



Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium
for Monitoring Educational Quality

Progress in Gender Equality in Education: Namibia

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Introduction

This policy brief deals with progress in ‘gender equality’ in primary education for the thirteen regions in Namibia by seeking answers to the following specific questions:

- What were the changes in the **proportion of girls’ enrolment** at Grade 6 for the thirteen regions in Namibia 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 thirteen regions in Namibia 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 Namibia?

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

Namibia’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. Namibia participated in SACMEQ I in 1995 (4,457 Grade 6 learners in 160 primary schools); SACMEQ II in 2000 (5,048 Grade 6 learners in 275 primary schools); and SACMEQ III in 2007 (6,398 Grade 6 learners in 267 primary schools).

The Importance of Gender Equality in Education

The importance of gender equality in education within the process of international goal-setting has been 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 Namibia

Since independence, the Namibian Government has been concerned with improving the status of women and addressing the negative effects of the colonial era. The quality of and equality in education, including gender equality, have been very important priorities for educational policy in Namibia. The main objective of gender policy, with regard to gender, education and training, is to ‘reduce gender inequalities in education, improve school completion rates for girls, and increase women’s access to vocational training, science and technology’ (Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGE CW), 2010, p. 25). As a consequence, Namibia has done well in terms of the enrolment of girls and boys at the primary and secondary levels of education (Ministry of Education, 2010). In addition, there are a number of projects dealing with the above-mentioned aspects of gender issues mainly for primary and secondary education. Regarding the status of women in all aspects of life beyond primary education, the MGE CW is responsible for formulating policies as well as monitoring progress.

Gender Balance in Grade 6 Participation

Figure 1 shows the proportion of girls enrolled at the Grade 6 level for each region and Namibia 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.

On average, for the country as a whole, the percentage of girls in Grade 6 did not change between 2000 and 2007. At the regional level, in almost all the regions, except Otjozondjupa, the proportion of girls approached the gender balance level of 50 percent. Otjozondjupa was one of the regions where the percentage of girls had been less than that of boys in 2000. By 2007, this had been reversed to such an extent that close to 60 percent of learners were girls. In 2007, the Ohangwena region continued having a high percentage of Grade 6 girls (around 56%).

Gender Differences in Learning Achievements

While there was some progress in Namibia towards greater 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 region. 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, the reading performances for boys and girls increased by over 20 points between 2000 and 2007. At the regional level, the largest increase, by 90 points, was for girls in the Oshana region, followed by girls in the Caprivi region with an 80-point increase. In these two regions, the boys showed an increase of about 60 score points. Only one region, Hardap, registered a slight drop for boys and girls between 2000 and 2007. The Khomas region did not improve much, but it continued to be one of the best-performing regions in Namibia. Despite this remarkable improvement in almost all regions, the more serious problem was the general low achievement for both boys and girls, especially in Kavango, Ohangwena, Omusati, and Oshikoto. For Namibia as a whole, there was not much gender difference in the reading achievements. In 2007, the largest gender difference (40 points in favour of girls) was seen in the Oshana region.

Mathematics

At the national level in 2007, the overall performance in mathematics increased by 40 score points for both boys and girls, thereby maintaining the gender equality like in 2000. At the regional level, the results increased considerably in most regions except for Hardap and Khomas, which registered a slight drop between 2000 and 2007. The largest increase was seen in the Oshana region with a 70- and 80- point increases for boys and girls, respectively, followed by Ohangwena and Caprivi, with an increase of around 50 points. The gender difference widened in favour of girls in the Caprivi and Oshana regions in 2007 with a 20- and 15-point difference, respectively. In the Hardap, Kavango, and Khomas regions, boys continued to perform slightly better than girls, with a margin of 10 to 15 points for both 2000 and 2007. In other regions the gender differences became less noticeable.

Other Information through the 'Gender Lens'

The above sets of results illustrated two positive scenarios regarding gender equality in education. Firstly, the enrolment at Grade 6 level in Namibia was very much gender balanced. This was consistent with the information provided by the Ministry of Education regarding female enrolment at all levels of schooling. Secondly, it appeared that there was consistent overall improvement in the learning achievements, with boys and girls, maintaining both stable and only marginal gender differences (Saito, 2010). 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 learners.

Female Staff

Having a gender balance of teachers and school heads has been seen as a strategy for gender equality in school success, since teachers and school heads are considered to be good role models as leaders. Among the SACMEQ countries, some had 'general' teachers who taught all subjects. In Namibia, the lower primary levels up to Grade 4 are taught by teachers who teach all subjects, while in Grades 5 to 12, learners are taught by specialized teachers for mathematics and English.

