



PETAUKE

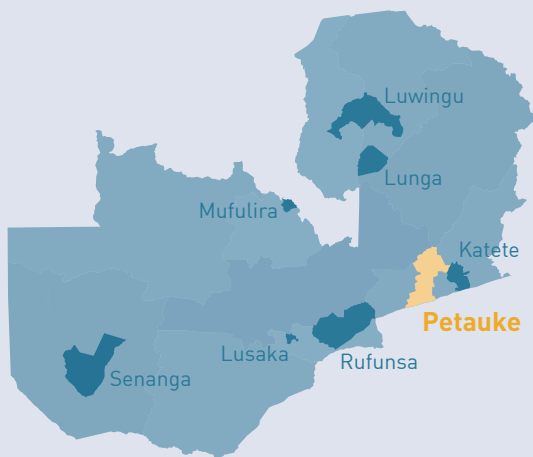
DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

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 Petauke. 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		6	6

Situating Petauke

I would wish my father would save money for the future of his children, especially for education. Also, maybe as a parent, train your children in some business skills so that at point of your death, they don't struggle with life because you would have already paved a way for them. – Adolescent

For the child not to drop out of school, the child, the parent and the school are involved, if one is missing, then the child is likely to drop out. So, it's important that all these three work together to make sure that the child stays in school. – Parent

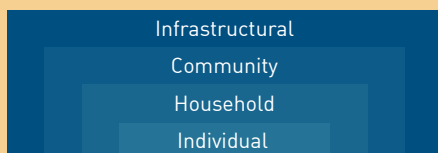
Located in Zambia's heavily agricultural Eastern Province, Petauke district is located about halfway between Lusaka and Zambia's border

with Malawi. Respondents lamented the heavy reliance on farming, in particular the dependence on rains, putting households at risk of hunger each year. At least, goods were not as expensive as in Lusaka, but availability was much more limited. Adolescents talked about drinks like *tobwa* and *munkoyo* and the availability of maize and groundnuts.

Limited data exists at the district level. However, as of the 2015, Eastern Province has the highest labour force participation in the country amongst persons aged 12 and up (63.3%), with 92.4% employed in the informal sector, which is 89.9% agriculture.¹

The main thing is finances; so many people fail to generate funds to go to school. – Government official

Key District Findings



Infrastructural: Endemic poverty; school infrastructure and overcrowding

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

Household: Interrupted school journeys due to household economic pressures; child labour in agriculture

Individual: Teenage pregnancy; early marriage; risky behaviours

1. **General poverty, and seasonality/ variations in household income**, were major drivers of both dropout and erratic attendance at school.
2. The **impact of traditional practices** such as initiation rites, and pressure towards early marriage, remained strong.
3. **Risky behaviour** on the part of adolescents, reportedly driven by peer pressure and the desire to experience sexuality after initiation rites, also contributed heavily towards drop-out journeys.
4. While **parents and guardians were named as the primary decision makers** around school, they themselves felt limited agency when constrained financially.
5. The authority of whomever was sponsoring a child was strongest; however, **children found means to exert agency** through actions impacting – positively or negatively – their school journeys.

In terms of net enrolment rate, Eastern province as a whole performed worse than all provinces except Lusaka, and was amongst the lowest in terms of secondary enrolment (with enrolment for grades 8-12 standing at 22% for boys and 18.6% for girls).² Transition rates were slightly worse for girls in upper secondary, 0.472 vs. 0.574.³

Factors in dropping out



Poverty. The highly agricultural nature of livelihoods in Petauke left most households dependent on the weather for earning money. With recent droughts, the typical seasonality of income generation in farming households had worsened, with direct links to dropping out.

Almost everyone in this community depends on farming to generate some income for the survival of their families. When there is drought like in the past few years, we have nothing to sell. If we have nothing to sell, then we won't

have any money for survival as well as to take our children to school. – Parent

The agricultural nature of income-generation could also lead to children working at least part time.

