

Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium
for Monitoring Educational Quality

Progress in Gender Equality in Education: Malawi

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Introduction

This policy brief deals with progress in ‘gender equality’ in primary education for the six divisions in Malawi 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 six divisions in Malawi between 2002 and 2007? What were the changes in the **size and the direction of the gender differences** in reading and mathematics scores for the six divisions in Malawi between 2002 and 2007?
- What were the changes in **selected gender-related school environment information** between 2002 and 2007 that could be further investigated in order to improve gender equality in education for Malawi?

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

Malawi’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. Malawi participated in: SACMEQ I in 1997 (1,983 Standard 6 pupils in 148 primary schools); SACMEQ II in 2002 (2,333 Standard 6 pupils in 140 primary schools); and SACMEQ III in 2007 (2,781 Standard 6 pupils in 139 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 Malawi

Malawi cites gender issues as an integral part of its national strategy for growth and development. The National Gender Policy (NGP) supports this national strategy and aims at promoting gender mainstreaming throughout the public sector. In the education sector, the NGP advocates reduced repetition, absenteeism, and dropout rates for girls, especially in the higher classes where the gender parity index decreased from 1.04 in the first four standards of primary education to 0.96 in Standards 5 to 8 (MOEST, 2008a). The policy also advocates the increased enrolment of girls in science and technology and the implementation of a gender-responsive curriculum. To effectively coordinate and monitor the implementation of gender-related programmes, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) has a Gender Coordinating Unit. As a policy requirement, all education institutions under the ministry are required to identify a gender focal point person.

Most of the policies and programmes addressing gender inequalities in education focus on access and participation, as seen in the following examples:

- Free primary education which reduced gender disparities in enrolment.
- The readmission policy which was put in place in 1993 (the procedures were revised in 2006) and that allowed school- aged mothers to return to

school after giving birth. The policy benefited a lot of girls.

- The child-friendly School programme. Included in this programme is the provision of water and sanitation facilities for both boys and girls, with an emphasis in particular on girls.
- Grant programmes targeting orphaned girls and boys. There are also specific grants aimed at girls in difficult circumstances.

Gender Balance in Standard 6 Participation

Figure 1 shows the proportion of girls enrolled at the Standard 6 level for each division and Malawi 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 was a small increase in the proportion of Standard 6 girls to boys between 2002 and 2007, reaching slightly above the gender-balance level of 50 percent. The same pattern was observed in the Central West and North education divisions. In terms of each division, the greatest increase occurred in the South West education division, with a rise of over six percentage points, resulting in more girls than boys. In contrast, in the South East education division, which in 2002 had recorded the highest proportion of Standard 6 female pupils (close to 52 percent), there was a decrease in the proportion in 2007, and consequently, the gender balance level was not attained that year. The most disturbing result was seen in the Central East division, where the proportion of Standard 6 girls remained unchanged at 45 percent. These results call for further investigation to establish the reasons behind this trend.

Gender Differences in Learning Achievements

While there was an improvement in Malawi towards greater gender equality in enrolments between 2002 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 division. 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

Between 2002 and 2007 in Malawi as a whole, both boys and girls showed reasonable improvement, but boys were consistently outperforming girls in reading by over 10 score points. At the division level, the improvement was remarkable in Central East and North divisions, but the gender differences became slightly wider (close to 10 score points) in 2007, in favour of boys. In Central West, South East, and Shire Highlands divisions, there was not much difference between 2002 and 2007 for both boys and girls, and the same gender gap of some 15 score points was maintained. The most worrisome division was South West, where there was a deterioration in the achievement for both boys (a 7 score-point drop) and girls (a 13 score-point drop), which resulted in a gender difference of 10 score points in 2007, while there had been virtually no gender difference in 2002.

Mathematics

At the national level, a similar trend was observed in 2007 for mathematics, where both boys and girls

improved quite noticeably in 2007, but with a consistent gender gap of about 12 score points in favour of boys. In all educational divisions except for the South West, there was some improvement in the learning achievements. In Central East, Central West, North, and South East divisions, the improvement was remarkable, moving the boys' mean score to around 455, and the girls' mean score to around 445, while the improvement in Shire Highlands was minimal. In the South West division, both boys and girls had much lower scores in 2007 than in 2002. However, the direction and size of the gender differences were consistent in all the divisions, with about 10 to 18 score points in favour of boys.

Other Information through the 'Gender Lens'

The above sets of results illustrated two contrasting pictures regarding gender equality in education. Firstly, Malawi had been making great progress in the implementation of the gender-related policy regarding access to and participation in primary schools, especially for girls. Secondly, it appeared that the overall improvement in learning achievements had carried through the same gender differences, which seems to suggest that the learning dimension of gender equality had been overlooked (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. In Malawi, the 'general' teachers have taught both reading and mathematics. As shown in Table 1, the proportion of

Standard 6 pupils taught by female teachers was very low, at just over 25 percent for both reading and mathematics in 2002. This percentage decreased slightly over time.

The overall proportion of Standard 6 pupils with female head teachers remained about the same between 2002 and 2007, at an extremely low percentage of 12 and 13 percent.

