]. The third reason is unpaid fees, the child 'always goes to school except when the school fees was not paid especially last year because this year she is sponsored' [Parent6-Highlands, 44 years, Male].

### **Boys' academic performance**

In responding to whether boys' disengagement from education could result from underachievement, participants think boys do not struggle academically. Girls think boys perform better in mathematics and sciences and support the view that disengagement does not result from poor academic performance. The following are some of their views, 'According to my knowledge boys, do well in maths and sciences' [Learners1-Urban, 16 years, Female]; 'There are some subjects that boys tend to do well in them than girls, this is mathematics' [Learner9-Highlands, 14 years, Female]. Teachers in the urban area express their views as follows: 'Our school is way different from other schools in that boys perform better than girls in school attendance and academic achievement' [Teacher1-Urban, 41 years, Female]. Another teacher echoes, 'Boys complete their five-year programme with high grades because most of the high achievers here are boys' [Teacher2-Urban, 28 years, Male].

Teachers went further to indicate that boys do well in all subjects generally but particularly in mathematics and science subjects. The following are some of their comments: 'The pattern has changed, boys do not only perform better in Math and Science subject but they also perform well in English because in the last results we received two A\* whom were boys' [Teacher3-Urban, 37 years, Female]. Another teacher echoes, 'It is not a norm that boys are more than girls in numbers at school, as results boys always top girls in every subject at this school' [Teacher1-Urban, 41 years, Female]. Teachers from the Highlands also do not think boys drop out due to poor academic performance. The following are some of their responses: 'it's the same, when they fail, they fail the same way, you cannot say boys are better somewhere' [Teacher6-Highlands, 30 years, Male]. Another teacher states, 'In the past, boys performed better in math and science but lately, I don't see any difference' [Teacher3-Highlands, 58 years, Male]. Similarly, teachers from the Senqu Valley region think boys perform well enough not to cause concern, the following is an example of these positive comments, 'There is no difference related to subjects, both genders perform equally' [Teacher1-Senqu Valley, 26 years, Female]. The findings refute a study by the Examination Council of Lesotho (2016) which found that girls are brighter than boys and align with other research that found no difference (Acer Centre for Global Education, 2014).



## Benefits of boys' education

The retention of boys in schools can yield personal and social benefits for youth in Lesotho. Through education, they can gain knowledge and skills that can help them join the labour market within and outside the country to improve their lives and the lives of their families. Research globally shows that men who have a secondary school qualification or lower committed more gender-based violence than those with a higher qualification (UNESCO, 2018). This is true for Lesotho, as data show that youth, especially boys, contribute to the high crime rate in Lesotho and most of the crimes are committed by people aged 30 and younger with upper secondary school qualification or lower (Lesotho Correctional Services, 2017). **Table 4** shows data collected by the Lesotho Correctional Services Institutions in 2017, according to which young men aged 20 years or younger accounted for 12.4 percent of the crimes committed nationally by males compared to female youth who contributed 11 percent. Although the difference seems marginal, the number of boys and men in correctional institutions is nearly twenty times higher than the number of girls and women.

**Table 4: Number and percentage distribution of people in correctional institutions by age group and gender –2017**

Age group	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total
Less than 15	14	0.4	1	0.6	15
15 – 20	388	12.0	18	10.4	406
21 – 30	1,567	48.3	71	41.0	1,638
31 – 40	890	27.4	44	25.4	934
41 – 50	258	8.0	20	11.6	278
Above 50	126	3.9	19	11.0	145
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,243</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>3,416</b>

Data Source: Lesotho Correctional Services (2017).

Education plays a critical role in alleviating social issues in the community. As **Table 5** illustrates, this is because fewer people with a tertiary qualification commit crimes than those with an upper secondary school qualification or a lower. As noted earlier, districts such as Thaba-Tseka and Mokhotlong have the highest number of people with no formal education and these two are, as shown in **Table 5**, among the five districts in the Highlands and Senqu Valley with the highest number of crimes committed by people with no education or secondary education at most.

**Table 5: Percentage distribution of people in correctional institutions by educational attainment - 2017**

Correctional institutions	Education level					Total
	None	Primary	Secondary	High school	Tertiary	
<b>Botha-Bothe</b>	8.6	63.3	19.4	7.2	1.4	100.0
<b>Leribe</b>	7.7	51.1	24.7	15.0	1.5	100.0
<b>Berea</b>	6.8	51.4	22.6	18.2	0.9	100.0
<b>Maseru Central</b>	8.0	41.5	23.6	20.9	5.9	100.0
<b>Female</b>	1.1	52.7	29.0	11.8	5.4	100.0
<b>JTC</b>	2.7	48.6	48.6	0.0	0.0	100.0
<b>Mohale's Hoek</b>	18.1	56.5	16.9	7.6	1.0	100.0
<b>Quthing</b>	25.8	38.4	23.3	6.3	6.3	100.0
<b>Qacha's Nek</b>	24.4	44.4	23.1	8.1	0.0	100.0
<b>Mokhotlong</b>	24.4	55.0	14.7	4.6	1.3	100.0
<b>Thaba-Tseka</b>	32.3	55.0	6.7	4.6	1.4	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Data Source: Lesotho Correctional Services (2017).

Additionally, recent quarterly data collected by the Lesotho Mounted Police (LPS) (2019) show that there were 43 assault crimes committed by males aged 16-25 against 6 cases committed by females of the same age; there were 38 murder crimes committed by males in the same age group to 0 cases for females. Males have also committed 24 violations of the Road Traffic Act to 1 for females, 8 cases of robbery to 0 for females, 25 sexual offences to 1 for females, 10 cases of stock theft to 0 female, 20 theft common cases to 5 for females and so on. Chipatiso et al. (2014) note that up to 62 percent of women experience gender-based violence in Lesotho and young men aged 20-29 perpetrate most of the crimes.

The benefits of boys' education expand beyond boys' own outcomes, but on the social and economic contexts of communities and on the realisation of gender equality.



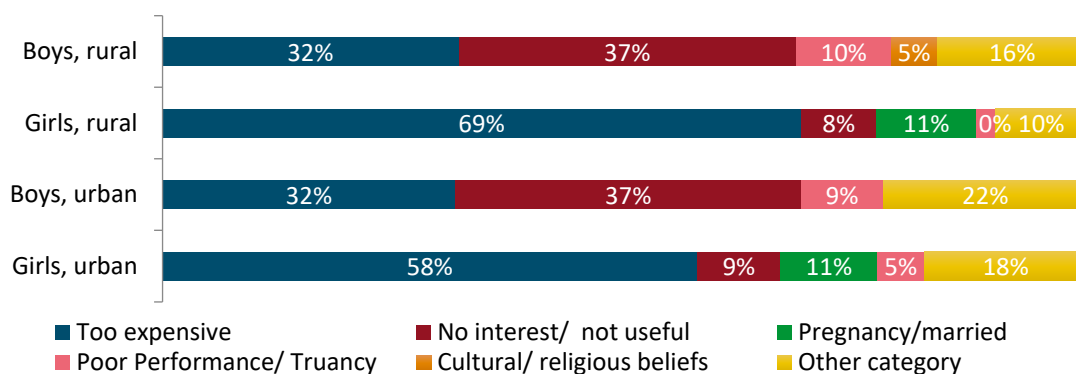
## Factors contributing to boys' disengagement and disadvantage in education

This section considers the factors contributing to boys' disengagement and disadvantage in education, considering the ecological model and the micro-, meso- and macro-system level.

In writing about boys' disadvantage and disengagement from education in Lesotho, Taylor and Spaul (2015) locate the problem in several causal factors that include inefficiencies of the current education system, traditional gendered labour roles that normalize boys' early exit to secure livelihood for their families (UNESCO, 2018) and the pastoralist nature of Lesotho's economy in which boys are herders (UNESCO, 2019). The National Strategic Development Plan also states that the country's topography influences inequality in accessing education, alongside the effects of poverty and cultural norms that lead boys to leave school for initiation and then become herd boys (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2018).

**Figure 20** shows some of the indicated reason for school drop-out among children aged 13-17 in one study by the Bureau of Statistics (2019). The cost of secondary education and lack of interest are the main reasons for boys' disengagement, while the cost of secondary education and pregnancy contribute towards girls' drop-out. The cost of, and apathy towards, education account equally for boys' disengagement in both urban and rural locations. However, boys in rural areas are the most disadvantaged, with location and socio-economic status as influencing factors. Figure 5 also shows that factors such as poor performance, absenteeism and belief system play a negligible role as a causal factor compared to other factors.

**Figure 20: Reasons for drop-out among children aged 13-17 by gender and location**



*Data Source:* Lesotho Bureau of Statistics (2019).

This chapter further outlines the findings of this study, including the perspectives of the three schools and communities engaged in this research. A dominant feature in this study is the urban-rural divide. Rural communities typically have limited economic activities except subsistence farming, have no electricity and therefore minimal multimedia influence. They display traditional gendered expectations for boys, and are the settings where schools are inadequate and under-resourced. The lack of community development, such as bridges across large rivers, also endangers access to education. There are multiple influences on a boy's education that are further explained below.

## Microsystem

### Individual influences (Self)

At the individual level, learners' health, their engagement in romantic relationships and effects of socio-economic status on their self-concept were found to affect their experience of education and lead to drop-out.

#### Ill-health

Ill-health was a theme that emerged in many of the discussions with study participants. Missing learning time due to ill-health can affect learners' attitude towards their studies, especially when a school has no mechanism to help learners recover lost time. The following are some views expressed by study participants: 'I do not come to school every day because of health problems' [Learner3-Urban, 16 years, Male]; 'When I am sick, I do not come to school' [Learner3-Senqu Valley, 17years, Male]. Ill-health was reportedly the most common reason girls miss school, 'I come to school every day unless I become sick that is when I do not come to school' [Learner3-Highlands, 18 years, Female]; 'I go to school every day but, because I sometimes suffer from recurrent tonsillitis, this year I skipped school twice' [Learner3-Urban, 16 years, Female].

Parents acknowledged that their children miss school due to ill-health as expressed in the following, 'My son goes to school every day. That is from Monday to Friday unless he is sick, and he has to go to hospital or stays at home get healed' [Parent1-Senqu Valley, 30 years, Male]; 'He was sick but it was at intervals' [Parent5-Urban, 49 years, Female]; 'He always goes to school except when he was sick from the injury he got this year and it was for few days' [Parent2-Highlands, 75 years, Female]. However, these seem isolated cases that may pose minimal damage to learners' education over the long run, and the findings may therefore bear little significance to boys' disadvantage.

#### Relationships, early marriage and early and unintended pregnancy

Romantic relationships, marriage and unintended pregnancy were reported to affect both boys' and girls' education pathways – particularly when learners drop out of school to parent. While these were seen to particularly affect girls, as reported here: 'Yes, there is an increase of dropouts in girls compared to the previous year because of pregnancy. This year, it is higher because learners had long breaks and spent more time idling when teachers were on strike' [Community3-Urban, 47 years, School Board Member, Male], boys were also expected to support their partners with potential impact on their education:

**"Boys are forced to get married if they impregnate a girl."**  
- Teacher5-Highlands, 60 years, Female

Early and unintended pregnancy did not appear to be the main contributory factor in either girls' or boys' exclusion though. The Children Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 prevents discrimination of learners on the basis of pregnancy status. As such, learners who are committed to their studies during pregnancy have legal recourse to continue their education.

#### Poor self-image linked to poverty

Poverty affects how learners view themselves, determines their outlook on life, and impacts their educational outcomes. The findings tally with Ntho's (2013) research results, which found that providing bursaries without addressing learners' socio-economic challenges hardly reduces boys' disengagement from education and subsequent search for low-skilled jobs such as herding.

The following are some participants' observations; 'Boys from less privileged families are being victimized by those that are from privileged families about their appearance in their school uniform' [Community2-Senqu Valley, 42 years, Male]; 'Children are forced by circumstances to leave school

because the issue of not affording school uniforms and other needs makes them feel inferior' [Community1-Highlands, 35 years, Female]; 'They are mostly late for school, their uniform is usually untidy, they lack an understanding of the schoolwork and their homework is hardly ever completed. Such students are usually reserved and are not active in the classroom' [Principal2-Urban, Male].

