



Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium
for Monitoring Educational Quality

Progress in Gender Equality in Education: Mauritius

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Introduction

This policy brief deals with progress in 'gender equality' in primary education for the seven regions in Mauritius 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 Mauritius between 2001 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 Mauritius between 2001 and 2007?
- What were the changes in **selected gender-related school environment information** between 2001 and 2007 that could be further investigated in order to improve gender equality in education for Mauritius?

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

Mauritius' 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. Mauritius participated in SACMEQ I (2,919 Standard 6 pupils in 158 primary schools) in 1995, SACMEQ II (2,945 Standard 6 pupils in 159 primary schools) in 2001 and SACMEQ III (3,524 Standard 6 pupils in 152 primary schools) in 2007.

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 Mauritius

Mauritius has achieved the goals of universal primary education and gender parity in enrolment. This is the result of government’s impetus for free primary education for all (which started in the 1940s) and it was heightened after independence in 1968 (EHRSP 2008-2020, p57). Since 2009, the Government is a signatory to the African Women’s Decade 2010-2020. The Government has committed itself to the principles of gender equality from the Beijing Platform for Action that urged for an efficient institutional mechanism aimed at integrating a gender perspective into all policies and programmes. The Government’s commitment to gender equality is reinforced through the setting up of a separate Ministry in 2005, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development & Family Welfare. This Ministry launched a National Gender Policy Framework, in 2008, with action plans for all stakeholders. This document outlines Mauritius’ vision for gender equality and women’s empowerment and spells out operational guidelines for more gender responsive actions on the part of all organisations.

According to the National Gender Policy, ministries are responsible for developing gender-responsive policies, programmes and budgets, within their scope. They are also responsible for generating sex-disaggregated administrative data for gender-responsive planning, implementing and monitoring of

their interventions. Gender focal points (GFPs) have been identified at the administrative and technical levels within each organisation.

In the Education and Human Resources Strategy Plan 2008-2020, one of the strategic goals of primary education is to ‘achieve gender equality’ by 2020 (EHRSP 2008-2020, p16). Also within the plan the development of an education sector gender policy has been advocated: ‘The Ministry shall develop a sector gender policy consistent with the principles and operational strategies of the National Gender Policy Framework. The policy shall ensure equal opportunities are given to both sexes to achieve gender equality in learning achievement. It shall also ensure the gender-sensitivity of curricula and teaching and learning materials. Gender-sensitive indicators shall be developed to monitor gender gaps in education.’ (EHRSP 2008-2020, p63).

Gender Balance in Standard 6 Participation

Figure 1 shows the proportion of girls enrolled at the Standard 6 level for each region and Mauritius as a whole in both 2002 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, there has been a slight increase in the proportion of Standard 6 girls between 2001 and 2007. At the regional level, in 2001 in Curepipe, and Rodrigues, there were slightly smaller proportions of girls than boys at the Standard 6 level. However, in 2007, this situation has improved with all regions achieving gender balance.

Gender Differences in Learning Achievement

While there was some improvement in Mauritius towards greater gender equality in enrolments between 2001 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.

English

At the national level in Mauritius as a whole, the overall mean score in Reading increased by about 40 score points for both boys and girls from 2001 to 2007, maintaining the same gender disparity of 30 points in favour of girls. At the regional level, a similar pattern with a slight improvement was depicted in all regions except for Rodrigues and Black River, where the gender difference increased. In Rodrigues, while there was a slight improvement for girls, boys' achievement dropped by about 40 score points. In Black River, while boys' achievement stayed at a very low level of 470, there was a remarkable improvement for girls, resulting in a score of 525.

Mathematics

At the national level in Mathematics there was an improvement of about 40 score points from 2001 to 2007 with a marginal gender difference in favour of girls maintained over the two time periods. At the regional level, the same sort of marginal difference was present in all regions, except for Rodrigues and Black River where the gender gap increased by 2007. In these regions, while boys' Mathematics

achievement did not change much, there was an improvement in girls' achievement.

Other Information through 'Gender Lens'

The above sets of results illustrated two contrasting pictures regarding gender equality in education. First of all, in Mauritius, the situation of gender balance in Standard 6 enrolment has been improving. Secondly, it appeared that the learning dimension of gender equality had been kept almost unchanged (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 of teachers and school heads has been seen as a strategy for promoting gender equality in schools since teachers and school heads are considered to be good role models for pupils. Among SACMEQ countries, some pupils had general teachers who taught all subjects, while others had specialized subject teachers. In Mauritius, the same teachers taught Standard 6 pupils Reading and Mathematics. As seen in Table 1, the proportion of Standard 6 pupils taught by female teachers has increased from 28 percent in 2001 to 40 percent in 2007. A similar change has occurred in the proportion of Standard 6 pupils who went to schools that were led by female school heads. Although males still dominated both categories the trends show that the proportion of female staff has been increasing.