As shown in Table 1, in 2000 the situation concerning female staff was pretty much gender balanced, and its evolution was different depending on the subject being taught. For example, the proportion of Grade 6 learners taught reading by female teachers increased to 62 percent, indicating a slight female predominance in 2007. On the other hand, for mathematics, there was a slight decrease in the number of female teachers from 49 percent in 2000 to 44 percent in 2007, making it not quite gender balanced. There was a reasonable increase in the proportion of Grade 6 learners going to

schools with female school heads, reaching almost the same percentage as that of mathematics teachers.

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 percentages of Grade 6 learners attending schools with fences increased from 73 percent in 2000 to 88 percent in 2007. Although there had been an improvement, it is disturbing to see that 12 percent of learners were still at schools without fences. This may be attributed to the fact that schools in poor communities are financially hard-pressed to fence their schools, as in most cases government schools are constructed without a fence. This then prompts schools to use their budget allocations, however, these are very small. Consequently, if schools use their small budget allocations to erect a school fence, they are then unable to order stationery and other school necessities.

Sanitation

In Table 1, the average numbers of learners per toilet in 2000 and 2007 are shown separately, namely, boys per boys' toilet and girls per girls' toilet. About 15 and 5 percent of Grade 6 learners in Namibia went to schools with no toilet at all in 2000 and 2007, respectively. The average numbers of girls and boys per toilet reflect only those schools with at least one gender-separated toilet. If the average number of learners 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. As shown in Table 1, nationally, there was a considerable improvement in terms of toilet provision between 2000 and 2007. While this is an improvement for both boys and girls, these ratios (58 boys per toilet and 53 girls per toilet) are still

higher than the Namibian benchmark standard of 35 pupils per toilet.

Summary of Results

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

The results indicated that:

- On average, the national percentage of girls in Grade 6 did not change between 2000 and 2007, thereby maintaining the gender balance. But the Ohangwena and Otjozondjupa regions had more girls than boys at Grade 6 level in 2007.
- In all the regions, except Hardap and Khomas, both boys and girls improved remarkably in reading and mathematics, keeping almost identical gender differences, except in Oshana.
- In 2007, female teachers continued to predominate in teaching reading. Although the positions of mathematics teachers and school heads were not gender balanced by 2007, there had been a noteworthy increase over time in the numbers of female school heads.
- Overall, quite a fair number of learners attended schools with fences. Toilet provision, however, remained insufficient for the continuously increasing number of learners, especially for girls.

Policy Suggestions

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

- The Ministry of Education, together with its regional partners, should review all the past

gender-related interventions at both the central and regional levels to identify: (i) the proportion of the project budget that was used for the improvement of gender equality; and (ii) the kind of quality-related indicators used to monitor progress in gender equality. It is important to take into consideration the specific regional concerns manifest in Ohangwena, Otjozondjupa, Oshana, Hardap, and Khomas.

- The Directorate of Programme and Quality Assurance (PQA) and the HIV/AIDS Management Unit (HAMU) may wish to consult with school heads regarding further schools-based investigations into actual classroom practices, with a view to examining gender-sensitiveness during the teaching and learning processes, which may be related to the low performance levels of boys, especially in reading.
- The Division of Human Resources may wish to consult with the regional directors in order for them to monitor the gender balance of teachers, especially for mathematics teachers.
- The teacher training institutions should be sensitized into enrolling more female students into mathematics teaching, while schools at the same time should encourage girls to follow that career path as well.
- The Directorate of Planning and Development as well as that of Finance should: (i) ensure that the benchmark of 35 learners per girls' and boys' toilets, respectively, is reached, and (ii) undertake an audit of the situation of school toilets.

Conclusion

To attain the gender-related objectives within EFA, it is necessary to go beyond gender parity (National Planning Commission, 2008). The SACMEQ III Project's research results for Namibia indicated that, while there had been progress in attaining gender equality both in enrolments and learning

achievements, there is still room for improvement of the general level of quality, and there is a need to address the underachievement of boys in certain regions. The Ministry of Education should review and prioritize the policy suggestions above, in order to draw up policy strategies for improving the quality of education for both boys and girls to reduce gender inequality.

