



THE EDUCATION- EMPLOYMENT PARADOX

**A life cycle approach to assess
gender gaps in education and labor
market outcomes in Lesotho**



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gender gaps in education and labor
market outcomes in Lesotho**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study aims to bring renewed attention to issues of gender inequality in Lesotho and motivate multi-sectoral policy and programmatic action. The specific objective of the study is to provide a deeper and more nuanced diagnostics of gender inequality in education and related human capital outcomes, to identify the primary driving factors, and to assess the implications on men's and women's long-term labor market outcomes. Based on these findings, the study presents prioritized policy recommendations. In doing so, the study aims to serve as a resource for the Government of the Kingdom of Lesotho as a whole and its relevant sectoral ministries in developing human capital policies and programs, as well as to the World Bank and other development partners in planning their support.

The note builds on several studies and policy notes prepared recently in education, skills, health and nutrition, and social protection and jobs by the World Bank and others notably the *Lesotho Gender Assessment* (Hemat et. al., 2022) and the *Investing in Human Capital in Lesotho* policy note (Posarac et al., 2021). The team is grateful to Mahmoud Elsayed, Diana Jimena Arango, Andrew Peter Brudevold-Newman, Paseka Mosia, Samaneh Hemat, Federica Ricaldi, and Olive Umuhire Nsababera for their review and invaluable comments. This study was conducted with guidance and support from the World Bank's Country Director for Southern Africa, Marie-Francoise Marie-Nelly; the Manager for Operations for Southern Africa, Asmeen Khan; the Resident Representative for Lesotho Yoichiro Ishihara; the Practice Manager for Education for Eastern and Southern Africa, Muna Salih Meky; Practice Manager for Social Protection and Jobs in Eastern and Southern Africa, Paolo Beli; and Practice Manager for Health, Nutrition and Population, Eastern and Southern Africa, Francisca Ayodeji Akala.

ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BCG	Bacillus Calmette-Guérin
CMS/HBS	Continuous Multipurpose Survey/Household Budget Survey
CGP	Child Grant Program
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DA	Direct Assessment
DHS	Demographic And Health Surveys
DTP	Diphtheria, Tetanus, And Pertussis
ECCDE	Early Childhood Care, Development and Education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPI	Gender Parity Index
ICT	Information And Communication Technology
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
HCI	Human Capital Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LEQEP	Lesotho Education Quality and Equity Project
LMIC	Lower-Middle-Income Country
MELQO	Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes
MICS	Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey
NER	Net Enrollment Rate
OAP	Old Age Pension
OVC-B	Orphans And Vulnerable Children Bursary
SC	Social Competency
SD	Standard Deviation
SR	Self-Regulation
SSA	Sub-Saharan African
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
STEM	Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
Tertiary-B	Tertiary Bursary
TVET	Technical And Vocational Training and Education
VACS	Violence Against Children and Youth Survey
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Southern Africa countries, such as Lesotho, are making progress in improving human capital outcomes and in narrowing gender gaps. However, a complex picture of inequality is emerging and requires urgent attention.

In Lesotho, boys and men are currently facing significant disadvantages in their educational attainment. Male enrollment rates, school completion rates, and learning performance lag behind female outcomes in almost all levels of education. If unaddressed, these disadvantages can have adverse economic and social implications. Economically, the education disadvantages boys and young men face are likely to harm their labor market prospects and limit their productivity. Low level of male education also poses obstacles to the realization of the broader benefits of schooling, including improvements in multi-generational education and health and social outcomes, such as improved civic engagement and reduction in violence, including gender-based violence (GBV)).

On the other hand, women's economic outcomes, in terms of their labor force participation rate, employment rate and wages, continue to lag behind men. The gender gaps in economic outcomes narrow among those with higher levels of education but remain significant. Available historical data also shows that the educational advantages girls and women have achieved in Lesotho have persisted across decades. This trend implies that the labor market disadvantages they continue to face are unlikely to be the result of a time lag between improvement in schooling and a resulting labor market outcome improvement. Consequently, women are not reaping the full benefit of their education and the country is not able to fully capitalize on its human capital investments.

Given these evolving circumstances, a more nuanced and updated understanding of gender inequality in the region is needed. It is within this context that this study aims to bring renewed attention to issues of gender inequality in Lesotho and motivate policy and programmatic action. The study first presents an in-depth diagnostic assessment of gender gaps in education, related human capital outcomes, labor market outcomes, and the driving factors of these gaps. For this assessment, the study applies a life-cycle approach, focusing on three stages of the life cycle: (i) early childhood, (ii) school age, and (iii) youth to adulthood. Building on this analysis and drawing from global evidence, the study provides high level policy recommendations.

THE KEY FINDINGS

Both boys and girls in Lesotho start their lives facing significant disadvantages in their physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. Childhood mortality rates are high, with about 73 children per 1000 live birth dying before the age of 5. In comparison, the average under-five mortality rates (U5MRs) for lower-middle-income (LMIC) countries is 44 deaths per 1000 live birth. The stunting and underweight rates among children ages 0-5 are high, at 35 percent and 10 percent respectively, and consequently children face significant risk of developmental delays, diminished ability to learn, and reduced lifelong productivity. Early childhood cognitive outcomes are also sub-optimal, for example, as evidenced by low acquisition of early literacy and numeracy skills. In several dimensions of early childhood development, boys are marginally worse off compared to girls, however, these gaps are not significant.

Boys underachieve during the school years in terms of enrollment, school completion, and learning. There is almost universal enrollment in early primary grades in Lesotho. However, many children, especially those from rural and poor communities, dropout before completing their secondary education. Despite starting at a similar level of enrollment rate, boys have a significantly lower school completion rate. For example, only 28 percent of secondary school age boys reach the last senior secondary grade, compared to 37 percent of girls in the same age group. Learning outcomes are sub-optimal for most children, while girls perform slightly better than boys. For example, 67 percent of girls compared to 40 percent of boys demonstrate

attainment of foundational reading skills by age 10, while 27 percent of girls, compared 10 percent of boys show attainment of foundational numeracy skills. At the secondary level, boys and girls exhibit comparable levels of learning. However, these equivalencies are likely partly driven by selection bias, due to the higher dropout rate among boys.

Women have higher enrollment rate in post-secondary education and training (PSET), but they are less likely to pursue science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. In tertiary education, women account for 60 percent of total enrollment. However, there is significant gender segregation into fields, with women having lower levels of participation in traditionally male dominated STEM fields. For example, women account for only 26.2 percent of enrollment in engineering, manufacturing, and construction and 37 percent in information and communication technology (ICT), natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics related fields. In technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs, women represent about 58 percent of enrollment. Unfortunately, reliable data on TVET including gender disaggregation by field is not available, creating a critical knowledge gap that requires attention.

However, the educational advantage girls and women have across the different levels of education has not fully translated into better labor market outcomes. Among working age individuals (i.e., ages 15 or older) women's labor force participation is only 44.8 percent compared to 54.7 percent for men. Furthermore, among those who are in the labor force, women's unemployment rate is 22.5 percent, which is comparable to the unemployment rate of men at 22.1 percent. However, women are more likely to be employed in the informal sector and they earn less than men. These patterns of inequality are apparent across all levels of education, even though the gaps narrow down at higher levels of education.

THE DRIVING FACTORS OF GENDER GAPS ACROSS THE LIFE CYCLE

Interrelated economic, social, and system level factors drive poor outcomes and gender disparities in education and in the labor market. Household poverty, which is made worse by other vulnerabilities such as orphanhood (mainly due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic), is a key factor that adversely affects educational outcomes for both boys and girls. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has added to these vulnerabilities, including through the adverse impact on households' economic wellbeing. In the face of binding economic constraints, households are likely to make hard choices, often resorting to detrimental coping mechanisms, such as pulling their children out of school.

Economic constraints, combined with harmful norms around gender roles, put boys from poor and rural communities at risk of early dropout. Norms around masculinity and cultural practices such as "initiation school"—a passage into manhood during the adolescence years, put a strong emphasis on boys becoming "men" and taking responsibility in their households. There is evidence showing that boys face pressure to drop out of school and become economically active, contributing to the high prevalence of child labor among boys.

Girls experience high levels of dropout due to poverty and early pregnancy. The dropout rate among girls is also high, albeit lower than boys. Over 60 percent of girls who have dropped out report poverty as the primary reason. Moreover, teen pregnancy is common in Lesotho, estimated at 17.8 percent among 15-19 year old girls nationally, and is cited as another key reason for girls dropping out of school. The rate of teen pregnancy is even higher among the poorest girls (25 percent), pointing to a linkage between poverty and adolescent pregnancy. Gender-based violence (GBV) is an important driver of adolescent pregnancy. Data from 2018 showed that one in seven females (14.5 percent) and one in twenty males (5.0 percent) experienced sexual violence before age 18.

Supply-side constraints related to low access, quality, and inequity of services across social development sectors contribute towards poor human capital outcomes and to gender inequalities. Access and quality of health care and nutrition services in early childhood remain inadequate and inefficient, driving high stunting

and child mortality rates. Fewer than half of children ages 3-5 years have access to early childhood care development and education (ECCDE). There are also significant concerns about the quality of services provided in ECCDEs, with the sub-sector woefully underfunded currently, receiving just about 0.3 percent of education sector budget.

Low quality of education is a critical challenge both at primary and secondary levels of education. There is evidence showing teachers have significant knowledge gaps and limited capacity to meet the needs of their students; for example, evidence shows that teachers struggle to teach boys returning from initiation school. Accountability systems are also not well developed in the education sector. For example, Lesotho currently does not have a regular and reliable learning assessment system. At the secondary education level, cost of schooling (secondary school is not free in Lesotho) and long distance to schools pose significant obstacle for children from poor and rural households to transition and complete their secondary education. There are social protection programs in place to mitigate the impact of poverty on schooling, for example, the Child Grant Program (CGP) provides an unconditional cash transfer to poor households with children, while the Orphans and Vulnerable Children Bursary (OVC-B) program cover school fees for poor children at the secondary level. However, issues related to insufficiency of the amount provided and ineffective targeting has limited the effectiveness of these programs.

Harmful social norms, gender biases in education and in the labor market, and lack of gender-responsive policies all put women at a disadvantage in the labor market. Some of the challenges women face in the labor market start in the education sector. For example, girls and women have lower enrollment rates in STEM fields, which limits their opportunities to be employed in STEM-related fields. Data also shows that women are less likely to hold managerial roles and are more likely to hold low-skill jobs. Furthermore, social norms that support traditional gender roles, with women disproportionately burdened with the responsibility of caregiving and chores at home, limits women's ability to work outside the home. Inadequacy of parental leave policies, which give only a short maternity leave and no provision for paternity leave further reinforces these social norms. Women also face barriers in accessing financial services and in obtaining credit. The available evidence points to lack of information and unfavorable banking practices and biases they face, such as higher standards to be deemed credit worthy or unfair financial terms. Collectively, these constraints are likely to significantly impact women's economic outcomes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving gender equality in Lesotho requires addressing the multidimensional challenges boys and girls face across the life cycle through multi-sectoral solutions that are both both general and gender targeted. From the analysis above, the following policy recommendations emerge as priorities, focusing on addressing the most binding constraints to gender equality in Lesotho. It should be noted that these high-level policy recommendations are not prescriptive, and instead they are intended to form the basis for further policy dialogue. Implementing these recommendations will require further in-depth analysis and discussion, including on priority setting, resource mobilization and allocation, and accountability for results.

In early childhood:

- **Improve the effectiveness of existing health, nutrition, and educational services, through better targeting and enhanced multi-sectoral collaboration.** Lesotho already has in place several programs in health, nutrition, and social protection aimed at improving outcomes in early childhood. It will be important to systematically review the targeting, resource allocation, and utilization of these programs and take actions to improve impact and efficiency, with strong focus on services provided at the local level. Improved cross-sectoral collaboration is also critically needed to ensure that children who are facing layers of vulnerabilities receive holistic services covering nutrition, health, education, and social assistance support. At the ground level, the existing cadre of community social workers (i.e., social development officers and village health workers) can play an important role to better coordinate the delivery of services for priority groups. Furthermore, the roles of these community facing workers

can be enhanced to implement cost-effective interventions such as building parents' and caregivers' knowledge about good child development practices.

- **Shift the focus of early childhood education towards inclusive whole-child learning.** To ensure that ECCDE programs are effective, a curriculum that is inclusive, focuses on hands on learning, and supports whole-child development is essential. Opportunities are arising to make this shift- after a long time, the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) has recently revised the ECCDE curriculum and is in the process of piloting it. If done well, the role out of the revised curriculum, along with high quality training for teachers, presents an opportunity to ensure that ECCDE programs meet the variable developmental needs of children.
- **In the medium to the long run, allocate more resources to the ECCDE sub-sector and increase access in underserved areas.** Without increasing financing, meaningful improvements in terms of increasing access and enhancing quality cannot be achieved. Consequently, absent additional and targeted allocation of resources, Lesotho will continue to miss this critical window of opportunity to improve human capital outcomes. Increased investments are needed to address critical gaps in the sub-sector, for example, to expand access in underserved communities.

During the school years:

- **Build teachers capacity to improve quality of education for all and enhance the support provided to at risk boys and girls.** Across all levels, teachers' capacity, both in terms of their content knowledge and pedagogical practice needs to be built to improve quality of education. This can only be achieved through a concerted effort to make in-service teacher training programs impactful by making them practical and incorporating ongoing support and coaching, including by leveraging cost-effective EdTech solutions. Through such in-service programs, teachers can also be equipped with the skills they need to support at risk boys and girls (e.g., boys returning from initiation school, pregnant adolescent girls, and teen mothers), address gender biases in schools, recognize GBV risks, and support impacted students. Stronger accountability mechanisms are also needed in the education system to meaningfully improve outcomes. In this regard, putting in place a learning assessment systems that generates regular and reliable data- to track outcomes, identify gaps including gender gaps, design interventions, and hold the system accountable for results will be crucial.
- **Break the impact of poverty on school attendance and completion, especially at the secondary level.** This may be achieved by improving key aspects of the existing social protection programs, mainly the CGP and OVC-B programs, to better link them to human capital outcomes. For example, the impact of the OVC-B grant can be improved significantly by improving the targeting to ensure that secondary age children from the bottom wealth quintiles, which currently account for only one third of beneficiaries, are covered. Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) and MoET are already collaborating to pilot different approaches to improving the impacts of the CGP and the OVC-B programs on dropout; such pilots can inform interventions in this area.
- **Shift harmful social norms and cultural practices that perpetuate harmful gender roles and foster early dropout.** Concerted effort is needed to build partnerships between cultural institutions (e.g., initiation schools), communities as a whole, and schools to mitigate the competing and often conflicting pressure boys face (e.g., attending initiation school at the expense of their formal education). This will require dialogue and close collaboration with chiefs and local leaders that have strong influence on communities and rally them to advocate on the education agenda.
- **Provide comprehensive support for adolescents and offer alternative pathways for education and training for dropouts.** Providing comprehensive support for adolescents including reproductive health education and services and life-skills coaching and mentorship will be essential to help them navigate this critical life stage. Such programs can be made accessible to adolescents through boys and girls clubs, within or outside the school setting. These clubs can also serve as platforms to raising adolescents' awareness about GBV (e.g., approaches to prevent, mitigate, and respond to GBV) and provide linkages to a referral system for additional social services. For those who have dropped out

of school, expanding skills development programs and providing alternative schooling options (e.g., second chance education for out of school herd boys) can offer a pathway for them to acquire the skills they need to thrive and have better long-term prospects.