Behind self-image, poverty also impacts on learners' ability to concentrate and engage with school:

**"Having no lunch at school discourages me to love school as I sometimes go to school with an empty stomach. Sometimes when I cannot afford to buy myself lunch or do not have a lunchbox it means that I am not eating that day."**

- Learner5-Urban, aged 16 years, Male

### Behaviour and attitudes

Several people in the study reported that boys are difficult to control, and that boys' conduct plays a role in poor academic performance and ultimate dropout. Comments about boys being stubborn and ill-behaved were common, with resulting impacts on educational participation and outcomes:

**"Teenage boys are mostly affected because at this stage, they are stubborn. They do not want to be disciplined and they answer in class when they only like. They do as they please. This affects their education badly."**

- Learner5-Urban, aged 16 years, Male

**"Being bossy and stubborn, they can keep secrets just like men do. They are always seen in shady mischievous behaviours. They have a tendency of going to school with harmful pricking objects."**

- Parent8-Urban, aged 52 years, Female

**"These students, especially boys, tend to be stubborn and begin to loiter around not going school."**

- Community1-Urban, aged 51 years, Male

Boys' behaviours and attitudes were found to be particularly problematic following initiation schools, as highlighted also in the section on factors at the level of the community and the school. Other studies have found that boys who undertake initiation present behavioural problems after performing the rite (Erasmus et al. 2019) and that most boys who drop out of school to go for initiation never come back to complete their studies (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2018).

**"Boys from initiation school have a bad attitude towards teachers and they no longer respect them. Hence they do not do better than those who did not go to initiation schools."**

- Learner4-Highlands, aged 16 years, Female

### Drugs, alcohol and risk-taking

The tendency for boys to be unruly was believed to be linked to the abuse of drugs, alcohol and other risk taking. While girls were also believed to be affected, boys were said to be the majority of those using drugs. Drug abuse is against school rules and learners addicted to drugs are most likely to be disadvantaged and to disengage from education. In some cases parents may not be aware of the situation: 'Most of them no longer participate in school activities but just joined drug groups. That is,



they no longer attend school even though their parents think they are at school' [Community2-Urban, aged 59 years, Male]. Other parents think it is the case; for example, when asked what is likely to pull boys away from school, 'drugs and alcohol' [Parent1-Urban, aged 40 years, Female].

**"During break or lunch time boys tend to smoke dagga or cigarette and sometimes they do not even return to classes. Boys who smoke should make an agreement that during weekdays they focus on their schoolwork and they will use drugs during the weekend."**

**- Learner4-Urban, aged 17 years, Male**

### Low interest and motivation

In addition to misbehaviour, it was revealed that some learners have negative attitudes towards education and that schoolwork feels like a burden. The following are some of the views, 'Coming to school during winter because one has to wake up very early in the morning even when it's very cold' [Learner2-Urban, 17 years, Male]. This also applies to girls, 'I do not come to school every day because I sometimes feel like not going to school. I become lazy to go to school' [Learner8-Highlands, 17 years, Female]; 'Children are no longer interested in going to school, irrespective of their economic status, where some children are needy, most of them are no longer willing to go to school' [Community1-Urban, 51 years, Male]. This was perhaps most strongly epitomized in the following quote:

**"Most boys do not go to school because they do not have much interest in educational activities."**

**- Community1-Highlands, aged 35 years, Female**

Results from this study tally with findings from the Pulamaliboho Nutrition and Health Consulting (2015) report, which concluded that many boys interviewed found formal education not beneficial. With many members of the community uneducated (Bureau of Statistics, 2016) and unlikely to encourage them to pursue formal education, it can become easy for boys in the rural areas to disengage from education. To a great extent, individual decisions to abandon school are a reflection of influences children have in their inner circle such as friends or family.

### Family influences

Family influence is viewed broadly to include socio-economic resources, customs and views about education, and the extent to which parents participate in a child's education.

### Poverty

The most commonly expressed form of exclusion boys experience comes from parents who cannot afford fees for secondary education. However, children still withdraw from primary education, which is free and compulsory. Many households in Lesotho are severely affected by poverty, which has a negative impact on the education prospects of boys. The following excerpt represent some of the views related to economic exclusion, 'Some children have the problem of parents who cannot afford to pay for their school fees especially at secondary... for some children their parents cannot afford to buy school uniforms and shoes' [Community3-Highlands, School Board Member, 55 years, Male].

Poor economic background exposes children from rural areas to inadequate parental support and supervision, as some parents leave to look for jobs and children are left without a guardian. Some participants state, 'Children should be under parental guidance, if not, the guardians have to take responsibility, but the situation is different here. They stay alone. The community encourages them to go to initiation schools and look for jobs' [Community1-Senqu Valley, 43 years, Male]. The lack of

adult supervision was highlighted also in other contexts: ‘Their parents take them here in the urban areas and they stay with people who don’t support them academically, either relatives or they stay alone. Others have parents who work in South Africa and are left at home with other children’ [Principal1, Female].

Erasmus et al. (2019) also describe the effects of HIV and AIDS on many children who are orphaned and poor, where high levels of unemployment mean learners from low socio-economic backgrounds fail to meet basic necessities (secondary school fees, uniform, transport and so forth) contributing to boys’ exit from education (see also UNESCO, 2018). Child vulnerability resulting from orphanhood was also found to be a challenge in a study by Pulamaliboho Nutrition and Health Consulting (2015). In this review, some orphaned children were found to be left with grandparents who are not only unable to support the children financially but have reduced supervisory ability for the children’s studies and behaviour more generally. Boys who are orphaned were also noted to be particularly at risk in this study, particular in child-headed households where gendered expectations mean that boys take on a role in supporting their families:

“Boys who have lost their parents can’t just sit back and watch their siblings suffer in their presence. They would rather drop out from school and work for the siblings and send them to school. Boys feel compelled to drop out of school and take care of others.”

- Principal1, Female

“The major cause of this pattern is family systems which are weak. Remember Lesotho has high number of orphans, so children live in child-headed households. Even in those remaining families where older relatives live with orphans, they lessen the burden of raising more children by taking boys to herd animals and give girls up for early marriages and only send their own children to school.”

- Key Informant2, Female

However, with primary education free, 51 percent of the boys dropping out before Grade 5 (see **Figures 16, 17 and 18**), and a considerable number (32 percent) citing the cost of education as the reason (see **Figure 20**), it is obvious that it is not the cost of schooling alone that acts as a barrier but the cultural view of life in rural communities that undermines the value of formal education. This was confirmed by one key informant from the Highlands who shared:

“The community invests a lot on livestock. So most boys are herd boys and not in education... Economic status has less influence because most have money to pay for school requirements but neither parents nor children are interested in education.”

-35 year old woman, the Highlands

### Gender roles and expectations – herd boys instead of schoolboys

Children have close interactions with their families and, as such, influence them and are influenced by them. Boys may be disadvantaged by gender roles they are perceived to play in their families as expressed in the following:



**“In the family, boys and girls are treated differently. Our parents make sure that all girls’ needs are all satisfied while boys have to work hard for their needs to be covered.”**

**- Learner4-Highlands, 14 years, Male**

**“In the family, boys are expected to support their parents financially.”**

**- Learner1-Highlands, Male**

The gendered and pastoralist nature of Lesotho’s economy is another factor contributing to boys’ disadvantage and disengagement in education. Frequent requests for boys to help in planting or herding or even dropping out to look for jobs are reflections of the gendered labour in the country where it is the duty of boys to engage economically in the family (Taylor and Spaull, 2015).

Research reveals that most boys who drop out of school and become herd boys come from families where parents are unemployed or practice subsistence farming (ibid.). A study conducted by Pulamaliboho Nutrition and Health Consulting (2015) of 73 herd boys found that poverty is one of the reasons boys drop out of school to herd. Parents of the boys in the study were unemployed, mainly dependent on subsistence farming and the families’ means of survival were erratic. Two-thirds of the boys had not completed primary education, and the main reason for dropping out of school was lack of money. The impacts of these expectations on educational participation and performance were highlighted by many in the Highlands and Senqu Valley regions:

**“Boys are groomed to be heads of families who know how look after cattle... Parents tell me to go and search for missing cattle, I sometimes return late and no longer have a chance to read”**

**- Learner6-Senqu Valley, Male**

**“If it is time to shear sheep, [boys] are expected to go there, and the process might take up to five days. That means 5 days of missing school. When they come back, they fall back and underperform.”**

**- Community3-Senqu Valley, School Board Member, Male**

**“If the teacher introduces a topic, for example, trigonometry, the following day it’s that child’s turn to herd animals, when the child comes back to school after a day, they would not be able to follow. As a result, boys drop out.”**

**- Key Informant2, Female**

In rural areas, parents ‘allocate their school-going children various assignments which tend to impact on school attendance’ (Lefoka et al., 2012, p. 52). This can go beyond livestock, as highlighted above, to also buying groceries, fetching water or other tasks (see **Annex**). The subsequent loss of learning time from frequent absenteeism may negatively affect boys’ motivation to learn. Frequent requests for boys to help in planting or herding or even dropping out to look for jobs are reflections of the gendered perception of labour in the country where it is the duty of boys to engage economically in the family (Taylor and Spaull, 2015). The results tally with research in Lesotho by Erasmus (2019), which found that some parents pressure their children to leave school and seek employment.

### Limited parental support to boys’ education

Where parents are not enthusiastic about education, as pointed out by Lefoka et al. (2012), parental backgrounds and outlooks on life are important in explaining boys’ disadvantage and disengagement within education. For example, some parents’ indifference toward education, based on the length of time it takes to realize its benefits, they influence their sons to go to initiation schools, transition into manhood and subsequently become herd boys as a form of adult occupation (Lefoka et al., 2012).

The absence of parental role models is confirmed by the World Bank report that indicates that 81 percent of the heads of households in rural areas have no education (World Bank, 2015). This not only makes families poor and unable to afford costs related to education, but also creates an environment in which it can be difficult to encourage boys to attend and stay longer in schools.

**Figure 5** shows that, besides the high cost of secondary education making it inaccessible, some boys from rural and urban areas seem to not find education useful. It can be argued that improving the relevance of education and facilitating more collaboration between schools and neighbouring communities could encourage parents to take an active role in their children's education and reduce indifference towards education.

The parental role in boys' disadvantage and exclusion is also acknowledged by school management, 'Parents are not active in assisting students with their homework, therefore they become demotivated to work hard and improve their performance' [Principal3, Female]; 'I think such behaviours arise from parents' inactive role in the students' academic life. A large number of parents are not involved in their children's academic life' [Principal2, Male]; This is corroborated by community leaders who echo the same sentiments, 'Parents do not communicate schoolwork with boys. That discourages boys if they do not find support from their parents' [Community2-Senqu Valley, 42 years, Male]. It seems apparent that to improve boys' participation, parental awareness must be raised about the importance of education. There is a culture of impunity; parents feel they can do as they please with their children while their decisions must be guided by national laws.

**"Culture. I wish parents could understand that it is their responsibility to ensure children attend school regularly and may only get assistance with herding for them after school."**

- Key Informant1, Male

## Peer influences

Besides family, children are also influenced by their circle of friends with whom they interact on a regular basis. Peer influence also contributes to boys' disengagement from education. In the rural areas, they are influenced by friends to leave formal education for initiation schools, while in the urban region a greater influence is towards abuse of drugs (which also leads to disengagement).

### Peer attitudes towards education

Boys are encouraged to leave school by their peers who question the relevance of education, or who have already dropped out of school. The following are some of the views shared, 'Some boys have friends who react negatively towards school and they discourage them from going to school because they say school is useless' [Learner3-Highlands, 17 years, Male], and here:

**"Our peers who are out of school advise us to drop-out. They say it's very nice to stay at home."**

- Learner7-Senqu Valley, 16 years, Male]

Peer expectations around initiation schools, and resulting implications on education, is also important. Initiation as a custom that pulls away learners from education is evident from the following responses, 'We are living in the villages where one is criticized for not going to initiation school because boys are expected to do so' [Learner6-Senqu Valley, 15 years, Male]; 'Boys normally dropout of school and go to initiation school because they hate being criticized, boys from the rural villages are expected to go for initiation school as part of their culture' [Learner1-Senqu Valley, 17 years, Male]. These views are echoed by those from adults in the same regions, 'There is a lot of

influence. The first thing that these boys are easily teased, either by those that come from Ceres or those that come from initiation and these things cause the boys to leave school so that they can be like their peers. Some are sponsored to be at school, but they are not ashamed to misuse their opportunities' [Teacher7-Senqu Valley, 37 years, Female].

The influence of initiation customs is mainly on what boys think and do once they have undergone the ritual, and their attitude towards formal education drastically challenges and they begin to disengage from their studies. Their behaviour becomes harder to manage after initiation school, as noted earlier (Erasmus et al., 2019). This also reflects the challenges encountered by children from communities with few literate people (Bureau of Statistics, 2016), as they lack role models that could motivate them to stay longer in school.

