

# Policy Brief

Number 6 (September 2011)



Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium  
for Monitoring Educational Quality

## Progress in Gender Equality in Education: Botswana

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### Introduction

This policy brief deals with progress in 'gender equality' in primary education for the seven regions in Botswana by seeking answers to the following specific questions:

- What were the changes in the **proportion of girls' enrolment** at the Standard 6 level for the seven regions in Botswana 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 seven regions in Botswana 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 Botswana?

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

### Botswana'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. Botswana participated in: SACMEQ II in 2000 (3,322 Standard 6 pupils in 170 primary schools); and SACMEQ III in 2007 (3,868 Standard 6 pupils in 160 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 Botswana**

In Botswana, the gender equality issue in education is guided by: the Gender Equality Policy adopted by the Botswanan Parliament in 1996; the Policy Guidelines for Financial Support for Women; Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO); as well as the National Gender Programme Framework that was launched in 1998. The policy was formulated after the Botswanan Government had identified areas of concern on gender, which were raised during the 1995 United Nations (UN) World Conference in Beijing. Botswana acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1996. After 1996, the government mandated the Department of Women’s Affairs, within the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs, to budget for and facilitate the mainstreaming of gender issues in the development process in 2002/03. Following this initiative, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development established a Gender Mainstreaming Committee that is supposed to ensure gender equality in the education processes, particularly as regards the following: women and poverty, women in power and decision-making, the education and training of women, women and health, and violence against women and young girls (Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs, 2011). The committee comprises officers from the Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation, and is represented in all activities on gender issues to ensure the development of curriculum material that is gender sensitive.

Gender equality in Botswanan schools is monitored through the following indicators: apparent intake rates, gender-parity index, repetition rates, age-specific enrolment rates, and dropout rates (Central Statistics Office, 2010).

## **Gender Balance in Standard 6 Participation**

For a very long time, the Government of Botswana has been dedicated to ensuring equal access to education by all sub-groups. For instance, in 1980 the Government of Botswana abolished school fees at primary school level to ensure that all sub-groups of the population would have equal opportunities in accessing primary education. The government also committed itself to ten years basic education for all, with the main aim of increasing access and educational opportunities for all sub-groups of the nation, in particular, increasing boys’ participation rates at the primary level and that of girls at secondary level.

In order to evaluate how much our education system has so far achieved as regards gender equality in participation, Figure 1 shows the proportion of girls enrolled at the Standard 6 level for each region and Botswana 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 Standard 6 level in the sample reflected the entire Grade 6 target population.

At the national level, Standard 6 boys and girls in Botswana had almost equal percentages of participation in the SACMEQ projects, with only a negligible percentage point differences for both years, in favour of girls. At the regional level, the percentage of participation was similar to that of the national level, with the exception of the Gaborone region, where a slightly higher percentage of girls was enrolled at Standard 6 level than boys. These

results were also coherent with the national education statistics for the same period and 2010.

## Gender Differences in Learning Achievements

Although gender equality in enrolments had been in place in Botswana for both 2000 and 2007, policy-makers should be concerned about whether similar gender equality trends were manifest in the learning achievements for the period analysed.

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 in Botswana, both boys and girls improved on their reading achievements between 2000 and 2007, resulting in similar gender differences, with some 30 points in favour of girls. At the regional level, a similar pattern was seen in the Central, Central South, Gaborone, and Northern regions, with improvements for both boys and girls and with stable gender differences. In South Central, while the boys' achievement did not change in 2007, the girls' achievement deteriorated slightly that year, thus making the gender-difference gap smaller by 20 points. In contrast, in the Southern region, due to the noteworthy deterioration in the boys' achievement, the gender difference became wider by a gap of 40 points. In the Western region, although there had not been much gender difference in 2000, the considerable improvement by girls in 2007 resulted in

a gender difference of over 20 points in favour of girls.

### Mathematics

At the national level, both boys and girls slightly improved on their mathematics achievements in 2007 compared to 2000, resulting in not much gender difference. At the regional level, results were more mixed. In the Central and Central South regions, where girls did considerably better than boys in 2000, gender differences turned out to be very marginal in 2007, due to the marked improvement by boys. In Gaborone, both boys and girls improved in 2007, and the gender difference gap became even larger by 20 points in favour of girls. In the Northern, South Central, Southern, and Western regions, there was not much difference between the scores for 2000 and 2007. The largest drop was for the South Central girls and the Southern boys, by about 20 points. Overall, the 2007 results in the four above-mentioned regions did not yield great gender differences.

## Other Information through the 'Gender Lens'

The above sets of results illustrated two contrasting scenarios regarding gender equality in education. Firstly, gender equality has been in place in terms of participation at the Standard 6 level. Secondly, it appeared that although general improvements were seen in the achievements in both reading and mathematics, the direction and magnitude of the gender differences had not changed over time in most of the regions (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 Standard 6 pupils.

