



Advision Lesotho



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Basotho endorse equality for women, including the right of a princess to succeed as chief

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 571 | Mamello Nkuebe

Summary

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 calls for gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, a cross-cutting principle underpinning inclusive development (United Nations, 2015). Globally, despite positive strides toward this goal, huge inequalities remain (UN Women, 2022).

Gender gaps are perhaps clearest in political leadership. A report from the World Economic Forum (2021) highlights the fact that across 156 countries, women hold only 26.1% of some 35,500 parliamentary seats and just 22.6% of more than 3,400 ministerial posts. Eighty-one countries have never had a female head of state. At the current rate of progress, the World Economic Forum estimates that it will take a whopping 145.5 years to attain gender parity in politics.

In Lesotho, the government has made efforts to promote gender parity in politics by introducing electoral gender quotas (Nyane & Rakolobe, 2021). At the national level, the "zebra list" model requires political parties to submit candidate lists on which women alternate with men for the 40 proportional representation seats (out of 120 seats total) in the National Assembly. At the local level, a quota system requires at least 30% women's representation on local councils (Government of Lesotho, 2011).

One area in which glaring gender inequality persists in Lesotho concerns succession to the chieftaincy: By a High Court ruling citing the Constitution, princesses are still denied the right to become chief (Lesotho Legal Information Institute, 2013).

On other fronts, the country has formulated national legislation and strategies to address gender gaps under its 2003 National Gender and Development Policy and its successor, the Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030 (Government of Lesotho, 2018). The legal framework includes the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act of 2006, which removed the minority status of married women; the Land Act of 2010, providing for couples' joint ownership of land; the Education Act of 2010, which mandates compulsory education for all; the Companies Act of 2011, allowing women to be directors and shareholders of companies without obtaining the consent of their husbands; and the Sexual Offences Act of 2003.

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2022) questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and perceptions of gender equality in control over assets, hiring, land ownership, and political leadership. (For survey findings related to gender-based violence, see Malephane (2022).)

In Lesotho, strong majorities express support for gender equality in hiring, land ownership, and political leadership, including the right of daughters to succeed to the chieftaincy. But sizeable minorities also consider it likely that female candidates for elective office might suffer criticism, harassment, or family problems.

Overall, a majority of Basotho disapprove of the government's performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women and say greater efforts are needed.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2022) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Lesotho, led by Advision Lesotho, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 citizens in February-March 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous standard surveys were conducted in Lesotho in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

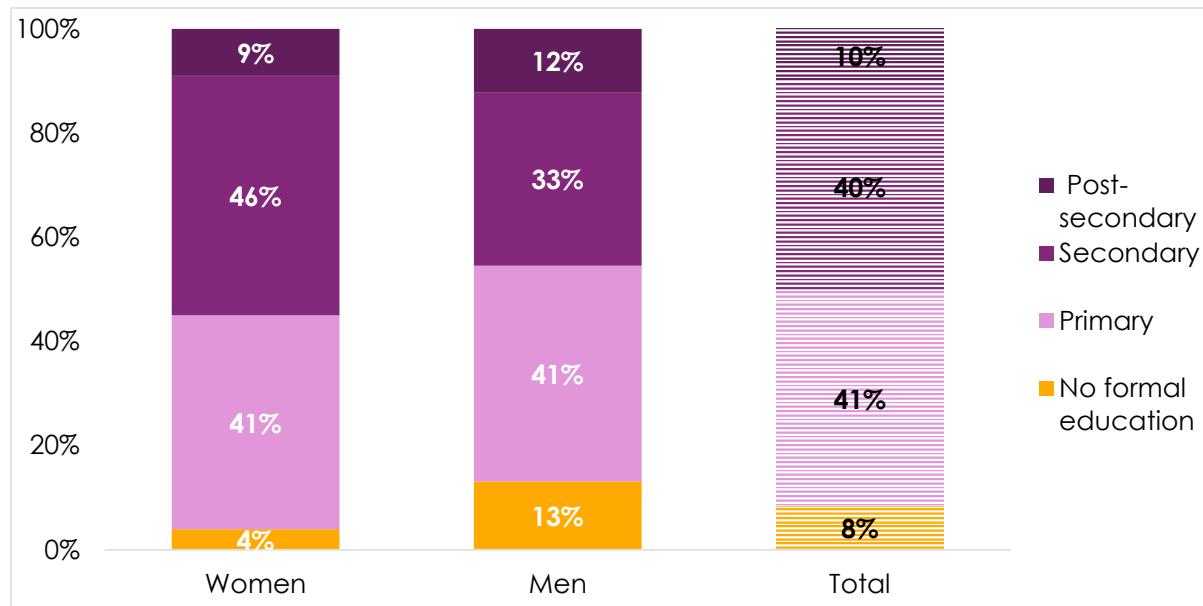
- In Lesotho, men trail women in educational achievement, with less secondary schooling and a greater proportion who lack formal education altogether.
- Women and men are about equally likely to own a mobile phone, a radio, a television, a motor vehicle, and a computer, but more men than women report owning a bank account (42% vs. 37%).
- About eight in 10 Basotho (79%) say women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land. A weaker majority (59%) – and only 48% of men – say women should have the same rights as men to get paying jobs.
 - Seven in 10 citizens say that in Lesotho today, women and men in fact enjoy equal rights when it comes to jobs (71%) and land (71%).
- Almost three-fourths (73%) of Basotho say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office.
 - But while more than seven in 10 (72%) citizens think a woman will gain standing in the community if she runs for office, majorities believe it's likely she will be criticised or harassed by others in the community (60%) or will face problems with her family (52%).
- Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Basotho – including a slim majority (53%) of men – say daughters should have the same rights of succession to chieftaincy as sons.
- Only about one-quarter (24%) of Basotho say the government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" in promoting women's rights and opportunities. Almost three in four respondents (73%) say it should be doing more.