Peer influences on drug and alcohol abuse and other risk-taking behaviour is also highlighted above, and evident in these views shared: 'Boys face difficulties that are caused by peers at home or peer from different schools who may engage them in risky behaviours that may involve the intervention of the police. These may also be caused by the use of drugs and alcohol' [Teacher5-Urban, 51 years Female]; 'Even when a boy can complete his secondary education, you would never know what went wrong when they are at tertiary. Boys are easily influenced by their peers into smoking and drinking and end up dropping out of school' [Community3-Urban, 47 years, School Board Member, Male] Drug abuse may not be limited to children in urban areas, as a divergent view is expressed by a participant from the rural areas, 'When my son is not at school, he goes to the fields to look after my cows, goats and sheep and when he is there, he joins his peers that deals with drugs and cigarettes' [Parent5-Senqu Valley, 50 years, Female]. Peer influences as revealed in this study reflect challenges and attitudes of the broader communal ethos on education.

## Mesosystem

### Community influences

Community influences overlap with family and peers, as the community reflects broader norms and attitudes that inform family, peer and individual values. Children in the rural areas of Lesotho mainly disengage from education because of initiation if they are boys, and early marriage if they are girls.

#### Initiation schools – becoming “a man”

Boys' need to conform to Basotho customs including attendance in initiation school is an important element contributing to boys' disengagement from education. Rathebe (2018, pp. 1-2) defines initiation schools 'as cultural educational institutions, where initiates are taught about societal norms, manhood values, traditional beliefs and customs...initiation ceremonies form an integral part of the Basotho culture and is performed for boys who are considered ready to become young men'.

From this perspective, it can be argued that once a young boy performs the initiation rite, there is a mind shift in how he views formal education, which is traditionally reserved for 'children'. Initiation is a passage into adulthood and will naturally require the young adult to seek out a life other than formal education after the completion of the rite. These include seeking a job and/or marriage, whichever comes first. When boys return from traditional initiation schools, their interest in formal schooling therefore dissipates as it does not fit with the view of what “makes” a man in their society.

Girls from Senqu Valley, in particular, gave elaborate descriptions of the effects of initiation on boys' attitudes to education:

**“Boys from initiation school distance themselves from other students because they think they are different.”**

**-17 year old female student, Senqu Valley**

**“Boys from initiation school lack social interaction and engagement skills with other students because they feel superior.”**

-15 year old female student, Senqu Valley

**“After initiation school they feel older and responsible, they also don’t care about their schoolwork.”**

-16 year old female student, Senqu Valley

All boys in the Senqu Valley engaged in this study said boys are expected to go for initiation:

**“Boys from the rural villages are expected to go to initiation school as it is part of their culture.”**

-17 year old male student, Senqu Valley

**“We are living in the villages where one is criticized if they do not go to initiation school. Boys are expected to do so.”**

-15 year old male student, Senqu Valley

This was also confirmed by community members engaged in the study, who identified a direct link between going to initiation schools and boys’ disengagement from school:

**“When they come back from initiation schools, they consider themselves men and can’t go back to school with kids.... Boys after reaching a certain age should go to initiation, get married and have kids, so the child grows up channelled this way.”**

-Male School Board Member, Senqu Valley

**“The issue is that boys go to initiation and when they come back, they no longer want to attend school and therefore marry girls.”**

-Male School Board Member, Senqu Valley

Discussion on this was limited from other sites. In particular, the initiation custom seems to have minimal effect in the urban region as boys from there said nothing about it as a barrier to boys’ participation in education. This was also confirmed by one woman, aged 35 in the Highlands: “Those in urban locations are less challenged because the issue of initiation is less of a focus. Initiation can be seen, though, as a door out of education for boys. As one boy from the Highlands, referring to the effects of a prolonged teachers’ industrial strike in 2019 on his education stated:

**“We did not gain anything from school this year. I don’t find the need to come to school when I am already going to fail because I know nothing.**

**I’d rather go to initiation school and become a man.”**

-19 year old male student, Highlands

Even when boys’ do not immediately disengage from education following initiation, several participants remarked that boys’ attitudes had changed – contributing eventually to their educational demise as reported below. Other studies have found that boys who undertake initiation present behaviour problems after performing the rite (Erasmus et al. 2019), including against teachers who have not been initiated, as reported by one principal in the study:

**“When they come back to school after going to initiation schools, boys no longer respect teachers. This attitude leads them to fail tests and examinations.”**

**-15 year old female student, Highlands**

Given that the large population of Basotho live in the rural areas and are poor (UNDP, 2017), and parents living in these areas have a negative attitude towards formal education, (Lefoka et al., 2012), boys from rural communities are vulnerable to disengagement. Most boys who drop out of school to go for initiation never come back to complete their studies (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2018).

### Community expectations of boys

Boys’ disadvantage and disengagement from education are also linked to how communities perceive boys and their roles in society.

When asked what attributes a good boy has, here are some of the views shared: ‘Good boys are those that please their parents even if it’s through farming. There is a clash with customs and communal expectations of what is a good boy’ [Community4-Urban, aged 58 years, Female]. ‘A good boy is the one who can listen to his parents and help other people when they are in need’ [Learner5-Highlands, aged 19 years, Male]. The views expressed by many adults equally show that attributes associated with being a boy reflect communalism and developing positive interpersonal relations. These have nothing to do with advancing oneself academically. Qualities that describe a boy such as, ‘submissive’, ‘understanding’, ‘respecting’ and so on refer to an African communal way of living, interdependence, and do not depict individual attributes of a child that can make them assertive and independent. Being raised within this attitude means that children cannot, therefore, claim their right to education if denied by a parent or an adult.

The gendered nature of labour (Taylor and Spaul, 2015) puts pressure on boys to find employment than stay in school. It can be understood that subsistence farming is a way of life in the rural parts of Lesotho and success in it is what defines success in that context. This can be understood in the following statements: ‘Culturally, there are activities like herding that boys pride themselves with more than going to school because their economic activity is the pastoral kind’ [Key Informant2, Female]; ‘This location influences boys to opt for farming rather than attending school and the community invests much on livestock. So, most boys are herd boys and not in education... Economic status has less influence because most have money to pay for school requirements but both parents and children are not interested in education’ [Community1-Highlands, aged 35 years, Female].

The pastoralist nature of the Lesotho economy means that farmers are the role models and employers in rural areas (Taylor and Spaul, 2015; UNESCO, 2019), but they are not formally educated and this hardly motivates boys to stay in school. Formal education is also hampered by the high unemployment rate of college and university graduates in Lesotho, ‘They are not motivated when they see people who have gone to school at home with no jobs’ [Teacher2-Highlands, 41 years, It seems the relevance of formal education may be called into question as formal education does not seem to add value to local economies, so communities may perceive it as incompatible with their ways of life.

### Locations of schools

According to UNDP (2017), the Government of Lesotho has not built enough schools within walking distance from some communities and, as such, many children have problem accessing education equitably. Two secondary schools selected for this study were in the rural part of Mokhotlong district, Highlands and Quthing district, Senqu Valley. They were both incomplete, in that classes ended with grade 10 while secondary education ends with grade 12. This implies that, although learners already walked long distances to school, parents would face further challenges of paying rent for their children to complete upper secondary. Challenges relating to the distance learners walk

to school in rural areas are expressed as follows, ‘During rainy days, the river I cross to school overflows and I sometimes get discouraged to go to school because I will be walking a very long distance’ [Learner9-Senqu Valley, 18 years, Male]; ‘I face a challenge in rainy days when rivers overflow, I have to walk a long distance to school and end up being late’ [Learner7-Senqu Valley, 16 years, Male].

Learners’ challenges are acknowledged but ignored as teachers still punish latecomers, as stated in the following, ‘Learners are punished if they arrive late at school. This might be another reason for these difficulties. Some learners travel about 2KM to school. Others come from the other side of the river and normally when it’s raining, the river overflows and they have to use the longest route to school and arrive late’ [Community3-Senqu Valley, School Board Member, Male]. These findings confirm results from other studies (World Bank, 2015; UNDP, 2017) showing that the lack of motivation to pursue formal education is exacerbated by the distance they travel to school for children in rural areas, particularly for boys who face not only long distances but expectations to support the family economically.

### School influences

Key issues that were raised in this study include teaching and learning facilities, the quality of education, the relevance of the curriculum, the policy on learner progression at primary level and teachers’ professional conduct.

#### Facilities and infrastructure

Beyond distance, the facilities and infrastructure available in and on the way to schools are often incomplete. Two communities selected for this study lack basic services such as electricity and bridges close to school so that learners can cross flooded rivers with ease. All schools selected had no library, and only one, in the urban area, has a science laboratory and a computer laboratory with 50 computers connected to the internet. These were only used, however, for research purposes as it was unable to accommodate all learners. The contrast in availability of teaching and learning resources (from a basic science lab to a modern computer lab) speaks to limited access to education in the rural areas, confirmed also by the World Bank (2015). A school in the Highlands had only one toilet shared by all students, and that was problematic.

**“The school does not have a science lab. We always imagine things and do theories only, nothing practical.”**

**- Learner2-Highlands, aged 21 years, Male**

When asked what was needed, one learner replied:

**“Increase school infrastructure – that is, increase classrooms numbers, build science labs and a library, toilets and accessibility of water in the school compound.”**

**- Learner4-Highlands, aged 21 years, Male**

### Relevance of education

There are different views as to whether the school curriculum in Lesotho fits the purpose as noted, ‘These children do not learn what they are supposed to. If you ask them about the climate in Lesotho, they will tell you ‘cold winters and hot summers’ yet Mokhotlong is still cold in summer. They are not taught about the realities of their lives. That the air in the highlands is fresher than the lowlands. There is nothing that helps children understand their communities better, there is no connection between school curriculum and everyday life in the community. Our syllabus is irrelevant’ [Community4-Urban, 58 years, Female]; ‘I think when you talk of relevance of education that they



are being offered today, it's really important that rural schools must adapt the curriculum so that if they also want to learn about agriculture they should be able to learn about it, schools should be helping them to do better in their own environment' [Key informant4, Female]; 'What we learn from school should be closer to the interests of the learners. Learners should feel they are partaking in something valuable ... for example, we teach children about camels before we can teach them about sheep which are part of their daily life' [Key informant1, Male]. However, one participant thinks the current curriculum is relevant but is poorly implemented as he states, 'The curriculum does cater for the needs of children especially this latest curriculum, but teachers are not well trained, and you cannot expect people to master it while they got four days training' [Community1-Senqu Valley, 43 years, Male].

Inadequate teaching and learning resources also seem to impact the quality of the curriculum delivery as stated below, 'We are studying and have learnt something about primary school teachers. They are under pressure to finish and are not able to deliver quality education. There are inadequate teaching aids to help learners understand abstract concepts' [Key informant1, Male]; 'The curriculum was initially implemented to develop the child based on their strengths and abilities, but because of high pupil teacher ratios, facilities and follow ups, it is not happening as it should. Teachers do not pay attention and don't even know the children's names, let alone their abilities. There is a shortage of teachers, which prevents the implementation of this curriculum' [Community4-Urban, 58 years, Female]. A critical look at the sufficiency of teaching and learning resources and relevance of the current curriculum is needed so that any gaps are addressed.

Taylor and Spaul (2015) argue that the massification of education in Sub-Saharan Africa has been an expansion of schooling access without ensuring that learning occurs. This, they argue, has the potential to produce people who have no skills to be absorbed by the labour market. The schooling quality defined by Taylor and Spaul (2015, p.48) and adopted for this study is 'the value added by a school to its students', which goes beyond mere test scores to acquisition of skills relevant for community development. Ensuring skills taught meet the labour market is important. Erasmus et al. (2019) found that boys in Eswatini, Lesotho and Malawi saw school as a waste of time if they could earn a lot of money without education - making boys more worried about job prospects than girls.

### Teachers, teacher competencies and teaching quality

Although Lesotho has expanded educational access, the education system has not yet ensured quality education for all, due to inadequate resources in schools and low investment in early childhood education. Educational resources also need to be better managed (UNDP, 2017). An evaluation of Lesotho's attainment of Millennium Development Goals found that one of the key barriers to schooling quality in Lesotho was a shortage of qualified teachers and high pupil-teacher ratios at the primary school level (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2016). Similarly, a study by UNESCO (2015) states that contributing factors to the low quality of education include 'the proportion of unqualified teachers, and high repetition rates particularly for boys', p.45. The latest annual education statistics confirm that there are unqualified teachers employed by the Ministry with more (12 percent) at the primary level and only a few (3 percent) at secondary level (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018c). However, the effect of unqualified educators on the quality of education needs further investigation, as the wastage is so high that it is unlikely to be solely attributable to unqualified teachers.

