



Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium
for Monitoring Educational Quality

Progress in Gender Equality in Education: Zimbabwe

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Introduction

This policy brief deals with progress in ‘gender equality’ in primary education for the ten provinces in Zimbabwe by seeking answers to the following specific questions:

- What were the changes in the **proportion of girls’ enrolment** at the Grade 6 level for the ten provinces in Zimbabwe between 1995 and 2007?
- What were the changes in the **size and the direction of the gender differences** in Reading and Mathematics scores between 1995 and 2007 for the ten provinces in Zimbabwe?
- What were the changes in **selected gender-related school environment information** between 1995 and 2007 that could be further investigated in order to improve gender equality in education for Zimbabwe?

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

Zimbabwe’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.

The origin of SACMEQ was a small experimental project initiated by IIEP in Zimbabwe in 1990. Based on this, SACMEQ has undertaken three large-scale, cross-national studies of the quality of education: SACMEQ I with seven Ministries (1995-1999, Reading); SACMEQ II with 14 Ministries (2000-2004, Reading and Mathematics); and SACMEQ III with 15 Ministries (2006-2010, Reading, Mathematics, and HIV and AIDS Knowledge). Zimbabwe participated in SACMEQ I (2,697 Grade 6 pupils in 150 primary schools) and SACMEQ III (3,021 Grade 6 pupils in 142 primary schools).

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 (MDGs) (United Nations, 2006).

The gender equality issue in education has been a major concern in many countries because of its link to 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 achievement and subsequent life opportunities.

Gender-Related Policy in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, gender equality issues in education are enforced through such policies as P35 and P77 which focus on issues of discipline and curriculum implementation. One of the effects of P35 was to provide continued access to schooling to girls who become pregnant while at school. P77 provided greater gender equality in subject selection and educational paths by ensuring equal access to all subjects including technical/vocational subjects. The Inspectorate Departments of the Ministry ensure that the provisions of those policies are adhered to in line with the fulfilment of the requirements of the Millennium Development Goals. A national strategic plan (2005-2010) for the education of girls and other vulnerable groups was put in place, and integrated civil education movement clubs have been set up in order to provide gender sensitive skills to girls.

Gender Balance in Grade 6 Participation

In Figure 1, the proportions of girls enrolled at Grade 6 level for both 1995 and 2007 have been presented for each province and Zimbabwe as a whole. It should be noted that the ‘scientific’ sampling method with internationally-required level of sampling accuracy that has been used throughout the SACMEQ studies has allowed the girls’ proportion at the Grade

6 level in the sample to reflect that for the target population.

At the national level, there was an increase in the percentage of girls in Grade 6 from 50 percent in 1995 to 57 percent 2007. At the provincial level, while the proportion of girls was approximately 50 percent in almost all the provinces during 1995, it increased considerably in many of the provinces. The highest increase was in Mashonaland East, where it jumped from 45 percent in 1995 to 63 percent in 2007, followed by Matabeleland North which increased by approximately 12 percentage points. Harare, Mashonaland Central, and Manicaland also had considerable increases in the proportion of girls in Grade 6. In 1995 Bulawayo Province¹ was the only province where the proportion of girls in Grade 6 exceeded 55 percent, and there was not much change over time. Overall eight provinces experienced different degrees of improvement in the proportion of girls at Grade 6 level. This significant and widespread increase does raise some questions about the levels of boys’ enrolment. The current discrepancies merit investigation as they may affect gender equality in the long term.

Gender Differences in Learning Achievement

As stated earlier gender equality refers to more than just equal numbers of boys and girls in school and as such gender equality in achievement must also be considered. Gender and time differences in learning achievement in Reading and Mathematics have been presented by province in Figures 2 and 3, respectively. The standardized scores with a pupil mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100 were established, based on the calibrated test items during SACMEQ II. Although Zimbabwe did not participate in SACMEQ

¹ Bulawayo was not a separate region in 1995, but data from SACMEQ I has been split in order to measure the progress in the region that is now known as Bulawayo.

