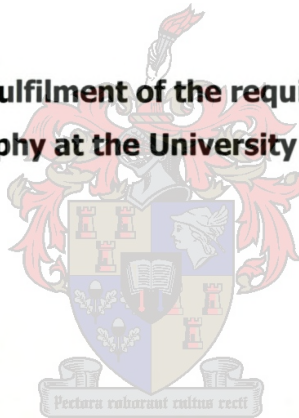


**Determining the attitudes/perceptions of retrenched Lesotho migrant
labourers from the RSA mining industries regarding education using
their career life histories**

Relebohile Nthati Morojele

**Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch**



Supervisor: Prof. Johann Mouton

Stellenbosch, April 2004

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature:

Relebohile Nthathi Morojele

Date:

11 MARCH 2004

Abstract

The level of unemployment in Lesotho has reached an alarming rate and this situation is compounded by massive mine retrenchments (Central Bank of Lesotho, 2001: 22). Given this background, it is imperative to gain a deeper understanding of the career life histories of retrenched Basotho migrant labourers in order to explain their perceptions/attitudes regarding education. In-depth individual interviews with 26 retrenched mineworkers were conducted for collecting data and a grounded theory approach was followed in analysing the data.

The life histories of the men were critically investigated, from the time before they were employed in the mines, to the stage when they were working in the mining industries. The enquiry continued to a stage when they were retrenched from the mines. Their lives after retrenchment were looked at to establish whether they had acquired skills whilst they were employed in the mines. The objective was to determine whether the skills acquired were useful to them after retrenchment and if they could secure them employment in other sectors of the economy besides the mines. The study revealed that most of the migrant labourers had not acquired other skills besides those that were offered in the mines. As a result, all of the men were unemployed because they lacked skills that were relevant to the economy of Lesotho.

Retrenched migrant labourers reported that education was important, especially for their children. For them, they indicated that they could pursue education if they would be employed in the mines again or if it is offered where they would be employed, on the job training. The question is whether these men will secure employment in other sectors in Lesotho given that they lack relevant skills. It is advisable, therefore, for the government of Lesotho to facilitate career guidance in the country to encourage these men to acquire marketable skills and to promote employment creation.

Opsomming

Die werkloosheidsyfer in Lesotho het 'n ontstellende vlak bereik en hierdie situasie word vererger deur massiewe afdankings by die myne (Central Bank of Lesotho, 2001: 22). Dit is dus noodsaaklik, gegee hierdie agtergrond dat 'n beter begrip van die beroepsgeskiedenis van afgedankte Basotho trekarbeiders omskryf word om hulle persepsies/houdings jeens opvoeding vas te stel. Daar is individuele in-diepte onderhoude gevoer met 26 afgedankte mynwerkers om data in te samel en 'n gegronde teorie aanslag is gevolg in die analise van die data.

Die lewensgeskiedenis van die mans is krities ondersoek, vanaf die tydperk wat hulle in diens geneem is in die myne tot hulle indiensneming in die mynindustrieë. Die ondersoek sluit ook die afdankings periode in. Hulle lewens na afdanking is ook ondersoek om vas te stel of hulle vaardighede tydens hulle diens in die myne aangeleer het. Die doelstelling hiermee was om vas te stel of die aangeleerde vaardighede indiensname in ander sektore kon verseker na hulle afgedank is. Die studie toon dat die meeste trekarbeiders nie enige ander vaardighede aangeleer het as wat hulle in die myne gebruik het nie. Dit het daartoe gelei dat hulle nie geskik is vir werk in ander sektore aangesien hulle nie oor relevante vaardighede beskik nie.

Afgedankte trekarbeiders het aangedui dat opvoeding belangrik is, veral vir hulle kinders. Hulle het wel aangedui dat hulle verdere opleiding sou wou ontvang indien hulle weer in diens geneem word of as deel van in-diens opleiding. Die kwessie is egter of hierdie mans in ander sektore in diens geneem sal word aangesien hulle nie oor die nodige vaardighede beskik nie. Dit word dus aanbeveel dat die Lesotho regering beroepsleiding te fasiliteer om hierdie mans aan te moedig om bemerkbare vaardighede te kry as ook om werkverskaffing aan te moedig.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Background to the study

Labour migration to the Republic of South Africa (RSA) has played a pivotal role in the economy of Lesotho. It is specifically the male population of Lesotho that has been actively involved in the RSA migrant labour system as labourers in the mining industries. This practice started with the discovery of minerals in the region during the nineteenth century, and has been gaining momentum over the years (Harris, 1993: 20), thus alleviating the serious unemployment situation in Lesotho. However, since 1995 there have been huge retrenchments in the South African mining industry, resulting in a continuing downward trend in the employment of Basotho (Lesotho nationals) mineworkers in South Africa, and thus compounding the unemployment problem in Lesotho (CBL, 2001: 22). The problem is becoming increasingly acute as the population continues to grow, and employment opportunities consistently fail to meet an ever-increasing demand for jobs (Gay, 2000: 66; Clark, 1983: 45). This poses a challenge to the economy of Lesotho in terms of job creation and diversification of sources of revenue and capital inflows (CBL, 2001: 12). However, the political unrest during September 1998 event that preceded May political elections further undermined economic stability and hence job creation. This unrest resulted in the looting and burning of many foreign-owned businesses and the loss of at least 6 000 jobs and the destruction of about 1,000 business establishments (Gay, 2000: 67; Msomi, 1999: 1).

The government of Lesotho has attempted to address unemployment primarily through the promotion of private sector enterprise (CBL, 2001: 22). It decided to prioritise privatisation and private sector development (Motlamente, 1999: 1; IMF, 2001: 1), and Lesotho has, as a result, privatised many state-owned companies. Unfortunately, this approach appears not to have had the desired effects because an alleviation of unemployment was not immediately apparent. The Basotho contend that privatisation causes unemployment and poverty in their country because it usually results in the retrenchment of employees. They argue that a system based on free competition and positive incentives allow privatised organisations to employ fewer people. There is an

obvious concern about the number of people who lose their jobs with little chance of finding alternative employment, because it increases the number of unemployed and impoverished (Motlamelle, 1999: 1-2). The recent boost in the manufacturing sector has, however, served to ease the severe shortage of jobs in the country (CBL, 2001: 22).

Yet another, though more indirect, government intervention is the offer of free primary education since 2000 to improve the literacy level in the country, with the ultimate objective of alleviating the unemployment crisis. Education and training are still considered to be effective poverty eradication strategies and a prerequisite for people to participate in the work market. Organisations both inside and outside Lesotho have initiated training for migrant labourers to curb the unemployment problem. These specially tailored educational programmes for migrant labourers were devised in response to the knowledge that Basotho migrant labourers generally have low educational backgrounds, and that they thus cannot meet the entry requirements at other vocational or technical training institutions in the country.

Retrenched migrant labourers face an extremely difficult life in Lesotho because the lack of an education and skills that are relevant to the economy of Lesotho drastically limits their chances of employment. They are in most cases reduced to waiting at the mine recruiting agencies in the hope of being recalled to the South African mining industries, because they know that this is the only sector for which they are adequately skilled.

2. Problem statement

The aim of the research was to study the lives of Basotho migrant labourers who had been retrenched from the RSA mining industries, and to establish, through a life history research design, their perceptions about and attitudes towards education and training. The target population was therefore men who were unemployed due to mine retrenchments, particularly those men who waited at mine recruiting agencies, hoping to be recalled to the mining industries where they had been employed, and also those seeking employment through the government employment agency, the Department of Labour. However, since the mining houses were shedding posts to recruit and train

skilled and semi-skilled workers (Ray, 1998: 19; Harris, 1993: 5), these unskilled Basotho workers stood little chance of re-employment at the mines. Given the mineworkers' low educational base and how this limits their chances of employment, I felt that there was a need to determine *their* perceptions about education and training and to assess whether *they* think that education could have a positive impact on their career lives.

High unemployment levels undermine the growth of any economy and demand strategies to address the situation. In Lesotho, the number of repatriated migrant labourers poses a problem to the economy because the country has a very low employment creation capacity (CBL, 2001: 22), and cannot absorb these miners into the economy because their skills are irrelevant to it (Sechaba Consultants, 1995: 167). My study is an attempt to gain insight into the career lives of these men, and to use the information obtained to propose interventions that will facilitate the maintenance of a relatively similar standard of living in Lesotho as they had whilst employed in the RSA mining industries. Since equipping this group with skills has been identified as the appropriate solution to this problem, I felt it was important to investigate the retrenched miners' views on education and training. My study is therefore intended to ensure that education and training programmes are planned and presented in a manner that considers the needs and concerns of the target population to ensure their participation and hence the success of these interventions.

3. Research methodology and design

To best capture the richness of the material, and therefore, give an elaborate viewpoint of issues that are being studied (Mostyn, 1985: 121), I have used life history methodology, which is qualitative in nature, to study the perceptions and attitudes of migrant labourers. Scott and Alwin for instance argue that "to understand how earlier events influence the present (and future), or to understand the process by which various life changes occur, it is essential to have accurate information about the past and the present" (1998: 99). In this instance, the interviews conducted with the men gave me a wealth of information about their life histories and also explained their views about training and education.

I used semi-structured in-depth interviews for collecting data for this study. Twenty-six interviews were conducted with retrenched migrant labourers and the interviews were audio recorded. I conducted the interviews over three weeks (05/06/2002 to 21/06/2002) at the *Department of Labour* (National Employment Service, *NES*), *The Employment Bureau of Africa (Teba)* and *ER Ramsden Bleskop* (the last two are mine recruiting agencies) in Maseru. *Teba* hires men that work at gold and platinum mines, whereas *ER Ramsden Bleskop* hires workers for platinum and coal mines, and also shaft sinkers for all mines. These places were decided upon because they are located in the capital town of Lesotho, and many people attempt to escape unemployment and poverty by migrating to towns and other urban areas (Gay, 2000: 66), in the hope that employment opportunities are better in urban areas than in rural areas. The other reason why Maseru was chosen was because *Teba* had reduced its functions in the other districts of Lesotho, and recruiting activities were only undertaken at the office in Maseru.

The interviews were conducted with men who visited these agencies. At the mine recruiting agencies they were approached while they waited to be recalled to their former places of employment or contracted to other mining industries. On the other hand, at *NESI* interviewed them after they had registered their names with the agency so that they could be assisted in their search for employment in Lesotho. Since the interviews were semi-structured, I designed an interview schedule (refer to Appendix A). The questions were grouped in the following five sections: The life of the respondent in the mining industry; The life of the migrant before he was employed in the mines; Retrenchment, to give a reflection of the retrenchment process; The life of the respondent after retrenchment; The opinion of the informant about education.

There was no structured method of selecting research subjects/interviewees because the exact number and personal details of retrenched mineworkers are not known. Available statistics on migrant labourers are inadequate for the purpose of this study because they are based on the men who are still engaged in the industry. Another hindrance to adopting a structured method of selecting interviewees was that the men who visited the agencies could not be identified and traced by name and address. Interviewees could therefore not be regulated because there was no guarantee that they would visit the research sites in a reliable pattern. For this reason, I selected

research subjects from those who were present when I collected the data. Interviewees for this study were men of varying age groups.

I conducted the interviews in Sesotho, the local language, to make interviewees feel more at ease with the process. The audio tapes used to record the interviews were transcribed and translated from Sesotho to English. The data was then entered into the computer for analysis, using ATLAS.ti, which identifies and codes common/main themes. The codes were linked so that relationships in the information collected could be established and a report could be produced.

4. Thesis outline

This chapter has given the relevant background information about migrant labour from Lesotho to South Africa to contextualise the study that was conducted. The unemployment situation in Lesotho, which resulted from retrenchments in the South African mining industry, has been identified as the problem that informs the research question of this study. This question concerns the unemployed miners' perceptions of and attitudes to the education and training programmes established for them. The objective of the study was to ensure that training interventions respond to the needs and concerns of the miners and thus to ensure their success. The chapter further explains that life history methodology was chosen as the most appropriate approach to adequately investigate the needs and concerns of unemployed miners through a process of semi-structured interviews, conducted over a three-week period in Maseru. Finally, the data analysis process is explained.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature consulted in the research process, starting with information about Lesotho's economic background and the history of labour migration from Lesotho to South Africa. The early discoveries of gold deposits in South Africa and the resultant growth in the demand for cheap labour in the area are discussed to illustrate how Basotho labour migration to South Africa was motivated by the urgent need for easy and quick wage returns. Strategies that were devised to attract more people to work in the industry are studied, as well as the way in which migration to the RSA mining industries for employment became a career to Basotho men.

The factors and implications of retrenchment are reviewed as the migrant labour system underwent major structural changes that lead to massive retrenchments in the industry. The last section of the literature review concentrates on training and education. It looks at the migrant labourer's educational background, the importance of education, policies/acts and the training and education system in Lesotho.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology and research design that was followed in conducting this study. It describes the research design, states its advantages and justifies the choice of the research design. The instrument that was used to collect data is examined, the method of selecting cases for the study and the method of capturing the data are looked into. Details of the activities undertaken, procedures followed and problems encountered while conducting the study, especially fieldwork activities are thoroughly discussed. The section continues to show how data was analysed and eventually interpreted.

The next two chapters present the results that were obtained. Presentation of the findings includes quotations from the main data set where applicable to substantiate the results. Conclusions drawn from the results are subsequently presented. The last chapter (6) is devoted to the interpretation of the findings and proposes recommendations about education and improvements of the retrenched migrant labourers which are based on the conclusions drawn.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

1. Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a contextual framework within which to situate my study of retrenched Basotho miners' perceptions about and attitudes towards education and training. In the first section (Section A), a brief description of the Lesotho economy (2001) is given, followed by an overview of the history of labour migration from Lesotho to the mines in South Africa. The failure of agricultural production to sustain the Lesotho economy and the parallel growth in the South African mining industry are identified as key factors in the migration of many Basotho workers to South Africa. Strategies used by the South African mining industries to recruit Basotho miners, and the eventual large-scale retrenchment of miners as a result of structural changes to the South African mining industries, are examined. The effects of these retrenchments on the economy of Lesotho and on the lives of individuals are discussed. The next section of this chapter (Section B) focuses on the migrant labourers' educational background, the education and training system in Lesotho, and the policies and acts that govern the delivery of education in Lesotho. The last section looks at initiatives that have been introduced to improve the migrant labourers' skills capacity.

SECTION A

2. The Lesotho economy (2001)

Lesotho is a relatively small African country, which is entirely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa (RSA). It comprises an area of 30,555 square kilometres, two thirds of which is mountainous, and one third habitable lowland area (*Lesotho Review of Commerce, Industry and Tourism*, 2001). The total population of Lesotho was estimated at 1,960,069 million in 1996 (*Population Census Report*, 1996). They are unevenly distributed because of the rugged landscape, with the largest concentration of the population in the lowland areas, whereas the population in the mountainous areas is small and dispersed.

The Lesotho labour force is defined as consisting of persons who are ten (10) years old and older, who are either employed or unemployed and looking for, or available for, work (Lesotho Labour Force Survey (LLFS), 1997: 25). The definition was adopted because many children join the labour market from the age of 10 as herd boys. The labour force was estimated at 701,997, of which about 23 percent constituted migrant labourers. In 1997 the unemployment rate was calculated at 34.2 percent. This figure suggests an urgent need for policy advisors and the government of Lesotho to create employment opportunities in order to reduce the increasing levels of unemployment. The challenge is enormous because Lesotho is faced with an average of 24,300 new entrants into the labour force per annum. Of this number, only 9,000 can be absorbed per annum (MEL, 1998: 4). Slow economic growth continues to hinder the pace of job creation in the country. Estimates indicate that for the domestic economy to attain full employment in the next decade, economic growth has to accelerate to at least 7 percent while annual job creation has to average 14 percent (CBL, 2001: 22). A rapid increase in employment is however noticeable in the informal sector, which is growing rapidly, employing about 16 percent of the labour force per annum (LLFS, 1997: 25).

Lesotho has a limited resource base: the country's economy depends largely on agriculture, the export of labour and external funds (*Population Census* Vol. IIIB, 1996: 46). Agriculture remains the single largest employer because a large proportion of the labour force has traditionally been involved in subsistence agriculture (CBL, 2001: 21). Unfortunately, the sector faces severe problems because of poverty, unpredictable weather conditions, serious soil erosion, a poor system of land tenure, and deterioration of soil fertility. These constraints have made it unlikely for agriculture alone to generate enough income to support approximately 85 percent of the rural population who engage mainly in subsistence agriculture (*Population Census* Vol. IIIB, 1996: 46; MEL/ILO, 1998: 7). Furthermore, it has been predicted that returns in the sector would depreciate further during the period 2001/2002 because of insufficient rainfall (CBL, 2001: 14-5).

Labour export is yet another crucial contributor to the economy of Lesotho. The migration of Basotho men to the South African mining industries contributed significantly to the economy of Lesotho, but large-scale retrenchments since 1995 were disastrous for the future of the country. The *South African Customs Union* (SACU)

revenue, on the other hand, constitutes almost 50 percent of the total revenue (CBL, 2001: 50).

Another significant contributor to the economy of Lesotho is the sale of water, the only major natural resource (*Population Census* Vol. IIIB, 1996: 46). The recent completion of the hydropower facility by the *Lesotho Highlands Development Agency* (LHDA) project has made the sale of water to South Africa possible. This has aided the economic situation because Lesotho receives royalties in transfer of the water. On average, this project and the agreement with South Africa will account for approximately 3-5 percent of Lesotho's GDP between 1990 and 2044 (LHDA, 1996: 4). In addition to the sale of water, the project is expected to benefit Lesotho by providing hydroelectricity, water and development in the highland zones. Employment opportunities are created during the construction of the dams and 4,000 Basotho were, for instance, employed in direct project activities during phase 1A of the project (*Population Census* Vol. IIIB, 1996: 46).

3. The history of labour migration from Lesotho to South Africa

Labour migration in Lesotho started in the middle of the nineteenth century, before diamonds and gold were first discovered at Kimberley and in the Witwatersrand (ILO, 1979: 40). According to Harris, "[d]iamond mining in Kimberly was initiated in 1866 by a team of diggers, both black and white, hired by prospectors before it became a deep-level mining operation" (1993: 20). At that time, Basotho were largely employed on farms and in towns in the Orange Free State and Cape Colony. Many were engaged as labour tenants, often with their families, but a dramatic new development, according to Kimble, was the large number of men engaged as individual wage labourers on the diamond mines, railway works, harbours and towns (1999: 25-6). Harris argues that "[t]he discoveries of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 decisively shifted industrial South Africa's core to Johannesburg, where it has remained until the present time" (1993: 20). This shift impacted significantly on Basotho labour migration, which responded to the growing demand for miners.

The Basotho labour migration trend has since diverted to incorporate people who were migrating for wage employment in other sectors of the economy, such as

manufacturing (MEL/ILO, 1998: 31-32). Migration for educational purposes constitutes another growing trend, and even though there are movements to other regions in Africa and to countries abroad, migration to South Africa is especially popular (*Census Report* Vol. IIIA, 1996: 104).

3.1 The failure of agricultural production to sustain the Lesotho economy

During the nineteenth century, the Basotho depended on agriculture for their subsistence and used surplus produce to trade with fellow Africans. With the arrival of white South Africans traders, however, a new outlet for surpluses, previously stored or exchanged amongst people in the area, was created. These traders earned their livelihood by purchasing grain (wheat, sorghum and maize) from the Basotho for resale at the diamond mines and other places in South Africa. The Basotho thus became major suppliers to the surrounding regions, and their market increased drastically because of the tremendous influx of people seeking their fortunes and working at the mines. Eldredge argues that the Basotho “were driven to trade by their efforts to acquire livestock and technology (guns), which would enable them to achieve economic and military security” (1993: 147). Lesotho thus became known as “the granary of Southern Africa” (Keegan. 1986:197; Kimble, 1992: 42).

In South Africa, white farmers started to cultivate their land and grow wheat, but their market did not flourish as the Basotho’s did. The low costs of the Basotho made them more effective and competitive than other producers and they were thus considered to be a threat to the other farmers, particularly the white South African farmers (Eldredge, 1993: 153). According to Keegan, “wheat was not a paying proposition for the capitalist farmer unless he had access to cheap labour, particularly at harvest time” (1986:210), unlike the Basotho, who were helped by their villagers or extended family members through the *letsema*¹ labour service system during these seasons (Keegan, 1986: 197). When the South African market did not flourish, the Orange Free State government introduced periodic bans and high import duties on imports of agricultural produce from Lesotho to undermine the competitive strength of the Basotho farmers

¹ Letsema is a crop-sharing arrangement between extended family members and/or people in the village.

and to eradicate the threat posed by the Basotho traders. The obstruction of grain imports from Lesotho to South African markets was intended to make grain farming profitable for the white South African producers. It was also a more calculated strategy to solve the labour problem in the South African mining industries and plantations by weakening the Lesotho economy (Keegan, 1986: 210; Eldredge, 1993: 152).

In 1897 Lesotho suffered a severe drought, which devastated agricultural production. The Basotho farmers were profoundly affected because they had traded all their surplus grain, and were compelled to trade their livestock for grain with other farmers to ensure their own survival (Keegan, 1986: 209). Since livestock, especially cattle, was a primary measure and source of wealth in Lesotho (Eldredge, 1993: 10), the loss of this valuable currency represented an obvious fall in status and quality of life. The effects of drought persisted and it became increasingly clear that yields, particularly of wheat, were much lower than when they had originally started cultivating. Drought was followed by the even more devastating rinderpest, which, as Keegan suggests, provided the Boer State with an opportunity to impose more far-reaching obstacles to Basotho entrepreneurship (1986: 211).

The drought persisted in Lesotho and the soil quality steadily deteriorated. In the meanwhile, the South African War (1899 – 1902) erupted, and contributed to the harsh conditions. However, after the war, the situation of the Basotho traders improved remarkably because they profited from the British Army's insatiable need for Basotho horses. These horses were often exchanged for herds of cattle, which the Basotho desperately needed to replace the herds they had traded for grain (Keegan, 1986: 212). At this point, the Basotho realised that their agricultural production did not improve and yields were becoming increasingly unpredictable. As a result, labour migration started, and Basotho migrant labourers moved into the South African mining industries or agricultural plantations at a steady rate. According to Keegan, "[t]heir capacity to survive without selling their labour and their livestock was becoming tenuous" (1986:214), and it soon became apparent that labour migration had become less a discretionary and more a necessary element in the economy of most households (Keegan, 1986: 214, Crush et al., 1991: 5, Eldredge, 1993: 166).

3.2 Strategies used to lure the Basotho into the migrant labour system

The most pressing task for the gold capital was to acquire a labour force, and since the labour market expanded during the early twentieth century, the mining industries had to compete against other employers for migrant labour. Kimble argues that it was relatively easy to compete against the low wages and working conditions on the farms (1999: 42-3), and because the Basotho had been forced into migrant labour by the agricultural failure in Lesotho, “[t]he better wages that were offered by the mines compared with the returns from agriculture attracted a lot of men” (Makatjane, 1990:4). To attract even more men to migrate to South Africa, mining industries introduced the following strategies: hut taxes were levied; recruiting agencies were used; government bodies became involved in the process (Makatjane, 1990:5).

3.2.1 Taxation

The introduction of monetary taxes on the Basotho by the British government was a deliberate strategy to create a market for the emerging industrial economy of South Africa in the twentieth century (Makatjane, 1990: 4, Crush et al., 1991: 5, Eldredge, 1993: 11). The imposition of hut taxes/colonial taxation that followed after Lesotho became a British colony in 1868 exacerbated labour migration to South Africa and generated income for the colonial administration. Hut tax had to be paid entirely in cash (Eldredge, 1993: 153; Harris, 1993: 170), and since money was not common amongst the Basotho because they used a bartering system for trading, they were forced to enter into wage employment. According to Makatjane, Crush et al and Eldrege, this was a deliberate strategy to deal with Britain’s failure to provide Lesotho with an economic environment capable of generating employment and the required income (1990: 4; 1991: 5; 1993: 11). Kimble also suggests that taxation did indeed serve to stimulate a labour outflow where the political mechanisms of the pre-colonial state were involved in migrant labour (1999: 50).

3.2.2 Recruiting agencies

According to Crush et al, recruiting agencies played a pivotal role in the plan to encourage the movement of Basotho men to South Africa to provide much-needed

cheap labour (Crush et al, 1991: 5). The employers' associations, particularly the *Chamber of Mines*, began to recruit for the mining industry as a whole, and subsequently the Chamber's recruiters invaded rural areas to contract labour on behalf of the mining industries. It established a far-flung network of offices throughout Southern Africa where labourers had to sign legal documents to secure their service for the mining companies (Crush and James, 1995).

These recruiting agencies developed a system whereby money for tax was advanced to workers upon their enrolment with the agency, which was clearly intended to exploit their desperate need for money and lure them to work in the mining industries. The Basotho eagerly signed on because they thus avoided the harassment they were subjected to when they could not pay the hut tax, and they could also in this way overcome the "No passes without tax receipts" law (Kimble, 1999: 67), which effectively controlled independent movement. In addition, the fact that recruits received a small credit, through the advance system, to give to their families before leaving the country encouraged more men to enrol as migrants, particularly during the bad years when very little was harvested (Makatjane, 1990: 5). The advance system was based on the payment of a cash exchange for a future obligation (a debt lien) to work in the mines (Crush et al, 1991: 5).

The *Chamber of Mines* operated through the *Native Recruiting Corporation* (NRC), which functioned mainly in Southern Africa and the already established *Witwatersrand Native Labour Association* (WNLA) operating in other parts of Africa (Crush et al, 1991: 6). The full-scale monopoly under *WNLA* and the *NRC* forced other independent recruiting companies out of business. The *NRC* was renamed the *Employment Bureau of Africa* (*Teba*) in 1977 (Crush et al, 1991: 213).