Furthermore, Moloi, et al. (2008) suggest that the poor retention of learners results from, *inter alia*, poor resources such as teaching overcrowded classrooms of up to 70 students per teacher. High pupil-teacher ratios are said to result in teachers resorting to defensive and teacher-centred approaches that are intended to control learning activities (Moloi et al. 2008). Another cause for concern is inadequate teaching and learning resources in schools, such as books, as it was found that only 50 percent of grade 6 learners in 2007 had exclusive use of a mathematics textbook (Jopo, Maema and Ramokoena, 2011). A recent study concurs that there are 'few books or written



materials in Lesotho schools' (Acer Centre for Global Education Monitoring, 2014). On a different front, Ntho (2013) argues that one of the contributing factors to low quality education in Lesotho is the system's lack of an objective measure of schooling quality, as examinations are merely used for certification and transition from one grade to the next. Thus, the lack of a reliable measure of the effect of inputs on outputs can lead some learners to drop out of school as seems irrelevant to their daily needs.

Nonetheless, it is vital to assess the extent to which teachers meet the learning needs of boys in schools and the possible effect of a teacher's gender on boys' motivation to learn and remain in school. **Table 6** shows that the teaching workforce at primary school level was predominantly female for 15 years before reaching parity in the past three years. The extent to which teachers' gender influences boys' motivation to learn has not been explored in Lesotho, and neither is it the focus on the current study. It is worth noting in **Table 6** is that pupil-teacher-ratio has greatly improved since the beginning of free primary education in 2000. However, national averages of these ratios must be read cautiously, as they may not translate equitably in individual school contexts – hence the need for individual case studies, such as this one, to depict school realities of equitable access to education resources.

**Table 6: Registered primary schools, gross and net enrolment rates and pupil-teacher ratios, 2001-2018**

Year	Gross enrolment				Net enrolment				
	Boys	Girls	GPI	Total	Boys	Girls	GPI	Total	PTR
2001	120.6	123.2	1.02	121.9	79.5	85.4	1.07	82.7	47
2002	122.7	124.9	1.02	123.8	81.1	87.0	1.07	84.0	47
2003	123.8	125.9	1.02	124.9	82.0	88.1	1.07	85.0	46
2004	126.2	127.0	1.01	126.6	81.0	86.0	1.06	83.0	44
2005	126.0	126.3	1.00	126.1	80.6	85.7	1.06	83.1	42
2006	127.3	127.5	1.00	127.4	81.6	86.3	1.06	83.9	41
2007	120.8	120.2	1.00	120.5	79.5	83.4	1.05	81.4	37
2008	119.3	118.6	0.99	119.0	79.9	84.1	1.05	82.0	35
2009	116.2	116.2	1.00	116.2	78.6	83.2	1.06	80.9	34
2010	116.2	113.9	0.98	115.1	80.1	83.5	1.04	81.8	34
2011	114.6	111.3	0.97	113.0	80.2	83.1	1.04	81.6	34
2012	111.6	108.8	0.97	110.2	79.6	82.6	1.04	81.1	34
2013	105.8	103.9	0.98	104.9	75.6	79.0	1.04	77.3	33
2014	103.4	101.1	0.98	102.3	75.1	78.2	1.04	76.6	33
2015	101.0	98.5	0.98	99.8	74.4	77.2	1.04	75.8	33.1
2016	119.0	113.0	0.98	116.0	89.0	89.8	1.01	89.4	33.8
2017	115.7	109.8	0.95	112.7	87.1	86.9	1.00	87.0	33.0
2018	109.6	103.9	0.95	106.7	84.8	85.6	1.00	85.2	33.4

Data Source: Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training (2018c).

Quality concerns were also voiced in this study. One participant notes, 'I think educational quality is an issue. We know that as from looking at the data and learning outcomes of 7-8 year-olds that they are relatively low. So I think while Lesotho has done well getting a lots of kids in schools, the learning is still lacking and that is why some kids drop out' [Key Informant4, Female]. Another participant raises a different challenge to the quality dimension, 'This is with regard to the PPA (pass one pass all) method mentioned earlier. This method has lowered the competition between students even among teachers. Everyone is already assured that they are moving to the next grade whether they pass or not. Most students have become lazy' [Principal2, Male].

**"I think where Lesotho has done well getting a lots of kids in schools. But the learning is still lacking and that is why some kids drop out."**

- Key Informant4, Female

Implementation of the integrated curriculum in Lesotho changed its focus from assessment of learning to assessment for learning. Whereas previously, primary school teachers would teach and assess whether learners can fail or pass a grade, no learner fails in the new dispensation. Teachers must identify and address individual learning paths of all learners in his or her class. Given the number of learners in grades 1 and 2 in the urban primary school, it can be challenging to implement this curriculum, and some learners may not attain basic skills for each grade. It has also been found that none of the schools has a teaching philosophy, teachers use defensive methods to keep control of their classes and compensate for inadequate teaching and learning resources. At times, as noted below, teachers fail to manage the behaviour of learners and use corporal punishment, which is outlawed by the Education Act of 2010. Results on inadequate resources such as classroom space and high teacher-pupil ratio align with results from previous research (UNESCO, 2015; Kingdom of Lesotho, 2016).

### Teacher-student interactions

Teacher-student interactions affect boys' experience of education, and are influenced by teachers' expectations of boys, as well as teachers' ability to manage classroom dynamics. Some learners felt that boys and girls had different interactions with teachers:

**"Boys and girls are not treated equal at school by teachers. Boys receive or are given hard punishment when they did the same mistake as a girl."**

- Learner 4, Highlights, Male

**"At school, boys are expected to perform better than girls in most of the subjects."**

- Learner 3, Highlands, Male

Many teachers were reported to have challenges managing student behaviour in their classes and fail to use learner-centred approaches in teaching and managing learners' behaviour. One participant notes that some schools are not child-friendly, 'At school, teachers have a mentality that boys have bad behaviour, and therefore approach them with that mentality without getting to the bottom of the cause for such behaviours and as a result they neglect them and do not encourage good behaviour' [Community1-Highlands, 35 years, Female].

Corporal punishment was a key theme emerging this study, affecting boys' interest in continuing their education:

**"Corporal punishment makes me lose interest in going to school."**

- Learner 1, Urban, Aged 16 years, Male

**"I suspect that teachers are likely to beat the boys than girls and that is an issue likely to make boys feel excluded, unsafe and not wanting to go to school."**

**So, I do think that is probably the big issue."**

**- Learner 1, Urban, Aged 16 years, Male [Key informant4, Female].**

A hostile teaching and learning environment is likely to discourage learners with limited interest in formal education to continue their studies. Teacher professionalism is low in some schools, as shown below, 'Our children are not happy with their principal and the way she treats them especially when they are from poor families' [Parent7-Highlands, 65 years, Female]; 'One Government school was closed due to teachers' discipline because most teachers there were not qualified. The school hired people from urban areas to teach and most had no experience and others were teaching irrelevant content, and as such parents lost their confidence and withdraw their children from the school. The school was forced to close' [Community1-Senqu Valley, 43 years, Male]. The findings on the need for teachers' continuous professional development to manage learners' behaviour are unique to this study. They affect learner motivation and may lead to disengagement of those learners in the rural schools perceived to be 'cheeky' after returning from initiation school.

## Macrosystem

### State and society

An examination of the role of the state and society on boys' disadvantage and disengagement from education revealed that available legislation is not implemented adequately to protect the boys' interests.

#### Insufficient legal frameworks

First, the complaints by learners about corporal punishment show that enactment of the 2010 Education Act abolishing the punishment has had little effect in changing teachers' views and attitudes towards such methods. Boys are thought to be cheeky, hard to control or at times they are punished for being late despite the long distances that learners walk to schools and the social responsibilities parents give them before school. Management of behaviour that schools find contrary to school rules must accommodate individual difference and mainly comply with national laws.

Second, the principles of free and compulsory education from the 2010 Education Act and education as a right declared by the Children's Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 have not yet been realized. Responses reflect that these policies have failed, as in the following, 'There are no laws making dropouts to get back to school' [Key Informant3, Male]; 'Free and compulsory education is free but not compulsory. Implementation of this policy is failing; parents are not held responsible for ensuring that their children are at school. No one takes responsibility for children found begging on the streets or herding animals in the fields' [Community4-Urban, 58 years, Female]; 'Again, the law does not enforce the importance of the Free and 'compulsory' education... we deal with and help children who did not go to school at all, so we do basic education' [Key Informant2, Female]; 'Although there are laws protecting children at an early age, they are not practiced because most people still hire underage children. As the society, we take advantage of the economic status of poor children' [Community1-Highlands, 35 years, Female].

Third, the Government should deliver on mother-tongue education, which should be the norm until grade three. The most excluded are minority languages that are found predominantly in the southern part of the country. A lack of minority languages in the school curriculum was evident in the following comment by a student from the Xhosa ethnicity, 'I do not that like the fact that English and

Sesotho are taught as different subjects. I want them to be taught at the same time as this could be easier for us to understand them because they are both language' [Learner6-Senqu Valley, 15 years, Male]. Sesotho and English are official languages in Lesotho and are both compulsory subjects throughout primary and secondary. However, as it appears in the eyes of a minority language speaker, they are both just languages and maybe making one compulsory would make sense so that minority language learners could choose their native languages as the second language to study at school.

Reacting to the launch of the new Language Education Policy, one participant states that the content has already been policy in the Ministry of Education and has just not been implemented. He notes, 'This policy has always been around and the Ministry has been failing the community because children here have IsiXhosa as their mother tongue but we are teaching them in Sesotho and most of the time they do not even understand simple Sesotho phrases like greetings when they start school' [Community1-Senqu Valley, 43 years, Male]. The extent of the damage resulting from the failure to implement a Language in Education Policy is not known, as one participant observes, 'The issue of language barriers contributes. I heard that in the south some learners of different ethnicities don't go to school on the basis that they are taught in Sesotho' [Key Informant2, Female].

**"I heard that in the south some learners of different ethnicities don't go to school on the basis that they are taught in Sesotho."**

**- Key informant2, Female**

Fourth, the Children's Protection and Welfare Act of 2011, which describes a child as 'a person under the age of 18', is undermined by the practice of initiation schools. One of the main contributors to boys' disengagement is enrolment at initiation schools to enter manhood and dissociate from formal education, which is attended by 'children'. As noted: 'In terms of completion rate, the number of learners who complete is decreasing. Learners don't complete because boys go to initiation schools' [Community2-Highlands, school board, 30 years, Male]. The key weakness noted by one participant is the timing of the initiation as stated, 'There is no control of these schools because they take young children as young as 9 years and this sort of influence seems to make children not go back to school' [Community3-Highlands, School Board Members, 55 years, Male]. The timing of initiation rites clashes with formal schooling but if the genuine practice of the custom was to be upheld, this is a passage into adulthood, and it cannot be undertaken by children as young as 9 years. Enrolling children younger than 18 years and into initiation schools, given its purpose, is against the law. The Government needs to enforce existing laws to retain boys in school as these underage children are engaged as cheap labour, which contravenes existing legislation.

### Socio-economic influence on access to education

One teacher notes, 'The difference is that those learners whom we expect to perform better because they are from privileged families are the ones who do not perform well while those that are from less privileged families perform better' [Teacher3-Urban, 37 years, Female].

On the other hand, one teacher believes it is one's personality that influences performance, as expressed in the following excerpt, 'Learners' characters help their learning; those of good characters perform better. Again, those learners who are feminine perform better because they act with passion' [Teacher5-Urban, 51 years, Female].

To some extent, teachers complain that learners become vulnerable and underperform due to behaviour problems. The following is a view of a teacher from an urban region; 'Learners who are well off are involved in misbehaviour, activities like the use of drugs and alcohol, as a result they fail to complete their education' [Teacher4-Urban, 29 years, Male]. This view is corroborated in the following excerpt, 'Learners from financially stable homes use drugs. The issue of adjustment for learners who come from model C school, they pick the drug behaviour at that level' [Principal1,

Female]. This indicates that, although these are isolated comments, family wealth does not protect boys from disengagement.

However, poverty is still perceived as contributing to boys' disengagement. One teacher states, 'Learners who are coming from ghetto villages are discouraged to finish their education because their peers talk negative about going to school' [Teacher6-Urban, 35 years, Male]. This shows the influence of both negative socio-economic status and peer pressure, as explained below.