II, use of the sub-set of test items along with the Rasch measurement approach during throughout all SACMEQ studies permitted valid comparison of scores over time.

Reading

At the national level in Zimbabwe as a whole, there was a slight increase in the Reading scores for both boys and girls in 2007, maintaining the same marginal gender difference in favour of girls as in 1995.

At the provincial level, the trends were mixed. In Harare, Midland, and Masvingo provinces, both boys and girls had increased scores, resulting in almost no gender difference. In contrast, Bulawayo, which reported no gender difference in 1995, had a gender difference of more than 20 score points in favour of girls in 2007, due to a remarkable score increase by girls. Large gender differences in favour of girls were also recorded in Mashonaland East, Matabeleland North, and Matabeleland South, but for different reasons. In Mashonaland East and Matabeleland South, boys' scores decreased by over 35 points which was much larger than the drop in girls' scores. In Matabeleland North, while boys remained at the same level of 450, girls recorded a 20 score point increase, resulting in a difference of over 50 score points in favour of girls. In Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland West, and Manicaland, although there was not a large gender difference, there were large drops in the scores of both boys and girls.

Mathematics

As there was no Mathematics test administered in 1995 a comparative analysis over time is not possible. In 2007 at the national level, there was no gender difference in Mathematics achievement, with boys and girls both averaging scoring 520.

At the provincial level, gender differences were marginal except for in Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South, where girls outperformed boys

by some 40 score points. In Harare, Mashonaland Central, and Midlands, boys performed better than girls by about 15 to 20 points.

Other Information through 'Gender Lens'

The two sets of results above illustrate two complementary pictures regarding gender equality in education. First of all, Grade 6 enrolment seems to be more in favour of girls. Secondly, it appears that learning achievement is also moving in favour of girls in Reading, especially in Matabeleland North and South. In order to help understand the context of these results, a set of selected gender-related information has been provided in Table 1. All the indicators expressed in Table 1 should be interpreted in relation to the Grade 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. Some SACMEQ countries had general teachers who taught all subjects, while others had specialized subject teachers. In Zimbabwe, Grade 6 pupils were taught Reading and Mathematics by the same teacher. As seen in Table 1, the percentage of Grade 6 pupils taught by female teachers increased from 22 percent to 29 percent in Zimbabwe between 1995 and 2007. Although it is not shown in the table, it should be noted that this indicator had a large variation between provinces, and that the change over time varied less in urban provinces than in rural provinces. There was an increase in the percentage of Grade 6 pupils who went to schools with female School heads from 10 percent in 1995 to 27 percent in 2007. These results indicate that there has been some success in efforts made towards greater gender equality in school teaching and leadership positions.

School Safety

Some school resources are critical for keeping girls at schools, for example school safety measures (such as school fences) and sanitation measures (such as separate toilets for boys and girls). Table 1 illustrates that on average, 72 percent of the Grade 6 pupils were in schools with fences in 2007. It should be noted that school fences are but one indicator of school safety, other indicators (such as school distance) are measured in the forthcoming National Report for Zimbabwe.

Sanitation

In Table 1, the average numbers of pupils per toilet in 1995 and 2007 are shown separately for boys' toilets and girls' toilets. It should be noted that about 1 percent of Grade 6 pupils went to schools with no toilet at all in both 1995 and 2007. The average numbers of girls and boys per toilet reflect only those schools with at least one gender-separated toilet. If the average number of pupils per toilet decreased in 2007 compared to 1995, this indicates that the situation regarding the provision of toilets improved over time. In Zimbabwe, the pupil/toilet ratios have slightly increased for both boys' toilets and girls' toilets between 1995 and 2007, indicating a relative deterioration of the toilet provision. In addition, compared to the Ministry's benchmark on of 20 girls per toilet and 25 boys per toilet, these numbers indicate that much needs to be done in order to ensure reasonable toilet provisions for both boys and girls

Summary of Results

In this policy brief, gender equality issues regarding the participation and learning achievements (Reading and Mathematics) of Grade 6 pupils in Zimbabwe have been examined. Additional information concerning female staff, security, and sanitary issues has also been presented, in order to understand the context.

