

Policy Brief

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Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium
for Monitoring Educational Quality

Progress in Gender Equality in Education: Lesotho

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Introduction

This policy brief deals with progress in 'gender equality' in primary education for the ten districts in Lesotho 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 ten districts in Lesotho 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 ten districts in Lesotho 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 Lesotho?

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

Lesotho'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. Lesotho participated in: SACMEQ II in 2000 (3,155 Standard 6 pupils in 177 primary schools); and SACMEQ III in 2007 (4,240 Standard 6 pupils in 182 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 Lesotho

Lesotho is committed to the EFA goal number 5, which is aimed at: eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015. Focus is on ensuring full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality. It has also committed itself to the MDG, especially goal number 3, which aims at promoting gender equality and empowering women. The Ministry of Education and Training’s (MOET) policy is to mainstream gender in the education sector through the forging of effective and inclusive partnerships with other stakeholders. It has developed indicators to monitor and evaluate: the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary school, and the ratio of females to males in tertiary education. The data for these indicators are collected annually through the Education Management Information System (EMIS) and the indicators are developed and monitored annually (MOET, 2005).

Lesotho, unlike many other African states, had the persistent problem of fewer boys enrolling in primary schools compared to girls up until 2003, when gender parity in terms of enrolment was reached. This meant that prior to 2003, Lesotho’s policy concerns focused on boys’ not attending primary school. One of the reasons for this unequal access was that boys helped with herding the livestock; consequently, sending boys to primary school incurred high opportunity costs compared to girls.

Gender Balance in Standard 6 Participation

Figure 1 shows the proportion of girls enrolled at the Standard 6 level for each district and Lesotho 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 Standard 6 target population.

At the national level, the proportion of Standard 6 girls remained the same (about 55 percent) for both 2000 and 2007. A similar pattern of girls outnumbering boys was seen in many of the districts for both years. In the districts of Mokhotlong and Thab-Tseka, the proportion of Standard 6 girls was already over 60 percent in 2000, and it continued to increase to nearly 70 percent by 2007. In these two districts, it is still very common practice for boys to herd stock. People there depend solely on agriculture, in particular, livestock farming. In Berea, Leribe, and Maseru, the proportion of pupils was kept at a gender-balance level of about 50 percent for both years. A noticeable change was seen in two other districts. In Butha-Buthe, the proportion of Standard 6 girls was less than 50 percent in 2000. This, however, increased to about 50 percent in 2007. In Mafeteng in 2000, girls predominated by over 60 percent. In 2007, there was a better gender-balance level (55 percent). Hence, gender balance improved in these districts.

Gender Differences in Learning Achievements

Since there was virtually no change to the pattern of girls predominating the proportion of Standard 6 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 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

In Lesotho as a whole, there was an overall improvement in reading achievements in 2007, with an increase of over 20 score points for boys and 15 for girls, maintaining a similar gender difference in favour of girls. At the district level, a similar trend was seen in Berea, Leribe, and Maseru. In Mafeteng and Qacha's Nek, improvement was seen only for girls. The most disturbing district was Butha-Buthe, where both boys and girls dropped by close to 40 score points, while girls in Mokhotlong suffered a 20-score-point drop. The most pleasing results were seen in Mohale's Hoek, Maseru, and Quting, where gender differences in 2000 (in favour of girls) diminished in 2007 with improvements made by both boys and girls.

Mathematics

At the national level, there was a remarkable improvement by both boys and girls of about 30 score points, thereby maintaining a situation of no gender differences for both years. At the district level, a very similar pattern was seen, namely, a large improvement and gender equality in Leribe, Mohale's Hoek, Maseru, and Quting. In Mafeteng, Qacha's Nek, and Thaba-Tseka, mathematics achievement was in favour of boys in 2000, yet by 2007, the results were more gender equal, due mainly to the notable improvement by girls. In Butha-Buthe and Mokhotlong, girls performed considerably better than

boys in 2000, yet by 2007 the gender differences had virtually disappeared. Girls had, however, dropped in Mokhotlong by a number of points in 2007.