Families' ability to meet basic needs of food, school fees and uniform contributes to whether a learner can feel motivated to learn. These are challenges that have the potential to negatively affect regular attendance and may lead to school drop-out. The following are some of the challenges creating barriers to education noted by participants: 'Having no lunch at school discourages me to love school as I sometimes go to school with an empty stomach. Sometimes when I cannot afford to buy myself lunch or do not have a lunchbox it means that I am not eating that day' [Learner5-Urban, 16 years old, Boy]. This indicates that access to education is affected by the extent to which learners' basic needs other than going to school and learning can be met.

The findings tally with those of Ntho (2013), who found that unmet psychosocial needs of learners can lead to learners dropping out of schools. The learner's views are supported by other participants as in the following excerpt, 'Learners from a disadvantaged background normally drop out of school even if they have a chance of performing well in their studies, and for those who are persistent enough to complete their secondary education, their challenges end there because at tertiary level, they are sponsored. Some learners stay far away from school and sometimes times parents are not able to provide them with transport money and lunch because they do not have lunch at school' [Community3-Urban, 47 years, School Board Member, Male].

## Good practices

### Legal and policy frameworks

Interventions for those struggling to access education feature in the legal and policy framework but do not specifically acknowledge the problems of boys and the particular nature of their challenges. Generally, non-formal education is the main intervention for providing basic education for people who cannot access formal education.

#### Constitution of Lesotho

The Constitution of Lesotho is the supreme law of the land and all legislation flows from and must be consistent with it. Education is provided for under chapter 3, 'Principles of State Policy', which are not enforceable by law. The Constitution deems education as a nonjusticiable principle of state policy and not a human right. Section 28 of the Constitution, 'Provision of Education', outlines the Government's commitment in providing education, declares primary education as compulsory and mandates Government to make it accessible for all, while section 32, 'Protection of children and young persons', refers to children's protection against economic and social exploitation (Kingdom of Lesotho, 1993). Furthermore, the Constitution encourages the development of laws and policies that promote access to education. Two statutes that flow directly from this mandate of the Constitution are the Education Act No. 3 of 2010 and the Children's Protection and Welfare Act No. 7 of 2011.

#### The Education Act No. 3 of 2010

The Education Act is a statute that regulates the administration of schools, employment and deployment of teachers, teachers' conduct and other matters relating to education provision in Lesotho. The purpose and objective of the Act, as stipulated in section 3(a), is to 'make provision for free and compulsory education at primary level'. The Act also declares attendance as compulsory in section 6(1), which states, 'a parent shall enrol a learner in a primary school at the age of six years...and the learner shall stay in school until he or she reaches such age as may be prescribed by the Minister' (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2010). This Act mandates the Government to provide requisite resources that enable access to education for all and obliges parents to send their children to school.

The Education Act's declaration of a free and compulsory education is boosted by the School Feeding Policy that stimulates retention of primary school learners by providing at least two meals per day in all public primary schools to counteract any possible socio-economic barriers to access (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2014). The Government of Lesotho has also tried to ease the financial burden of secondary education in the Act, as it gives the Minister of Education and Training authority to award bursaries to vulnerable learners to study at secondary school level and/or in a special schools, and the Government also instituted fee rationalization in all public secondary schools in an effort to make secondary education accessible (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2010).

Additionally, the Government introduced a textbook rental scheme at secondary level from 2004 to reduce the burden of book fees on parents (UNESCO, 2006). Despite these policy interventions by Government, the cost of secondary education is mainly borne by parents – contributing to large differences in participation rates between primary and secondary education.

#### Children's Protection and Welfare Act No. 7 of 2011

The Children's Protection and Welfare Act complements requirements in the Education Act by providing social protection for children without which free and compulsory education would not be possible. Section 11 is a provision for the 'Right to Education and Health' and section 11(1) reads, 'A child has a right to access education, adequate diet, clothing, shelter, medical attention, social services or any other service required for the child's development'. The Act stipulates that a child's

right to education must be fulfilled irrespective of the type and severity of disability [s11(3)], it prevents exclusion on the basis of a girl being pregnant or a boy participating in a cultural rite [s11(4)] and discourages parents from forcing children to undergo a cultural rite [s11(5)] (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2011). Additionally, section 226 of the Act provides protection against exploitative child labour. For example, section 226(1) and (2) reads, 'No person shall employ a child in exploitative labour. For purposes of this Act, labour is exploitative if it deprives or hinders a child access to health, education and development' (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2011). It can be concluded that this Act sets the framework within which boys' disadvantage and disengagement from education can be managed and accounted for. The mandates of the two statutes have inspired several policies in an attempt to broaden access across various levels of education.

### The National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (NPIECDD)

Early childhood care and development in Lesotho was unregulated for many years until enactment of the NPIECDD in 2013. Strategies four and five are relevant to supporting boys' education, relating to 'improving and expanding inclusive preschool education' and 'child rights to be honoured and child protection services to be expanded and improved' (Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), 2013). Mosia, et al. (2019) state that improving and expanding schools at the early childhood care and development level is important for achieving the policy goals. Due to an inadequate number of pre-primary schools – with 95 percent being privately owned, fee-paying and thus inaccessible for the poor – many vulnerable children (including boys) are excluded. Currently, access to education in pre-primary and in technical and vocational education and training is constrained due to both sectors receiving inadequate attention from the Government (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2018). Boys' disadvantage in pre-primary education can be counteracted by the fifth strategy that relates to honouring child rights and ensuring child protection.

### Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy

The long-awaited Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018a) should be instrumental in stimulating boys' retention in schools, as it addresses a broad range of barriers to learning and development. It calls for efforts to "ensure that the learner is free from any form of discrimination in accessing education and is availed all educational opportunities provided (ibid, p. IV). The policy provides guidelines for the provision of education for learners with disabilities including those with special educational needs. The policy recognises uneven participation in terms of gender, with more boys in primary and more girls in secondary, but little guidance is provided further on the consideration of gendered barriers to education and the intersections between gender, ability, location and other characteristics that can contribute to exclusion.

This presents a missed opportunity by the Ministry to develop a comprehensive policy anchored strongly on the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4. The policy also fails to promote the principle of leaving no one behind, as stipulated by the National Strategic Development Plan, and to engage with the broad mandate of the Ministry of Education and Training as outlined in the Education Sector Strategic Plan. Socio-economic barriers are clearly outlined in the Draft Education Sector Analysis and a policy such as the Lesotho Inclusive Education Policy should be one of the instruments used to redress unequal educational opportunities.

### Lesotho Education Language Policy

The Lesotho Education Language Policy seeks to promote integration of minority languages speakers into the education system by recognizing the pluralistic existence of persons who are deaf, Xhosas, Phuthi and Ndebele by providing initial education in their mother tongue (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019a). Supported by the World Bank, Lesotho is implementing the Lesotho Education Quality for Equality Project and one of the project objectives is 'strengthening school accountability for student learning and retention in target schools' (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019b). Generally, the policy aims to broaden access for the most vulnerable groups in society, such as



learners who belong to minority-language groups, including people with hearing impairments. Although it has always been the policy of the Ministry to provide education in the first three years of school in a mother tongue, implementation of the policy mandate has remained a challenge.

### Other education policies

The Non-Formal Education policy regulates the provision of education and training outside the formal sector, so as to upskill individuals who dropped out of school before they could benefit from formal education (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018b). It acknowledges the failure of the education system to retain learners within formal education long enough to attain basic schooling, and is a deliberate effort by the Government to accommodate people who have disengaged from education (most of whom are boys).

Along with non-formal education, TVET has received limited attention to date. There is a policy note stating that the TVET sector is guided by the Technical and Vocational Education Act of 1984 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019c). If this sector is to complement limited access to secondary education, it must diversify its programmes to suit the market needs (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2018). A planned Draft TVET Bill is due to set up the Lesotho Skills Authority, which would register and accredit TVET institutions (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019c). The Government of Lesotho, through MOET (2019c), developed the Lesotho Qualifications Framework to regulate qualifications in the country, including for basic education and TVET.

The Higher Education Act No. 1 of 2004 regulates the quality of higher education. It established the Council on Higher Education that regulates the governance and funding of public higher education (HE) institutions, the registration of private higher education institutions and promotes quality assurance at this level (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2004). There is also the Higher Education Policy, which highlights the need to regulate access for marginalized groups such as students with disabilities (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2013). Both the Act and the Policy adopt the principle of leaving no one behind, as endorsed by the Sustainable Development Agenda.

### Reducing costs of education

The Education Act of 2010 is an empowering statute for the Government of Lesotho (GOL), as it declares primary education free and compulsory, gives the Minister of Education authority to rationalize secondary education school fees and to award scholarships to vulnerable children (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2010). Ntho (2013) also notes that the Government of Lesotho ‘increase[d] equitable access, especially primary schooling, by introducing special programmes for herd boys by providing grants for schools that accept disadvantaged children and by abolishing school fees’ p.6. The net effect of free primary education was easily observed from 2000 with increasing gross enrolment ratios and net enrolment ratios. However, a high number of children, especially boys, remain excluded from formal education in Lesotho (Lefoka et al., 2012; Ntho, 2013; Pulamaliboho Nutrition and Health Consulting, 2015) as school fees are just a fraction of the total cost of education, which includes costs of transport, uniform, stationery and other costs (Ntho, 2013).

### Non-formal education

The most widely known means of intervention for disengaged children in Lesotho is non-formal education. The Government of Lesotho has, over the years, used non-formal education as a means to provide access to education for people who have been excluded from the formal schooling system (UNDP, 2017). Ntho (2013) sees non-formal education as targeting the ‘re-training among disadvantaged groups such as herd boys, out-of-school youths, and adults who missed out on formal education and retrenched mine workers’ (p. 34). The Ministry of Education considers non-formal education an alternative pathway to formal education addressing the needs of ‘children who are unable to fit the regular and conventional instruction provided mostly by primary and secondary schools’ (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019d, p. 7).

Non-formal education has been used as a mechanism to upskill citizens who left formal school schooling before attaining literacy and numeracy skills. As one key informant in this study shared, “We are changing now our adolescent programming because traditionally a lot of our funds have gone into support service delivery of non-formal education. Basically, we fund literacy centres in rural areas to ensure that herd boys and other school children attain basic literacy and numeracy skills.” She continued, “We have worked very closely with the ministry to draft the non-formal education policy which we are hoping to implement. We want to move away from an unsustainable reliance on development partners for the costs of delivering non-formal education, and we do not have that level of funding anymore.”

Another key informant highlighted cooperation in correctional facilities to build literacy and other foundation skills. He shared, “We went to correctional service institution to sign memorandum of understanding to pave a clear system of work between these two ministries ... most people involved in criminal acts are not able to write or are uneducated. The Government introduced an out-of-school programme to extend a hand to those who are no longer able to return to school.” The findings are consistent with the literature, which finds that the commission of crimes is associated with limited education opportunities (Lesotho Correctional Services, 2017; UNESCO, 2018). Keeping boys longer in school is an economic and social investment, as is rehabilitating those already in the correctional system.

While these programmes are notable, this intervention does not seek to return the child to school but provides literacy and numeracy programmes to enhance their competence in these areas. As such, the problems that cause disadvantage and disengagement are not addressed and the ideal of providing every child with access to inclusive and equitable quality education by 2030 is missed.

### Life skills education

A few participants noted that the Ministry of Education and Training works with development partners and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to teach life skills to secondary school learners. These seem to be sporadic initiatives covering a small proportion of the school and learner population. Key informants shared about the efforts of World Vision, Sentebale and UNICEF to roll out life-based sexuality education, assisting with teacher training and the monitoring of its delivery in the classroom.

Another informant mentioned Kick4life, which is working with local government to work embraces and develops talents, we also have LGA working with girls and few of boys’ [Key Informant3, Male]; ‘Sports are the most attended activity in Quthing, we have many times tried to encourage establishment of clubs, and they just don’t last’ [Community1-Senqu Valley, 43 years, Male]. Teachers’ reservations to mention Life Skills Education (LSE) as an intervention need further probing as the Ministry launched the LSE programme approximately five years ago and schools must know its contribution towards changing learners’ attitudes to education and life generally.

In responding to how boys can be helped in schools, participants gave various constructive ideas about possible interventions, including: ‘There should be seminars for boys to enlighten them on importance of active participation in education. Again, initiation school committees and the Ministry of Education should have gathered and deliberated on the importance of initiation. There should be boys’ clubs formed for boys and boys should lead themselves’ [Community1-Highlands, 35 years, Female]; ‘We need the youth corners, if it’s for them, it has to be by them, so students should have youth corners where they can share ideas, in many schools’ [Community1-Senqu Valley, 43 years, Male].