We do a lot of farming, our children help us at our farms, cultivating, planting seed, watering and so on. This is for both girls and boys. – Parent

General poverty at Petauke in turn influenced individual choices that adolescents and their families had to make around early marriages and pregnancies, bad influences from friends, work and stealing, which could all directly lead to dropping out. As one adolescent put it,

If the man is rich and you are poor, you can't refuse because when you are married, you will enjoy using whatever he has. – Adolescent

They will start prostitution because you find that the parents are poor. – Community leader

Respondents specifically drew a link to school fees at the secondary school level, among other costs, as leading to dropout. As one parent put it, “Back in the day when education was free things were easy. Now that schools have high fees for admission for children, I have been unable to pay because of my suffering and lack of a job. I simply told my children to stay at home.”



School infrastructure. Poor quality and overcrowded schools were mentioned multiple times as contributing to dropout. Over enrolment, at a high level, was widespread due to the limited number of seats in secondary school. Respondents underlined that it could be worsened in schools perceived as being of higher quality, thereby undermining their quality, as parents sought to enrol their children there.

As parents, we would want to associate ourselves with schools that produce better

Gendered approaches to child rearing

Heavily linked by respondents to tradition, parents frequently expressed gendered approaches to child-raising. While in some cases, this simply leads to, for example, different household chores for girls and boys, in others this can have a direct impact on education.

In some cultures, education is seen to be only for males and not females. Children are told this from an early age. This makes it hard for girls to see themselves beyond grade 9 or grade 12, because they know that soon after they reach these grades, they'll be asked to drop from school and maybe married off to older men. Other don't allow girl children to go to school. – Teacher

I think mostly we also have traditional values. Because you find that when the girl is of age, you find that the parents will keep the girl in the house and teach them about marriage things and they delay their school while boys go to school. – Government official

results hence the over enrolment in some of the schools within town. – Government official

Normally, back in the day, what we knew was that they were supposed to be 40 pupils in a class, but this time we have a teacher having 90 children in one class. Some of them have 100, 130 to 150, so there's congestion and because of that there's a lot of overburdening of the teachers. – Religious leader

The schools themselves were often in poor condition, with respondents flagging, for example, the lack of windows and damaged roofs.



Initiation rites and other traditions. Traditional practices such as Nyau dancing and initiation rites were mentioned as a socio-cultural factor that could facilitate dropping out by adolescents both directly – by keeping them home – as well as indirectly – by, for example, creating feelings of adulthood and supposedly creating aspirations around sexuality and marriage.

When a girl becomes of age, they keep her in the house and tell her what she should do, like giving elders respect or when you are giving your parents nshima, you should be kneeling. They tell her a lot of things. – Adolescent

When they're initiated, they are told that they're woman enough. At this point the girl feels she can handle any man. So, what next, there's higher motivation to get married. Around 85% of girls that have been initiated have dropped out of school. – Religious leader

Unlike in nearby Katete, cattle herding was not highlighted and Nyau dance groups and initiation rites for boys were mentioned less frequently; although they did come up, the emphasis was placed on initiation rites leading to girls staying at home and getting married.

Cultural practices around dowries could also impact girls in particular through early marriage.

Some parents don't value education, for example once they see a friend who has a daughter and is rich and has cattle, they may choose to marry two children from both families in order to acquire and share wealth. – Teacher



Early pregnancy and marriage. Recent research in Petauke highlighted that “teenage pregnancy appeared both as a cause and as a consequence of child marriage,” although the tendency seemed to be for pregnancy to be the precursor to marriage more frequently than the other way around.⁴ Girls in Eastern Province were tied with those in Central for the youngest median age at first birth (18.6 years), and 35.4% of girls 15-19 began childbearing.

Parents seemed to play a key role in organizing marriages when girls were pregnant.

