

How policies affect gender equality in education

Despite the substantial gains that have been made in recent years, access is the single most important cause of disparities against girls in the pursuit of primary and secondary education. But girls also face in-school disadvantages in forms that include biased treatment, harassment and sexist stereotypes in educational content. Boys are less likely than girls to be excluded from education based on their gender, but they also face in-school issues that contribute to higher repetition and dropout rates.

Gender disparities can take many different forms across countries. Thus countries need a range of different policies to address the specific inequalities related to school intake, classroom practices and the transition to higher levels of education. Just as most countries take steps to ensure that girls have access to school, they also need policies to address the different disadvantages facing boys and girls that arise at different levels of schooling.

1. Female role models an important factor in girls' academic success

One important factor that contributes to girls' success in school is the presence of female teachers who can serve as role models and send powerful messages to young girls. Female teachers can also make classrooms seem like safer and more inviting places for girls and young women and, in the process, encourage them to continue their education.

Map 8.1.1 Women account for a majority of primary school teachers in most countries and regions

Percentage of female teachers, primary education

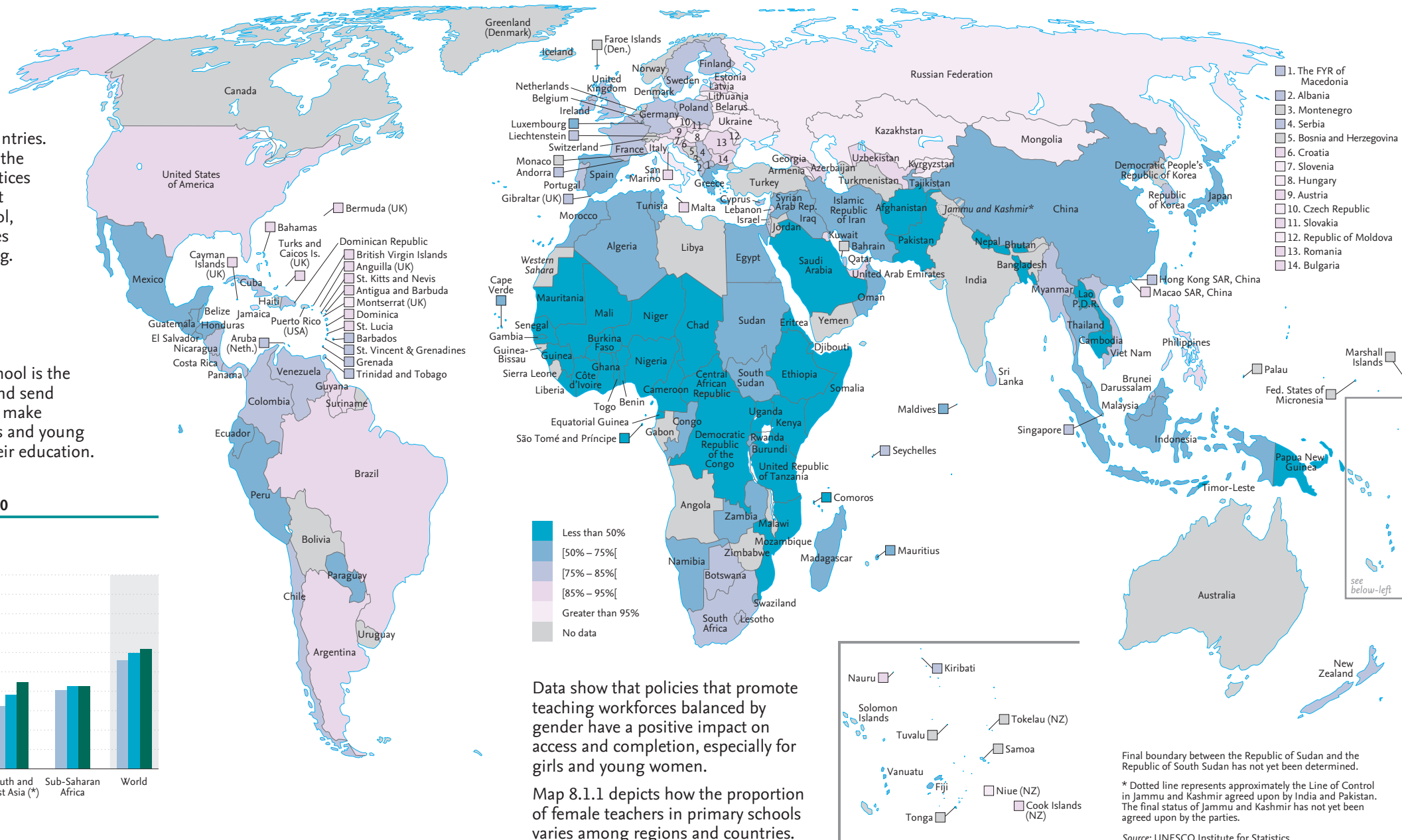
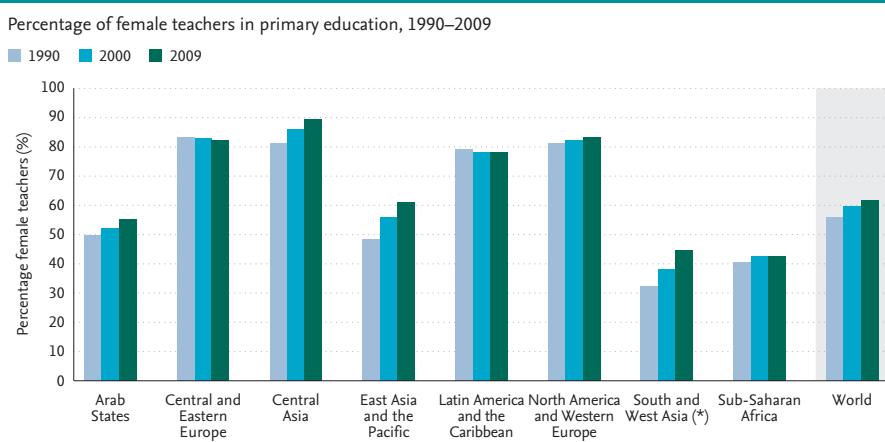