The MOEST acknowledged that the lack of female teachers had a detrimental impact on female students. It noted that the dominance and conduct of male teachers was a serious concern for girls' education, especially in the rural areas (MOEST, 2008b). The ministry recognised that the recruitment and deployment of teachers has been inefficient and not deliberately targeted at female teacher trainees. Increasing the supply of teachers with a positive bias towards increasing female throughput for both primary and secondary schools by at least 35 percent is one of the key targets of the National Education Sector Plan (NESP).

School Safety

Certain school resources are very critical in order to keep girls at school. Such resources, for example, include school safety (school fences) and sanitation measures (separate toilets for boys and girls).

The SACMEQ study included the investigation of the percentage of Standard 6 pupils who went to schools with fences. Overall, there has been an increase in the proportion of boys and girls attending schools with fences (see Table 1), from 16 percent in 2002 to 19 percent in 2007. Although this increase was marginal, it is commendable, taking into consideration the tremendous amount of new schools that have been built since the introduction of free primary education. However, it is a very unpleasant situation when both pupils and teachers have not been secure whilst at school.

Sanitation

In Table 1, the average numbers of pupils per toilet in 2002 and 2007 are shown separately, namely, boys per boys' toilet and girls per girls' toilet. About 8 and 1 percent of Standard 6 pupils in Malawi went to schools with no toilet at all in 2002 and 2007, respectively. These 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 2002, this would have indicated that the situation regarding the provision of toilets had improved over time. This was not the case for Malawi.

Table 1 illustrates that the provision of toilets for both boys and girls worsened consistently between 2002 and 2007. The mean number of pupils per toilet for boys went up from 113 in 2002 to 131 in 2007. Similarly for girls, the mean number went up from 114 in 2002 to 124 in 2007. These figures were far removed from the ministry's benchmark of a pupil/toilet ratio of 10:1 for girls and 12:1 for boys (MOEST, 2001). Needless to say, a lack of toilet facilities is a health hazard which can lead to the outbreak of contagious diseases. This can also lead to low participation amongst pupils and poor concentration on studies, especially 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 Malawi. Additional information concerning female staff, security, and sanitary issues **was also presented** to understand the context.

The results indicated that:

- There was an overall improvement in Standard 6 girls' participation for all divisions, but the Central East and South East educational

divisions persisted in having fewer girls than boys.

- The learning achievements, in general, saw some improvement, except for the South West educational division. In all the educational divisions, boys were systematically better in both subjects.
- The proportion of female staff stagnated over time, and the gender balance remained very uneven.
- Overall, not many pupils went to schools with a fence, and toilet provision was not sufficient for the continuously increasing number of pupils, both for boys and girls.

Policy Suggestions

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

- The Gender Coordinating Unit of the MOEST together with its developmental partners may wish to review all the past gender-related interventions in order to identify: (i) the proportion of the project budget that was used for the improvement of quality; and (ii) the type of quality-related indicators used in order to monitor the progress in gender equality.
- The Department of Teacher Education and Development should take the lead in the development and implementation of a gender-sensitive teacher training and deployment policy to ensure increased proportions of female teachers and head teachers.
- The Planning Department in collaboration with the Department of Basic Education, the Buildings Department, the Education District Offices and School Management Committees should develop an action plan that should aim at translating into reality the targets set out in the Education Sector Implementation Plan (ESIP), for example, the construction of more toilets within the shortest possible time. The plans

should include the involvement of the Local Development Fund (LDF) and other stakeholders, especially community-based organizations and NGOs that support basic education programmes.

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 Malawi indicated that Malawi still has a lot to do to attain gender equality in learning achievement as well as teaching and leadership positions. Girls were consistently disadvantaged compared to boys in most of the indicators analyzed. The progress noted between SACMEQ II and SACMEQ III in some of the indicators, offers an opportunity from which to learn. Interventions that have brought about such positive developments need to be increased. More efforts and new interventions need to be implemented to address the challenges, especially regarding construction of toilets, promotion of girls' achievement, and the allocation of female teaching staff and head teachers.