Other Information through the 'Gender Lens'

The above sets of results illustrated two extraordinary scenarios regarding gender equality in education. Firstly, girls' domination of Standard 6 enrolments continued in most of the districts, resulting in slightly more girls than boys at the national level. Secondly, it appeared that the better overall performance in both reading and mathematics did not affect gender equality in the learning achievements of boys and girls (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

Increasing the female staff has been seen as a strategy for girls' 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. Lesotho suffered from a huge qualified teacher deficit. The practice, therefore, was for 'general' teachers to teach all subjects in primary schools. Hence, 'general' teachers taught reading and mathematics to Standard 6 pupils. As shown in Table 1, female school staff predominated, regardless of the subject or the position. This was illustrated by the consistently high percentages of Standard 6 pupils: being taught reading and mathematics by female teachers, and attending schools with female school heads (ranging between 69 to 79 percent) for 2000 and 2007.

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 there was a slight decrease in the percentage of Standard 6 pupils going to schools with fences, implying a relative deterioration in terms of school safety and security. This seems to be caused by the construction of new schools without fences. However, the gloomiest message is that only about 40 percent of Standard 6 pupils were in schools with fences, indicating that the situation of school safety and security is not satisfactory.

Sanitation

According to a UNICEF manual on Child Friendly Schools (CFS), separate toilets or latrines should be available to girls and boys. Privacy, cleanliness, and safety are major considerations when planning the location and design of facilities (UNICEF, 2009).

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 37 and 10 percent of Standard 6 pupils in Lesotho went to schools with no toilet at all in 2000 and 2007, respectively. These findings indicate that, if the ministry can continue to build more toilets, it will most likely be able to reach the target of providing all schools with toilets by 2015.

The 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. While there was an improvement in the percentage of Standard 6 pupils going to schools with at least one gender-separated toilet, the number of pupils who had to share a toilet had increased from 80 to 97 boys per

boys' toilet and from 75 to 92 girls per girls' toilet in 2000 and 2007, respectively..

These numbers are far too high compared to the national benchmark which, per school (regardless of the size of the school), is to construct at least four toilets for girls, three toilets for boys, and one toilet for the male and female teachers each. The ministry undertook to make primary schools more child friendly, by revising the standard drawings for toilet construction to not only incorporate gender-sensitive toilets, but to also improve the design by making provision for the disposal of sanitary towels for girls in at least one of the girls' toilets, and placing a urinal in one of the boys' 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 Lesotho. Additional information concerning female staff, security, and sanitary issues was also presented to understand the context.

The results indicated that:

- Girls continued to predominate in the Standard 6 enrolments in many districts, unlike the trend seen in Standard 1, where there was a gender balance.
- Learning achievements in reading improved in general in 2007, excepting in Butha-Buthe. Not much gender difference was seen, except in Berea and Mafeteng.
- For mathematics, there was an improvement in the levels and gender equality in virtually all the districts.
- Not a big change was seen in the strong female presence in the teaching force and leadership positions during the two years.

- The provision of school fences remained negligible, and the situation for toilets has deteriorated over the years.

Policy Suggestions

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

- The Ministry of Education and Training should continue with its investigation based on its already established hypotheses regarding the relationship between high absenteeism and drop-out amongst boys throughout primary schools.
- The Ministry of Education and Training's Planning Unit in collaboration with the National Assessment Unit should undertake a study to find out why the Butha-Buthe district's reading achievements deteriorated in 2007 (all the other districts showed an overall improvement) despite it being one of the best-performing districts in the primary school leaving examination administered at the end of the primary cycle for Standard 7 pupils.
- The Planning Unit, through the office of the Education Facilities Unit (EFU), and the inspectors should undertake a national audit to identify those schools lacking school fences and gender-separated toilets.
- The EFU should also review the building plans, so as to ensure that all newly built schools have a fence as standard procedure.