Other comments alluded to the need to educate the community about the importance of formal education, ‘We need programmes or activities that teach parents about the importance of school, so that they understand that their children do not have to live like they do. I believe that a lot of our students could benefit from counselling services that should be provided here at the school’

[Principal4-Senqu valley, Male]; 'I urge the owners of initiation schools to be more aware of boys' education needs before accepting them into the initiation school. The chiefs should also be accountable of the impact that initiation school has on students' participation in school because most of them drop out and never return' [Principal3-Highlands, Female]. One participant sees the need for boys to undergo counselling, 'Career guidance by someone from outside the school and community such as lawyers, police and teachers from outside the school would motivate the students to improve their grades' [Principal3-Highlands, Female].

Finally, teacher professionalism and accountability must receive attention, 'I do think there needs to be increased focus of quality of education, increase focus on the relationship, as I said, with the community and school and building that up' [Key Informant4, Female]; 'Teachers should be responsible for learners' attendance at school because before one can dropout in school, he would first start by not coming to school for a day or two days, and week maybe....Parents should be taught how to be influential in their children's education. Parents should check whether their children are doing their homework even if they are not helping them because some parents are uneducated but the support that they will be giving their children will motivate them and find it necessary to attend school' [Key Informant5, Female].

Non-formal education has been highlighted in both the literature and these findings as the only one intervention implemented broadly by the Government not to counteract boys' disadvantage and disengagement but to give basic numeracy and literacy skills to eligible Basotho who either have never attended school or dropped out before attaining the skills. Within school intervention, the focus seems to be on life skills but seems sporadic and facilitated mainly by organizations outside the Ministry. Thus, there is a missed opportunity for teachers to highlight how important life skills education can be in addressing the problem.

## Conclusions and recommendations

This study finds that boys are disadvantaged in accessing education in Lesotho. This is evident in both the literature and current research findings. Boys' disadvantage results from an education system that is inefficient in addressing learners' individual needs. The disadvantage also results from social customs (initiation and herding) of what it means to be a man, which currently exclude the acquisition of a formal education.

Boys, especially those living in the rural areas of Lesotho, lack role models to motivate them to complete formal education. Parents and boys' negative attitudes towards formal education play an important role in boys' disengagement from education. Having parents from lower wealth quintiles can also be a disadvantage, as fees associated with secondary schooling and large distances between home and school make regular school attendance difficult for boys.

The quality of education needs to be improved, as it does currently not meet contextual needs, does not stimulate boys' interest and is impaired by inadequate resources. Existing policies are also not implemented efficiently and have not adequately addressed challenges relating to boys' disadvantage. For example, the Lesotho Inclusive Policy does not address all areas of disadvantage in educational access. There is a vast disparity in physical resources at the disposal of urban and rural schools, such as availability of electricity, laboratories and libraries. Qualified teachers are a limited resource and high pupil-teacher ratios can be a barrier at the primary school level. Moreover, teachers are not skilled to identify and support at risk learners, particularly boys.

Despite the societal benefits of retaining boys in school, the study found that there are limited interventions to support boys' participation, progression and learning outcomes. Non-formal education is not a sufficient intervention for the attrition of boys because it is not comparably resourced, while aspects such as the compulsory nature of primary education are not reinforced through this mode.

Laws are not yet enforced. For example, parents assign their children duties that hinder their participation in education, teachers unlawfully use corporal punishment and boys are employed as herders despite this being a violation of child labour laws. The legal framework must be strengthened and enforced.

It is recommended that:

- A study with a representative sample be conducted to ascertain the extent of the problem and influence policy direction.
- The Government of Lesotho enforce existing laws so that any weaknesses can be identified.
- Non-formal education be better financed to be accessible to all its recipients.
- The Government of Lesotho builds more schools that are within walking distance for the communities they serve.
- Existing school resources be improved, and new ones built where they do not exist (expanding access to libraries and science and computer laboratories) and quality be assured.
- More attention be paid to understand the gendered nature of disengagement from education, and efforts taken to ensure all children can fulfil their right to education.

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## Annex: Quotations used in the content analysis

### School attendance

- 'I face a problem with the distance to walk to school. It is too long and when I get to school, I am already tired and I fail to concentrate in class' [Learner9-Highlands, aged 14 years, Female].
- 'I have to walk to school especially when it is rainy, I do not go to school because I am unable to cross the river near the school' [Learner3-Highlands, aged 18 years, Female].
- 'Sometimes he does not go to school because he walks a long distance to school, and on rainy days he is not going to school because he cannot cross the river nearby the school' [Parent3-Senqu Valley, aged 65 years, Female].
- 'Only at the time when I have not yet paid the school fees the one in secondary gets expelled, while the younger one is in primary and he attends a free primary education hence he is not expelled from school. But when his brother is not going to school, he also does not want to go to school' [Parent5-Senqu Valley, aged 50 years, Female].
- 'He left home going to school, but he was not seen in the school campus' [Parent8-Urban, aged 52 years, Female].
- 'He always goes to school except when he was sick from the injury he got this year and it was for few days' [Parent2-Highlands, aged 75 years, Female].
- 'He was only absent during teachers strike' [Parent3-Highlands, aged 72 years, Female].
- '[She] always goes to school except when the school fees was not paid especially last year because this year she is sponsored' [Parent6-Highlands, aged 44 years, Male].

### Boys' academic performance

- 'According to my knowledge boys, do well in maths and sciences' [Learners1-Urban, aged 16 years, Female].
- 'There are some subjects that boys tend to do well in them than girls, this is mathematics' [Learner9-Highlands, aged 14 years, Female].
- 'Our school is way different from other schools in that boys perform better than girls in school attendance and academic achievement' [Teacher1-Urban, aged 41 years, Female].
- 'Boys complete their five-year programme with high grades because most of the high achievers here are boys' [Teacher2-Urban, aged 28 years, Male].
- 'The pattern has changed; boys do not only perform better in Math and Science subjects but they also perform well in English. In the last results, we received two As, which were boys' [Teacher3-Urban, aged 37 years, Female].
- 'It is not a norm that boys are more than girls in numbers at school, as results boys always top girls in every subject at this school' [Teacher1-Urban, aged 41 years, Female].
- 'It's the same, when they fail, they fail the same way. You cannot say boys are better somewhere' [Teacher6-Highlands, aged 30 years, Male].
- 'In the past, boys performed better in math and science but lately, I don't see any difference' [Teacher3-Highlands, aged 58 years, Male].
- 'There is no difference related to subjects, both genders perform equally' [Teacher1-Senqu



Valley, aged 26 years, Female].

- 'The difference is that those learners whom we expect to perform better because they are from privileged families are the ones who do not perform well while those that are from less privileged families perform better' [Teacher3-Urban, aged 37 years, Female].
- 'Learners' differences do not affect their learning. Learners participate equally at their school' [Teacher1-Urban, aged 41 years, Female].
- 'Learners' characters help their learning. Those of good characters perform better. Those learners who are feminine perform better because they act with passion' [Teacher5-Urban, aged 51 years, Female].

## Microsystem – Individual influences (Self)

### III-health

- 'I do not come to school every day because of health problems' [Learner3-Urban, 16 years, Male].
- 'When I am sick, I do not come to school' [Learner3-Senqu Valley, aged 17 years, Male].
- 'I come to school every day unless I become sick. That is when I do not come to school' [Learner3-Highlands, aged 18 years, Female].
- 'I go to school every day but, because I sometimes suffer from recurrent tonsillitis, this year I skipped school twice' [Learner3-Urban, aged 16 years, Female].
- 'My son goes to school every day. That is from Monday to Friday unless he is sick, and he has to go to hospital or stays at home get healed' [Parent1-Senqu Valley, aged 30 years, Male].
- 'He was sick but it was at intervals' [Parent5-Urban, aged 49 years, Female].
- 'He always goes to school except when he was sick from the injury he got this year but it was for few days' [Parent2-Highlands, aged 75 years, Female].

### Relationships, early marriage and early and unintended pregnancy

- 'Having affairs affects my performance at school' [Learner10-Senqu Valley, aged 17 years, Male].
- 'Yes, there is an increase of dropouts in girls compared to the previous year because of pregnancy. This year, it is higher because learners had long breaks and spent more time idling when teachers were on strike' [Community3-Urban, aged 47 years, School Board Member, Male].
- '[Boys] are forced to get married if they impregnate a girl' [Teacher5-Highlands, aged 60 years, Female].

### Self-image linked to poverty

- 'Boys from less privileged families are being victimized by those that are from privileged families about their appearance in their school uniform' [Community2-Senqu Valley, aged 42 years, Male].
- 'Children are forced by circumstances to leave school because the issue of not affording school uniforms and other needs makes them feel inferior' [Community1-Highlands, aged 35 years, Female].
- 'They are mostly late for school, their uniform is usually untidy, they lack an understanding of the school work and their homework is hardly ever completed. Such students are usually reserved and are not active in the classroom' [Principal2-Urban, Male].

- 'Having no lunch at school discourages me to love school as I sometimes go to school with an empty stomach. Sometimes when I cannot afford to buy myself lunch or do not have a lunchbox it means that I am not eating that day' [Learner5–Urban, aged 16 years, Male].

#### **Behaviour and attitudes (general)**

- 'Being bossy and stubborn, they can keep secrets just like men do. They are always seen in shady mischievous behaviours. They have a tendency of going to school with harmful pricking objects' [Parent8-Urban, aged 52 years, Female].
- 'Children say they have some rights hence they cannot do what their parents say they must do but rather do what they themselves want them do' [Community3-Highlands, School Board Members, aged 55 years, Male].
- 'Teenage boys are mostly affected because at this stage, they are stubborn. They do not want to be disciplined and they answer in class only when they like. They do as they please. This affect their education badly' [Community3-Urban, aged 47 years, school board member, Male].
- 'Some learners do not listen to the teachers and they end up being uncomfortable at school, their performance also drops' [Learner7-Senqu Valley, aged 16 years, Male].
- 'These students, especially boys, tend to be stubborn and begin to loiter around not going school' Community1-Urban, aged 51 years, Male]

#### **Behaviour and attitudes – initiation schools**

- 'Boys from initiation school have a bad attitude towards teachers and they no longer respect them hence they do not do better than those who did not go to initiation schools' [Learner4-Highlands, aged 16 years, Female].
- 'Boys that went to initiation school do not do better ... tend to have bad attitude towards teachers and never respect them' [Learner7-Highlands, aged 15 years, Female].
- 'Some students do not respect teachers who have not been to initiation school' [Principal4, aged 30 years, Male].

#### **Drugs, alcohol and risk-taking**

- 'During break or lunch time boys tend to smoke dagga or cigarette and sometimes they do not even return to class. Boys who smoke should make an agreement that during weekdays they focus on their schoolwork and they use drugs during the weekend' Learner4-Urban, aged 17 years, Male].
- 'Alcohol abuse affects learners, mostly females, and sellers advertise it to be acceptable' [Community2-Senqu Valley, aged 42 years, Male].
- 'I think it's pretty safe to assume the children who are not in school are more vulnerable to those kinds of things and I think the other issue is drug and alcohol abuse', Key Informant4, Female].
- 'They are drug abusers' [Parent7-Urban, aged 40 years. Female].
- 'Most of them no longer participate in school activities but just joined drug groups. That is, they no longer attend school even though their parents think they are at school' [Community2-Urban, aged 59 years, Male].
- 'There are no difficulties for boys to attend school, but the problem we currently face is that of pupils that have joined different groups that are dealing drugs. They are no longer engaging with other students at school' [Community2-Urban, aged 59 years, Male].

- 'When my son is not at school, he goes to the fields to look after my cows, goats and sheep and when he is there, he joins his peers that deal drugs and cigarettes' [Parent5-Senqu Valley, aged 50 years, Female].
- 'Boys have become very aggressive, they carry deadly weapons, and they are addicted to drugs and alcohol. The issue stems from their needs being ignored' [Community4-Urban, aged 58 years, Female].
- 'We decide to do random searching and find dangerous weapons from students such as knives and pepper spray. We also have reports from learners about other learners bullying them' Principal1-Urban, Female].
- 'Learners who are well off are involved in misbehaviour, activities like the use of drugs and alcohol, as a result they fail to complete their education' [Teacher4-Urban, aged 29 years, Male].
- 'Learners from financially stable homes use drugs. The issue of adjustment for learners who come from model C school, they pick the drug behaviour at that level' [Principal1, Female].
- 'Most of them no longer participate in school activities but just joined drug groups. That is, they no longer attend school even though their parents think they are at school' [Community2-Urban, aged 59 years, Male].
- Asked what is likely to pull boys away from school, 'drugs and alcohol' [Parent1-Urban, aged 40 years, Female].

