



KATETE

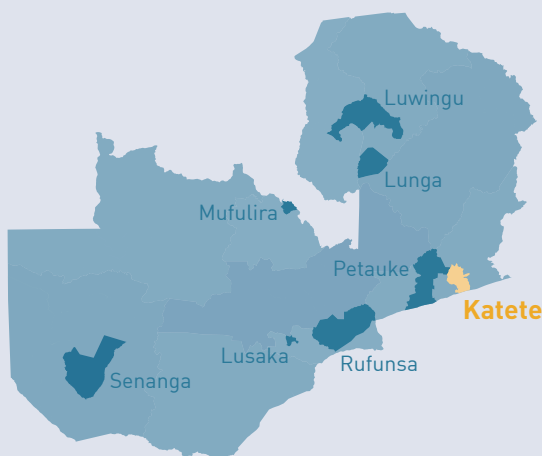
DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

DROPPING OUT?

A PARTICIPATORY EXPLORATION
OF ADOLESCENT SCHOOL
JOURNEYS IN ZAMBIA

Research Approach

Commissioned by UNICEF Zambia, a primarily qualitative study was conducted to **understand how decisions are made on whether or not adolescents (aged 10–19) complete their schooling in Zambia.** In order to answer this, the research examined key actors and factors in journeys of school retention and dropout in Zambia. Round Robins, three-day activities with adolescents, provided an innovative and participatory means of gathering information and making adolescents actors in the research; case studies with adolescents and parents, and focus group discussions with parents and teachers, along with stakeholder key informant interviews and a small quantitative exercise in Lusaka, were also used. See *Dropping Out? A Participatory Exploration of Adolescent School Journeys in Zambia – Final Report* for further methodological info. **This report consolidates key findings from Katete. These are based on fieldwork conducted in two locations and are informative rather than comprehensive.**



	Town	Rural	Total
Round Robins	1	1	2
Case Studies	3	4	7
Parent FGDs	2	2	4
Teacher FGDs	1	1	2
KIIs		7	7

Situating Katete

The problems people face here is the lack of things. If it's here in the mission, the situation is better with those that work, but when you go a bit deeper in the farms, people are really suffering. [...] people don't have money; others become thieves because of lack of things; others do not cultivate; hence they just eat leftovers from Katete boarding school in this area. – Adolescent

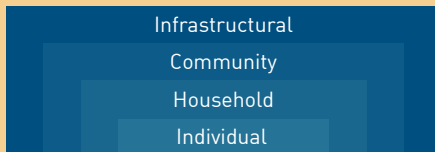
They lack money to take us children to school. Also, we don't have uniforms, shoes and other things required at school. This is why children drop out of school because they tell our parents, that money is needed so when they fail to pay, the children get sent home until they drop out eventually. – Adolescent

Adolescents were asked what made their location different or unique from others; they noted 'good things' generally and "cooperation among people unlike other areas", but expressed frustration about the "lack of money to take us children to school", saying "we are poor here and a number of my friends don't go to school."

While limited data exists at the district level, in 2014, Eastern province ranked as "low" according to the human development index. Although poor, this shows some improvement from 2006.¹

In terms of education access, Eastern province as a whole performed worse than all provinces except Lusaka in terms of net enrolment rates at the primary level and was amongst the lowest at the secondary level (with enrolment for grades 8-12 standing at 22% for boys and 18.6% for girls).²

Key District Findings



Infrastructural: Endemic poverty; transport infrastructure/distance to school

Community: Culture (*Nyau* dance groups, female initiation, cattle herding); pressure for child marriage

Household: Lack of value of school; interrupted school journeys due to household economic pressures

Individual: Teenage pregnancy; early marriage

1. While the most commonly given reason for dropouts was economic, “traditional”, **community level-factors received significantly more attention than in other areas**, ranging from dance groups to initiation rites and early marriage and pregnancy.
2. Parents appeared less likely to ascribe high value to school.
3. Although parents were identified as the key decision-maker across the board, **adolescents, especially older ones, can exert their agency** in such ways that parents must simply follow the decision made.

Factors in dropping out



Economic difficulties. Education-related costs were by far the most commonly mentioned factor in

dropouts. Parents in Katete could not afford education costs, with secondary fees highlighted as “too expensive for vulnerable people”. Poor families often struggled to find money for attendant costs. Many saw education costs (in particular school fees) as a major contributor to dropout decisions, linked to household poverty in all areas of Katete. The lack of formal job opportunities, and reliance on farming and rainfall contributed heavily to individual poverty in rural areas.