Education and control of assets

Women lead in educational achievement in Lesotho (Figure 1). Women are about as likely as men to have post-secondary qualifications (9% vs. 12%) and are significantly more likely to have secondary schooling (46% vs. 33%). Proportions with primary schooling are equal, and fewer women than men lack formal education altogether (4% vs. 13%).

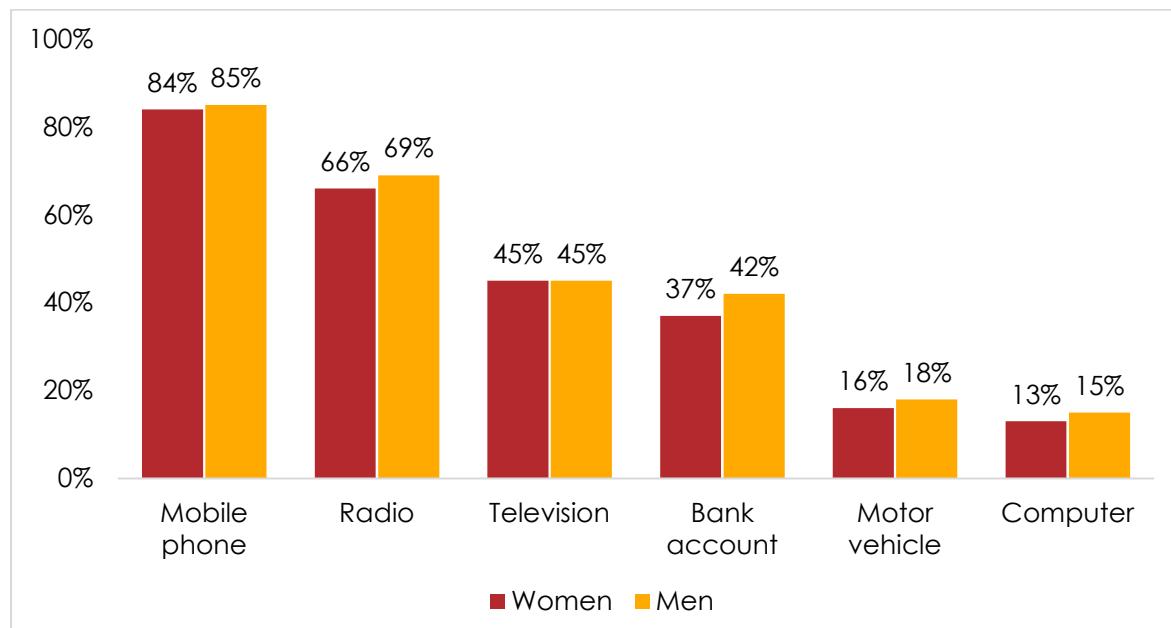
Control over household assets is almost gender-equal. About the same number of women and men own a mobile phone, a radio, a television, a motor vehicle, and a computer. Women are slightly less likely than men to own a bank account (37% vs. 42%) (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Educational attainment | by gender | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: What is your highest level of education?

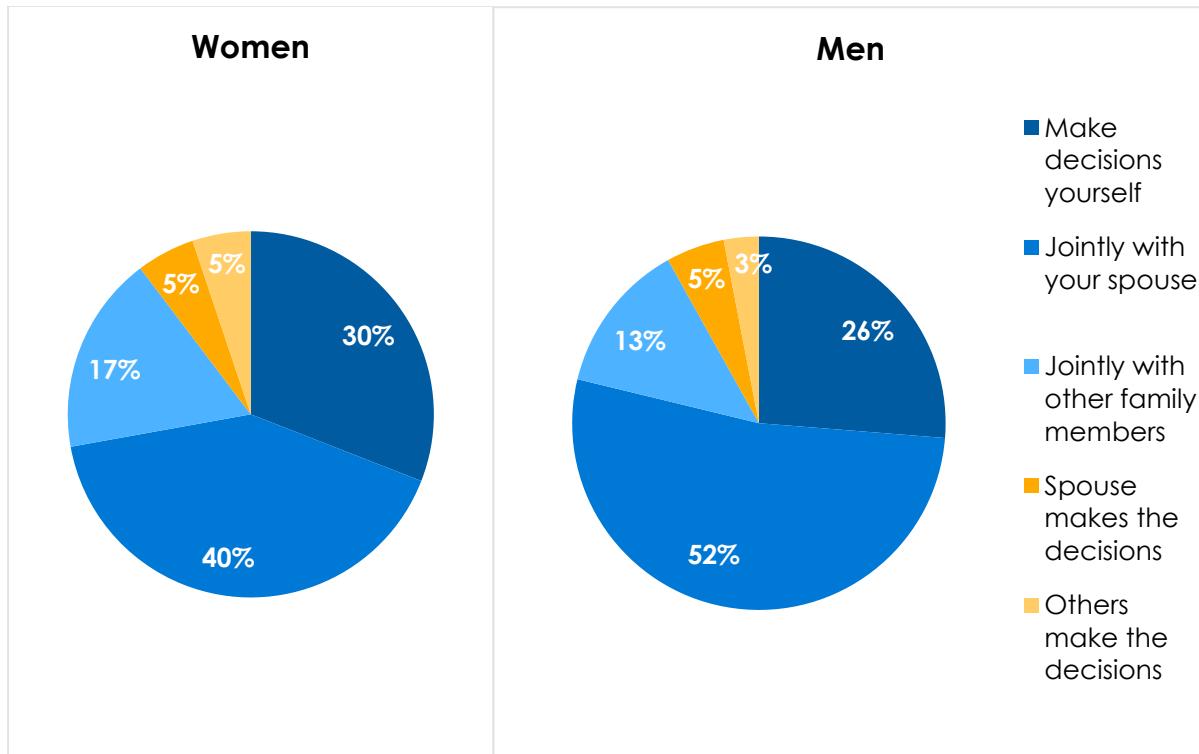
Figure 2: Asset ownership | by gender | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: Which of these things do you personally own?

