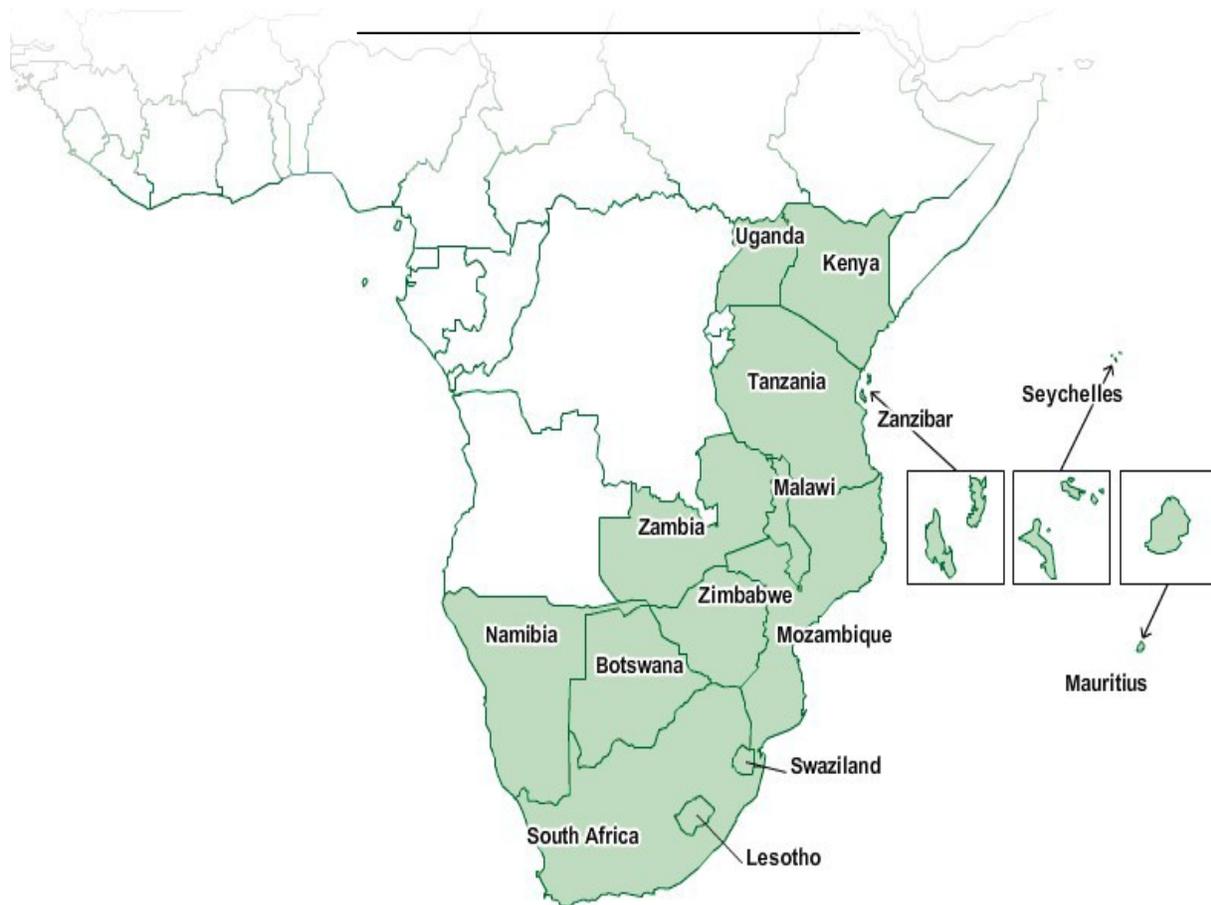


About SACMEQ



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Acting Director of SACMEQ
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Introduction

Sub-Saharan African countries have continued to make rapid progress towards universal primary education over the past decade by expanding access to schooling for a large number of children. However, the past decade has also seen a growing need for nations to broaden the concept of “Education for All” beyond a concentration on increased “access” to schooling, to include improvements in the “quality” of learning outcomes for all children.

There is general concern that the quality of education that is being offered in many countries does not provide learners with the desired competencies. In other words, learners are not acquiring critical knowledge and skills at school that are required for meaningful contribution to sustainable national development. The poor quality of education has been demonstrated by low student achievement levels in national and international assessment studies. The poor results have led to on-going debates about the quality of education in many countries. These debates have prompted the World Bank and other international organisations that invest in education programmes to combine the focus on increasing enrolment rates into schools with greater emphasis on improving the quality of education in order to achieve improved “Learning for All” (LFA) for the next 10 years.