#### Low interest and motivation

- 'Coming to school during winter because one has to wake up very early in the morning even when it's very cold' [Learner2-Urban, aged 17 years, Male]
- 'I do not come to school every day because I sometimes feel like not going to school. I become lazy to go to school' [Learner8-Highlands, aged 17 years, Female].
- 'Children are no longer interested in going to school, irrespective of their economic status. While some children are needy, most of them are no longer willing to go to school' [Community1-Urban, aged 51 years, Male].
- 'Most boys do not go to school because they do not have much interest in educational activities' [Community1-Highlands, aged 35 years, Female].

### Microsystem – Family influences

#### Poverty

- 'Some children have the problem of parents who cannot afford to pay for their school fees especially at secondary... for some children their parents cannot afford to buy school uniforms and shoes' [Community3-Highlands, School Board Member, aged 55 years, Male].
- 'Some learners stay far away from school and sometimes times parents are not able to provide them with transport money and lunch because they do not have lunch at school' [Community3-Urban, aged 47 years, School Board Member, Male].

#### Disengaged or unsupportive parents

- 'Some parents say that they also didn't finish school but were able to do well in life and survived so they discourage boys from going to school' [Teacher4-Highlands, aged 60 years, Female].
- 'Children should be under parental guidance, if not, the guardians have to take responsibility, but the situation is different here. They stay alone. The community encourages them to go to

initiation schools and look for jobs' [Community1-Senqu Valley, aged 43 years, Male].

- 'Parents are not active in assisting students with their homework, therefore they become demotivated to work hard and improve their performance' [Principal3, Female].
- 'I think such behaviours arise from parents' inactive role in the students' academic life. A large number of parents are not involved in their children's academic life' [Principal2, Male].
- 'Their parents take them here in the urban areas and they stay with people who don't support them academically, either relatives or they stay alone. Others have parents who work in South Africa and are left at home with other children' [Principal1, Female].
- 'Parents do not communicate schoolwork with boys. That discourages boys if they do not find support from their parents' [Community2-Senqu Valley, aged 42 years, Male].
- 'Some parents do not encourage their children to go to school. There is the other place here called Ceres, when boys feel stronger, they go there to work. Most parents also work there leaving children on their own and as a result they drop out' [Teacher3-Senqu Valley, aged 41 years, Male].
- 'I am only supported by my father in my education, my mother does not want me to attend school' [Learner2-Senqu Valley, aged 16 years, Male].

### Orphanhood

- 'Boys who have lost their parents can't just sit back and watch their siblings suffer in their presence. They would rather drop out from school and work for the siblings and send them to school. Boys feel compelled to drop out of school and take care of others' [Principal1, Female].
- 'The major cause of this pattern is family systems which are weak. Remember Lesotho has high number of orphans, so children live in child headed households. Even in those remaining families where older relatives live with orphans, they lessen the burden of raising more children by taking boys to herd animals and give girls up for early marriages and only send their own children to school' [Key Informant2, Female].

### Gendered expectations of boys

- 'In the family, boys and girls are treated differently. Our parents make sure that all girls' needs are all satisfied while boys have to work hard for their needs to be covered' [Learner4-Highlands, aged 14 years, Male].
- 'Parents have expectations and already have plans of what their children will do and at what age' [Teacher2-Highlands, aged 41 years, Male].
- 'In the family, boys are expected to support their parents financially' [Learners1-Highlands, Male].

### Herder boys instead of schoolboys

- 'They also have problems doing their homework because of their parents. Parents don't give boys time to do schoolwork after school, they expect them to do other chores such as looking after their animals' [Community2-Highlands, school board, aged 30 years, Male].
- 'Boys are groomed to be heads of families who know how look after cattle' [Learner6-Senqu Valley, Male].
- 'Those from poor families are forced to herd for survival... more boys than girls are employed to harvest marijuana, as a result they drop school to do the job since most families are child headed' [Community1-Highlands, aged 35 years, Female].

- 'We have problems reading and doing homework because we are forced to look after family livestock after school' [Learner5-Highlands, aged 19 years, Male].
- 'Parents tell me to go and search for missing cattle, I sometimes return late and no longer have a chance to read' [Learner6-Senqu Valley, aged 15 years, Male].
- 'I help my parents with cows that are going to be used for ploughing' [Learner10-Senqu Valley, aged 17 years, Male].
- 'If it is time to shear sheep, [boys] are expected to go there, and the process might take up to five days. That means 5 days of missing school. When they come back, they fall back and underperform' [Community3-Senqu Valley, School Board Member, Male].
- 'If the teacher introduces a topic, for example, trigonometry, the following day it's that child's turn to herd animals, when the child comes back to school after a day, they would not be able to follow. As a result, boys drop out' [Key Informant2, Female].
- 'I think this world has changed and we live for money, meaning we focus on things that give us money more than we do on school. A parent weighs things on whether to send a kid at school or let them take care of the family business or look after animals to help them survive' [Teacher7-Highlands, aged 30 years, Male].
- 'Culture. I wish parents could understand that it is their responsibility to ensure children attend school regularly and may only get assistance with herding for them after school' [Key Informant1, Male].

#### Household duties and expectations

- 'My parents send me to buy grocery at Mapholaneng...Our parents force us to skip school. This discourages us because we have to repeat the grade or the classes' [Learner2-Highlands, aged 21 years, Male].
- 'Drought affected the community so much that boys have to fetch water from distance place before they go to school that makes them to be late for school' [Community2-Senqu Valley, aged 42 years, Male].
- 'I was babysitting my uncle's kids' [Learner7-Senqu Valley, aged 15 years, Female].

#### Microsystem – Peer influences

##### Peer attitudes towards education

- 'Some boys have friends who react negatively towards school and they discourage them from going to school because they say school is useless' [Learner3-Highlands, aged 17 years, Male].
- 'Our peers who are out of school advise us to drop-out. They say it's very nice to stay at home' [Learner7-Senqu Valley, aged 16 years, Male].
- 'After school, these boys meet up with their friends who don't attend school and things that they talk about eventually discourages the students from going to school' [Community3-Senqu Valley, School Board Member, Male].
- 'Learners who are coming from ghetto villages are discouraged to finish their education because their peers talk negative about going to school' [Teacher6-Urban, aged 35 years, Male].
- 'Boys face difficulties that are caused by peers at home or peer from different schools who may engage them in risky behaviours that may involve the intervention of the police. These may also be caused by the use of drugs and alcohol' [Teacher5-Urban, aged 51 years, Male].

Female].

- ‘Even when a boy can complete his secondary education, you would never know what went wrong when they are at tertiary. Boys are easily influenced by their peers into smoking and drinking and end up dropping out of school’ [Community3-Urban, aged 47 years, School Board Member, Male].

### Peer expectations around initiation schools

- ‘Boys normally dropout of school and go to initiation school because they hate being criticized. Boys from the rural villages are expected to go for initiation school as part of their culture’ [Learner1-Senqu Valley, aged 17 years, Male].
- ‘There is a lot of influence. The first thing that these boys are easily teased, either by those that come from Ceres or those that come from initiation and these things cause the boys to leave school so that they can be like their peers. Some are sponsored to be at school, but they are not ashamed to misuse their opportunities’ [Teacher7-Senqu Valley, aged 37 years, Female].
- ‘These children have their friends who come from initiation schools. These peers pressurize them into dropping out of school to be like them. They smoke’ [Teacher2-Highlands, aged 41 years, Male].
- ‘They surrender to initiation school because they feel they can’t fit in’ [Parent1-Highlands, aged 56 years, Female].
- ‘Our children are forced to go to initiation school by their peers. Those that are not circumcised are discriminated by their friends. This is because most boys in our community went to initiation schools and these cause them to leave school early’ [Parent8-Highlands, aged 26 years, Male].
- ‘We are living in the villages where one is criticized for not going to initiation school because boys are expected to do so’ [Learner6-Senqu Valley, aged 15 years, Male].

### Mesosystem – Community influences

#### Social custom of initiation

- ‘After initiation school they feel older and responsible, they also don’t care about their schoolwork’ [Learner9-Senqu Valley, aged 16 years, Female].
- ‘Boys from initiation school distance themselves from other students because they think they are different’ [Learner2-Senqu Valley, aged 17 years, Female].
- ‘Boys from initiation school lack of social interaction and engagement skills with other students because they feel superior’ [Learner6-Senqu Valley, aged 15 years, Female].
- ‘Boys from remote areas tend to go to initiation school more than boys from the urban side of Maseru’ [Learner3-Urban, aged 16 years, Female].
- ‘The teachers’ strike discouraged us from going to school because we did not gain anything from school this year, I don’t find the need of coming to school when I am already going to fail because I know nothing. So, I’d rather go to initiation school and become a man’ [Learner2-Highlands, aged 19 years, Male].
- ‘We are living in the villages where one is criticized for not going to initiation school because boys are expected to do so’ [Learner6-Senqu Valley, aged 15 years, Male].
- ‘Boys normally dropout of school and go to initiation school because they hate being criticized, boys from the rural villages are expected to go for initiation school as part of their

culture' [Learner1-Senqu Valley, aged 17 years, Male].

- 'Our traditions and norms are really affecting these boys as most of them go to initiation schools' [Community1-Urban, aged 51 years, Male].
- 'When they come back from initiation schools, they consider themselves men and can't go back to school with kids.... Boys after reaching a certain age should go to initiation, get married and have kids, so the child grows up channelled this way' [Community3-Senqu Valley, School Board Member, Male].
- 'Here problems start at primary level because they normally go for initiation at primary level, mostly at grade 5... It starts from the families, boys from supportive families and those in urban location are less challenged because the issue of initiation is less of a focus' [Community1-Highlands, aged 35 years, Female].
- 'When they get to post primary, they marry each other. The issue is that boys go to initiation and when they come back, they no longer want to attend school and therefore marry girls' [Community1-Senqu Valley, aged 43 years, Male].
- 'In terms of completion rate, the number of learners who complete is decreasing. Learners don't complete because boys go to initiation schools' [Community2-Highlands, school board, aged 30 years, Male].
- 'There is no control of these [initiation] schools because they take young children as young as 9 years and this sort of influence seems to make children not go back to school' [Community3-Highlands, School Board Members, aged 55 years, Male].

#### Gendered expectations of boys: A good boy

- 'A good boy is the one who can listen to his parents and help other people when they are in need' [Learner5-Highlands, aged 19 years, Male].
- 'A good boy is someone who is obedient and feels sorry for his bad behaviour' [Learner2-Highlands, aged 21 years, Male].
- 'A good boy is the one who respect both adults and peers, well disciplined' [Learner2-Urban, aged 17 years, Male].
- 'A good boy is a boy that listens to his teachers and works very hard in his studies. He respects himself, older people and his teachers and peers' [Learner1-Senqu valley, aged 17 years, Male].
- 'A good boy is a boy that is submissive and respecting. A person who is so innocent that it would be difficult to suspect him of doing something wrong' [Community1-Urban, aged 51 years, Male].
- 'Good boys are those that please their parents even if it's through farming. There is a clash with customs and communal expectations of what is a good boy' [Community4-Urban, aged 58 years, Female].
- 'A boy who participate in sports and who is a hard worker. A good boy is understanding and well disciplined, he knows how to accept his mistakes and ask for forgiveness when he is faulty' [Community3-Urban, aged 47 years, School Board Member, Male].
- 'A good boy is a boy that is submissive and respecting. This should begin from home to the community and from the community to school' [Community2-Urban, aged 59 years, Male].
- 'A good boy is the one who likes school, respects his teachers and everybody in the community, responsible and approachable' [Community2-Highlands, School Board, aged 30 years, Male].



### Expectations to be herders rather than learners

- 'Culturally, there are activities like herding that boys pride themselves with more than going to school because their economic activity is the pastoral kind' [Key Informant2, Female].
- 'This location influences boys to opt for farming rather than attending school and the community invests much on livestock. So, most boys are herd boys and not in education... Economic status has less influence because most have money to pay for school requirements but both parents and children are not interested in education' [Community1-Highlands, aged 35 years, Female].
- 'You cannot expect Moyeni children to drop out in larger numbers, but get to Mphaki, Tele and Moojani, there are higher rates of drop-outs. Places differ.... So, once they come from initiation, they leave their homes to the post to herd sheep. Farmers are their role models' [Community1-Senqu Valley, aged 43 years, Male].