When it comes to deciding how household money is spent, slightly more women than men say they make the decisions themselves (30% vs. 26%), while men are more likely than women to say they make decisions jointly with their spouse (52% vs. 40%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Who decides how money is used? | by gender | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

Rights to a job and land

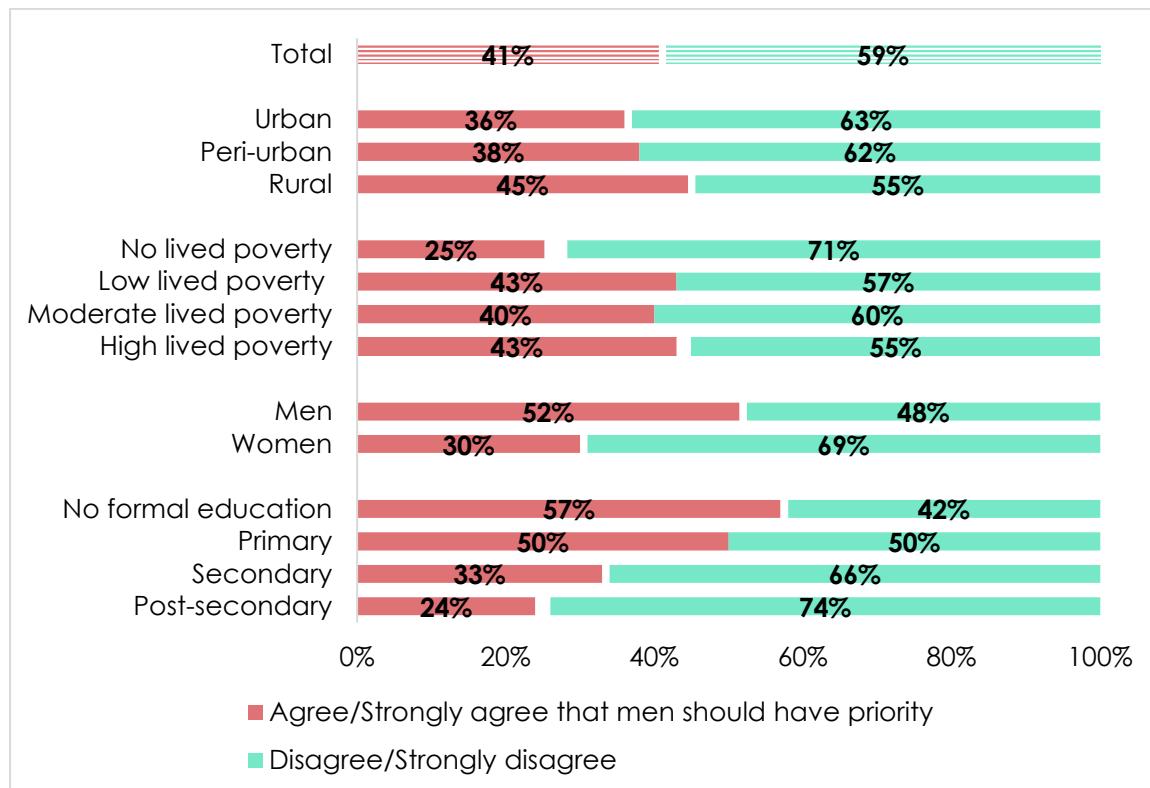
The ability to claim certain rights can be a tool to promote gender equality – or to maintain inequality. Do Basotho want gender equality when it comes to jobs and land? And if so, how close to equality are they?

Four in 10 Basotho (41%) endorse the idea that men should be given priority over women in hiring when jobs are scarce, while six in 10 (59%) reject this form of gender discrimination (Figure 4).

Men (48%) trail women (69%) in insisting on equality when it comes to jobs. Support for equality in hiring increases with respondents' education level, ranging from 42% of those with no formal schooling to 74% of those with post-secondary qualifications. This view is also more widely shared among urban residents than their rural counterparts (63% vs. 55%), and among the wealthy than the poor¹ (71% vs. 55%).

¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

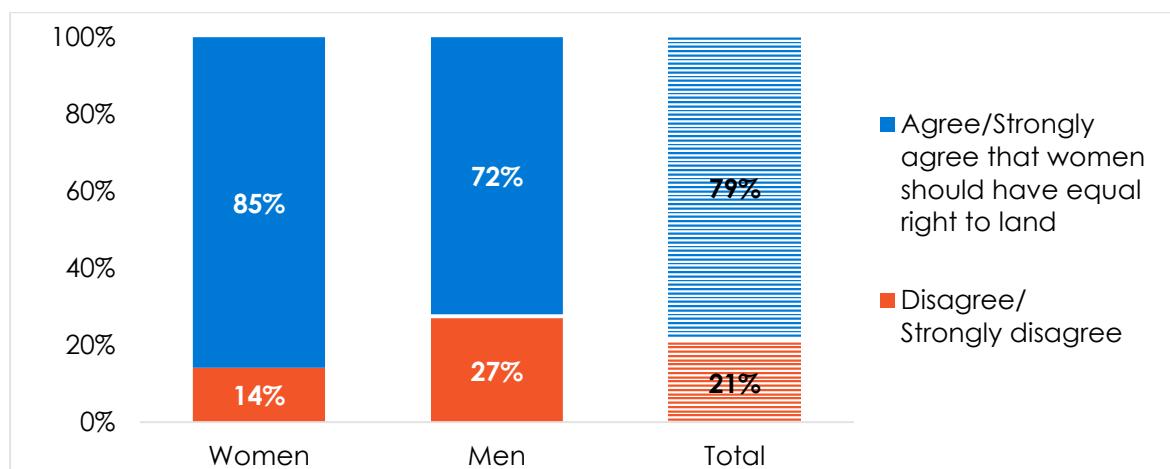
Figure 4: Should men have priority for scarce jobs? | by demographic group
 | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: When jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than women.

A larger majority (79%) endorse equal rights to own and inherit land. Here, too, men are less likely than women to believe in equality (72% vs. 85%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Should women have equal rights to land? | by gender | Lesotho | 2022

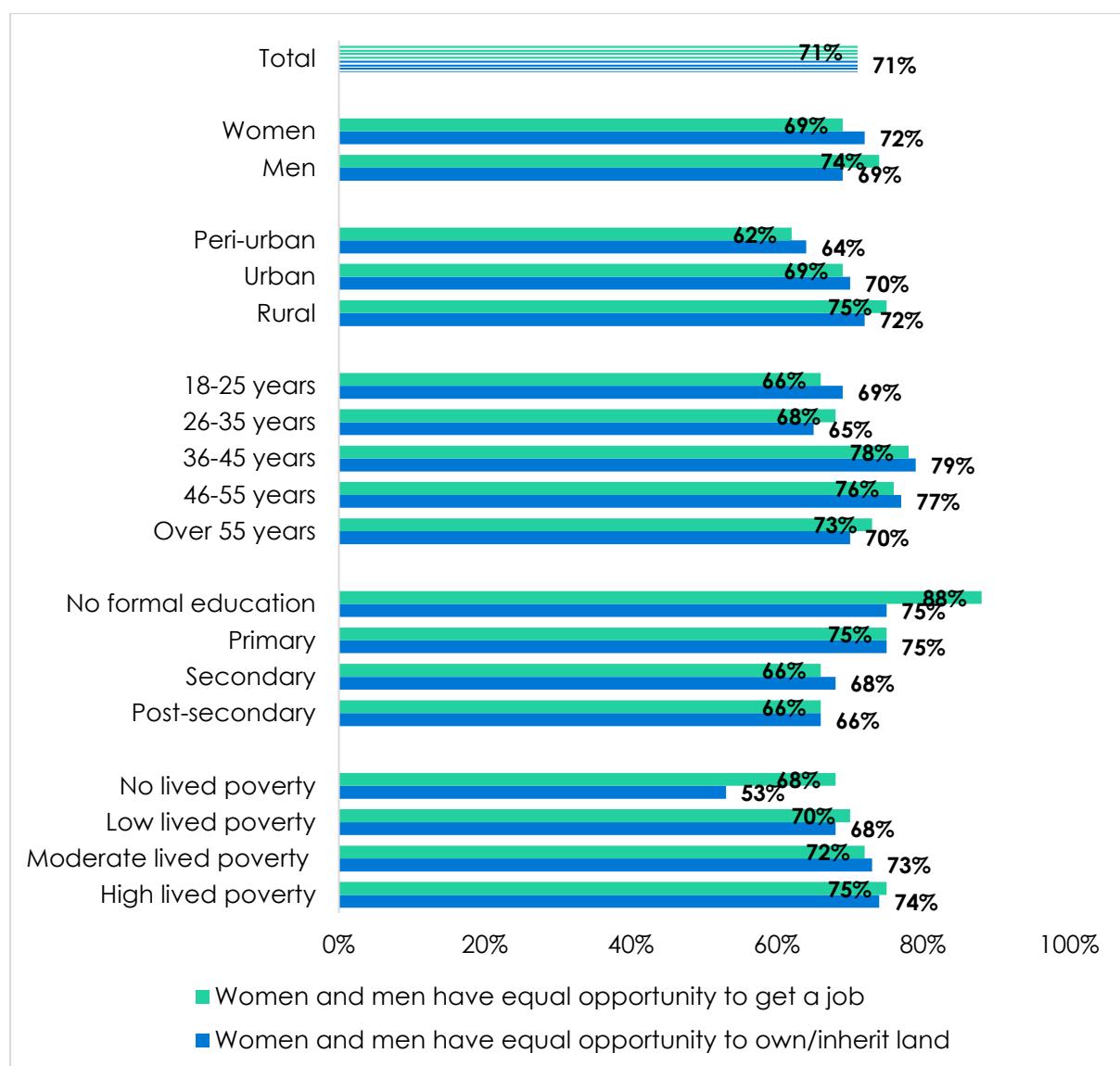


Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land.