Improving the quality of education is a priority within the context of the African Union’s Plan of Action for the First Decade of the Development of Education in Africa. SACMEQ’s research and training programmes are aimed at improving the quality of education in SACMEQ member countries because of a shared common understanding that improving the quality of education provides a critical pathway for achieving socio-economic development.

SACMEQ has been highly successful by employing scientific methods for monitoring and evaluation of the conditions of schooling and the quality of education in member states. SACMEQ’s research agenda is determined by general policy concerns identified by SACMEQ Ministers of Education. SACMEQ researchers translate the policy concerns into specific research questions which form the basis for data collection and reporting as illustrated in the SACMEQ policy research cycle (see Figure 1).

1. What is SACMEQ?

The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) is an international non-profit developmental organisation with a membership consisting of 15 Ministries of Education located in Southern and Eastern Africa.

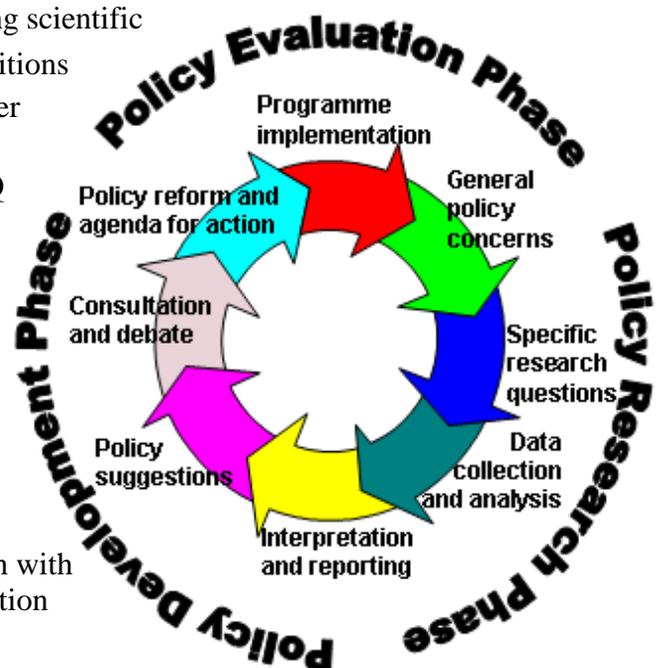


Figure 1

2. Which Countries are Members of SACMEQ?

The SACMEQ Consortium currently has 15 members: Ministries of Education in **Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania (Mainland and Zanzibar), Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.**

3. What are SACMEQ's Main objectives?

- (a) To provide training opportunities that will build the technical capacity of the SACMEQ Ministries of Education to monitor and evaluate the conditions of schooling and the quality of their own education systems;
- (b) To undertake co-operative educational policy research in order to generate information that can be used by decision-makers to plan the quality of education;
- (c) To utilize innovative information dissemination approaches and a range of policy- dialogue activities in order to ensure that SACMEQ research results are widely discussed, debated, and understood by all stakeholders and senior decision-makers and then used as the basis for policy and practice.

4 What has SACMEQ Accomplished?

The SACMEQ Consortium has completed three large-scale cross-national studies of the conditions of schooling and the quality of education in Southern and Eastern Africa:

The SACMEQ I Project commenced in 1995 and was completed in 1999. Seven Ministries of Education participated in the project (Kenya, Mauritius, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, Zanzibar, and Zimbabwe). The study provided "agendas for government action" concerning: educational inputs to schools, benchmark standards for educational provision, equity in the allocation of educational resources, and the reading literacy performance of Grade 6 learners. The data collection for this project included information gathered from around 20,000 learners; 3,000 teachers; and 1,000 school principals.

The SACMEQ II Project commenced in 2000 and was completed in 2004. Fourteen Ministries of Education participated in the project (Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania (Mainland), Tanzania (Zanzibar), Uganda, and Zambia). The research included an extensive assessment of the performance levels of students and their teachers in the areas of literacy and mathematics. The SACMEQ II Project data collection covered around 40,000 learners; 4,000 teachers; and 2,000 school principals.