3.2.3 Government bodies

By 1910, most of the traders in Lesotho had been swept into the migrant labour system. The village chiefs, whose wealth increased through the payment of tribute in labour and in kind, were sending off their followers to the RSA to be employed in the mining industries. The government of Lesotho, like other neighbouring colonial governments, inevitably became eager to encourage their men to participate in labour

migration because it was evident that this was a profitable exercise. The migrant labourers generated income through remittances sent home, and the government thus saw them as a commodity, "but one to be rented rather than sold" (Crush et al, 1991:6). It "charged the mining companies fees for every employee sent and insisted that a large proportion of workers' wages be deferred and repatriated to await them in their home countries" (Crush et al, 1991:6). According to Murray, between a minimum of 60 percent and a maximum of 90 percent of the miners' basic wage were deferred by the employer and paid into a special account in the state bank of Lesotho, the National Development Bank (1981: 21).

4. The migrant labour system in South Africa

According to Natrass, "gold mining has long been the backbone of South Africa's migrant labour system" (1995: 166). It has always operated on the labour supply from neighbouring colonial countries (foreign labour), for which it paid notoriously low wages. The migrant labourers' poor living conditions in single-sex hostels, provided by the mining industry, and the unpleasant working conditions in the mines, coupled with inadequate wages, prompted many analysts, such as Rex, to argue that "the system of migrant labour in South Africa was worse than slavery" (1974 cited in Weber, 1993: 292). This sub-section of my study reviews the structure and prominent features of the South African migrant labour system.

4.1 Dependence on foreign labour for mining

According to Thabane and Guy, the South African mining industry have, for most of history, relied on a cheap and abundant supply of African labour (1984: 2). The supply was primarily obtained from outside the main city centre, the former homelands and neighbouring countries such as Lesotho. The justification used by industries for the low wages paid to migrant labourers was that "the fixed price of gold and rising production cost made substantial wage increases impossible and that it had been forced to rely on a large, formally untrained, migrant work force that was inexpensive" (Thabane and Guy, 1984: 2). Foreign labour was, therefore, favoured because South Africans would not work for the wages that the mining industries could pay. In addition, the mining companies contended that foreign workers comprised a reservoir of skills, experience

and work-discipline that the mining industry could not do without (Crush and James, 1995). Hence, almost 80 percent of the migrant labour force came from outside South Africa in the 1970s (Crush, 1995: 18).

The South African government's concern about the use of foreign labour, as opposed to local labour, in the mining industries surfaced when domestic unemployment increased conspicuously. The *Chamber of Mines* explained that mine employment was not considered a prestigious occupation and that the people who worked in the mining industries were often ridiculed (Crush et al, 1991: 118). Foreign labour "constituted the most experienced and the more skilled component of the work force" (Crush et al, 1991: 118). It was also far easier for mine management to control them, because, as Lacey argues, "the threat of dismissal was a more powerful weapon when used against imported workers than it would have been had the men been living permanently near the mines" (1981: 184). The South African government did, however, recommend that foreign workers should not be employed when a South African national was available for work. It was further recommended that the mining companies should reduce their foreign labour component from 40 percent to 20 percent. The result, according to Crush, was that "the proportion of foreign workers had plummeted from 80 percent to 40 percent where it stabilised" during the 1970s (1995: 18).

4.2 Low wages and flexible employment conditions

Thabane and Guy argue that low wages and the flexibility of employment conditions are important features of the migrant labour system in South Africa, because the low wages and the fact that employees were easily dismissed and replaced prevented the stabilisation of the labour force (1983: 13).

The low wages that were offered were controlled to ensure consistency in all mining houses throughout the country. In the history of the migrant labour system, "companies recruited indentured workers from China, which enabled them to reduce the cost of African labour and increase the rate of work and output in the mines, even after Africans replaced Chinese workers" (First, 1983: 10). The contention was that, meagre as the wages were, the total was large and meant substantial income to impoverished supplying areas (Crush, et al, 1991: 4).

Mineworkers worked on a contractual basis for eleven months per year and had one-month leave. They had to be re-employed every year (Clegg, 2002: 3). This situation weakened their bargaining power and made it impossible for employees to start a workers' union, which could be organised and demand higher wages and better working conditions.

Paradoxically, employers incurred costs because they had to continually train new replacement workers, and they also paid high wages to white employees to prevent black workers from becoming skilled. The flexible employment conditions however appeared to work to the advantage of the black employees, especially the Basotho. They exercised a degree of control over their own terms of employment by deciding when to provide labour and when to withdraw, depending on when circumstances were unfavourable to the worker. The arrangement also enabled them to maintain links with their rural homes (Eldredge, 1993: 193 - 194).

4.3 Control through legislation

The migrant labour system was also devised in a fashion that encouraged and enabled one group, males, to migrate for employment while the other group, women, remained at home in the rural areas. Contracts were not available for women (Eldredge, 1993: 183; Murray, 1981: 41). In 1963, legislation was enacted, prohibiting women from British Protectorates (Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland) from entering South Africa to work (Harris, 1993: 7). There were strict regulations regarding the settlement of people in the urban areas at this time, evident in, for instance, the *Influx Control Act*, *Pass Laws* and the *Aliens Control Act*. The *Influx Control Act* prohibited black South African nationals from settling in the urban areas if they were not employed in the area (Clegg, 2002) According to Crush, the *Pass Law*, in the case of black South African nationals, and the *Aliens Control Act*, in the case of foreigners, implied that neither could seek other forms of employment in the urban areas (1995: 16). Since the South African government "did not want an urban society, which would be difficult to control or would have residence rights in the city", as Clegg suggests, these "policies were implemented in order to limit the growth of a black population" (2002: 2).

The colour bar under the *Mines and Works Act* was enacted in 1911. Its subsequent amendment helped to protect the white miners' monopoly of all the higher paying jobs. The act consisted of a battery of legislation that was passed to give poor whites the opportunity to be upwardly mobile (Harris, 1993: 27; Crush, 1991: 7). The legislation had in turn denied a black population access to certain categories of work that were reserved for whites, for example, blasting and positions higher than that of a team leader, even though many of the black miners were in fact doing the work (Vletter, 1987: 201). The act thus sheltered whites from competition with the low paid and increasingly skilled black workers, and therefore imposed higher wage costs on management (Crush, 1991: 7).

4.4 Accommodation: the compound system

It was obviously essential that prospective employees had to be assured of accommodation when recruited by the recruitment agencies. The employee received a letter from the employer (mining company) stating that they would supply accommodation, and the employee was given a bed number for a specific hostel (Clegg, 2002: 2). This bed number gained the employee entrance at the mining company gate.

According to Harris, the labour migrants were housed under the compound system (1993:20), which denied labourers the right to live with their families in the compounds located close to the industries. Only a small percentage was allowed to bring their wives (Harris, 1993:20; Clegg, 2002: 2), and these places were therefore lonely for men who cared for their wives and families. Even though they could travel to visit their wives and children, opportunities for wives to travel in the opposite direction were rare, and families were also prohibited from visiting the single-sex male hostels (Sechaba Consultants, 1995: 168). The system was introduced when diamonds were first discovered in Kimberley to control the movement of the men to prevent them from smuggling diamonds out of the mines (Harris, 1993: 20). Accommodation in the compounds allowed miners barely any contact with the community because they were generally isolated from any surrounding communities (NUM, 1996: 1). The hostels were unhygienic, lacked privacy because facilities were shared by many people, and the hostels were frequently crowded. Since the hostels were shared, there was no

sense of ownership or permanence. According to Clegg “the only thing that the miners owned was the receipt for the bed number that they slept in” (2002: 2).

5. Structural changes in the migrant labour system

After the 1980s, the South African government went through major political changes and the nature and dimension of the migrant labour system changed significantly. According to Vletter, it no longer fitted “the pattern of oscillating migration on which the South African economy, and the mines in particular, had been so heavily reliant for over a century” (1987: 200). Principally, the changes in the system came as a result of the eradication of some of the government regulations and acts, and the adoption of new methods of operation. The changes can also be attributed to the pressure that the *NUM* had exerted by demanding the review and improvement of the migrant labour system.

5.1 Abolition of government regulations

The abolition of government regulations/acts such as the *Influx Control Act*, which was regulated through the *Pass Law* and *Aliens Control Act*, and the *Colour Bar Act* initiated many changes in the structure of the migrant labour system. The amendment of the *Influx Control Act* led to the free movement of all races in South Africa, especially blacks, from the rural areas to settle in the urban areas. Similarly, the removal of the *Colour Bar Act* in July 1988 enabled workers to obtain certificates of competency, which had until then been denied them. These included blasting certificates and winding drivers' certificates (Nattrass, 1995: 169).

5.2 Introduction of the internalisation policy

With the movement of the rural black population to the urban areas, the high unemployment levels in South Africa became more conspicuous. Crush argues that the “historical argument that South Africans would not work in the mines for the wages that the industry could afford to pay ceased to have much credibility” at this time (1995: 19), particularly because wages increased sharply with the rise in the gold price. To address the growing level of unemployment in South Africa, an internalisation policy

was introduced, and mining industries began to replace foreign labour with South Africans. Mining companies started to employ directly at their own gates (Crush et al, 1991: 153), which was far more cost effective for them because they did not have to pay recruiting agencies for their services.

The implementation of this policy reduced the number of novice recruitments from foreign countries such as Lesotho, and it lowered the general intake of foreign labour significantly (McNamara, 1995: 62). Preference was given to South Africans, especially for long-term employment categories, such as jobs in administration and skilled production. However, foreign workers still filled the highest skilled positions as a result of their long service in the industry. Since novices from outside South Africa were deliberately not employed, there was a noticeable age difference between the foreign employees, who were older than the new South African recruits (Vletter, 1987: 203-212, Crush 1995:18).

5.3 Stabilisation of the industry

The mining industry stabilised in the 1980s when a regular, predictable flow of labour between the mines and the rural reserves was established. Mining thus became a career, instead of a "temporary expenditure for the army of unemployed, waiting for easier, better-paid jobs" (Crush et al, 1991: 151). Miners became more career oriented in response to the conditions of re-employment and to become regular employees (Vletter, 1987: 201). "They worked for fixed periods of nine months to a year and returned to their jobs after a predetermined period of leave" (Crush et al, 1991: 160).

'Commuter migrancy' largely replaced the earlier, more flexible system of migrancy because the mineworkers' eleven months contracts system ended, and was replaced by a system that forced them to spend a greater part of their working lives away from home living in hostels. Hence, mine management was forced to allow workers living close to the industry to return home for occasional weekends (Crush, 1995: 27).

5.4 Changes in accommodation

The miners' extended stay in hostels caused them to become increasingly dissatisfied with conditions on the mines, and it created a fertile area for the establishment of trade unions, such as the *National Union of Mineworkers (NUM)*, which started operating effectively in 1985 (Crush, 1995:27). The accommodation situation of miners had in fact received attention because the *NUM* had exerted pressure on the mining companies to examine and improve accommodation for its employees. According to Vletter, this became a crucial issue when the unionisation of the mining force increased in the 1980s (1987: 201). The various reforms enacted by the state during the same period significantly changed the housing policies of the mine management, and thus opened the way for changes in the types of accommodation offered to migrant labourers. Some mining companies, for instance, started building townships for married workers (Vletter, 1987: 201).

However, as a result of the implementation of internalisation and stabilisation policies, foreign groups such as the Basotho became minorities in the mining industry. This, in turn, led to violent clashes between different tribes in the hostels, because the dominant tribe in the mining company usually wants to 'own' the mine, i.e. they want to secure the mine to provide a reliable place of work for men from their region, who could be recruited through a network of support and patronage. Mining hostels were therefore transformed into places that were synonymous with violence and deprivation (McNamara, 1995: 62-64).

6. Retrenchment

Many factors contributed to the large-scale retrenchment of migrant labourers from the South African mining industries. Mine management, for instance, concluded that the influence of the former government's internalisation policy, and the uncertain and relatively low pricing structure in mineral markets, were responsible for these retrenchments. Thoahlane and Coplan argue that "the increasing mechanisation, made attractive in part by labour agitation and the failure of productivity to keep pace with negotiated increases in wage scales and benefits", also contributed significantly to the

situation (1995: 141). The two factors I have identified as central to my study are the 1987 mineworkers' strike and the price of gold.

6.1 Key factors leading to retrenchments

6.1.1 The 1987 mineworkers' strike

The emergence and effective involvement of the *NUM* in mineworkers' labour relations, and their demand for improved working conditions and better wages for the workers, were central to the historical development of the migrant labour system. The growth in its membership soon outstripped that of its rivals (Crush et al, 1991: 187). However, within five years after its establishment, it faced the dilemma of massive retrenchments as a result of the 1987 strike (Philip, 1995: 185).

These retrenchments in the mining industry were caused by the protracted mineworkers' strike in 1987 (Thabane, 1995: 191, Crush et al, 1991: 199), which was an outcome of the mineworkers' grievances about the wage demands, the persistence of the colour bar, and claims that mine management was thwarting NUM organisers that had been tabled through the *NUM* (Crush et al, 1991: 198). The main negotiations between the *NUM* and mine management were centred on the demand for wage increases. *NUM* demanded a 55 percent wage increase, while mine management offered increases ranging from 17 percent to 23 percent on the gold mines, and 15 percent to 23 percent on the coalmines. Negotiations reached a deadlock and it became apparent that mine management would not budge on the wage demand (Markharm & Mothibeli, 1987: 61). The wage increase demand was based on the marked profit increases in the industry during the last ten years, which had generated surplus profits, and the assumption was that mine management could as a result afford to increase mineworkers' wages.

The strike started on 9 August 1987, and caused substantial loss in mine production as it continued for weeks (Markham and Mothibeli, 1987: 63). Eighteen gold mines and about 230,000 mineworkers, including mineworkers who were not represented by *NUM*, were affected (Nattrass, 1995: 170). Mine management tried various strategies to break the strike: union officials were denied access to the mines, the workers were

prevented from holding general meetings and threats about evicting workers from the hostels were made, although they were not implemented, and on 27 August 1987, mine management finally started the dismissal of workers from some mines (Markham & Mothibeli, 1987: 65). According to Markham and Mothibeli, the mine management's actions wreaked havoc because workers at Kloof gold mine came out before the time needed to legalise the strike, thereby resulting in mass dismissals (1987: 61).

It is generally agreed that the strike was not successful because it resulted in great job losses (Markham & Mothibeli, 1987: 61). At the end of the strike, the *NUM* was forced to accept the original pay offer of the mine management, but they also attempted to negotiate the re-employment of the dismissed workers with mine management. The mining companies recalled some of its former employees even though it could not absorb them all. At the end of the strike, about 60,000 workers were estimated to have lost their jobs (Markham & Mothibeli, 1987: 69).

6.1.2 Declining price of gold on the international market

The price of gold fell sharply on the international market during the years following the 1987 mineworkers' strike, and caused marked economic contractions in the South African economy, especially when the British's Central Bank started to auction off gold (Bezuidenhout, 1999: 69). The gold price decreased from US \$850 an ounce in 1980 to US \$500 an ounce in 1987. The price lowered further in 1996, from US \$400 an ounce to US \$260 an ounce in 1999, which was the lowest since 1976 (Monyau, 2000: 10). Gold mining has been a key ingredient in building the economy of South Africa, and the threat to the economy as a result of the drop in the gold price demanded serious organisational and operational reforms in the mining industries.

The initial response of the mining industry was to continue to retrench workers, because labour is the only cost that it could easily control (Siedman, 1993:15). Thus elapsed mineworkers' contracts were not renewed, and in 1990 it was estimated that about 80,000 jobs had been shed through natural attrition, retrenchment, early retirements, transfers and extended leave schemes (*Financial Mail*, 1991: 22). Of these, 27,000 had been genuine retrenchments. Statistics reveal that during the period 1986 and 1992, almost all mining industries laid off workers (Crush, 1995: 21).

Some gold mining companies dealt with the falling gold price by closing down their operations. Those forced to close down in 1990 were Barbrook, Afrikander Lease and Vlakfontein, and several more closed in the years that followed (*Financial Mail*, 1991: 22). Gold mining industries lost nearly 180,000 jobs to downscaling and retrenchments as a result of mine closures (Seidman, 1993: 15). The impact of the drop in the gold price therefore had an immediate impact on the Lesotho economy because many Basotho men had been retrenched as a result of the restructuring and downscaling of the South African mining industry (*CBL*, 2001: 13).

6.2 The consequences of mine retrenchments

Retrenched mineworkers are clearly the most severely affected by retrenchments because they have the least resources to rely on for their survival. This is, in spite of the support that they continue to get from the *NUM*, which they credit for having fought, often successfully, against great odds for their rights (Thoahlane & Coplan, 1995: 141). Retrenchment also affected the South African economy and the economies of the sending countries, which had benefited immensely from the engagement of its male population in the South African mining industries. The Lesotho government lost its valuable external source of revenue, thus exacerbating the domestic unemployment crisis (Matlosa, 1998: 33). According to Solomon, "gold mining is still the most important sector of the South African minerals industry and the greatest employer of mine labour, therefore, downscaling in this sector is a serious problem" for the economy (Solomon, 1997: 35). Since my study focuses particularly on the perceptions and attitudes of the retrenched Basotho mineworkers, I will now discuss the consequences they suffered, including the effects of an increase in sub-contracting, and the overall impact of retrenchment on the Lesotho economy.

6.2.1 Effects of retrenchments on mineworkers' living standards

According to Seidman, the impact of retrenchment on migrant labourers was devastating, especially when regular income stopped or when the employment benefit packages (if available) had been used up. In many instances, former employees had done little else outside the mine, and they expected to continue as miners throughout their lives (1993: 27). Finding alternative employment was therefore near impossible.

Consequently, they camped around the Union or *Teba* offices hoping to be rehired, while others camped at the gates of the mining industries where they had been employed. Mineworkers feared retrenchment precisely because they had no other skills, and no other jobs to go to (Seidman, 1993: 20).

Their situation was aggravated by the absence of any form of counselling or information provision about the management of their retrenchment packages prior to retrenchment. In many cases workers were handed their retrenchment letters as they came off their shifts, without any explanation or preparation. They were given a month's pay in lieu of notice, which meant that the legal requirements for a notice period were met, but, as Philip argues, the workers received no 'psychological' notice (1995: 186). Workers were, in most cases, patently unable to manage their retrenchment packages effectively, and studies show that the money was used for day-to-day activities rather than being invested productively. Many retrenched mineworkers, for instance, used the money to establish a small business, but these inevitably failed because of poor management skills.

According to Seidman, more than half the retrenched mineworkers' households were reported to have had no cash income of any kind (1993: 25). The devastating effects of retrenchment on the Basotho mineworkers' standard of living are apparent, especially when it is considered that there are 7 to 10 dependants for every mineworker. If 100,000 jobs were lost in the mining industry, approximately 850,000 Basotho would be indirectly affected as a result (Monyau CBL, 2000: 11; Solomon, 1997: 39). Furthermore, successful farming activities in Lesotho depend directly on investments derived from cash earnings, and farm income is supplementary to an income from migrant labour rather than the other way around (Murray, 1981: 96; Marais, 1999: 13). "Women and children in Lesotho with access to migrant remittances from husbands, fathers and brothers were among the most privileged in the rural areas" (Harris, 1993: 8), and felt the effects of retrenchments most severely.

6.2.1.1 Mine sub-contracting and its effects

The high incidence of retrenchment in the mining industry has given rise to increased use of sub-contractors in the region. Studies conducted by Crush and Ulicki, with a

sample of 27 gold mines revealed that the total number of employees declined by 32.7 percent between 1988 and June 1996 (2001; 199: 61). They showed that during the same period, the use of subcontracted labour on gold mines increased by 96.8 percent. In 1998, about 7 percent (5, 261 workers) of all Basotho mineworkers were employed by 30 subcontractors registered with the *Chamber of Mines* (Ulicki, 1999: 61; Crush et al, 2001).

The use of sub-contractors in the mining industries is considered to be a great challenge to the *NUM* and to the entire labour movement. The *NUM* has been dealing with the issue in negotiation since 1995 (Mantashe, 1999: 67; Bezuidenhout, 1999: 73), because while the *NUM* and the department of labour advocate a more skilled and stabilised workforce, the mines have adopted strategies that are having precisely the opposite effect through the use of sub-contracting companies (Crush et al, 2001: 8). The working conditions of contracted employees are not in accordance with the *Labour Act* and *Mine and Health Safety Acts* of 1997. Employees are paid low wages; they are generally not entitled to medical schemes, pension or death benefits; they do not receive severance packages; they are required to work longer hours in dangerous parts of the mine; and are discouraged from joining the union. According to Ulicki, a direct link between higher percentages of subcontracted workers and higher total death and injury rates on mining industries has been established (1999: 64). The *International Labour Organisation (ILO)* further points out that "many of the advantage of sub-contracting for employers are mirrored in disadvantages for workers" (Crush et al, 2001: 7). The *NUM* argues that sub-contracting is a problem because it replaces quality jobs with inferior jobs, and thus destroys national social security (Mantashe, 1999: 67).

6.2.2 Impact of retrenchment on the economy of Lesotho

The accelerated retrenchment of migrant labourers intensified the already precarious unemployment problem in Lesotho and ravaged. The employment of men in the South African mining industry was a relief to the Lesotho economy because significant employment creation levels had not been reached (*MEL*, 1998: 5). Migration, therefore, represented a necessary social 'safety-valve' for domestic employment crisis in Lesotho (Matlosa, 1998: 36). It also contributed significantly to the government's coffers

through remittances of about M20 million per month via the *Deferred Pay Scheme* that was established in 1973 (Murray, 1981: 21), constituting a significant 80 percent of the country's GNP (Monyau, 2000: 11; Matlosa, 1998:36). The miners' remittances thus supported other sectors of the economy, such as finance imports, retail shopping, and capital and services expenditure (health and education).

Mine retrenchment led to the extension of permanent residence status to foreign mineworkers since 1995, which depressed the shaky economic base of Lesotho even further (Matlosa, 1998: 33; *ILO*, 1998: 2). The first offer was confined to miners who had worked for at least 10 years. The second offer was made to any SADC citizens who had worked for at least 5 years in South Africa (Sechaba Consultants, 1997: 11). During the period, 34,017 Lesotho citizens had been granted permanent residence in South Africa (*ILO*, 1998: 2) and, even though this development at last rewarded mineworkers who had contributed to the country's economy through their labour and the taxes they paid, the impact on the economy of Lesotho was profound. Solomon (1997: 39) asserts that this decision could have a potentially devastating effect on the fledgling economies of labour supply states, particularly Lesotho, which depends on miners' remittances, because the increase in poverty and crime causes political instability.

SECTION B

7. Migrant labourers' educational background

Basotho culture does not encourage its male population to undertake any form of formal education or training. From a very young age (about 4 to 5 years), boys herd the calves of their own or relatives' families, along with their older brothers who herd cattle or sheep. This system facilitates the transfer of herding skills from older to younger boys to prepare them for their future role as livestock herders. "In traditional rural Basotho society, livestock herding by young boys is a rite of passage and a prerequisite to manhood in the community" (IGT, Inc, 2000: 37). When young boys come of age at 17 years, they undergo a traditional education (initiation), which marks their passage into adulthood. Upon completion of this traditional course, the men are expected to migrate to the South African mining industries for employment. Passing

through all the stages of the traditional education or initiation process is crucial because youths under 18 years old may not be recruited for employment outside the country (*Lesotho Labour Court Order*, 1992: 1319).

The assumption that employment in the mining industries would always be available to uneducated Basotho men discouraged many of them from getting a formal education. Thus, as Ulicki points, there has always been "a high rate of illiteracy amongst Basotho mineworkers" (1999: 62). In the 1997 *Labour Force Survey*, which comments on the increase in job seekers subsequent to large-scale retrenchments during 1993, it is shown that whereas the majority of job seekers had a primary education, a significant number had no schooling at all (28). This information is supported by the 1985/86 *LLFS* report, where it was revealed that 81 percent of mineworkers had not completed a primary education. Of this figure, 29.6 percent had no schooling and 56.8 percent had only primary education. A study conducted by Thabane & Guy (1984: 11) also shows that formal education standards were markedly low with more than half the informants having no schooling at all. There is a significant difference in school attendance by males and females even from the lowest grades (*ILO/MEL*, 1998: 51).

Mineworkers still acquired mining skills despite their low educational base. They were employed in many different jobs and acquired a variety of skills because of their long service in the industry (*Sechaba Consultants*, 1997: 7). The transferability of these skills however is severely limited. Retrenched mineworkers comment that the skills gained in the mines are only useful in the mines (Thabane & Guy, 1984: 13). They also "express a sense of failure and disappointment at their lack of education and suggest that it was an important determinant of their present predicament, unemployment" (Thabane & Guy, 1984: 11). Unfortunately, young men who grew up in a society that depended on migrant workers' remittances expect the pattern to continue (Head, 1995: 130; Seidman, 1993: 27). They are not interested in attaining educational qualifications because they plan to go to the mining industries when they come of age.

8. Conceptual Framework

Since 'education' and 'training' are two key concepts in my study, I will discuss how different authors have defined these terms, and I will position my study within the field thus established.

According to Rodwell, training is defined as a series of structured or planned activities designed to either "do different things" or "do things differently" (1994:3). Jacobs and Jones on the other hand give the meaning of training as "the primary means in which organisations develop employees' expertise" (1995: 10). The authors assert that training and work are inter-related. Therefore, the explanation of expertise is said to be "what the most capable employee know and can do on the job", while training is "the means used to communicate that knowledge and skill to others" (Jacobs and Jones, 1995: 11). They continue by saying that "training can only help an employee to achieve a certain level of mastery, and the employee must make an effort over time to develop the expertise" (11).