While majorities say women should have equal rights to jobs and land, do they currently enjoy equality? Seven in 10 Basotho say women do have the same opportunities as men to get a paying job (71%) and to own and inherit land (71%).

As demographic breakdowns in Figure 6 illustrate, views on these two questions vary across key groups (Figure 6). With regard to hiring, women (69%) and urban residents (69%) are somewhat less likely than men (74%) and rural dwellers (75%) to agree that women have equal opportunities. On both indicators, less educated respondents, those who are poor, and the middle-aged (36-55 years) are more likely to perceive gender equality as a reality that has been achieved.

Figure 6: Do women and men have equal opportunities to get a job and to own/inherit land? | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to get a job that pays a wage or salary.

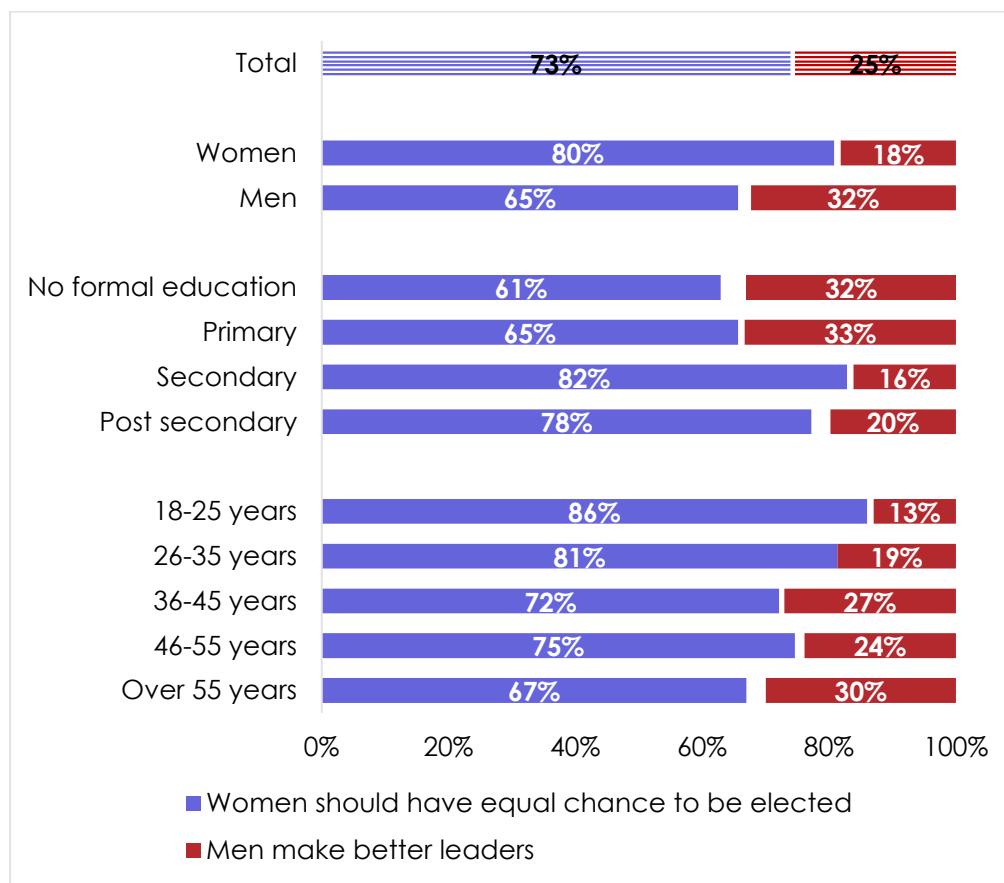
In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land.
(% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Gender equality in political participation

One critical aspect of gender equality is women's participation in political leadership, which helps ensure that women's voices are heard in policy making.

In Lesotho, more than seven in 10 citizens (73%) say women should have the same chance as men to vie for political office, rejecting the idea that men make better political leaders and should thus be given priority as candidates (Figure 7). More women (80%) than men (65%) endorse equality in politics. People with higher education (78%-82%) are more likely than their less educated counterparts (61%-65%) to support equality in politics, as are younger citizens compared to their elders, ranging from 86% among 18- to 25-year-olds to just 67% among those over age 55.

Figure 7: Should women have an equal chance to be elected? | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women.

Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.

