



MUFULIRA

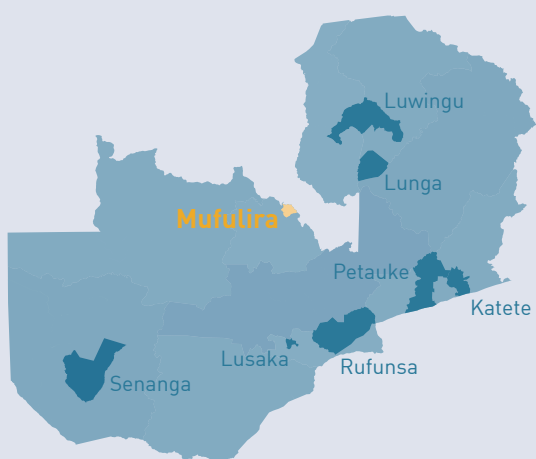
DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

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 Mufulira. 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	4	4	8
Parent FGDs	2	2	4
Teacher FGDs	1	1	2
KIIs		6	6

Situating Mufulira

The people here are mostly charcoal burners and they do some farming and they have not much to do. And the adolescents are greatly affected, and they drop out of school. There are so many factors that cause that one. They don't realize the importance of education because most parents are not educated. Only a few do realize, and it is just now that they are realizing the importance of school that they are seeing other people progressing. – Adolescent

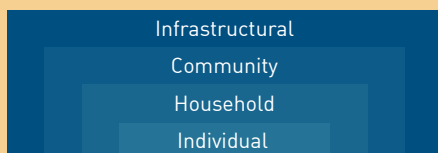
When adolescents were asked what made them happy to be from Mufulira, they talked about the “welcoming and friendly” people, the nearby border with Congo, the presence of industries, particularly mining, the variety of beautiful trees, and children’s respect for their elders.

The local news was around an upcoming “reduction in the price of mealie-meal as we have approached the rain seasons because many people will soon start farming” and “some are saying that the council will bring back the water in town, as the people in Butondo have not had some water of late.”

Farming, mining, and charcoal burning were the most common type of jobs. However, job losses in the mining sector had adversely affected the predominantly urban district. High rates of poverty were pervasive.

Even though Mufulira as a district has 10 secondary schools, shortage of schools in rural areas was still a problem where adolescents face long distances to reach school. Despite this, in 2014, Mufulira ranked 6th out of 101 districts on its Grade 7 exams scores. Respondents acknowledged the quality of teachers, even

Key District Findings



Infrastructural: Poverty; limited job opportunities; distance from school

Community: Initiation ceremonies; pressure for early marriage

Household: Lack of value of school; death of parent; burden of school fees

Individual: Risky behaviours; teenage pregnancies; poor academic performance

1. Despite a more diversified economy than other districts visited, **poverty and school fees continued to represent key obstacles** to completion of school journeys for adolescents.
2. In rural areas, **distances to school** are a significant barrier to attendance, in particular for girls.
3. **Parents remained key decision makers** around dropout and retention decisions, but **adolescents themselves – and their peers – could have a strong influencing role** when aiming to stop school.

though school infrastructure were generally poor. Yet, even when children pass exams, parents were not able to afford school costs.

Most children around here pass their exams, but our parents have nowhere to get money for school. – Adolescent

Factors in dropping out



Poverty and school fees.

Respondents overwhelming saw poverty and households' inability to pay for school fees for the number one reason children were not sent to school. High level of unemployment or low-income work, such as piece work, meant that school fees constituted a large percentage of households' monthly income.

You will find that you get paid a k700, school fees are k500 and house rent is k250. The money we get is not enough to cater for the family needs. – Parent

The costs increased significantly with the move from primary to secondary, often making Grade 7 the last grade completed by adolescents: "Just from grade 1, its k150... but for Grade 8, it's

about k700." In the Copperbelt, the transition rate from Grade 7 to 8 was actually 81%, the highest among all 8 provinces. However it dropped to 50% from Grade 9 to 10.¹

Parents and adolescents also cited additional school expenses or "requirements" as a challenge to paying for their children's education.

The money we pay is too much. A person like me cannot manage. The costs of book is high, the pens, pencils, rulers and uniforms are very expensive. I cannot afford in my situation. – Parent

Family size further compounded households' ability to pay for all children.

Yes, family size can have an impact on why there is a large number of drop outs before Grade 12. ... Parents are made to make a choice, for example there is one I know who has 12 children and 5 dependents whom he has to sponsor, so he has decided to drop 2 dependents from education and continue sponsoring only 3, so capacity also can be affected by family size. – Government official

The knock-on effect was that the inability of parents to pay fees led to a loss of revenue for the

school, impacting infrastructure and continuing poor or inadequate equipment and facilities,

... because parents are not paying the required user fee. Therefore, the schools are not able to run because they do not have the money to do so. – Teacher

It further impacted teachers' ability to teach:

The teachers do not have enough stationary to teach children, this is because the rate of parents paying school fees is low. – Parent

In Mufulira, it was commonly discussed that many households have a single parent, a grandparent, or an older sibling as the head of the household. The Copperbelt as a whole had “the highest proportion of orphans at 16.7%”.² This put adolescents at greater risk of not completing school.

