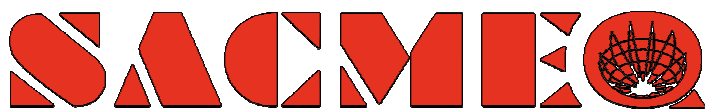


# Policy Brief

Number 6 (September 2011)



Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium  
for Monitoring Educational Quality

## Progress in Gender Equality in Education: Swaziland

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### Introduction

This policy brief deals with progress in 'gender equality' in primary education for the four districts in Swaziland by seeking answers to the following specific questions:

- What were the changes in the **proportion of girls' enrolment** at the Grade 6 level for the four districts in Swaziland between 2000 and 2007?
- What were the changes in the **size and the direction of the gender differences** in reading and mathematics scores for the four districts in Swaziland between 2000 and 2007?
- What were the changes in **selected gender-related school environment information** between 2000 and 2007 that could be further investigated in order to improve gender equality in education for Swaziland?

Answers to the above questions are expected to guide policy decisions regarding the gender-related interventions in education.

### Swaziland's Participation in SACMEQ

The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) is a network of 15 ministries of education (Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland,

Tanzania (Mainland), Tanzania (Zanzibar), Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe).

SACMEQ's mission is to: (a) expand opportunities for educational planners to gain the technical skills required to monitor and evaluate the quality of their education systems; and (b) generate information that can be used by decision-makers to plan and improve the quality of education.

SACMEQ undertook three large-scale, cross-national studies of the quality of education: SACMEQ I (1995-1999, reading) with seven ministries; SACMEQ II (2000-2004, reading and mathematics) with 14 ministries; and SACMEQ III (2006-2010, reading, mathematics, and HIV and AIDS knowledge) with 15 ministries. Swaziland participated in SACMEQ II in 2000 (3,139 Grade 6 pupils in 168 primary schools); and SACMEQ III in 2007 (4,030 Grade 6 pupils in 172 primary schools).

### The Importance of Gender Equality in Education

The importance of gender equality in education within the process of international goal-setting was emphasized in the Education for All (EFA) Goals (UNESCO, 2000) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (United Nations, 2006).

The gender equality issue in education has been a major concern in many countries, because of its link

with health and nutrition, economic development, and civic responsibilities. For the purposes of this policy brief, the concept of ‘gender equality in education’ follows the UNESCO (2003) interpretation, which refers to the notion of boys and girls experiencing the same advantages or disadvantages in attending school, receiving teaching methods, curricula, and academic orientation, and producing equal learning achievements and subsequent life opportunities.

## Gender-Related Policy in Swaziland

The Ministry of Education and Training is committed to ensuring that children are protected at all times. A number of initiatives are in place for the protection of the child, which include: the setting up of a National Children Coordinating Unit (NCCU), a Gender Desk within the ministry, and the Child Protection Centre with a ‘call-in-line’ for children to report cases of abuse. In addition, the ministry is also implementing the ‘Schools-as-Centres-of-Care’ project, which is a Southern African Development Community (SADC) initiative aimed at protecting the child, especially girls. There have also been activities that encouraged the participation of girls in science and technology, for example, the ‘Take-your-girl-child-to-work’ project, which aimed at encouraging girls to take up careers previously dominated by men (Ministry of Education, 1984).

The ministry is working on a national policy, which will address these issues in a coordinated and focused fashion. The issue of gender comes up in Swaziland due to the prevailing HIV/AIDS situation, and thus there is also a need to look at other aspects, such as teaching materials, the curriculum, and the teachers themselves with a view to making schools more child friendly. Gender has not been raised as a core issue at the primary level, presumably because there were no major differences in the enrolments between girls and boys in school. However, there appeared to be gender stereotyping in the subject choice at secondary level; certainly in the pre-vocational subjects, and so

probably also in vocational training. This is an issue at secondary level, where there is an increase in the number of girls dropping out. As the ministry works on its policy, a number of core issues will come up, and these might drive future policies of the country (World Bank, 2010).