Figure 8.1.1 Proportion of female teachers on the rise since 1990



Note: (*) 2009 data for South and West Asia refer to 2007
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Data show that policies that promote teaching workforces balanced by gender have a positive impact on access and completion, especially for girls and young women.

Map 8.1.1 depicts how the proportion of female teachers in primary schools varies among regions and countries.

Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.
* Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

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Map 8.1.1 (see pages 98–99) shows that women account for a majority of primary teachers in more than three-quarters (78 percent) of the 171 countries for which data are available. In 9 percent of countries they constitute virtually all (more than 95 percent) of the teaching force.

For the world as a whole, the percentage of female teachers at the primary level has been increasing over the last two decades – from 56 percent in 1990 to 62 percent in 2009.

As seen in Figure 8.1.1 (see page 98), females now account for a majority of primary teachers in six of the eight regions. The two exceptions are South and West Asia (45 percent) and sub-Saharan Africa (43 percent). Central Asia has the highest proportion of female teachers (89 percent).

The female proportion increased in six of the eight regions while remaining stable in Latin America and the Caribbean and Central and Eastern Europe. Interestingly enough, the greatest gain (13 percentage points) took place in East Asia and the Pacific, which had a percentage below 50 percent (48 percent) in 1990. By and large, females are less well represented in the classroom in poor countries where primary teaching jobs have considerable appeal to males. Conversely, they tend to be well represented in wealthier countries where teaching is an important source of employment for women looking to have both a family and a career.

2. Secondary teaching force evenly divided among males and females

The importance of having female teachers as role models for female students is just as relevant at the secondary as at the primary level. Whereas females have traditionally represented a minority of the teaching force at the secondary level, this situation is changing.