Megginson and Pedler define training as a "relatively systematic attempt to transfer knowledge or skill from one who knows or can do to one who does not know or cannot do" (cited in Pont, 1995: 7). Steinmetz defines training similarly as "the ability to pass on to others the knowledge and skill gained in mastering circumstances. This is done by deliberate examples, by signs, and by words" (1967: 1). Training is also referred to as "an organised effort to transfer knowledge, skill and attitudes which workers need to perform one or more specific tasks or change their working behaviour" (Fluitman & Alfham, 1996: 94). Lastly, Goldstein & Gilliam define the training process as "the systematic acquisition of skills, rules, concepts or attitudes that result in improved performance in the work environment" (in Schneier et al., 1994:1).

The above definitions situate training as central to the work environment as a process designed and intended for persons who are already employed in order to help them improve their performance at work. For the purpose of this study, Megginson and Pedler's (1995) definition will be adopted, because training is explicitly linked to securing formal wage employment or to becoming self-employed.

Education, on the other hand, is defined as “the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or a young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives” (Fafunwa 1982: 11). Zvobgo defines it (education) in relation to its functions. The functions outlined include “to impart the skills, training and habits needed the economy for the production of goods and services” (Zvobgo, 1994: 2). According to Watts,

education is concerned with the development of the individual’s full range of abilities and aptitudes, with the cultivation of spiritual and moral values, with the nurturing of imagination and sensibility, with the transmission and reinterpretation of culture (1985: 9).

Finally, the *Oxford Dictionary* defines education as the process of training and instruction, which is designed to give knowledge and develop skills.

The difference between the definitions of education and the adopted definition of training seem to be rather blurred; training is one form of education, it is encompassed in the definition of education. Therefore, these two terms will be used interchangeably in this study.

8.1 Importance of education and training

The importance of education and training in any economy cannot be overemphasised. It is the key to economic success and serves as an indicator of the level of development (*ILO/MEL*, 1998; 52). “Low educational levels, illiteracy and low skill levels all lead to unemployment and poverty – all of which impact negatively on industrial relations, the economy and society as a whole” (Erasmus & Hough, 1994: 111). Basic education is vitally important in the changing world with growing demands for adaptable workers who can readily acquire new skills (*World Bank Review*, 1995: 19). According to the *World Bank Review*.

Contributions of education can be estimated by its impact on productivity, measured by comparing the difference in earnings over time of individuals with or without a particular course of education . . . A decrease in the demand by employers for manual dexterity, physical strength, and traditional craftsmanship has increased the demand

for educated workers, resulting in relative wage increases favouring more educated workers. (1995: 21, 25)

Individuals must therefore safeguard their position by acquiring education (Todaro, 2000: 337). Considering their lack of education, retrenched Basotho mineworkers are therefore faced with protracted periods of unemployment, with little hope of a change in their circumstances.

Relative poverty is generally reduced when the labour force becomes more educated. An increase in the number of educated workers leads to decreased earning differentials between them and the less educated (*World Bank Review*, 1995: 26). Good general education would therefore yield broad social benefits for a country because the population becomes trainable throughout a career, even if it is in the informal sector. Importantly, training benefits not only individuals to develop and upgrade their skills, but it also benefits enterprises and the economy at large (*MEL*, 1998: 31; Vilakaza, 2002: 7). Basic education is essential for the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed in society. They enable people to acquire job-specific skills and knowledge in the workplace (*World Bank*, 1995: 104).

Since Lesotho is predominantly rural, it would be realistic to propose education and training that would be relevant and efficient to the Lesotho setting. Cornwell asserts that observations made in developing countries have stemmed doubt regarding the validity of ideas about human capital formation (1988: 7). The debate is triggered by the extremely low rates of economic growth experienced throughout the third world countries despite massive investments in the field of formal education. Todaro argues that for training to have direct relevance to the needs and aspirations of developing countries like Lesotho, appropriate changes to course content will have to be implemented to ensure the internal effectiveness and equity of educational systems (2000: 350). Although investment in training certainly contributes to economic growth, it is also important to remember that training is not an instrument to create jobs or reduce unemployment (Alfthan & Sparreboom, 1997: 5). Skills acquisition is unlikely to lead to employment and productivity growth if job opportunities do not expand at the same time.

Provision of relevant skills has been identified as a strategy in addressing the unemployment challenge in Lesotho by the *Gold Crisis Co-ordinating Task Team (GCCTT)*². It is essential to harness and strengthen education and training to ensure economic growth and social development. When training is well conceived and delivered, it benefits individuals, enterprises and societies at large. It plays an important, if not a decisive role in the economic growth and development of countries, according to *Report of the National Seminar on Labour Market Information for Training Policy Development* (1996: 15). In the case of Botswana, Vlaardingerbroek, for instance, suggests that the expansion of access to training lowers the unemployment rate and thereby leads to the development of the country (1999: 146). Tanzania also offered adult education with the intention of promoting economic development. According to May, Tanzanians felt they “could not afford to wait for the effects of improved schooling to percolate through” to a more productive next generation, and adult education could immediately provide useful knowledge, for example, about crop improvements (1997: 64). It is therefore clear that “training must have a purpose and must contribute to the attainment of national objectives in the areas of technology, economic development and improvement in the living standards of the people” (Monts’o, 1996: 86).

9. Training in Lesotho

Maope argues that the most serious challenge facing Lesotho is poverty and unemployment (2001: 6). Since human resource capacity is the foremost resource of the country, it should be given the highest priority, both in the medium and long term (*MEP*, 1997: 175). For that reason, the largest allocation in the budget for the fiscal year 2001/2002 went to the *Ministry of Education (MOE)*. There was an increase of 15 percent in line with the government’s objective to increase the resource base of this sector by at least 5 percent above inflation (Maope, 2001: 18).

² The Gold Crisis Co-ordinating Task Team (*GCCTT*) is a committee that was formed in June 1999. It consists of both government and non-governmental organisations that are interested in RSA migrant labourers’ activities. The committee was formulated to develop strategies and an action plan aimed at assisting retrenched mine workers. It intends to help minimise the negative impact of the gold crisis on the economy and the people of Lesotho.

9.1 The Lesotho education and training system

Lesotho's education and training system has largely provided 'academic education' for so-called 'white collar' wage employment in the public sector, but in order to address the severe unemployment situation, a conscious effort to revise the training and education system has been made. The provision of technical and vocational education and training is now seen as fundamental to the eradication of poverty (Monts'o, 1996: 82). It is furthermore recognised that providing education and training that suit a country's social and economic conditions is the key to success (Cornwell, 1988: 8).

The Lesotho government does not deny anyone the right to education if they cannot afford to pay school fees because its vision for 2000 was to provide access to, and facilitate the completion of, at least primary education by all Basotho children between ages 6 to 12 years. For those who are older but have not received or attained primary level education, informal education is provided, focusing on the development of literacy and numeracy, but also providing skills that would make them productively competitive in the labour market (*Lesotho Vision 2020*, 2000: 40).

9.2 Education Act

The *Education Act* (NO.25 of 1984) entrusts the *Ministry of Education (MOE)* with the responsibility for technical and vocational training. The *MOE 1996/97 – 1997/99* plan focused on improving and expanding vocational and technical education, in order to capture retrenched mineworkers and disadvantaged groups. The intention is to provide skills that will enable graduates to find employment at grassroots level, and will open up avenues for self-employment and other income generating activities relevant to their rural settings (*MEP*, 1997: 170). Key aspects in the education policy of Lesotho are to improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of education. It emphasises the right of learners to have access to education and training, so that they are able to realise their full potential during their lives (*MEP*, 1997: 169).

My study concentrates on the technical and vocational training policy and system because it is relevant to the mineworkers, my research target group. This policy aims to assess industrial needs in training, improve quality of vocational and technical

education across the board, and improve capacity to capture disadvantaged groups. In order to do so, it will identify the niche and focus on highly marketable skills; it will provide trade-testing control and supervision. Its strategy is to train for self-employment by developing highly marketable skills, whilst also concentrating on semi-skills to develop the skills base of disadvantaged groups, including the retrenched migrant mineworkers. The long-term aim is to minimise unemployment and improve links between employment and schools (*MEP*, 1997: 170 – 175). It has been acknowledged that in order for policies on educational reforms to be effective, they ought to coincide with policies for additional employment opportunities and for the modification of current labour market practices. This has in turn led to the formulation of an employment policy by the *MEL* that takes the training and education system of Lesotho into account (*MEL*, 1998: 31).

9.3 Education and training offered to retrenched mineworkers

MEL/ILO argue that wage employment in Lesotho is continuing to shrink under the present structural adjustment programmes, and therefore, self-employment appears to be the only alternative left for the majority of school leavers, some university graduates, and retrenched mineworkers in particular (1998: 32). As a result, equipping retrenched migrant labourers with skills seems to be the appropriate approach to helping them survive, as well as to curbing the unemployment problem in Lesotho. Organisations inside and outside Lesotho have initiated training in order to assist them. The *NUM* implemented short (two weeks) micro-enterprise training programmes that are mainly applicable to rural areas where most of the retrenched migrant labourers live, co-ordinated by the *Migrant Labourers Development Agency (MDA)* (Philip, 1995: 187). The government of Lesotho also established the *Ntlatso Skills Training Centre (NSTC)*, with the aim of equipping retrenched mineworkers with skills that would enable them to fill productive employment opportunities or to start their own businesses. The three-month programmes offered include plumbing and carpentry. Both initiatives offer programmes free of charge.

10. Concluding remarks

This chapter set out to provide a contextual framework for my study by discussing the economic situation of Lesotho, the failure of agriculture to sustain the population, and its dependence on migrant labour to South Africa. Strategies used by the South African mining industry and government to recruit workers for the mines were briefly reviewed, and the migrant labour system of South Africa, particularly its exploitation and eventual retrenchment of foreign labour as a result of the 1987 Miners' Strike and the drop in the gold price on the international market, was analysed. It then looked at the increase in the level of unemployment in Lesotho that resulted from these retrenchments and the near-hopeless situation of the Basotho workers who, returning to Lesotho, are confronted with unemployment because their skills are irrelevant to the Lesotho context.

The second part of this chapter review the literature on possible solutions to unemployment in developing countries, specifically the provision of education and training, to address the plight of the retrenched mineworkers. The crucial role education plays in improving people's living standard was discussed, and the impact Lesotho's education and training policies and programmes, and the programmes set up by the *NUM*, could have on the circumstance of retrenched workers was identified.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

1. Introduction

The chapter will focus on the research design adopted and the methodology followed for this study. The aim of the research was to ascertain what the retrenched mineworkers' attitudes to and perceptions of education and training are. The purpose was to reconstruct the men's lives by using their own descriptions of their life histories as the building blocks to explain their present circumstances. A qualitative research design was used to adequately engage with the Basotho migrant labourers' perspectives of and attitudes to education and training.

The retrenched mineworkers' life histories were chronologically traced, starting with their initial employment in the mines and continuing to the stage when they were retrenched and repatriated to Lesotho. Their perceptions of and attitudes to education and training are analysed against the background of these life/career histories.

The chapter explains how the research design was selected thereby weighing the advantages and disadvantages involved. It discusses the procedure that was followed when conducting the study and elaborates on how the target population was selected and was reached so that data could be collected. The data collection method, individual interviews, is discussed and a full description of the interview schedule is given. The section elaborates on how the interviews were considered to be the best strategy for collecting data in this study. Yet another important aspect that is considered in the chapter are the sources of error that are prevalent in this kind of study and measures that were taken to eliminate or minimise them. The final section gives an overview of the ethical considerations involved in conducting qualitative studies of this nature, for example, life histories.

2. Research design

2.1 Different paradigms in social research

I followed a qualitative research approach in this study. Qualitative research refers to the collection of data and description of findings in their natural settings, and aims to provide an in-depth description of a group of people or a community (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 270; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 2). Typical features of the research design include a detailed encounter or engagement with the object of study. This approach is particularly appropriate for my study because it captures “the richness, complexity, and gestalt of the material, and it therefore gives a comprehensive perspective of issues that are being studied” (Mostyn, 1985: 121). Qualitative studies are often exploratory in nature; they explore the range of opinions and the different presentation of the issues rather than counting the opinions (Gaskell, 2000: 41).

The quantitative research design is different from the qualitative approach which searches for facts and causes through research methods that produce data that allows the researcher to statistically prove relationships between operationally defined variables (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975: 2). The quantitative researcher believes that the best or only way of measuring the properties of phenomena, such as attitudes of individuals towards certain topics, is through measurement (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 49). On the contrary, qualitative researchers are usually not interested in testing specific hypotheses but want to answer general questions in the area of interest. In fact, they aspire to generate hypotheses by jointly collecting and analysing qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967: 39).

Qualitative research uses an ideographic research strategy whereby studies are mainly interested in understanding the particular and specific event or case within its own context. Researchers describe the actions of the research participant in great detail and attempt to understand these actions in terms of the actor’s own beliefs, history and context (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 309). According to Bogdan and Taylor, “[t]hey allow us to know people personally and to see them as they are developing in their own definitions of the world. They also enable us to explore concepts whose essence is lost in other research approaches” (1975:5).

In addition, qualitative researchers understand respondents as people, that is, they use a more phenomenological approach, one which is more likely to give a better understanding of everyday experiences (Mostyn, 1985: 121). This approach enabled me to view my informants as actors where I could investigate their actions and give an interpretation and explanation thereof (Allan, 1991: 178). According to Bryman, qualitative research inquires from the 'inside' rather than from the 'outside' (1988, cited in Mouton, 2001: 141).

Qualitative research practise is often criticised for being non-scientific and therefore invalid (Berg, 1998: 2) whereas quantitative research practice is generally considered to be rigorous and truly scientific in approach. Quantitative researchers are, for instance, said to have contributed to moving social sciences beyond myth and common sense (Kvale, 1996: 61), because their arguments are based on observable data, and the observation of the data and interpretation of their meanings are strictly separated. Qualitative methods of data collection are, in contrast, not strictly separated because they use qualitative interviews, which consist of meaningful statements based on interpretations (Kvale, 1996: 62). Nonetheless, their approach is scientific because it throws light in new areas of study and thereby forms a basis in the formulation of new hypothesis and theories, which will in future studies, be tested (Mouton, 2001:173).

2.2 Studying the life histories of mineworkers

Plummer explains that "life histories place a great emphasis upon the changing meaning of an individual's life course as he or she moves through a personal crisis (careers) side by side with a given cohort in an evolving historical culture" (1983: 71). This is one of the three modes of approaching historical studies and is derived from interactionist writing (Plummer, 1983: 71). This approach attempts to recapture past ideas in people's histories that could have influenced and shaped their present (Berg, 1998: 199). The career life history of retrenched mineworkers has been used as a tool to understand their attitudes/perception regarding training and education.

I used the limited topical personal document because it details a number of responses to the problem faced (e.g. unemployment) rather than taking an in depth look at one individual case (Marsden & Duff, 1974 cited in Plummer, 1983: 109). The document is

used to throw light upon a particular topic or issue in the person's life, and therefore a complete overview of the individual's life unnecessary. A small group of retrenched mineworkers' narratives were analysed with the aim of reconstructing their lives. Plummer argues that "[w]hat is crucial in these types of research studies is the facilitation of as full a subjective view as possible, not the naive delusion that one has trapped the bedrock of truth. Life history research reveals, like nothing else can, the subjective realm" (1983: 14).

The research design seemed to be appropriate for this study because it gave a vivid picture of the experiences of the mineworkers, which was simultaneously used to back up their attitudes to and perceptions about education and training. This was necessary because it enabled me to consider peoples' concrete experiences and build an "intimate familiarity" with them (Plummer, 1983:65). Lofland, for instance, argues that failure to seriously observe peoples' concrete experiences, the researcher could fall short to addressing the problem of the study, and thereby, speculate about a phenomenon which is non existent (1976 cited in Plummer, 1983: 65).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Selection of cases

Sampling is essential to qualitative research because it is impossible to cover the entire research field and target group comprehensively (Punch, 1998: 193). However, the sampling plan and sampling parameters must be coherent and consistent with the study's logic, that is, coherent with the purpose and the research questions of the study (Punch, 1998: 194). I used purposeful sampling – "the selection of a sample on the basis of one's knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of research aims" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 166) – in order to select relevant informants. In almost all instances, purposeful sampling is applied in studies where qualitative methods are used (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 288). This method allowed me to choose informants who embodied the issues and concerns I was interested in

There is no comprehensive statistics on retrenched migrant labourers in Lesotho. Available records give annual statistics of miners who are still employed in the mining

industries. The number of retrenched workers is established by calculating the difference in annual employment totals, which tends to be very unreliable because it does not specify the number of employees who were pensioned, deceased or retrenched (*NES records and Lesotho Labour Force Bulletin*, 1996). Furthermore, unemployed people in Lesotho are not legally bound to register with the *NES* because there are no unemployment benefits. Those who do register want to be assisted in their search for employment.

I interviewed twenty-six retrenched mineworkers in this study. These were men who waited at the mine recruiting agencies hoping to be engaged to the mines. "Qualitative research seeks to maximise the range of specific information that can be obtained from and about that context, by purposely selecting locations and informants that differ from one another" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 277). I deliberately approached men of different age groups and those who were engaged at different mining houses because diversity is central to the selection of cases that are to be observed until the "process of saturation" takes shape (Bertaux & Bertaux-Wiame, 1981: 187). Diversifying the selected population enabled me to observe commonalities in the mineworkers' experiences. The data obtained when using maximum variety sampling give high quality descriptions that are useful for documenting uniqueness, and significant shared patterns of commonalities existing across participants are also identified easily (Patton, 1990).

I must point out that selecting men from different mining companies proved difficult because *Libanon Mine*, at the time interviews took place, recalled former workers to the industry to work under contractors, and most of the informants I interviewed were previously employed at *Libanon Mine*. The other informants I interviewed were from companies such as *Free State Geduld*, *Haartebeesfontein*, *Kinross*, *Western Areas Free State Mine*, *Harmony Mine* and *Vaal Reefs* at Klerksdorp.

Since I was purposefully concentrating on retrenched unemployed mineworkers in this study, I decided to collect data at the mine recruiting agencies. I had observed that most of the retrenched men waited at the employment/mine recruiting agencies so that they could be recalled to their former places of employment or contracted to other mining industries. I decided to confine the study to Maseru at *Teba*, *ER Ramsden*

Bleskop and the *NES* offices. *Teba* is the largest mine recruiting agency in Lesotho, whereas *ER Ramsden Bleskop*, the other mine recruiting agency, does not have as many people queuing for employment as one finds at *Teba*. At the other site, the *Department of Labour (National Employment Service, NES)* at the *Maseru District Office*; informants were interviewed after they had registered their names with the agency so that they could be assisted in their search for employment in Lesotho.

The other fundamental issue in undertaking a successful study is the ability of the researcher to identify a good informant. According to Morse, a "good informant is one who has the knowledge and experience the researcher requires, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed, and is willing to participate" (1994: 228). I encountered minor problems in this regard because not all men who had once worked in the mining companies and were unemployed had been retrenched, even though they all believed this to be the case. Some of these men had in fact been dismissed for disciplinary reasons, and some were dismissed because they did not return to work on the specified date after they had been on leave. Another group consisted of men who had been subcontracted to companies in the mines. It appeared to me that they did not understand the difference between the end of a contract and retrenchment. All these men were facing repatriation to Lesotho and it thus necessitated caution in my selection of cases.

3.2 Description of the measuring instrument

Newman and McNeil state that:

All studies are conducted to find out specific information, and the usefulness of the information collected is contingent upon how clearly the objectives are stated. It is imperative to ensure that everything asked in the measuring instrument is pertinent to the objectives underlying the study (1998:25).

For this study, semi-structured interviews were used and an interview schedule was designed. Tremendous caution was exercised when constructing questions in order to avoid asking leading questions, because it is essential to the integrity of the study not to influence the informant's response.

The interview schedule that I used to construct the life histories of the retrenched workers' lives in the mining industries was divided into five sections:

- their lives before they were employed in the mine,
- the men's lives while they were employed in the mines,
- the retrenchment period,
- their lives after retrenchment, and
- their attitudes to and perceptions about education and training.

In this way, mineworkers were able to reconstruct their lives using their experiences in the mines. They were asked how they became participants in the migrant labour system, and their responses were used to support their views about education and training in their present circumstances.

3.2.1 Mineworkers' lives before they worked in the mines

Informants were asked to relate how it came about that they took up employment in the mining industries. They were requested to give a record of their employment history, considering that they may have been employed elsewhere before they worked in the mines. If they had not been formally employed, they were asked to give an account of their lives until they took up employment in the mines. I asked them to explain why they changed jobs to become mineworkers if they had worked at other places. I also questioned them about their level of education and other training received before they took up employment in the mines to establish a link between the education and skills informants have and the type of work they did in the mining industries. Lastly, I enquired about whether there were or had been any other family members who were/are engaged in the sector. This was to determine if their relatives' engagement in the sector could have encouraged them to become migrant labourers.

3.2.2 Life in the mines

The point of focus in this section was to gain information about the mineworkers' experiences in the mining industries. They were therefore asked to identify the length of time they had worked in the mines, the names of the mining companies that had employed them, and the kinds of jobs they had done. They also had to indicate

whether they had obtained training before undertaking their tasks at work. Interviewees were asked to comment on employment conditions, giving their most positive or most negative opinions, and also on their level of job satisfaction.

3.2.3 Retrenchment

The mineworkers were asked to relate precisely how the process of retrenchment had happened. They had to comment on whether the mining company informed them about their impending retrenchment, who had informed them, if they had been informed, and how were they informed. The enquiry continued to probe whether an explanation was given for the retrenchment, and what arrangements had been made for them before the retrenchment.

3.2.4 Life after retrenchment

This section looked at the retrenched mineworkers' circumstances at the time interviews were done. It attempted to gain information about the alternative forms of employment workers engaged in after retrenchment to establish whether they had to acquire new skills in order to secure employment. The broad aim was gain insight into their means of survival after retrenchment from the mining industries.

3.2.5 Attitudes to and perception of education and training

The section centres on the attitudes of retrenched migrant labourers towards education and training. Firstly, I asked respondents to specify the skills they wanted to acquire, and to motivate their choice of the training selected. Their attitudes to and perceptions of education and training in general were also elicited, and they were asked to indicate whom they held responsible for their education. The aim here was to see whether their perceptions regarding education and training could be explained by their life history. Most importantly, it was intended to determine if retrenchment and changes in the structure of the migrant labour system had resulted in a change of attitude towards education.

Finally I requested respondents to give an overall comment about issues that were raised in the interview. Most respondents initially felt that important aspects had been covered, but when the points discussed were itemised, they invariably had something to add.

3.3 Description of data collection process

3.3.1 Interviews

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were used for collecting data in this study. Kvale defines the use of interviews as "a uniquely sensitive and powerful method of collecting experiences and lived meanings of the subject's everyday world. They allow subjects to convey to others their situation from their own perspective and in their own words" (1996:70). This method seemed to be suitable for this study because it enabled mineworkers to narrate their own experiences in the best way possible. This kind of information cannot be easily obtained administratively because administrative records are not always meaningful (Tagg, 1985: 163). Tagg further asserts that it becomes evident especially if the researchers believes that informants can relate stories about their past events better than those records (1985: 163).

I opted for interviews because they are generally considered to be one of the main data collection tools in qualitative research. Punch also argues that "they are a very good way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings, and definition of situations and construction of reality. They are one of the most powerful ways we have of understanding others" (1998, 175). They offer more in-depth understanding and provide valuable contextual information that help explain particular findings (Gaskell, 2000: 38).

The advantages of using interviews for this study were that they "allowed both parties, the subject and the researcher, to explore the meaning of the questions involved" (Brenner et al, 1985: 3). Misunderstandings that arose on the part of the subject and the researcher could be instantly checked, which is not the case when questionnaires or tests are used. I favoured them because they gave me a rapid and immediate response. In addition, when interviews are used to collect information, the populations

under study are less restricted because an interviewee need not be literate, as long as he/she understands the language of the interviewer (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000: 549).

Interviews tend to vary from brief structured sessions to lengthy, complicated and unstructured ones that could last for a few hours. I settled for semi-structured interviews where only some questions were specified (Hagedorn, 1983: 549; Fontana & Frey, 1994: 363). I conducted them in Sesotho, the native language, because it is important that respondents are interviewed in a language with which they feel comfortable (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 238). Since I used semi-structured interviews, I had designed an interview schedule. The interview schedule or guide proved to be very useful, especially when the interviewees were reluctant to take control of the interview process (Bertaux, 1981: 38). The schedule was also designed to avoid asking open-ended questions, even though they are known to increase rapport, because they tend to lead to unanalysable material. Unrestricted information is problematic because it is open to a multiplicity of alternative interpretations (Tagg, 1985: 176). To avoid this, interviews were structured to maintain a clear focus within set boundaries however without "constraining the interviewee unduly" (Canter et al, 1985: 86).

The length of interviews varied depending on the information that the informant was willing to share and the interviewer's ability to probe and encourage the informant to talk. In essence, "an interview should be long enough to adequately cover the topics that are raised but not so long that either the interviewer or the subject is fatigued" (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975: 109). On average, the interviews I conducted lasted for about thirty minutes, with a few of them extending to about forty minutes. Within this time, I was able to explore the topic in depth and cover most questions in the interview schedule, depending on the detail of the informant's responses.

3.3.2 Data collection process

I had to request permission from Teba management, ER Ramsden Bleskop management and the *Labour Commissioner (Ministry of Employment and Labour)* to gain access to the retrenched mineworkers. *Teba* and the *Maseru District Office* provided rooms for my use. The room provided by the *Maseru District Office* also served for interviewing workers found at ER Ramsden Bleskop.

The conversations between the researcher and the respondents were tape recorded because it is the most effective strategy for capturing data obtained during interviews. This is because audiotapes can be “replayed and transcripts improved, and they preserve sequences of talk” (Silverman, 2001: 162). Important issues raised in the interviews are also effectively captured and included in the analysis and interpretation of results.

