

# Social cash transfers, generational relations and youth poverty trajectories in rural Lesotho and Malawi

## Research highlight 5 (Malawi): Young people's poverty trajectories 2008-16

Preliminary findings from an ESRC-DFID-funded research project August 2017



Of the 52 young people involved in our original research in 2007/8, 23 of the 28 who were still resident were interviewed, along with two who were now staying elsewhere and a further 3 young people who had not been directly involved in 2008, although they were resident in the village at the time.

### Education

- \* All of the young people had attended primary school, at least very briefly, but the vast majority had dropped out between Standard 1 and Standard 7
- \* Dropping out often followed frequent absenteeism
- \* Reasons for dropping out were often related to clothing. Several dropped out because they had no uniform. One boy said students were allowed to wear non-uniform clothes on Wednesdays, but he was teased because he had to wear the same clothing every Wednesday.
- \* Six of the young people interviewed had completed primary school and all but one of these (four male and one female) progressed to secondary education, although one dropped out after one term. The young man who dropped out had earned enough money through ganyu (casual work) to pay his primary school development fee, but like others found that doing ganyu was ultimately incompatible with studying, particularly given the high cost of secondary school fees.

### Marriage and children

- \* All but five of the young people had married, young women generally marrying at about 19 (but ranging from 15-20) and young men at about 20 (range 16-23)
- \* Among the five that remained single (three male, two female), two had delayed marriage in the hope of progressing with education.
- \* Some marriages were responses to unplanned pregnancies
- \* Most remained with the partners they originally married, but a few had been widowed and seven had divorced (some more than once)
- \* Six of the divorcees were women: either their husbands had left them for other women or they had thrown them out for infidelity
- \* Most had two or three children, very often with an intentional 4- or 5-year spacing between them
- \* Both women and men spoke of the value of contraception to ensure that children did not cause too great a burden to the family, including by limiting women's contribution to agricultural work



## Employment and migration

- \* Five of the young people (four male, one female) had been to Blantyre, some having been offered work, some in search of it and one purely to visit
- \* Two had undertaken domestic work and one found a job selling eggs, but two of these were sacked within days of starting
- \* Five others had had work on the local agricultural estates, including work in a factory, tree nursery, sorting macadamia nuts and in a clerical role. These roles usually entailed residing on the estate
- \* Those who had tried working elsewhere had often had negative experiences, and returned to the village believing they could achieve more through an agricultural livelihood



## Village livelihoods

- \* Some had acquired particular skills (building, tailoring, bicycle repair, drawing) and had had varying levels of success making money from these.
- \* The majority focused largely on field agriculture and dimba cultivation (hand-irrigated vegetable growing on riverine plots)



- \* Some had been much more successful than others in building livelihoods from these activities.
- \* Several had, for instance, used the proceeds from sales of dimba produce to invest in assets including livestock (for instance cattle that would both produce milk for sale to the dairy and offspring that could be sold) and bicycles (which could be hired out or used as a taxi).

*Photographs in this briefing are illustrative only: they do not portray the individuals profiled and not all are from the case study village.*

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