Map 8.2.1 offers a global picture of the proportions of female teachers at the secondary level, where the teaching force is more evenly divided between the two sexes. Women represent a majority of teachers in 68 percent of 152 countries – well below the comparable proportion of 78 percent of countries at the primary level. Significantly, there are only eight countries in which they account for at least 80 percent of the secondary teaching force.

As at the primary level, the proportion of female teachers in secondary schools is rising. For the world as a whole, the proportion of female secondary teachers grew from a minority of 48 percent in 1990 to a slight majority of

Map 8.2.1 Proportion of female teachers in secondary schools rising but still lower than at the primary level

Percentage of female teachers, secondary education

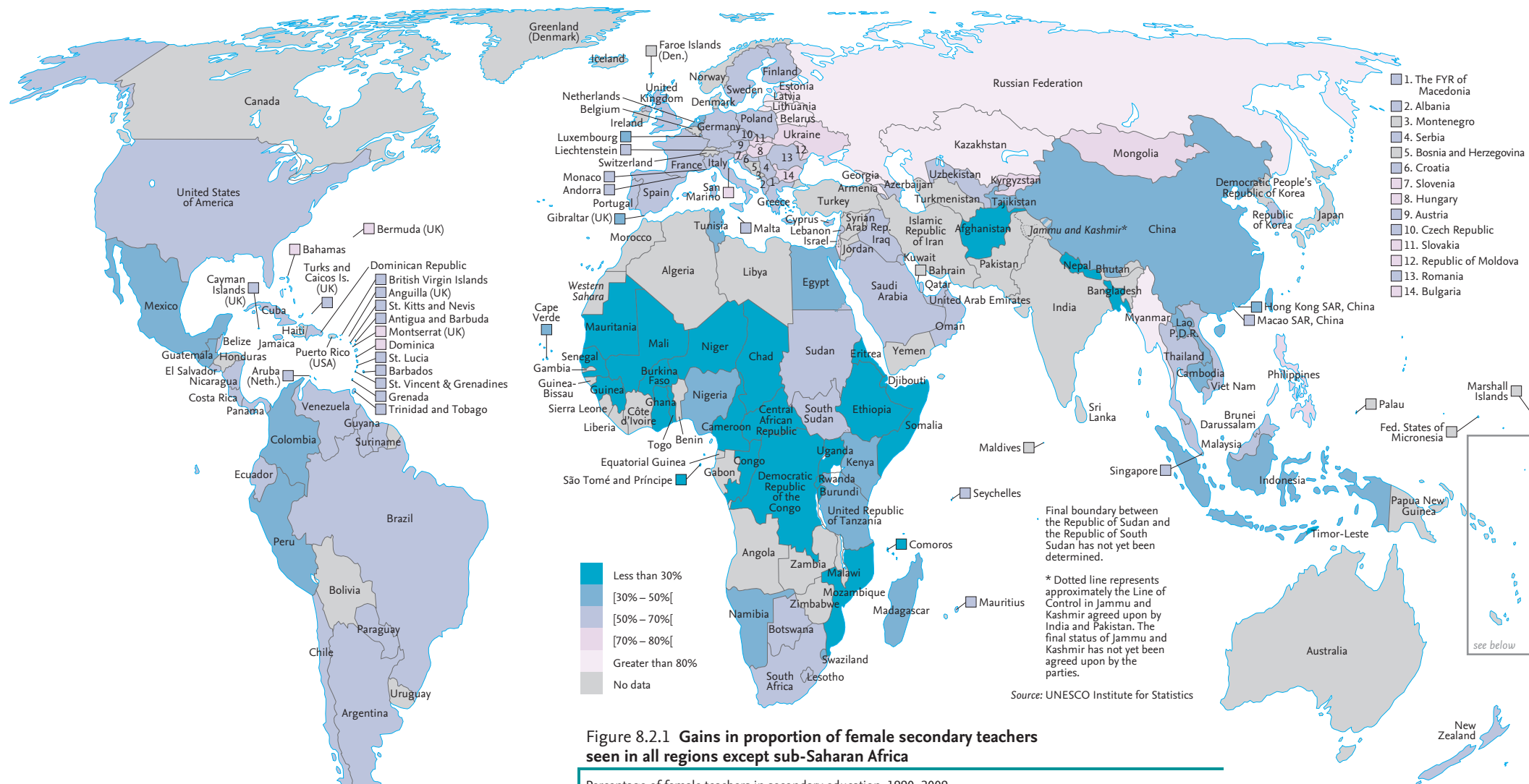
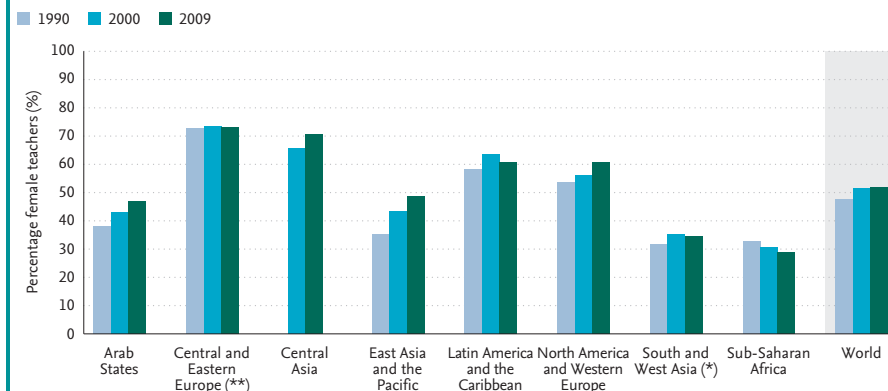