During youth into adulthood, support school to labor market transition, with emphasis on women's economic empowerment.

- **To help female youth enter into STEM fields, aggressively challenge gender biases at all levels of education, but especially at tertiary level where the STEM education gap is the most pronounced.** This requires training and advocacy among educators, educational leaders and even parents, to shift entrenched biases in education at different levels of education. Advocacy efforts can also be used to expose girls and female youth to female role models that have been successful in STEM fields to motivate them to be involved in STEM.
- **Strengthen school-to-work transitions support services for youth, focusing on helping female youth enter fields that have been dominated by men.** Interventions that provide youth with information about jobs, connection to relevant networks, provision of tailored job-matching support (e.g., through internships and targeted employment services), and help to build soft-skills needed for success in their employment can help youth successfully navigate the school-to-work transition period. Such programs can also be further tailored to support female youth make inroads into fields they are often excluded from, including STEM fields.
- **Implement the laws and policies that are already in place to promote fairness and equity in the workplace.** In the workplace, there must be policies and practices in place to ensure equal pay for equal work. Putting in place laws and policies that promote equal treatment and fair remuneration for men and women is essential, but not sufficient. It must be ensured that these laws and policies are implemented, including by raising awareness among employees and employers, promoting transparency (e.g., around wage and performance evaluation processes) and strengthening reporting systems to improve accountability.
- **Promote fair distribution of housework and childcare responsibilities at home, including through public policy reforms.** Outdated gender norms that put the burden of family care and housework on women have been found globally to negatively impact women's labor market participation. Shifting these norms requires sustained advocacy to change beliefs and outdated gender norms. It also requires supporting parents-both mothers and fathers, through family friendly policies such as equal and adequate maternity and paternity leave policies that encourage an equal sharing of child caring responsibilities. Making childcare affordable and accessible will also enable parents, especially mothers, to stay in the labor market when they choose to do so.
- **Support gender-responsive financial inclusion interventions to improve women's access to finance.** Such interventions need to include financial literacy and business skills trainings, support to improve business credit worthiness, simplification of collateral policies, and development of financial products targeted at micro, small, and medium enterprises, especially those owned by women and youth. More must be done to address the discrimination women face by financial institutions, both through advocacy to position women as an important market for financial services and through the implementation of anti-discrimination laws.

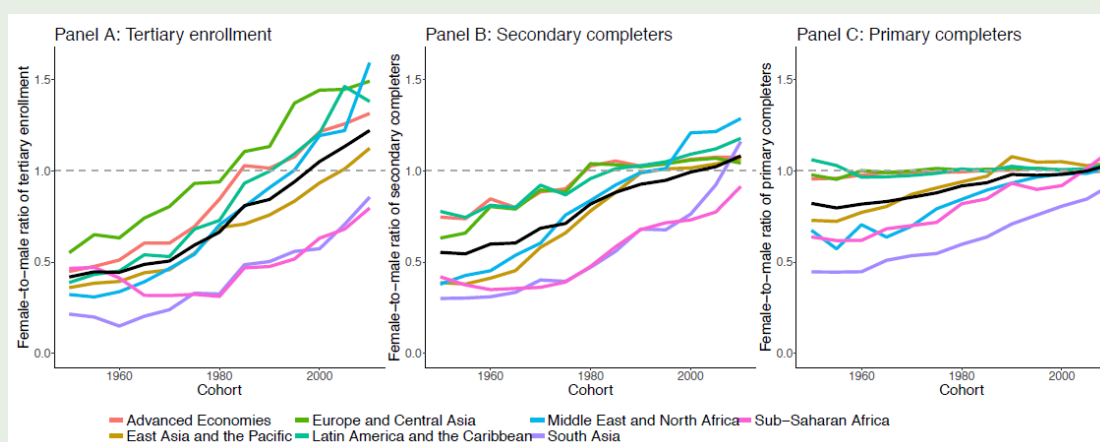
I. INTRODUCTION

1. Ensuring gender equality has long been recognized as an important instrument to achieve development objectives such as reducing poverty and accelerating sustainable growth. In many low- and middle-income countries, efforts aimed at improving gender equality in education and beyond have put a strong emphasis on improving outcomes for girls and women. This emphasis reflects the fact that in many of these countries, girls and women have been historically at a disadvantage compared to boys and men. However, the pattern of gender disparity is changing in many countries and a more complex picture is emerging. Many high-income countries have not only closed the gender gap in education but have also significantly reversed it in favor of women (Hausmann, Ganguli and Viarengo, 2009; Welmond and Gregory, 2021). Evidence from middle-income and some low-income countries is also showing a narrowing of gender inequalities and increasingly reversals, in terms of higher enrollment and school completion rates and better learning outcomes. However, the educational gains that girls and women are attaining are not automatically and fully translating into better economic outcomes. Globally, women continue to have lower levels of labor force participation, high unemployment rates, and earn less than men.

BOX 1: Global and regional picture of gender disparity in education

Most high-income countries and a growing number of middle-income countries are experiencing a reversal in gender gap in education, where women's educational attainment is exceeding that of men's (Bossavie and Kanninen 2018). In many of these countries, recent trends are showing higher levels of enrollment and completion rates for females than males at the secondary and higher education levels. Learning poverty rates are higher for boys than girls in most countries of the world, showing that boys are also lagging behind in terms of the acquisition of foundational skills. While gender reversal in education has been well documented and studied in high-income countries, it is a more recent phenomenon in middle-income and increasingly in low-income countries that requires attention. It should also be noted that while trends in gender parity are changing, in many Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia countries, girls still face significant challenges, for example in accessing secondary and tertiary education. Moreover, globally female participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields remains lower than male participation (Welmond and Gregory, 2021).

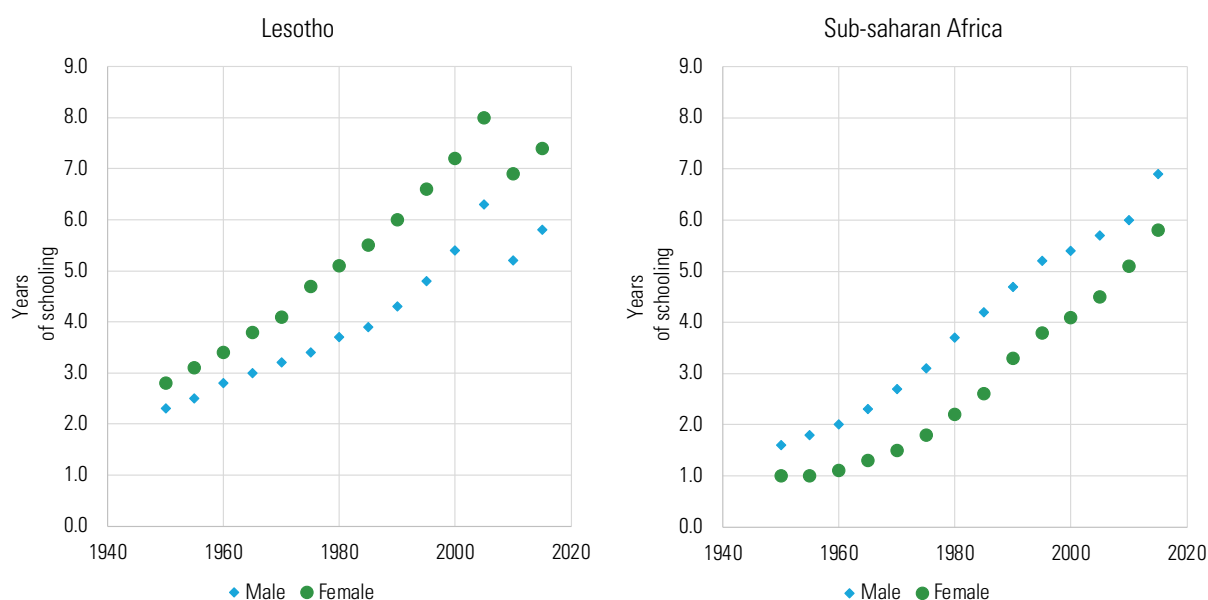
Gender gap reversal in educational attainment by region



Source: Bossavie and Kanninen 2018 based on data from the Barro-Lee Educational Attainment Database.

2. Lesotho is currently grappling with this complex reality of gender inequality, where in education, boys and men are at a great disadvantage, while women continue to have poorer economic outcomes. These patterns of inequality have persisted over decades and continue to pose a binding constraint on the country's human capital and economic development. Historical data shows that, in Lesotho, boys have been lagging behind girls in their educational outcomes starting in the 1950s and the gap has not closed over time. This indicates that boys are not benefiting from the progress the country is making in expanding access to education at the same rate as girls (Figure B1.2). This scenario contrasts sharply with the commonly observed patterns in most Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries, where boys continue to outperform girls. Across most SSA countries there is shift in this pattern with the gender gap closing and, in some cases, reversing in favor of girls in more recent years (e.g., in Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa). Hence the lessons from Lesotho can be informative to understand these emerging challenges in other contexts in the region.

FIGURE 1: Male and Female Educational Attainment in Lesotho and Sub-Saharan Africa



Source: Based on analysis of Barro-Lee educational attainment data.¹

3. This study aims to bring renewed attention to the gender inequality agenda in Lesotho-focusing on gaps in education and labor market outcomes, in order to motivate urgent policy and programmatic actions. To this end, the study first presents an in-depth analysis of gender disparities across key stages of the life cycle- early childhood (ages 0-5), school age (ages 6-17), and youth into adulthood (ages 18 and older) and the interlinkages between gender and other dimensions of inequalities, such as spatial, rurality, and social and economic inequalities. The study also examines the key factors that drive gender inequalities and provides prioritized policy recommendations, drawing from a global evidence base. The study builds on recently completed studies- notably the Lesotho Gender Assessment (Hemat et. al., 2022) and the Investing in Human Capital in Lesotho policy note (Posarac et al., 2021).

¹ The Barro-Lee Educational Attainment data set includes 33 SSA countries, all of which are included in the analysis. The data set provides a measure of educational attainment of the adult population (15 years and over). The data covers years 1950 to 2010, hence it is one of the few data sets that provides historical trend data for a large number of countries. Year of schooling is the average educational attainment among men and women aged 15 and over.

II. EARLY CHILDHOOD (UNDER 5 YEARS OF AGE)

Key facts

- U5MR is high, with 73 deaths per 1,000 live births, which is much higher than the average for LMIC at 40 deaths per 1,000 live births. About 35 percent of children under age 5 are stunted and 10 percent are underweight.
- Early cognitive development outcomes such as the acquisition of early literacy and numeracy are low, and boys perform marginally worse than girls.

A. STATUS OF KEY OUTCOMES AND GENDER INEQUALITIES

4. **Currently in Lesotho, both boys and girls start their lives facing significant disadvantages in their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development.** Early childhood mortality rates are high, with 73 children per 1,000 live births dying before reaching age five. This figure is comparable to what is observed in many SSA countries, but much higher than figures for LMICs—the average U5MR for LMICs is 44 deaths per 1,000 live births. Early childhood mortality outcomes are worse for boys than girls. However, this disparity is not unique to Lesotho, with similar patterns being observed in SSA and LMICs (see Table 1).²

TABLE 1. Early Childhood Mortality by Gender

Health outcome indicator ³	Lesotho			SSA			LMICs		
	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
Neonatal mortality (in the first 28 days)	35.3			27.1			21.2		
Infant mortality (in the first 24 months)	57	62.6	50.9	49.9	54.7	44.9	33	35.3	30.6
U5MR per 1,000 live births	72.9	79.3	66.1	73	78.2	67.5	43.7	45.8	41.3

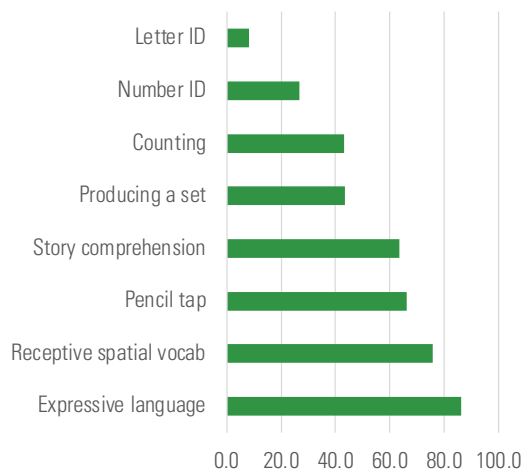
Source: World Bank Development Indicator (data from 2021).⁴

5. **Boys and girls in Lesotho also experience poor outcomes in their early cognitive development, while their outcomes are relatively better in their social and emotional development.** Regular and reliable data on early childhood cognitive and socio-emotional development is scarce in Lesotho and the most recent data comes from the 2018 Measuring Early Learning Quality and Outcomes (MELQO) assessment. The MELQO results shows that children in Lesotho underperformed in the literacy and numeracy related domains of their cognitive development, indicating that many will enter primary grades with minimal preparation. Socio-emotional developmental outcomes are better, but there are still some gaps that require attention (Figure 2). There are some gender differences in some of the early childhood development outcomes, but these differences are small or statistically not significant (see Annex, Figure A1.1 and A1.2 for additional details).

² Understanding the biological and environmental factors that drive gender gaps in early childhood mortality and their relative importance requires further investigation and is beyond the scope of this study.

³ All figures are reported per 1,000 live births.

⁴ World Development Indicators extracted on August 15, 2023 from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.IMRT.IN>.

FIGURE 2: Early childhood cognitive and socio-emotional development outcomes in Lesotho**A. Early childhood cognitive development**

Note: Estimates show the average proportion of task under a domain that are correctly completed.

Early childhood socio-emotional skills

Note: Estimates show the share of children showing the given skill almost always.

Source: Authors' analysis of MELQO (child direct assessment data), 2018.

B. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POOR EARLY CHILDHOOD OUTCOMES AND GENDER GAPS

6. **There are gaps in the provision of early childhood health, nutrition, and educational services, which combined with household poverty explain many of the sub-optimal outcomes in early childhood.** Many children in Lesotho experience food insecurity in their early childhood, resulting in high rates of malnutrition. Household survey data from 2018 shows that over 10 percent of children under the age of 5 were underweight and about 35 percent were stunted. There is also evidence showing that the situation was made worse by the adverse economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Posarac et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2022). Currently, nutrition programs are not sufficiently funded, while parents and caregivers often lack the knowledge on appropriate dietary practices for infants and young children (World Bank, 2021). On the health side, about 30 percent of children ages 2-3 years have not received all the vaccines that are appropriate for their age (see Table 2). Spending in the health sector is relatively high; however, the spending is highly skewed towards urban areas, leaving little funding for basic health services in rural districts, and there are inefficiencies in utilization (World Bank, 2021; UNICEF and World Bank, 2017; Roberts, et al, 2022; Nyaradi et al, 2013).
7. **On the education side, a substantial share of children in Lesotho do not receive adequate support and stimulation for learning at home and they do not have access to early childhood education services.** For example, data from the 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) shows that over 20 percent of children ages 2-4 years were not adequately engaged in activities that promote learning by parents or care givers within their household⁵. Over half of children aged 3-5 years do not have access to any ECCDE services (see Table 2). Such lack of quality support and stimulation within and outside the home has been shown to adversely impact children's acquisition of essential skills (Gertler et al, 2014; Baker-Henningham and Florencia, 2010).

⁵ Engagement in activity that promotes learning refers to engagement in activities such as reading, playing, taking outside, singing, counting, or drawing with a care giver who is 15 years old or older.

TABLE 2. Gaps in Early Childhood Investments in Nutrition, Health, and Education

Select early childhood investment indicators		Total	Girls	Boys	(Girls-Boys)
Nutritional and health investments	Exclusive breastfeeding under 6 months	55.6	48.2	64.3	- 16.1**
	Underweight for age (ages under 5) ⁶	10.3	8.9	11.7	- 2.8 **
	Stunted for age (ages under 5) ⁷	33.6	31.8	35.5	- 3.70*
	Not fully vaccinated (ages 2-3) (BCG, Polio 3, DTP 3, Measles-Rubella 1)	30.6	30.1	31.1	- 0.94
Support for learning investments	No engagement with an adult in an activity that promotes learning (ages 2-4)	20.2	19.9	20.4	- 0.4
	Inadequate supervision by an adult (ages under 5)	16.6	16.0	17.1	- 1.10
	Not attending ECCDE (ages 3-5)	54.2	53.6	54.8	- 1.23

Source: Based on analysis of MICS data, 2018.

Figures in brackets indicate standard errors and stars indicate level of statistical significance of the difference in means. *** indicates significance at the 0.01 level, while ** and * indicate significance at the 0.05 and 0.1 levels respectively.

8. **A high rate of adolescent childbearing in Lesotho is also a key contributing factor to the poor early childhood outcomes.** There is extensive evidence globally showing that adolescent childbearing is detrimental to the young mother's own education and overall human capital development (Klepinger et al, 1995; Lloyd and Mensch, 2008; and Sonfield et al, 2013). Adolescent parenting is also a major risk factor associated with poor early childhood development outcomes for the offspring (Ganchimeg T, 2014; Blum and Gates, 2015). In Lesotho, pregnancy among teenage girls (aged 15–19 years) is high, estimated at 17.8 percent nationally, and the rate is considerably higher among the poorest girls (25 percent) and girls with primary or no education (32 percent). Data shows that children born to teenage mothers in general have worse outcomes, compared to children born to mothers ages 20 to 34.8 In terms of neonatal and infant mortality rate and rates of stunting, for example, statically significant differences are observed between children born to teenage mothers, compared to mothers ages 20 to 34, with the former group being at a disadvantage (see Table 3). While data from Lesotho is not available, research from other countries shows that children born to teenage mothers are also more likely to have worse cognitive, socio-emotional, and educational outcomes, and poorer labor market prospects in the long-run (Hoffman and Maynard, 2008).

6 Underweight refers to being 2 Standard Deviations (SD) below the average weight for age.

7 Stunted refers to being 2 SD below the average height for age.

8 The worst child mortality outcomes are observed among children born to mothers ages 35-49 (see Table 3). There is extensive literature showing that advanced maternal age is a risk factor for fetal abnormalities, stillbirth, obstetric complications, and worse health outcomes for children (Sauer, 2015; Laopaiboon, et al., 2014).

TABLE 3. Early childhood health outcomes by mother's age in Lesotho

Health outcome indicator	Mother's age at time of birth			Diff (1)-(2)	Diff (1)-(3)
	<20 (1)	20-34 (2)	35-49(3)		
Neonatal mortality per 1,000 live births (the first 28 days)	62.0 (9.7)	37.9 (3.7)	64.0 (14.5)	24.1** (10.4)	-2.0 (1.7)
Infant mortality per 1,000 live births (0-24 months)	85.3 (10.9)	68.5 (5.0)	89.3 (16.0)	16.8* (11.0)	-4.0 (19.4)
Under- five mortality per 1,000 live births	87.9 (11.0)	75.8 (5.3)	96.7 (16.3)	12.1 (12.2)	-8.8 (19.6)
Underweight for age (ages under 5)	11.7 (2.1)	10.0 (0.9)	10.3 (1.5)	1.7 (2.2)	1.4 (2.6)
Stunted for age (ages under 5)	41.0 (3.0)	31.6 (1.4)	34.0 (2.4)	9.5*** (3.3)	7.1* (3.4)

Source: Based on analysis of MICS data, 2018.

Figures in brackets indicate standard errors and stars indicate level of statistical significance of the difference in means. *** indicates significance at the 0.01 level, while ** and * indicate significance at the 0.05 and 0.1 levels respectively.

III. SCHOOL AGE (AGES 6-17)

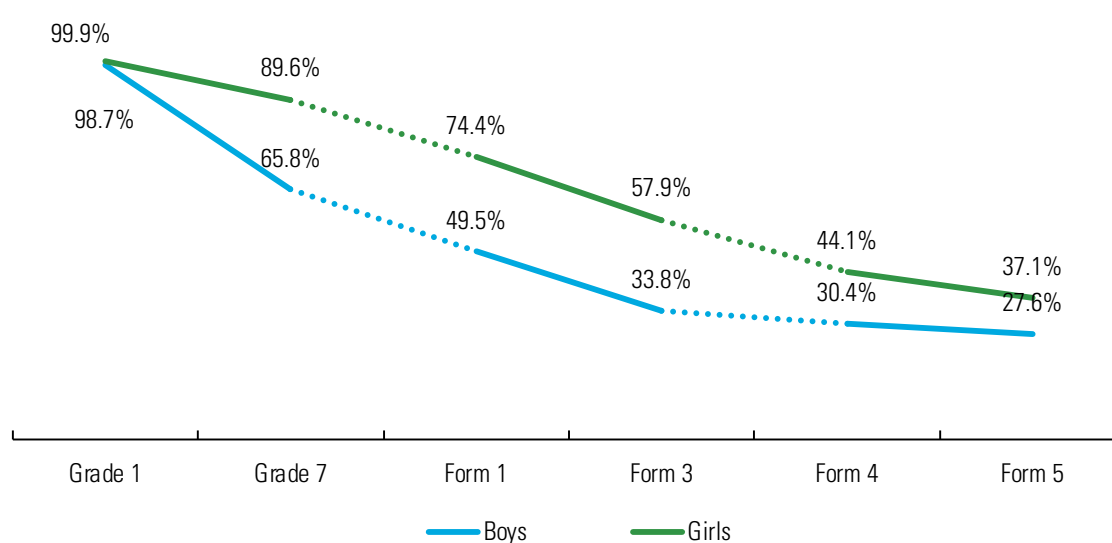
Key facts

- In primary education there is universal enrollment, but dropout is high across grades, especially for boys.
- The intake rate to Grade 1 is almost 100%, but only 37% of girls and 28% of boys access the last secondary grade.
- Learning outcomes are poor; by age 10, only 54% of girls and 27% of boys acquire basic literacy skills in Sesotho, while only 27% girls and 9.6% of boys acquire basic numeracy skills.
- At the secondary level, learning outcomes remain low, while gender differences are marginal. However, the convergence between boys and girls is in part likely to be driven by the high dropout rate among boys.

A. STATUS OF KEY OUTCOMES AND GENDER INEQUALITIES DURING THE SCHOOL YEARS

9. In Lesotho, educational outcomes, especially in terms of participation, have improved greatly over the past decades. However, unequal participation and low and disparate learning levels remain a challenge. In early primary grades, gender parity has been achieved in terms of participation. The intake rate into Grade 1 is almost 100 percent for both boys and girls, pointing to almost universal enrollment. However, as students move across grades, enrollment rates decline drastically, and more rapidly for boys compared to girls. Only 90 percent of girls and 66 percent of boys access the last grade of primary (Grade 7).⁹ In lower secondary, 3 in 4 girls access Form 1 (Grade 8) compared to only half of boys. The gap narrows to some extent in upper secondary, where the retention rate of boys is more stable than girls but remain significant (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: Access and retention by gender in Lesotho

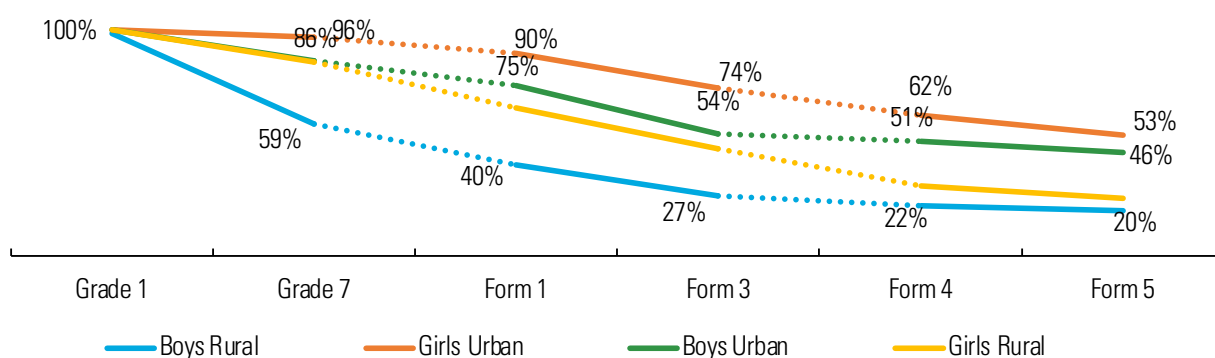


Source: Education Sector Analysis (MoET, 2020)

⁹ In take rate (or access rate) into the last grade of an education cycle is used as a proxy for completion rate of the relevant level. For example, in take rate into Grade 7 is used as a proxy for primary completion.

10. **Gender inequality in enrollment and retention also has a strong spatial and socio-economic dimension, with the poorest rural boys being the most disadvantaged group.** At the beginning of the primary level, there are almost no differences in school participation between urban and rural boys and girls and across socio-economic groups. However, 96 percent of urban girls and 86 percent of rural girls access the last grade of primary (Grade 7) compared to 86 percent of urban boys and only 59 percent of rural boys. These disparities continue to widen into junior secondary level, where only 27 percent of rural boys access the last grade of junior secondary (Form 3), compared to 74 percent of urban girls. Only 20 percent of rural boys and 26 percent of rural girls complete senior secondary education (i.e., proxied by intake into the last year of senior secondary level), compared to 53 percent of urban girls (see Figure 4). This shows that rural children are at a great disadvantage in terms of accessing secondary school, while rural boys are the most excluded group.

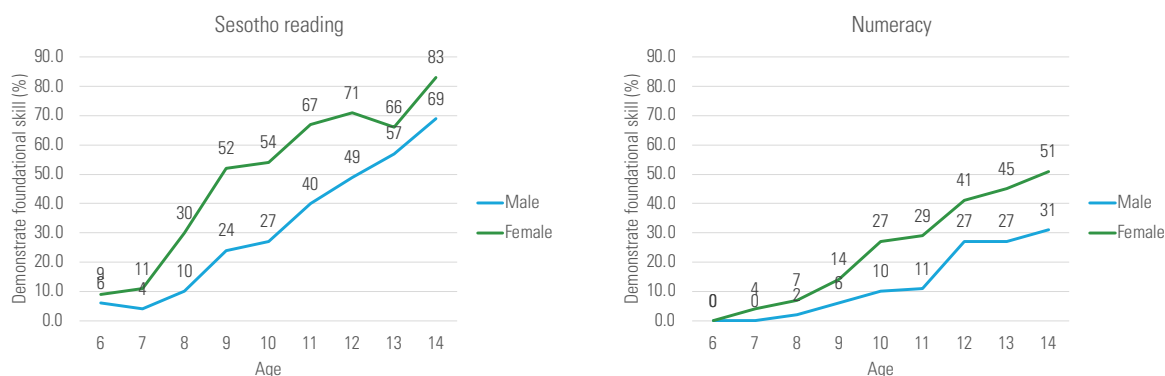
FIGURE 4: Access and retention by gender, location, and socio-economic status in Lesotho



Source: Education Sector Analysis (MoET, 2020)

11. **Learning outcomes are low in Lesotho— starting with foundational learning, and particularly for boys.** The available data¹⁰ shows that by age 10, about 54 percent of girls and 27 percent of boys acquire basic literacy skills in Sesotho, while only 27 percent of girls and 9.6 percent of boys achieve basic proficiency level in numeracy (see Figure 5). Disparities in foundational learning also have a strong spatial and socio-economic dimension, with boys from rural and poor households having the worst outcomes (see Annex 1, Figures A1.7 and A1.8).

FIGURE 5: Foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes by gender in Lesotho

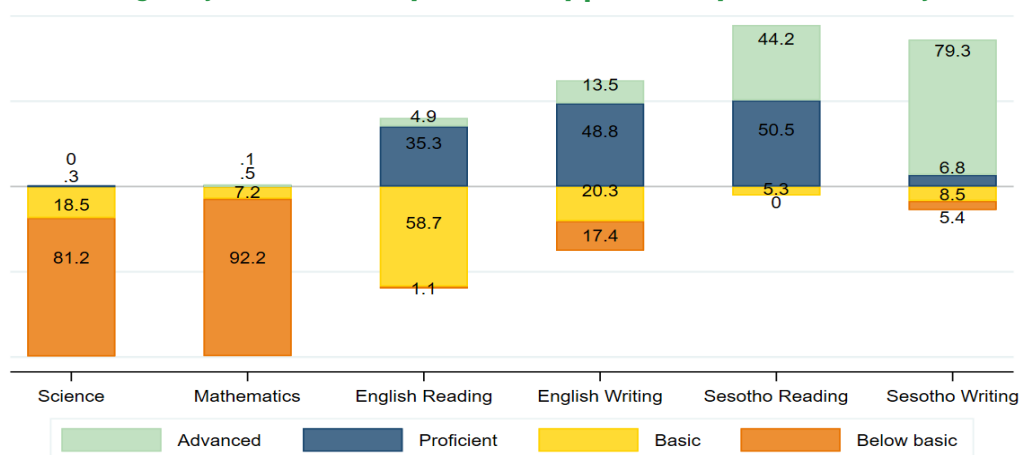


Source: Author’s analysis of MICS data, 2018.