The SACMEQ III Project commenced in 2006 and was completed during 2011. All 15 SACMEQ Ministries of Education participated in the study. The research followed the general research directions of the first two SACMEQ Projects by focusing on an examination of the conditions of schooling and the quality of education.

At the request of the SACMEQ Ministers of Education, an additional research component was included in the SACMEQ III Project in order to provide information that could be used to generate more effective educational planning responses to the challenges associated with the HIV-AIDS pandemic. The SACMEQ III Project involved data collections from around 60,000 learners, 8,000 teachers, and 2,800 school principals. The management, cleaning,

scoring, and merging of the SACMEQ III Project data required SACMEQ to develop new and innovative software and logistical tools to ensure that the final data archives satisfied the highest international benchmarks for accuracy and relevance.

The SACMEQ IV Project is scheduled for implementation during 2012 – 2014. The first working meeting for SACMEQ National Research Coordinators and Curriculum Specialists on: “The design and development of new instruments (tests, questionnaires and manuals) for the SACMEQ IV Project” will be held in Nairobi in March 2012. The main data collection is scheduled for 2013 and the results will be presented in 2014. The SACMEQ IV Project will enable the 15 SACMEQ school systems to report on progress made towards the attainment of Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the year 2015.

5. How is SACMEQ Governed and Operated?

(a) General Policy and Administration/Finance: The main policy decisions concerning SACMEQ's programmes of research and training are set down by the SACMEQ Assembly of Ministers of Education – which meets every two years.