Now we are facing some challenges because you find that the rains are not doing well this season and it becomes harder to have a good harvest. So, it used to be a very big challenge to take children to school because of that.[...] Others rely on doing business but due to the money challenges across Katete, [...] even if you do business, you are going nowhere because [...] you don't have customers. – Community leader

Adults and adolescents presented the causes of parental poverty differently:

- As many parents earn money through agriculture, they pointed to the effect of poor harvests or low rainfall on their income; some mentioned the lack of formal jobs, large families, or the “lack of capital to start up something in life”.
- Adolescents also cited broad economic factors, such as the lack of jobs, but mostly blamed parents for (individual) poverty, saying they were “lazy”, lack education, or have “too many children”.



Traditional practices. Parents and teachers in town highlighted the role which *Nyau* dance groups can have for boys, particularly reducing study time. Joining these was presented as both parental and/or community-driven, and as an expression of personal agency.³

In more rural areas, respondents also highlighted cattle herding. For those who began herding cattle young,

Most children drop out of school because, when a child is 10 and goes to school, he will be intimidated; then he cannot continue. – NGO representative

For girls, initiation rites were presented as changing their mindset around school. According to parents,

[Girls] are taken in to the chinamwali initiation house once they are considered to be grown. Then you find that they get confused and want to practice what they have learnt, so they drop out of school. In addition, when one is taken into the chinamwali initiation house, instead of people teaching her about good living, cleanliness and other things health wise, they tell her about married life as though she is married, so when she leaves, she just wants to try things out. – Parent

Respondents in town presented these primarily as secondary or distal reasons for dropout decisions, because they lead to pregnancy and marriage; however the three month duration of some initiation rites can in itself lead to dropout.



Parental valuing of school. An NGO worker interviewed flagged, “from the time I started work [here] in 2011, what I have noticed is that parents don’t value education [...], they don’t encourage their children like to go to school. In Katete, the tradition is stronger than any other part of the country I have been to.”

Parents’ educational background has a strong influence on their attitude toward education, said adults and NGOs in all parts of Katete. As a result, the children of uneducated parents were more likely to drop out of school or not attend at all; instead, parents wanted those children to help with the farming. Many parents in Katete interviewed for this study seem to view education primarily as an investment:

The money one gets back from education, after finding a job, is more than the money we put in. – Parent

When parents sold assets such as cattle to pay school fees, they considered the cost worthwhile only if a child completed school or, at least, found work as a result.



Individual watershed moments. When both boys and girls spoke of the coming-of-age experience in Katete, no topic was discussed more often than changes associated with puberty. Unsurprisingly perhaps, **pregnancy and early marriage** were both frequently identified as linked to dropping out. Early pregnancies have reportedly increased in one of the locations visited.

In 2017 and 2018, we have seen a lot of [pregnant] girls, some getting married and others continuing with school. We have two in Grade 9 with big tummies, which I never used to see in 2011, 2012 . – Teacher

Early pregnancies primarily caused girls to drop out because parents could consider that the girl’s interest was diverted from school. Others could be concerned about school mockery. In some cases, pregnancy linked to early marriage, as families put pressure on girls to marry. However, existing evidence around this is rather contradictory. A recent UNICEF study found that, “in Katete and Mufulira, pregnancy did not appear to be as significant a driver of child marriage as it was elsewhere: In these sites, girls tended not to marry, either because their family wanted them to remain at their natal home to contribute labour to the largely agricultural-based domestic economy (as in Katete) or because the community was in major flux and not governed by traditional structures that would normally influence and frame adherence to social norms and practices (as in Mufulira). Instead, families may agree [on] a damage payment to be made by a boy and his family when a girl becomes pregnant.”⁴

One community leader noted efforts to separate early pregnancy from early marriage, implying that the latter would lead to more permanent dropouts.



Failing specific exams. Adolescents in particular, but also parents and other adults, mentioned exam failure as a reason for dropping out. The risk of leaving school increased when a student failed exams (for example in grade 9, because,

adolescents noted, parents may not see the point of keeping a child in school, as described by one parent:

I have a boy who really wanted to stay in school but when he failed Grade 9, it was difficult for me to pay for him to repeat and to get help, so now he is just seated at home. – Parent

Passing a specific exam could also motivate long-term retention, especially when passing was not assured, as in the case of Samuel (see Case Study).

Shaping the journey

Parents and guardians were arguably the most important people in the lives of adolescents in Katete. Several teachers in the town commented that parents and guardians are among those who have the greatest influence on the attitudes and behaviours of adolescents. Many male and female adolescents in both locations reported going to a parent for guidance on issues such as friendships, other relationships, and difficulties at school, with boys consulting their fathers and girls their mothers.