Figure 8.2.1 Gains in proportion of female secondary teachers seen in all regions except sub-Saharan Africa

Percentage of female teachers in secondary education, 1990–2009



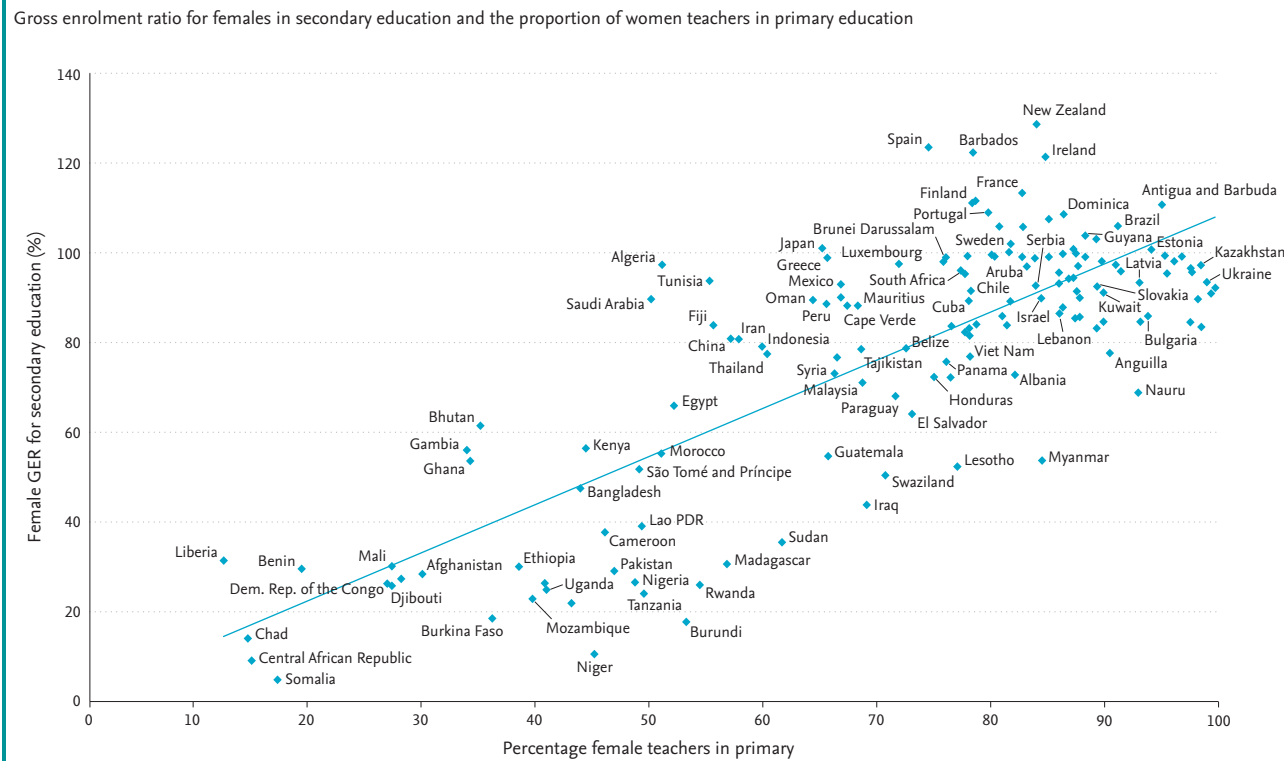
Note: (*) 2009 data for South and West Asia refer to 2007; (**) 1990 data for Central and Eastern Europe refer to 1995