### Female Staff

Having a gender balance amongst teachers and school heads is a strategy for gender equality in school success, since female 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, while others had specialized subject teachers. In Botswana, the ‘general’ teachers have taught both reading and mathematics. As shown in Table 1, the degree of ‘feminization’ of the teaching profession in Botswana had not changed at all over time, as seen in 2000 and 2007, where 67 and 66 percent of Standard 6 pupils were taught by female teachers. While the gender balance (53 percent) had already been achieved for the school head positions in 2000, the situation changed in 2007, when 64 percent of Standard 6 pupils were going to schools with female school heads – very similar to the situation of teachers. These results indicated that female domination in the teaching cadre was consistent with the national statistics, where females dominated the proportion of trained teachers. Naturally, more trained teachers are expected to rise to the positions of school heads and other higher positions in the education field.

### **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, although school fences were not indicated among the minimum standard facilities required for a primary school in Botswana, most of the Standard 6 pupils during SACMEQ II and III, in 2000 and 2007, respectively, went to schools with school fences. The percentage of pupils in schools with school fences was slightly higher in 2000 than in 2007. This was presumably due to newly constructed schools without fences that were part of the SACMEQ III study.

### **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. Although negligible, up to 1 percent of Standard 6 pupils in

Botswana went to schools with no toilet at all in 2000 and 2007. The average numbers of girls and boys per toilet reflected only those schools with at least one gender-separated toilet. In Botswana, the numbers of pupils per toilet decreased for both boys’ and girls’ toilets. While this was an improvement, these ratios are still high, indicating that for both boys and girls, many continue having to share toilets.

## **Summary of Results**

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

The results indicated that:

- Botswana had almost achieved gender equality in terms of access to and participation in primary education by both boys and girls.
- Both boys and girls improved in reading and mathematics, with similar gender differences appearing for 2000 and 2007 in favour of girls.
- There is a trend towards female domination in the teaching field, which could be the reason for the prevailing gender disparity in favour of women in school head positions.

## **Policy Suggestions**

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

- The Department of Pre-primary and Primary Education may wish to effectively provide remedial teaching to those pupils lagging behind in their studies, especially for boys, to close the gender gaps in pupil performance.
- The Ministry of Education and Skills Development may wish to consult with inspectors and teacher training units, to

investigate whether a gender-sensitive teaching approach may have an effect on the underachieving boys in school subjects, especially in reading.

## Conclusion

To attain the gender-related objectives within the EFA Goals, it is necessary to go beyond gender parity. The SACMEQ III Project's research results for Botswana indicated that there has been a serious gender gap in reading achievement, illustrated by boys' underachievement. The Ministry of Education and Skills Development should review and prioritize the policy suggestions above, in order to draw up policy strategies to improve the quality of education for both boys and girls, so as to reduce gender inequality in learning.

