



# LUNGA

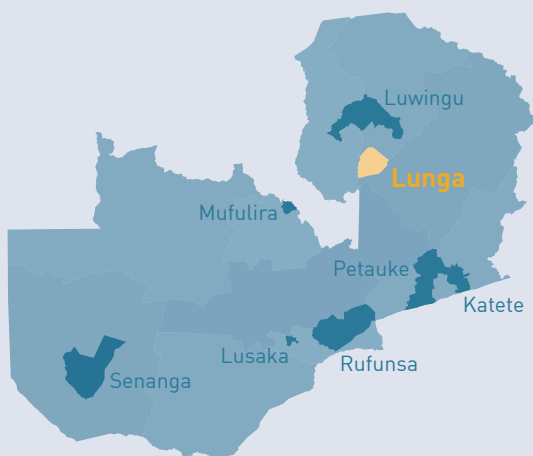
## DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

# 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 Lunga. These are based on fieldwork conducted in just one location and are thus **informative rather than comprehensive**



	<b>Total</b>
<b>Round Robins</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Case Studies</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Parent FGDs</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Teacher FGDs</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>KIIs</b>	<b>4</b>

## Situating Lunga

*This area is called Lunga; we call it “unga”. This area is surrounded by many bodies of water compared to other areas in Zambia. [...] There is so much wildlife and different species of fish. We do not have roads where vehicles can pass; we do not have proper toilets, no boreholes compared to other places. Here even learning is a very difficult compared to other areas because most parents do not value education. Parents would choose to take their children to the fishing camps; therefore children do not manage to concentrate at school.* – Adolescent

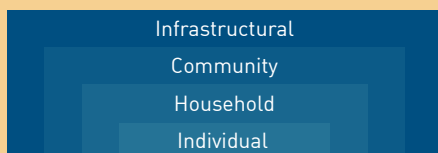
*This place is an island surrounded by bodies of water. The people here have nothing else to do except fishing. All age groups do fishing. [...] Firewood and charcoal are a problem here.*

*There is no electricity here as well. Despite all I have said, people say that chief takes good care of his people.* – Adolescent

In order to get to Lunga district, the simplest way is a two-day road trip to Samfya from Lusaka, followed by a four hour motorboat ride. This district, created in 2012, is made up of an “archipelago of islands in the Bangweulu Wetlands in the South East of Lake Bangweulu.”<sup>1</sup> As a new district, it has struggled with securing civil servants and building adequate infrastructure.

*At my school, we have 7 houses against 33 teachers. You would notice that in a single house keeps about 4 to 5 teachers.* – Government official

## Key District Findings



**Infrastructural:** Endemic poverty; lack of roads, electricity, and transport; quality of teaching; distance to school; poor facilities; increasingly limited fishing

**Community:** Initiation rites; pressure for child marriage; alcohol consumption

**Household:** Interrupted school journeys due to child labour (fishing); push for child marriage (economic reasons)

**Individual:** Teenage pregnancy; early marriage; risky behaviours

The specificities of the drop-out journey in Lunga centred on the district's remoteness and dependency on fishing. These generated a number of infrastructural factors, as detailed below, which contributed to oft-interrupted, when not fully stopped, schooling journeys. The lack of clear opportunities beyond the fishing industry, combined with the perceived decline of the industry itself, seemed to leave many without clear ambitions for their future. Furthermore, the situation of the district made both strong schooling infrastructure and the recruitment of good teachers more difficult.

Adolescents reported that the “place is peaceful and welcoming too” but “people here have nothing to do apart from going to the fish camps to catch fish”.

At the provincial level, only 11.2% of jobs in Luapula are formal; of the 88.8% which are informal, 84.2% are in some form of agriculture, largely fishing. The 2015 *Zambia Living Conditions Monitoring Survey* underlines that, “in rural areas, save for households whose head was in wage employment, households headed by persons in self-employment, farming/fishing/forestry, unpaid/piece workers, unemployed and inactive were associated with high levels of extreme poverty.”<sup>2</sup>

## Factors in dropping out



**Economics.** Most respondents agree that parents lack the money to pay school fees, in part due to a decline in fishing – the main local industry.