When a girl child gets pregnant the family may give up on taking care of the girl and she may be forced to be married to the person that got her pregnant in the first place. – Parent

Both were clearly linked to dropouts by all types of respondents. Some teachers noted also the stigma that could contribute to this in some cases. This impact was very gendered, just as in Zambia as a whole, where only 0.9% of boys who have dropped out give “making a girl pregnant” as a reason for dropping out, compared to 10.6% of girls noting pregnancy (marriage was similarly given by 0.5% of boys vs. 5.3% of girls).⁵ Both were noted as watershed events leading to dropouts, for girls in particular, although some sought to combat this trend.

He lied to me that he was going to marry me but after I became pregnant, I realised that I cannot manage to be in marriage. I’m still young. I just have to go to school. – Adolescent



Risky behaviour. Children and adults alike named risky behaviour as a driver of dropouts, in the rural and urban areas visited alike. This behaviour was in most cases clearly linked to peer pressure from other adolescents. For boys, respondents primarily raised the risks of drinking, smoking and theft.

[Consider a] group of boys that have already dropped out of school and engage in bad vices like beer drinking, smoking, drug abuse, theft and so on. If a child finds friends among such people, he is likely to join these activities. This cannot end well when it comes to school for this child. – Parent

Case Study: Henry, age 18, dropout

Henry (name changed), age 18, dropped out of school due to financial constraints. His story highlights the further challenges of reconstructed families and parents with different priorities.

I was very excited when I started school, I was very happy because I got to play with my close friends. It was a new thing for me, I liked learning the things that we were taught, in math, learning to write my name, how to count and how to speak.

*One thing that has made me sad over the years is the **separation of my parents**. They divorced when I was still quite young, so it was not easy to understand what was going on. My mother took us to live with her while my father moved away to another town. I was upset because I didn’t not get to see my father as often as I wanted to. Since my mother had no job and no husband to support, it meant that she could not afford many things, including my school fees to continue with my education.*

*I **dropped out when I was in Grade 2**. We have been struggling for quite some time and I haven’t been to school since I dropped out. I feel angry because the people that I was in the same class and grade with are now in higher grades while I just stay at home. This makes me very sad. My mother got married again to another man who also had children from another woman. He has only been paying for their school fees and says he will pay for us later but that has never happened. I would love to go back to school and continue with education. I want to learn.*

His mother adds,

*I sit down with my husband; we discuss what we can do and we make the choice. My husband usually has the final say in so many matters especially about education. Like right now, **he only pays school fees for the children from his first marriage**. He promises to pay for my children from my first marriage, but he never does. He sometimes says he does not have enough money.*



In the case of girls, risky behaviour was often linked by respondents to (transactional) sex and pregnancy.

For girls, it sometimes starts with dress code. They begin to envy what other people are wearing and are influenced by the things that they have. You find that a girl has a friend who has a phone that she got from a boyfriend; this may entice the innocent girl to be on the lookout for any potential boyfriend who can also get her a phone and other things that her parents would otherwise get for her. Once she finds this boyfriend, she might be tempted to engage in sexual activities. – Parent

This is because most boys that go out with these girls are slightly older and will insist on having sex in exchange for these items. The girl will be in danger on contracting diseases or may even get pregnant, both of which are conditions that will not enable the girl child to continue with school. – Parent

Decision-making and adolescent agency

As in Zambia, broadly, parents/ guardians were the named decision makers, in particular around school.

It is a big issue because it is the parents are the ones that pay your school fees, whereas you, the child, cannot make the decision to go to school. If the parents don't want you to go to school, you cannot. – Adolescent

That being said, parents and guardians themselves did not feel that level of agency, with decisions 'forced' upon them by economic constraints rather than choice.

As for other family members, family relatives had mixed level of agency when it came to making decisions, both around school and other points. Their role was that of decision-maker when they were approached as economic providers for school.

My grandmother just told me that I am stopping school because there was no money. – Adolescent

Their role was more widespread in non-school related decision making, where adolescents in particular note them as strong influencers.

While parents in theory make decisions, interviewed parents and children recognize ways in which (1) children could directly exert agency, limiting parents' range of action, and (2) ways in which they could work to influence their parents.

