

# Policy Brief

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Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium  
for Monitoring Educational Quality

## Progress in Gender Equality in Education: Uganda

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### Introduction

This policy brief deals with progress in ‘gender equality’ in primary education for the four regions in Uganda 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 four regions in Uganda 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 four regions in Uganda 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 Uganda?

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

### Uganda’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. Uganda participated in SACMEQ II in 2000 (2,642 Primary 6 pupils in 163 primary schools); and SACMEQ III in 2007 (5,307 Primary 6 pupils in 264 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 Uganda**

The education authorities in Uganda were very concerned about the negative effects of the free primary education policy, which started in 1997. The quality and equality of education, including gender equality, have been very important priorities for educational policy in Uganda. Within the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Gender Desk looks after the gender equality issues covering equitable access, girls’ retention in school, girls’ performance in science and mathematics, protection of girls against violence, gender-sensitive curriculum, and gender-responsive teaching methodology. There have been a number of projects dealing with the above-mentioned aspects of gender issues, mainly for primary education. Regarding the status of women in all aspects of life beyond primary education, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) is responsible for formulating policies as well as monitoring progress (Muhwezi, 2003).

## **Gender Balance in Primary 6 Participation**

Figure 1 shows the proportion of girls enrolled at the Primary 6 level for each region and Uganda 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 Primary 6 level in the sample reflected the entire Primary 6 target population.

At the national level, there was an overall improvement in the gender balance at the Primary 6 level, with girls’ enrolment increasing from 44.5 percent in 2000 to 50.7 in 2007. At the regional level, in all the regions, except for Central, the proportion of girls increased by 8 to 10 percentage points. In 2000, Central was the only region where the proportion of girls (54%) was more than that of boys, and the proportion did not change much in 2007. In the Western region, the proportion of girls in Primary 6 increased from 46 percent in 2000 to 54 percent in 2007, overtaking the boys’ percentage. The Eastern region became more gender balanced (50%) in 2007. In the Northern region, despite a large increase in the proportion of girls, the boys’ proportion was still much larger in 2007.

## **Gender Differences in Learning Achievements**

While there was some progress in Uganda towards greater gender equality in enrolments between 2000 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 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**

At the national level in Uganda as a whole, the reading performance for boys did not change much

between 2000 and 2007. However, the reading scores for girls dropped by about 10 points during this period. At the regional level, the largest drop occurred in the Eastern region with a 35-point drop for girls and a 24-point drop for boys. The largest increase was in the Western region with a 49-point increase for boys, and a 22 point increase for girls. The largest gender difference in 2007 was seen in the Northern region, followed by the Eastern region by about 12 and 10 points, respectively. The more serious problem, however, was the generally low achievements for both boys and girls.

### **Mathematics**

At the national level, the overall performance in mathematics dropped in 2007 for both boys and girls. The results dropped in 2007 in all the regions except for Western, where both girls and boys improved. The largest drop was seen for girls in the Central region with an over 50-point drop, followed by the Eastern region with a 45-point drop for both boys and girls. While the drop for girls was marginal in the Northern region, that for boys was over 30 points. Both genders there reached a very low level of around 460, thereby resulting in not much gender difference. Western was the only region with a score increase; however, the direction of gender difference was reversed in 2007 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, Uganda had been making great progress in the implementation of the gender-related policy regarding access to and participation in primary school, especially for 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**

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 Uganda had specialized teachers for mathematics. As seen in Table 1, the general proportions of female staff were very low in Uganda. Although the proportion of Primary 6 pupils taught reading by female teachers did in fact increase over time, it had only reached 27 percent by 2007. Furthermore, for female mathematics teachers, there was not much change over time, and by 2007 less than 10 percent of Primary 6 pupils were taught mathematics by female teachers. The number of female school heads increased, but the proportion of Primary 6 pupils with a female school head did not even reach 25 percent in 2007.

### **School Safety**

Certain school resources are very critical in order to keep girls at schools. 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 a school with a fence did not change much over time and remained generally low. It is disturbing to see that only 31 percent of pupils were at schools with fences in 2007. This could presumably be explained by a sort of balancing effect between: (a) those existing schools, which already had fences in 2000, and (b) the newly constructed schools (built since 2000 within the context of EFA) which were not supplied with fences.