*These days it looks like there no more fish in the water. The incomes of people here have*

*declined because they can't sell as much fish as before. The money available for school is also less, especially when the learners proceed to secondary school where they have to start paying a lot more money for their children's education. The majority of children are chased from school because they can't pay school fees. That is the main reason why every year, only a few pupils complete secondary here. The parents would prefer that their children just get married or go to fishing camps. – Teacher*

Few alternative means of earning a living were reported to exist in Lunga.

*Most of the adolescents are not into education, [rather they think] maybe they can start up a business when they are out of school; they can learn how to fish and selling isabi (fish). There is no value in that now as the fish have finished in the lake and there is nothing else that they can do besides fishing. – School staff*

A few respondents noted that the economic barriers to paying school fees were worsened for the many children whose parents died young. The

2010 Census found that Luapula province has the lowest life expectancy in Zambia, at 45 years, as compared to a country level average of 51.2 years. Contributing to this is the second highest maternal mortality rate in the country, behind only Northern province.<sup>3</sup> Loss of one or both parents further impacted the ability to pay for school.

### Fishing, child labour and dropping out

According to nearly all respondents, fishing plays a key role in the economy in Lunga – and in recent years it has not been a positive one. The area's livelihoods are threatened by drops in fishing stocks. While a yearly three-month fishing ban is in place to help replenish these, but some suggested that fishers continue to fish at night, and a Luapula minister has suggested a longer, twelve-month ban.

*Fish have finished in the river, which is the main source of income.* – Parent

Despite the fishing industry's challenges, it somewhat paradoxically remained the 'solution' for many to financial households. Children, boys in particular, would "go to the fishing camps" to earn additional money.

*In many cases if a child has no one to support him or her to school. Most of the time he goes to the fishing camps in search for money. The time he is required to study is all spent killing fish.* – Parent

In some cases, this was problematic because the missed school time made it too difficult to reintegrate into school (see the case study). In others, children reportedly grew to prefer making money.

*For instance, when a child finds little money, and keeps in business and thinks there is no need to go to school when they can have their own income. [...] He would even stop school in Grade 5 when he starts going to fishing camps and gets about k500 and starts up a business.* – Religious leader

*[With regards to the] lack of sponsorship, most of the children here do not have parents to take them to school.* – Teacher



**Poor infrastructure.** Poor infrastructure in the area was highlighted as contributing to school dropouts in several different ways.

One teacher described these problems as follows:

*There are two schools in this area. The secondary has one by four classrooms. The secondary classrooms are borrowed by the primary section. The primary is lacking infrastructure. Teachers have no houses. In a single house, they are sharing as many as four teachers. The learners have problems accessing water; they depend on one borehole.* – Teacher

The secondary school in the area were noted as lacking electricity, desks, labs, running water, and enough classrooms, with teachers reportedly fetching water from the river. Some classes were run in shifts by teachers teaching in the morning and the afternoon.

*Electricity is a challenge in these schools. Teachers always have difficulty preparing themselves for classes. You would find that they do not even have torchlights to assist them.* – School staff

**Teachers' accommodation was crowded, and communication with other parts of the country is difficult;** as a result, respondents noted that workers from other districts are challenged by the conditions, making it difficult to recruit and keep good teachers.

*There are also few teachers here because there is no accommodation at secondary to support them. As a result, many leave when they are posted here. They get discouraged with the hardships they find.* – Religious leader

*We don't have electricity here. Most of the workers that are posted here are finding it difficult to stay with us.* – School staff

Finally, some children in Lunga, like in other parts of the country, faced long and tiring journeys to school. While the situation has improved – before, children would travel as far

as Samfya or Lubwe for school – still, not all children could get to school quickly.

*Imagine trying to come to secondary with all the challenges that the children face. As you can see this place is surrounded by water; there are children who come from as far as Nsalushi and Kalenga on canoes just to come and acquire some education. As they come, the children are tired, they are hungry, and they are late. You do not expect them to catch up with classes. They are always behind. We have noticed many adolescents who come from these far areas stop coming to school as they are discouraged with distance and transport costs.* – Teacher



#### **Widespread risky behaviours.** ‘Risky’

behaviours were underlined across the districts visited as contributing to dropout rates. Lunga, however, was unusual, in that the respondents interviewed highlighted not just adolescents’, and their parents’ risky behaviours, but that of teachers.