(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

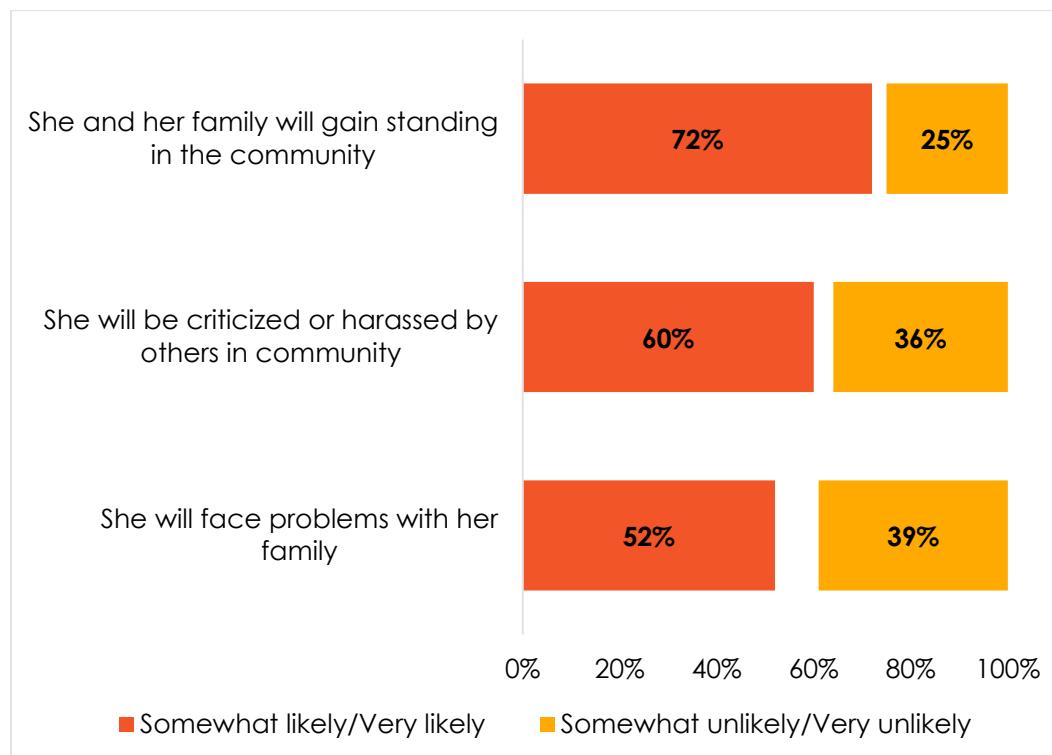
Aside from being given a fair shot at winning, a woman may be encouraged to run for public office – or discouraged from doing so – by other consequences she expects to result from her candidacy.

On the positive side, more than seven in 10 Basotho (72%) say it is "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that a woman and her family will gain standing in the community if she runs for

elective office (Figure 8). But six in 10 (60%) respondents consider it likely that others in the community will criticise her, call her names, or harass her for seeking public office, while 52% think she might face problems with her family.

The fact that fewer than four in 10 respondents see it as unlikely that a woman will face community criticism/harassment (36%) or family problems (39%) as a result of running for office may give some women pause as they consider throwing their hats into the ring.

Figure 8: For better or for worse: How running for elected office affects women's lives
| Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: If a woman in your community runs for elected office, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur?

She and her family will gain standing in the community?

She will be criticized, called names, or harassed by others in the community?

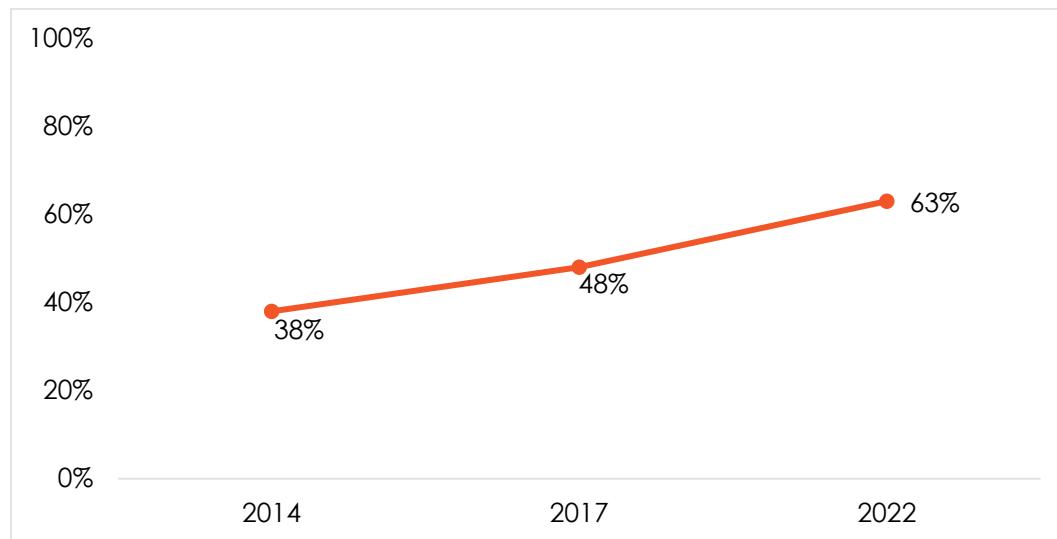
She will face problems with her family?

Daughters should have the same rights of succession to chieftaincy as sons

Support continues to grow for giving daughters the same rights as sons to succeed to chieftaincy. More than six in 10 Basotho (63%) endorse female succession, up from 38% in 2014 and 48% in 2017 (Figure 9), a remarkable shift in attitudes on a culturally significant issue in Lesotho.