### Community context – long routes to school

- 'During rainy days, the river I cross to go to school overflows, and I sometimes get discouraged to go to school because I will be walking a very long distance' [Learner9-Senqu Valley, aged 18 years, Male].
- 'I face a challenge in rainy days when rivers overflow, I have to walk a long distance to school and end up being late' [Learner7-Senqu Valley, aged 16 years, Male].
- 'Learners are punished if they arrive late at school. This might be another reason for these difficulties. Some learners travel about 2 kilometres to school. Others come from the other side of the river and normally when it's raining, the river overflows and they have to use the longest route to school and arrive late' [Community3-Senqu Valley, School Board Member, Male].
- 'Building schools is very expensive because of the topography and there is inadequate number of secondary schools that is one reason for low participation in secondary, there is not enough schools where they have to be' [Key Informant4, Female].

### Mesosystem – School influences

#### School facilities and infrastructure

- 'We don't have enough classrooms. We only have 5 for 7 grades' [Principal5, Female].
- 'We don't even have science laboratories, as a result, learners don't have any interest in what is being taught. The teaching quality also has an impact. We only have 4 granted teachers here now and it has been years, so this affects the quality of education' [Community3-Senqu Valley, School Board Member, Male].
- 'Our community is disadvantaged and poor. Learners leave our school to other school, if our school can have facilities like electricity so that learners can learn a computer study which is very essential in today's daily life' [Community4-Highlands, aged 66 years, Female].
- 'Currently there are no laboratories at the school. There is a computer laboratory for the High school that we used to have access to but because they are so few and we have a large number of students, scheduling became an issue' [Principal2-Urban, Male].
- 'We also have an IT room with 50 computers connected to the internet. These computers are only used for research purposes, we don't have computer studies because of the large numbers of students in classes so the computers cannot accommodate all learners' [Principal1-Urban, Female].
- 'I have problem with school facilities. Here at school, we only have one toilet' Learner3-

highlands, aged 15 years, Male].

- 'The school does not have a science lab. We always imagine things and do theories only, nothing practical' [Learner2-Highlands, aged 21 years, Male].
- 'Increase school infrastructure – that is, increase classrooms numbers, build science labs and a library, toilets and accessibility of water in the school compound' [Learner4-Highlands, aged 21 years, Male].

### Irrelevance of education

- 'These children do not learn what they are supposed to. If you ask them about the climate in Lesotho, they will tell you 'cold winters and hot summers' yet Mokhotlong is still cold in summer. They are not taught about the realities of their lives. That the air in the highlands is fresher than the lowlands. There is nothing that helps children understand their communities better, there is no connection between school curriculum and everyday life in the community. Our syllabus is irrelevant' [Community4-Urban, aged 58 years, Female].
- 'I think when you talk of relevance of education that they are being offered today, it's really important that rural schools must adapt the curriculum so that if they also want to learn about agriculture, they should be able to learn about it, schools should be helping them to do better in their own environment' [Key informant4, Female].
- 'What we learn from school should be closer to the interests of the learners. Learners should feel they are partaking in something valuable ... for example, we teach children about camels before we can teach them about sheep which are part of their daily life' [Key informant1, Male].
- 'They are not motivated when they see people who have gone to school at home with no jobs' [Teacher2-Highlands, aged 41 years, Male].
- 'One Government school was closed due to teachers' discipline because most teachers there were not qualified. The school hired people from urban areas to teach and most had no experience and others were teaching irrelevant content, and as such parents lost their confidence and withdraw their children from the school. The school was forced to close' [Community1-Senqu Valley, aged 43 years, Male].

### Teacher competencies and teaching quality

- 'The curriculum does cater for the needs of children especially this latest curriculum, but teachers are not well trained, and you cannot expect people to master it while they got four days training' [Community1-Senqu Valley, aged 43 years, Male].
- 'We are studying and have learnt something about primary school teachers. They are under pressure to finish and are not able to deliver quality education. There are inadequate teaching aids to help learners understand abstract concepts' [Key informant1, Male].
- 'The curriculum was initially implemented to develop the child based on their strengths and abilities, but because of high pupil teacher ratios, facilities and follow ups, it is not happening as it should. Teachers do not pay attention and don't even know the children's names, let alone their abilities. There is a shortage of teachers that prevents the implementation of this curriculum' [Community4-Urban, aged 58 years, Female].
- 'I think educational quality is an issue. We know that as from looking at the data and learning outcomes of 7-8 year-olds that they are relatively low. So I think while Lesotho has done well getting a lots of kids in schools, the learning is still lacking and that is why some kids drop out' [Key Informant4, Female].
- 'Children have significantly dropped out of school and gone to other schools because they

say our primary and high school are not performing well' [Community3-Highlands, School Board Members, aged 55 years, Male].

### Teacher-student interactions

- 'What happens in classrooms, during the learning process some teachers when asking questions choose learners randomly and this makes me uncomfortable' [Learner3-Urban, aged 17 years, Male].
- 'At school, boys are expected to perform better than girls in most of the subjects' [Learner3-Highlands, Male].
- 'I hate collecting and cutting wood during the school hours while girls stay in classrooms but when they sweep, we have to help them' [Learner4-Senqu Valley, Male].
- 'Boys and girls are not treated equal at school by teachers. Boys receive or are given hard punishment when they did the same mistake as a girl' [Learner4-Highlands, Male].
- 'Some teachers shout at us when we ask questions in the classroom and it lowers our confidence' [Learner1-Senqu Valley, aged 17 years, Male],
- 'Some teachers do not explain to us when we ask questions in the classroom' [Learner2-Senqu valley, aged 16 years, Male].
- 'My daughter's concern is on the teachers who humiliate them or use harsh words when they approach them, she wishes to have teachers who are always happy and have a good relationship with students. She said one of their teachers would say to them 'I wrote my Grade 9 long ago' and that discourages her from learning' [Parent1-Highlands, aged 56 years, Female].
- 'She is not happy with the treatment she gets from her teachers she always feel unwanted and discriminated' [Parent2-Highlands, aged 75 years, Female].

### Teacher and student interactions – the role of initiation schools

- 'Boys from initiation school have a bad attitude towards teachers and they no longer respect them hence they do not do better than those who did not go to initiation schools' [Learner4-Highlands, aged 16 years, Female].
- 'Boys that went to initiation school do not do better ... tend to have bad attitude towards teachers and never respect them' [Learner7-Highlands, aged 15 years, Female].
- 'Some students do not respect teachers who have not been to initiation school' [Principal4, aged 30 years, Male].
- 'When they come back to school after going to initiation schools, boys no longer respect teachers and this attitude leads them to the failure of tests and examinations' [Learner4-Highlands, aged 16 years, Female].
- 'Boys from initiation school no longer respect the teachers and this bad attitude makes them not pass their tests and they end up giving up at school' [Learner2-Highlands, aged 15 years, Female].

### Discipline and corporal punishment

- 'I have a problem with the way we are being taught. For example, our English teacher does not cooperate with us. He does not communicate well with us and uses corporal punishment' [Learner1-Highlands, aged 14 years, Male].
- 'Corporal punishment makes me lose interest in going to school' [Learner1-Urban, aged 16 years, Male].

- 'I do not like corporal punishment at school' [Learner3-Senqu Valley, aged 17 years, Male].
- 'Teachers lately prefer expelling students from school when we do something against the school laws which brings shame on us when we have to bring our parents at school for minor mistakes. I prefer teachers to continue using corporal punishment instead of expelling us from school' [Learner5-Urban, aged 16 years, Male].
- 'I suspect that teachers are likely to beat the boys than girls and that is an issue likely to make boys feel excluded, unsafe and not wanting to go to school. So, I do think that is probably the big issue' [Key informant4, Female].
- 'The matter was taken to the police by the parents. In the end, the parents were able to come to an understanding with the teacher without having to go to court' [Principal2-Urban, Male].
- 'At school, teachers have a mentality that boys have bad behaviour, and therefore approach them with that mentality without getting to the bottom of the cause for such behaviours and as a result they neglect them and do not encourage good behaviour' [Community1-Highlands, aged 35 years, Female].
- 'Our children are not happy with their principal and the way she treats them especially when they are from poor families' [Parent7-Highlands, aged 65 years, Female].

## Macrosystem level — State and society

### Insufficient legal frameworks

- 'There are no laws making dropouts to get back to school' [Key Informant3, Male].
- 'Free and compulsory education is free but not compulsory. Implementation of this policy is failing. Parents are not held responsible for ensuring that their children are at school. No one takes responsibility for children found begging on the streets or herding animals in the fields' [Community4-Urban, aged 58 years, Female].
- 'Again, the law does not enforce the importance of the Free and 'compulsory' education... we deal with and help children who did not go to school at all, so we do basic education' [Key Informant2, Female].
- 'Although there are laws protecting children at an early age, they are not practiced because most people still hire underage children. As the society, we take advantage of the economic status of poor children' [Community1-Highlands, aged 35 years, Female].

### Insufficient application of the policy on mother tongue education

- 'I do not that like the fact that English and Sesotho are taught as different subjects. I want them to be taught at the same time as this could be easier for us to understand them because they are both language' [Learner6-Senqu Valley, aged 15 years, Male].
- 'This policy has always been around and the Ministry has been failing the community because children here have IsiXhosa as their mother tongue but we are teaching them in Sesotho and most of the time they do not even understand simple Sesotho phrases like greetings when they start school' [Community1-Senqu Valley, aged 43 years, Male].
- 'The issue of language barriers contributes. I heard that in the south some learners of different ethnicities don't go to school on the basis that they are taught in Sesotho' [Key Informant2, Female].

## Responses and recommendations

### Non-formal education

- 'We went to correctional service institution to sign memorandum of understanding to pave a clear system of work between these two ministries ... most people involved in criminal acts are not able to write or are uneducated. The Government introduced out of school programme to extend a hand to those who are no longer able to return to school' [Key Informant3, Male].
- 'Traditionally we have been working all out, we are changing now our adolescent programming because traditionally a lot of our funds have gone into support service delivery of non-formal education. Basically, we fund literacy centres in rural areas to ensure that herd boys and other school children attain basic literacy and numeracy skills. We worked very closely with the ministry to draft the non-formal education policy of which we are hoping to implement because we want to move away from its unsustainable reliance on development partners for the costs of delivering non-formal education and we do not have that level of funding anymore' [Key Informant4, Female].

### Life skills education

- 'There is World Vision, Sentebale and UNICEF that play a role by addressing life skills-based sexuality education (LBSE). They assist with the training of teachers as well. Sentebale monitors if teachers are implementing LBSE in the schools' [Community4-Urban, **aged** 58 years, Female].

### Clubs and associations

- 'Kick4life embraces and develops talents, we also have LGA working with girls and few of boys' [Key Informant3, Male].
- 'Sports are the most attended activity in Quthing, we have many times tried to encourage establishment of clubs, and they just don't last' [Community1-Senqu Valley, aged 43 years, Male].
- 'There should be seminars for boys to enlighten them on importance of active participation in education. Again, initiation school committees and the Ministry of Education should have gathered and deliberated on the importance of initiation. There should be boys' clubs formed for boys and boys should lead themselves' [Community1-Highlands, aged 35 years, Female].
- 'We need the youth corners, if it's for them, it has to be by them, so students should have youth corners where they can share ideas, in many schools' [Community1-Senqu Valley, aged 43 years, Male].

### Parent and community advocacy and outreach

- 'We need programmes or activities that teach parents about the importance of school, so that they understand that their children do not have to live like they do. I believe that a lot of our students could benefit from counselling services that should be provided here at the school' [Principal4-Senqu valley, Male].
- 'I urge the owners of initiation schools to be more aware of boys' education needs before accepting them into the initiation school. The chiefs should also be accountable of the impact that initiation school has on students' participation in school because most of them drop out and never return' [Principal3-Highlands, Female].
- 'Career guidance by someone from outside the school and community such as lawyers, police and teachers from outside the school would motivate the students to improve their

grades' [Principal3-Highlands, Female].

- 'I do think there needs to be increased focus of quality of education, increase focus on the relationship, as I said, with the community and school and building that up' [Key Informant4, Female];
- 'Teachers should be responsible for learners' attendance at school because before one can dropout in school, he would first start by not coming to school for a day or two days, and week maybe....Parents should be taught how to be influential in their children's education. Parents should check whether their children are doing their homework even if they are not helping them because some parents are uneducated but the support that they will be giving their children will motivate them and find it necessary to attend school' [Key Informant5, Female].



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## Leave no child behind

## Boys' disengagement from education

## Lesotho case study

In the framework of its work gender equality in and through education better understand boys' disengagement from education, UNESCO commissioned five country case studies to inform the publication "Leave no child behind: Global report on boys' disengagement from education". National research teams examined the situation in five countries – Fiji, Kuwait, Lesotho, Peru and the United Arab Emirates.

This case study presents the results from Lesotho.

## Stay in touch



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