10 Lesotho does not frequently participate in international and regional learning assessments or undertake regular standardized national assessments. The limited data on learning outcomes comes from household surveys and one-off assessments that are financed under donor funded projects.

12. At the secondary school level, learning outcomes remain low in core subjects, while the differences between boys and girls are marginal.¹¹ A 2018/2019 learning assessment conducted in a nationally representative sample of secondary schools showed that in Science and Mathematics, more than 81 percent and 90 percent of junior secondary students, respectively, were at the below basic proficiency level, while less than 1 percent of students reached proficient or advanced level in these two core subjects. Outcomes were significantly better in English and Sesotho, with about 62 percent of children reaching proficient or advanced level in English writing and 95 percent of children reaching proficient or advanced levels in Sesotho reading (Figure 6). There is minimal difference between male and female learning outcomes at the secondary level. However, it is likely that this convergence is at least partly driven by the disproportionately high dropout rate among boys, which might bias the average learning outcomes for boys in an upwards direction.

FIGURE 6: Percentage of junior secondary students by proficiency levels and subject in Lesotho



Source: Authors' analysis of junior secondary level learning assessment data conducted under LEQEP, 2019.

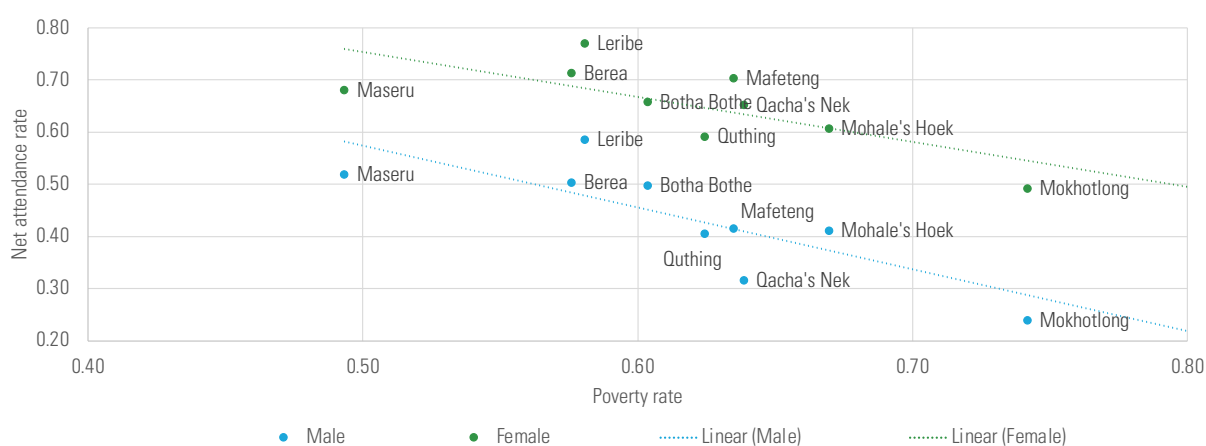
B. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POOR OUTCOMES AND GENDER GAPS DURING THE SCHOOL AGE YEARS

13. There are many demand and supply-side factors that negatively impact educational outcomes and drive gender disparities. On the demand-side, economic factors including household poverty and demand for child labor and social factors and harmful gender norms drive poor educational outcomes and gender gaps. On the supply-side, gaps in the provision of basic services in education and other human development sectors contribute towards the observed deficiencies and disparities.
14. **Poverty:** In Lesotho, poverty is a critical factor that drives poor educational outcomes for both boys and girls. The impact of poverty is particularly acute at the secondary level, where schooling is not free and the dropout rate is the highest. A 2018 household survey data showed that among children who have dropped out of school, over 41 percent cited the high cost of schooling as a key factor for dropout (Continuous Multipurpose Household Survey/ Household Budget Survey (CMS/HBS) survey, 2018). Moreover, a factor analysis using the same data shows that, of child and household characteristics that are correlated with dropout, the household's economic status emerges as one of the most important demand-side determinants of school dropout (see Table A1.1 in Annex 1). For example, the likelihood of dropout is reduced by about 26 percentage points for secondary school age boys who are from the richest income quintile, compared to boys of the same age from the poorest income quintile.

¹¹ As mentioned earlier, data on learning outcomes is scarce in Lesotho, including at the secondary level. The latest available data on learning outcomes at the post-primary level comes from a sample-based learning assessment survey that was conducted in a sample of junior secondary schools in 2018/19 with support from the Lesotho Education Quality for Equity Project (LEQEP), which is World Bank financing.

15. The link between poverty and poor educational outcomes is also observed at the district level, with a strong negative correlation between district level poverty rate and secondary school enrollment rate (see Figure 7). In particular, Thaba-Tseka and Mokhotlong districts, that have some of the highest poverty rates in the country (80 percent and 70 percent respectively), also have the lowest secondary school enrollment rates for girls (48 percent and 49 percent respectively), and even lower enrollment rates for boys (21 percent and 24 percent respectively). In contrast, districts such as Libre and Berea, where the poverty rate is less than 60 percent, the secondary enrollment rate is over 70 percent for girls and above 50 percent for boys. The gender gap in secondary school enrollment between boys and girls is also significantly worse in poor districts. The highest estimates for gender parity index (GPI) in secondary enrollment¹² are found in Thaba-Tseka and Mokhotlong district, with GPI of 2.3 and 2.1 respectively, indicating a disproportionately high number of girls enrolled in secondary schools compared to boys.

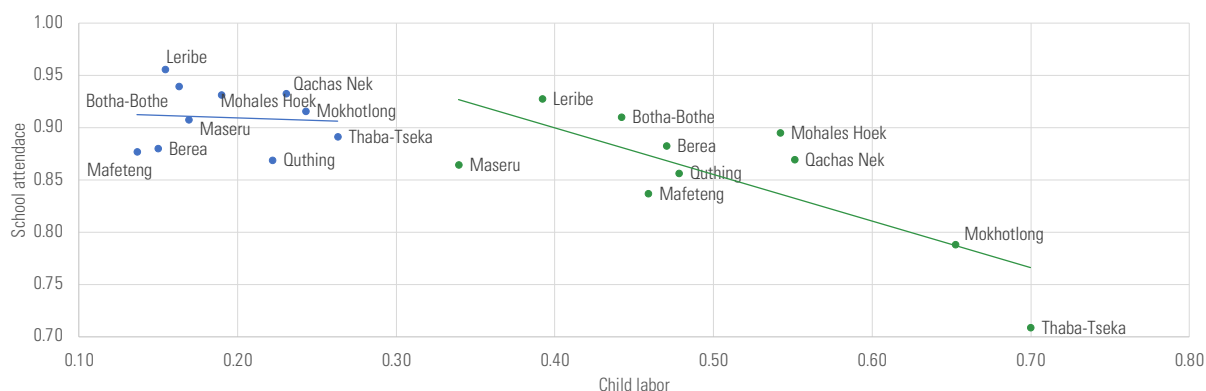
FIGURE 7: Secondary net attendance rate and poverty rate by district in Lesotho



Source: Author's analysis of MICS data, 2018.

16. **Child labor:** The high prevalence of child labor—a direct consequence of poverty, is also an important economic factor that impacts educational outcomes, especially for boys. Household survey data shows that a significant share of children engage in child labor, inside and outside the home. Overall, 46 percent of boys are engaged in child labor, either by working in economic activities and domestic chores for excessive hours or engaging in hazardous work, compared to 18 percent of girls. The high prevalence of child labor among children in Lesotho, especially among boys, has a detrimental impact on their schooling. At the district level, there is strong negative correlation between the prevalence of child labor and boys' secondary school attendance. However, a similar negative correlation is not observed for girls (see Figure 8). Moreover, the evidence shows that Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka districts, which have some of the highest poverty rates and lowest school attendance rates for boys, also have very high share of boys engaged in child labor.

¹² The GPI in secondary enrollment is calculated as the ratio in girls' secondary school enrollment relative to boys' secondary school enrollment.

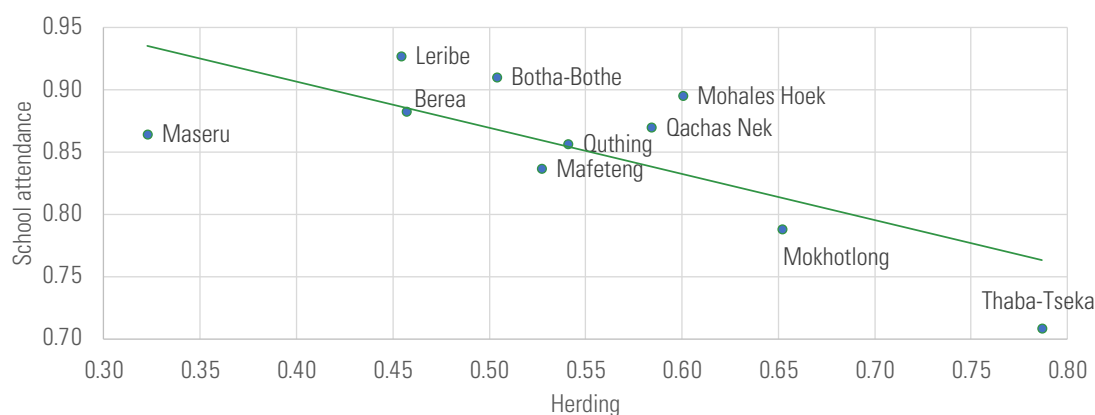
FIGURE 8: Child labor and school attendance rates by district in Lesotho

Source: Based on analysis of MICS data, 2018.

BOX 2: Livestock Herding Among Boys

In Lesotho, livestock herding, where cattle and sheep are taken out daily in search of grazing fields, is a common economic activity many children, particularly boys engage in. Data from the MICS 2018 survey shows that an overwhelming share of boys (49 percent) engage in herding compared to girls (only 3.8 percent). Many boys start engaging in herding at a young age, which requires them to stay in remote places, often under harsh weather conditions and with limited access to social services including schools, for an extended period of time.

Herding and school attendance rates by district for boys in Lesotho



Source: Author's analysis of MICS data, 2018

Herding is most commonly observed amongst children from rural and mountainous areas of the country and poor households, which suggests that it is not only driven by cultural factors, but mainly by poverty (Jha & Kelleher, 2006; World Bank, 2022 draft). There is also evidence showing that lack of employment opportunities for educated youth often discourages families and boys themselves from education, often pushing them into economic activities, with herding emerging as the most common option (World Bank, 2022 draft; Hemat et al., 2022). Herding related child labor is more prevalent in districts such as Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka, which are also districts that have high poverty rate, low enrollment rates, and worst gender disparities with boys being at a significant disadvantage.

17. ***Parental death and related vulnerabilities:*** Another important factor that contributes to increased vulnerability and affects educational attainment for boys and girls in the Lesotho context is parental loss. One of the most devastating impacts of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Lesotho has been the adverse effect on the family structure due to the death of household members, often parents. Consequently, a large share of children in the country are growing up as orphans, having lost one or both parents due to the epidemic. The 2018 MICS survey, for example, shows that about 23 percent of children (ages 17 or younger) are orphans having lost at least one parent. The loss of a parent is strongly and negatively correlated with educational outcomes. For example, factor analysis of demand-side determinants of dropout shows that death of a parent, especially the death of the mother, is linked with increased probability of dropout (see Annex 1, Table A1.1. for detailed discussion of the factor analysis results).
18. ***Social norms and cultural factors:*** Social norms around gender roles and masculinity influence decisions individuals and household make, including about schooling, in the face of other binding constraints. Evidence from a qualitative study shows that in Lesotho there is strong emphasis on men being providers in the household and on the need for boys to play the role of the provider when the household head is absent or there is an economic shock to the household. This means that boys are more likely to seek economic opportunities to contribute to the household, often at the detriment of their schooling. The cultural practice of initiation school, which is common in Lesotho, is another social factor that is linked with high dropout rate for boys. It is often conducted around the age of 13-15, over a significant amount of time ranging from weeks to several months, away from home. Hence it is likely to disrupt school attendance of boys, leading to lost learning and, in many cases, dropout (Mohlaloka, et al., 2016; Monyela, 2017; World Bank, 2022, draft). There is evidence showing that boys who are newly initiated into manhood often face challenges integrating back into the formal education system, where they are still treated as adolescent boys. A literature review and a qualitative study conducted as part of this analytical work show that teachers and schools struggle to teach and manage the young boys returning from initiation schools “due to deviant behavior such as a refusal to participate in class, acting with disdain towards female teachers and uninitiated male teachers, as well as involvement in gangster activities” (Mohlaloka, et al., 2016; Monyela, 2017). On the other hand, boys who have gone through initiation school report that schools are not a welcoming space for them upon their return (World Bank, 2023; Hemat et al., 2022).
19. **Adolescent pregnancy:** The linkage between adolescent childbearing and poor educational outcomes for girls is well documented globally and this correlation is also observed in Lesotho. The 2018 CMS/HBS survey shows that about 10 percent of girls who have dropped out of school report pregnancy as the main reason.¹³ There are many social and economic factors that drive the high rate of adolescent pregnancy in Lesotho. Knowledge gaps and misconceptions about sexual and reproductive health, limited access to contraceptives, and insufficient know-how among teenagers on the proper use of contraceptive methods are all likely drivers of risky sexual behaviors among youth. In addition, poverty forces many adolescent girls to engage in intergenerational relationships and transactional sex. An additional cause of unintended pregnancy is sexual violence, which is widespread. A recent study using data from the Lesotho Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS) 2018 showed that, among 18–24-year-olds, approximately 15 percent of females and 5 percent of males reported experiencing sexual violence before reaching age 18 and most reported having limited knowledge and access to support systems (MoSD, et al., 2020).
20. ***Gap in access to secondary schools:*** The insufficient number of secondary schools is a critical supply-side factor that affects secondary school enrollment and completion. As of 2018 there were 2,208 ECCDE centers or reception classes, 1,486 primary schools and 348 secondary schools, with almost no change in the number of schools in the last four years (MoET, 2020). The ratio of primary to secondary schools is 4:1, meaning lower number of secondary schools are under immense pressure to

13 Beyond the impact of adolescent pregnancy on the mother's educational outcomes, its impact on early childhood outcomes for her offspring(s) is well known (see discussion under section II of this study).

take-up the learners graduating from primary schools. The shortage of secondary schools is particularly acute in districts that have high poverty rate (in Thaba-Tseka and Mofeng districts, the primary to secondary school ratios are 7.4:1 and 6.7:1 respectively). Not surprisingly, districts that have fewer secondary schools relative to primary schools also have lower primary-to-secondary transition rates.