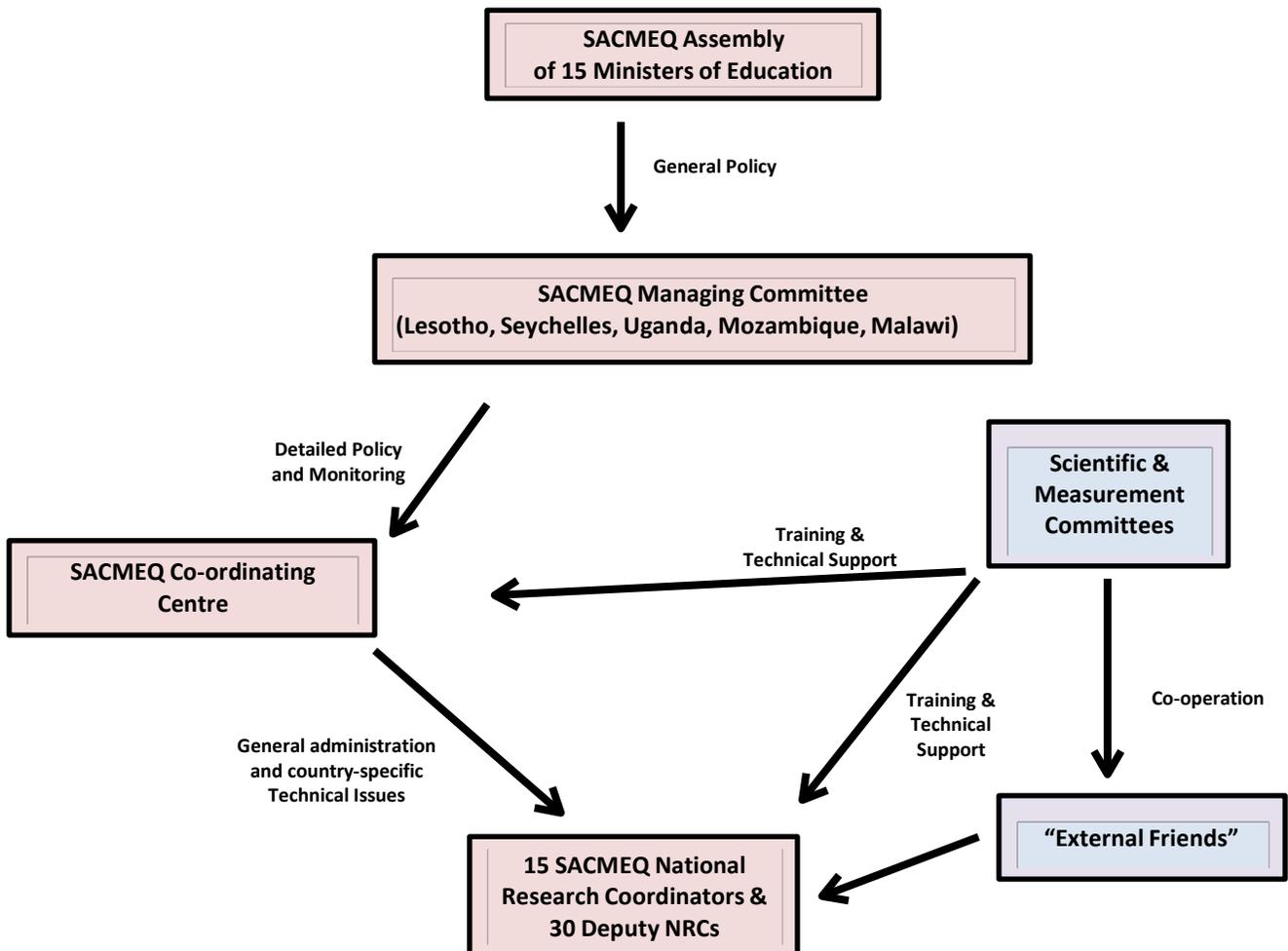


Figure 2

The details of SACMEQ's administration and finance are coordinated by the SACMEQ Managing Committee (a sub-committee of the SACMEQ Assembly of Ministers) which holds annual meetings and is available, as required, for more frequent consultation.

(b) Operational Activities: SACMEQ's daily operational activities are managed by the SACMEQ Coordinating Centre (SCC) which is staffed by the SACMEQ Director and the SACMEQ Technical Manager. The SACMEQ Coordinating Centre provides administrative and technical support for the SACMEQ National Research Coordinators and their Deputies.

The SACMEQ Coordinating Centre also works with partners to obtain funding for SACMEQ's research and training programmes (such as training workshops; technical support (especially for sampling and educational measurement); the production of specialized software systems for data management and data analysis; and the design and production of technical field manuals.

(c) Within-Country Activities: Each SACMEQ Ministry of Education is responsible for: (i) appointing a SACMEQ National Research Coordinator and two Deputies; and (ii) managing its own within-country SACMEQ research activities.

6. What are the Benefits of SACMEQ's Programmes?

The main short term "**outputs**" of SACMEQ's programmes include:

- (a) **Research products and tools** in the form of research reports, indicators, and information systems that can be used to make informed decisions concerning the current status of an education system, and trends that have developed;
- (b) **Trained educational planners and researchers** that are able to use modern survey methods in a wide range of educational policy research settings to generate evidence that can be used to monitor and evaluate the quality of education; and
- (c) **Improved and expanded dissemination systems for SACMEQ information resources** that reach a wide audience of stakeholders via the use of the Internet, information meetings, and targeted publications (such as the SACMEQ Policy Issues Series).

The main long term "**outcomes**" of the SACMEQ programmes include:

- (a) **A long-term information base on education quality** that is used by Ministries of Education and external stakeholders to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of various educational interventions over longer time periods (of 10 to 15 years) by using accurate, relevant, and comprehensive data on student educational achievement (in reading, mathematics, and HIV-AIDS knowledge) and detailed information on the general conditions of schooling.
- (b) **Improved and expanded evidence-based policy procedures** are used by Ministries of Education for planning decisions concerned with the quality of education and the conditions of schooling.

7. What are Some of the Dimensions Associated with SACMEQ Learners' Achievement?

SACMEQ's conception of monitoring and evaluating the *quality* of education is influenced by an attempt to have a holistic approach to quality that takes into account the linkages between inputs, processes, and outcomes of education. This entails the collection of policy relevant data about school contexts (size, location, type, and resources), and the characteristics of learners (age, gender, school attendance and home background), teachers (age, gender, qualifications, teaching practices, classroom, resources, behaviour and perceptions), school heads (age, gender, management training, and experience) – in addition to assessment of learning outcomes in reading literacy, mathematics, and knowledge about HIV and AIDS.

The interactions between some of the SACMEQ variables that are associated with learner achievement have been illustrated in Figure 3 below.