Adolescents seemed to rely primarily on their parents or guardians, with the majority naming parents as “people they can rely on”. The influence of parents and guardians on adolescents’ (independent) decisions was primary in most cases. Most male adolescents named their parents as the most important people in their lives for decisions about education and school, while female adolescents primarily named just mothers. For dropout and retention decisions they did not make themselves, parents and guardians usually provided advice or encouragement or discouragement. Parents sometimes actively discouraged children from going to school by saying, for example, “even if you go to school, there is no work”.

Mothers in particular were among the most important influencers for non-schooling decisions, particularly related to early marriage and early pregnancy. Adolescents across Katete often commented on the influence of mothers and grandmothers in those decisions, suggesting they pressed for marriage and pregnancy.

Case Study: Samuel, age 16, dropout

Samuel (name changed), age 16, lives with his grandmother, as his parents have passed away. Sarah is 71 and has limited means. She explains the difficulties this poses in raising her 4 grandchildren:

Money is difficult to find so that I can take them to school. The other thing is feeding them is a problem because I am old. I also don't have clothes to give them hence they are walking in their nakedness. I approach these problems by sometimes selling my clothes to someone in order for them to cultivate for me so that I also can have some maize. With clothes and money, I don't really have anything to give them. Things are just too difficult, and the worst thing is that my husband died.

As a result, she and her family have struggled to find money to pay school fees. Samuel remembers,

I was given money by a well-wisher in Grade 3. At that time, we didn't have money to pay for my school fees, so I just asked a man whom I knew to help, and he gave me a 30 Kwacha to pay for my school fees.

But money alone is not all that has motivated Samuel. Recent school success has renewed a desire for further schooling, as well as convinced other supporters of the value of his continued school attendance.

Passing my Grade 7 [exam] has been the most critical thing that happened to me. From Grade 1 to 3, I never used to put in much effort in school; from Grade 4 I started to put in some effort at least but in Grade 7, my performance went down such that people including myself were doubting to whether I would pass. So, I shocked them by passing because even those that used to score better grades than mine before the exam, did not do as well as I did. Some people who knew me, even gave me some presents such as new clothes and money.

Peers appear as strong – but negative – influencers, blamed by adults and adolescents, in particular in town, as causing other adolescents to engage in negative behaviours.

Adolescents and adults repeatedly mentioned peer pressure, group influence, or specific peers (such as boyfriends) as drivers for school dropout decisions. Dropouts and others in rural areas said peers may influence or encourage each other to stop attending school, citing economic rationales, such as “we should stop school and start a business”. In other cases, teachers and older students observed peers who bully (“laugh about”) classmates — particularly those from poorer families or who made poor grades — causing them to consider dropping out.

The influence of regarding schooling decisions also extended to marriage (a girl might want to marry because “her friends are married”; others in rural Katete reported being pressured or coerced into marriage by friends or boyfriends). Peer pressure and group influence also encouraged adolescents to become sexually active, potentially leading to pregnancy, said adults and adolescents in all areas. Pregnant girls or young mothers sometimes stayed away from school because they “fear going to school and that their friends will laugh at them”.

Additional family members and community members reportedly exerted positive but limited influence on decision making.

Decision-making and dropout journeys

Decision makers. In most cases, as in Zambia broadly, parents and guardians were the primary decisions-makers for any issue regarding their children. Most adolescents named parents or other family members who care for them as “persons who have ever made an important decision for them”. Parents said mothers and fathers usually “make [decisions] as a team”, but the final say rests with the father because “the head of the family is a man”, and adolescents in town in particular confirmed this.

My mother makes the most important decisions in my life, even those that concern education. Even when I dropped out of school, she is

the one who told me to leave school because she did not have money for my school fees.
– Adolescent

Whilst adolescents could exert agency by becoming pregnant, parents in Katete played a clear decision-making role in decisions around what to do after. Adults said it is up to the parents to decide whether a girl will return to school because they understand, for example,

The burden will still be on them because they have to take care of [the girl] and her baby.
– Parent

In other cases, parents in both rural and town areas wanted their daughters to get married (and thus mostly drop out) to improve their own financial condition because

If I get rid of this child, I will have fewer children [to] feed. So, it's better to get rid of them. – Religious leader

Reality may be more nuanced. Adolescents reported some cases of adolescent agency around school-related decision making. Adults, similarly, despite reporting being in charge of decision-making, underlined that in many cases adolescents decide to drop out when they want to marry, are pregnant, or no longer see the value of education. **This agency increases as adolescents age, especially boys.**

Dropout patterns. Individual household poverty and a lack of money amongst parents/guardians was arguably both the most defining aspect of the lives of most adolescents in Katete, in terms of access to education, and yet has the least binary impact on school journeys. In many cases, rather, it led to temporary stoppages, or to other elements which in turn led to drop out. Unlike early marriage, which seemed to fairly frequently trigger a firm dropout, economic patterns frequently resulted in fragmented educational journeys.