When I conducted the study, I identified myself in great detail to the group I was studying in order to encourage full participation. Full identification ensures that accurate data that will contribute to an improvement of living conditions can be obtained (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 244). Other important aspects to be considered when data is collected through face-to-face interviews are the interviewer’s presentation style and ability to gain the trust of the respondents. “The decision of how to present oneself is very important, because when one’s presentational self is ‘cast’ it leaves a profound impression on the respondent and has a great influence on the success (or failure) of the study” (Fontana & Frey, 1994: 367). By the same token, gaining, and maintaining, the respondents’ trust is essential to an interviewer’s success.

I proceeded to ask the respondents for permission to use the tape recorder before the interviews could be conducted. The use of a tape recorder seemed to create a sense of uneasiness at the beginning of the interview, but as the conversation continued informants relaxed. Conversing with them was easy because they seemed to appreciate my interest in the circumstances surrounding their unemployment. Some retrenched mineworkers indicated that they preferred to be interviewed in groups (focus group discussion), as opposed to being interviewed individually. They explained that they could thus remind each other about important issues that could be forgotten during individual interviews.

The data collection process lasted for about three weeks, during which at least three informants were interviewed per day. On only two days no interviews were recorded because the men I approached either refused to be interviewed or were unwilling to have their discussion audio recorded. A total of twenty-six people was interviewed and tape-recorded. I interviewed sixteen informants at *Teba*, the biggest recruiting agency

in Lesotho, seven were interviewed at *ER Ramsden Bleskop* and three at the *Labour Department*.

The three places were selected because:

Retrenched migrant labourers visit *NES* to register as job seekers so that they can be assisted with their search for employment in Lesotho. They visit the place at least once a month if they have not found placement.

Teba is the biggest mine recruiting agency in Lesotho. Retrenched migrant labourers frequent the agency because there is still hope that they will be employed again (their services will still be required) in the mining industries. Other ex-miners also visit *Teba* to collect what is due to them after retrenchment, or to withdraw money that was deposited into the *Teba* bank while they were employed.

ER Ramsden Bleskop, though smaller than *Teba*, still attracts retrenched mineworkers hoping for employment or re-employment.

3.3.3 Additional information gathering

Documented information was consulted to complement the data that was collected through interviews with migrant labourers. It was obtained from books, journal articles and newspapers.

3.4 Data analysis

The main focus in conducting research is to verify existing theory or, as in the case of qualitative studies, to discover what concepts and hypotheses are relevant for the study that is conducted. After the data had been collected, it was transcribed verbatim and then entered into the computer where it was manipulated so that it could be analysed and interpreted. "Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to a mass of collected information. It is the search for general statements about relationships among categories of data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989: 112).

In qualitative data analysis, flexibility remains an advantage because data analysis is not restricted to a stage when the data had already been collected. "By the time the

fieldwork is finished, the researchers has more or less a clear idea about the significant issues that have emerged in the fieldwork and about the way in which they are to be presented and analysed" (Allan, 1991: 185). My objective was to yield results that would reveal the history of retrenched migrant labourers and to use the findings as a reference to explain their attitudes to and perceptions of education and training.

I incorporated grounded theory in this study because there was no satisfactory theory on this topic (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 499; Punch, 1998: 168). "Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory grounded in data that is systematically gathered and analysed. Theory evolves during the actual research process, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994: 273). Grounded theory thus allowed me to inductively develop a theory that best suited the lives of the migrant labourers. Grounded theory involves three stages; open coding, and then the categories are connected with each other to produce a set of propositions, known as axial coding. Finally, selective coding is applied and a theory is written and the data are integrated (Punch, 1998: 215).

Data was analysed using ATLAS.ti, a very useful computer programme for sorting data. The basis is a flexible coding and sorting system that allows easy collation and manipulation of the data blocks (episodes of talk or action that are marked or coded according to categories that have been created). I continued to code and sort my data until I felt that all instances had been ordered together and appropriate relationships generated to establish a workable pattern (Allan, 1991: 186).

3.5 Shortcomings and sources of error

Allan states that "[v]erification is the central tenet of science: empirical investigation should be capable of being replicated by others so that the results of a study can be confirmed or refuted (1991:181). Verification of a study involves ascertaining the representativeness, reliability and validity of the findings in a study. These are of particular interest in life history research as it is generally accused of technical inadequacy (Plummer, 1983: 65). Mouton suggests that validity should be regarded as a criterion that is applicable to the whole research process (1996: 109). In as much as the life history research design is the most suitable research design for this study, it is

important to note that there are various “ontological and sociological constraints that seriously curtail truthful findings in any study” (Mouton, 1996: 108). The predominant purpose of all research is to arrive at results that are valid, where validity is defined as “the best approximation to the truth” (109) achieved when potential errors are consciously avoided and eliminated.

Mouton also argues that representativeness underpins validity in the use of an “unbiased sample” (1996: 110). In an attempt to control for representativity of the sample in a study, the researchers usually diversify the cases as much as possible. Diversity leads to the process of saturation, which occurs when the information sought (through interviews) duplicate knowledge that has already been obtained. “The saturation process then rests the validity of the sociological assumptions of the study that is being conducted. Several stories taken from the same set of socio-structural relations support each other and make-up a strong body of evidence” (Bertaux & Bertaux-Wiame, 1981: 187). When I collected data for this study, I reached saturation when the information obtained at *Teba* began to repeat the content of the first few interviews I had conducted. As I continued to interview the mineworkers, a repetition of details and information from earlier interviews became apparent. I concluded that it might be because my data collection period coincided with *Libanon Mine’s* plans to reemploy former workers, resulting in the bulk of my respondents being formerly employed by this company. I then relocated to *ER Ramsden Bleskop*, but the information I obtained at this agency also duplicated the information I had obtained from the previous interviews. Information obtained at the *NES* repeated the pattern.

The other limitation of this research design was that it could be biased, both from the interviewer’s (interviewer effect) and the informant’s side. Interviewer effect is the degree to which the results are affected by characteristics of the interviewer. Hyman, for instance, argues that the “final data can be affected by the prejudices, expectation, attitudes, opinions and beliefs of the researcher” (1954, cited in Mouton, 1996: 151). It is possible for the interviewer to choose to neglect certain information and concentrate on what she/he thinks is important and related to her/his study. This practice could lead to the omission of some useful data that could yield alternative explanations. In my study, the threat was counteracted by using a tape recorder to capture the entire conversation/interview, and to transcribe every word of the recording. This implies that

all the information gathered during the interview was considered for analysis in order to reach valid findings.

According to Mouton, interviewee bias could result from life history studies' reliance on information about past events, which is difficult to verify (1996:111). Memory decay is an example of such a threat and it leads to an underreporting of past events (Brenner et al, 1985: 4). Often, retrospective methods of collecting data depend on what people remember because the respondent's prejudice and perceptions can distort the information (Stern, 1979: 29; Tagg, 1985: 173). "Researchers recognise that the memory is less trustworthy than once assumed, but it does not mean that researchers cannot talk about past events, rather, they need to be aware of this limitation and interpret results cautiously" (Tagg, 1985: 173). Bogdan & Taylor suggests, therefore, that the researcher should be careful about information and ideas that could be distorted deliberately (1975: 116)

It is important for the researcher to be on the alert for any errors that may distort the veracity of her/his research result, and to control for as many extraneous variables as possible. Furthermore, the researcher should be conscious of what Mouton calls "reactivity, the phenomenon that human beings react to the fact that they are participants in research" (1996: 141). The researcher must ensure that the study simulates reality as closely as possible, and conditions must be unobtrusive and normal. It must depict the usual reality of the participants in that it must test people within their usual surroundings (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000: 80). For this reason, the retrenched mineworkers were approached while they waited at the agencies, as they usually do, waiting to be recruited to the mines.

Finally, "reliability is the requirement that the application of a valid measuring instrument to different groups under different sets of circumstances should lead to the same observation" (Mouton, 1996: 144). However, the requirement of reliability could be quite limiting for the qualitative researcher because life histories usually rely on what Plummer describes as a "free flowing babble of talk", and hence to attempt standardisations of questionnaires is to invite invalidity (Plummer, 1983:101). Marshall and Rossman support this position, arguing that the demand for reliability assumes that "people are living in an unchanging world, which is utterly unrealistic in the life of

a qualitative researcher” (1989: 147). It is important to obtain results that are valid, as opposed to those that are reliable, in order to reveal the subjective realm of life histories research (Plummer, 1983:102).

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethics are concerned with the questions of right and wrong, as well as fairness and justice. In research, they aim to provide guidelines on what constitutes moral behaviour in the sphere of science. There are therefore numerous sets of ethical guidelines for particular categories of researchers, and even though they differ depending on the field of study, they work towards a shared goal. The aim is to have rules that can protect both the research subject and the researcher when a study is undertaken. Ethical statements provide guidelines for researchers in their respective disciplines and inform them about ethical issues that may arise in the course of their work. This is to encourage them to behave ethically and professionally when conducting their studies so that they can protect the subject of study as well as themselves.

Discussions about ethics in social sciences hinge on many factors, such as exploitation, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity.

3.6.1 Voluntary participation

Ethical consideration in qualitative research involves the decision made by informants to participate in a study. The participation of informants must be completely free of direct or indirect coercion. Babbie and Mouton explain that, however important it may be to encourage informants to participate voluntarily in a study, it is often not realistic in qualitative research (2001: 521). They indicate that researchers frequently choose not to reveal that a study is in process to avoid the possible influence this knowledge may have on the social processes being studied.

The retrenched mineworkers interviewed for this study were all volunteers. I approached them individually to tell them about the purpose of my study, and I asked them to be interviewed. Although some of the men I approached agreed to be

interviewed, there were some who refused, either wanting payment or claiming not to have the time.

3.6.2 Informed consent

Ethical research practice demands that the informer gives his/her consent before any type of research can be undertaken. "The population to be studied should be informed about the research in a comprehensive and accurate manner, and they should give their unconstrained consent" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1994: 264). In this instance, when I introduced myself, the consent of informants was sought before the tape recorder was used. On the whole, men who agreed to be interviewed also allowed me to tape-record our conversation. Another group of men rejected the use of a tape recorder, but consented to be interviewed to contribute to the information gathering process. These interviews were mostly conducted at *ER Ramsden Bleskop*.

3.6.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity are important aspects to be considered in order to ensure that respondents communicate without any reservations. Confidentiality in a study is when a researcher knows or could know the identity of the participant but does not reveal who they are (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 523, Bailey, 1996: 16). Since information in this study was collected through face-to-face individual interviews, anonymity could not be maintained. Respondents were assured that the information that they had given would be treated with confidentiality (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1996: 101). Importantly, I guaranteed them that the information would not be broadcast over the radio, which was their main concern. Having been assured of these conditions, the respondents appeared to be free to give honest and complete information.

When I started collecting data, I asked informants their names and their places of residence but I realised that it made them feel extremely uneasy. I discovered that it made them believe that I would betray their confidence, especially because the conversation was tape-recorded. For this reason, I deliberately avoided asking the informants' names, but I always introduced myself fully to them. It struck me that often, after the interviews had been completed, the interviewees had a few questions

to ask in response to our conversation. They particularly wanted to know how their life histories would be of importance to me.

In order to maintain the confidentiality of the research process, I have used pseudonyms where interviewees are quoted.

3.6.4 Harm to participants

While it might appear possible to involve people in a study without their approval, the researcher has to ensure that they are not harmed in any manner, physically, psychologically or emotionally. The same ruling applies to people who have volunteered to participate in a study; "they should not be exposed to substantial risk of personal harm" (Mouton, 2001: 245). In my study, every precaution has been taken to avoid inflicting injury of any kind.

4. Closing remarks

This chapter argued that life history research design proved to be the most appropriate research design for this study, because it relies on the retrenched mineworkers' recollected information about the past in order to explain their current perceptions of and attitudes to education and training. Unemployed retrenched migrant labourers were purposefully selected so as to meet the objectives of the study. The chapter then provides an overview of the data collection process, starting with the interviewing of informants, the transcription of audiotapes, and the analysis of data. It also reflects on areas of potential error in the gathering of information and looks at the role of ethics in this type of research.

In the next chapter, the research results of the study are presented and discussed.

Chapter 4

The life histories of retrenched Basotho migrant labourers

1. Introduction

The purpose of the study was to understand retrenched Basotho mineworkers' attitudes to and perceptions of education and training. These attitudes were analysed within the context provided by a reconstruction of the men's career lives based on interviews I conducted in Maseru, and this chapter presents and discusses my research results.

The chapter is divided into four parts:

- the period before the informants went to the mining industries,
- the men's lives in the mines,
- the retrenchment period,
- the men's lives after retrenchment from the mines.

2. The lives of mineworkers before they went to the mining industries

Figure 1 below illustrates the lives of the respondents before they started working in the mines in South Africa. There are two categories of interviewees: those who had not received any formal schooling and those who had received formal schooling. Interviewees with no schooling had been employed in the mining industries in South Africa, whereas those who attended school either dropped out of school or completed their high school education (incomplete schooling). Interviewees who dropped out of school immediately joined the labour market. They either immediately worked in the South African mining industry or first worked in other economic sectors in Lesotho, where they also received training, before turning to the mines for employment. On the other hand, the group with incomplete schooling was faced with limited employment opportunities in Lesotho and they also resorted to South African mines for employment in the mining industries.

Notes:

The illustrations in figures 1 to 5 are networks that show different stages in the migrant labourers' lives. These stages are represented by symbols on the left and numbers on the right. The symbols include a shrub-like feature, a diamond, a diamond with a cross, and a diamond with a ring to the right. The shrub-like feature indicates that more than three quotations were created when it was coded during the process of analysis. All other codes that were created during data analysis are represented by the diamonds. When more than five codes were created at a stage, the diamond with a cross symbol appears. The last symbol, the diamond with a ring to the right, represents codes that I have commented on during the process of analysis.

The numbers on the right hand side of the stages show the number of codes identified during the process of analysis. The other digit, which is on the right, shows the number of linkages that have been made in the mineworkers' lives. These linkages are indicated by the abbreviation *ff* for 'the following stage in the miners' lives'.

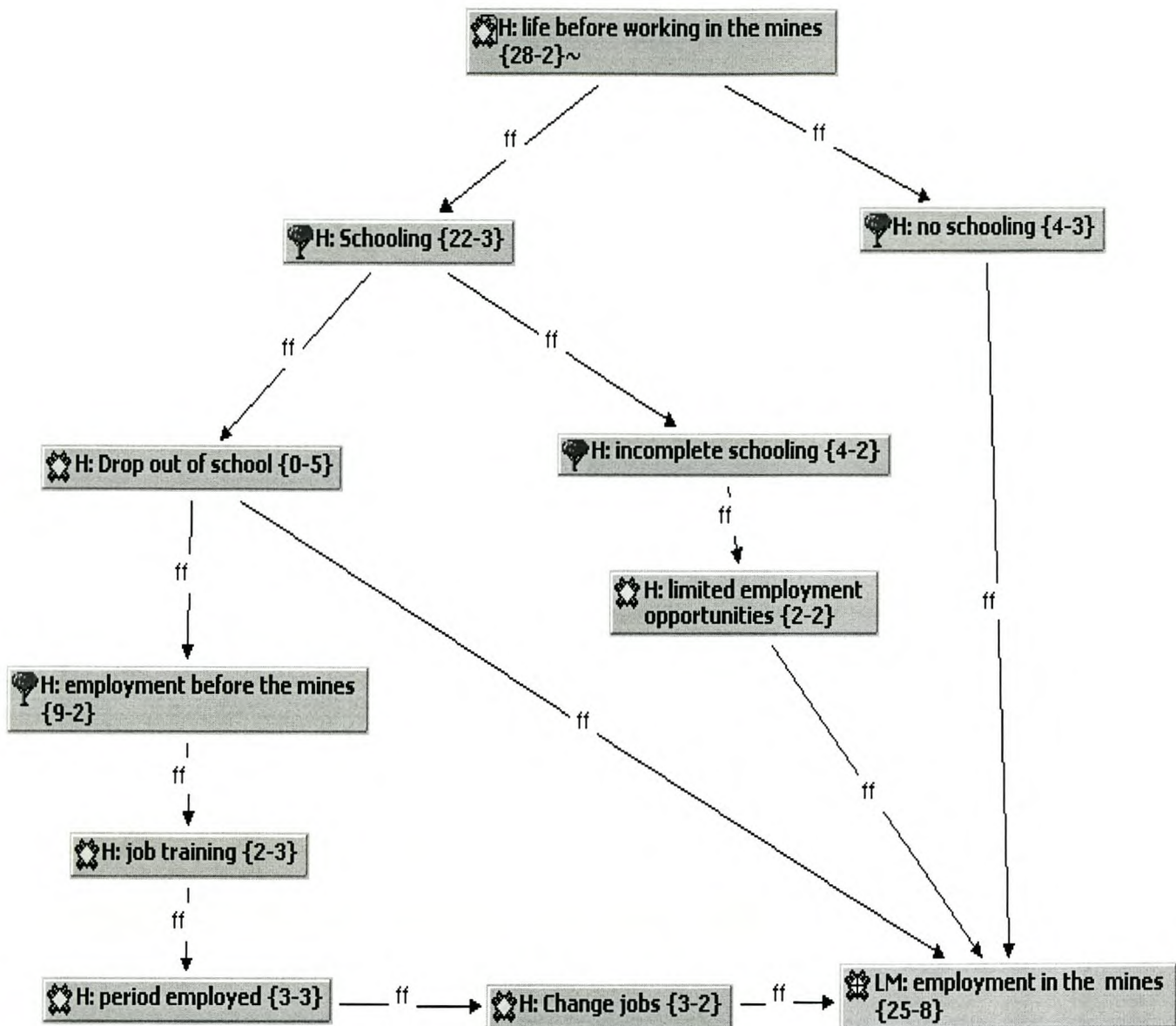


Figure 1The life of the mineworkers before they migrated to the mines

2.1 No formal schooling

The men who had never received any formal schooling explained that when they grew up education was not important, because employment in the mining industries was guaranteed. One interviewee, whom I shall call Mohau, reported that:

At the time when I was growing up, it was only a few parents who understood the importance of education and encouraged their children to

go to school. Most families, including mine, were eager to see their sons employed in the mining industries. I was raised knowing that I would be employed in the mining industries hence I never attended any formal schooling.

Mohau's description of his situation is a concrete example of the argument by authors, such as Crush, (1991: 46) that the migrant labour system depended on cheap labour from the neighbouring countries. The industry was eager to employ able-bodied men who were neither educated nor skilled.

Informants also explained that they had not attended any formal schooling because their parents had kept animals and they had to look after them. Molemohi, who was retrenched from *Vaal Reefs* in 1992, described his life as follows:

I have never been to school all my life. When I grew up I herded animals and I never made it to school. When I had come of age I took up employment in the mining industries. I worked in the mining industry until I was retrenched.

2.2 Mineworkers who attended formal schooling

Amongst the informants who had attended school, many had dropped out at either primary or secondary level (incomplete schooling), and only three had completed their high school education. Most of the informants in the incomplete schooling category stated that they had been forced to leave school because of either family problems, or because they had to herd animals, or because they had come of age and were eager to work in the mines.

2.2.1 Family problems

Most of the interviewees in this category indicated that their parents had been unable to afford their school fees and they had been compelled to drop out of school. Lebaka, a former *Libanon* worker who had left school at the first level of high school education said:

My family was faced with severe economic problems and could not afford to pay for my schooling. I was forced to drop out of school. Further, considering the fact that I was the eldest son in my family, I felt obliged to assist my parents in order to maintain my sisters and brothers.

Another informant, Potlako, explained that he had dropped out of school when his father, who had been paying for his schooling, passed away: "I dropped out of school at standard 3 when my father passed away and I had to take care of my younger brother."

Informants who fell in this category generally stated that they had no funding for furthering their education so they had to start working and earning a salary. Thabang stated that his brother, who had been funding his schooling, had told him that it had been the last year that he paid his school fees. He recalled:

My brother had been paying for my education and after the matric level he had already indicated that he would not be sponsoring my education anymore because he could not afford it. He said that I should start working in order to support myself.

2.2.2 Herding animals

The other category of informants consisted of people who dropped out of school because they had to mind their parents' animals, which in Basotho culture are seen as a sign of wealth. Lerata recalled:

My father owned many cattle and had pointed out blandly that his sons would not attend formal schooling... He was adamant that school was not intended for boys....When he finally permitted us to go to school, we were

never at school every day. Whenever fields were ploughed we had to be absent from school because we had to help our father.

On the other hand, there were informants who decided to drop out of school to mind the animals against their parents' wishes. They said that they considered cattle/animals to be important and could not bear to see non-members of the family herding them. Mojela informed me that:

My parents insisted that I should continue with my education but I refused. I told them that education was not important and that I would mind the cattle. In essence, I refused to attend formal school. I attended the initiation school and upon completing the course I continued to take care of my parents' animals until I went to the mining industries.

2.2.3 Coming of age

Coming of age played a very significant role in determining whether young Basotho men would migrate to the South African mining industries or not. Morena summarised his experiences before he went to the mines in the following manner:

In 1989 I obtained my Standard 7 certificate and enrolled in Form 1. I dropped out at secondary level (Form 1) and joined the traditional initiation programme. When I completed the programme I had come of age so I went to the mining industries.

The other informant who reported that he had taken up employment in the mines because he had come of age was Thebe. He said that he had attended school but had dropped out when he came of age:

Yes, although I did not attend school for a long time. I think that I reached Standard 4 but had to drop out because I had come of age and had to start working.

Turning 18 is an important milestone in the lives of Basotho youths because it is stipulated in the *Lesotho Labour Court Order* of 1992 that no persons below age eighteen should be engaged in industries outside the country (1325). Petlane's

response illustrates the complexities of the situation faced by many youths:

...I am only 26 years old, even though my passport reflects a different age. When I was desperate to go to the mining industries years ago I increased my age because I was still under age.

2.3 Employment before working in the mines

Only a few informants had worked in other industries before they were engaged in the mines. They had not been trained in any specific skills before they were engaged but they acquired relevant skills on the job. Morena gave this response when I enquired about skills that he possessed before being engaged:

I learned the skill on the job when I started working. Acquiring a skill does not require one to undertake any formal training – it can be acquired by watching people who mastered the skill.

When these informants joined the mines after being employed at other establishments, it seems that the skills they had acquired were not recognised at the mines. They were employed as labourers, only to be promoted when they had acquired other skills that were relevant to the mining industries.

These informants, who had been employed at other places in Lesotho before they went to the mining industries, had changed jobs at least once while still in Lesotho. They explained that they were interested in a job that paid well hence they finally joined the mining industries. This is the explanation given by Neo who had moved through three different establishments:

...I then moved from Molimo - Nthuse to go to Basotho Pony Trekking, and finally I went to South Africa. I moved from one establishment to another because the salaries offered were not satisfactory. Salaries in Lesotho are generally very low.

2.4 Explanations for taking up employment in the mines

Several explanations for taking up employment in the mines were given by the men. A key factor to most of them was that jobs were not available in Lesotho. They pointed

out that employment in South Africa did not offer them anything out of the ordinary but they had been forced to migrate because employment opportunities in Lesotho were limited. Potlako explained:

Employment in the mining industries does not offer us anything out of the ordinary – we migrate because there are no job opportunities in Lesotho. If we could be employed in this country we would not migrate to South Africa.

In addition to the limited employment opportunities for the men in Lesotho, other factors such as peer pressure and traditional practices contributed to their decision to migrate to South Africa. Mojela reported that it was common practice ('customary') to get married when they were employed in the mines (Cobbe, 1986: 27). He said that he took up work in the mines in order to get married to his long-standing girlfriend:

I realised that many people settled down after being employed in the mining industries. I was afraid that my girlfriend would be attracted to other men who worked in the mines and I felt the need to go and work in the mines as well.

Some informants indicated that there had been job opportunities in the country but they had opted for employment in the mines because they were pressurised by their peers. They said that their friends had convinced them that the wages offered in the South African mines were much better than those offered in Lesotho. Thabang recounted:

My parents urged me to look for employment in Lesotho, telling me that employment in the mines would not develop me...But seeing my peers coming back from the mines looking polished and confident because they were rich – was impressed. I thought to myself, 'someday I want to look just like them'.

Neo also attributed his decision to take up employment in the mines to the influence of friends:

...The fact that my friends were employed in the sector played a very pivotal role in my decision to take up employment in the mines because I was interested in earning a good salary. Money is very important; I was interested in earning a good salary.

In another case, the informant told me that he had been employed in the mining industries after his father had passed away while he was still employed in the mines. Monaheng explained that the mine management had offered him a job after his father's death. He said: "My father passed away in the mining industries and then the company sent for me and I was hired."

The life of the migrant labourers before they went to the mines involved either attending school or not attending schooling. The men who did not attend school herded animals and then attended the traditional initiation programme. When they came of age they went to the mines. On the other hand, the men who attended formal schooling generally also dropped out of school to attend the traditional initiation programme when they came of age so that they could migrate to the mines.