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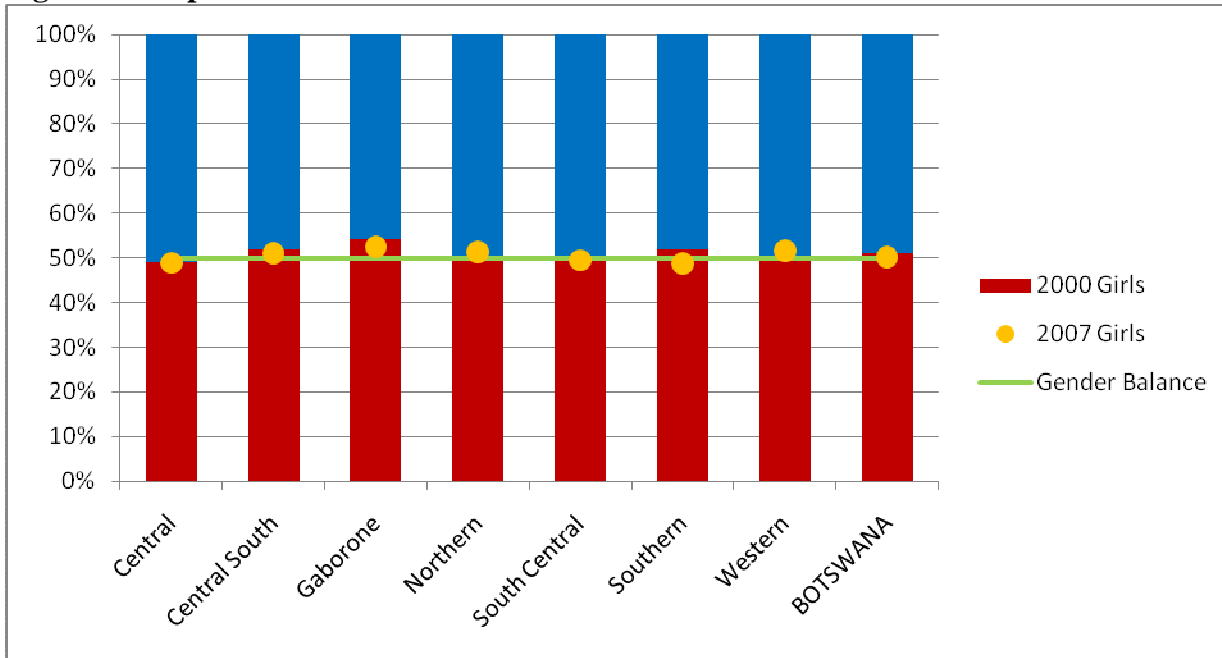
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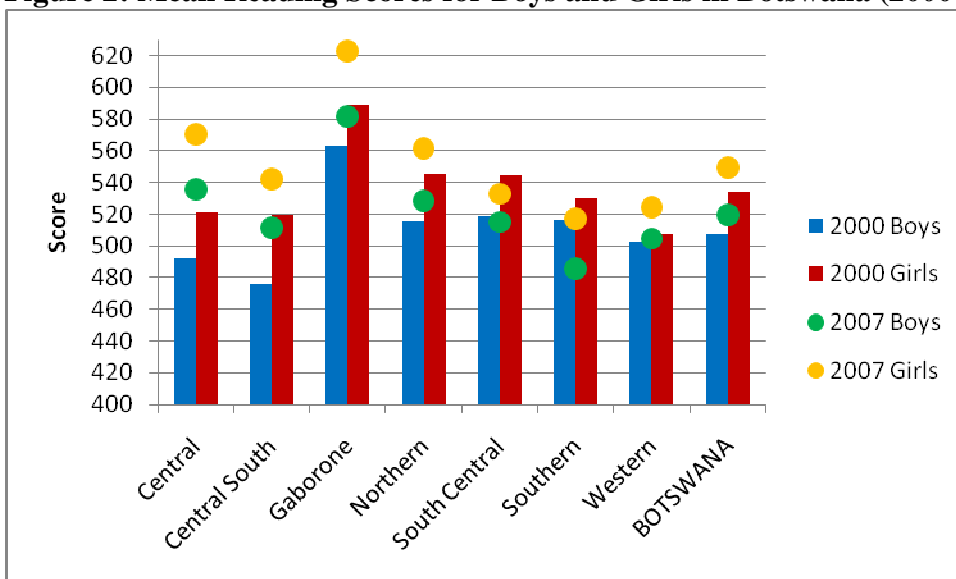
SACMEQ wishes to acknowledge the generous financial assistance provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Netherlands in support of SACMEQ's research and training programmes.

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



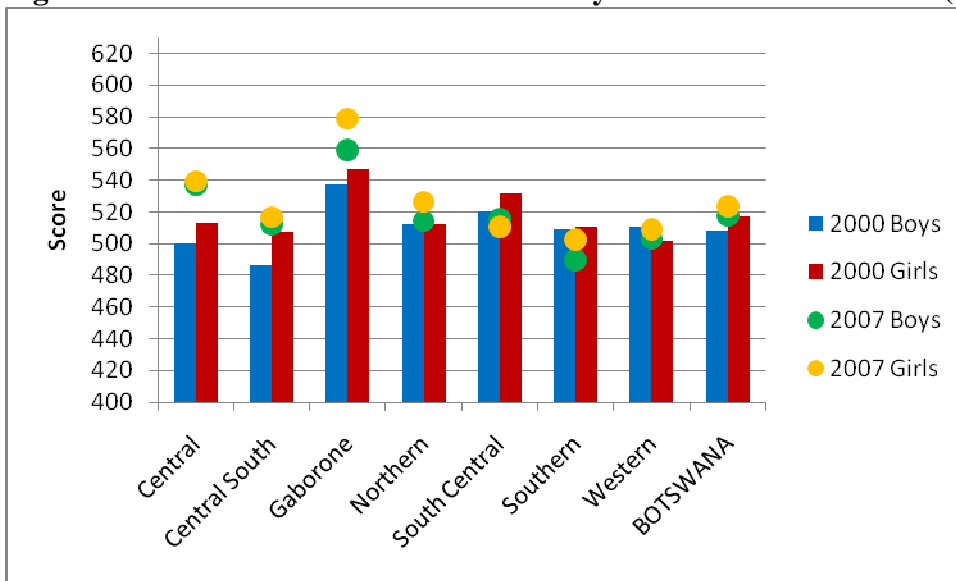
Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

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



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

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



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

**Table 1: Selected Information through ‘Gender Lens’ in Botswana (2000 and 2007)**

<b>Selected Indicators</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2007</b>
Female Reading Teacher	67%	66%
Female Mathematics Teacher	67%	67%
Female School Head	53%	64%
Schools with Fences	93%	89%
# Boys per Boys' Toilet	45	41
# Girls per Girls' Toilet	45	38

Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.