If one is an orphan, there will be no one to pay for his/her school fees, so it is easy to stop school even when you want to be in school. – Adolescent

Early marriage and child labour were also clearly linked to pervasive poverty.

Poverty can influence the attitudes of parents/guardians/sponsors towards adolescent and their education. Some of these parents for

instance is they happen to get approached by someone with a lot of wealth who say 'I want to marry your daughter'. – Government official



Parental valuing of school. Descriptions of how parents value education and support their children varied by respondent. Parents overwhelmingly said they value educating children but the household finances made it difficult to prioritise.

There is great value in education and once a child gets educated, it brings great joy on the family. – Parent

We have to work hard as parents to ensure that there is some money that has to readily available for all the school requirements of our children. – Parent

In contrast to parents, adolescents, community members, and teachers primarily described parents as “not valuing education”. Common complaints were parents misuse of funds on alcohol and drugs.

What causes this small number [low school completion rates] is the negligence of parents in regard to the education of a child. You would find that a parent is a beer drinker that cares more about drinking than the education of their child. As a result, when the school fees are needed at school, money is not available. – Parent

When education was not valued, children are often married off early for bride prices or sent to work.

Parents sending children to go and sell vegetables. Parents are ignorant and do not understand the benefits of a child going to school, as such they don't value education. – Adolescent



Distance to school. For the rural location in Mufulira, access to schools was highlighted as major factor in dropouts; the location was described as having a “shortage of schools”. The distance from home to school could be considerable; one adolescent noted a journey of over two hours each way. It was clear that distance was a strong contributor to dropout journeys.

Gender norms and roles

Overall, parents mentioned that males and families were equally easy to raise. However, more responsibility and demands seemed to be placed on girls in the form of household chores and duties. Though the issue was brought up in both locations, it seemed a bit more prevalent in the rural area.

Based on community members' observations, more importance was placed on the boy child getting an education.

Even today as people still prefer to take a boy child to school than a girl child. – Government official

I had no option but just to stop going to school. The only reason is just the distance.

– Adolescent

A concern chiefly expressed by parents was that traveling over the long distances was potentially unsafe, particularly when alone.

If there is flooding and there is no where were they are going to pass. And if there is an area where they are wild animals, really they will fear to go to school. – Government official

The safety of girls was also a concern, with some worried that they would fall pregnant due to the lack of parental supervisions on the journeys.

Even if pupils choose to remain in school, traveling long distances had detrimental effect performance and ability to concentrate in class.

Because of the long distances from home to school, you find that you get tired before you reach school and by the time the teacher will be teaching you are dosing. Sometimes they beat and punish at school if you come late.

– Adolescent



Early pregnancy. High levels of teen pregnancy were cited by all respondents as the biggest drop out factor facing adolescent girls. Pregnancy was attributed to peer pressure and seeing the material benefits of engaging in sexual activities with an older man. Girls were described as “too playful”, “having no responsibility”, “misbehaving” and “lacking discipline”.

Adolescent girls dropped out despite the Re-entry policy, due to the demands of taking care of a baby, or mockery from peers:

The girl would have difficulties to concentrate at school, as there would be need for a young mother after giving birth to care for the need of her baby. – Teacher

If someone gets pregnant, they mock at school, so you feel uncomfortable then you stop going.

– Adolescent

Impacts or consequences for the father was rarely discussed.

Case Study: Sarah, age 17, drop out

Sarah's (name changed) guardian was her grandmother who also kept several other of her grandchildren. The grandmother's husband passed away and the family lost the main financial provider, so the Sarah had to drop out of school. While out of school, she got pregnant. Though she was hoping to return to school after giving birth, the money is not there for her to resume her education.

My grandfather, he fell so sick. He later died. Since that time, there has been no one to pay for my fees. I only remain with my grandmother. I have just been staying home [...] I did not make any decision to stop going to school; It's just because of my grandfather's death.

After passing to Grade 10, I have not gone back because of money. The people were supposed to buy me books and pay for my school fees had passed on in December. It was my grandfather who paid for me since childhood. It (pregnancy) also prevented me from going back to school.

Her grandmother further detailed,

The frustrations I have is not having anything to provide for my family, because the person who used to help me feed and provide for my children passed away. I want all my children to get educated but I do not have the means to do so. I have many grandchildren in different grades who stay with me.

My granddaughter passed her exams to go to Grade 10, the thing that followed is that the boy who impregnated her cannot take care of her. The main reason she also was not going to school is because there was no money to pay for her school fees. Even her results have not been collected; we have a balance of school fees, but she would like to be in school.

There was no one who came out strongly that she should stop school. In the process of looking for money, she fell pregnant that is how we said first her child should grow a little then she goes back. Also during this time is when my husband was very ill but he promised that immediately he gets better he will look for the money and pay for her to be in school but he died soon after.

