Different pathways to EFA for different school systems

Research results arising from SACMEQ's second educational policy research project in Southern and Eastern Africa suggest that different countries need to chart different pathways towards the goal of Education for All.

THE declarations of the 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education and the 2000 Dakar World Education Forum both called upon the nations of the world to broaden their view of the concept of *Education for All (EFA)* beyond a concentration on increased participation in education. These declarations emphasized that the achievement of EFA required expanded access to education to be accompanied by improvements in educational quality and equity.

For several years, the IIEP has been working with the 15 Ministries of Education that together form the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) in order to explore a variety of approaches for measuring and comparing the quality and equity of primary education systems.

The research results

One of the innovative research approaches used by SACMEQ has involved making comparative assessments of (a) *quality* – by comparing school systems with respect to average pupil scores on a reading test that was developed by experienced teachers and reading specialists in SACMEQ countries from a collaborative and agreed analysis of official school curricula, and (b) *equity* – by comparing school systems according to their capacity to minimize the main components of variation in pupil scores on this reading test. Based on this approach, the SACMEQ school systems with higher average pupil reading scores were considered to be delivering *relatively*

higher levels of educational quality; and the SACMEQ school systems with lower variations in pupil reading scores (both between schools and within schools) were considered to be delivering *relatively* higher levels of educational equity.

The most recent SACMEQ educational policy research study (SACMEQ II) collected detailed information between 2000 and 2002 on pupil reading achievement from around 42,000 Grade 6 pupils in over 2,250 schools. Some of the results of this research have been summarized in the diagram on page 9 and then explained, using four school systems as examples, in the following discussion.

➤ **Quality.** The left-hand column of figures in the diagram shows the average pupil reading score for each SACMEQ school system. The average score for SACMEQ overall was 500. The averages for school systems ranged from a low value of 429 for Malawi to values near the SACMEQ average of 482 and 517 for Uganda and Mozambique, respectively, and to a high value of 582 for the Seychelles. (It is important to note here that the SACMEQ researchers expected to find this pattern of differences in average pupil reading scores because of the many differences in country-specific social, economic, and historical factors. To take just one example, the Gross National Income per capita in the Seychelles was around 40 times higher than in Malawi.)

➤ **Equity.** The right-hand column of figures in the diagram shows the total variation in pupil reading scores for each school system. The total variation for SACMEQ overall was 100. The total

variation for school systems ranged from a low value of 25 for Malawi to a high value of 154 for the Seychelles. The total variation for Uganda of 83 was slightly less than the SACMEQ overall variation, whereas the total variation of 42 in Mozambique was slightly less than half the SACMEQ overall variation. The total variation values were broken down into 'between-school' and 'within-school' components and then presented as bar graphs in the centre of the diagram. The graphs show that the between-school and the within-school components of variation for Malawi and Mozambique were both among the smallest for SACMEQ school systems. In contrast, the between-school component of variation for Uganda and the within-school component of variation for the Seychelles were the largest for SACMEQ school systems.

What they imply for policy

Given these research results, what can be said, at this point in time, about these four school systems as they continue to work towards Education for All? First of all, it should be noted that the Seychelles, Uganda, and Malawi have excellent participation rates for the first six years of schooling – with Net Enrolment Ratios that approach or exceed 95 per cent. The participation rate for Mozambique is much lower – with a Net Enrolment Ratio in the region of 70 per cent. When this access information is combined with the discussion of quality and equity presented above, it is clear that these school systems will need to

chart different pathways towards EFA

The EFA challenge for Malawi will be to (a) *maintain participation rates,* (b) *improve quality* by directing efforts into raising the low average pupil reading score, and (c) *maintain equity* by ensuring a continuation of small variations in pupil reading scores – both between and within schools.

Uganda will have to (a) *maintain participation rates,* (b) *consolidate quality* by working to ensure that the average pupil reading score continues at around the SACMEQ average, or perhaps is increased, and (c) *improve equity* by reducing the between-school component of variation in pupil reading scores.

In Mozambique, the challenge will be to (a) *improve participation rates*, (b) *consolidate quality* by working to ensure that the average pupil reading score continues at around the SACMEQ average, or perhaps is increased, and (c) *maintain equity* by ensuring a continuation of small variations in pupil reading scores – both between and within schools.

Finally, the EFA challenge for the Seychelles will be to (a) *maintain participation rates,* (b) *maintain quality* by sustaining efforts that will retain the high average pupil reading score, and (c) *improve equity* by reducing the within-school component of variation in pupil reading scores.

These different pathways towards EFA will require the four school systems to address different target groups and to employ different strategies concerning the identification and deployment of required resources.

Malawi will need a determined effort across **all schools** to increase the average pupil reading score. This will require substantial additional human and material resource inputs to be delivered to schools through long-term partnerships with external donors.

Uganda will require a more targeted approach in order to identify and assist the **subset of schools** where pupils have low reading scores. This approach could be based on the implementation of a resource allocation mecanism that

delivers supplementary resources to the most disadvantaged schools.

Mozambique will have to concentrate on **community-specific** methods for improving participation rates. The first steps will be to determine why participation rates are low and how participation rates vary across communities. This information could then be used to design a 'two-pronged' campaign aimed at stimulating demand for education, and at the same time encouraging communities to form partnerships with government to ensure the provision of adequate supporting infrastructure and services.

The Seychelles will need to make structural and teaching changes **within schools**. This could be achieved at relatively low cost by dismantling ability streaming at all grade levels, and then introducing teaching methods that are suitable for mixed ability groups.

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SACMEQ II Study: Average Pupil Reading Scores and Variation in Pupil reading Scores