

Policy Brief

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Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium
for Monitoring Educational Quality

Progress in Gender Equality in Education: Seychelles

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Introduction

This policy brief deals with progress in 'gender equality' in primary education for the six regions in Seychelles by seeking answers to the following specific questions:

- What were the changes in the **proportion of girls' enrolment** at the Primary 6 level for the six regions in Seychelles between 2000 and 2007?
- What were the changes in the **size and the direction of the gender differences** in reading and mathematics scores for the six regions in Seychelles between 2000 and 2007?
- What were the changes in **selected gender-related school environment information** between 2000 and 2007 that could be further investigated in order to improve gender equality in education for Seychelles?

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

Seychelles' 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. Seychelles participated in SACMEQ II in 2000 (1,484 Primary 6 pupils in 24 primary schools); and SACMEQ III in 2007 (1,480 Primary 6 pupils in 24 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 achievement and subsequent life opportunities.

Gender-Related Policy in Seychelles

Within the Ministry of Education’s overarching policy document (Ministry of Education, 2001) the statement on gender is subsumed under the equity principles. Information from a variety of sources (for example, examination reports, a study on gender, school improvements evaluation reports, and a child-study project) brought to light the disparity in the learning achievements between boys and girls, indicating that boys were underachieving.

A plan of action concerning gender equality in education for 2002–2005 was drafted to address some of the inequality issues. These included: mainstreaming gender, conducting gender research, achieving equitable learning outcomes, developing appropriate structures to sustain gender-development work, creating safe learning environments in which both genders are respected and valued, and ensuring that gender equity principles are taken into consideration in curriculum development (Ministry of Education and Youth, 2002a).

As part of the implementation of the plan, a gender study was carried out to identify in-school factors relating to gender inequity within primary school (Ministry of Education and Youth 2002b). Much later, an action research project in two primary and secondary schools was carried out (Geisler and Pardiwalla, 2007) to clarify home-related factors, which might have had an influence on boys’ achievement. Unfortunately, most of the issues

evoked in the plan remain unattended to, and no further intervention programme has been implemented.

Gender Balance in Primary 6 Participation

Figure 1 shows the proportion of girls enrolled at Primary 6 level for each region and Seychelles as a whole in both 2000 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 Primary 6 level in the sample reflected the entire Primary 6 target population.

At the national level, the participation of girls did not change very much between 2000 and 2007. At the regional level, the changes in most regions were negligible. The proportion of girls in the Island region increased by five percentage points, reaching a more equal level, while that for the Northern region decreased by six percentage points.

Gender Differences in Learning Achievements

While boys and girls are equitably distributed in primary schools in Seychelles, 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.

Reading

Between 2000 and 2007, in the Seychelles as a whole, boys remained at a level over 540, and girls remained at the level of 610 during this period. As a result, the difference in the achievements between boys and girls remained the same, with some 70 points in favour of girls. At the regional level, in the Eastern region, while boys remained the same at 525, the girls improved by some 30 score points, resulting in a gap of almost 100 points. In contrast, in the Northern region, despite the boys' improvement being remarkable, a gender gap of about 45 score points still existed in 2007 in favour of girls. In the Western region, both boys' and girls' performances dropped by close to 40 score points, and the gender gap remained the same (almost 60 points in favour of girls) in 2007.

Mathematics

In the country as a whole, the mean mathematics score slightly decreased between 2000 and 2007, resulting in a similar gender gap of 35 points in favour of girls. At the regional level, a similar trend was seen in the Eastern and Southern regions, where the gender gaps remained more or less constant for both years. In the Central and Island regions, due to the drop in the girls' scores, there was a decrease in gender differences, although girls were still outperforming boys. A large overall increase was seen in the Northern region, where boys improved from 520 to 540 points, and girls from 545 to 565 points, thereby maintaining the same gender differences. The most disturbing result was in the Western region, where boys' performance dropped by 15 points, resulting in a gender gap of 20 score points in favour of girls.

Leste (2005) suggested that practice of streaming in the Seychelles may have a role to play in the gender disparities in learning achievements. Although a new

non-streaming policy was implemented in 2004, pupils at the Primary 6 level in 2007 did not benefit from this programme.

Other Information through the 'Gender Lens'

The above sets of results illustrated two contrasting pictures regarding gender equality in education. Firstly, there seemed to be no problem in terms of access and participation at the Primary 6 level for both boys and girls. Secondly, it appeared 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 Primary 6 pupils.