The most important impacts of poverty/ lack of funds in Katete can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Parents and guardians in all areas could not afford school fees (especially for secondary school) or related costs, such as uniforms; as a result children might have stopped attending, until further funds were found;

- 2) Poverty was a driver for early marriage, which could lead to dropping out;
- 3) When it comes to pregnancy, poverty increased the risk that young mothers “can’t afford to return” to school; and
- 4) Children from very poor households were at greater risk of hunger, and, because “a pupil who comes to school on an empty stomach ... does not concentrate”, academic performance could suffer and dropping out was more likely.

I send my children to school because I know that it’s not every year that we experience a good rainfall pattern. Some of us sorely depending on farming. So, when there is good rainfall, we experienced less burdens. With children, it then becomes an easy thing to do the requirements of school. But when the rainfall is bad, we suffer and can’t take these children to school. – Parent

Schools often turned away children if their fees were not paid; if they enrolled late, parents and guardians expressed concern that they would have trouble catching up; in other cases, students attended early in the school year, but ran out of funds later.

In third term, with failure to pay fees, they stop school. – Teacher

Conclusions & recommendations

Dropout journeys in Katete – in both the rural and town location— resembled those of Zambian adolescents as a whole. Economics, both broadly and at the household and individual level, played a key role, shaping the nature of the adolescents’ drop out and return to school. Parents had a lead – although not unilateral – role in decision making, especially for younger children. Examining key factors contributing to dropouts underlined a stronger-than-average role of ‘culture’ and community level pressures around traditional practices and early marriage in particular. As a result, key recommendations for Katete are as follows:

1. **Create stronger linkages between education and traditional practices**, such as working to promote the scheduling of cultural groups and initiation rites around school as well as considering potential means for inclusion of teaching of appropriate initiation rite content within the structure of the secondary school system. Local chiefs and elders in charge of initiation ceremonies can be engaged on how to include comprehensive sexual education in traditional ceremonies and reduce pro-pregnancy and marriage narratives at the community and household level.
2. **Promote household economic well-being and expand the appeal of education** through initiatives to diversify sources of income, including TVET and skills programmes for young dropouts and the inclusion of ‘practical’ courses in the curriculum. These should be designed around current labour market opportunities in Katete. Cross sectoral programmes should link household income generating activities with school attendance opportunities. Further efforts should be made to continue to promote the value of education beyond its potential financial gains, including the value of school for girls.
3. **Ensure more flexible school fee payment schemes and schedules** that take into account poor rainy seasons or household economic downturns to ensure continuity in attendance and reduce the number of times an adolescent misses school.

- 1 <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/zambia/docs/hdr%20reports/ZHDR%202016.pdf>
- 2 Ministry of General Education (Zambia). ‘Educational Statistical Bulletin 2016’, 2016.
- 3 One teacher noted that some (male) adolescents joined Nyau dance groups and drop out of school, without parents having a say.
- 4 Republic of Zambia. ‘Qualitative Study of Child Marriage in Six Districts of Zambia’, 2015. www.gender.gov.zm/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Qualitative-Research-Report.pdf.



Community voices: Recommendations

Research participants themselves were asked to highlight what they consider top needs and approaches to support to reduce school dropouts in Katete district.

It is important to help [dropouts] come back to school and if they are not able to do so, help them enter into institutions that offer skills so that they can be able to help themselves.

– Teacher

We have good tailors and carpenters as our parents, so a child can come to school and invite the friends to come and see how the father or mother does a certain skill. The parent may also take up maybe a volunteering role. – Parent


It's not just in school where a child can learn something, even on issues of life, our parents from way back have good experience to give us and guide us such that it can be of benefit to you. – Parent

Encourage parents to take their children to school because education is the key to success.

– Adolescent

Some people do not have anyone to support them and consequently end up in marriage. So, there is need to introduce group that will help orphans and those that can't pay to go back to school. – Adolescent

Educating girls on the badness of early marriages. – Adolescent

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The findings of the study 'Dropping Out? A Participatory Exploration of Adolescent School Journeys in Zambia' are presented in the following report documents:

- Final Report
- Katete: District Highlights
- Lunga: District Highlights
- Lusaka: District Highlights
- Luwingu: District Highlights
- Mufulira: District Highlights
- Petauke: District Highlights
- Rufunsa: District Highlights
- Senanga: District Highlights