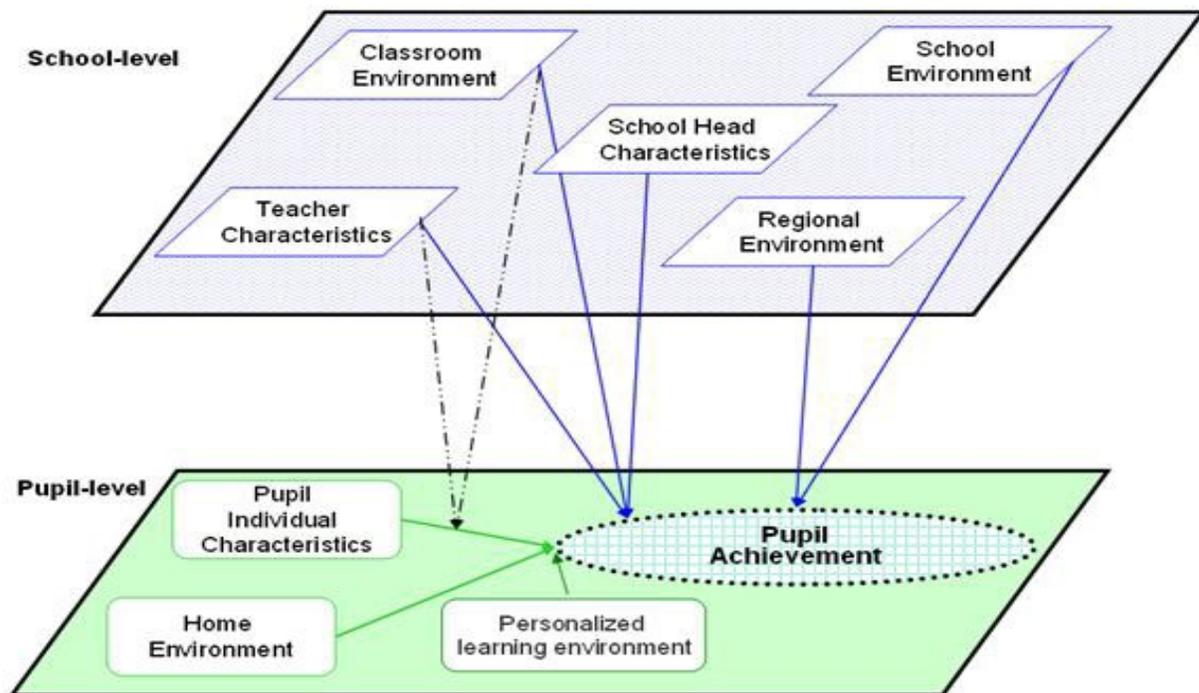


Figure 3

8. What are the Key Findings of the SACMEQ III Project?

The results of the SACMEQ III Project show that there were differences in the conditions of schooling, and the quality of learning outcomes across SACMEQ school systems. Wide differences were also observed between provinces within individual countries, and the trend between 2000 and 2007 revealed different patterns. For example:

- (a) There was an **improvement in reading and mathematics achievement in some countries, a decline in achievement in some countries, and in others the achievement levels remained more or less the same** between 2000 and 2007. (See <http://www.sacmeq.org/downloads/policy/002-SACMEQPolicyIssuesSeries-Pupilachievement.pdf>)
- (b) There was **no change in the gender differences in learning achievement between 2000 and 2007**. The pattern of the differences remained the same. (See http://sacmeq.org/downloads/Working%20Papers/04_Gender_Final_21-02b.pdf)
- (c) The results also showed that **existing HIV-AIDS prevention education programmes in SACMEQ school systems were not effective** because a majority of the Grade 6 (13 years old) learners did not have the minimum level of knowledge about HIV and AIDS that is required to preserve and protect health. (See http://sacmeq.org/downloads/policy/003-SACMEQPolicyIssuesSeries-HIV_AIDSknowledgetests.pdf)
- (d) There were **differences in the characteristics of teachers** across the 15 SACMEQ school systems in terms of age, qualifications, employment status, gender, and teaching subject matter knowledge. (http://www.sacmeq.org/downloads/Working%20Papers/02_Teachers_Final_05Dec2011.pdf)
- (e) There were **variations in the provision of essential school and/or classroom resources** (such as textbooks) across the 15 SACMEQ school systems and among provinces in each country. (See http://www.sacmeq.org/downloads/sacmeqIII/Levels_and_Trends_in_School_Resources_FIN2.pdf)

More results of the SACMEQ I, II, and III Projects can be found and downloaded from the SACMEQ website: www.sacmeq.org



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