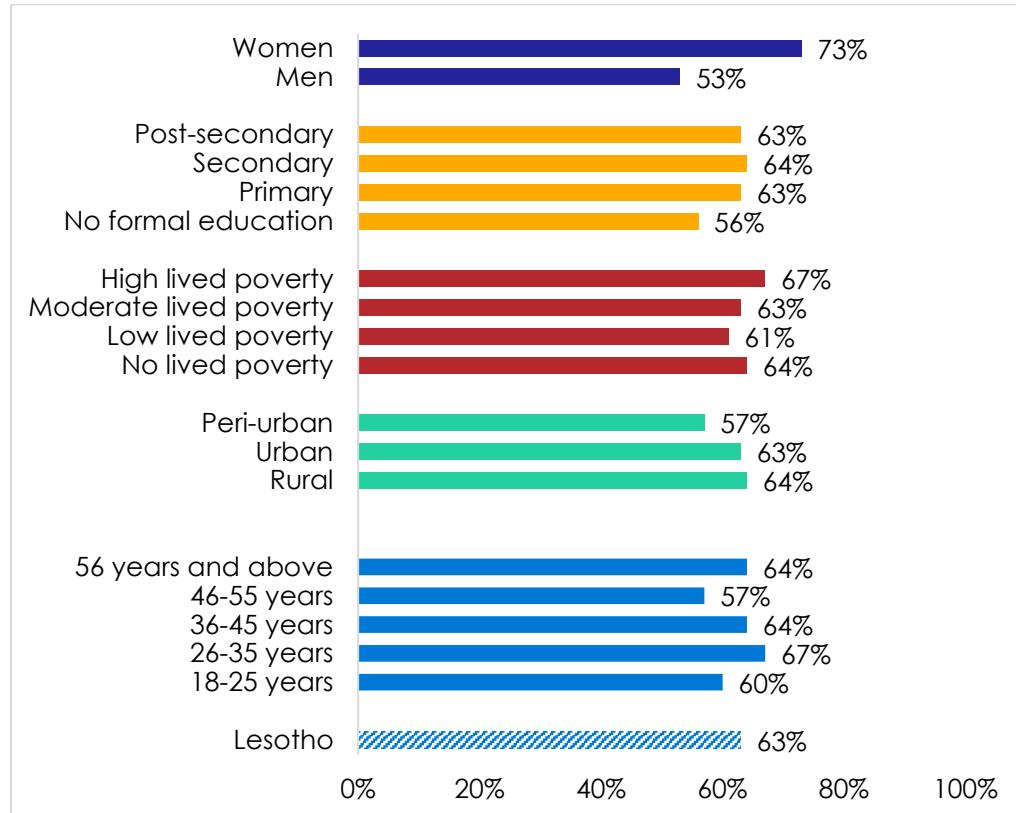
Even among men, a majority (53%) now embrace equal rights of succession for princesses, though they are far less likely than women (73%) to support this form of equality (Figure 10). Citizens with no formal schooling (56%) trail those with at least primary education (63%-64%) in supporting equality for princesses, but support for female succession is equally strong in rural and urban areas.

Figure 9: Daughters should have the same rights of succession to chieftaincy as sons
 | Lesotho | 2014-2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Daughters should have the same rights of succession to chieftaincy as sons? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Figure 10: Daughters should have the same rights of succession to chieftaincy as sons | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022



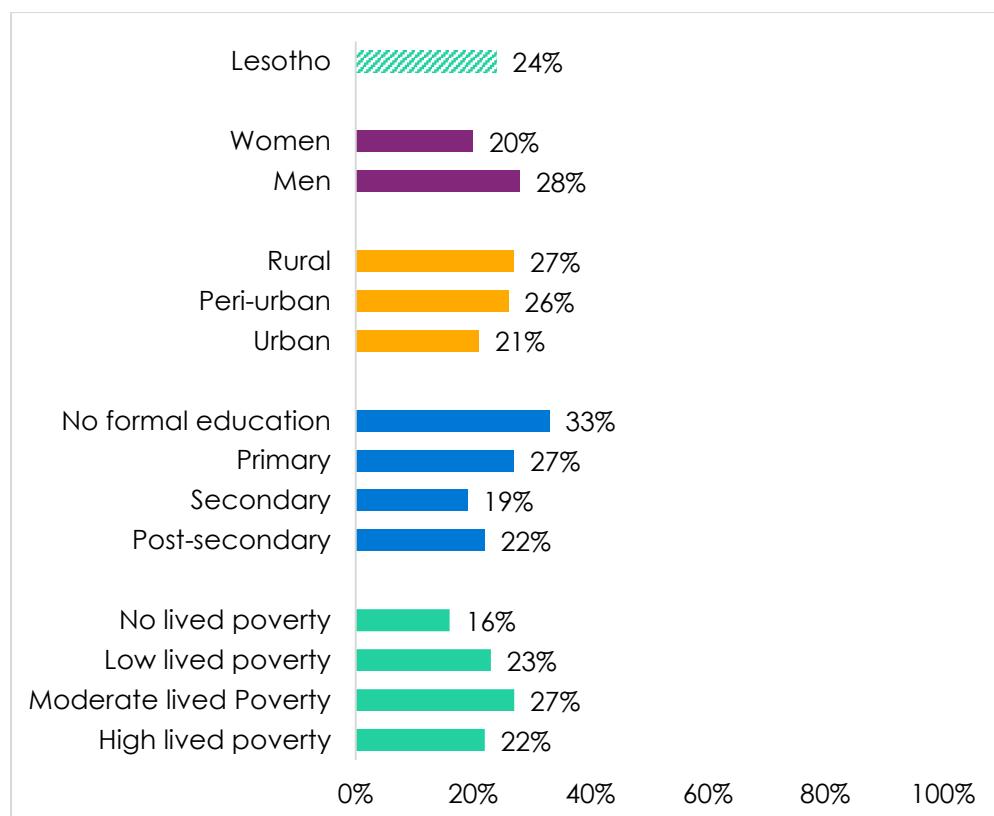
Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Daughters should have the same rights of succession to chieftaincy as sons? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities

Only one-quarter (24%) of Basotho say their government is doing a “fairly” or “very” good job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (Figure 9). Women (20% approval) and men (28%) differ significantly in their assessments of the government’s efforts (Figure 11).

Approval ratings are lower in cities (21%) than in peri-urban and rural areas (26%-27%). Citizens with higher education (19%-22%) are less likely than those with no schooling (33%) to praise the government’s efforts to promote gender equality, as are the wealthy (16%) compared to those experiencing lived poverty (22%-27%).