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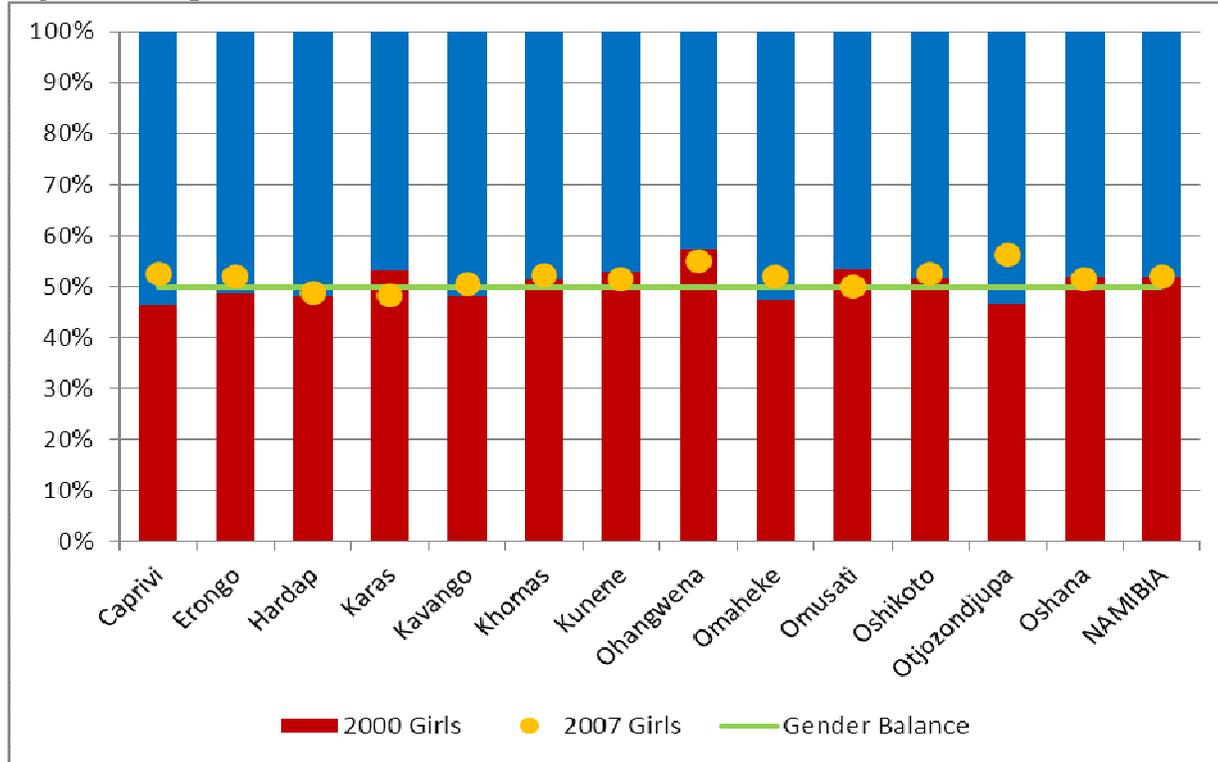
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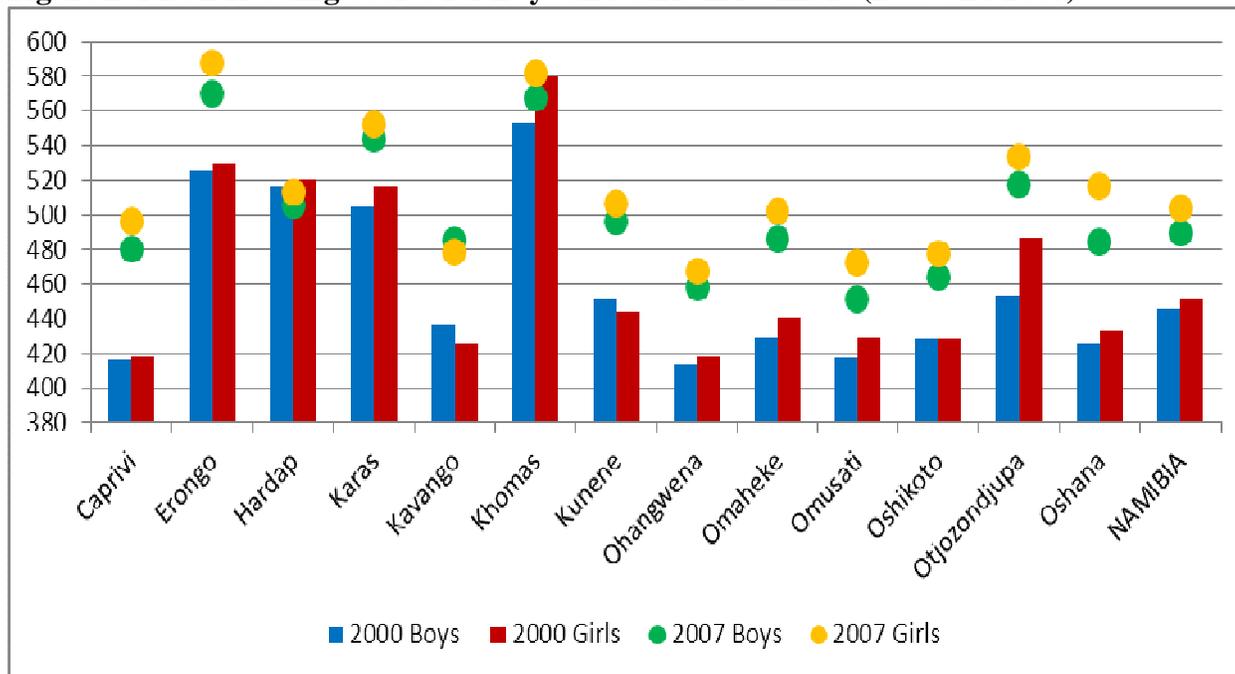
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Figure 1: Proportion of Grade 6 Girls out of Total Grade 6 Enrolments in Namibia (2000 and 2007)