## Gender Balance in Grade 6 Participation

Figure 1 shows the proportion of girls enrolled at the Grade 6 level for each district and Swaziland as a whole in both 2000 and 2007. Throughout all the SACMEQ studies, the use of a ‘scientific’ sampling method with an internationally required level of sampling accuracy ensured that the proportion of girls at the Grade 6 level in the sample reflected the entire Grade 6 target population.

At the national level, there was not much change in the gender balance at Grade 6 level. Although there was a slight drop from 52 percent of girls in 2000 to 50 percent in 2007, at the primary level, there was no gender disparity. In 2007, all of the regions except Hhohho recorded a decrease in terms of girls’ representation. The Hhohho region recorded an increase in the proportion of girls from 48 percent in 2000 and to 50 percent in 2007. Other regions showed a decrease of about 2 percent on average, resulting in a more gender-balanced enrolment. Generally, the gender balance was quite equal in Swaziland, when compared with other SACMEQ countries in terms of pupil enrolment.

## Gender Differences in Learning Achievements

While there were no major changes in Swaziland in terms of gender equality in enrolments between 2000 and 2007, policy-makers should be concerned about whether this enrolment trend was accompanied by greater gender equality in terms of learning achievements.

Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the gender and time differences in the learning achievements in reading and mathematics by district. The standardized scores with a pupil mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100 were established during SACMEQ II, based on the calibration of test items from the SACMEQ I and SACMEQ II studies. During SACMEQ III, use of the sub-set of these test items along with the Rasch-measurement approach permitted valid comparison of scores over time.

### Reading

At the national level in Swaziland, there were increases in the reading performances between 2000 and 2007. These averaged about 20 score points for both boys and girls. The almost uniform increases suggested that it was an overall improvement and did not favour any of the genders. However, as was observed in 2000, girls tended to do better than boys, by about 10 score points. This suggested that girls continued to perform better in reading than their male counterparts.

At the regional level, although all regions witnessed increases, some regions did not increase as much as others. Hhohho recorded a 5-score-point increase, whilst the other regions' increases ranged from 13 score points to 35 score points. The highest increase was achieved by girls in Manzini, where they recorded a 35-score-point increase from a mean score of 527 in 2000 to 562 in 2007.

### Mathematics

At the national level, the overall performance in mathematics increased by 27 score points for boys and by 22 score points for girls between the years 2000 and 2007. The smallest increase was observed amongst girls from the district of Hhohho, who only recorded an 8-point increase, which resulted in a larger gender difference in 2007 than in 2000. The largest increase was for the Shiselwen boys, who recorded a 41-score-point increase, thereby making the gender difference in this district larger in 2007.

They were followed by Manzini girls, who recorded a 37-score-point increase, resulting in virtual closure of the gender gap in 2007. Generally, boys outperformed girls in mathematics.

## Other Information through the 'Gender Lens'

The above sets of results illustrated two contrasting pictures regarding gender equality in primary education in Swaziland. Firstly, gender equality was in place in terms of participation at the Grade 6 level. Secondly, it appeared that the learning dimension of gender equality had been overlooked (Saito, 2010). The fact that girls performed better in reading, whilst boys were better in mathematics, raises concerns as to how the subjects are taught in schools. The results for SACMEQ II and SACMEQ III, regarding gender differences in performance, seem to suggest that the ministry has not done enough to improve the performance of girls in mathematics and that of boys in reading. To understand the context of these results, a set of selected gender-related indicators has been provided in Table 1. All the indicators shown in Table 1 should be interpreted in relation to the Grade 6 pupils.