21. ***Low quality of education and low teacher capacity:*** In the education sector, a key supply-side issue that affects educational outcomes and gender disparity is the poor quality of classroom instruction both at the primary and secondary levels. Data on teacher attendance, content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and amount of time spent teaching in class are currently not collected regularly and systematically in Lesotho— a critical information gap in the education system. The limited available data and evidence on teacher quality, comes from a one-off sample-based student and teacher assessment that was conducted in 2018.¹⁴ The findings shows that most teachers have significant content knowledge gaps in core subject areas. For example, among primary school teachers, only 57.3 percent demonstrated competency in literacy. Among junior secondary school teachers, 69.1 percent demonstrated competency in Chemistry, 33 percent in Physics, and 31.1 percent in Mathematics. While data on teachers’ pedagogical skills and classroom practice is lacking, discussion with the MoET points to teachers’ lack of capacity to implement student centered approach that meets the differing needs of students, which is critical to address gender disparities in education.¹⁵
22. ***Gaps in social assistance services:*** Social assistance programs can play an important role in mitigating the impact of many of the demand-side factors driving gender inequality in human capital outcomes, such as poverty, child labor, and parental loss. There are several social assistance programs supported by the Government of Lesotho, which are aimed at improving human capital outcomes, closing disparities, and reducing poverty and vulnerability at the different stages of the life cycle. However, several studies show that there are gaps in terms of targeting, coverage, and the level of support (i.e., amount) provided through the various programs, which has limited the effectiveness of these programs in improving human capital outcomes. The CGP, which is paid to poor households with children ages 0-18 to reduce malnutrition, improve health status, and increase school enrolment, provides a very small amount of cash that is not sufficient to achieve these objectives (World Bank, 2021).¹⁶ The OVC-B and Tertiary-B programs, which are aimed at improving educational attainment among economically disadvantaged children at the secondary and tertiary levels respectively, are more likely to benefit the non-poor. Only 28 percent of OVC-B beneficiaries come from the bottom two quintiles of consumption, while the Tertiary-B is highly regressive and mainly benefits the non-poor who send their children to higher education institution in Lesotho and abroad, such as universities in South Africa (World Bank, 2021). Moreover, across most social assistance programs, boys and men are underrepresented. Such gaps (e.g., in access to OVC-B and CGP) (see Table 5).

14 The assessment was conducted by ECoL in 2018 with support from the World Bank financed LEQEP project. The student assessment data was used in this study to examine learning gaps, which was discussed above.

15 Several studies, for example, have shown that teachers often struggle teaching boys who have gone through initiation school, which may point to some capacity gaps teachers may have in tailoring their approach to meet the needs of their students especially during adolescence (Mohlaloka, et al., 2016; Monyela, 2017).

16 The monthly benefit ranges from M120 to M360 (US\$ 7.7 to US\$ 23.2) depending on household size (World Bank, 2021).

TABLE 4. Social assistance programs and beneficiaries by gender in Lesotho

Social Assistance Programs	Total number of beneficiaries	Total number of children/individuals	Number of females	Number of males
OVC- Bursary program	26,627	26,627	15,605	11,022
CGP	47,317	141,951	72,395	69,556
Old Age Pension	77,510	77,510	52,680	24,830
OAP		76,704	52,012	24,692
APC		562	548	14
LLA		244	120	124
Public assistance	12,000	60,000	30,600	29,400
Total	163,454	306,088	223,690	159,638

Source: Based on summary data provided by MoSD in December 2021 as part of this study.

IV. YOUTH TO ADULTHOOD (AGES 18 AND ABOVE)

Key facts

- In tertiary education, women account for over 60% of total enrollment. However, women continue to be underrepresented in STEM fields.
- In the labor market, women have worse outcomes compared to men. Women's employment rate is 34.9%, compared to 42.9% for men, mainly driven by their lower levels of labor force participation.
- Women with primary and secondary education on average earn about 59% and 54%, respectively, of what men with the same level of education earn. For women with higher education, the corresponding figure is 80%.

23. Youth to adulthood represents another important stage of an individual's life cycle, covering transition time from school towards post-secondary education and training (PSET), the labor market, family formation, and old age. This section examines some of the key areas where pronounced gender disparities are observed, focusing on gender gaps in access to PSET and disparities in labor market outcomes.

A. DISPARITIES IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION (TERTIARY AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION)

24. **In tertiary education, men students are underrepresented in total enrollment, while women continue to be excluded from STEM fields.** Women account for over 60 percent of tertiary enrollment, with their participation increasing over time. Enrollment figures by field of study show that men have higher levels of enrollment in natural sciences, mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), and engineering, manufacturing, and construction fields. Women account only for 37.5 percent of enrollment in natural sciences, mathematics, and statistics fields, 36.8 percent in ICT, and 26.2 percent in engineering, manufacturing, and construction fields. Over time, the share of women in STEM fields is increasing, but more needs to be done to close the gap fully.

TABLE 5. Enrolment in tertiary education by domain and gender in Lesotho

Classification	2014/15			2017/18		
	Female	Male	%Female	Female	Male	%Female
Education	4,431	2,034	68.5%	3,693	1,500	71.1%
Arts & Humanities	1,449	715	67.0%	862	418	67.3%
Social Sciences, journalism and Information	801	381	67.8%	1,399	827	62.8%
Business, Administration & Law	3,383	1,980	63.1%	4,468	2,420	64.9%
Natural Sciences, Mathematics & Statistics	161	340	32.1%	238	397	37.5%
Information & Communication Technologies	145	349	29.4%	357	612	36.8%
Engineering, manufacturing & construction	471	1,611	22.6%	493	1,389	26.2%
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	322	498	39.3%	300	411	42.2%
Health & Welfare	1,019	467	68.6%	1,245	551	69.3%
Services	475	268	63.9%	727	237	75.4%
Grand Total	12,657	8,643	59.4%	13,782	8,762	61.1%

Source: Education sector analysis (MoET, 2020).

25. **Enrollment in TVET is expanding in Lesotho in the past few years but remains low, with women accounting for majority of students.** With the addition of seven new TVET institutions, between 2016 and 2019, enrollment has increased from 2,800 in the year 2016 to more than 4,200 in 2019, and females accounts for 58 percent of all enrollments (BOS 2018). There are 42 programs in the formal TVET system. However, according to available data almost all students (99.8 percent) are enrolled in the 10 programs: agriculture, automotive, carpentry and joinery, bricklaying and plastering, tailoring/ sewing, metal work, electrical installation, home economics, leather, and plumbing. Unfortunately, data is not currently available to break down enrollment by field of specialization and gender, an important information gap that needs attention.

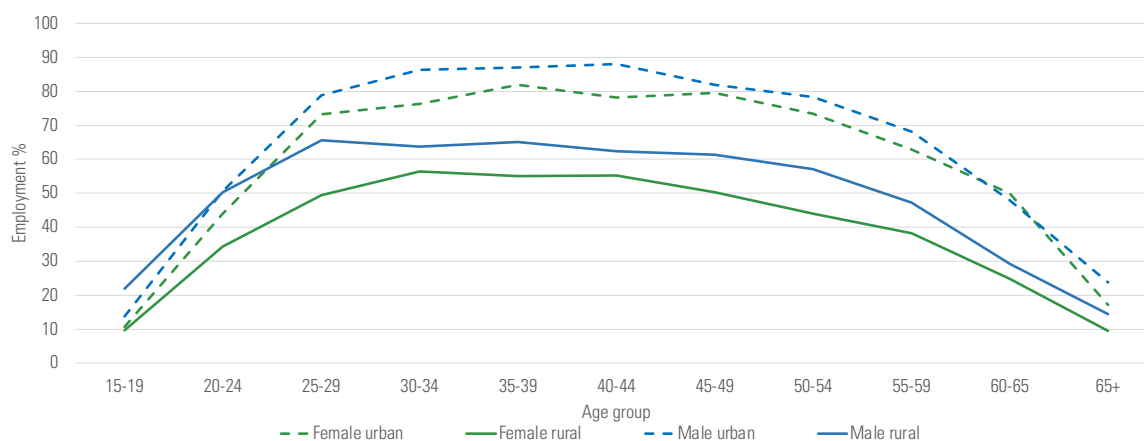
B. INEQUALITIES IN THE LABOR MARKET

26. **Even though women in Lesotho are increasingly attaining higher levels of education, these achievements have not fully translated into better labor market outcomes.** Women have significantly lower employment rates compared to men. This is to a large part driven by lower levels of labor force participation. Analysis of data from the 2019 Labor Force Survey (LSF, 2019) shows that among working age individuals (i.e., ages 15 and older) the employment rate is 42.4 percent for men compared to 34.9 percent for women.¹⁷ In the same age group, women's labor force participation is only 44.8 percent compared to 54.7 percent for men. Among those who are in the labor force, women's unemployment rate is 22.5 percent, which is comparable to the male unemployment rate at 22.1 percent. The differences between women and men labor market outcomes are apparent across all age groups, albeit to varying levels (see Figure 9).

¹⁷ **Employment rate:** the percentage of the working age population that is employed (regardless of labor force participation status). **Labor force participation rate:** percentage of the working age population working or actively looking for work or trying to start a business. **Unemployment rate:** the share of the labor force (i.e., the working age population that is actively engaged in the labor force seeking for work or trying to start a business) that is unemployed.

27. **The most drastic inequalities in labor market outcomes emerge at the intersection of gender and rurality, with women from rural areas having the worst outcomes.** Women from rural areas of the country have the lowest rates of labor force participation and employment rates compared to rural men and compared to urban women and men (see Figure 9). Currently in Lesotho, about 58 percent of the working age population live in rural areas. Hence, the observed poor labor outcomes of women and men from rural areas reflect the reality of a significant share of the population.

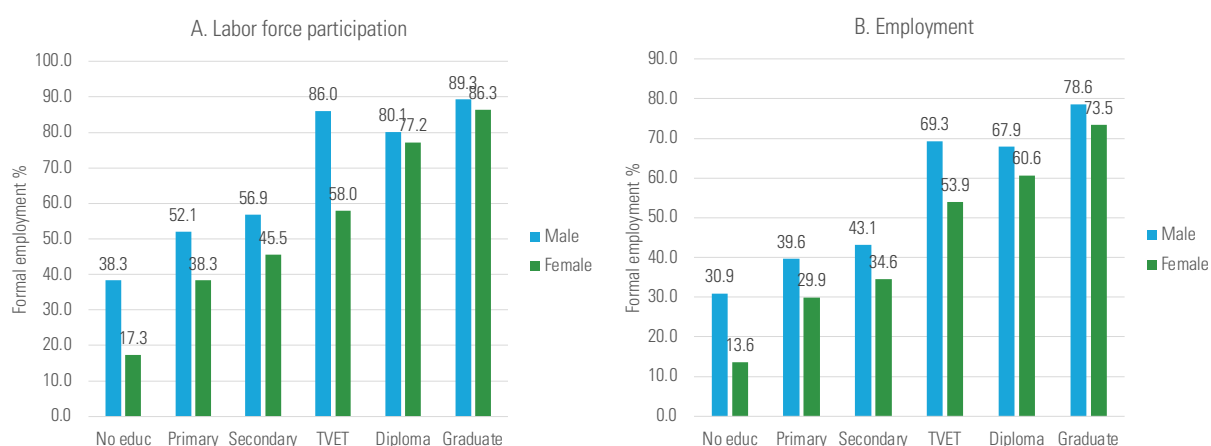
FIGURE 9: Employment rate by age group, gender, and rurality in Lesotho



Source: Based on analysis of the LFS 2019 data.

28. **Labor market outcomes improve with higher levels of education, for both men and women, while gender gaps narrow but remain significant.** Some of the largest gender gaps in labor force participation and employment rates are observed amongst working age individuals with below primary level of education (i.e., working age population no education or informal education). However, it should be noted that less than 6.5 percent of the working age population fits in this educational group. Most of the working age population has primary or secondary level of education (45.7 percent and 39.5 percent of the working age population respectively). In these education groups, the gender gap in labor force participation rate and employment rate are quite substantial. At higher level of education (diploma and graduate levels which covers bachelor and higher levels of education), gender gaps significantly narrow down but remain substantial.

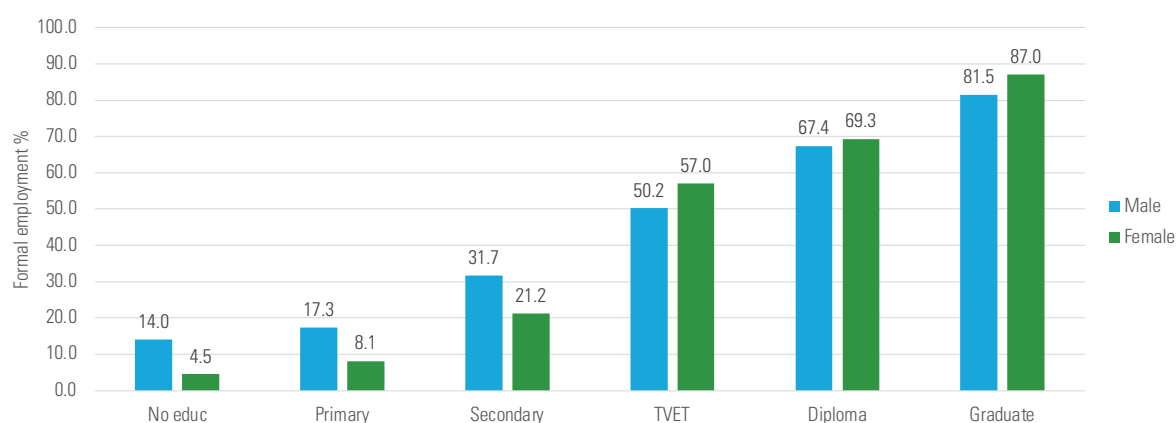
FIGURE 10: Labor force participation and employment rates by gender and education in Lesotho



Source: Analysis of the LFS 2019 data. All estimates are weighted using sample weights.

29. **When they are employed, women are more likely to be in informal employment, but this pattern changes at higher levels of education.** Formal employment remains small in Lesotho. Among those who are working, only 25.8 percent of women and 29.5 percent of men are engaged in formal employment. The level of informality is highest among men and women with lower levels of education. For example, among those who have primary level of education and are working, only about 17 percent of men and 8 women are in formal employment. Across higher levels of education, the share of formal employment increases significantly, while the difference between the genders diminishes. In fact, among those with graduate level education (bachelors or higher), women are more likely to be formally employed compared to men (see Figure 11).