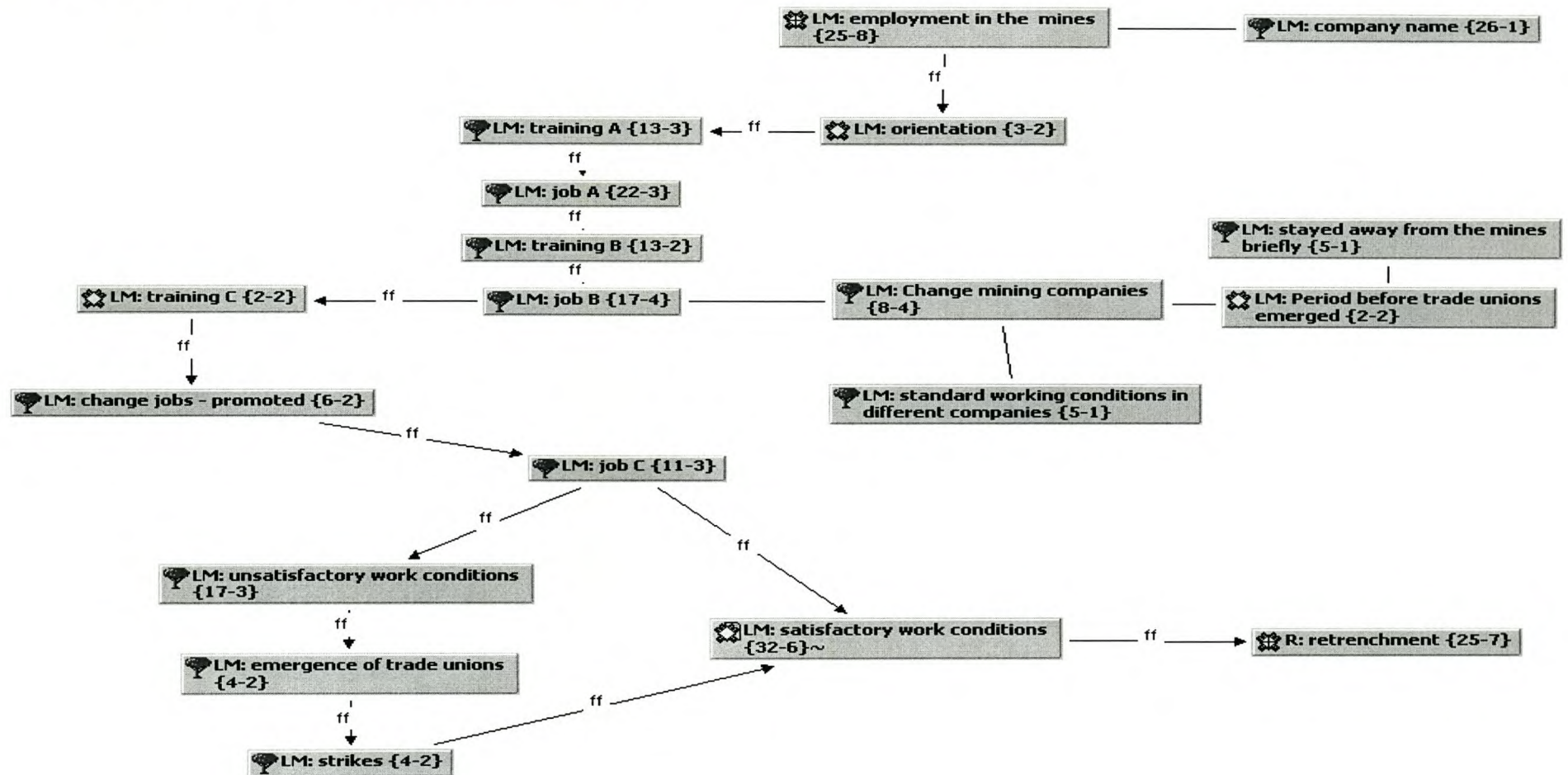
3. Life in the mining industries

The lives of the interviewees in the mining industries in South Africa are represented on Figure 2. The interviews were conducted with twenty-six retrenched migrant labourers in Lesotho. Upon engagement, new recruits were oriented into the system and then trained for their first job in the mining industry (job A). When they were promoted to a higher level they were expected to undergo training again to enable them to perform activities at that particular level (job B). At job B, they could either proceed to another post (job C) in the same mining company or move to another mining company, where they also occupied senior positions (job C). This practice was prevalent before trade unions emerged, as was the practice of staying in Lesotho for a while before returning to the mines. According to the interviewees responses, working conditions in the different mining companies in South Africa were standard.

When commenting about their experiences in job C, some interviewees expressed satisfaction about the working conditions, whilst others stated that the conditions were not satisfactory. Interviewees who complained about unsatisfactory working conditions were mostly from the generation that participated in the migrant labour system before trade unions emerged (before the 1980s). The emergence of trade unions was accompanied by strikes in the mining industries, which ultimately led to improved working conditions, but when satisfactory working conditions had been negotiated in

the mining industries, retrenchments soon followed, resulting in the large number of retrenched workers from which the sample for this thesis has been taken.

Figure 2 The life of the mineworkers on the mines



3.1 Mining companies

The sample consisted of men who were employed in many different mining companies in South Africa. When the miners arrived at the mines they were inducted into the industry. They were taught the common language, *fanagalo/fanakaloko*, which is used in the industry to enable mineworkers to understand each other. *Fanakaloko* is a “pidgin language without nuance or subtlety used by supervisors to order blacks about and which ensures that the relationship between bosses and workers on the mine are as limited and impersonal as possible” (Moodie with Ndatshe, 1994: 13). The orientation included a short course on safety precautions in the work place. Lebaka recollected his first memories of the mines:

I attended an initiation programme where we were taught the language that is used in the mining industry, *fanakaloko*. After this short course, I was assigned to work in a particular shaft in a section. In this shaft other workers trained me on the job. This type of work did not require any special training.

“At other mining industries, the orientation involved acclimatisation to strenuous work underground at high temperatures” (Moodie with Ndatshe, 1994: 13). Morena reported that they were subjected to high temperatures in a steam room to acclimatise them to extremely hot temperatures underground. He said that when they had acclimatised and could resist hot temperatures, they started working immediately. He recollected:

Our resistance to hot temperatures was tested before we could start working underground – the test took place in a steam room. At *Joel Mine* we stayed in the steam room for 30 minutes while at *Oryx Mine* we stayed for 4 hours. After this experiment our temperatures were checked using some instrument, I don’t remember what it is called, to determine whether we would resist the high temperatures that we would be subjected to underground.

The miners were employed in the industries without any specific skills, and most of them therefore had no skills when they started working. They were employed as labourers, including those with incomplete schooling, and were promoted to senior positions over the years. Workers in the incomplete schooling category progressed

more quickly compared to those with no schooling or those who had dropped out of school at primary level. They were also allowed to get skills training or occupy positions that were previously reserved for white workers because the *Racial Discrimination Act* had been removed (Nattrass, 1995: 169). Petlane, who had incomplete schooling, described his first work experiences underground as follows:

When I started working underground I was told that I would have to work my way from the lowest position to the highest position. I started as a machine operator, then I became a winch driver and finally I was promoted to being a team leader.

Training is of utmost importance in the mining industry. Before workers could undertake any type of work, they were expected to undergo training related to this area. Interviews showed that whenever a worker was promoted to another job or returned from a holiday, he was expected to undergo training. Morena reported:

Yes, a worker has to be trained for any kind of work that he does in the mining industries. ...Training is very important in the mines, whenever I returned to work after leave I had to go to the training centre in order to refresh my skills.

Training offered in the industry was basically work-related. The workers were also taught to take safety precautions in the areas where they were based. Lebaka explained: "The training was work related, we were basically taught the general use of the machine, and health and safety precautions at the work place such as first aid." The men pointed out that the training was often very short and lasted for only one week. Other interviewees however stated that the training period was longer in some cases.

3.2 Transferring between mining company

In the 1970s and early 1980s, before the emergence of trade unions, workers were able to transfer from one mining company to another very easily. The men informed me that they could move between mining companies easily if they were not satisfied

with the wages or the working conditions at the mines where they were employed. Makuta recounted:

In the past, the operation/system in the mining industries was better than today in that if a worker was not satisfied at the company in which he was employed, he could easily be transferred to other companies. It is different from the way that companies operate nowadays.

Mineworkers therefore worked in more than two different companies in their career lives. Their migration from mine to mine revealed, however, that the working conditions were standard in all mines throughout the country. Potlako reflected:

This was the period when transferring from one mine to another was very easy. When people told me that the wages offered at a certain mining industry were higher than those offered at the mine I was employed in, I could easily transfer. But the wages were the same in all mines.

3.3 Flexible working conditions

During this period, the workers seemed to have enjoyed the flexibility prevalent in the mining industries, where migrants tended to work intermittently and for various periods of time. They often interspersed periods of mine employment with other jobs (Crush, 1995: 25). Manamolela indicated that he had worked in more than five mining companies in his lifetime. He had started working in the mines in 1975. He mentioned that he usually took breaks from the mines after working for a certain number of years to take care of his animals or other businesses that he had at home: "In 1985 I left the company and went home. I established a shop at home and I managed to live well until I decided to return to the mines in 1988."

On another occasion he stated that he had been forced to return home because he needed to sort out family matters:

I left the mines because there was no one to look after my cattle at home. The person that I had trusted with my cattle was using them for his own purpose.... When I went home this time I returned with six heads of cattle, I was going to look for a herdsman for my animals. ... When I had found a herdsman and was convinced that he would take good care of my animals,

I decided to go back to work. *Kinross* employed me again until last year when I was retrenched.

3.4 Working conditions

3.4.1 Satisfactory working conditions

Most workers indicated that the working conditions in the mines had been satisfactory. They mentioned that they had enjoyed their work and were earning good wages. The degree of satisfaction coincided with their ability to pay for their children's education and maintaining their families. Manamolela happily gave me this information when I asked him about the working conditions in the mines:

The wage was good. I was able to buy heads of cattle while I was working in that company. I decided to go to mines because I felt I had come of age and needed a wife. I married my wife when I was working in the mines and we are still living together to date.

Makuta concurred that the working conditions were satisfactory in the mines, he said:

The working conditions were pleasant indeed. My salary was satisfactory, my children were enrolled in schools and they were living comfortably. Taking into account the fact that I worked in that company for 25 years, it was gratifying.

The ability to maintain one's family is a great source of pride for Basotho men. Mining was therefore associated with male maturation, household responsibility and ethnic solidarity (Moodie with Ndatshe, 1994:14).

3.4.2 Unsatisfactory working conditions

Some informants, although not many, said that they had been oppressed in the mines because they were forced to work at highly dangerous sites. They complained immensely about the unsatisfactory working conditions in the mines. Lerata said:

Sometimes we were forced to work at extremely dangerous sites in the mine. As a winch driver I would have to drive through a place that was

saturated with water. The danger of boring/drilling holes through a rock that was saturated with water was that it could release the water, and I could drown and I would die. When I pointed out this matter to our white supervisors they would be offended and state that if I was not willing to work I could always return to Lesotho.

The other dangers associated with employment in the mines were health related. The incidence of tuberculosis (T.B) in the mines was reported to have been on the increase, particularly among underground workers. It was often said that the workers often did not complete their T.B. treatment since they often combined it with traditional medication (Molapo, 1995: 95). Some workers raised the concern that the environment in which they lived and worked made them vulnerable to contracting diseases in the mines. The South African government had been made aware that the housing and living conditions for black workers in the mining industry were largely sub-standard and that this impacted adversely on their health, safety and well being. This issue was addressed in the *Mining and Minerals Policy* of 1995. Mohau shared this information:

Life in the mines is not easy and can prove to be highly dangerous. If there was an outbreak of infectious diseases like T.B, all workers were at risk of contracting the disease.

Lastly, informants described the work that they did as demanding and strenuous, and therefore, unsatisfactory. Mining is described as "hard labour under conditions of extreme discomfort – deafening noise, intense heat and humidity, and cramped space" (Moodie's with Ndatshe, 1994: 16). Interviewees said that it required a lot of energy and strength, and that mining companies therefore employed well-built workers. Lebaka described the daily activities of the *Libanon* labourers as follows:

The work included fastening the support system to ensure that the table does not fall over the workers while they worked underground. This requires manpower; it is a very tedious and heavy task indeed.

3.4.2.1 Accommodation

Informants further complained about the housing arrangements that had been made available to them in the mines. Neo, a former worker of *Freddies Mine* who was retrenched in 1998, described the hostels as unpleasant and unsafe. He said:

There were times when we had no running water, especially after work when we desperately needed to bath. Also, we used cold water for bathing. Our compounds were not safe; if we were all on duty we would return from work to find our items stolen.

He further complained about the meals that were served at the compound. He said that they were not served good food. Previous studies show that workers at different mining houses complained about the food that was served. Some mineworkers even called the food served 'pig food' and said that it did not give them strength to do their job properly (Payze: 1995: 60). The informant had commented: "The food that we ate was not nutritious, we only ate because we had no alternative."

3.5 Better working conditions

The working conditions in the mines were known to be highly unsatisfactory, which lead to the emergence of the *NUM* in 1982. The *NUM* has been the greatest domestic factor to influence the mining industry. "Through the organisation, migrant workers have changed their lives and their working conditions" (Golding, 1995: viii).

Workers who had been in the industry from the period before the emergence of trade unions commented on the changes that had taken place in the mining industries over the years. They pointed out that the wages and working conditions had improved over the years due to the emergence of trade unions. Potlako started working in the mines in 1973, and he gave this opinion:

We were oppressed and our supervisors did not understand when we complained about the low wages that we earned in comparison to the work that we did. This was before trade unions emerged.

Informants commended on how they had struggled, through strikes, to persuade the mine management to increase their wages. Coplan and Thoahlane obtained similar results when supporters of the union credited the *NUM* with having fought successfully against great odds for the support of the rights of the workers (1995: 143). Lerata, who worked at *Freddies* from 1975 to 1994, proudly commented:

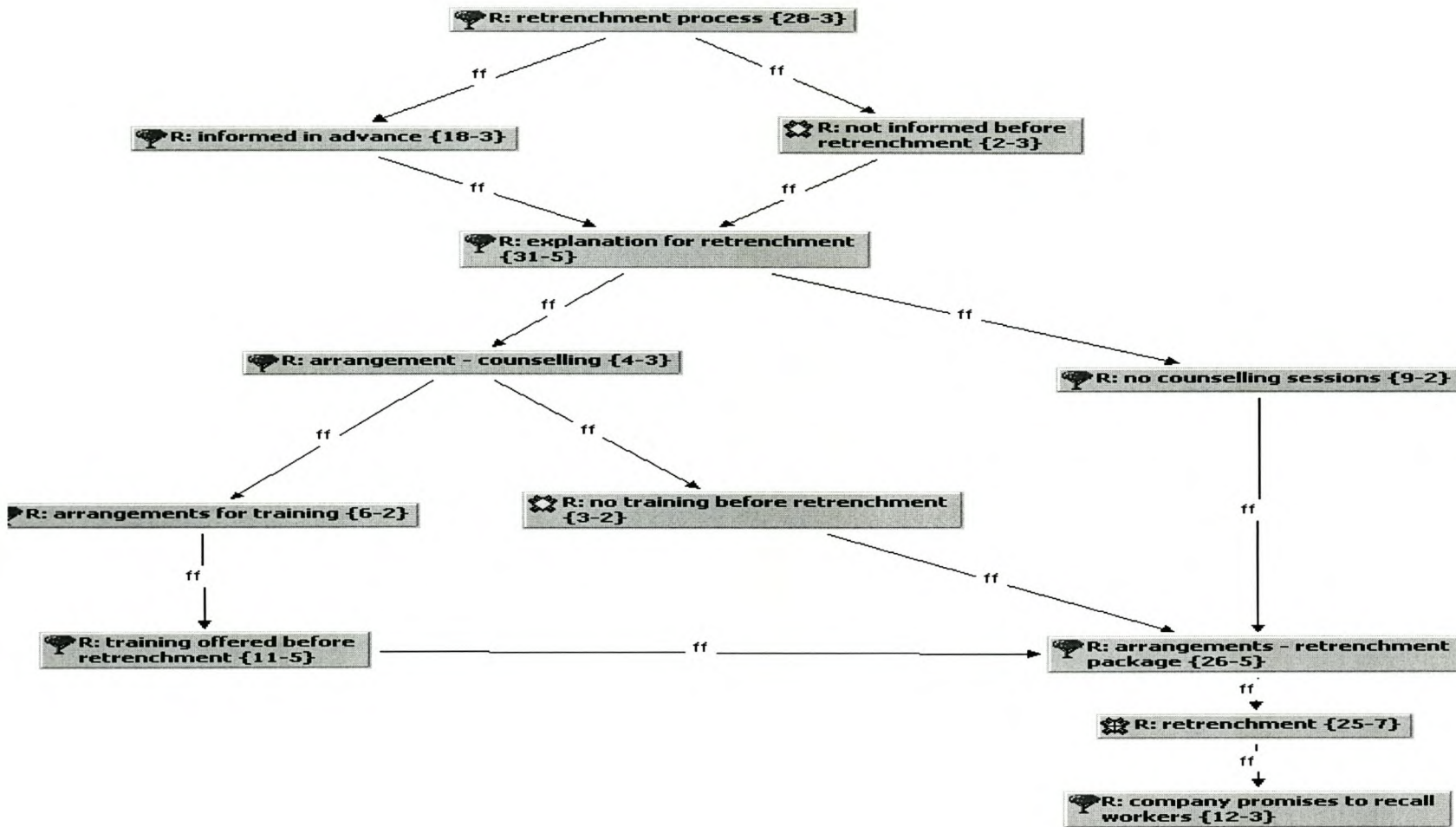
We received low wages and were always struggling through strikes to negotiate better wages. The struggles and strikes were based on the fact that the wages that we received were not relative to the work that we did underground.

The opinion of the informants regarding the working conditions in the industry varied. Some described them as satisfactory, which was based on the salary that they earned, and others viewed working conditions as unsatisfactory, based on consideration of broader issues.

4. Retrenchment

The network on Figure 3 shows that most of the interviewees were told about future retrenchments, but some did not receive prior notification. However, all interviewees received an explanation for the retrenchments. Some of the interviewees who received prior warning also received counselling, but this service had not been provided for all retrenched miners. The interviewees who were counselled had also, in some cases, received skills training to equip them for careers outside the mining industry, whereas other interviewees received retrenchment packages and were sent home with a promise that they would be recalled back to work. In a similar fashion, interviewees who had not been counselled also received their retrenchment packages and were promised that they would be recalled when more workers were needed.

Figure 3 Retrenchment process



From the discussions with the men, it seemed that the process of retrenchment in the mining industries came at a time when most informants least expected it. Some informants told me that it surfaced at a period when they also found their work to be very enjoyable. This is the response given by Lechesa, who had been retrenched at two different mining industries:

I could acquire everything that I wanted. I honestly enjoyed my work and was highly satisfied at *Beesfontein (Hartisbeesfontein)* But god, 'phungula' came into the picture; it caught us by surprise. It came at a time when we least expected it. It caught us while we were still napping at *Beesfontein* because we were not expecting it completely.

Moreover, the men talked about retrenchment with great distress, pointing out that if it had not been for retrenchment they would probably still be working in the mines.

4.1 Information about retrenchment

Some respondents reported that they heard rumours about retrenchment before they were told about it. They said that the rumour was mostly heard at the trade union meetings, and that they ignored it. When the mine management or the trade union finally informed them, they said that it took them a long time before they believed that they would actually be retrenched. Lebaka had given this report:

The trade union was forever informing us at its meetings that *Lebanon Mine* would be retrenching workers. It is only natural that it never registered until we were actually retrenched.

Although most of the informants acknowledged that they had been informed about retrenchment before it happened, some displayed disapproval at how trade unions (the *NUM*) had misled them as they passed on the information. They said that trade unions had assured them that it would handle the situation as diplomatically as it possibly could to ensure that the workers would not be retrenched. They explained that it was the reason why they were somewhat unprepared for the retrenchment when it finally happened. This was in spite of the information that was broadcast over the radio,

Mats'ohlong at *Lesedi Stereo*, verifying the information that was given by the trade union. Lebaka described his experience as follows:

But I must say that the trade union misled us in a way because they told us that they would not agree to it. They insisted that we would not be retrenched. So we were not prepared for retrenchment when it finally happened.

The other workers pointed out that they had not been prepared when they were retrenched because it happened very quickly. Philip (1995) noted that retrenchment in the mines sometimes happened hastily, and that the workers were given their retrenchment letters as they clocked out of work at the end of the day. "They would be sent to their hostels to pack, and were put on buses bound for home" (1995: 186). Thebe gave this description:

This was something that happened very quickly and we left the mine very quickly. We did not have time to know much about it, just when we had been informed about it we were already being retrenched.

In addition, Molemohi described the process as follows:

The retrenchment process happened very quickly and we did not have time to organise our lives. We had loans and other commitments, and we were suddenly released from work permanently.

Of all the informants considered for this study, only two men indicated that they had not been informed about retrenchment before it happened. One of the informants sadly recollected:

The trade union informed us that our services were no longer needed and that we had to go home. They pointed out that there was nothing that they could do about it. This was very sudden and very sad.

4.2 Arrangements made for workers before retrenchment

In some mining industries, before the workers were retrenched, arrangements were made by the different companies to prepare the men for a life after retrenchment.

Skills acquisition was considered to be the appropriate strategy that would enable them to survive when they were no longer employed in the mines.

4.2.1 Skills development

In the event of retrenchment, some companies offered their workers some form of training before they were released from work. There was a group of informants that had received training and was grateful to have received such exposure. Even so, informants indicated that they could not put the skills acquired into practice due to financial constraints. "This is a common feature in Lesotho; people with marketable skills do not have the means to market themselves. This is due to the inability to purchase equipment, tools and other material inputs" (Care, 2001: 27). Motsamai explained why he had not put the skill acquired into practice.

The problem that I am facing is obtaining wax for the candles. They had indicated the places where the wax could be obtained in this country but that requires money which I do not have. If I had capital for this kind of business, I would start working immediately.

In the same manner, Ts'eliso explained that he had not put the skill that he had acquired into practice. He said that it was because he was still hoping to return to the mining industries: "I never put the skill that I acquired into practice because I am still hoping that I will return to the mining industries."

In some instances, the workers were offered training but they were expected to pay for it even though the mining companies had initiated it. Informants who were employed at *Libanon* and *Freddies* reported that they had incurred these training expenses even though the training had not necessarily benefited them. Lebaka, for instance, mournfully reported:

But the kind of training that I obtained cannot even be classified as training at all because it is not useful to me today. I do not feel like I acquired any skill. To make matters worse, the company did not compensate for our training and we were forced to use our own resources. Sadly, we were no longer employed and had been evicted from the mining company compound.

4.2.2 Social plan

Social Plan is a scheme that was devised by the *NUM* and the South African government in the event of massive mine retrenchments. The scheme was intended to ensure that the workers were equipped with skills that would enable them to maintain their families when they had been retrenched. The main objective of the *Social Plan* is to deal with retrenchments even before they happen, and to deal with them as humanely as possible when they are inevitable (South African Labour Minister, 1999). Ts'eliso, who had been retrenched when the policy had been implemented, reported:

Before we could be retrenched, we were offered training under the *Social Plan*. There were many courses from which to choose. We were allowed to choose as many programmes as we wanted. We were advised to select programmes that we believed would be of benefit to us after retrenchment... All mineworkers who were retrenched after 2001 acquired skills under the *Social Plan* scheme.

On the other hand, there were industries that did not offer their workers training before they retrenched them. As discussed earlier, the workers said that retrenchment happened very quickly and they were released before they knew much about it.

4.3 Retrenchment process

Companies adopted different approaches to inform the workers that they had been retrenched. Some informants reported that the mine management displayed the list of employment numbers of workers who were going to be retrenched at the mine gates. In this case, the workers were requested to read through the list before they started working and at the end of their working day. They were thus kept in a constant state of anxiety, waiting for their employment numbers to be displayed so that they could go home. Motlatsi from *Hartebeesfontein* explained how the process worked:

When your number had been released it implied that you would be retrenched and you could not negotiate remaining with the company. We had been informed that people whose numbers had been released would be retrenched. Then we would wait for our retrenchment payments so that we could come home and we would not complain.

Some informants indicated that their employment numbers had been displayed on the list of people who were being retrenched while they were on leave and in Lesotho. Lebaka said that his colleagues had told him that he had been retrenched when they met at home:

Back in Lesotho for the holidays, I met colleagues who informed me that they had seen a number that they thought was mine in the list of people who were being retrenched. Returning to work after my leave had ended, I was presented with a letter stating that I had been retrenched.

Another method of informing workers about their retrenchment was by denying them access to the work place. As they swiped their employment cards to report for work a red light would flash and they would have to report to the office. Monaheng elaborated:

The normal procedure was to swipe our cards before we started work. It was through this process that we received a message that indicated that we were needed at the office. When you reach the office you would be informed that you had been retrenched.

In some cases informants said that they had been given letters to notify them that they had been retrenched. Phane said that he had also been presented with the retrenchment letter when he returned from leave. He had just been equipped with a skill and was expecting to be promoted when he returned to work, but was retrenched instead. He explained:

In January 1998 I was given a letter informing me that I was being retrenched. I had taken leave from work in December 1997, after I had undertaken training for about two weeks. After training I was supposed to have been promoted but there had been a problem.

4.3.1 Explanation for retrenchment

All informants that I interviewed indicated that they had been given an explanation before they were retrenched. Generally, the men were given the same explanation for the massive retrenchments in the mines, which was that the price of gold had depreciated on the international market. The Rand gold price depreciated remarkably in 1987 and the price has not improved substantially since. The effects resulted in

huge job losses in the mining sector (Nattrass, 1995: 167). Mojela, a former *Libanon* worker, said he was given this explanation:

... the price of gold on the market had depreciated dramatically so the company could not afford to pay its workers hence they had to retrench them. This was to lower the number of the workers so that the company could retain a number that it could afford to maintain.

Other mining companies explained that they were retrenching workers because their operations were closing down. Although they did not elaborate to the workers, it was basically because of the low prices of gold on the market. Thabo related how they were informed:

It was explained that *Joel* mining industry was being sold.... It was sold to *Anglo Gold* and then *Anglo Gold* sold it to *Haremone* [*Harmony Mine*]. When I left the industry, *Haremone* had bought it.

The other explanation given for the retrenchment of the workers was that the companies had plans to use subcontracting companies. The companies promised the workers that they would be recalled when operations had started, Lechesa recounted:

...the mine management indicated that mining companies wanted to use sub-contracting companies instead. It was said that we would have to go home and we would be recalled when the use of sub-contractors had been effected.

