



Escaping exploitation

Only those who have goals can achieve them: Herd boys in Lesotho are learning that they have the power to shape their own lives.

Published by

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

When labour and children's rights have no meaning

In the mountainous regions of Lesotho, many young boys start working at an early age to contribute to their families' income. Instead of attending school, they work as child shepherds, driving herds of livestock through the highlands. Working conditions are harsh and dangerous.

People living below the poverty line in Lesotho depend on any extra income. So many rural families send their sons up into the highlands to be herd boys. The work is hard, the isolation makes life difficult for the boys, and generally no one checks whether regulations like the statutory minimum wage are upheld. These hazardous employment conditions have consequences that impact society as a whole: Some young men are traumatised and exhibit aggressive behaviour, especially toward women and girls.



Preventing violence against women and girls in southern Africa

With the help of the GIZ “Partnerships for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls in Southern Africa” (PfP) project and in cooperation with the “Participatory Initiative for Social Accountability” (PISA), herd boys in Lesotho are turning their backs on violence and discovering new opportunities. The project also involved government officials, police officers and employers in conversations about how to more effectively target and punish labour rights violations against herd boys. The project was commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

“The cultural norms have to change.”

Herd boy Thabo, 22, tells other young shepherds about their rights and opportunities for their futures:*

Thabo* was just ten the first time he was sent up into the mountains to care for livestock. From then on, he walked more than eight hours a day with the sheep, cows, and goats, even spending nights with them. At the time, having to drop out of school did not bother him – he felt honoured to be able to contribute to his family’s income and enjoyed spending time with the animals. The work was hard though because no one took the time to show him how to take on this challenging and sometimes dangerous job.

In rural Lesotho, most children of poor families have to pitch in to put enough food on the table. Thabo did not question this widely accepted fact of life for a long time. He could not imagine a life beyond shepherding, one that might even enable him to escape poverty.

Looking back, Thabo can see how the work has impacted his life. 22 years old today, Thabo speaks out against how boys are forced into shepherding and how the animal owners almost completely disregard the rights of these working children. But what bothers him most is that he was given no choice in the matter. He gained this insight in a workshop organized by the Help Lesotho non-governmental organisation: “I now know what I want.” Help Lesotho organizes trainings for herd boys on human rights, gender equality and HIV. The workshop was the first place Thabo learned about his labour and other rights as a child, like the right to an education, and

understood that he could want and work toward a different life. Thabo is still a shepherd, but his goals have changed: “I want to go to vocational school, have a family and work for them. Achieving this dream won’t be easy, but it’s what I want.” He says the workshop changed a lot in the lives of other herd boys too. “There is a school near here where herd boys used to harass the girls. They beat them and sexually abused them.” The workshop put an end to that, he says, and they now show more respect for the girls. “Our lives have changed a lot, even though the project was so short.”

Today, Thabo passes on this knowledge to the other herd boys he meets at the livestock shelters in the mountains. He teaches them about their rights, how to treat girls with respect, and gives them a chance to talk about future prospects beyond herding. “Some are worried that demanding their rights would be disrespectful to their elders.” He keeps bringing these topics up though, especially since he experienced first-hand the positive impact this exchange can have.

But Thabo also knows, “Nothing will change as long as the culture stays the way it is.”

To improve the herd boys’ situation, he says, the attitude of families and villagers has to change too.

And employers must be held accountable for providing reasonable working conditions for the boys and allowing them to go to school.

“They must all understand that they cannot deny the boys the right to education and a future of their own. Every boy, every child, every person should be given the chance to choose for himself or herself what he or she wants to do with his or her life.”

**name changed.*



The situation is Lesotho

Workers with no rights

Lesotho's school enrolment rate has increased rapidly since the introduction of compulsory primary education: Almost every child – around 90 percent – starts school at the age of six. For boys in particular, however, school attendance is often short-lived. While more than two-thirds of girls move on to secondary school, most boys fail to complete primary school. This is mainly because they have to start contributing to the family income at an early age. About half of Lesotho's population lives below the national poverty line, and many families cannot survive without income from their children. Most boys start working as shepherds. When they are not caring for their own animals, they hire out to larger livestock farmers to lead their animals to watering holes and grazing areas. But the work is hazardous: Labour regulations have failed to address the herd boys' situation: They rarely have enough food or clothes, and

are often paid far below the minimum wage. Some spend months sleeping with the animals in remote shelters without sanitation or health care. This violates the rights granted to all children in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO Conventions 138 and 182 – the Minimum Age for Employment and the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

The situation is catastrophic for the boys' adolescent development: Herd boys face dangers from the forces of nature and armed attacks by livestock thieves with no protection. They are also usually taught a patriarchal and hierarchical worldview at home, so many boys have not learned to live together peacefully or to treat women and girls with respect. As a result, herd boys repeatedly fight over grazing land or attack and sexually assault girls of the same age.

The project

A new way of life

In cooperation with the "Participatory Initiative for Social Accountability" (PISA), the GIZ "Partnerships for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls in Southern Africa" (PfP) project showed herd boys from Lesotho new perspectives and encouraged them to set their own paths in life. In workshops, the herd boys learned about the rights of children, conflict resolution and respectful behaviour, especially towards women and girls. The participants are now passing on their knowledge to other herd boys.

To improve working conditions for the herd boys, government officials, police officers, staff from local health care centres, and representatives from livestock farmers' associations discussed meas-

ures for curbing exploitation – such as requiring employers to outfit the children and young men with foul-weather gear. They also agreed to develop measures to more effectively punish employers who violate the rights of children in future.

The project used a human rights-based approach. Through peer learning, advocacy, community dialogue, and capacity building for the appropriate authorities, herd boys and young girls and women were empowered to exercise their rights as children and young adults. The project addressed two key violations of children's rights in Lesotho: Child labour and the exploitation of herd boys in Thaba Tseka, and sexual violence against young women and girls.

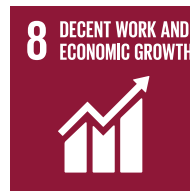
Partnerships for the Prevention of Violence Against Young Women and Girls in Southern Africa

Project duration	01/12/2017 – 30/11/2021
Budget	10,000,000 €
Project	GIZ “Partnerships for the Prevention of Violence against Young Women and Girls in Southern Africa” (PfP) project
Partners	Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, “Participatory Initiative for Social Accountability” (PISA), Help Lesotho, Alliance Francaise, Paray Hospital, MoLE, MoGYSR, Sakeng Initiative
Contact	begona.castro@giz.de

Children’s rights addressed

Protection from violence, abuse and neglect (Art. 19, CRC)
Adequate standard of living (Art. 27, CRC)
Protection from economic exploitation (Art. 32, CRC)

SDGs addressed



Imprint

Publishing details
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices
Bonn and Eschborn

Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5
65760 Eschborn, Germany
T+ 49 61 96 79 – 0
F+ 49 61 96 79 – 11 15
E info@giz.de
I www.giz.de

Programme/Project description:
Sector Programme Human Rights

Responsible:
Viola Bölscher,
Head of Sector Programme Human Rights
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32+36, 53113 Bonn

Editing and design:
Bunny Island GmbH
Managing partners:
Sarah Klein, Eva-Maria Verfürth
Kessenicherstr. 197
53129 Bonn

Illustrations:
Taniah Andriamanga

Layout:
Jan Walter Hofmann

Translation:
Sarah Smithson-Compton

The GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.

Commissioned by:
The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and
Development (BMZ), Division Human Rights, Gender
Equality, Inclusion of Persons with
Disabilities RL 412@bmz.bund.de

Bonn 2021