Conclusion

To attain the gender-related objectives within EFA, it is necessary to go beyond gender parity. The SACMEQ III Project's research results for Lesotho indicated that, at the national level, gender parity was reached in both SACMEQ studies in terms of boys' and girls' access to primary schools. The same finding emerged from the EMIS annual school census

reports. However, there are still some disparities among the districts, namely, the mountain districts of Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka. There are also some disparities in the mean reading scores in favour of girls. Some gender parity was reached in the mean mathematics scores. The majority of primary school heads were female and most Standard 6 pupils in Lesotho were taught reading and mathematics by female teachers. The Ministry of Education and Training should continue to address other gender gaps, such as the provision of toilets, because children and teachers need gender-separated toilets. They should also have access to running water to wash their hands and to drink. Research has shown that there is some correlation between the provision of these facilities and the quality of education. The ministry should also take into consideration the need for and quality of fencing around schools. Fences and gates not only provide safety, particularly for the girls, but they are also necessary to protect the properties during the school vacations.

Authors

Haleokoe Eric Jopo, Ministry of Education and Training.

(ericjopo0607@yahoo.com/Haleokoe.Jopo@gov.ls)

Motseng Maema, Ministry of Education and Training.

(Motseng.Maema@gov.ls/motsengmaema2002@yahoo.co.uk)

Matseko Ramokoena, Ministry of Education and Training.

(ramokoena18@yahoo.com)

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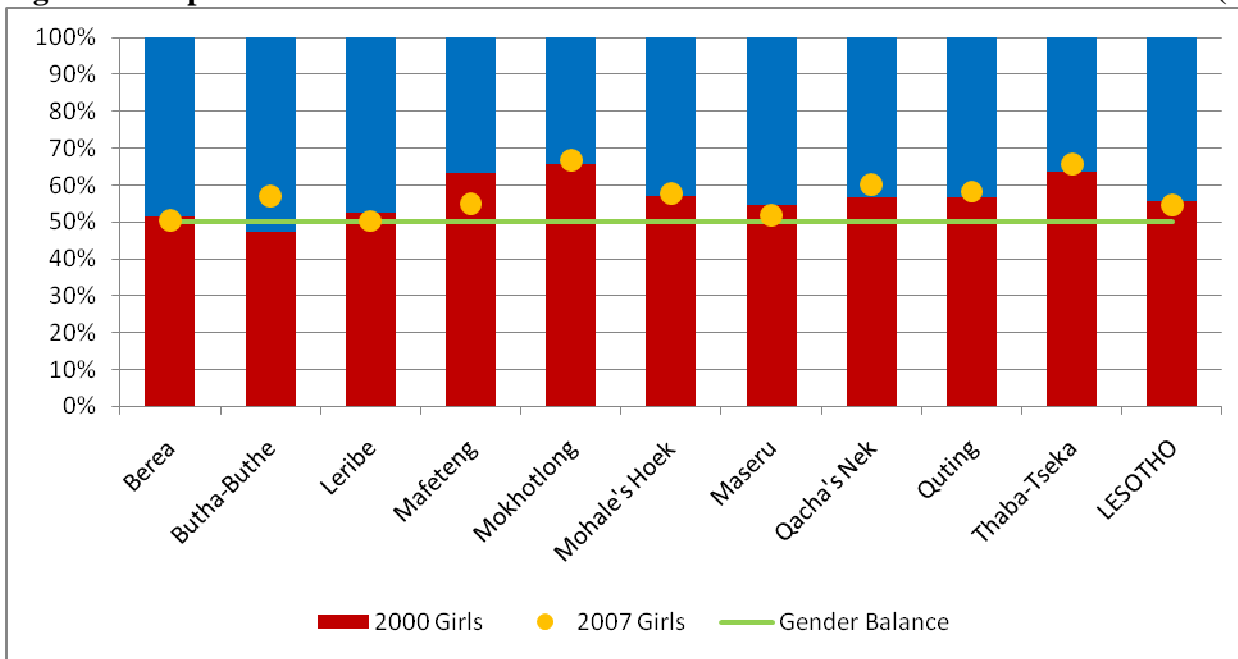
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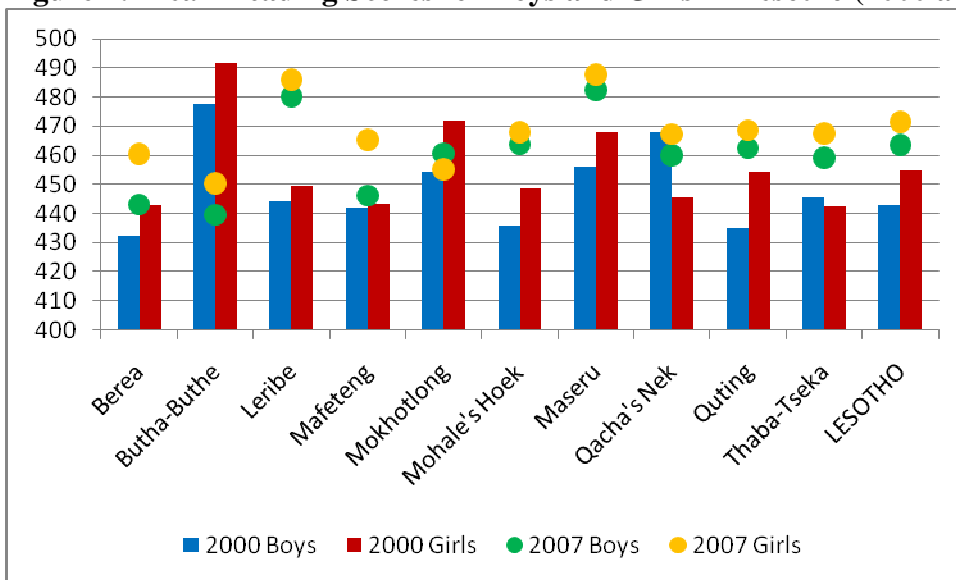
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Figure 1: Proportion of Standard 6 Girls out of Total Standard 6 Enrolments in Lesotho (2000 and 2007)