Some companies spared its workers from retrenchment by transferring them to other mining industries. In most instances, they transferred workers because they were closing down their operations. Makuta, an informant who was retrenched from *Libanon Mine*, gave the following explanation:

Venterspost transferred me to *Libanon* when the mine was closing down. They said that the mine was closing down because it was not generating a profit. We were informed that we would be transferred to *Libanon* and we would continue to do the same activities that we had been doing at *Venterspost*.

Other informants explained that they had been retrenched because of xenophobia that was prevalent in the region where they worked. *Rustenburg Mine*, located in a village of the Batswana of Phokeng, was identified by informants, who said that the villagers explicitly stated that they did not want people from other ethnic groups to work at the mines in that region. Trade unions in the region were organised at the villages and, unlike the *NUM*, they served the interests of the villagers of the Phokeng only. Other ethnic groups were made to feel unwelcome. Motsamai remembered:

They always emphasised the fact that the industries were established on their family plantations. They did not want people from other ethnic groups or other regions to work in those mines. So, to avoid killings in the industry... we were sent home.

Despite the explanations that had been given to the workers for retrenchment, other informants believed that retrenchment was a strategy intended to evict the Basotho from the South African mining industries. They explained that although they were given other explanations for the retrenchment, they thought otherwise. Potlako expressed his thoughts by saying:

This is the information that we were given about retrenchment. However, when we reviewed the situation it appeared to us that the industry was selecting Basotho workers only.

Informants seem to have attributed retrenchment to the 'internalisation' policy – “a process by which the South African government was supposedly replacing foreign workers with South African nationals” (Crush, 1995: 18). Mohau, who was employed at a different mining industry, also raised this concern:

I feel that trade unions orchestrated this scenario. I think that there was a policy that they wanted to implement which was clouded under retrenchment. It is unfortunate that they employed people from outside South Africa when it suited them, perhaps that was when South African nationals were not available.

4.3.2 Counselling sessions

Most of the informants reported that they did not receive counselling sessions before they were retrenched, because they had to leave the mines immediately after they were informed about their retrenchment. Mojela gave this information:

When we were retrenched, there was a lot of confusion in the industry. We were given our retrenchment packages and told to go home. Nothing else was communicated to us, there were no counselling sessions that were offered to us, not at all.

The workers were also not advised on how to manage their retrenchment packages before they were released. This information verifies Seidman's findings that the men received no advice on what to do with the retrenchment packages (1993: 25). Some informants said that they used the money for maintaining their families, while others said they spent all their money before they reached home. Morena responded: "No we were not advised. It is the workers' responsibility to use the money wisely. Some people used up all their money before they reached home."

A number of informants reported that some companies did advise their workers on strategic ways of spending their retrenchment packages before releasing them, but this is clearly a recent intervention because these informants were released from work the year 2000. Lechesa, who was retrenched from *Libanon* mine in 2000, gave this report:

There were a few things that were proposed, I cannot remember them now but, there were a few things that were mentioned. There were people who were invited from other mining industries, who gave us sessions on how to survive at home after we had been retrenched.

4.3.3 Voluntary retrenchment

In some cases companies proposed to the workers that they volunteer for retrenchment, because, they claimed, retrenchment was inevitable. Some informants followed the companies' advice and were retrenched voluntarily. Thabang, from *Free State Geduld Mine*, explained that the company had informed them about its plans to

retrench workers. Workers were then given the choice to either wait for the company to retrench them or to volunteer for retrenched:

We were informed that officials in the industry were too many. We were encouraged to go home, to opt out of work before the mine retrenched us because it would do so eventually. The company wanted to spare people who wanted to stay with the company while it released those who were willing and ready to leave.

The conditions for voluntary retrenchment appear to have varied. Motsamai was retrenched voluntarily was from *Vaal Reefs* after the disastrous accident of 1995. He explained that the company had given the workers the option to resign from work voluntarily because they had been traumatised. He related:

I left Matlatsane after the disastrous accident when a shaft collapsed and killed many people. ... After the accident many people were emotionally traumatised and were afraid to continue working. The company gave us the opportunity to apply for retrenchment so that we could be retrenched voluntarily. This was a very difficult choice to make while simultaneously I was afraid to continue working in the same mining company.

4.3.4 Retrenchment packages

All informants reported that they received retrenchment packages, and that the composition and calculation of the packages, based on the number of years that they had been engaged in the industry, were explained to them. Lerata explained: "The union informed us that we would be given one-month salaries for every year that we had worked in the mine."

Despite the given breakdown of the calculations, some informants felt that they deserved more than the amount they had been given. They believed that they had been treated unfairly when they were retrenched. Neo voiced this complaint: "When I was retrenched, I knew that I had been cheated. This was because of the number of years that I had been employed; I knew that I had been cheated."

Potlako also felt that he had been treated unfairly: "When we considered the number of years that we had been employed in the industry, we felt that our benefit packages did not equal the number of years that we had been employed."

It was notable that the informants who felt cheated were of the first mineworkers to be retrenched. They felt that they had not been adequately compensated. Mohau, who was retrenched in 1989 after having been employed for nine years, said:

I was one of the first people to be retrenched and we were not compensated. I received R1000.00 only when I was retrenched for all the years that I had been engaged in the industry.

On the other hand, other informants seemed to be content with their severance payments. Morena, who had worked at *Joel Mine* for three years, reported that he was satisfied with the amount he received: "I had worked for a short period of time but the payment that I received when I was retrenched was satisfactory. I invested a portion of it in the bank while I used the other portion." He also felt that "[t]here is nothing more fulfilling than money when you are heartbroken because you are being retrenched, absolutely nothing."

4.3.5 Promises made to workers by mining companies

Mining companies promised retrenched workers that they would be recalled if future operations required more labour. Mohau recollected that:

The mine management indicated that they were looking for other sites where we could be absorbed and promised us that when a place had been identified we would be recalled and we could start working again. They emphasised that they were not deserting us but would recall us to work if they needed more workers.

This promise, of course, encouraged mineworkers to rely on the possibility of re-employed at the mines and they therefore waited in anticipation to be recalled. Some of them were delighted when they heard that *Libanon Mine* had recalled its workers to the industry. This made them more enthusiastic about returning to the mines and it fuelled their hope that their turn would also come.

On a psychological level, the promise of future re-employment softened the impact of retrenchment. Petlane commented that *Harmony Mine* had managed its retrenchment process better than the other mining companies because it promised to re-employ its former workers when they needed more workers. He said:

Harmony Mine seemed to manage the process of retrenchment better than the other companies. This was because if you were retrenched you would be told that you would be recalled to the industry at a later stage. Whereas in the mines that we were employed at . . . we would be handed over to sub-contractors.

4.4 Effects of retrenchment on the workers

"Retrenchment is one of the most stressful life events that can happen to a person. Take away a person's work and you remove his or her reason for and means of existence" (South African Labour Minister, 1999). Retrenchment caused enormous anguish for mineworkers, especially if they had not been informed in advance. The men in this study "had done little else during their working years, they had few skills that could make them employable outside the mine, and they expected to be able to continue as miners throughout their lives" (Seidman, 1993: 27). Molemohi recollected how he received the news about his retrenchment from the mines:

I was shaken, I did not receive the news casually ... This was a very difficult time for me because I took it that I would have to clear my accounts with the money that I was given for retrenchment. It scared me because I realised that I would have nothing to live on in the time that I would be looking for another job.

Mats'ela said that his greatest fear had been about finding another job. He had not been informed about retrenchment in advance. This is how he expressed his feelings:

This was very sad because it was unexpected. I kept wondering where else I would get a job, especially taking into account how scarce employment opportunities were in Lesotho.

Petlane said that he saw a very confused workforce of elderly people who had been informed that they were being retrenched. He recollected:

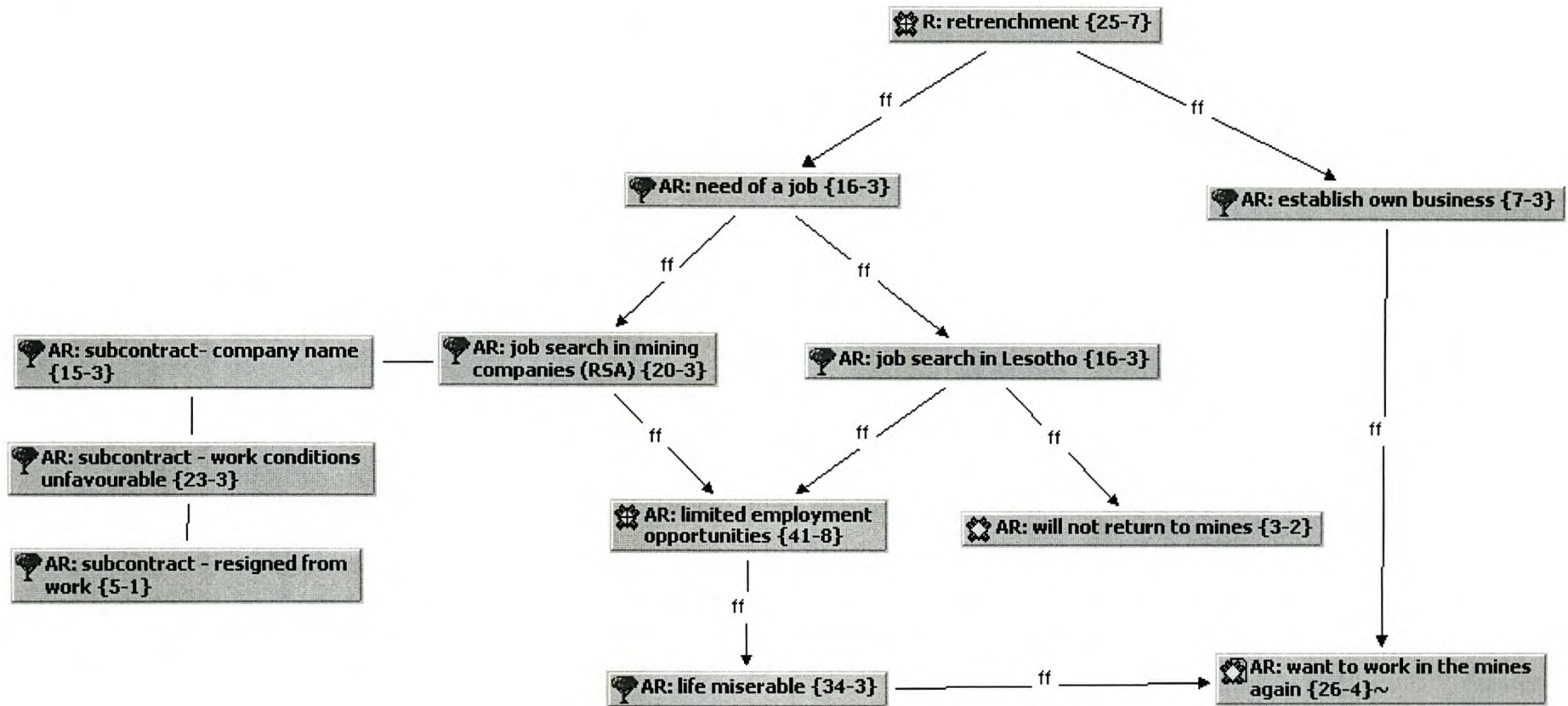
... those who had been informed that they would be retrenched soon were very confused. The news was very disturbing. It was also dangerous because the incidence of accident occurrence was very high after they had learned. It is emotionally distressing for a worker to know that he might lose his job.

In addition to the emotional stress suffered as a result of retrenchment, mineworkers feared unemployment because their survival and the survival of their families depended on a reliable income.

5. Life after retrenchment

After the men had been retrenched from the mines, they followed two distinct routes: one group established businesses immediately after retrenchment, and the other group started looking for alternative employment (refer to Figure 4). Those who looked for alternative employment searched in Lesotho and in the South African mining industry. In South Africa they were largely subcontracted to mining companies where working conditions were dangerous, which caused many miners to resign. Some of those who looked for work in Lesotho did so in earnest because they did not want to return to the South African mines for employment. Fundamentally, the group that needed jobs expressed concern about limited employment opportunities both in Lesotho and South Africa, which made their lives extremely difficult. Nevertheless, most of them expressed their desire to return to South Africa for permanent employment in the mining industries.

Figure 4 The life of the mineworkers after retrenchment



5.1 Workers who established businesses

This group immediately invested the money they received after retrenchment in their own businesses. Some of these men had already established businesses prior to retrenchment. A variety of businesses were undertaken, but the most common were shop keeping or running a taxi business. Tsebo's describes his situation as follows:

When I first reached home, immediately after I had been retrenched, I engaged in several activities until I finally bought a combi (taxi). That was after almost a year. It was because I did not see any progress in the other things that I was doing. I then decided to venture in the taxi business.

Moeletsi invested his retrenchment package in a clothing shop immediately after he had been retrenched. He said: "Immediately after retrenchment I started a small business where I sold clothing in my village."

5.1.1 Unsuccessful businesses

Seidman found that some of the businesses started by retrenched miners failed (1995: 183), and this trend is also visible in the group of workers interviewed for this study. When a business failed to yield the expected rewards, the owner opted out of it and looked for other forms of employment. Chabeli, who had been retrenched from *Hartebeesfontein*, decided to stop operations of his business because it was not doing well.

I was running my own business. I have two taxis that commuted between Maseru and Thaba-Bosiu. In the four years that I was running the business, I realised that prospects for growth in the industry were limited. ... My business was not growing. When I heard that mining companies were recalling their former workers I visited their site and was successful.

Some respondents indicated that their businesses had collapsed, and they were therefore forced to look for alternative employment. This is the feedback that was given by Thabang, who was retrenched in December 1998: "In 1999 I bought a taxi so that I could engage in the taxi business. Unfortunately, at the beginning stages of the business, the taxi was involved in an accident."

Informants whose businesses failed generally looked for employment in the mining industries.

5.1.2 Successful business

Other informants reported that their undertakings were successful. They however pointed out that they could not entirely depend on the profits generated by their business, because it would cause its collapse. They therefore considered other forms of employment to complement the income generated by these operations. Makuta, who had been running a 'spaza' shop since he had been engaged in the mines, explained:

... understand that in order for me to run the business effectively and profitably I need a job. If I depend entirely on a business like this one, it will not yield any profit. I would not meet all of my family's needs with the money that is generated by this business.

In addition, Thabo who was in the dog business seemed to be concerned about the sustainability of his business when he was not employed. He pointed out that he needed a job in the mines so that his business could improve, he said:

I have big dogs and I sell them. The problem that I am faced with is that I use the money generated in this business as soon as I receive it. Now I wonder how I am going to sustain the business. This kind of business functions well when I am employed in the mining industries because providing meals for these dogs is very expensive.

It was interesting to note that mineworkers who operated businesses that were considered to be successful also wished to return to the mines to get money to invest in the development of these businesses. They said that they needed permanent jobs.

5.2 Alternative employment

5.2.1 Employment in the South African mining industries

This group of informants looked for alternative employment immediately after they had been retrenched. They searched for employment in both the South African mining

industries and in Lesotho. Amongst them were men who only wanted to return to the mines and who therefore never looked for employment in Lesotho. When they were in Lesotho, they visited mine recruiting agencies only. Morena did not look for a job in Lesotho when he was retrenched but searched in South Africa, as he wanted to work in the mines. He said: "When I was retrenched from *Joel Mine* I did not come home but went around the mining houses looking for another job."

Ts'eliso indicated that when he was retrenched he went to his father's workplace to wait at the mining compound so that he could be considered for a job. When he returned to Lesotho without having obtained a job he visited *Teba* regularly. He said:

I went to Rustenburg where my father is employed to look for a job and I stayed in the area for almost one year but did not get a job. I returned home and started coming to *Teba* from January this year. I come here frequently.

Besides informants who decided to search for employment in South Africa, there were those who had looked for jobs in Lesotho but had not been successful. They claimed that Lesotho had limited employment opportunities and they decided to look for employment in the South African mining industries. Lesotho has a serious unemployment problem that is worsening as migrant labourers are being retrenched (CBL, 2001: 22). Thebe waited at the Lesotho manufacturing industries hoping to be employed but had not been successful until he decided to visit *Teba*. He commented:

Lesotho seems to have problems because there are no job opportunities. The manufacturing sector employs women only so I know that I can never get a job in this country. Hence I decided to come to this place (*Teba*) where I know that there is a possibility that I will obtain a job.

Potlako also complained about gender discrimination in employment in Lesotho. He believed that employment opportunities were only open to women irrespective of the fact that men could undertake the task. He argued that he had learned to sew in the mines, but that "[i]t is only the women who obtain jobs in the manufacturing sector, men are not considered yet we can undertake the job. This country only employs women while men are ignored."

5.2.2 Subcontracting in the South African mining companies

Employment in the mining industries is no longer guaranteed as it was in the past. In the event that Basotho men failed to obtain employment in the South African mining industries and in Lesotho, they were subcontracted to companies in the mines. The use of subcontracting companies in the mines have reached epidemic proportions because they do not have to conform to regulations stipulated under the *Labour Relations Act (LRA)* of 1997, the *Mining Health and Safety Act (MHSA)* of 1996 and the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act* of 1998 (NUM, 2002).

Men who have been subcontracted to companies in the mines increased their employment potential because they were often re-contracted to the same, or another, company. Subcontracting companies usually moved with the same working team to the site where they had been contracted anew. Petlane, who had been subcontracted to more than two different companies, describes this practice as follows:

I proceeded to the third company when I changed from *Harmony Mine*. I went to where I was dismissed in August 2001.... I returned home in order to look for a job. I went to *Teba* and was employed at *Blaaiskop*.

5.2.2.1 Working conditions under subcontracting companies

Subcontracting companies are generally known to subject workers to extremely unfavourable working conditions (Crush et al, 2001: 7). The disadvantages are low wages the instability and insecurity of employment, and dangerous working conditions. Petlane agreed that the working conditions under subcontractors in the mines were highly unfavourable:

The conditions were rough, especially when working under contractors because they work within a tight time frame. Their terms of contract are based on the completion of a certain task. They are not guided by any regulations, which is greatly different from the way that proper mines operated. For this reason, contractors subject workers to extremely unfavourable working conditions. For example, people could start work at 0300hrs and retire at 1800hrs.

Comparing the working conditions under subcontractors with those in the mining industries, Morena confirmed that employment under subcontracting companies was extremely difficult. He pointed out that it was better for miners to work in the mines than to be subcontracted to companies in the mines. He stated:

There is a big difference between employment in the mining industries and being subcontracted to companies in the mines. Contractors are out to oppress workers unlike mining companies that operate compassionately. It is safer for a worker to be employed in a mining company than to work under a contract.

Morena further commented:

Being subcontracted to a company in the mines is the worst thing that can ever happen to anyone. Being employed by a mining company is a blessing compared with the contractors because people work like slaves under subcontractors. For one, contractors do not recognise public holidays and weekends.

The working conditions under subcontractors were said to be extremely taxing, so much so that the informants felt that they had been treated like slaves. They furthermore commented on the misfortune of their circumstances, which forced them into accepting the dismal working conditions, particularly considering the low wages received for this exhausting work.

- ***Wages***

The wages offered by subcontracting companies are extremely low, lower than those offered in the mines. The *NUM* (2002) reported that most of the people who had been retrenched in the past years were currently subcontracted to companies in the mines. It pointed out that some of them were employed to do the same jobs they had done before, but under conditions far inferior to their previous places of employment. Most workers earned half the wages they had earned when they were permanently employed. Mohau commented:

I did the same job that I did while I was employed in the mines; I operated the machine. But I somehow felt that my position had been graded

differently from when I had been employed in the mines, I thought that it was lower. I felt like I was at the lowest level of the ladder because the wage that I was earning was equal to that I earned as a labourer in the mines.

Informants believed that the work they did was not commensurate with the wages earned under subcontracting companies. They indicated that they worked for long hours under unfavourable working conditions and earned extremely low wages. Molemohi related:

The working conditions were unsatisfactory; we worked very hard under this company yet the wages were very low. I think we worked for twelve hours per day; we started at 0500hrs and ended our day at 1700hrs. It was sad because the wages that we earned were very low despite the hard work that we did.

- ***Dangerous working conditions***

Subcontracted men said that they usually undertook activities that were considered to be the most dangerous in the mine. Crush (2001: 23) and the *NUM* (2002) report that the health and safety standards under subcontractors were highly compromised. Subcontracted miners worked in the most dangerous sections of the mines where regular mine employees and their union representatives refused to work. This is despite the rigidly defined health and safety rights by the *MHSA* of 1997. The Act accords a worker the right to refuse to work in a dangerous place. Basotho men are usually subcontracted as shaft sinkers and they confessed that the work was very dangerous. Guy & Thabane's (1988: 268) report similar results regarding the dangerous work that the Basotho miners were exposed to. This is how Manamolela described the conditions:

Working as a shaft sinker is extremely dangerous, very dangerous. We are always grateful at the end of the day when we are still alive. If you see a rock approaching you for example, there is no way of avoiding it. All we do is trust in the powers of God Almighty because we still continue to work.

- ***Accidents at the work place***

The miners explained that the accident rate is remarkably high among people who worked under subcontractors because they tended to work for longer hours. They said that workers who were injured at work were not attended to, nor compensated for the injuries suffered. Unlike permanent employees, subcontracted workers did not receive medical attention when they had been injured at work (NUM, 2002). Mats'ela, confirmed this report by saying:

If you are involved in an accident and sustain injuries while working, you are not taken to the hospital. Also if you die while working in the mines when working under a subcontract, your family is not compensated, as would be the case if you are employed by a mining company. If the family is compensated, the amount is not substantial, as would be the case if the victim were a proper mineworker. In essence, subcontracts operated differently from the mining industries.

The above statement confirms the findings by Ulicki, who argues that subcontracted miners do not receive medical attention if they were injured (1999: 64),

Despite the extremely unfavourable working conditions that subcontracted miners were exposed to, Basotho men mentioned that they felt compelled to work in the mines because there were no jobs available for them in Lesotho. They regard the conditions under which they worked to be exploitative (Crush, 2001: 26). Mats'ela commented:

Considering the problems that face us in our lives, we do not have a choice but to work for subcontractors. It is better to work for a contract than to be unemployed and wait at the mine recruiting office with the hope that you will be employed to a proper mine.

Mohau mentioned that he had observed that most of the Basotho men undertook subcontracted activities even though the working conditions were highly unsatisfactory. They felt that they would rather be employed than live in Lesotho without jobs. "As such, they are more vulnerable, and are likely to accept wages and working conditions that South Africans shun" (Crush, 2001: 12).

Due to the high unemployment rate in Lesotho, it was reported that there were workers who forged certificates of competence in order to secure employment in the mines (Ulicki, 1999: 62). Petlane raised this comment:

It saddened me to see other people at work who had to operate machines that they had never operated before. ...Due to poverty and unemployment in Lesotho, people forge certificates in order to secure employment in the mines.

- ***Resignation from work***

Morena and Petlane mentioned that they found the working conditions under subcontractors to be extremely unsatisfactory and that they decided to resign from work. Morena complained about the low wages that were offered in comparison to the amount of work that was undertaken. He said that the wage he earned did not allow him to progress socially and he decided to resign. On the other hand, Petlane said that the working conditions had been unbearable; he said that they had worked extremely hard at dangerous sites and under unpleasant working relations. He said that he felt obliged to resign despite the narrow employment opportunities and poverty in Lesotho.

5.2.3 Seeking employment in Lesotho

The last category consisted of one informant (Neo) who looked for a job in Lesotho. He was upset that the Lesotho government failed to absorb retrenched mineworkers into its economy. He had been retrenched from the mines in 1998 and was still unemployed. Nonetheless, he was convinced that he would not return to the mining industries for employment because the working conditions were too harsh.

I can never submit my application form or passport to be considered for employment in the mines. I would never. I will never work in the mining industries again in my entire life because of the oppression. However, I am disappointed at the Lesotho Government, it hires us out so that it can generate income for the country but it does not want to create jobs for us when we return home.

Securing employment in Lesotho is clearly not easy for retrenched mineworkers. If they are employed, their jobs last for only a few months. Lebaka gave this report: "I obtained another job in February of the same year, I was in luck. This job also lasted for three months, which is similar to the last one that I had."

5.3 Means of survival while unemployed

All the men interviewed for this study were unemployed and I therefore needed to establish how they managed to survive without an income. Most of them indicated that they depended on agricultural production and assistance from family and friends. They said that they cultivated their crops simultaneously with searching for employment. "Very poor households in Lesotho depend largely on assistance in the form of food, money and clothing ('gifts') from children, relatives, friends and neighbours" (Care, 2001: 26). This is the response given by Mohau:

I cultivate my fields, I engage in crop cultivation. Although at times I sell clothes, I am actively involved in agricultural production. I have one piece of land. ... Sometimes the produce is not good because of unfavourable weather conditions and this is very problematic especially when I do not have other sources of income.

Molemohi mentioned that he received assistance from friends and family members while he was unemployed:

During this time my two sons who are employed in the mining industries assist me. When they visit home for the weekend they usually give me some money to purchase a few goods for the family. Besides that I cultivate crops for subsistence.

The men faced many difficulties, and some had to rely on short-term casual work to make ends meet. It was indicated that the money earned at the end of the 'piece job' (casual work) did not allow them to invest in anything worthwhile. Motsamai gave this information: "I have not been employed for more than 3 days. Usually it is for a day or two times in a week. I have never been engaged for more than one month."

Although most workers took on casual work to survive, they did not see it as a solution to their problem. Thebe emphasised that he did not consider casual work to be a proper job because it lasted for a short period of time and was very unreliable.

Sometimes I do piece jobs but they are very rare. The longest period that I was engaged for was a week and it takes long before I could find another one. Hence I mentioned that my life was difficult. I cannot consider these engagements to be jobs; it is similar to obtaining assistance from members of my family. We look for them because we are desperate but it is very rare that you find them.

Other informants indicated that they used savings from previous mine engagements for survival, while another one owned property, *malaene* or linear-pattern one-room flats, which he was renting out.