### **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.

About 4 and 8 percent of Primary 6 pupils in Uganda went to schools with no toilet at all in 2000 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 2000, this would have indicated that the situation regarding the provision of toilets had improved over time. The number of pupils per toilet decreased for both boys' and girls' toilets in Uganda overall. While this was an improvement for the genders, these ratios are still extremely high, indicating that far too many boys and girls continue having to share toilets.

## 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 Uganda. 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 girls' participation for all regions, but the Northern region persisted in having fewer girls than boys.
- The learning achievements, in general, saw some deterioration, except for the Western region. Boys were on the whole better in both subjects, but especially in mathematics.
- The proportion of female staff increased in general, but the gender balance is still far from being achieved.
- Overall, not many pupils went to schools with a fence, and toilet provision was not sufficient for the continuously increasing number of pupils, especially for girls.

## Policy Suggestions

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

- The Ministry of Education and Sports, together with its developmental partners, may wish to review all the past gender-related interventions in order to identify: (a) the proportion of the project budget that was used for the improvement of quality; and (b) the kind of quality-related indicators used in order to monitor the progress in gender equality.
- The Gender Desk of the Ministry of Education and Sports may wish to consult with school heads about further school-based investigations into actual classroom practices, to examine gender-conduciveness during teaching, which may be related to the low performance levels of girls, especially in mathematics.
- The team in the Education Service Commission (within the Ministry of Education and Sports) dealing with staffing issues, may wish to consult with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, to better monitor the gender balance of teachers, especially for mathematics teachers.
- The School Facilities Grant Unit in the Ministry of Education and Sports may wish to: (a) establish a benchmark figure for the number of pupils per toilet — since privacy is an important issue for girls, there should be separate benchmark figures for each of the genders, with the number of girls per toilet being less than that for boy; (b) carry out an audit of the condition of school toilets.

## 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 Uganda indicated that, although there had been progress in

attaining gender balance in enrolments, gender equality in learning achievements had not been realized. The Ministry of Education and Sports should review and prioritize the policy suggestions above, in order to draw up policy strategies aimed at improving the quality of education for both boys and girls, and reducing gender inequalities in learning.

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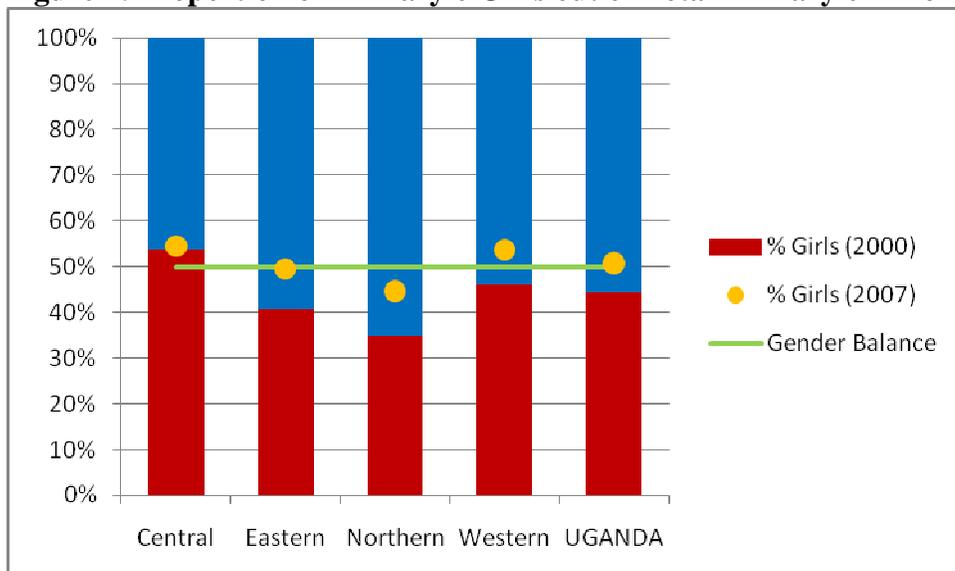
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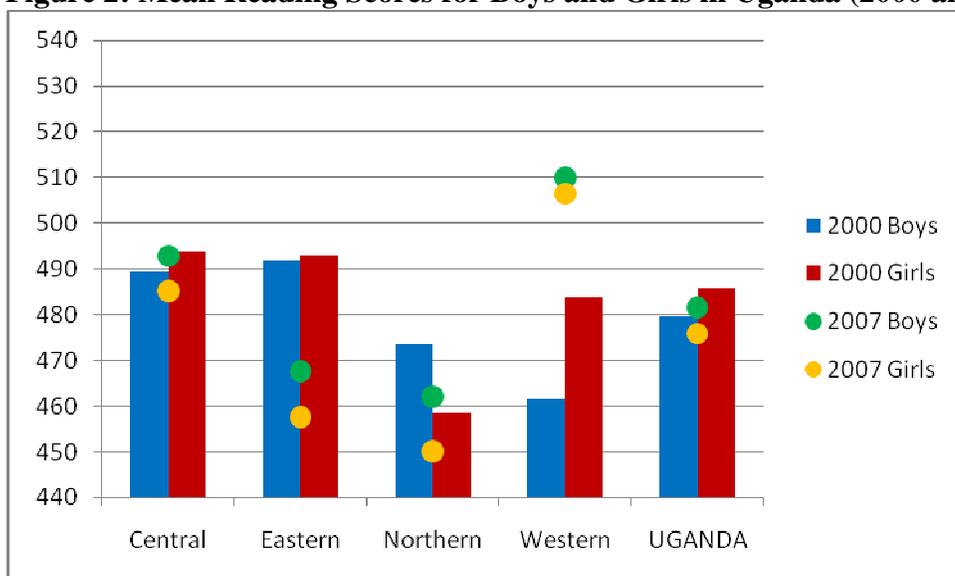
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**Figure 1: Proportion of Primary 6 Girls out of Total Primary 6 Enrolments in Uganda (2000 and 2007)**