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 situation did not change over time with more than 95 percent of

Standard 6 pupils in schools with a basic security feature such as a fence.

Sanitation

In Table 1, the average numbers of pupils per toilet in 2001 and 2007 are shown separately, namely, boys per boys' toilet and girls per girls' toilet. All Standard 6 pupils went to schools with at least one gender-separated toilet. If the average number of pupils per toilet had decreased in 2007 compared to 2001, this would have indicated that the situation regarding the provision of toilets had improved over time. In Mauritius, an average Standard 6 boy was going to school where the boys/toilet ratio was 45 in 2001, and it had not changed much by 2007 (44). A slight increase was also seen for the girls/toilets (from 35 in 2001 to 38 in 2007). According to the 1957 Education Act, for an average enrolment of 500 pupils in a mixed school the ratio of number of girls to toilet should be 25 and ratio of number of boys to toilet should be 50.

Thus, while the ratio for toilet provision to boys is within the national benchmark, the situation is still far from satisfactory for girls.

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 Mauritius. Additional information concerning female staff, security, and sanitary issues was also presented to understand the context.

The results indicated that:

- The gender balance of Standard 6 pupils improved slightly from an already good position between 2001 and 2007.
- There was a noteworthy improvement in both Reading and Mathematics achievement. The size and the direction of gender differences did not

change much between 2001 and 2007 except for Rodrigues and Black River, where the girls performed much better in 2007. In other words, gender differences worsened in the poorest and the most isolated regions, but remained very similar in more advantageous regions.

- The teaching and leadership positions in Mauritius have been more feminized than before, but the proportion is not yet at the gender balance level.
- The situation of school fences in 2007 did not change from that in 2001, indicating that almost all the pupils are at schools with fences.
- In terms of gender-separated toilets, the number of pupils/toilets have not changed drastically over time either boys or girls. However the ratio of girls to girls' toilet was still far from satisfactory when compared to norms established in the Education Act.

Policy Suggestions

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

- The Human Resource Management and Development unit in the Ministry of Education and Human Resources which is responsible for the posting and transfer of teachers may wish to establish clear criteria for class allocation of teachers in the upper primary levels in order to ensure gender balance in teachers.
- The Planning unit may need to identify those schools where provision of girls' toilets is not in accordance with norms prescribed by the government for less gender discrimination
- The Ministry may wish to identify the possible causes of an increasing gender gap in achievement in Reading and Mathematics in Rodrigues and Black River.

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 Mauritius indicated that there is not much cause for alarm concerning gender differences in primary enrolment at the national level. However, there are gender differences in four important areas: (1) achievement in Reading and Mathematics (in favour of girls); (2) provision of toilets (below benchmark ratio for girls); and (3) gender equality in terms of female staff. Furthermore, at the micro level, gender differences in Reading and Mathematics are greatest in two regions Rodrigues and Black River. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources should address this issue before the gender gap increases further. For too long at primary level the focus has only been on comparing enrolment ratios for girls and boys. The gender perspective must now expand to cover more areas within the primary sector.