5.4 Desire to return to the mining industries

Informants pointed out that their lives had been comfortable when they were employed in the mining industries. They admitted that they were encountering severe economic problems ever since they have been retrenched from the mines. For that reason, they all felt that they wanted to return to the mines for employment. The one thing worse than having a mine job in South Africa is not having one (Coplan, 1993 cited in Crush, 1995: 25). The informants who wanted to return to the mines included people who had been subcontracted to companies in the mines, as they want to be permanent mineworkers, and those who had established businesses because their businesses had failed. Summarised below are the explanations that were given by the informants for wanting to return to the mining industries.

5.4.1 Employment

Most informants said that they wanted to return to the mines because they needed employment. They pointed out that they needed permanent jobs that would allow them to take care of their families, because even though they engaged in agricultural

production, it could only be sustained with earnings from the mining industries. Maema said:

My crops depend on some form of income. I cannot afford to buy fertilisers and other things that are needed to ensure good produce. I think it is better for me to return to the mining industries.

The transferability of skills acquired in the mining industries is limited, according to Thabane & Guy (1984: 13). Interviewees did not know sectors in Lesotho that could utilise their skills, and they therefore did not know where to look for jobs. They pointed out that they did not have the appropriate qualifications for the economy of Lesotho.

This is because I do not know whether I will get a job if I searched in other sectors. On the other hand, I am definite that I can obtain a job in the mining industries. I do not have qualifications for employment in Lesotho

5.2.4 An option of generating money quickly

Employment in the mines is considered to be an option for generating quick cash (money) either to start a business, or to build houses. Crush describes how this practice had been phased out when the stabilisation policy in the 1980s was adopted: "Stabilisation implied that a regular, predictable flow of labour between the miners and the rural reserves was established and mining was no longer a temporary expenditure for the army of unemployed, waiting for easier, better-paid jobs" (1991: 151). It is apparent that most of the miners were not aware of the changes that had happened in the structure of the migrant labour system and still believed that entry was as easy as it had been in the past.

5.4.3 Capital for starting businesses

The other informants appeared to understand that the age of guaranteed employment in the mines had ended. However, they still hoped that they would return to the mining industries in order to earn wages, with which they could establish businesses to earn a salary that would improve their economic situation. They pointed out that they wanted to reduce their dependency on employment in the mines by operating their

own enterprises, and that they needed a wage that could be used as capital for new operations. This is what Molemohi aspires to:

But I am still hoping to obtain a job in the mines so that I can generate capital to establish a business so that I will not depend on employment in the mines. I need to establish a business that will enable me to live well even when I am not employed in the mines.

The businesses that informants wanted to establish were generally the same. Most of the men wanted to build *malaene* because these tend to yield good returns, as Mats'ela's response showed:

Building *malaene* can generate good returns. I believe that these would be very helpful. ...This can generate enough money for family subsistence as well as for the children's school fees.

Egg production was also high on the list of business options because it could generate money very quickly.

5.4.4 Educational reasons

Some of the interviewees regretted failing to take advantage of the education offer while they were still employed in the mines. They therefore wished to return to the mines to advance their education. They aspired to be re-employed in the mines so that they could go to the school that is run in the mining industries.

A thought keeps crossing my mind very often, that if I can be fortunate enough to secure a job in the mining industries once again, I know better. Although I have matured, I believe that I can improve my life, which is something I never thought about before I was retrenched. I feel that I could attend courses offered at the mining school. (Lebaka)

Motsamai also wanted to return to the mines to improve his education through Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). This is a programme provided in the mining

industry to eliminate illiteracy and innumeracy on the mines (*Mining and Minerals Policy*, 1995).

If only I could secure a job in the mining industries again. There is a programme called ABET, it is an educational programme for adults. They assess your capabilities and determine the stage at which you can start the programme. If I could obtain a job in the mining industries again so that I could follow that programme, I think it would be a blessing.

6. Concluding remarks

This chapter presented the results that were obtained when an enquiry about retrenched migrant labourers' lives was conducted. It revealed that migrant labourers generally have a very low educational base. Most of the men were primary school dropouts or had never attended school, whereas those who did attend high school also dropped or had incomplete schooling.

It also showed that young Basotho males were drawn into the migrant labour system because it had become part of the Basotho culture for them to migrate to the South African mining industries for employment. Lack of employment opportunities in Lesotho, coupled with influence from their peers, also played an instrumental role in encouraging the men to migrate. The mines equipped workers with various skills that were specific to the mining industry and useless in other employment sectors. Some informants reported that the working conditions were unfavourable because they earned low wages, whereas others said that they had been satisfied with the working conditions in the mines.

When the price of gold dropped on the international market, the men were retrenched and repatriated to Lesotho. In Lesotho they encountered difficulties because they were unemployed and they therefore wanted to return to the mines for employment. The mining industries could not absorb them permanently, and subcontracting became the only means of employment available to them, despite the low wages paid and the dangerous working conditions that prevailed because they were not protected by the *NUM*. Some informants established businesses that ultimately collapsed and they also

aspired to return to the mining industries for employment. In summary, most men said that they needed to return to the mines for employment.

The next chapter presents the research findings on the retrenched mineworkers' attitudes to and perceptions of education and training.

Chapter 5

Retrenched Mineworkers' Attitudes to and Perceptions of Education and Training

1. Introduction

This chapter reports on the retrenched mineworkers' attitudes to and perceptions of education and training. In the first part of the chapter, interviewees' responses are presented, and in the second part these responses are interpreted against the background of their life histories presented in the previous chapter.

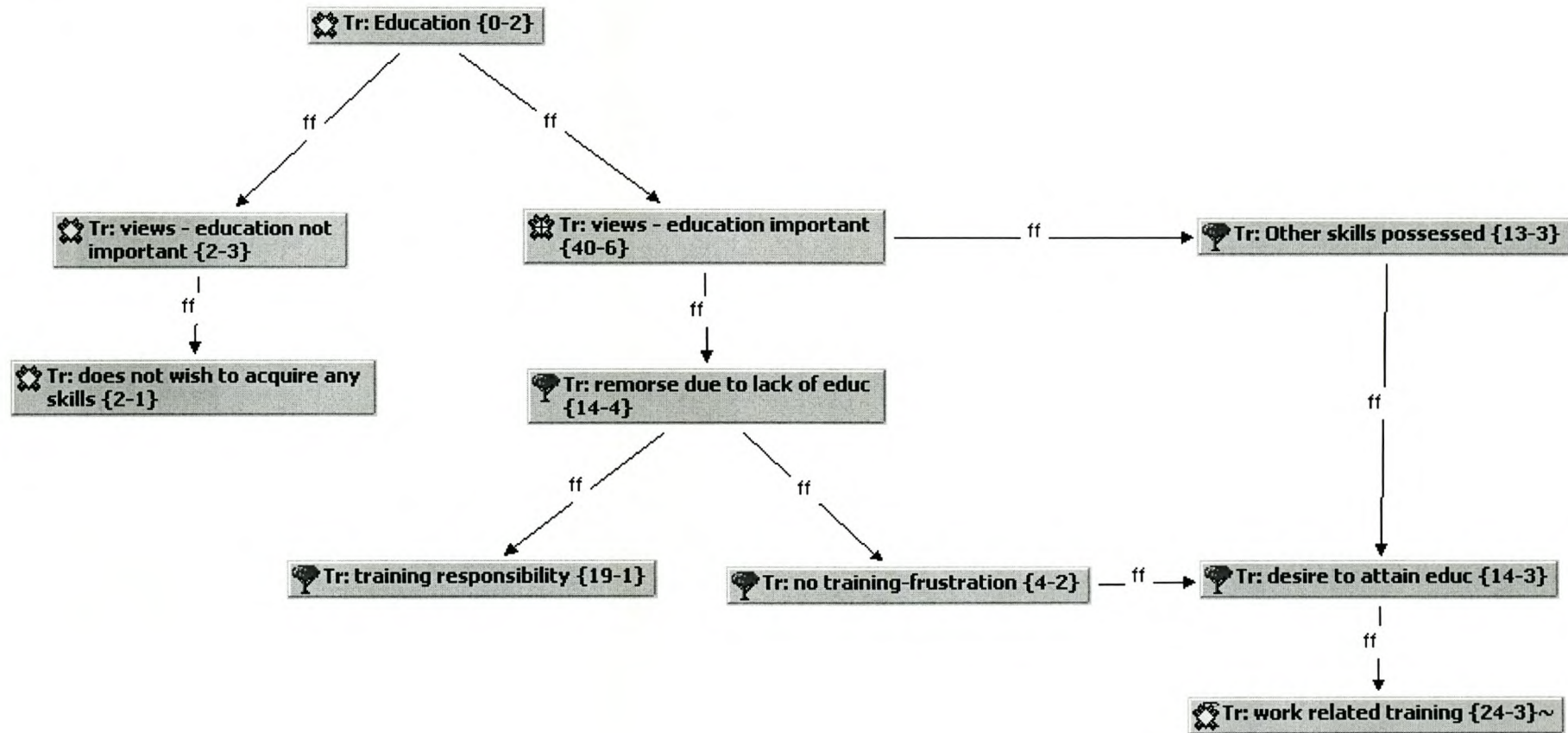
2. Education and training

The mineworkers' opinions about the importance of education can be grouped into two categories: those who believed that education was not important and those who believed that it was important. Interviewees who considered education not to be important indicated that they did not wish to improve their education by acquiring new skills (see figure 5).

On the other hand, interviewees who regarded education to be important showed remorse and frustration over their lack of education, and they attributed their lack of education to particular people in their lives. Furthermore, they expressed their desire to obtain an education, and in most instances, they pointed out that they would rather wait until they were employed so that they could receive training that is relevant to their work. The men who possessed other skills than those offered in the South African mines also pointed out that they were interested in acquiring skills.

Most of the retrenched migrant labourers acknowledged that education was important. Out of the twenty-six men interviewed for this study, twenty-four informants considered education to be important, one thought that it was not important, and one informant believed that education could be both important and unimportant.

Figure 5 Education of the mineworkers



2.1 The education of the migrants

"Migrant labourers generally have a low educational base" (Ulicki, 1999: 62). This is reflected in the research sample, which consisted largely of primary school dropouts, those with no schooling, and a few informants with incomplete schooling.

2.1.1 The informants' skills profile

The miners possessed a wide range of skills and experience acquired in the mines (Thabane & Guy, 1984: 13; *Sechaba Consultants*, 1997: 6). This is in spite of the fact that they were employed without skills or substantial educational qualifications. When they reached the mines, they received the relevant training. Workers usually moved through at least three different jobs during their employment period and they thus acquired different skills. This is the response that Lebaka gave regarding training in the mining industry: "Yes I was trained for the job before I started working, I was taught how to operate the machine as well as bore holes in the rocks so that gold could be mined."

In other instances, informants initiated the process of acquiring new skills at work because they were eager to earn higher wages. Molemohi reported:

I discovered that machine operators were earning a much better wage than that of labourers. One of my colleagues taught me how to operate the machine and when I was competent in the skill I requested our supervisor to enrol me in the school so that I could be graded. I attended the mining school where I polished my skills and qualified with the skill.

The mineworkers had acquired many skills in areas ranging from winch driving, machine operating, fitting, stoping and leading teams. Other informants acquired skills to ensure that they obtained jobs easily, because having a broad range of skills qualifies them for more jobs in the industry. Interviewees liked to boast about their skills and said how easy it was to obtain jobs with their many skills. Morena proudly said: "I have many certificates with different skills so if there are vacancies I am definite to obtain a job."

2.2 Views regarding education

There were varying opinions about the importance of education and training amongst the informants. For some, retrenchment seems to have been a turning point, because it made them aware of the role education plays in their current situation. Many regretted their decision to leave school when they had the opportunity to continue because their parents were able and willing to pay for their schooling. Other informants wished that their parents could have understood the importance of education, and therefore encouraged them to pursue it. Significantly, all these informants regretted not attending school, or 'skuru mine', at the mining industries while they were still employed. Only two informants felt that education was not important.

2.2.1 Education is not important

The informants in the sample who believed that education was not important were Morena and Koto. Morena said "going back to school is a waste of time" and he could not picture himself going back to school, because he could no longer be a dependent (aged 30). He had been retrenched from the mines for about four years but had not been without a job for more than two months. He had been subcontracted to several companies in the mines over this period. Koto's response was as follows: "There is an emphasis about the importance of education but I do not understand because I do not consider it to be important". Koto continued to say that he did not wish to undertake any form of training because his life was comfortable as it was: "I am satisfied with my life. There is no difference in my life between when I was employed and now when I do not have a job. I am happy with my life."

2.2.2 Education is important

Informants who believed that education was important seemed to understand the significant difference it could make and they acknowledged that it impacted positively on people's lives. "The challenges that the men face economically and socially have

made them aware that skills development was not an option" (Daniels, 2002: 1). Moeletsi commented:

With respect to the current means of livelihood, I think that there is nothing more important than education. Education is extremely important. I think that everybody should be encouraged to pursue education of some sort. That is my principal objective in life; I want to work hard to ensure that my children receive the education that they deserve.

Although informants were convinced that education was important, they said that they would not pursue it because they felt that they had passed the schooling stage. They were however willing to pursue education if they could be re-employed in the mines. Some of the informants, such as Maema, pointed out that they wanted to work hard to ensure that their children were educated: "Well, it is something that I can never pursue anymore because of my age; I feel I am too old now. What I can do now is to work hard to ensure that my children are educated."

Informants agreed on this issue and they indicated that it was imperative to encourage their children to pursue education. For that reason, they felt it was necessary to obtain jobs that would enable them to afford their children's education. They did not want their children to lack education/training.

2.2.2.1 Informants who possessed mining skills only

Informants who possessed mining skills only and considered education to be important revealed that they did not understand the importance of education until they had been retrenched from the mines. They had not acquired any other skills aside from those offered in the mining industries. Mojela acknowledged:

It is only now that I understand that education is important, I wasted my time when I dropped out of school and decided to take up employment in the mines. If I had not defied my parents and continued with my education I might have not worked in the mines. It is only now that I understand the importance of education. I behaved like a young man without thinking seriously about my future and concentrated on what I wanted then. I did not understand that my parents were giving me a gift.

Amongst the people who considered education to be important, were those who lamented their low educational qualification and regretted not taken advantage of the education offered to them by the mining industries. They explained that it was because they did not understand the importance of education until they were retrenched from the mines. Lebaka believed that he could improve his situation if he returned to the mines:

Although I have matured, I believe that I can improve my life, which is something I never thought about before I was retrenched. I feel that I could attend courses/training that are offered at the mining school.

a) Remorse and frustration due to lack of education

These informants felt great remorse at not having used available opportunities, and they saw their unemployment as a direct result of their extremely low education, because employment opportunities in Lesotho are largely open to educated people. Thabane and Guy (1984: 11) also found that ex-miners expressed a sense of failure and disappointment at their low, or lack of, education, and suggested that it was an important cause of their present predicament. Lebaka said:

Due to my lack of education or skills, I cannot possibly obtain a job in this country. What can I present in front of the employers? They require education certificates so that they can employ people and I do not have them. The sad aspect to it all is that even if I was to open a shop, I doubt if it would be successful. My lack of education is really a limitation, a real big problem.

The men were greatly saddened by the fact that their present unemployed state implied that they could not afford their children's education. They expressed disappointment at the Lesotho government for failing to create employment for them.

Education is a new phenomenon in Lesotho, it was not important. They do not realise that this is a vicious circle; children from families whose parents are not employed will have no education and will face a difficult life that is similar to their parents'. Only those children whose parents are employed will attain education, but the government is not addressing this issue. (Maema)

The other concern that informants in this category raised was that employers, including the mining companies, were no longer interested in people who were not educated. Although Morena had initially said that education was not important, he seemed to be worried that mining companies were retrenching them only to be replaced by a better-educated workforce:

My brother paid for my fees when I was in Form1 but then I left school, little did I know that I was killing myself. ...This saddens me terribly because the times are changing and the labour market requires people who are educated. I regret ... I regret the fact that I decided to drop out of school. I wish I had at least obtained a Std 9...Form C certificate before I decided to drop out, I believe it would place me in good stead in terms of employment.

Maema shared the same sentiment, he said:

Education is very important nowadays unlike in the past years. In our time education was not important and employment opportunities were many for people without education as opposed to today. Mining industries are now interested in people who are educated.

b) Responsibility for the informants' education

The informants argued that their lack of education or their low standard of education could be attributed to either their parents or to themselves. One group felt that the government of Lesotho was responsible for their lack of education.

- ***Parental responsibility***

Most informants believed that it was the responsibility of parents to encourage children to go to school. Informants blamed their parents for their lack of education or their low level of education because they had not encouraged them to go to school. In some cases they had refused to allow them to attend school. For this reason, some

informants did not experience life at school because they were never given the chance to attend. Mohau, who had never been to school, sadly commented:

Without being judgmental or looking for a scapegoat for the position that I am in, but I believe that our parents misguided us. It is unfortunate that they did not understand the importance of education hence they did not encourage us to pursue education. There are many things that life offers today and education appears to play a significant role in achieving them.

The other informants stated that their parents did not want them to attend school and they therefore had been forced to pay for their own schooling. Motsamai sadly recounted how he had to alternate years between working and schooling in order to generate money to pay for his education:

My parents did not understand the importance of education. I don't know the kind of future they anticipated for me; I didn't understand them. I would enrol in school but I had no place to stay when I went to school. ...I could not live at home with my parents when I went to school because they would not allow me.

- ***Individual responsibility***

Informants who had decided to leave school despite the encouragement they received from parents felt that they were responsible for their low standard of education. Most of them emphasised that their parents had urged them to continue with their schooling when they dropped out but they had defied their parents. Ts'eliso regrettably agonised over his low level of education and blamed himself:

I find it to be very unfortunate today because my parents were still paying for my schooling. I cannot blame my parents for my lack of education but myself; I feel I am responsible because I decided to leave school.

Morena also blamed himself for his low level of education despite his previous comment that education was not important. He sorrowfully said:

I should have been responsible and continued with my education; I was stupid and got carried away. ... It was stupid of me to drop out of school because I wasted my time.

- ***Governmental responsibility***

The government of Lesotho was also held accountable for the informants' lack of education. Informants indicated that they had the desire to further their education but had not received proper guidance in the country hence they were not educated or did not complete their education. They indicated that career guidance initiatives were supposed to be the responsibility of the government of Lesotho. Thabang strongly recommended the following course of action:

I think that the government of Lesotho should be held accountable for providing career guidance in this country. This will benefit the country, the people and their families. The government should guide us, I feel that it should encourage and open doors for improvements in education and training. It should highlight the importance of education to the nation so that people can be eager to learn and acquire skills.

The other issue that was highlighted was accreditation of educational institutions in the country. They proposed that the government of Lesotho accredit all educational institutions in the country. They said that accreditation was vital in order to ensure that people were trained at fully accredited institutions. Thabang said:

It is entirely the responsibility of the government to accredit educational institutions in the country. For example, there are training institutions such as MDA that are specifically designed for migrant labourers. ... The qualifications that are obtained at this institution are not recognised, employers do not hire graduates from these institutions but prefer graduates from other institutions. I feel that training is the responsibility of the government and it needs to improve by accrediting all training institutions in the country so that training obtained can benefit trainees.

2.2.2.2 Informants who possessed other skills

There were informants who possessed other skills not related to the work undertaken in the mines. The skills were learned at different stages in the men's lives. Some men had acquired certain skills before they went to the mines, while others acquired them while employed in the mines. Some skills had been acquired after retrenchment. Phane

explained how he learned to knit jerseys and had acquired other skills before he went to the mines:

I was not formally trained but I acquired the skill from my elder sister who was already operating in the knitting business. I also learned how to repair shoes; I did not find it to be a difficult task when I attempted to do it on my own. I repaired shoes in my village in order to generate an income to maintain my family.

Potlako explained that he learned how to sew while he was still employed in the mines. He mentioned that the interest developed because he had purchased a sewing machine that was auctioned at the mine: "I attended sewing lessons offered in the mines and I acquired the skill. ... I decided to learn because I bought a sewing machine. I thought that I would use it for surviving when I was retired." This informant could also fix saddles, and these skills turned out to be very useful now that he was unemployed. Generally, the informants possessed many different skills other than those offered in the mines.

In addition to the skills that the informants possessed, they appeared to be eager to train in other skills. There was one informant, Petlane, who was pursuing another programme through distance learning. He said that he wanted to acquire many different skills because he wanted to be considered for many job opportunities in the labour market. He said: "Currently, I am taking a course in motor mechanics.... I have been in the programme for six months now, if I obtain a job I will not complete soon, otherwise, I should obtain my certificate in September."

Informants in this category appeared to be committed to improving their skills as well as to acquiring new skills that they believed would be of benefit to them in the future.

2.3 Training desired and anticipated benefits

When the miners were asked about the kind of training they would like to receive, or the type of skills they would like to acquire, many different options were proposed. They stated that human beings were never content with what they had but always want to improve, and that they would like to specialise in more than one skill. Despite

their wish to attain these skills, they seemed to understand their limitations in as far as acquisition of skills and training was concerned. Morena, for instance, said: "These are the skills that I wish to acquire though I realise that it is not easy because of my low educational qualifications."

Mohau stated that he needed courses in basic communication skills in an international language. He specified English as that language. He said that he needed skills that would allow him to converse with prospective employers so that he could obtain a job:

With respect to my age, I am not interested in a course that will qualify me for a job in the office, I need basic communication skills in an international language. I want to be able to communicate my ideas so that I can obtain a job and relate with my colleagues. That is all I want at this age.

The benefits from these skills sought after by the informants were basically similar. They said that they anticipated leading good lives, obtaining jobs, and that they believed that the skills were marketable. Molemohi, who had no schooling, said that if it were possible he would like to become a teacher. He said: "I would like to be a teacher. ... A teacher works for a long time in his life and there is never a time when he does not have a job. I would like to see that stability in my life."

Petlane pointed out that he was weighing options regarding the programme that he wished to pursue. He said that he was undecided between Accounting and Legal studies:

Actually, I am considering taking a course in accounting, I think it is highly marketable because people with this skill are scarce. Otherwise I prefer Law even though the training period is too long...I plan to undertake one of these programmes so that I will have something to fall back on if I encounter problems in South African mines and have to return to Lesotho. I realise that people with these qualifications lead the kind of life that I would like to lead; that is a good and a comfortable life.

Most informants said that they wanted to take courses in agriculture. They said that subsistence agriculture in Lesotho was the main source for livelihood for many families in Lesotho that do not have members who are engaged in formal wage employment.

Some of them said that courses should be offered nationally as it was very important for the development of Lesotho.

If training in agriculture could be promoted, I believe that many people's lives would improve. This is because there would be a reliable food supply for them and simultaneously jobs would be created. Courses in agriculture should be encouraged to people of all ages in order to promote a good life (Lerata).

The other informants mentioned that they did not know the courses that they could pursue. They said that they needed courses that would be relevant to the economy of Lesotho, and in turn immediately benefit them. Mojela, who had dropped out of school at primary level, said:

If I was educated I would have pursued a course that is marketable, I do not know but I believe that it would have been a programme that would be of benefit to me today. Since I am not educated, I do not know the skill that I could follow, I really do not know. Usually a person decides on the programme to follow based on his qualifications and that is something I don't have.

In spite of the skills that were desired by informants, they pointed out that they were only willing to undertake training if it was offered on the job. Most informants' needed to earn salaries while they acquired the desired skills. They said that they preferred work-related training. Maema said:

I can only undertake training that is related to the work that I am employed to do and would be generating money at the same time. I cannot attend school on a full time basis; I have to ensure that my children go to school. I am only interested in work-related training because it will generate money that will pay for my children's education.

3. Interpretation of information against the background of the life histories of retrenched migrant labourers

The lives of Basotho migrant labourers can be divided into four stages: the time before they went to the mines, the period when they were employed in the mines, the

retrenchment phase, and finally their life after they had been retrenched from the mines.

Basotho men either attended school or not, before they went to the mines. Some did not complete their schooling to engage in livestock farming, largely cattle herding, or they attended school along with minding the animals. In most instances, those who did go to school left to attend the traditional initiation programme with those who did not attend school. Upon completion of this programme, the men were of age and ready and willing to migrate to the South African mining industries for employment. Some informants did complete their high school education (incomplete schooling) before they went to the mines. This category of men did not attend the traditional initiation programme.

During the next phase the men were employed in the mines. They were employed at different mining companies throughout South Africa. They were employed as labourers, but one informant who was employed as a security guard until he was engaged on a new contract to work underground as an apprentice fitter. After four years of apprenticeship he qualified in the skill. The men who were employed as labourers acquired skills relevant to the industry and they were promoted to senior positions.

When the men arrived in the industry they were inducted and they received training for their specific job. Experiences and working conditions in the mines differed for the informants. It is generally known that the working conditions in the mines are unfavourable and highly dangerous (Crush & Tshitereke, 2001: 51), hence the industry is governed by the *NUM* and South African government policies to ensure the well being of the workers. There were different dimensions to the discussion about the working conditions in the industry. This was due to the men's different periods of engagement in the industry and the different types of work undertaken.

- Those who had worked before trade unions emerged considered the working conditions to have been satisfactory as they moved through the different phases. They mentioned that they had moved through a period of bad to improved working conditions at the time when they were retrenched.

- The group that had worked in the mining industries only after the emergence of trade unions considered the working conditions to have been unsatisfactory. They said that they had worked for remarkably low wages.
- Informants who were skilled and did some technical work seemed to have been absolutely content with the working conditions. They enjoyed their work and emphasised that their salaries were good.
- The group that had resorted to employment under subcontractors after retrenchment from the mining industries felt that the working conditions at the mining industries were favourable and pleasant. They stated that they had been totally satisfied with the working conditions at the mines, whereas conditions under contracted companies in the mines were considered to have been highly unfavourable in comparison.