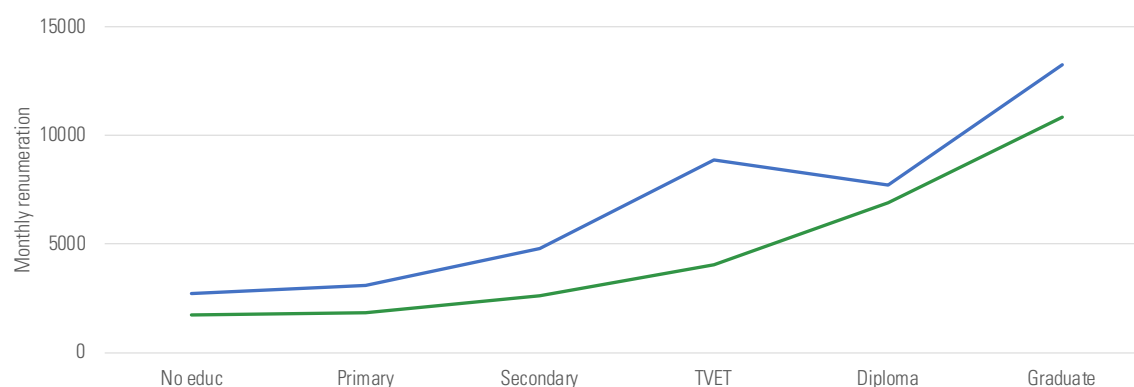
FIGURE 11: Formal employment rate among those who are working, by gender and education in Lesotho



Source: Analysis of the LFS 2019 data. All estimates are weighted using sample weights.

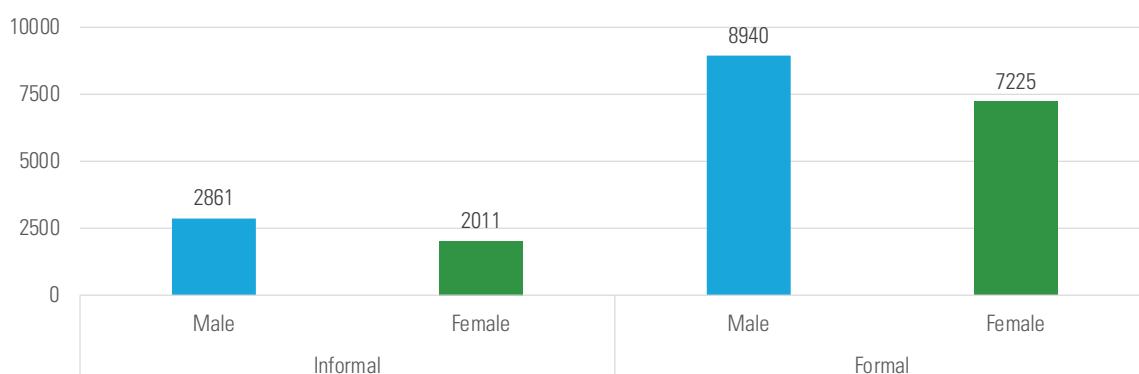
30. **Women earn less than men and this gap is observed across all education groups and among those who are formally and informally employed.** The biggest gap in earning is observed between men and women with TVET education. However, this group accounts for a very small share of the working age population. Among those with primary education, women on average earn just about 59 percent of what men on average earn, while among those with secondary education, women on average earn about 54 percent of that of men. The gap narrows down at higher levels of education. For example, women with graduate level of education earn on average about 81 percent of what men with the same level of education earn (see Figure 12).

FIGURE 12: Earnings by level of education and gender in Lesotho



Source: Analysis of the LFS 2019 data. All estimates are weighted using sample weights.

31. Gender gaps in earning are also apparent regardless of employment type, be it in the formal sector or informal sector, which shows the pervasiveness of the issue. Among those in informal employment, women on average earn about 70 percent of what men earn, while among those in formal employment, the gap is narrower with women earning on average 80 percent of what men earn (see Figure 12).

FIGURE 13: Earnings by level type of employment and gender in Lesotho

Source: Analysis of the LFS 2019 data. All estimates are weighted using sample weights.

C. FACTORS DRIVING GENDER DISPARITIES IN YOUTH AND ADULTHOOD

32. **The gender disparities observed in youth and adulthood are driven by a wide range of economic and social factors, many of which are also underpinned by inequalities that emerged earlier in the life cycle.** The available data from household surveys and literature review of studies in Lesotho and other middle and low-income countries points to several key and overlapping factors, some of which are discussed below.
33. **Mismatch between educational attainment and job opportunities:** In many developing countries, the low educational attainment of women, especially low completion of secondary and post-secondary education, is an important driving factor that has been shown to affect women's labor market outcomes. In the case of Lesotho, the situation is reversed, with women more likely to complete secondary school and attain tertiary education. The increased level of education women acquire may raise the employment expectations of women (e.g., by raising their reservation wage). If this expectation is not matched by the creation of gainful job opportunities in the economy, it may drive women to exit the labor force. However, more data and further analysis is needed to examine this potential channel in the Lesotho context.
34. **Low relevance of PSET and women's exclusion from STEM:** There is evidence showing that there is mismatch between the quality and relevance of education and training youth receive in PSET, including TVET and university levels, and the types of skills needed in the labor market. This mismatch is likely to impact the employability of both men and women, even when they have accessed higher levels of education. Women are at risk of being impacted more significantly, as they continue to be excluded from STEM related fields, which are often fields with high growth and earning potential.
35. **Social factors and gender norms:** Evidence from household survey data shows that women spend significantly more time working in the household and taking care of family needs compared to men. The disproportionate burden of household chores and care giving on women has been shown to pose significant obstacle for women's prospect in paid employment outside the home. In the Lesotho context, among working age individuals (ages 15 to 65) who are not in the labor market (i.e., not employed, seeking jobs, or trying to open a business), 46 percent of women state family considerations as the main reasons for being out of the labor force, followed by education (29 percent) and lack of jobs (6 percent). For men, being a student is the top reason for not being in the labor market (49 percent), with only 12 percent mentioning family related factors as a barrier for labor force participation (analysis of 2017/18 CMS/HBS). Gender norms that drive unequal division of household work, especially work related to childcare, are further reinforced by lack of gender-responsive public policy. Currently in Lesotho, the duration of maternity leave is only twelve weeks, while there is no parental leave policy

for fathers (Hemat et.al., 2022). There is also no financial support for new parents to cover the cost of childcare. This means parents have to make tough choices between working and raising their children, and the choice is likely to be for the mother to stay at home. Such short-term coping strategies often have lasting impacts on women's long-term economic outcomes.

36. **Access to credit and other inputs:** Compared to many countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, Lesotho has high female ownership of formal firms (39.1 percent), which is still significantly less than men. However, female owned businesses are often very small, usually engaged in livelihood or subsistence, with limited growth opportunities. There is some evidence suggesting that the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs include limitations in access to credit, discrimination by financial institutions, high levels of unpaid care work resulting in a lack of ability to engage in enterprise development, and limited access to business development, training, knowledge, and access to networks and markets. Access to finance by women is low, particularly among rural women in the low-income category, due to factors such as constraints on women's access to formal credit, low credit history, and high rejection rate of women loan applicants.
37. **Gaps in the institutional setting (laws, protection, benefits):** Another factor that affects disparities in labor market outcomes between men and women is discriminatory practices in the labor market that perpetuate limited growth opportunities, lower compensation, and limited protection. Lesotho, like many countries in the world, have implemented laws and policies that are aimed at promoting equal opportunities in the labor market. However, there are gaps in the implementation of these laws and policies which limit their effectiveness in protecting vulnerable workers, including women.¹⁸

V. THE WAY FORWARD: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

38. **Addressing gender inequalities, including the pervasive inequalities in education and in the labor market discussed above is an urgent priority, for Lesotho to fully harness its human capital potential.** Two overarching results emerge from the study: (i) there are significant gender gaps in educational outcomes, often with boys and men at a disadvantage, and (ii) the gains girls and women are making in education are not fully translating into improved labor market and economic outcomes. The study also show that interrelated economic, social, and cultural factors along with gaps in the quality and equity of social services contribute to the observed inequalities. This section presents high level policy recommendations aimed at unlocking some of the most binding constraints driving the disparities. These policy recommendations are not prescriptive, and instead they are intended to form the basis for further policy dialogue. Implementing these recommendations will require further in-depth analysis and discussion, including on priority setting, resource mobilization and allocation, and accountability for results.

A. POLICY PRIORITIES DURING EARLY CHILDHOOD

39. **In early childhood, ensure the provision of holistic services to all children, prioritizing those facing multiple disadvantages.** Investing in early childhood development holistically, to ensure that children thrive in their physical, cognitive, and socioemotional development, is key to lay the foundation for life-long human capital development; it has also been shown as a cost-effective strategy to mitigate inequalities that open early and persist over the life cycle. Lesotho already has in place several programs in health, nutrition, social protection, and education that aim to improve outcomes in early childhood. However, strong effort is needed to maximize impact under existing programs, while also expanding service provision where there are acute gaps.

18 More details can be found in the Lesotho Gender assessment (Hemat et al, 2022).

40. **Improve provision and take-up of existing health, nutrition, and educational services, through better targeting and multi-sectoral collaborations.** Strong focus on improving the targeting and take-up of services is critical to improving poor outcomes and close inequality gaps that start to open early, especially among children born in rural areas, in economically and socially disadvantaged households, and to teen mothers. This requires stronger multi-sectoral coordination, especially in terms of the targeting of services across the different sectors. In this regard, the existing cadre of community social workers (e.g., social development officers (SDOs) and village health workers (VHWs)) can play a crucial role in coordinating service delivery across different sectors and ensuring that children that face multiple vulnerabilities receive all key services. The roles of these community facing workers can also be adapted, and they can help implement cost-effective interventions (e.g., building parents' and caregivers' knowledge about good practices including good dietary practices for infants and young children and on how to engage young children in stimulating activities to promote cognitive and socio-emotional development).
41. **Improve the quality of ECCDE and shift towards inclusive approaches that support whole-child learning.** Shifting the focus of ECCDE towards hands-on activities and experiences and whole-child-learning approaches will be important in order to improve early learning outcomes for all. This will require a well-designed and updated curriculum that draws from the latest evidence base on early childhood development along with capacity development of teachers and practitioners to implement the curriculum. Lesotho is already taking steps to revise the ECCDE curriculum, pilot it, with a plan to gradually roll it out nationally. This presents an important opportunity to build an ECCDE system that recognizes and supports variability in child development, including between boys and girls. Improving quality of ECCDE will also require measurement of child development outcomes regularly; to monitor system level progress and make data driven and evidence-based decisions and investments to improve service delivery and ultimately children's outcomes.
42. **In the medium to the long run, allocate more resources to ECCDE sub-sector, to expand access and improve quality.** More needs to be done to rapidly expand access to ECCDE and this cannot be achieved without significant increase in public sector financing to the ECCDE sub-sector. Public provision of ECCDE is particularly indispensable to increase access in underserved areas of the country, mainly rural and poor districts. Lesotho can build on recent efforts such as the introduction of reception classes attached to public primary schools as a cost-effective public provision approach. Public-private-partnership (PPP) models may also be an effective strategy for the Government to expand access to ECCDE. There are already many low-cost private preschools and community ECCDE centers in the country, many of which are not currently registered with the MoET. Through a PPP model, the Government can provide support to these non-public providers, for example by providing training to their teacher, along with enhanced regulation and oversight, while also providing targeted subsidy to poor families to reduce the cost of attendance for their children.

B. POLICY PRIORITIES DURING THE SCHOOL YEARS

43. During the school year, keeping all boys and girls in school and ensuring that they are learning needs to be a priority. This will require addressing gaps in the quality of education that impact both boys and girls and addressing demand- and supply-side factors that contribute to high dropout and low completion rates. Across all of these priorities, tailored and targeted interventions will also be needed to address factors that differentially impact boys and girls.
 - **Improve the quality and relevance of education, by strengthening teacher professional development and by developing learning assessment systems for enhanced accountability.** Increased and sustained effort is needed to address teachers' capacity gaps in terms of their content knowledge and pedagogical practice, across all levels of education. To achieve such improvements, well designed teacher training and professional development programs that provide practical and ongoing support to teachers are

essential. Such programs will be essential to enhance teachers' effectiveness, including by building their capacity to tailor their teaching to the needs of their students. Hence disadvantaged children, including boys who are lagging behind and who are likely to dropout under the status quo, stand to benefit significantly.

- Teacher training and professional development programs also offer opportunities to shift harmful biases and beliefs teachers may have (e.g., views about boys being disruptive and girls not being good in STEM). Through such programs the Government can also equip teachers with teaching strategies that actively promote gender equality, enabling them to meet the varying needs of their student (for example, to better support overage children boys returning from initiation schools, pregnant adolescent girls, or teenage mothers). Moreover, teachers and school leaders can be trained to effectively identify GBV risks, both inside and outside the school, and provide support to affected students, for example by linking them with other social services. In addition to building teachers' capacity, regular learning assessments are needed to evaluate the current state of learning, to assess inequalities across gender and other dimensions, to set tangible goals, and to track progress over time.
- **Break the impact of poverty on school completion:** Economic support to poor households is needed to alleviate the impact of poverty on school completion. Well targeted economic support can play an important role in narrowing stark inequalities that emerge at the intersection of rurality, socio-economic status, and gender and that have persisted over time. Interventions that reduce the costs of education by providing financial support for tuition and other costs of schooling have been shown to increase student enrollment and attendance. Lesotho has already put in place programs such as the OVC-B grant program which provides tuition support for poor and vulnerable children in secondary education. To be impactful, however, the intervention needs to be better targeted. It also needs to provide adequate amount of support, beyond just tuition. Along with economic support, more needs to be done to protect children from child labor, including by improving the implementation of child labor policies.
- **Shift harmful social norms and cultural practices that sustain harmful gender roles and foster early dropout, especially among boys.** Follow-up support for beneficiaries, including by building school-community partnerships, are also needed to keep at risk children in school. By involving both schools and key actors in the community, including chiefs, community leaders, and initiators, advocacy and public awareness efforts around the boys' education agenda can be fostered. These platforms can also be used to shift harmful social and gender norms that impact both boys and girls. Collaborations between traditional institutions and the formal education system can also facilitate a more consistent messaging and support for adolescent boys and girls from the different institutions they interact with as they transition into adulthood.
- **Empowering adolescents to make informed decisions.** Comprehensive support including reproductive health education and services and life-skills education are needed to equip adolescent boys and girls with the knowledge and skills they need to make informed choices, including about their education and health. Such support can help them navigate the various challenges they face as they transition into adulthood, including challenges related to early pregnancy, GBV, and substance abuse. Giving adolescents' access to life skills education (e.g., on self-management, communication, negotiation, and critical thinking) through peer groups (e.g., boys and girls clubs), extracurricular activities, and mentorship and exposing them to positive role models can play a role in giving them relevant life skills as well as help them establish a positive support network to handle some of the social issues they face during this transitional stage of their life cycle. For those who are out of school, expanding skills development programs and providing alternative schooling options (e.g., second chance education for out of schoolboys) can offer a pathway for them to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to thrive and become productive members of their community.