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

52 percent in 2009. The highest proportion (73 percent) was registered in Central and Eastern Europe.

Figure 8.2.1 indicates that the proportion of female secondary teachers increased in all regions except sub-Saharan Africa, which had one of the lowest proportions of female teachers in 1990 and retained this position in 2009 after its proportion dropped by another four percentage points.

Figure 8.2.2 Countries with high female GERs have more female teachers



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Since girls seeking to become primary school teachers need to go to secondary school, it is not surprising that large proportions of female teachers at the primary level are associated with high gross enrolment ratios at the secondary level – a pattern that is illustrated in Figure 8.2.2. It shows that the percentage of female teachers in primary schools roughly correlates with the gross enrolment ratios of girls’ at the secondary level.

Countries like Chad, Somalia and Central African Republic, for example, are among the lowest both in their percentages of female primary school teachers and their proportions of females attending secondary school. By contrast, in all of the countries with female gross enrolment ratios of 100 percent, females make up at least two-thirds of the primary level teaching force.

This correlation may partly reflect the impact that female role models have in making education more attractive to girls. Conversely, low participation rates for girls in secondary schooling will lead to fewer females enrolled in teacher training programmes.

On the other hand, both male and female teachers have been guilty of gender stereotyping – which, depending on circumstance, can operate to the detriment of either boys or girls.

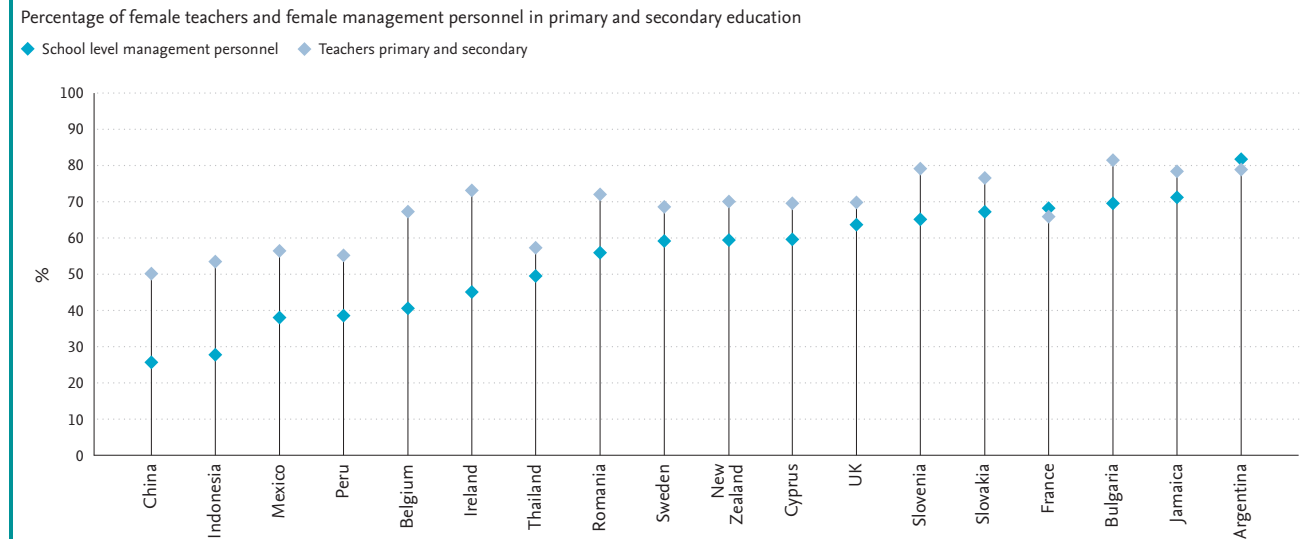
Despite the fact that they now represent a majority of teachers at both the primary and secondary levels, female teachers are not as likely as their male counterparts to move into school level management positions.