The men were retrenched and repatriated to Lesotho. During the process of retrenchment, men were informed that they were being retrenched and proper arrangements were made before they were retrenched. These arrangements were, for instance, to give the men their severance payments (all interviewees had received their packages) and, in some cases, workers received training to deal with unemployment. Lastly, before the companies released and repatriated workers back to Lesotho, they promised to recall them when they needed more workers.

The last stage came after retrenchment from the mines. After receiving severance payments, most men reported to have used their money for maintaining their families. Even before the money received had been used up, the men started looking for employment in earnest. An alternative route for the other men after retrenchment was to invest the money in business establishments, which almost inevitably collapsed. When businesses collapsed, they also started looking for jobs.

Some men searched for employment in Lesotho while others searched in South Africa without considering Lesotho. The men who looked for employment in Lesotho considered all economic sectors, but they were disappointed because they were not employed. A contributing factor to this crisis was that the men returned to Lesotho with skills that were relevant to the mining industries and not to the Lesotho economy. Failing to be incorporated into the economy, the men concluded that employment in

Lesotho was offered to people with high educational qualifications. They also expressed disappointment in the Lesotho government for failing to address their situation. As a result, the men resorted to waiting at the mine recruiting agencies, hoping to be re-employed.

The men who searched for employment in South Africa usually waited at the gates of the mining companies where they had been employed. When they were not hired, however, they returned to Lesotho. In Lesotho they joined the group of men, who had failed to find jobs in other economic sectors in Lesotho, at the mine recruiting agencies. A few of these retrenched men had been subcontracted to companies in the mines, as opposed to having being employed as permanent mineworkers. Subcontracting companies are known to subject workers to highly unfavourable and dangerous working conditions, but Basotho men agreed to work because they were, and are, desperate for employment.

The men waited hopefully at the mine recruiting agencies because the mining companies had promised to recall them when they needed more workers. They gave many different explanations for their desire to return to the mines. Some informants wanted to return in order to generate capital for businesses that they wanted to operate. Others wanted to take advantage of the education offered in the mines because they believed that improving their education would broaden their chances for employment.

The explanation for retrenchment given to the migrant labourers was that the prices of gold on the international market lowered dramatically. Aside from this explanation, the men also believed that the mining companies were wanted to employ people with higher educational qualifications. These thoughts surfaced when they were unemployed, and they started thinking seriously about education and acknowledging its importance. Most informants reported that it was only after retrenchment that they understood the importance of education and wanted to improve their own education. Those who already understood the importance of education, and were unemployed as a result of their low educational qualifications, said that they now understood what it implied. The men further indicated that the realisation made them sceptical.

For some informants, understanding that education was important did not imply that they wanted to pursue it or improve their education. They felt that they were too old to undertake training, and instead wanted employment to earn salaries that would allow them to pay for their children's education. They were therefore committed to improving their children's future prospects, and they recognised that the age of raising male children without education to encourage them to migrate to the mines in South Africa was something of the past.

The understanding that employment in today's economy is dependent on education also contributed to the men's readiness to return to the mines for employment. This was despite the extremely unfavourable and dangerous working conditions that were prevalent in the mining industries. They had become extremely desperate because of the limited opportunities for employment in Lesotho, and they wanted to find employment to support and maintain their families and pay for their children's education.

4. Concluding remarks

Generally, the perception of the men regarding education can be described as positive. They acknowledged the importance of education and that it improves lives in the present economic climate. The informants have shown frustration with and remorse at their low educational qualifications, and they believed that if they had improved their education they would not be faced with the predicament of unemployment. As a result, they held themselves, their parents or the government of Lesotho responsible for their low educational qualifications.

Retrenched migrant labourers possessed a wide range of skills that were acquired in the mines but which were not useful in other sectors. The men seemed eager to acquire work and they were not interested in training that did not guarantee employment. They believed that they were too old to acquire training; instead, they specified that they needed jobs to earn salaries that would enable them to pay for their children's schooling and maintain their families. They accepted that education was important, and they wanted their children to be educated so that they would have a better quality of life.

The following chapter gives the conclusion of the study. It contains the interpretation and the recommendations that can be made based on the findings that unfolded.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendations

1 Introduction

The objective of my study was to explain the perspectives on and attitudes to education and training of retrenched Basotho mineworkers by using their career life histories. This chapter summarises the findings of the results that were obtained in the previous two chapters and continues by interpreting them. It concludes by proposing some recommendations.

2. Findings

Growing up in the mountains of Lesotho, Basotho men followed different paths. but their roads crossed when they worked in the South African mining industries. These men had either never attended school, or had dropped out of school at primary or at secondary level, or had incomplete schooling. Most of the informants who had never made it to school and who had dropped out of school, generally attended the traditional initiation programme. Upon completing the traditional programme, the young men migrated to the mining industries for employment. Informants with incomplete schooling migrated to the South African mines when they had completed their high school. Informants explained that they took up employment in the mines because there were no jobs in Lesotho.

With respect to the results that unfolded in the previous two chapters, it became clear that retrenched migrants thought highly of education. Although most of them have low educational qualifications, they seem to acknowledge that education impacted positively on people's lives. Having acknowledged that education is important, they believe that it was their obligation to ensure that their children were educated. Therefore, they preferred to obtain jobs to ensure that they would be able to finance their children's education. In addition, some of the informants pointed out that they wished to return to the mines so that they could study through ABET. Overall, all

informants wanted to return to the mines for employment, and they seemed confident of the possibility because the companies had promised to recall them.

3. Interpretation

Basotho migrant labourers' attitudes to and perceptions of education and training will be interpreted in terms of the role men play in the Basotho culture and the tacit knowledge that they have acquired as a result of training offered in the mining companies.

3.1 The role of men in the Basotho Culture

For the purpose of my interpretation, male roles are defined as "the social norms that prescribe and proscribe what men should feel and do" (Thompson & Pleck, 1987). Society expects the men to migrate to the South African mining industries when they come of age so that they can build homes and provide for their families. This also explains why the informants ultimately took up employment in the South African mining industries.

Constructions of masculinity in the Basotho culture are also rooted in the high value attached to agricultural production, for instance, the cultural significance of cattle ownership. As a result, the participation of young boys in their families' farming activities (e.g. cattle herding) was traditionally seen as far more important than formal education or schooling. The shift in the mineworkers' opinions about the importance of education resulting from their own sense of disempowerment and lack of control over their future careers are also interpreted in this thesis.

3.1.1 Life before working in the mines

Men in Lesotho are viewed primarily as breadwinners whose wages make family consumption and security possible. Thus, society implants a strong need for achievement in the men, which is represented by the building of stable homes and keeping many cattle. These expectations often implied employment in the South African mines so that they could provide for their households. This factor strongly

influences the men's perceptions of and attitudes to education because employment in the mining industries was guaranteed. The sector employed persons who were not educated and who were not skilled, and therefore, most of the informants did not prioritise education, but instead participated in the migrant labour system.

Agricultural production, e.g. cattle rearing, has for a long time been very important among Basotho. The number of herds of cattle that a Mosotho man had was a strong indicator of his wealth, hence it was very important for them to migrate to South Africa for employment to afford to buy cattle. The cattle accumulated were used to marry and to maintain their families thereafter. Prior to their involvement in the migrant labour system, they participated in agricultural production exclusively because parents had instilled the idea that agriculture was more important than education.

3.1.2 Life in the mining industries

Employment in the South African mining industries enabled the men to fulfil their role as providers in households; they were obliged to send remittances home. The men's lives at this stage suggest that they lived to conform to societal expectations. The societal obligation to maintain their families comfortably was very important to the migrant labourers because they transferred to other mining companies when they were not satisfied with their wages. They transferred to different mines in order to earn higher wages that would enable them to meet their obligations. In addition, the men were eager to acquire work-related skills, which qualified them for higher wages because they were promoted to senior positions. Considering that Basotho mineworkers were family breadwinners while employed in the mines suggests that and improving their educational qualifications was not prioritised because they were in fact already fulfilling societal expectations.

Furthermore, the men's involvement in the South African mining industries tended to shift their attention from exclusive participation in agricultural production to concentrate on generating income to finance their children's education. The men worked hard and were eager to earn high wages. They often expressed a feeling of satisfaction at their achievements when they could afford their children's schooling expenses. This information points to the fact that although they were brought up to

believe that agriculture is important, their perceptions had changed because they acknowledged that education was more important than agriculture.

3.1.3 Retrenchment

Changes in the migrant labour system intruded into the normal pattern of the Basotho migrant labourers' lives because they were retrenched. Retrenchment implied unemployment, which threatened their position as providers in households. This was a challenge to the men because they were unable to meet their family obligations. Their belief that the motivation behind retrenchment in the mines was to replace the current workforce with a more qualified workforce compelled them to reconsider their views of education and training. Their perceptions and attitudes changed especially when they realised that they would be unable to provide for their families during the period of unemployment.

Understanding that education was important made the men aspire to a better education for their children. Therefore, this also shows a pronounced change in the men's opinions towards agricultural production and education. This practice was different from the time when they grew up, a tradition/practice that emphasised the importance of agriculture, particularly cattle rearing.

Rather than the traditional forms on agricultural production (e.g. children became herdboys at an early age), the retrenched mineworkers now saw education as essential to their children's future success and security. They recognised that their lack of skills other than those relevant to the mining industry severely hampered their chances of employment in other sectors. The dependence on the mining industry, aggravated by the industry's promise to recall them if jobs became available, contributed to a sense of disempowerment and victimisation resulting from their obvious inability to control factors leading to the restructuring of the mining industry in South Africa.

3.1.4 Life after retrenchment

Retrenchments in the mining industries meant that Basotho mineworkers were repatriated to Lesotho. The men returned to Lesotho equipped with mining skills and

their absorption into the labour market of Lesotho was therefore not easy, especially because their low educational qualifications further limited their chances of employment. To secure employment outside the mining industries, it was necessary for them to acquire other skills (through education and training) that are relevant to the economy of Lesotho.

The participants in my study all endorsed the traditional Basotho male gender roles that construct men as the breadwinners in their households. Their strong desire to conform to this masculine ideal by bringing home a wage was not altered by the retrenchment from the mines. Migrant labourers still wanted to continue with their prescribed roles as breadwinners in their households. They felt that they would rather search for employment than attend school to acquire skills that would broaden their prospects for employment.

Consequently, the men appeared to be eager to return to the mines for employment, especially because the mining companies had promised to re-employ them when they needed more workers. This was in spite of the fact that migrant labourers' views of education and training were positive. They did not want to pursue education but preferred to be employed in order to provide for their families and be in a position to finance their children's education. Their understanding of the importance of education made them conscious of the fact that people with higher educational qualifications found work more easily. They consequently wanted their children to be educated, and wanted to work and earn wages to afford their children's education.

This implies a shift in the men's perceptions regarding the importance of education and training. Unlike in the past, they showed great concern when they could not afford their children's schooling instead of being comfortable when their children engaged in agricultural activities. The shift becomes clearer when the men become determined to undertake any activities, including being subcontracted to companies in the South African mines, to generate income that will finance their children's education.

There were a few informants who had acquired skills that are unrelated to the mines, including those whose training had been arranged by the mining industries. The one informant who did not want to return to the South African mines for employment

formed part of this group. Although migrant labourers' perceptions regarding education were positive, they found it difficult to grasp that they were skilled and yet unemployed. They also questioned how the other former mine employees that they knew of, who had attended training courses at *MDA*, were also still unemployed. The situation suggests a severe lack of employment opportunities in Lesotho, which supports the men's reluctance to pursue education. Instead, they chose to migrate to the South African mining industries for employment. Employment in South Africa would enable them to resume their role as breadwinners in their households.

For informants whose skills training had been arranged by the mining industries, the positive impact of education and training was somewhat unknown. Normally, successful completion of a training programme, especially offered in the mines, acts as an incentive in the employees' lives because it offers job advancement. In this instance, the situation unfolded differently because it was contradictory to the men's expectations. They did not retain their jobs but instead were retrenched, and prospects of obtaining new jobs are doubtful. This further explains why the informants were reluctant to acquire additional skills and preferred to look for employment to enable them to live up to societal expectations.

Another meaningful aspiration in the lives of retrenched migrant labourers was to gain stability. Employment in the South African mines promises a stable life with a regular income. Most of the men indicated that they wanted to be employed in the 'proper' mines where they would be employed as permanent mineworkers. They strove for stable lives that would allow them to plan for the future. Unemployment severely undermines any sense of being a Mosotho man because the man can no longer provide a regular income to support his family.

There seemed to be a slight misunderstanding with one informant who thought that education was both important and unimportant. This response could be described as denial because he failed to acknowledge that finding employment for a person with low educational qualifications was difficult. He based this opinion on his own regular employment due to being subcontracted to companies in the mines. He wanted to convince himself that the belief that education was important was false. On the other hand, he acknowledged that education was important because he regretted his

decision to leave school, and agreed that it would qualify him for a better job than that in the mines.

The other informant, who believed that education was not important, can be described as indifferent. It seems as if he had chosen to ignore the changes that happened around him, especially amongst his former co-workers who were experiencing severe economic constraints after retrenchment. He pretended not to understand their predicament because his life had not altered due to retrenchment from the mines. He said that his life was as comfortable as it had been while he was employed in the mines.

Informants lived in a state of desperation because they were not employed in Lesotho after retrenchment from the South African mines, and neither were they employed in the South African mines. Employment in the mines was no longer guaranteed, and in desperation to be employed and to resume their roles as breadwinners, the men accepted job offers under subcontracting companies in the mines. Subcontracting companies subject workers to highly unfavourable and dangerous working conditions and pay very low wages, but the men nonetheless agreed to be subcontracted to the companies because they preferred to be employed rather than be unemployed.

3.2 Tacit knowledge of the migrant labourers

In this phase of the interpretation, I will consider the tacit knowledge that Basotho migrant labourers have acquired and used whilst employed in the mining industries. The men were very knowledgeable about their work and displayed a high level of understanding and commitment (Polanyi, 1967: 14). For the context of this thesis, I have adopted Kraak's (1997) definition of tacit knowledge, that is, "the informational base and expertise accumulated over time, which is unique to a firm and upon which it builds comparative advantages in the global market place" (58). Kraal elaborates by saying that it is rooted in the actions of the workers and specific to the work that they do, and therefore, it is "practised by skilled workers in the workplace" (1997: 58).

3.2.1 Life before working in the mines

Formal education of the male children was not prioritised in Lesotho and most parents did not encourage their children to attend formal schooling. At a young age the men were expected to participate in agricultural production as herdboys and to attend traditional institutions. Although they were aware that they would eventually migrate to the RSA mining industries for employment when they came of age, they did not acquire skills that were relevant to the industry. Acquiring skills was not important because employment in the mining sector was guaranteed. The informants therefore did not prioritise formal education and training but aspired to be employed in the mining industries where they would learn new skills that would be relevant to the mining sector.

3.2.2 Life in the mining industries

Given that the men joined the migrant labour system without the skills needed in the industry imply that they had to acquire the appropriate skills whilst employed in the industry. This was important for them to ensure their relevance to the work place and to retain their jobs. In the industry, skills were learned by emulating team leaders or people who were already in the job. In some cases, the men managed to learn the skills on their own (without the instructor's guidance) because they were eager to advance in their careers and earn higher wages. Their ability to learn skills display understanding and commitment in their work, i.e. tacit knowledge. They were continuously eager to learn new skills, which ultimately qualified them for senior positions, such as team leaders, because of the experience they had accumulated in the industry over the years.

At this stage of the informants' career lives, mining industries appeared to appreciate the tacit knowledge that the informants had because they preferred employing foreign labour (including Basotho men) over domestic workers. It was argued that the men's skills were indispensable and that they showed great work discipline. Their knowledge gained them confidence and recognition in their work because they are renowned for being good shaft sinkers.

3.2.3 Retrenchment

Retrenchment from the mines brought about a change in the normal career lives of the mine workers. This phase of their career lives represented disappointment because their tacit knowledge was rendered obsolete by the mining industries and they were repatriated back to Lesotho. Since the knowledge embedded in them was unique to the mining industries, immediate absorption into the Lesotho labour force did not happen and they were discouraged. This resulted in a clear change in their perceptions regarding education. They considered education important because of the belief that they had been retrenched from the mines only to be replaced by a more educated workforce.

3.2.4 Life after retrenchment

When the migrant labourers had been retrenched from the mines and repatriated back to Lesotho, obtaining employment was not easy because their knowledge was oriented to the mining industries. In Lesotho they have not managed to obtain new jobs and prospects of obtaining it are doubtful. They realise that their knowledge is useful only in the mines and as a result, they are eager to return to the mines for employment.

As yet, Lesotho does not know how to utilise its human resource with regards to these men; however, mining companies have not forgotten about their capabilities. The companies sub-contract Basotho men to the mines in order to advance the mission of the mining industries. These companies prefer to employ them, knowledgeable workers, with mine work experience as opposed to novices. Their knowledge is valued in this sector even though they can only be employed on a contractual basis. These employment terms tend to frustrate the informants and they began to change their attitudes regarding education and training. They considered it important, particularly for their children because they did not want their children's careers to be confined to one specific industry as their own careers had been.

4. Conclusion

Education had not been important in the lives of the informants prior to retrenchment because they did not need an education to find employment in the mines. It was difficult for some informants to comprehend that mining industries were forced to retrench them because of the low prices of gold on the market and the changes in the structure of the migrant labour system. Their failure to understand these issues made them still eager to return to the mines. However, it is doubtful that their expectations will be met because South Africa cannot absorb foreign workers in great numbers as it did in the past because of the implementation of the internalisation policy.

The other informants understood the importance of education after they had been retrenched from the mines, but they saw it as a possibility for their children, more so than for themselves. This was because they still hoped that they would obtain jobs in other economic sectors regardless of their low education and skills that were only relevant to the mining industries. They also seemed to be reluctant to improve their education. They did not understand that it was crucial for them to acquire skills that would expand their prospects for employment in the Lesotho economy because their knowledge is invisible currently. Given the current economic situation in Lesotho, drastic improvements in the employment situation are imperative. Focus could be directed at sectors such as road construction. Road construction activities appear to be appropriate because the knowledge acquired in the mines is appropriate to the proposed new work environment.

The motive behind the men's desire to return to the mines was their desire to resume their roles as breadwinners that had been prescribed by society. Their strong desire to maintain their families suggests that these Basotho migrant labourers constructed their position in societies and households as the sole breadwinners. This also suggests a change in the manner in which they value education. The men desire to return to the mines for employment to ensure that they would afford their children's education because it has become of great importance to them. Further, they wanted to apply the knowledge they had acquired in the mines because they were aware that it would be profitable to them as well as the companies.

5. Recommendations

Given the findings and interpretations of this study, it is imperative to make the following recommendations and to show their implications. The issues that arose in the discussion about the interviewees' attitudes to and perceptions of education and training were linked to the society and the government of Lesotho. The recommendations that I give are directed at these two bodies. I conclude by identifying areas that I feel need to be researched further.

5.1 The government of Lesotho

- The Lesotho government should embark on an employment creation campaign in order to cater for the retrenched Basotho men. It is apparent that retrenchments from the South African mining industries are at the beginning stage, but Lesotho has already been adversely affected. Instrumental employment creation mechanisms should be devised to cater for currently unemployed retrenched migrant labourers as well as for those who will be retrenched in future. This would reduce the dependence of the Lesotho government on South Africa for employment of its male population, and it will alleviate the men's desperation to migrate to South Africa to generate an income that will enable them to support their families and finance their children's education.

The government of Lesotho has to recognise and utilise the very useful skills that the retrenched miners have developed in the mining industry by integrated the men into sectors where their skills can be adapted to suit the context. The men will, as a result, view their skills as empowering, which will in turn enable them to break their dependence on the South African mining industry and the mine recruiting agencies for employment. This implies that the Lesotho government will have to make a financial investment to establish such initiatives and projects, and it will have to set up structures to ensure that these projects are effectively implemented.

- The Lesotho government should assist migrant labourers who have started their own businesses and those who plan to start their own businesses. The government could provide training in management and other business skills. This will ensure

that Basotho retrenched migrant labourers do not always look to the government for employment but have the entrepreneurial skills to successfully set up and maintain independent businesses. A well-structured and managed training programme is essential to ensure success because, even though many retrenched miners do start their own businesses, these generally collapse. Many interviewees who were already operating businesses felt that they needed permanent jobs to help them complement the money generated in the businesses.

- The *Ministries of Education and Employment and Labour* should facilitate career guidance in the country, which should be based on the labour market skills demand. This practice will guarantee that appropriate skills are acquired to benefit both migrant labourers and the Lesotho economy. This will lower the unemployment rate while at the same time reducing Lesotho's dependency on South Africa for employment of its male population. To ensure the successful implementation of initiatives and projects, a thorough research process needs to be set in motion to gain adequate information about the skills needed in the labour market and to evaluate the miners' skills that are currently not utilised. In addition to information gathering, an extensive information dissemination campaign will have to be established to assist the unemployed miners in their career choices.
- A national unemployment benefit scheme should be established in Lesotho to encourage retrenched migrant labourers to pursue education. The aim will be to encourage retrenched migrant labourers to acquire skills by subsidising their basic needs during the training period. Furthermore, this would contribute to the building and maintaining of an exhaustive labour market database for the country, which will enable proper planning, because it will provide the necessary information in terms of the number of and the places where training institutions need to be established for retrenched mineworkers.

If these suggestions are taken up by the Lesotho government, it will be made clear to the retrenched miners that their contribution to the Lesotho economy during their past employment in the South African mining industry is recognised and valued. This will in turn address the debilitating effects retrenchment and unemployment have had on the men's sense of self worth because they were unable to provide for their families.

Recognising and validating the miners' ability to contribute to the Lesotho economy by adapting the skills they learnt in the mining industry for the Lesotho context will encourage the men to undergo further training, rather than wait on the South African mining industry to recall them to the mines.

5.2 Societies in Lesotho

- Basotho communities could encourage villagers to use the services provided by retrenched migrant labourers who have set up their own businesses to create a market for these operators. This would require collaboration with the *Ministry of Trade, Industry and Marketing* because they are experts in promoting and marketing businesses in Lesotho. Marketing committees (in the communities) that will communicate with government officials should therefore be formed to co-ordinate the programmes.
- Since education has been acknowledged to impact positively on people's lives, Basotho families are advised to encourage their male children to pursue education. It is apparent that the age of guaranteed employment in the South African mines where skills and education were not important has come to an end, and that education is essential for securing employment. This shift to prioritising education over agriculture implies a demand for proper planning and management of education in Lesotho to ensure delivery. Government funding will be necessary to build and maintain educational centres (infrastructure) and train and pay teachers (labour).
- Communities in Lesotho should refrain from exerting pressure on its male population by expecting them to become sole breadwinners in their households. It is also important that jobs are not gendered as either for men or for women, because it limits productivity. I believe that this would enable men to function more constructively and to contribute more meaningfully to society and families.
- Basotho retrenched migrant labourers are advised to engage in community based projects, particularly in agricultural production for commercial purposes. This is proposed because the men have shown an interest in crop cultivation/livestock

farming coupled with the fact that they were raised to believe that agriculture was very important in their lives. Engaging in these projects could also counteract the men's dependence on the government for employment. To ensure the success of these agricultural projects, the *Ministry of Agriculture* will have to set structures and funding in place to start and monitor these projects. On the other hand, communities will have to be committed to the initiatives.

6. Areas for further research

- I believe that there is a need to investigate the relationship between the construction of masculinity (i.e. being the sole breadwinners) and the low educational qualifications of retrenched mineworkers. Among other things, the objective could be to determine how their perceptions about manhood could be changed so that they are able to concentrate on improving their low educational qualifications (education).
- Informants commented on the fact that people who had acquired skills through *Mineworkers Development Agency* were still unemployed. It is therefore necessary to evaluate it and perhaps the *Ntlatfatsa Skills Training Centre* as well, to establish how they perform and how they can be improved to meet the needs of their target population.
- This research showed that Basotho men's tacit knowledge remains absolute in the context of Lesotho today, but, I believe that the situation can be reversed because knowledge has a purpose even if the results are not immediately measurable. An investigation regarding the men's tacit knowledge, generated through mine work over time, can be used in Lesotho to benefit both Basotho men and the economy of Lesotho.

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

Life in the mines

1. For how long were you employed in the RSA mines?
 - When were you retrenched?
2. What was the name of the mine that you were employed in?
3. What kind of work did you do?
 - Did you receive any training before you could undertake the job?
4. How did you experience your working conditions at the mine?
 - Most positive or most negative?
 - Job satisfaction.

Life history of the respondent

5. What did it come that you took up employment in the mines?
 - Other forms of employment before working in the mines?
6. What kind of formal schooling did you have before you were employed in the mines?
 - What is the highest qualification/certificate did you obtain?
7. Had you obtained any other training before you were employed?
8. Were there any other family members who were employed in the RSA mines?

Retrenchment

9. Can you relate precisely how the process of retrenchment happened.
 - Before you were retrenched from the mines, were you formally informed, that is, told a few months in advance?
 - Who informed you?
 - How was it revealed to you?
 - What explanation was given to you for the retrenchment?
10. What arrangements were made for you before you were retrenched?
 - Did you receive any psychological counselling?
 - Did you receive any career or vocational guidance?

Life after retrenchment

11. How has your life been like since the retrenchment?

- Have you been employed after being retrenched from the mines?
- If yes, what kind of employment is it/was it?
- Were you trained for the job?
- For how long have you been employed?

12. How do you survive (supposing the respondent has not been employed since retrenchment)?

Training

13. What are your views on training?

14. What skills would you like to obtain?

- What benefits would you expect to receive as part of the training?

If the respondent does not want to undertake any form of training, the following question will be asked:

15. Do you feel that you are currently sufficiently skilled or competent for another job?

Training and other bodies

16. Who do think is responsible for your training?

17. How is that? (Why?)

18. Reference to our discussion, is there anything else that you would like to tell me?