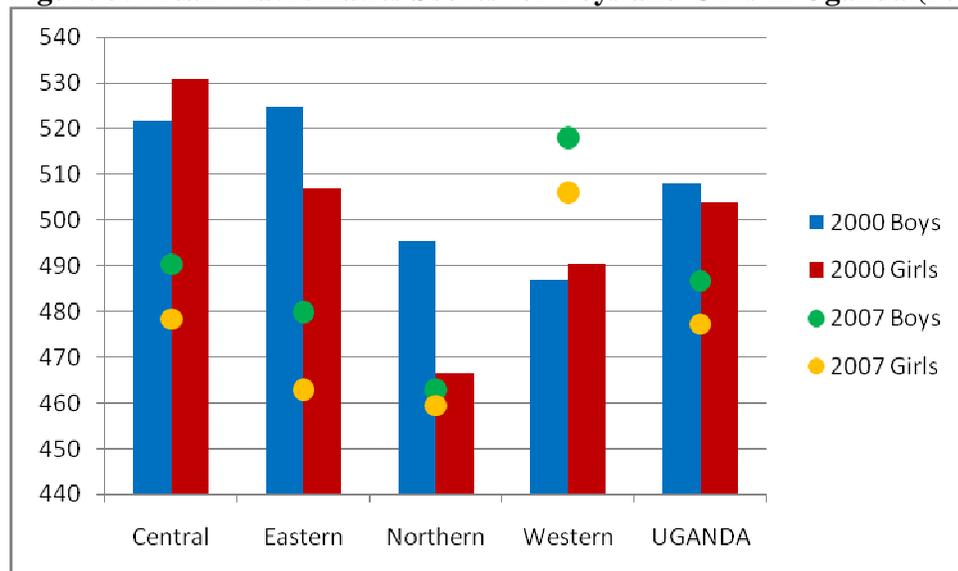
Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

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



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

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



Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.

**Table 1: Selected Information through 'Gender Lens' in Uganda (2000 and 2007)**

<b>Selected Indicators</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2007</b>
Female Reading Teacher	17%	27%
Female Mathematics Teacher	8%	9%
Female School Head	15%	23%
Schools with Fences	30%	31%
# Boys per Boys' Toilet	135	122
# Girls per Girls' Toilet	133	119

Source: SACMEQ Data Archive.