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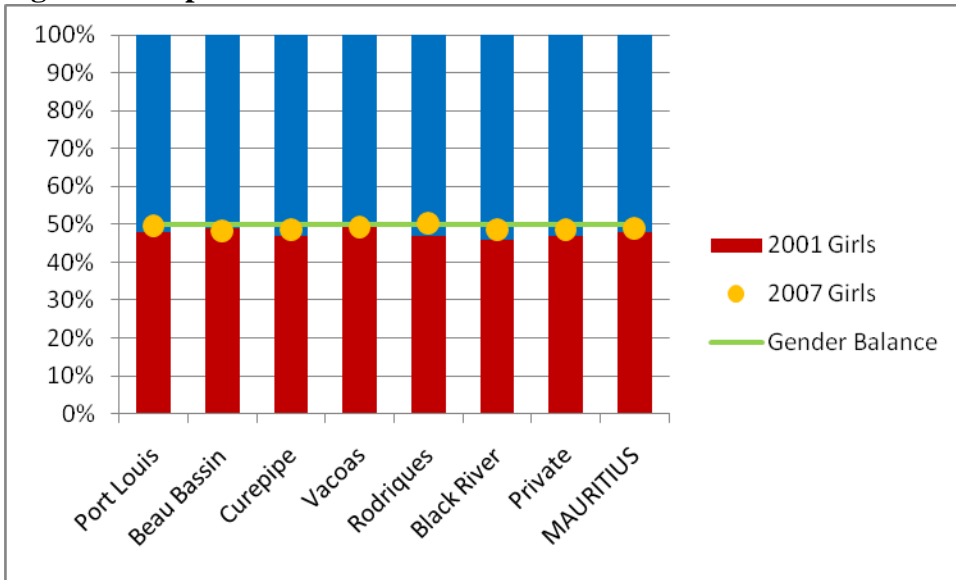
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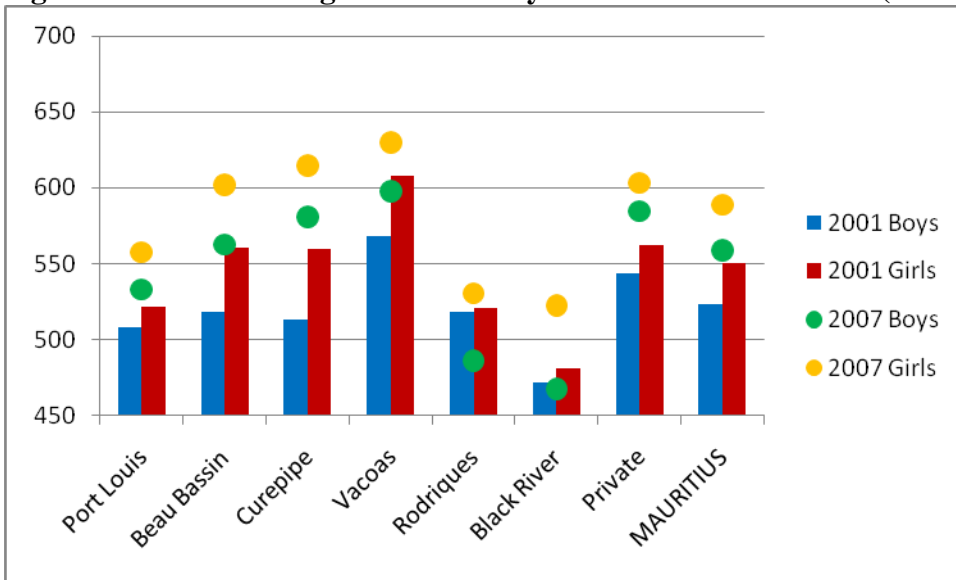
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Figure 1: Proportion of Standard 6 Girls out of Total Standard 6 Enrolments in Mauritius (2001 and 2007)



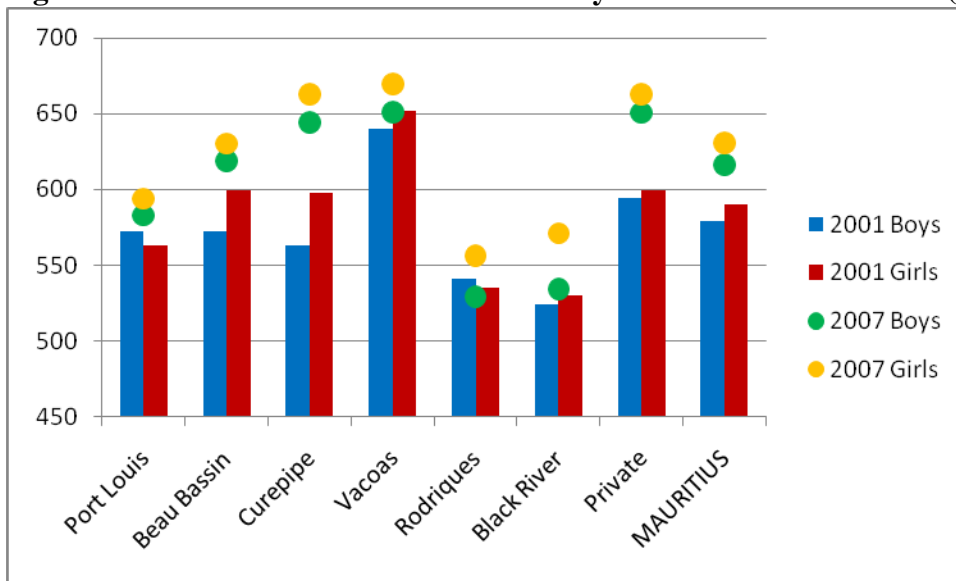
Source: SACMEQ Data Archive

Figure 2: Mean Reading Scores for Boys and Girls in Mauritius (2001 and 2007)



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive

Figure 3: Mean Mathematics Scores for Boys and Girls in Mauritius (2001 and 2007)



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive

Table 1: Selected Information through ‘Gender Lens’ in Mauritius (2001 and 2007)

Selected Indicators	2001	2007
Female Reading Teacher	28%	40%
Female Mathematics Teacher	28%	40%
Female School Head	34%	40%
Schools with Fences	97%	97%
# Boys per Boys' Toilet	45	44
# Girls per Girls Toilet	35	38

Source: SACMEQ Data Archive