The results indicated that:

- The Grade 6 enrolment, which was gender-balanced in 1995, was more in favour of girls in 2007.
- Learning achievement in Reading has improved in four provinces, while it decreased in three provinces. The size and the direction of the gender difference did not change at the national level.
- In regards to learning achievement in Mathematics, there was not much gender difference in most of the provinces except for two provinces (Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South).
- There was an improvement in the gender balance of school staff, although it was still a male dominated profession in both teaching and leadership positions.
- While there was no data on fencing situation in 1995, the results of 2007 indicate that some pupils were unsecured during school.
- The provision of pupils per toilet has slightly increased, but was still below Ministry norms.

Policy Suggestions

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

- The Ministry should investigate the reasons behind the gender imbalance in enrolment, especially related to possible reasons for boys to be out of school.
- The Ministry should investigate why there is significant gender imbalance in achievement Matabeleland North and South.
- The Ministry should encourage female teachers to apply for promotion.
- The Ministry should encourage school development committees to ensure that all schools have a secure fence/wall.
- The Ministry should provide more resources towards the repair and maintenance of school toilets.

Conclusion

In order to attain the gender-related objectives within EFA, it is necessary to go beyond gender parity. The SACMEQ III Project research results for Zimbabwe indicated that, Grade 6 enrolment which was previously gender balanced was dominated by girls in 2007. The Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture should ensure all schools are properly secured and that increase the numbers of female teachers and school heads.

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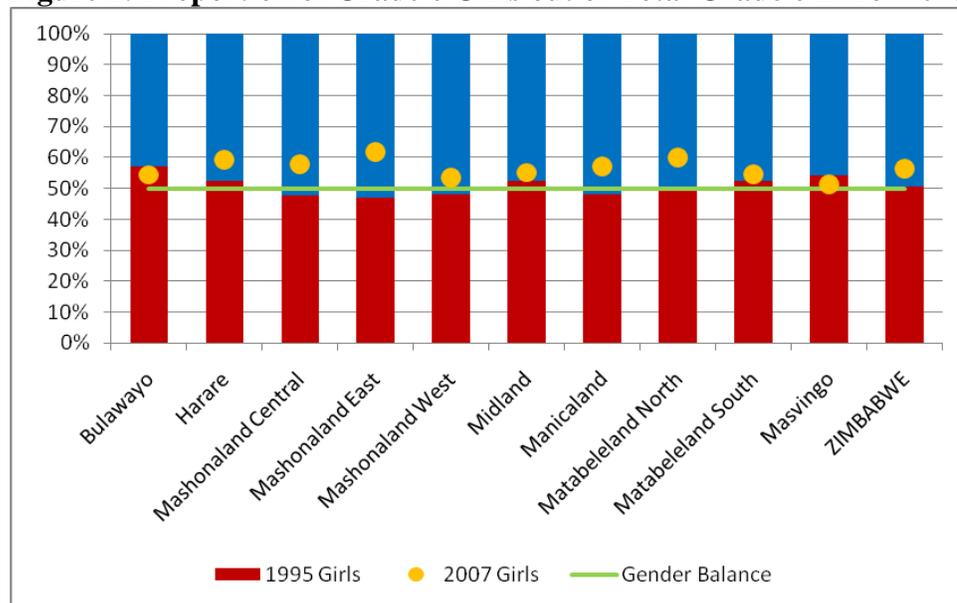
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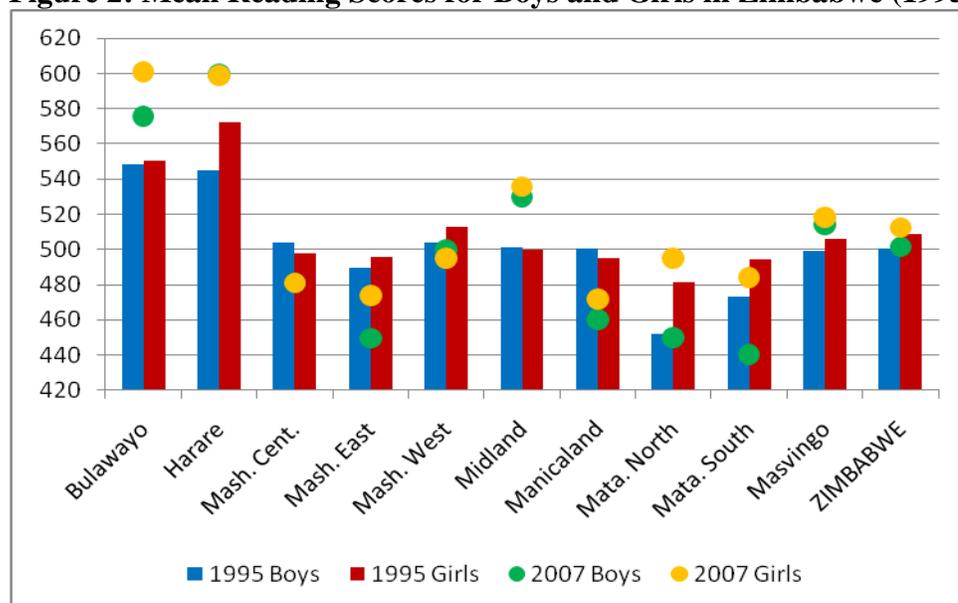
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Figure 1: Proportion of Grade 6 Girls out of Total Grade 6 Enrolments in Zimbabwe (1995 and 2007)



