

**CO-OPERATION:** SACMEQ holds its second meeting of National Research Co-ordinators in Namibia

## SACMEQ gets down to business

**W**ORLD-WIDE interest in methodologies for undertaking large-scale educational policy and planning research studies concerning the quality of education was provoked by one of the main recommendations of the Jomtien World Conference on *Education for All*. This conference emphasized that special attention should be given to the establishment of systems of data collection and analysis that would permit the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards achieving a high standard of basic education for all.

Scientific mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation have been established for a number of years by the education systems of developed countries. This work has usually been undertaken by ministries of education – often through participation in organizations such as the *International Association of the Evaluation of Educational Achievement*. In developing countries, interest in this important field has also grown rapidly and the IIEP has responded by working with a number of ministries to develop and implement long-term strategies for building the capacity of educational planners to monitor the quality of basic education. A key aspect of the IIEP's work in this area has been the presentation of a series of workshops at which educational planners from many countries have gained practical experience in the collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of educational policy research data.

One of the most innovative outcomes arising from these efforts has been that eight

Ministries of Education in the Southern Africa sub-region (Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Tanzania (Mainland), Tanzania (Zanzibar), Zambia and Zimbabwe) have taken the initiative to launch the *Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality* (SACMEQ). SACMEQ's main mission is to undertake co-operative sub-regional research projects that can be used to guide policy decisions related to the quality and conditions of basic education. The first meeting of SACMEQ's National Research Co-ordinators (NRCs) was held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in February 1995. At that meeting the NRCs finalized a set of national and sub-regional research designs for SACMEQ's initial educational policy research project.

### Field work

The field work component of SACMEQ's initial project commenced in mid-1995 when the NRCs mobilized national resources and personnel in order to undertake data collections for large-scale samples of pupils, teachers, and school heads in Mauritius, Namibia, Tanzania (Zanzibar), Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Small-scale *trial data collections* were also undertaken in Kenya and Malawi.

In January 1996, Mr Dhurumbeer Kulpoo (NRC for Mauritius and SACMEQ's Interim Sub-regional Co-ordinator) visited the IIEP for discussions concerning the ways in which the IIEP could facilitate the final stages of SACMEQ's initial project. It was agreed that work on this project could be accelerated and

**Second meeting of National Research Co-ordinators (NRCs) for the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ).**

(Windhoek, Namibia  
15-24 April 1996)

**“The creation of a databank containing a 50 megabyte interconnected set of comprehensive profiles of the quality of education in Southern Africa.”**

improved if the SACMEQ's NRCs had an opportunity to work together as a team on the production of first drafts of their national policy reports. This *co-operative working style* had already been employed successfully by the SACMEQ's NRCs in order to develop a significant policy report focussed on Zimbabwe's education system which was published in late 1995 in the International Journal of Educational Research.

### **Discussions and outcomes**

Subsequent consultations with SACMEQ's NRCs and the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture in the Republic of Namibia resulted in the decision that the IIEP and the Ministry should join forces to host the *Second Meeting of SACMEQ National Research Coordinators*. This meeting was held in Windhoek, Namibia during the period 15-24 April 1996. The main aims of the meeting were:

- to undertake computer-based data analyses for SACMEQ's initial educational policy research project, and
- to prepare first drafts of national educational policy reports based on these data analyses. The areas of educational policy to be addressed during the meeting were focussed on issues that were specified as *high priority* by the senior decision-makers within the sub-region's ministries of education.

There were *two* important outcomes from this meeting. The *first* was the production of the first version of a databank for SACMEQ's initial project. This large and interconnected

set of computer-stored files exceeds 50 megabytes in magnitude and contains comprehensive profiles of the quality of education in Southern Africa based on detailed information collected from some 15,000 pupils, 700 school heads, and 1,500 teachers. The files in the databank were assembled via the disaggregation of information obtained from school heads and teachers across the data records recorded for pupils. This type of file structure will permit a wide range of descriptive national and cross-national data analyses of the quality of education to be undertaken. It will also facilitate evaluations to be made of the impact of many important home, community, and school conditions on fundamental literacy skills acquired by pupils.

The *second* important outcome was the preparation of initial drafts of national policy reports. Even in their draft form, it is evident that these reports contain many important messages for future educational policy in the SACMEQ countries. The reports will be finalized over the coming months in readiness for a sub-regional educational policy forum which is scheduled for later this year. At that forum several major decisions will be taken concerning the future of SACMEQ in terms of its governance, the location of its sub-regional administrative headquarters, and the design of its next large-scale educational policy research project.

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