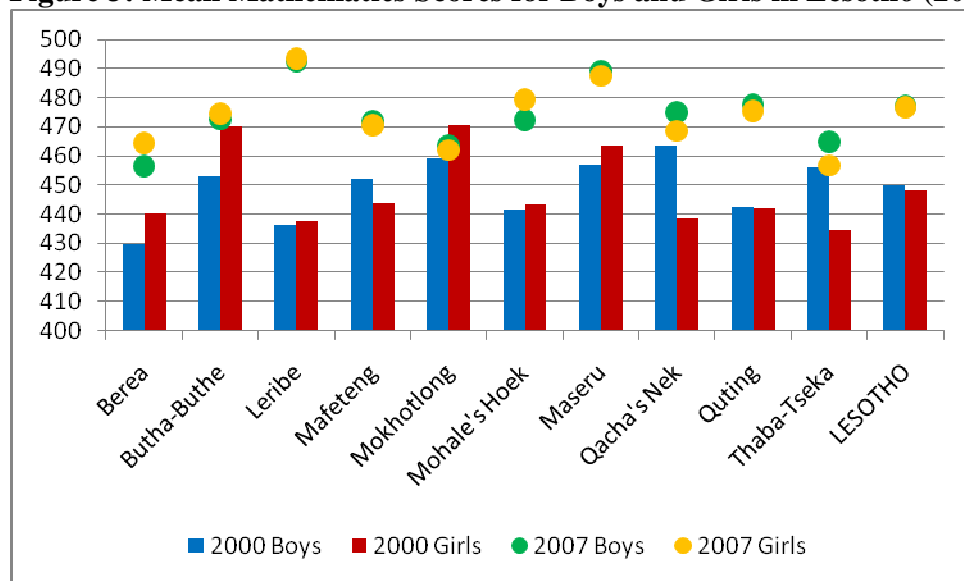
Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

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



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

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



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

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

Selected Indicators	2000	2007
Female Reading Teacher	75%	72%
Female Mathematics Teacher	76%	68%
Female School Head	72%	79%
Schools with Fences	43%	41%
# Boys per Boys' Toilet	80	97
# Girl per Girls' Toilet	75	92

Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.