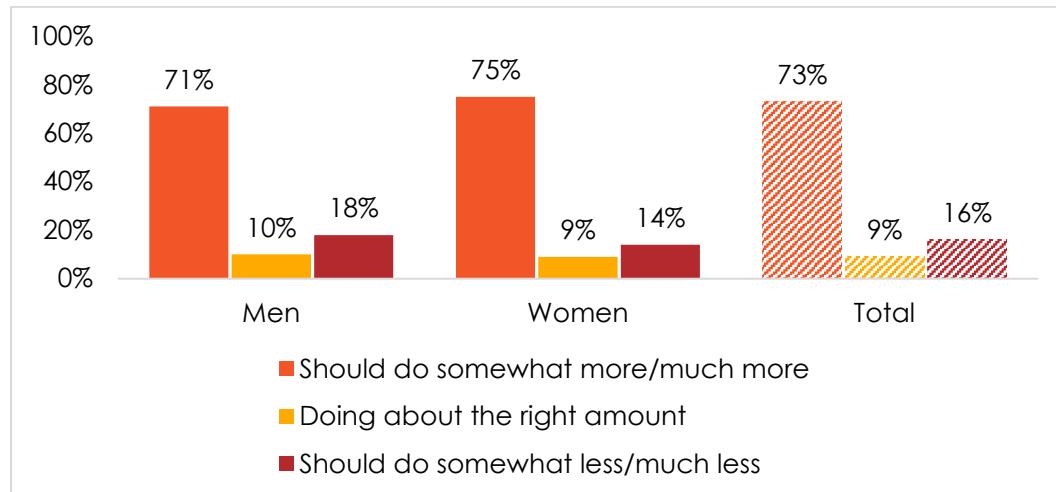
Figure 11: Government performing well in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough to say: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women? (% who say “fairly well” or “very well”)

In line with these generally poor ratings, close to three in four Basotho (73%) think the government could do “somewhat more” or “much more” to promote equal rights and opportunities for women. Slightly more women (75%) than men (71%) want to see greater efforts from the government on this issue (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Should government and elected officials do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women? | by gender | Lesotho | 2022

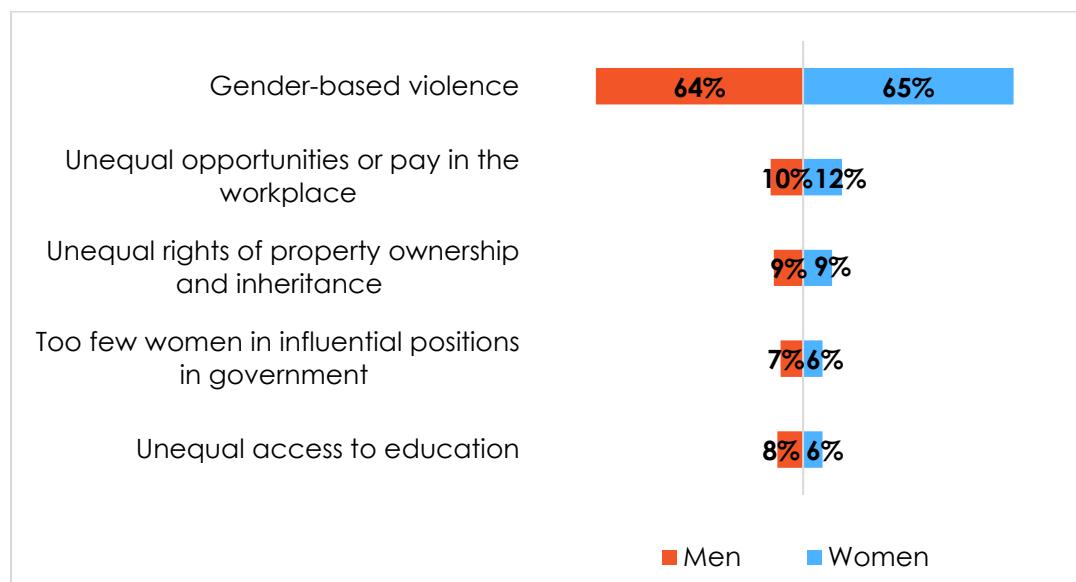


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, should government and elected officials be doing more than they are doing now to advance the rights and equality of women, or should they be doing less, or are they doing about the right amount?

Asked what they consider the most important issue related to women's rights and equality for their government and society to address, almost two-thirds (64%) of Basotho cite gender-based violence. (For survey findings related to gender-based violence, see Malephane (2022).)

Men and women are equally likely to see violence as the top priority (Figure 13). Unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace comes in as a distant second (11%), followed by unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance (9%), too few women in influential positions in government (7%), and unequal access to education (7%).

Figure 13: Most important women's rights issue | by gender | Lesotho | 2022



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, which of the following issues related to women's rights and equality do you think is the most important for our government and society to address?

Conclusion

Basotho generally perceive gender equality as a reality, including in access to paying jobs and ownership of land. But a majority of the population report that women may face criticism and problems with their families if they run for public office. And only one-quarter of Basotho give the government positive marks on its efforts to promote equal rights and opportunities for women. Majorities believe that more needs to be done, particularly in the area of gender-based violence, which respondents cite as the most important women's-rights issue that the government and society must address.

Support continues to grow for giving daughters the same rights as sons when it comes to succession to the chieftaincy, suggesting that Basotho appreciate the need for closing that remaining gender gap.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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