### Female Staff

Increasing the female staff has been seen as a strategy for girls' success, since female teachers and head teachers are considered to be good role models as leaders. Among the SACMEQ countries, some had 'general' teachers who taught all subjects, while others had specialized subject teachers. In Swaziland, the national policy is that all teachers are to teach all subjects. However, as a result of specialized training for student teachers offered as research and in-depth study during their final year, some teachers have tended to choose to teach specialized subjects.

The results presented in Table 1 depict a worrying emerging scenario. The percentage of Grade 6 pupils taught reading by female teachers continued to

predominate (68 percent in 2000 and 70 percent in 2007). However, that for female mathematics teachers dropped to just over 50 percent. It was also equally disturbing to see the proportion of Grade 6 pupils going to schools with female head teachers dropping from 40 percent in 2000 to 34 percent in 2007. This was despite the fact that the majority of teachers at this level of education were female.

### **School Safety**

Certain school resources are very critical to the well-being of both pupils and teachers. Such resources, for example, include school safety (school fences) and sanitation measures (separate toilets for boys and girls). Table 1 illustrates that the number of Grade 6 pupils attending schools with fences increased from 60 percent in 2000 to 84 percent in 2007. This indicated the level of commitment communities and schools have to the safety of their children. In Swaziland, school fencing is done largely by the school community, namely, by parents themselves either setting up the fences or through contributions by way of materials and labour.

### **Sanitation**

In Table 1, the average numbers of pupils per toilet in 2000 and 2007 are shown separately, namely boys per boys' toilet and girls per girls' toilet. About 4 percent and 1 percent of Grade 6 pupils in Swaziland went to schools with no toilet at all in 2000 and 2007, respectively. These average numbers of girls and boys per toilet reflected only those schools with at least one gender-separated toilet. If the average number of pupils per toilet had decreased in 2007 compared to 2000, this would have indicated that the situation regarding the provision of toilets had improved over time. The number of toilets in schools in Swaziland increased during the period under review. Consequently, the boys/toilet ratio decreased from 1:100 to 1:77, and for girls the ratio decreased from 1:93 to 1:73. The fact that the ratio for girls was lower, indicated that schools considered girls' personal hygiene to be very important.

## **Summary of Results**

This policy brief focused on gender equality issues regarding the participation and learning achievements (reading and mathematics) for Grade 6 pupils in Swaziland. Additional information concerning female staff, security, and sanitary issues was also presented to understand the context.

The results indicated that:

- The gender balance in enrolments at Grade 6 level improved even more during SACMEQ III, with all districts at or very near 50 percent.
- The performance of Grade 6 pupils in reading and mathematics, both boys and girls, improved between SACMEQ II and SACMEQ III by over 20 score points. This suggested that there was a great effort to improve the literacy and numeracy standards as recommended by the SACMEQ II study in 2000.
- Grade 6 girls continued to perform better in reading than boys for both 2000 and 2007, but boys did better in mathematics than girls in those years. This implied that the ministry had not done enough to remove the gender-related inequalities already revealed in 2000.
- The gender situation of reading and mathematics teachers did not change much over the period. There were more female teachers teaching reading, whilst for mathematics, the genders were equally balanced.
- The results also indicated that although the majority of teachers were female, this was not reflected in the position of head teachers, where males tended to predominate.
- Although schools had erected fences to protect their pupils and school property, a lot still needs to be done to create safe and caring environments for girls. The current pupil/toilet ratios are far too high to be acceptable, and there is a need to reduce the ratio to 40 pupils per toilet maximum for each of the genders.