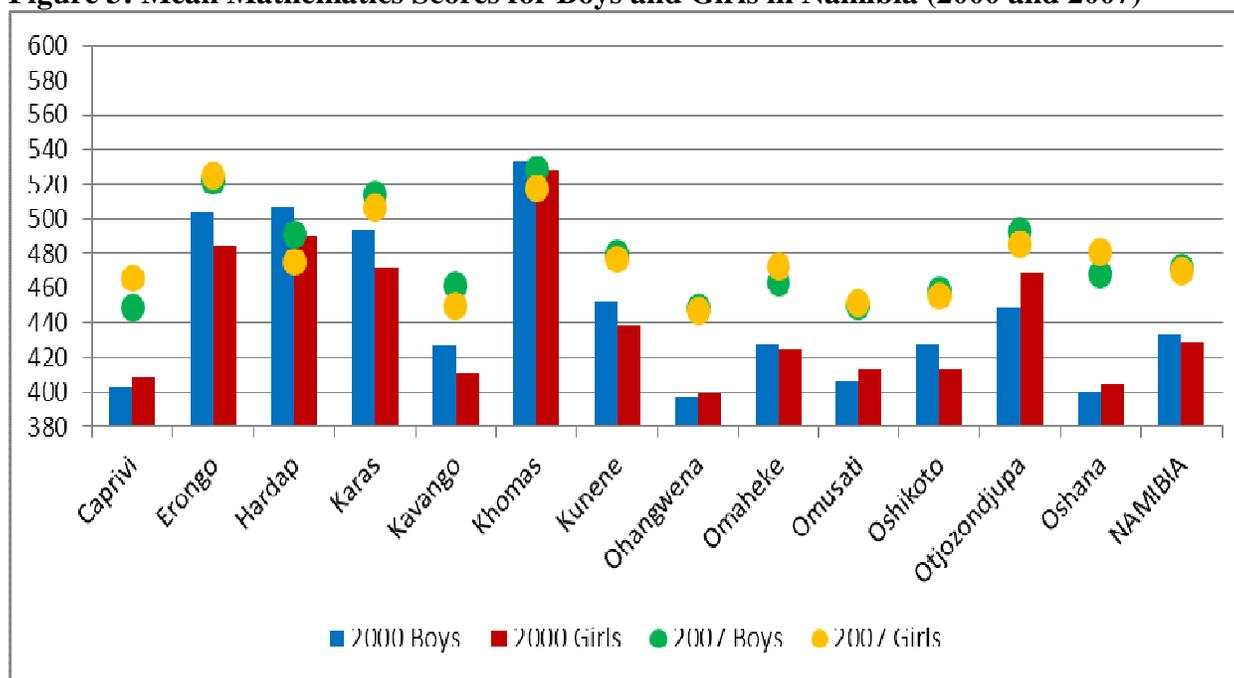
Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

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



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

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



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

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

Selected Indicators	2000	2007
Female Reading Teacher	52%	62%
Female Mathematics Teacher	49%	44%
Female School Head	29%	42%
Schools with Fences	73%	88%
# Boys per Boys' Toilet	79	58
# Girls per Girls' Toilet	74	53

Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.