C. POLICY PRIORITIES DURING YOUTH INTO ADULTHOOD

44. Education has long been promised as the means for economic inclusion for all; to ensure that this promise is realized, comprehensive support for youth is needed to prepare them for the labor market and facilitate their successful transition from school into productive employment. Furthermore, social, economic, and institutional barriers that particularly impact female youth and women need to be systematically addressed.
- **Support female youth and women to break into STEM fields.** Sustained effort is needed to shift biases that discourage girls and women from studying STEM fields or from pursuing STEM-related jobs. The fact that women have low enrollment in STEM fields in higher education contributes to occupational segregation, which then creates a vicious cycle as the absence of women in STEM jobs likely reinforce harmful stereotypes. To break this cycle, gender biases in the education system should be challenged, including through training of educators and leaders. These efforts need to start early, at the basic and secondary education levels and continuing into higher education, where STEM gender gaps are most pronounced.
 - **Strengthen school-to-work transitions support services for youth, focusing on helping female youth enter fields they have been excluded from.** Targeted employment support for youth, for example, by helping them define their career aspirations, training them on job search strategies, by matching them with internships, on the job training, or actual employment opportunities can be impactful in addressing the challenge youth face entering into productive employment. Such programs can also be used to address barriers that acutely impact female youth. For example, targeted recruitment programs into STEM, including through internship programs, can help women break into STEM fields.
 - **Institutionalize laws and policies that promote gender equality and implement them:** There must be laws and policies in place to protect women's economic rights, outlaw discrimination, and ensure equal pay for equal work. More than that, translating these laws and policies into practice will be critical. This may be achieved by, among other things, promoting transparent wage practices, implementing clear evaluation processes, and strengthening reporting systems.
 - **Improving women's access to finance:** In addition, to improve women entrepreneurs' access to finance and to support them to grow and contribute fully to the country's economic development, targeted effort needs to be made to improve their credit worthiness and address the discrimination they face by financial institutions. This can be done by reforming the mechanisms used for evaluating women's bankability and creditworthiness and implementing frameworks that prevent discrimination. Technology based solutions, including mobile banking can also play an important role to improve women's access to finance and promote their business, especially in rural areas.
 - **Shifting harmful norms on gender roles in the household:** Shifting pervasive harmful gender norms requires sustained advocacy and behavior change campaigns at national and community level. It will also require supporting both men and women to take active roles in the home and in the labor market, through family friendly policies that support parents, especially working mothers; including by making childcare affordable and accessible as well as providing adequate parental leave to ensure that women can stay in the labor market when they choose to do so. Parental leave should be available to men as well, so they are in a better position take a more active role in childcare. The stereotype of women being the sole caregivers of children needs to change whereby child-rearing becomes a joint responsibility.

TABLE 6. Theory of change to close gender gaps in education and labor market outcomes

	Challenges	Contributing factors	Policy Recommendations
Early childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High under five mortality rate • High stunting and underweight rates • Deficits in cognitive skills including early literacy and numeracy skills, and social and emotional skills • Lower outcomes for boys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low immunizations rates; poor nutritional status; and inadequate social protection support • High adolescent pregnancy rates • Inadequate support and stimulation for learning at home • Low access to and quality of ECCDE • Limited coordination of ECD services across human development sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen cross-sectoral coordination in ECCDE to improve targeting, efficiency, and impact of existing programs. • Shift the focus of ECCDE towards whole child learning. • Increase funding for ECCDE and expand access.
School Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High dropout rate and low secondary completion rate, especially for boys • Low levels of foundational literacy and numeracy skills, especially for boys • Low levels of learning in core subjects at secondary level for both boys and girls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty and high demand for child labor, especially among rural boys • Gap in the targeting and adequacy of the OVC-B and CGP • Harmful gender norms around masculinity and role of boys • Adolescent pregnancy, including due to high risk of GBV and gaps in reproductive health services • Limited focus on foundational learning in lower primary grades • Quality and relevance gaps in secondary education • Low teacher capacity and harmful gender biases • Low access to secondary education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen economic-support programs, with better targeting. • Advocate to shift gender norms involving community leaders. • Regularly assess learning at all levels of education. • Strengthening teacher training and support to improve subject knowledge and pedagogical skills. • Update the secondary school curriculum to improve relevance. • Make school environments safe and inclusive; train teachers to combat gender bias and GBV. • Provide comprehensive support for adolescents, including reproductive health education and services and life skills education and alternative schooling options for dropouts.
Youth to adulthood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low enrollment in PSET, especially for male youth • Low enrollment of women in STEM fields in tertiary education, including in ICT • High share of youth, especially female youth, neither studying nor working • Low employment rates and low wages, especially for women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited engagement of female youth in STEM, gender bias • Discrimination in the workplace against women • Disproportionate burden of unpaid work on women • Limited Access to credit and other financial services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support female youth to enter into STEM fields and occupations through advocacy, internships, mentorships. • Enhance support for school-to-work transitions for youth, prioritizing women. • Implement laws and policies that protect women's rights and promote equity in the workplace. • Implement family friendly policies for mothers and fathers and make childcare affordable. • Improve women's access to financial services through gender-responsive financial inclusion interventions.

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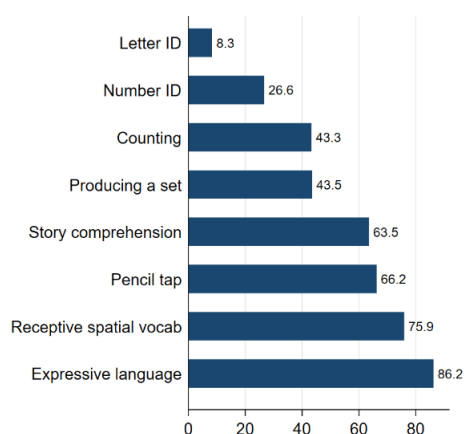
ANNEX 1: ADDITIONAL RESULTS

A. ADDITIONAL FINDINGS FROM THE MELQO ASSESSMENT

45. **Boys and girls in Lesotho also experience poor outcomes in their early cognitive development, while their outcomes are relatively better in key domains of social and emotional development.** Analysis of the 2018 MELQO data shows that children in Lesotho underperformed in the language/literacy and mathematics/numeracy related domains of their cognitive development. In the core literacy skill of letter identification, for example, the average proportion of correct answers was 8 percent. This means children were on average able to identify just about 1.3 letters out of the 16 letters presented to them. In terms of numeracy, the average proportion of correct answers in the number identification task was 26.6 percent, meaning that children could identify only about 2.7 numbers on average out of 10 presented to them. In both the literacy and numeracy domains, boys marginally underperform compared to girls, while in domains such as expressive language¹⁹ and receptive spatial vocabulary²⁰ related cognitive tasks both boys and girls perform better, with no statistically significant differences between the genders.

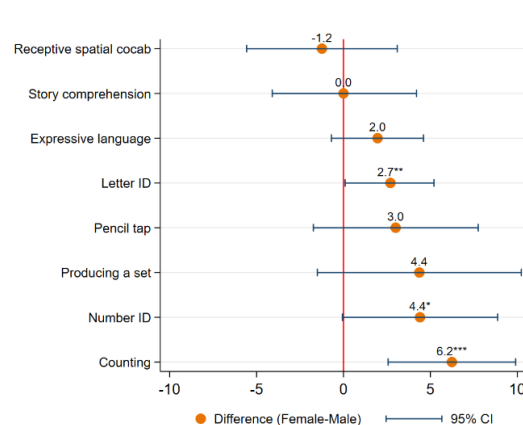
FIGURE A1.1: Early childhood cognitive development outcomes

Early childhood cognitive development



Note: Estimates show the average proportion of task under a domain that are correctly completed.

Gender gap in cognitive development



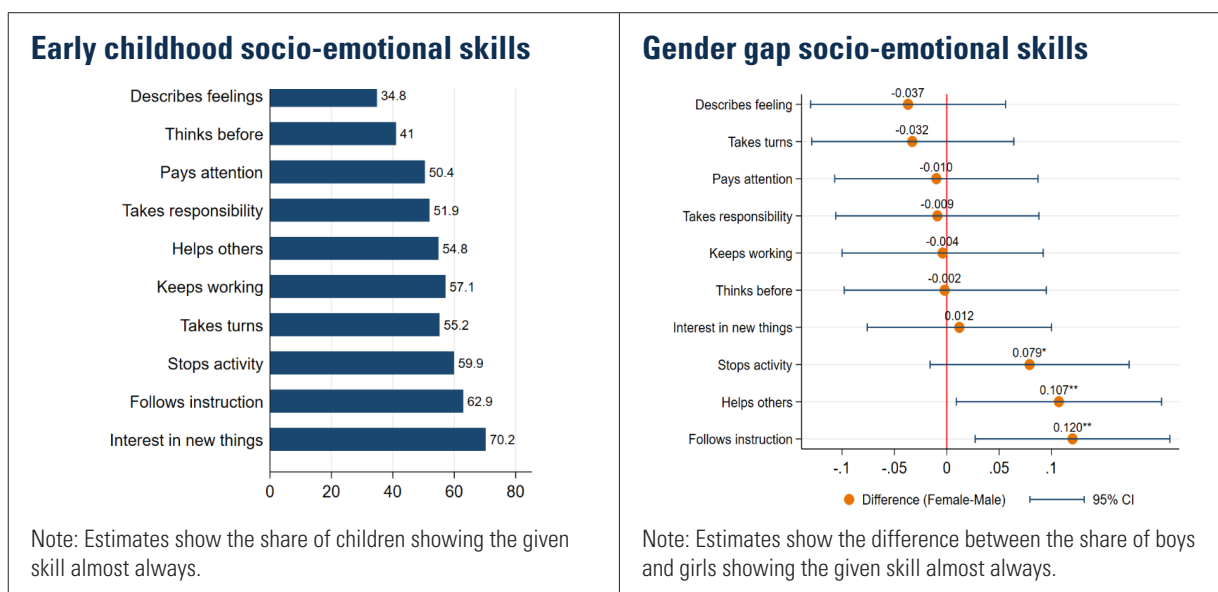
Note: Estimates show the difference between boys and girls in the average proportion of task that are correctly completed

Source: Analysis of MELQO (child direct assessment), 2018 data.

46. **Early childhood social and emotional development outcomes are better for children in Lesotho compared to their cognitive development related outcomes.** Children do well on skills related to engagement in new things and following direction, which are skills related to the self-regulation domain in the MELQO. Specifically, teachers reported that 70 percent of children show interest in new things almost always, while 60 percent of children follow direction the majority of the time. On the other hand, lower scores were observed in socio-emotional skills related to the ability to describe feelings, which falls under the social competency (SC) domain. The MELQO results shows that only 35 percent of children show skills related to describing their feelings almost always. Furthermore, boys perform lower than girls in some of the key socio-emotional skill domains (e.g., stopping activity when asked (SR), following instruction (SR) and helping others (SC)) (See Figure 3).

19 Expressive language is measured as the child's ability to name body parts that have been shown to him or her.

20 Under this domain children are asked to describe the special arrangement of objects, which they are shown in pictures.

FIGURE A1.2: Early childhood socio-emotional skills

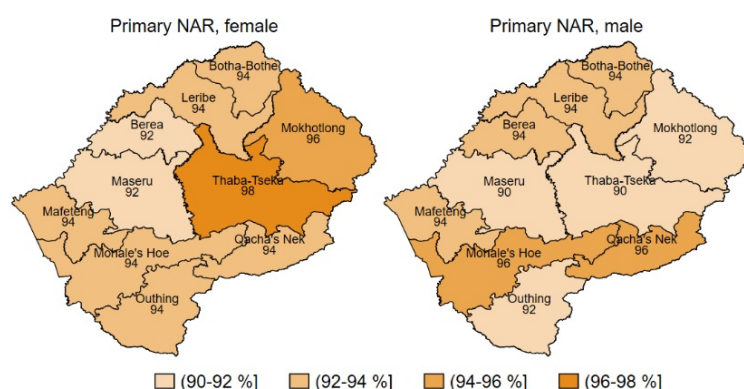
Source: Analysis of MELQO (child direct assessment), 2018 data.

47. **In reality, early childhood cognitive, social, and emotional development outcomes in Lesotho are likely to be worse than what is reported in the MELQO.** This is because the 2018 MELQO assessment included only children enrolled in ECCDE programs (either in public reception classes or private or community ECCDE centers) and received some early childhood education and support services. Nationally, fewer than half of children ages 3 to 5 have access to ECCDE services. Hence, most children are likely to have worse outcomes than reported in the MELQO, and the disadvantages boys face in key cognitive and socio-emotional development domains could be potentially higher. Following the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, early childhood services, including ECCDE, were severely disrupted for a prolonged time period, and this disruption could have worsened the situation. Updated data with a wider coverage is needed to reassess the situation and identify the gaps in this foundational stage of the life cycle.

B. EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES ACROSS GENDER, GEOGRAPHIC AREAS, AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROUPS

48. Enrollment rates and gender gaps vary substantially across Lesotho's ten districts, with these differences being more pronounced at the secondary level. Overall, there are minimal differences between enrollment rates for boys and girls at the primary level across the ten districts. Differences in enrollment rate between girls and boys are in general less than +/-2 percentage points in most districts and often not statistically significant.

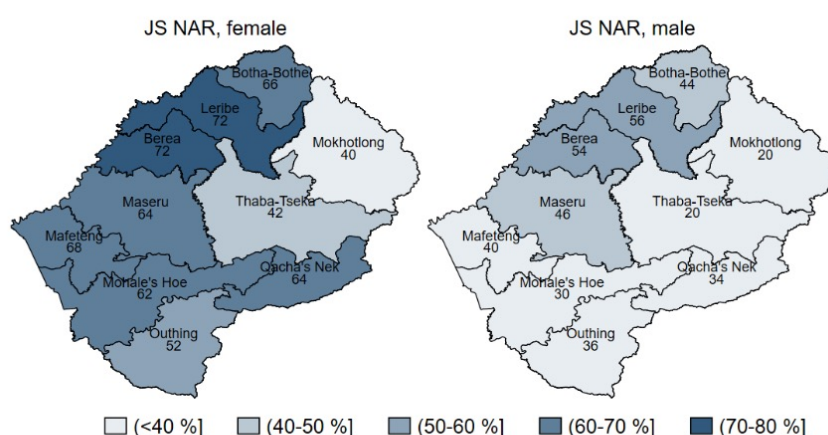
FIGURE A1.3: Primary net attendance rates by district and gender



Source: Based on analysis of MICS data, 2018.