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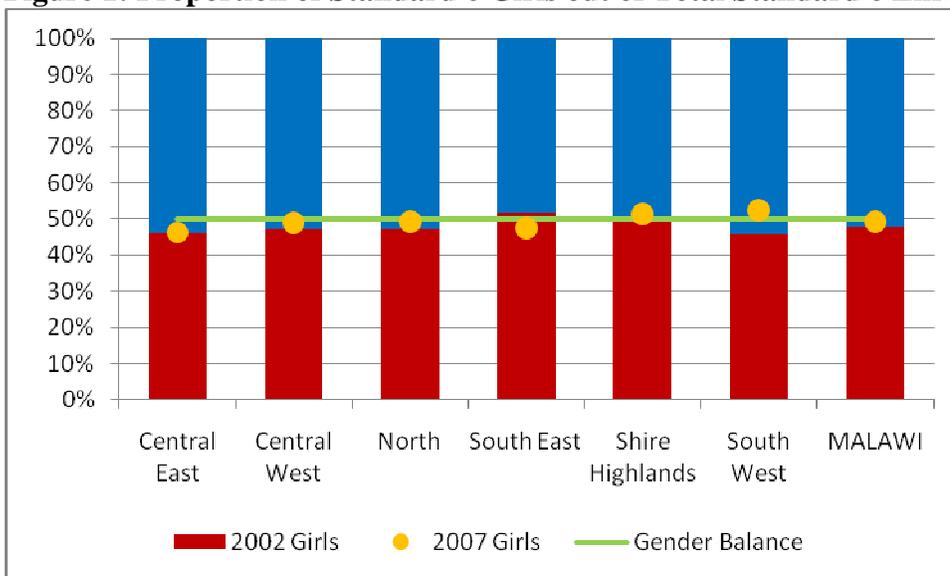
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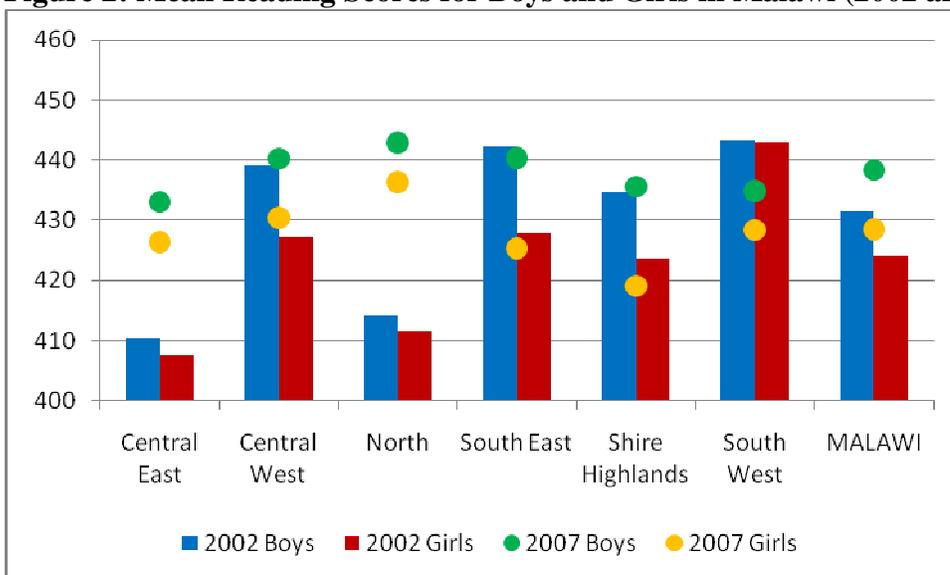
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Figure 1: Proportion of Standard 6 Girls out of Total Standard 6 Enrolments in Malawi (2002 and 2007)



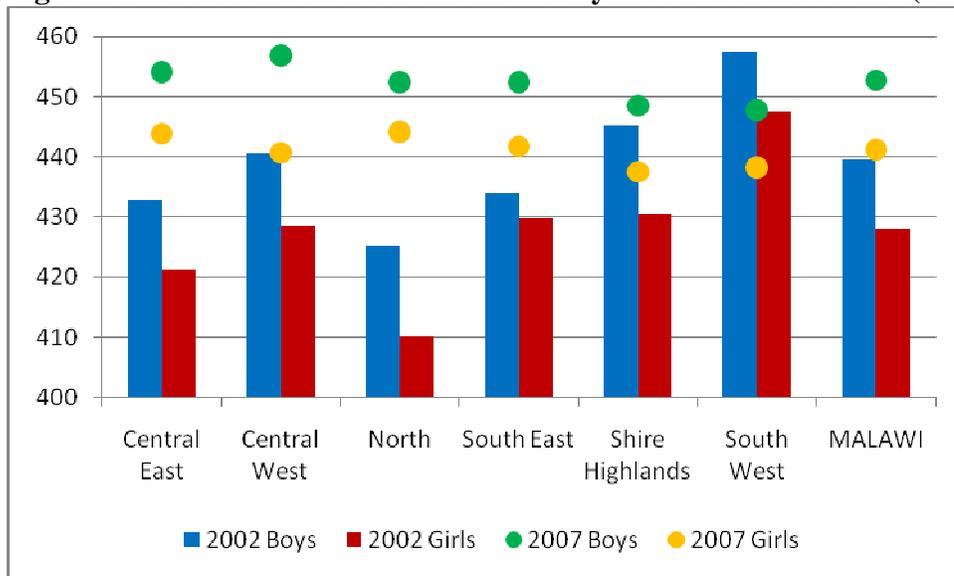
Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

Figure 2: Mean Reading Scores for Boys and Girls in Malawi (2002 and 2007)



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

Figure 3: Mean Mathematics Scores for Boys and Girls in Malawi (2002 and 2007)



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

Table 1: Selected Information through ‘Gender Lens’ in Malawi (2002 and 2007)

Selected Indicators	2002	2007
Female Reading Teacher	28%	26%
Female Mathematics Teacher	27%	25%
Female School Head	12%	13%
Schools with Fences	16%	19%
# Boys per Boys' Toilet	113	131
# Girls per Girls' Toilet	114	124

Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.