Shaping the journey

Children are now independent and do not entirely depend on parents or guardians but themselves. – Adolescent

Parents and guardians. Respondents agreed that parents and guardians were the major influencers and decision makers for adolescents on every aspect of their lives.

At my age it is not easy to decide for myself on various issues because we're are still kept by our parents. Mostly they tell us what to do.
– Adolescent

Parents and guardians were situated within Zambian extended family and community networks who helped shape the choices they make.

The way I am a single parent, I make all those decisions alone. I am just firm on my children with what I want from them. Sometimes when I feel I have failed; I call on family members to help me out or the elderly neighbors around her. – Parent

Any decision regarding education, particularly as it relates to school costs, rested squarely with parents. However, adolescents were not completely excluded from the decision making process.

The method of sitting down with them and deciding together is the one we still do. – Parent

Parents' negligence in terms of providing for their families or being a negative influence on their children was highlighted by some respondents, particularly with regard to early marriage:

Sometimes it's because of the parents. They concentrate so much on drinking alcohol and not providing their children with anything.
– Adolescent

It's like a culture in this area, where you are a child at 12, pregnant at 14. It is normal here. Even the parents support this kind of issue.
– Teacher

Peers. Peers were the biggest influence on adolescents' lives; adults, in particular, saw them as contributing to dropping out.

Sometimes friends make others to stop school because of what they do. If someone has friends who don't go to school, they can influence one to also stop. – Adolescent

Media. The sentiment of adults was that media, particularly social media, has an overall negative effect on adolescents' behaviours and attitudes, although adolescent themselves did not underline it as an influence. It reportedly impacted both family relations and in school.

Back then a child could only get advice from a parent or relatives but these days a child can get advice anywhere, on the phone, the TV, anywhere, and that advice most of the time is not good for the child. – Government official

Exposure from social media can also make adolescents leave school deliberately thinking that what they see is more pleasing than getting educated. – Government official

Adolescent agency and school

Adolescents in the younger age groups (10 – 14) describe their relationship with their parents/families as stronger and close, explaining, “during this age group, our family is close to us.” However, that relationship progressed to more and more independence the older adolescents got. There we an increased willingness on the part of parents and guardians to discuss problems with them,

When we receive the problem, we sit our children down and try talk to our children about the problems they are facing... We try to talk to them what has caused the problem. – Parent

The older age groups responded they have much more input into decisions as they get older though some stated that the “major decisions” were still made by the parents, “in some instances, you find that parents still make important decisions for their children.”

Conclusions & recommendations

Dropout journeys in Mufulira were similar to those examined across the country: finances played a key role but did not fully explain the diverse schooling journeys adolescents take. This was particularly expressed in discussions around the valuing of school: parents strongly stated they value school but face financial difficulties in paying for it, while in contrast, other respondents highlighted that parents use of funds for other priorities – in some cases, alcohol and drugs. This could further contribute to gendered economic coping mechanisms such as early pregnancy and marriage. Decision-making was led by parents, but adolescents were able to express some agency, especially around dropouts. As a result, key recommendations for Mufulira in particular include:

- 1. Build knowledge around risky behaviours among adults and adolescents.** Targeting parents as well as adolescents is important to reduce the likelihood of parents prioritising drugs and alcohol over school fees whilst simultaneously preventing adolescents from beginning those habits. This can also contribute to addressing the ‘cost-benefit’ economic narrative driving some adolescents’ dropout.
- 2. Address the question of social media in schools.** Building adolescents’ understanding of how to interpret what they see on social media – and how social media can bias their views of opportunities and social norms – can (a) provide a way to increase adolescent engagement in a class – given widespread interest in media by them – and (b) give them the tools necessary to understand how to interpret what they read and hear.
- 3. Take onboard urban and rural specificities in designing programming.** Students living in rural areas of Mufulira face challenges similar to those of students in rural areas across the country, including long distances to school. In urban Mufulira, challenges are more centred on the economic factors.



- 1 Central Statistical Office (2016), Educational Bulletin, pg 23
- 2 Central Statistical Office (2015), Zambia Living Conditions Monitoring Survey, p. 17

Community voices: Recommendations

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

If we look the infrastructure of the schools, just the facilities, if they were boosted a bit, I think the children will be more interested in coming to school. Of course, I appreciate new schools are being built but look at a school like Chibolya which was built 50 years ago. It is dilapidated. Even if the structure looks good, there is dilapidation. The doors have seen better years. These things will attract the child to school .


– School staff

I would want them to learn things that will enhance their livelihood like mingling with disciplined people and learning skills like brick making. There is a stream where they can do fishing. – Government official

Sensitization to the pupils on the importance of education and ensuring that schools and other learning environments are conducive for the learners. You know Mufulira has produced a lot of high-profile people in society so if only those people can hold talks with pupils telling them the importance of being in school and the importance of education. That can really help.

– Government official

If parents are not able to raise school fees for their children, I advocate that they pay in kind unlike sending away their children. I can hold awareness campaign meetings with parents encouraging them on the value and importance of education for their children. – Government official

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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