Figure 8.2.3 presents data for 18 selected countries comparing the proportion of school level management personnel who are female to the proportion of female teachers at the primary and secondary levels. The proportion of female managers ranges from a low of 26 percent in China to a high of 82 percent in Argentina.

Argentina and France are the only countries in which there is a higher proportion of female managers than female teachers. The largest gaps are in China, where the ratio of female teachers to managers is almost two to one, and Ireland, where females account for nearly three-quarters of teachers but less than half of managers.

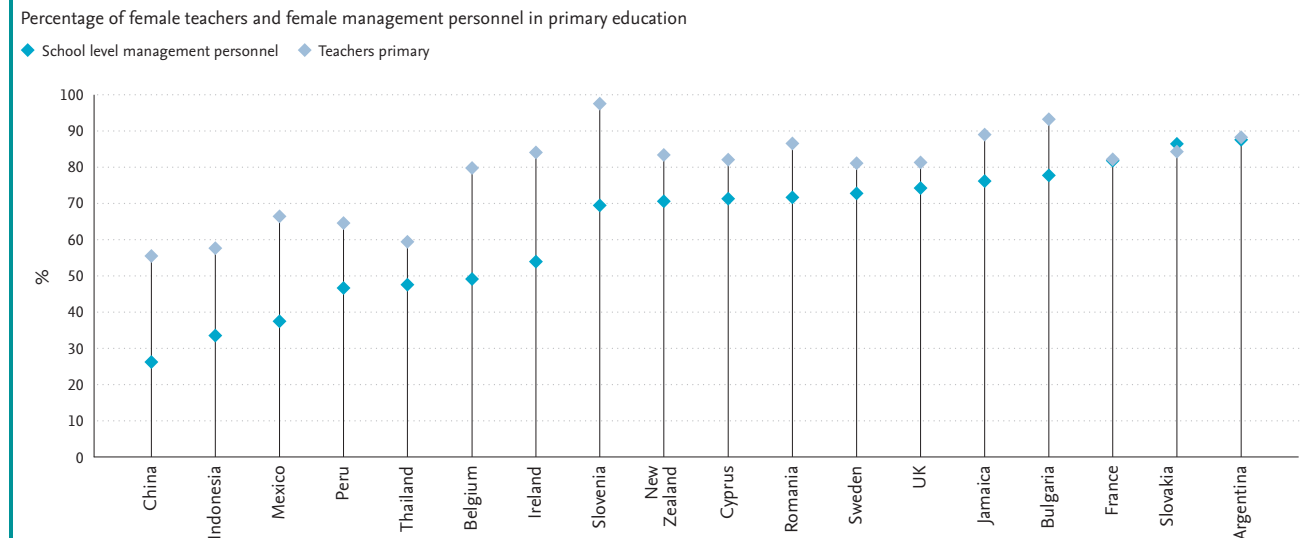
Figure 8.2.4 presents parallel data for the primary level alone. Slovakia is the only country where females constitute a slightly higher proportion of managers than teachers at the primary level. When the primary and secondary levels are combined, however, male managers have a significant edge. In Argentina and France the proportions of female managers and teachers are the same.

