



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Address by Irina Bokova,  
Director-General of UNESCO  
on the occasion of the SACMEQ Assembly of Ministers**

**IIEP, Paris, 23 October 2011**

Excellencies Ministers,

Dear Khalil Mahshi, Director of UNESCO International Institute for  
Educational Planning,

Mr Demus Makuwa,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you, Ministers from the 15 countries of  
the *Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring  
Educational Quality*, to this 8th Assembly meeting.

Your presence today testifies to your long-standing commitment  
to tackle educational challenges in your countries based on  
informed evidence.

The *Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring  
Educational Quality* – SACMEQ -- provides such evidence.

This is a tested model of cooperation that combines research and  
training to assess what is happening in schools.

It is building strong capacity in countries, and it is generating information that is vital for decision-makers to improve the quality of education – and we know that quality is an overarching challenge that goes hand-in-hand with increasing access and promoting equity.

SACMEQ pursues a ‘learning by doing’ strategy, always the best pedagogy for success.

Every round of SACMEQ widens in scope.

SACMEQ III covers 60,000 pupils, 8,000 teachers and 2,800 school heads in over fifteen countries. This is impressive.

The results provide a scan of the state of education in your respective countries – starting with schooling conditions, achievement levels in reading and mathematics, and including the knowledge that pupils and their teachers have about HIV and AIDS.

UNESCO and its International Institute for Educational Planning are proud to be associated with this project, and to have accompanied its evolution.

The project has had strong support from the outset.

The International Institute for Educational Planning was a founding partner and takes pleasure in hosting the SACMEQ Coordinating Centre. The Netherlands has always recognized the value of this initiative.

The results of SACMEQ III have telling implications for policy.

They underscore the conclusions of other recent Reports -- that in any given country, socio-economic background and location are key causes for disparities in learning achievement.

They tell us about the positive impact of pre-school on learning performance. This is a message that many of you heard at our first *World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education* in Moscow, in September 2010.

They show that bolder action must be taken to address the gender gap in learning outcomes.

They insist on the fundamental role of teachers in a student's schooling life.

And in countries suffering from some of the world's highest HIV prevalence rates, they highlight that prevention education programmes are not working as effectively as they should be.

Together, we must tackle these challenges.

We must encourage national universities and research institutes to conduct policy-oriented studies based on these results.

This reconfirms the absolute priority of education in UNESCO's mission.

Education is a basic human right that is essential for human dignity and empowerment. It also brings sustainability to all of the

development goals adopted in 2000, from poverty reduction to better health to environmental security.

As you know, UNESCO has two global priorities that are embedded in all our programmes – these are Africa and Gender Equality.

Last July, Ministers gathered at the High Level Segment of the ECOSOC, devoted for the first time to education, adopted a Declaration that underlines the central role of education for development.

This Declaration endorses the holistic vision of education that inspires SACMEQ.

Our education interventions in Africa support the goals of the African Union's *Second Decade for Education in Africa*, which run until 2015.

We are supporting reforms to improve access to learning, from early childhood to primary and lower secondary.

Through our *Teacher Training Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa*, we are continuing to assess and strengthen the capacities of national institutions.

In close partnership with the *Association for the Development of Education in Africa*, we are promoting the application of Open and Distance Learning in teachers' professional development.

We have provided support to 17 countries in East and Southern Africa to develop comprehensive education sector responses to HIV and AIDS.

The SACMEQ data tells us there is still a long way to go.

We are putting in place Education Management Information Systems that are so vital for producing quality data.

It is crucial to support policies that improve the quality of education and the transition to secondary level.

We are developing a broad quality framework to strengthen national understandings of the constraints to learning and how to respond to these.

South Africa has been among the countries that has offered us guidance in the early phases of this initiative.

Later this week, we will be launching in New York the new edition of the *Global Education Digest* produced by UNESCO's Institute for Statistics.

This shows that governments are struggling to meet the rising demand for secondary education -- especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where there are enough school places for only 36 percent of children to enroll, with girls facing the greatest barriers.

UNESCO's *Global Partnership on Girls' and Women's Education*, which I launched last May in Paris with the United Nations Secretary General Mr Ban Ki-moon, Secretary of State Hilary

Clinton and the Prime Ministers of Mali and Bangladesh, puts the spotlight on secondary education and literacy — two weak links in the system.

Societies pay a high price for such exclusion.

Your region is acting on these challenges.

I am pleased that just last month several of your countries, including Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, participated in the *Eastern Africa High Level Forum on Education for All*.

Allow me to once again congratulate Kenya, and you, Excellency Minister Ogeri, for organizing this insightful initiative.

During that meeting, you took stock and identified key challenges – ones reflected in the SACMEQ findings and also challenges relating to literacy, technical and vocational education, as well as issues linked to climate change and education for refugees and internally displaced persons.

This broad vision of education is the foundation for building knowledge societies, which are so essential for sustainable development today.

I thank you again for your commitment and I look forward to welcoming you to the General Conference.

I trust that it will also be an occasion for you, in the spirit of SACMEQ, to continue sharing knowledge and learning from our family of Member States.

I wish you a successful meeting.