
CO-OPERATION: IIEP helps create a consortium of planners and policy-makers in Southern Africa

SACMEQ – An innovative and exciting concept

**Six questions you
might be asking
about SACMEQ ...**

THE *Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality* (SACMEQ) was officially launched in Harare, Zimbabwe, in February 1995. In connection with this major landmark, the IIEP has tried to answer a series of questions raised by donor agencies, ministries of education, and international organizations.

Why is SACMEQ important?

SACMEQ is a consortium of ministries of education and culture located in the

Southern Africa sub-region. Its main aim is to undertake *policy research* in order to guide sound decision making on important educational policy and planning issues associated with monitoring progress on the achievement of educational quality goals, defined by the Jomtien Conference on *Education for All* in 1990. The SACMEQ model is one of the most innovative and exciting concepts that has ever occurred in the field of educational planning. It has three main ingredients that optimize its contributions to educational planning in the Southern Africa sub-region: it focuses

on providing policy advice to key decision makers on educational quality issues considered as *high priority* by their respective ministries of education; it is a co-operative initiative which operates through a *strong network* of ministries of education and culture; and its programme of educational policy research is defined by *consensus* among the participating ministries, and the role of external agencies is limited to contributing when formally invited.

Which countries are involved?

The founding members of SACMEQ are the ministries of education and culture in Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Tanzania (Mainland), Tanzania (Zanzibar), Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Throughout several capacity-building programmes in educational planning undertaken as co-operative activities by the IIEP and the above ministries over the last four years, the planners (referred to as National Research Co-ordinators, or NRCs) of these countries have worked together, learned from each other, shared experiences and expertise. The potentiality for other Ministries in the sub-region to become members at this stage might be limited unless the *technical gap* is offset by additional support from the participating countries with possible assistance from IIEP since the *Initial Project* is more than half-way through implementation. The support requires the NRC, nominated by the new ministry, to acquire the *hands-on* skills needed to conduct a policy research project and to accord with other countries on the methodological, administrative, and financial arrangements finalized in the *Project Plan*.

How is SACMEQ financed?

Up until February 1995, all the work for the Initial Project, including sub-regional as well as national activities, was supported by the IIEP, thanks to the Fund-in-Trust agreement between the Italian Government and UNESCO. Between February 1995 and December 1996, the IIEP (under the FIT agreement with the Dutch Government) supports only the sub-regional co-operative work, which consists of:

- the design of data collection instruments and manuals;
- the preparation of sample designs;

- the analysis and interpretation of trial-test data;
- the preparation of master copies of data collection instruments and manuals;
- the organization of related sub-regional training workshops;
- the provision of software systems to facilitate computer-based data entry; and
- the initial data analyses.

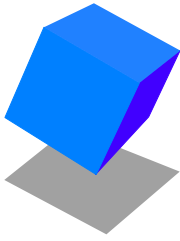
During this period, each country is responsible for providing the resources required to conduct the research. For each country, the cost is divided into *hidden* costs (where resource requirements in countries can be absorbed within current budget allocations through increased efficiencies and/or redeployment of personnel and equipment), and *visible* costs, (where countries will need to make financial outlays over and above normal budget allocations). For example, while salaries of NRCs and their assistants and provision of offices and equipment can be considered as *hidden* costs, the printing of data collection instruments as well as the conduct of field data collection come under *visible* costs.

What is the organizational structure of SACMEQ?

In each country, the NRC is responsible for implementing SACMEQ's projects. Each NRC is assisted by a national *Policy Steering Committee* and a *Technical Committee*. The *Policy Steering Committee* decides what projects SACMEQ should undertake, monitors quality standards, schedules and project budgets. It is composed of senior members of the Ministry and is chaired by the Director General or Permanent Secretary of Education. The *Technical Committee* is responsible for the technical and logistic details of the studies undertaken and is chaired by the NRC.

In the period preceding the launching of SACMEQ, the IIEP was invited by the ministries involved to take a central role in facilitating the presentation of training and research programmes that would build within-country capacity to undertake the kind of large-scale policy research that is associated with SACMEQ's *Initial Project*. However, the *Project Plan* for the next two years adopted by the SACMEQ NRCs requires a diminished role for the IIEP, which becomes that of an 'external friend' willing to respond with advice and assistance when formally requested by

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SACMEQ to do so.

For this new working relationship between the IIEP and SACMEQ to evolve smoothly, it was felt necessary that the ministries collectively establish a *Sub-regional Co-ordination Centre* (SCC), which functions as an NGO, and a *Sub-regional Co-ordinator* who represents that NGO acting on behalf of SACMEQ. Currently on a temporary basis, the NRC from the Ministry of Education and Science of Mauritius serves as Interim Co-ordinator of SACMEQ.

The Governing Board of the SCC comprises the chairpersons of each of the National Steering Committees. Its roles include: deciding on SACMEQ projects by reviewing the policy issues and concerns put forward by its members, as well as the proposals prepared by NRCs; ensuring national/international funding and monitoring the auditing of its accounts; and ensuring adequate dissemination of the results of each project to all ministries in SACMEQ.

What are the main aims of SACMEQ's Initial Project?

At the country level the main focus of the research effort in SACMEQ's *Initial Project* is concerned with preparing educational policy reports. These country reports, to be prepared by each NRC, seek to provide clear answers to the following policy issues currently challenging senior education decision makers in the sub-region:

- What are the baseline data for selected inputs to primary schools?
- How do the conditions of primary schooling compare with the ministry of education and culture's own benchmark standard?
- Have educational inputs to schools been allocated in an equitable fashion?
- What is the level of reading achievement of pupils at the upper primary school level for the three main domains of reading literacy (narrative, expository, and documents)?
- Which educational inputs to primary schools have most impact on pupil reading achievement at the upper primary level?

At the sub-regional level, three reports are planned to be produced. The first is a technical report which gives a detailed account of all procedures and research

materials used in the project and provides some summary results in association with estimates of their sampling errors. The second report is based on a comparative analysis of the patterns that emerge across countries for the answers to the five country-level policy questions listed above. The third report consists of a set of short research papers on the following five sub-regional educational policy questions that have recently been 'hot' issues in the sub-region and yet not applicable to any specific country:

- Are the sources of job satisfaction for primary school teachers the same or different across countries?
- What, if any, are the differences in the reading achievement of boys and girls in primary schools and do these differences vary across countries?
- Are some primary schools in some countries better at improving the educational performance of children who live in disadvantaged communities?
- What are the characteristics of an effective primary school and do these characteristics differ across countries?
- Can a sub-regional list of the essential schooling conditions be drawn up for countries to use as a target as they develop their primary education systems?

What is the future of SACMEQ?

Based on the evaluation of SACMEQ's *Initial Project* according to the criteria set out in the *Project Plan*, the SACMEQ Governing Board will take several decisions in 1996. The first one concerns the establishment of an NGO, which requires the adoption of by-laws, statutes, etc. Associated to it is the decision about location and staffing (on a continuing basis) of the Sub-regional Co-ordination Centre. Finally, future projects to be undertaken by SACMEQ should be chosen.

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