Figure 8.2.3 Proportion of female managers at primary and secondary levels ranges from 26 to 82 percent



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Figure 8.2.4 Slovakia the only country with more female managers than teachers



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

3. Teachers' pay a factor in proportion of female teachers

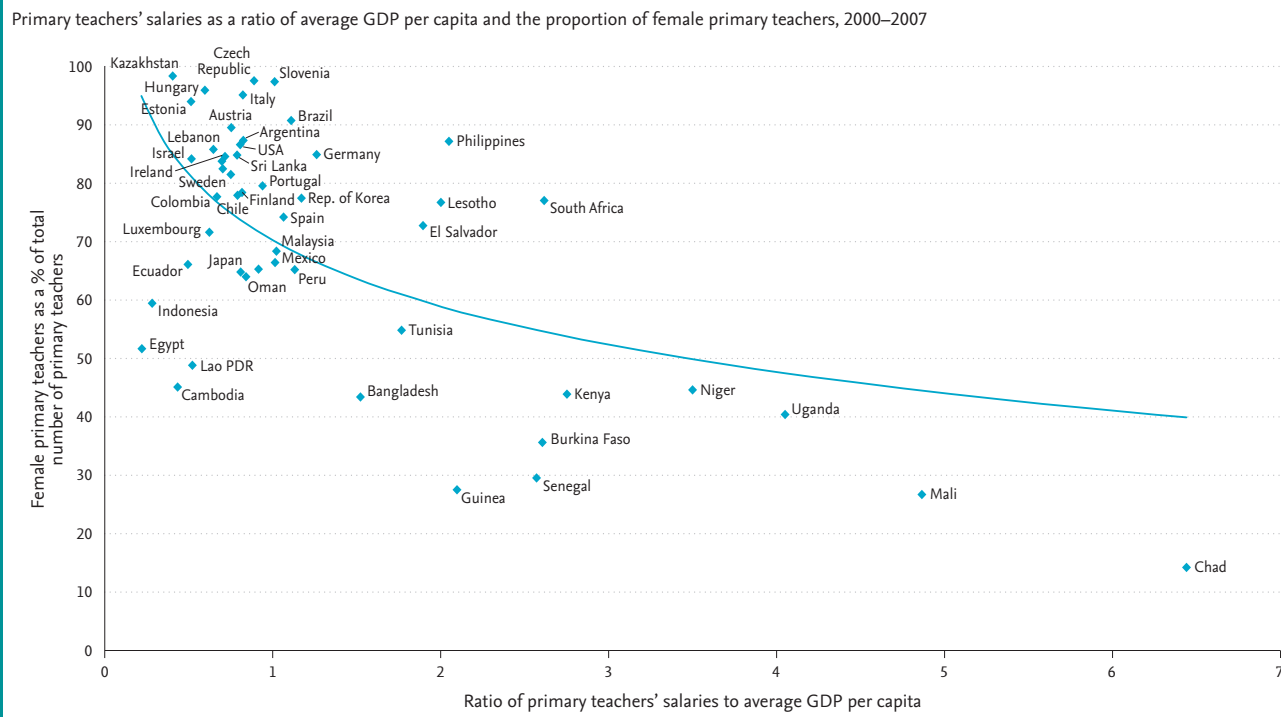
The proportion of female teachers in a country tends to reflect how well teachers are paid. That proportion tends to be high in places where teacher salaries are low. By contrast, males tend to dominate the teaching force in countries where teachers are relatively well paid.

Figure 8.3.1 compares primary teachers' salaries (measured in relation to the average GDP per capita) with the proportion of women teachers in 50 countries.