## Policy Suggestions

To overcome some of the above-mentioned shortcomings, it is suggested that:

- The Teaching Service Commission (TSC) needs to attain gender balance as far as head teachers are concerned. This does not mean compromising on quality, but trying to ensure that the number of women in leadership positions is increased by at least 3 percent each year until they represent at least 45 percent of the posts. This can begin by replacing retiring head teachers with well-qualified female staff.
- The curriculum and teaching materials should be reviewed, so as to address the poorer performance by female pupils in mathematics compared to boys. The appointing of more female inspectors for mathematics and science subjects, though laudable, has not proved sufficient to overcome gender imbalance.
- Since gender issues need to be given more priority, an office dedicated to all gender issues, especially in learning, could be created. The Gender Unit, currently under the Career Guidance Unit, needs to be a stand-alone unit with an office devoted entirely to gender issues. Presently, it is too cross-cutting and does not get the due attention it deserves when it comes to the development of gender issues in education.
- The Research and Planning Unit and other agencies, like UNICEF, need to create awareness in areas associated with the well-being of children, especially girls. The number of toilets for girls should be increased and a national benchmark set for every school. In addition, the ministry needs to introduce a programme of providing sanitary pads to girls in schools. Most OVC (orphans and vulnerable children) girls cannot afford these. The provision of sanitary pads at school is another way of making the school a place of safety and comfort.

## Conclusion

To attain gender-related objectives within EFA, it is necessary to go beyond gender parity. The SACMEQ III Project's research results for Swaziland indicated that in terms of gender equity, though there was reasonable success in certain areas, there is still a lot that must be done. The Ministry of Education and Training needs to push the gender policy through the various channels and also make all the necessary adjustments in curriculum and teaching materials in order to achieve greater gender balance.

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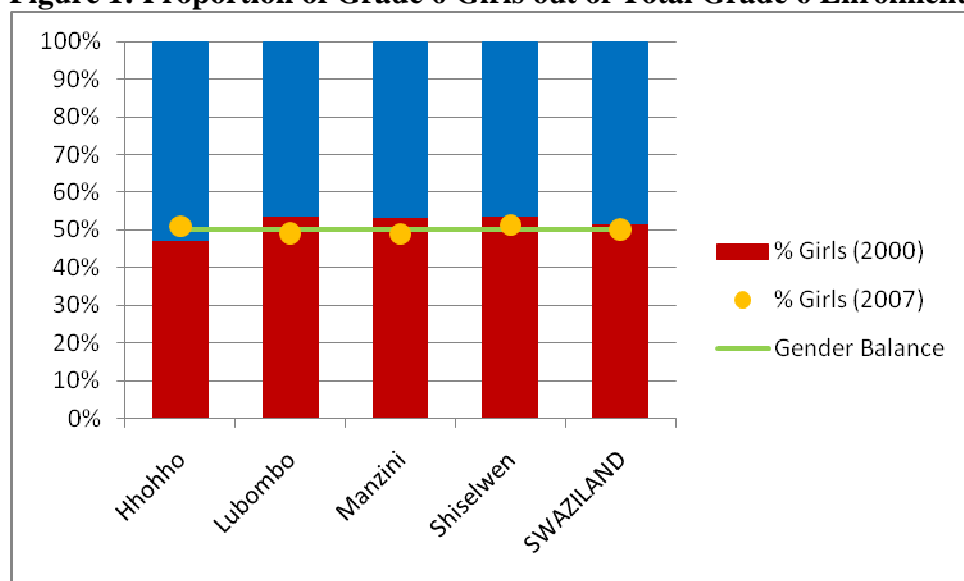
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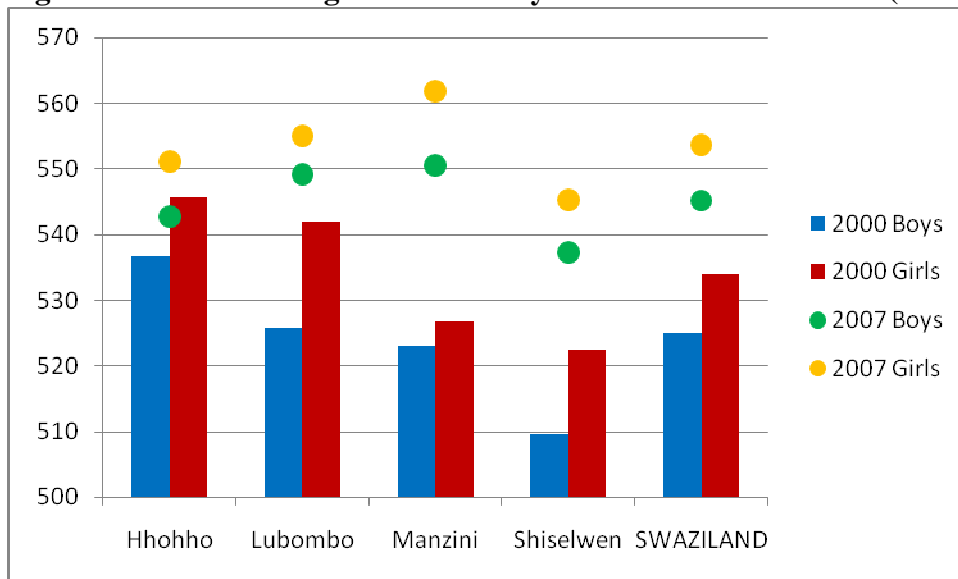
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**Figure 1: Proportion of Grade 6 Girls out of Total Grade 6 Enrolments in Swaziland (2000 and 2007)**