Adolescents’ risky behaviours were given as both cause and consequence of dropping out from school.

*Many boys that are going to school and those that are not in school have nothing to do at home. If they have not gone to catch fish, most of them hang out with bad groups that teach how to smoke and drink alcohol.* – Adolescent

Parents’ drinking reduced the financial and emotional support they could give to schooling.

*If parents drink a lot, you will find that all the money will be wasted in beer and when the children need to pay school fees, there will be nothing left over.* – Adolescent

*Parents just spend money on alcohol and women hence children are left with nothing at home.* – Adolescent

Some teachers’ behaviour included clearly inappropriate elements which could contribute to dropout journeys.

*What surprises me here is that most of the teacher’s drink alcohol with their pupils and*

*propose the with girls from the community and at times they even fight over girls* – Adolescent

*In our area both teachers and pupils drink beer heavily together and sometimes they even leave classes just to go and drink beer since bars are near the school.* – Adolescent

*Sometimes the teachers make [adolescent girls] pregnant as their wives live far away.* – Parent



#### **Pregnancy and early marriage.**

Pregnancy was frequently noted as the female version of risky behaviour which can – although not always – lead to dropout.

Early pregnancies were attributed, in some cases, to transactional sex:

*Girls who are coming from poor families admire what their friends have. As a result, [they] start hanging with men in order to have [this] as well. In the process, they find themselves pregnant* – School staff

While the Re-Entry policy allows girls to return to school, the negative reactions of some parents to it suggested that girls who have been pregnant may face stigma and lack of parental support in returning to school.

*This law that has been brought into school has just spoiled the children. [If] they had introduced a law that whoever gets pregnant is expelled from school, maybe these pregnancies would not have increased.* – Parent

Another parent added that boys who fathered children should also be expelled.

Early marriages were attributed primarily either to (1) financial reasons, with parents using their daughters to earn money, or (2) as a result of pregnancy.

Early marriage was understood by some to improve household economics by removing the burden of feeding and caring for a young girl, as well as the receipt of a dowry.

*In this area, many parents don’t know the value of school. They choose to marry off their children to get money in return and enjoy before they die.* – Adolescent



### Quality of teaching and methods

**used.** The quality of teachers/teaching was mentioned by respondents (both adults and adolescents) as a factor that can increase dropout rates. Very few stated that the quality of teachers/teaching was 'good'; in addition to behaviour outside of school, some of the disciplinary methods used by teachers were criticized (corporal punishment is illegal in schools).

*We receive many cases and reports here from adolescents of teachers not being serious compared to other schools. Here there is a tendency of teachers frequently drinking beer.*  
– Government official

*We thought we had a teacher who was disorganized. We told our class teacher at that time to bring us a much better teacher so that we would easy catch up again as he was not good at his duties teaching.* – Adolescent

### Case Study: Gideon, age 17, dropout

Gideon (name changed), age 17, dropped out of school due to financial constraints. His story highlights the further challenges of adolescents in Lunga, whose families depend on the fishing industry.

When Gideon began school, he felt proud of his academic successes.

*There was a time when, for the first time, in my life I passed number three in Grade 5. They called us in front of the whole school to be presented with certificates. Our parents were also present watching....I never felt that good before.*

However, when he reached Grade 7, the financial difficulties faced by his family grew too strong, despite his motivation to continue with his schooling.

*I had a very difficult time. Money has been a very big problem since my father was involved in a road accident. My mother was then doing nothing. She was just seated at home taking care of dad before she died. My father was a fish trader who used to travel to Samfya and even as far as Serenje to sell fish. Since he broke his leg and spine, he went out of business and ever since life has never been the same again. No more money to continue supporting me to school.*

*I wrote my Grade 7 exams and luckily enough I passed and went to Grade 8. There, the school fees had increased so much. I was missing out in many classes at school at that time. When there was no money, I would only stay at home. However, I kept on with school despite difficulties. I failed to write my final Grade 9 exam because by then; money was inadequate to pay for my exams and school fees. I was forced to stay at home in frustration while waiting to see if any miracle would take me back to school. Much time had passed before I could go back to school. Two years later until I became a fisherman.*

Having raised money on his own, Gideon sought to return to school, but soon decided for himself that fishing was the better option for both him and his family.