Female Staff

Having a gender balance amongst teachers and school heads has been seen as a strategy for gender equality in school success, since 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 the Seychelles, Primary 6 pupils were taught by different subject teachers. As shown in Table 1, the teachers of reading were mostly female, and there was no appreciable change to this trend between 2000 and 2007. In comparison, the percentages of Primary 6 pupils being taught by female mathematics teachers were lower than that for reading and there was no change between 2000 and 2007.

Concerning school heads, in 2007, 83 percent of pupils were in schools with female school heads, compared to 94 percent in 2000. It is fair to conclude that, although female school heads predominated in the school system of the Seychelles, attempts were being made to appoint men as heads, as was evidenced in the Central and Western regions.

This policy brief's findings confirm that the primary schools' operation and administration is very much the domain of women. Perhaps the time has come to challenge this, by conducting an open debate as to whether the current staffing arrangements should be continued or called into question.

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 percentages of Primary 6 pupils who went to schools with fences increased by eight percent between 2000 and 2007. This is encouraging, since the ministry's intention is to build fences around all primary schools, and when new schools are planned, fences are to be included in the plans, as part of school safety for both genders.

Sanitation

In Table 1, the average numbers of pupils per toilet in 2000 and 2007 are shown separately, namely, boys per boys' toilet and girls per girls' toilet. All the Primary 6 pupils in the Seychelles went to schools with at least one gender-separated toilet. However, the average number of pupils per toilet increased in 2007 compared to 2000. This indicated that the situation regarding the provision of toilets had deteriorated over time. Although the figures are fairly low, it is still an alarming trend, since it would appear that overall fewer toilets are being built.

Summary of Results

This policy brief focused on gender equality issues regarding the participation and learning achievements (reading and mathematics) for Primary 6 pupils in Seychelles. Additional information concerning female staff, security, and sanitary issues was also presented to understand the context.

The results indicated that:

- Seychelles had no problem in gender equality in terms of access to and participation in primary education by both boys and girls.
- The learning achievements, in general, remained the same for both reading and mathematics. Girls continued to outperform in both subjects. Of particular concern was situation of the boys in the Eastern and Western regions.
- Women predominated among the teaching and managerial staff.
- Overall, not many pupils went to schools without fences, but toilet provision was not sufficient for the number of pupils, especially for boys.

Policy Suggestions

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

- The Schools Division should evaluate the implementation of the non-streaming policy with a view to developing training programmes for teachers in differentiated instruction, so as to address the issue of gender disparity in the achievements of boys and girls.
- The Ministry of Education's senior decision-makers should undertake broad consultations with parents, community leaders, and education specialists to reflect upon the current situation concerning gender equity in school staffing, and explore the possibility of developing a policy so that staffing becomes more balanced across gender groups.
- Although a balance between male and female teachers in primary schools may be a long-term goal, the Ministry of Education with the University of Seychelles should take more immediate steps to review their recruiting strategies, so as to attract more men to teach in primary schools.

Conclusion

The SACMEQ III Project's research results for Seychelles indicated that there was gender balance in terms of Primary 6 enrolments. However, there is a need to continue searching for ways to reduce the gap in the achievement levels between boys and girls, and to make firm decisions about gender parity in school staffing. The Ministry of Education should review the above-listed policy suggestions, in order to draw up policy strategies aimed at improving the quality of education for both boys and girls, so as to reduce gender inequality in learning.