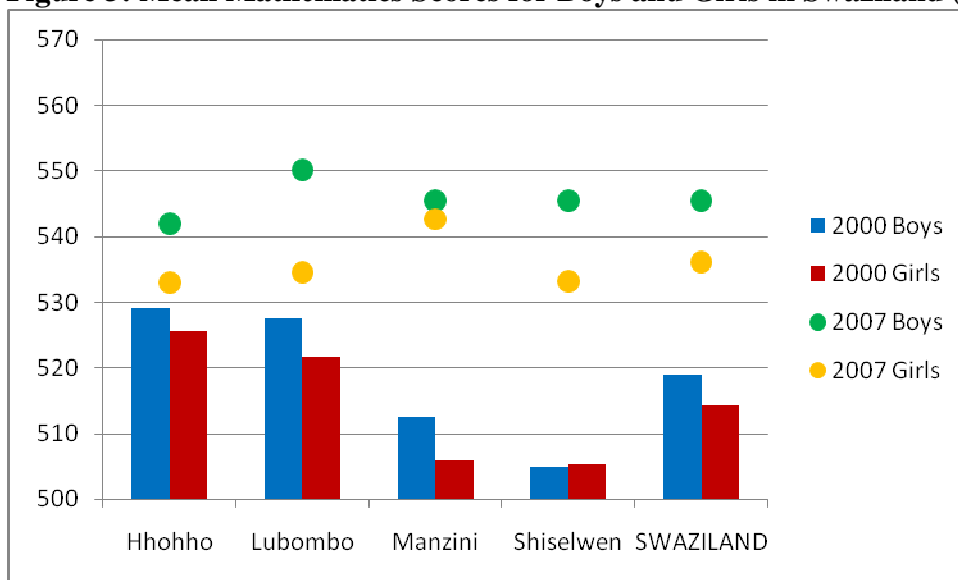
Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

**Figure 2: Mean Reading Scores for Boys and Girls in Swaziland (2000 and 2007)**



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

**Figure 3: Mean Mathematics Scores for Boys and Girls in Swaziland (2000 and 2007)**



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

**Table 1: Selected Information through 'Gender Lens' in Swaziland (2000 and 2007)**

| <b>Selected Indicators</b> | <b>2000</b> | <b>2007</b> |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Female Reading Teacher     | 68%         | 70%         |
| Female Mathematics Teacher | 52%         | 51%         |
| Female Head Teacher        | 40%         | 34%         |
| Schools with Fences        | 60%         | 84%         |
| # Boys per Boys' Toilet    | 100         | 77          |
| # Girls per Girls' Toilet  | 93          | 73          |

Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.