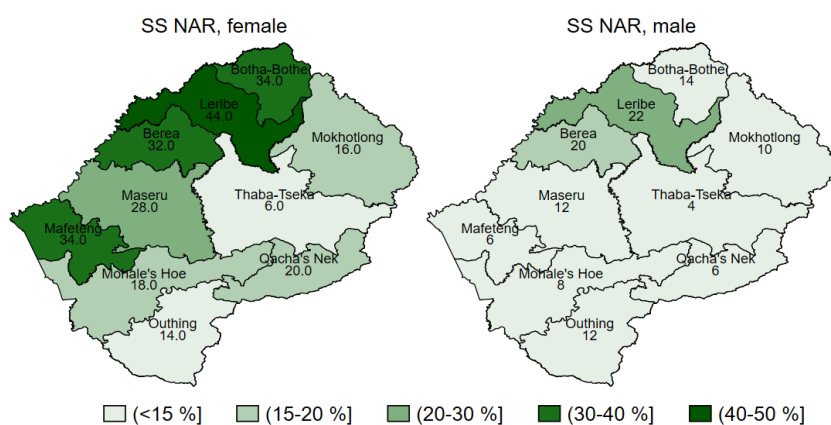
49. At the junior secondary level, however, there is significant variation across districts in enrollment, with the net enrollment rates ranging between 40 and 72 percent for girls and between 20 and 56 percent for boys. The difference between girls and boys is the highest in districts such as Mafeteng (a difference of 28 percentage points in favor of girls), Qacha's Nek (a difference of 31 percentage points in favor of girls), and Mohale's Hoek (a difference of 32 percentage points in favor of girls).

FIGURE A1.4: Junior secondary net attendance rate by district



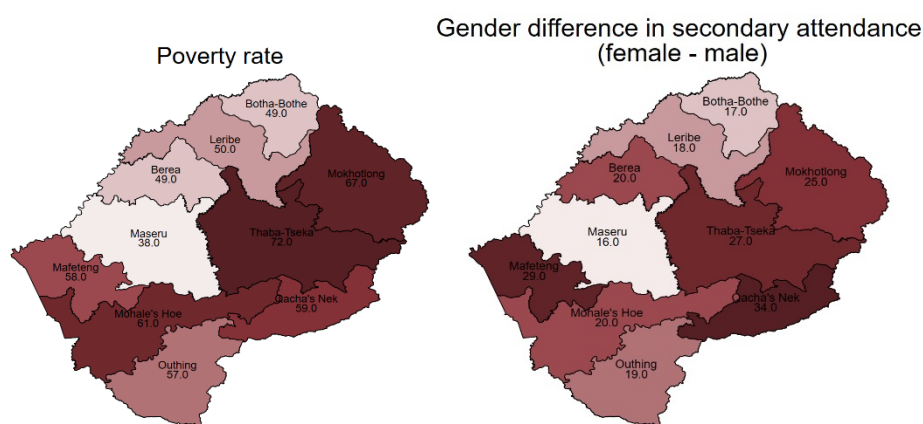
Source: Based on analysis of MICS data, 2018.

50. Boys also lag behind girls in senior secondary school enrollment across all districts of the country. In terms of absolute differences in net enrollment, the highest differences are observed in Botha-Bothe (a difference of 20 percentage points in favor of girls), Leribe (a difference of 22 percentage points in favor of girls), and Mafeteng (a difference of 26 percentage points in favor of girls). In Qacha's Nek and Mohale's Hoek, there is an even bigger difference in relative terms, where girls' senior secondary enrollment is more than double that of boys (see Figure A1.5).

FIGURE A1.5: Senior secondary net attendance rate by district

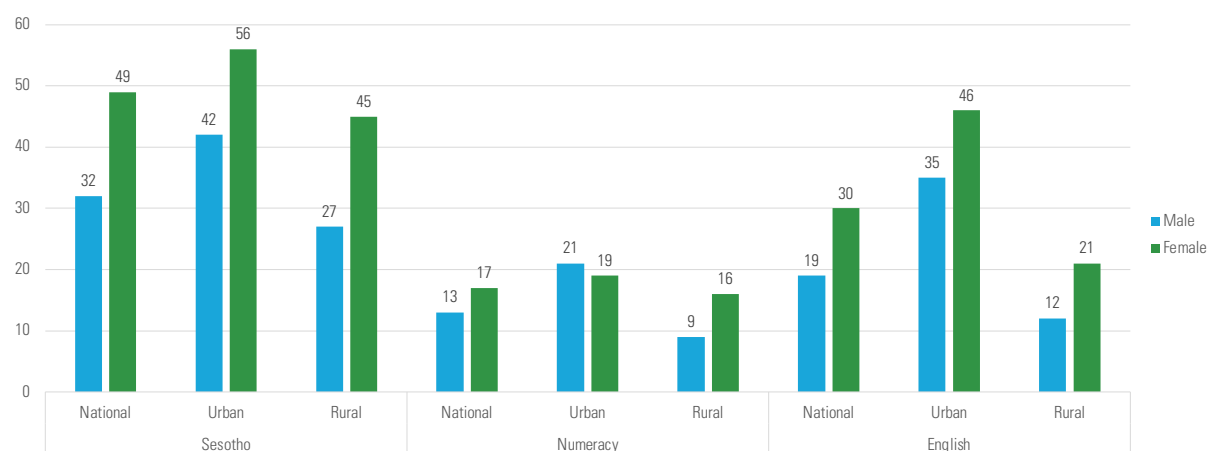
Source: Based on analysis of MICS data, 2018.

51. It should also be noted that the districts that have high gender disparity are also those that have high poverty rate (see Figure A1.6).

FIGURE A1.6: Gender difference in secondary enrollment and poverty across districts

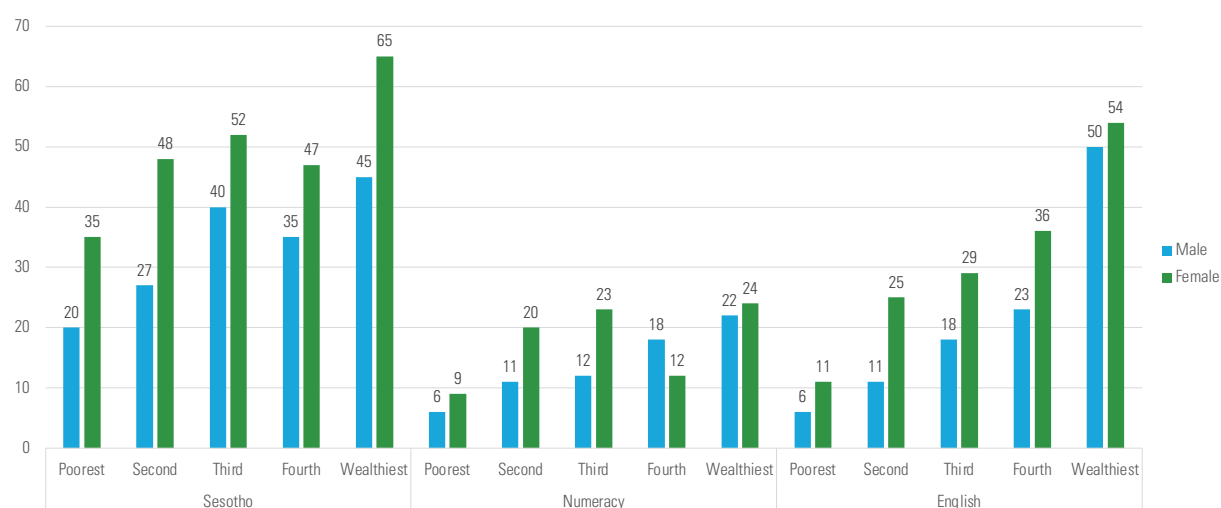
Source: Based on analysis of MICS data, 2018.

52. Gender disparities in foundational learning have a strong spatial and socio-economic dimension, with boys from rural and poor households having the worst outcomes. In terms of literacy both in Sesotho and English, boys and girls in rural areas do worse than their peers in urban areas, with rural boys being at the greatest disadvantage in foundational learning, compared to all other groups. In terms of numeracy, gender differences in urban areas are less pronounced with boys showing a marginal advantage over girls. However, gender differences in rural areas, where majority of students live, are pronounced, with only 9 percent of boys showing foundational skills in numeracy compared to 16 percent of girls (see Figure A1.7).

FIGURE A1.7: Foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes by gender and location

Source: Based on analysis of MICS data, 2018.

53. **Wealth is another factor that affects foundational learning outcomes and compounds gender inequalities.** Across almost all income groups boys tend to underachieve compared to girls in literacy and numeracy skills. Boys from the poorest wealth quintile are at a significant disadvantage compared to all other groups, with over 90 percent of them not acquiring basic literacy skills and over 80 percent not acquiring numeracy skills (see Figure A1.8).

FIGURE A1.8: Foundational literacy and numeracy outcomes by gender and wealth groups

Source: Based on analysis of MICS data, 2018.

C. FACTOR ANALYSIS OF DEMAND-SIDE DETERMINANTS OF DROPOUT BY GENDER

54. This annex presents factor analysis results that show the linkage between the likelihood of dropping out and demand-side factors, including child characteristics, household characteristics, and location. The analysis uses data from the 2018 MICS survey, focusing on school age children (ages 6–17-year-old). Gender disaggregated analysis is also conducted using a sub-sample of the data for secondary school age children (ages 13–17). The analysis applies a regression model with a logit specification, to estimate the probability of dropping out as a function of demand side factors. In Table A1.1, marginal effects associated with key demand-side characteristics are presented.

TABLE A1.1: Marginal effects of child and household characteristics on the probability of dropping out of school among children ages 6-17

	Marginal effects				
	(A) School age (6-17)	(B) Primary age (6-12)	(C) Secondary age (13-17)	(D) Secondary age male (13-17)	(E) Secondary age female (13-17)
Child characteristics					
Boy	0.039***	-0.000	0.095***		
Age	0.029***	-0.003**	0.084***	0.094***	0.076***
Orphanhood status (omitted category is both parents alive)					
Mother dead-father alive	0.038***	-0.019**	0.102***	0.083***	0.126**
Father dead-mother alive	0.011	-0.000	0.022	0.021	0.019
Both parents dead	0.026*	0.039	0.033	-0.000	0.063
Household head characteristics					
Female	-0.018**	-0.017***	-0.022	-0.020	-0.017
Age	0.000	0.000**	-0.000	0.000	-0.000
Parental migration status (abroad only, omitted category is both parents not migrants)					
Only mother has migrated	-0.037***	-0.018*	-0.051	-0.012	-0.109***
Only father has migrated	-0.024**	-0.007	-0.046*	-0.014	-0.090***
Both parents have migrated	0.011	0.009	0.006	0.058	-0.064**
Mother's education (omitted category is no education or primary education)					
Secondary education	-0.019***	-0.003	-0.042***	-0.038**	-0.053
Tertiary education	-0.011	0.000	0.045	0.068	-0.001
Father's education (omitted category is no education or primary education)					
Secondary education	-0.005	-0.001	-0.019	-0.007	-0.018
Tertiary education	-0.023	0.000	0.015	0.043	0.006
Household income quintile (omitted category is the lowest income quintile)					
Second	-0.013**	-0.017	-0.023	-0.042	-0.007
Middle	-0.036***	-0.019**	-0.080***	-0.102***	-0.060**
Fourth	-0.043**	-0.005	-0.113***	-0.171***	-0.042*
Richest	-0.074***	-0.021**	-0.177***	-0.262***	-0.081***
Household location (omitted category is urban)					
Rural	0.009	-0.014*	0.043**	0.085***	0.022
District (omitted category Butha Buthe)					
Leribe	-0.013***	-0.004**	-0.017***	-0.026**	-0.013***
Berea	0.018***	0.012***	0.041***	0.079***	-0.008
Maseru	0.042***	0.033***	0.059***	0.078***	0.033***
Mafeteng	0.030***	0.035***	0.035***	0.075***	-0.017***
Mohale Hoek	-0.010***	0.008***	-0.027***	-0.056***	0.009
Quthing	0.009***	0.019***	0.002	0.013***	-0.003
Qacha's Neck	0.005***	0.005***	0.009**	0.036***	-0.026***
Mokhotlong	0.032***	0.018***	0.058***	0.151***	-0.043***
Thaba Tseka	0.034***	0.017***	0.062***	0.117***	-0.017**
Number of Observations	9,254	5,069	3,871	1,987	1,884
Pseudo R2	0.215	0.06	0.192	0.205	0.190

Note: The table presents marginal effects estimated through a logit model with standard errors adjusted for clustering at the district level. Dummy variables with the omitted category indicated in parentheses. Marginal effects are computed at the sample mean for continuous variables; for dummy variables, the probability derivatives indicate the change in probability as the variable is changed from 0 to 1, while holding all other variables at their means. * = significant at 10%; ** = significant at 5%; *** = significant at 1%. Source: Author's analysis of MICS, 2018 data.

55. Several interesting findings emerge from the analysis on the demand-side determinants of dropout:

- The results show that demand-side factors related to child and household characteristics and location are strongly correlated with the likelihood of dropping out of school among secondary age children, but less so among primary school age children. It should be noted that the incidence of dropout is very rare among primary age children, compared to secondary school age children. Specifically, only 2.6 percent of primary school age children report dropping out, compared to 19 percent of secondary school age children. Hence it is likely that dropout at the primary level is driven by ad hoc factors, and not by the demand side determinant included in the analysis.²¹
- Gender and age are important child level characteristics that are strongly correlated with the likelihood of dropping out of school, especially at the secondary level. Holding all other variables constant, boys are significantly more likely to drop out of school than girls. In the full study sample (ages 6–17-year-old), the gender gap in the probability of dropping out is estimated at 3.9 percentage points, and it increases to 9.5 percentage points among secondary age children. Moreover, the probability of dropping out increases with age for both boys and girls, especially among those who are of secondary school age.
- The household's economic status is one of the most critical factors that is highly correlated with the probability of dropping out of school. The link between economic status and dropout is also stronger among secondary school age children, compared to primary age children. Among secondary age children, the probability of dropping out of school is reduced by 18 percentage points for those who are in the richest income quintile, compared to those who are in the poorest income quintile. The linkage between the household's economic status and dropout is particularly strong for secondary school boys, where the likelihood of dropping out is reduced by 26 percentage points for boys from the richest quintile, compared to those from the poorest income quintile. For secondary school age girls, the corresponding reduction is about 8 percentage points.
- Among secondary age boys, their likelihood of dropping out of school is also influenced by their location of residence. Being from rural areas increases dropout by 8.5 percentage point. Coming from districts such as Mokhotlong and Thaba Tseka, which are also districts that have high poverty rate and lower supply of secondary schools, increases the probability of dropping out by 15 and 12 percentage points respectively. For girls, the correlation between location is dropout is significantly weaker.
- Loss of a parent, in particular, the death of a mother has a very adverse impact on girls schooling, being associated with 12.6 percentage point increase in dropout; the corresponding estimate for boys is 8 percentage points. Parental migration is also associated with a reduction in dropout rate for girls, but not for boys.



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