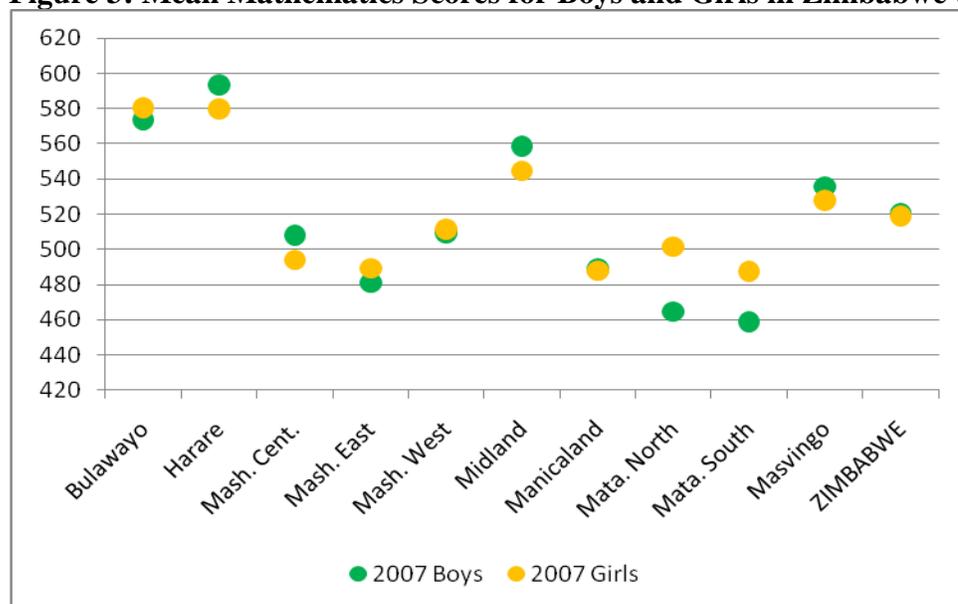
Source: SACMEQ Data Archive

Figure 2: Mean Reading Scores for Boys and Girls in Zimbabwe (1995 and 2007)



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive

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



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive

Table 1: Selected Information through 'Gender Lens' in Zimbabwe (1995 and 2007)

Selected Indicators	1995	2007
Female Reading Teacher	22%	29%
Female Mathematics Teacher	NA	29%
Female School Head	10%	27%
Have School Fence	NA	72%
# Boys per Boys' Toilet	34	37
# Girls per Girls' Toilet	31	36

Source: SACMEQ Data Archive