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## SACMEQ - from project to development model

SACMEQ's successful evolution over the past decade offers agencies and donors an important 'model' for delivering sustainable development projects. The Consortium started its life as an experimental IIEP research project in one country. It has since grown into a powerful and respected inter-governmental agency that designs and implements research and training programmes across 14 countries in Southern and Eastern Africa.

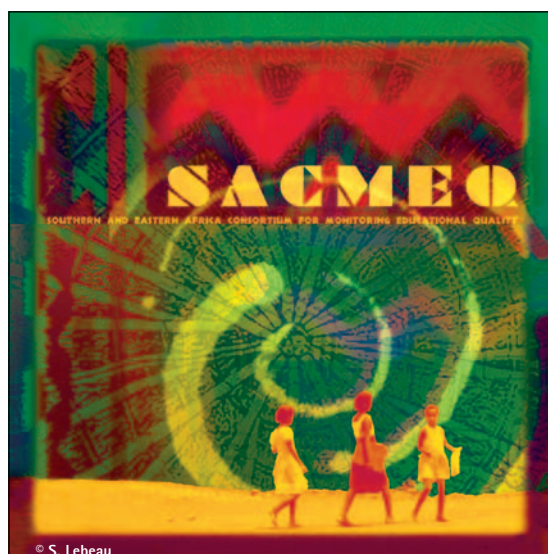
ONE of the key features of the worldwide discussion and debate on the need to achieve Education for All (EFA) has been a broader interpretation of this challenge to ensure that increased participation in education is delivered in association with improvements in the quality of the conditions of schooling and student achievement levels. This intense focus

on quality has been encouraged by the emerging understanding that education systems can act as pathways to national economic development in an increasingly globalized world.

These trends, coupled with the enormous expenditures by governments on education, have precipitated demands for more information and accountability concerning the quality of education. Governments can only respond to these demands if they have trained personnel who are able to employ modern research methodologies to make valid comparisons of *a*) the performance of single education systems across several time points (Are we improving, or staying the same, or getting worse?), and *b*) the relative performance of several school systems – particularly those that share similar socio-economic conditions, ethnic profiles, and patterns of historical development (Are we better, or worse, or the same, as other countries like us?).

Most industrialized nations have already established arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of education as part of the normal operations of their management information systems. A number of ministries of education in developing countries have also shown increased interest in building the capacities of their staff to conceptualize and manage monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The IIEP's work in this area has included extensive technical and logistical support

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for the co-operative educational policy research and training programmes conducted by the 14 countries (Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania (Mainland), Tanzania (Zanzibar), Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) that together comprise the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring the Quality of Education (SACMEQ).

### Evolution from experiment to inter-governmental agency

The evolution of the SACMEQ Consortium – from its humble origins in 1995, as an experimental IIEP research project conducted in Zimbabwe, to its current status as a formal African inter-governmental organization – has been remarkable. SACMEQ now has a permanent home base in Africa (the SACMEQ Co-ordinating Centre, or SCC) with a full-time Director. It has also completed two large-scale cross-national studies, is commencing a third, and has become an important source for training in quantitative research methods. It has a unique governance structure that ensures ministerial involvement in the choice and implementation of its own research and training programmes.

The IIEP has accommodated these important developments by moving its support for SACMEQ through three phases. First, starting from an ‘initiator role’ in the design and delivery of an IIEP research project in a single country, then moving to a ‘facilitator role’ with a focus on the IIEP, using the results of this research as a medium for training educational planners and researchers in a network of nearby countries, and finally, taking an ‘external friend role’ whereby the IIEP provides guidance and support for the research directions that the network of countries has selected according to its own objectives and requirements.

The main focus of IIEP’s recent co-operation with the SACMEQ Consortium has been on expanding the dissemination of the Consortium’s information resources with the aim to encourage their wider usage for educational policy purposes. This has included the launch and improvement of the SACMEQ web site, the further distribution and support of updated versions of the SACMEQ Data Archive, and the organization of the inaugural SACMEQ International Research Conference.

The Consortium’s web site, available at [www.sacmeq.org](http://www.sacmeq.org), contains a wealth of useful research-based information about the quality of education in Africa. Throughout 2005, it was receiving around 600 to 800 visitors per month. In late 2005, the site was expanded to contain a comprehensive downloadable coverage of SACMEQ research reports, published articles, and data tabulations. In addition, training modules were made available for download – and these have proved to be very popular with professors and postgraduate students.

The SACMEQ Data Archive now has around 200 registered users around the world, and has been used at the national level to prepare a range of educational policy reports and at the international level for projects, including UNESCO’s EFA Global Monitoring Report (2005 and 2006).

A SACMEQ International Research Conference was held at the IIEP in September 2005 which attracted research

papers from 50 senior professors and researchers located in Africa, Australia, China, Japan, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, and Viet Nam. Seven papers presented at the Conference were awarded the SACMEQ Research Medal in recognition of their quality and their utility for educational policy purposes.

The Consortium has now turned its attention to the design and implementation of its third cross-national educational policy research project. The SACMEQ III Project will provide important trend data for monitoring the quality of education in sub-Saharan Africa, and will also examine the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the daily functioning of schools and the educational achievement of students. A number of donors, especially the Government of the Netherlands, have provided generous support for this research programme.

The implementation of the SACMEQ III Project will mark a turning point in the nature of the support that the IIEP provides for the Consortium’s network. In 2006, a premium will be placed on transforming the more experienced SACMEQ National Research Co-ordinators from ‘trainees’ into ‘trainers’ – with the aim to establish SACMEQ as an African-based source of advanced training in quantitative educational policy research methods.

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