*After raising little money, I thought I could pay for myself. Unfortunately, I found myself going back to Grade 7. I continued going to school until I realized it was taking me nowhere and eventually thought of just continuing with fishing that would raise me enough money for my family and myself. I just thought I was not losing anything by stopping school. Both of my parents were not doing anything. Besides, I thought going back to Grades 7 would cost me a lot of time and money, and just the idea of being a repeater frustrated me.*

*Stopping school was purely my own decision looking the situation of things. My parents, teachers, and even friends had asked me concerning this. No one ever pushed me to make the decision I made. As long as my parents were in support. I had a serious argument with my mother though. She wanted me to continue with school.*

## Decision-making and adolescent agency

As with other locations in Zambia, parents were key decision makers. That being said, adolescents' agency in decision making increased as they grew older.

*We rely on our parents because at this stage we do not even know how to make a decision.*  
– Adolescent

*I make most of the decisions by myself because am now over sixteen.* – Adolescent

Adolescents perceived themselves as making decisions on both school and non-school matters. This type of decision making was discussed mostly when it came to issues such as choosing friends, engaging in risky behaviours such as substance abuse, early pregnancies and marriages.

*I took it upon myself to get pregnant because I wished for it. It's only me and the person that made me pregnant that decided.* – Adolescent

Other family members were named as key decision-makers only when they were paying school fees.

In terms of dropout journeys, the most often repeated path was one of gradual dropout, with money for fees unavailable, students missing terms, falling behind, eventually engaging in risky behaviour and then dropping out, with the decision attributed as much to circumstances as to a measured decision.

*[Fishing bans] are very common. At that time there is no exception, we all become affected. These parents fail to take their children to school because they do not have an alternative income source and hence other children will stop going to school. As a result, the adolescents start playing around and if it is girls, they become pregnant. Boys engage themselves in wrong peer groups and the learn smoking, do what they want and then drop out of school.* – Government official

## Conclusions & recommendations

Improving the schooling journey for adolescents in Lunga is challenged by the depth of the infrastructural challenges, as well as households' limited economic opportunities, and more widespread risky behaviours – including teachers. As one key informant flagged,

*Development is a huge problem. When you want to initiate projects, material and resources are miles away and you have to incur huge financial costs to bring in resources.* – Government official

Acknowledging this challenge, the recommendations below are oriented towards “easier” fixes, with the exception of improved teacher accommodations.

- 1. Improve quality of accommodations offered to teachers** coming from other districts, to allow them to come with their family and reduce poor behaviour with students. In particular, consider where local material can be used.
- 2. Engage local community in education;** positive mention was made of having contributed to the construction of the secondary school. This would contribute to a more education-positive environment.
- 3. Focus on alternative livelihood options for adolescents and their households** through initiatives to diversify sources of income, including TVET and skills programmes for young dropouts and the inclusion of ‘practical’ courses in the curriculum, contributing to opportunities beyond fishing.

1 <http://www.luapula.province.gov.zm/districts/lunga.html>

2 Zambia living conditions monitoring survey, p. 109

3 Central Statistical Office, 2010 Census of Population and Housing, National Analytical Report, pp. 58-59.

## Community voices: Recommendations

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

**Parent and Teacher Community Campaign:** *[It] will make both the teachers and parents find better ways of helping the community and inform other people about the importance of education especially to those parents who don't value education of their children, maybe this will reduce the number of drop outs and early marriages.* – Adolescent

**Building motivation:** *Children need motivation [...]. There is also the need to educate parents on the importance and the value education to eliminate negligence on education of their children. I would firstly talk to the parents and then their children. It's important to introduce programs involving role models once in a while to talk to the children so that children and see and learn the value and benefit of school.* – School staff

**Sexual education:** *For this community, even the parents have no education on sexuality education. They have no ideas on family planning. Even, they have children any time, at any age. Pupils here have no recreation activities to keep them busy. They only have sex. I cannot lie to you. They practice sex anywhere at any time at all ages. Even Grade 2 at primary knows about it but do not know its related problems.* – Teacher

**Skills training:** *In addition, if they are educated with computers, they would already know how to use them in the offices of their workplace.* – Parent

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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