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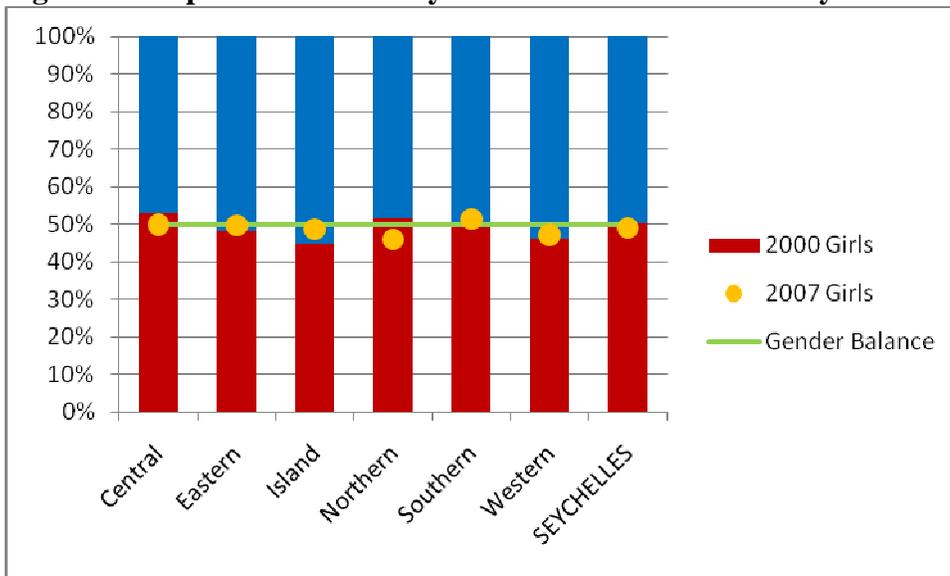
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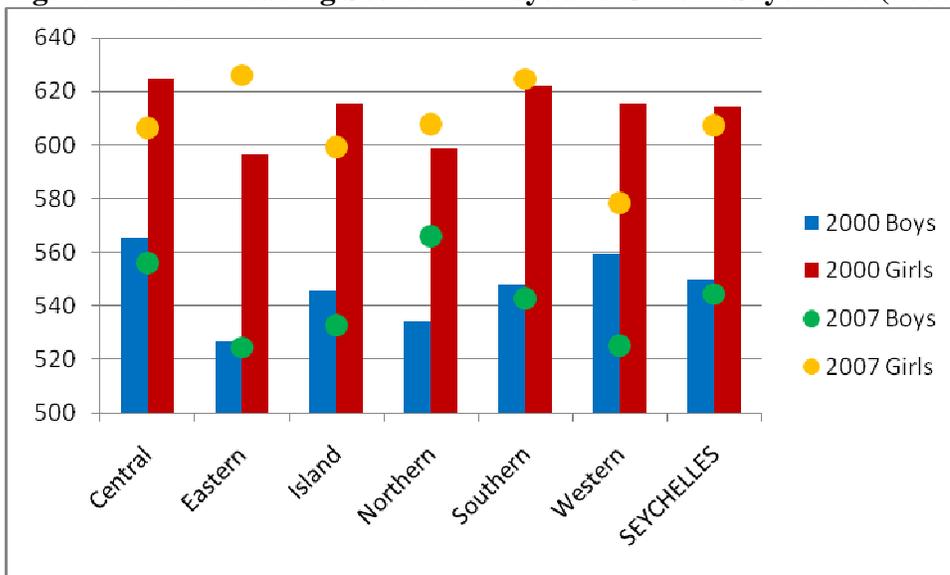
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Figure 1: Proportion of Primary 6 Girls out of Total Primary 6 Enrolments in Seychelles (2000 and 2007)



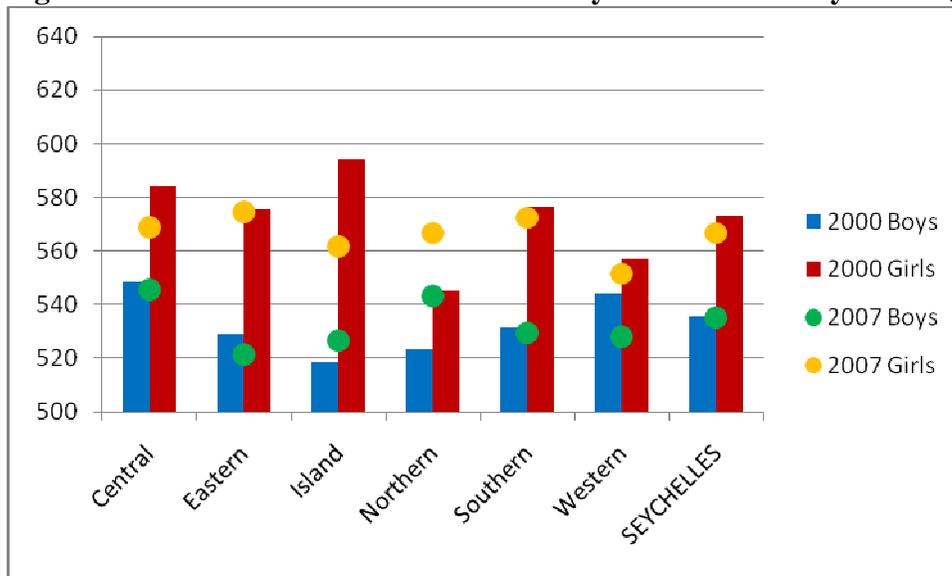
Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

Figure 2: Mean Reading Scores for Boys and Girls in Seychelles (2000 and 2007)



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive

Figure 3: Mean Mathematics Scores for Boys and Girls in Seychelles (2000 and 2007)



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

Table 1: Selected Information through ‘Gender Lens’ in Seychelles (2000 and 2007)

Selected Indicators	2000	2007
Female Reading Teacher	99%	97%
Female Mathematics Teacher	81%	81%
Female School Head	94%	83%
Schools with Fences	73%	81%
# Boys per Boys' Toilet	24	35
# Girls per Girls' Toilet	23	25

Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.