For example, adolescents explained this in cases where parental pressure to do chores could interfere with schooling:

It is a small issue. If parents stop you from going to school to do household chores, you do the chores and when you finish, you go to the chief to tell him 'my parents have stopped me from going to school.' – Adolescent

Conclusions & recommendations

If we happen to have finances, we must sit down as parents and make budget for the whole family. We first see how much we have and how many children have not paid school fees. If we happen to have any surplus, we use at home to buy the requirements. When we see that a child is not performing well academically, we usually consult teachers to find out what's the problem. – Parent

Decision making around school attendance in Petauke, while it may appear a simple, economically-driven decision, was a complex process with multiple factors playing a role. Respondents underlined in particular the role played by traditional cultural practices (initiation rites) leading to girls to get married, as well as linkages between early pregnancy and early

marriage. As a result, the recommendations focus on those specific elements in Petauke.

- 1. Encourage school-friendly means of participation** in traditional practices. These should especially consider girls' initiation rites, and how these could be scheduled around school, as well as coordinate with additional teaching *within* school to break the linkages between initiation rites and dropouts.
- 2. Support understanding and dissemination of the Re-Entry policy in the district** to ensure that early pregnancy does not necessarily lead to early marriage and dropping out, but rather can mean continued education. This can include work to reduce pro-pregnancy and marriage narratives at the community and household level, as well as to provide childcare for young mothers and work to address any social stigma to re-entry.
- 3. Promote the importance of education among parents**, underlined as key decision-makers in this district as in others, through the promotion of alternative narratives of success involving schools. Making linkages in particular to household economic well-being will be key in convincing them of the importance of education. This could include the addition of TVET and skills programmes in the curriculum – more 'practical' courses with an obvious output.

- 1 2015 Zambia Living Conditions Monitoring Survey
- 2 Ministry of General Education (Zambia). 'Educational Statistical Bulletin 2016', 2016.
- 3 Ministry of General Education (Zambia). Online statistics
- 4 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6197635/>
- 5 Based on the 2015 Zambia Living Conditions Survey, p. 38



Community voices: Recommendations

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

Joint decision-making between parents and adolescent: Some parents were aware that adolescents need to be engaged and buy into education.

School is very important in someone's life. It is important to ask the child what she wants to do. Especially those that are older and are able reason well. – Parent


Sex education: Speaking to high pregnancy rates, a number of respondents, adolescents in particular, called for more comprehensive sexual education.

Sex education can help girls not to drop out of school in terms of pregnancies and to stay away from sex. – Adolescent

New skills: Parents and others were well aware of the instability of both subsistence farming and unskilled 'businesses' common to the area.

The world is changing now and we are moving to a time when computers are very important for learning. Children around here don't know a lot about computers; they need this knowledge and skills in computers to be able to access information that will benefit them as they grow and develop. – Parent

With technical skills, if their parents don't have money to pay school fees, they can start up small businesses. – Adolescent

 Samuel Hall is a social enterprise that conducts research in countries affected by issues of migration and displacement. We specialise in socio-economic surveys, private and public sector studies, and impact assessments for a range of humanitarian and development actors. With a rigorous approach and the inclusion of academic experts, field practitioners, and a vast network of national researchers, we access complex settings and gather accurate data. We bring innovative insights and practical solutions to addressing the most pressing social, economic, and political issues of our time.

Samuel Hall has offices in Afghanistan and Kenya, and a presence in Germany and the United Arab Emirates. For more information, visit www.samuelhall.org.


for every child

UNICEF works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

For more information about UNICEF and its work for children, visit www.unicef.org/zambia.

This publication was commissioned by UNICEF Zambia. It was prepared and conducted by Samuel Hall. The views and analysis contained in the publication therefore do not necessarily represent the views of UNICEF Zambia. Any errors are our own and should not tarnish the reputations of others.

This document should be cited using the following referencing style: Samuel Hall (2019). Dropping Out? A Participatory Exploration of Adolescent School Journeys in Zambia - Petauke: District Highlights, commissioned by UNICEF Zambia.

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