In Chad, Mali and Uganda, where teacher salaries are more than four times GDP per capita, females account

for only 14 percent, 27 percent and 40 percent of the teaching force respectively. By contrast, in Kazakhstan, Czech Republic and Italy, where teacher salaries are below the levels of GDP per capita, females make up well over 90 percent of teachers. There are, however, plenty of exceptions to these general patterns. In Cambodia, for example, men make up a majority of primary teachers, but the salary level is less than half of GDP per capita. In South Africa more than three-quarters of teachers are female even though teacher salaries are more than two times GDP per capita.

Figure 8.3.1 More female primary teachers in countries where salaries are low



4. Girls more affected than boys by distance to school

The need to travel long distances to school has a negative impact on attendance and persistence for both sexes, but distance is a significant obstacle for girls, especially at the lower secondary level.

Figure 8.4.1 presents data showing the relation between the gross attendance rate and the distance to school at the primary level for four African countries: Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia. In three of the countries attendance rates decline as the distance increases for both sexes, with the decline particularly steep in Nigeria.

both Nigeria and Uganda the negative impact of distance on attendance is slightly higher for girls than for boys.

The exception is Malawi, where attendance remains relatively steady for both sexes as the distance to school increases.

As seen in Figure 8.4.2, the negative impact of distance from school in the four countries is much greater at the secondary than at the primary level for both boys and girls. In Malawi the negative impact is significantly greater for girls than for boys.

Figure 8.4.1 How distance affects primary attendance in four sub-Saharan African countries

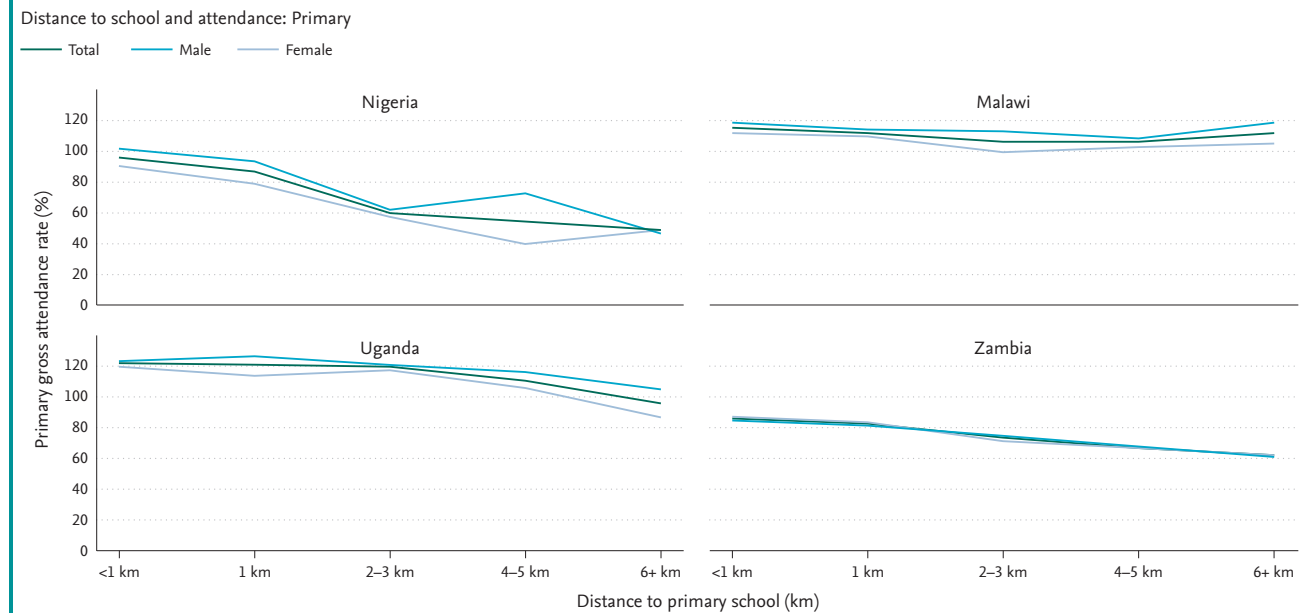
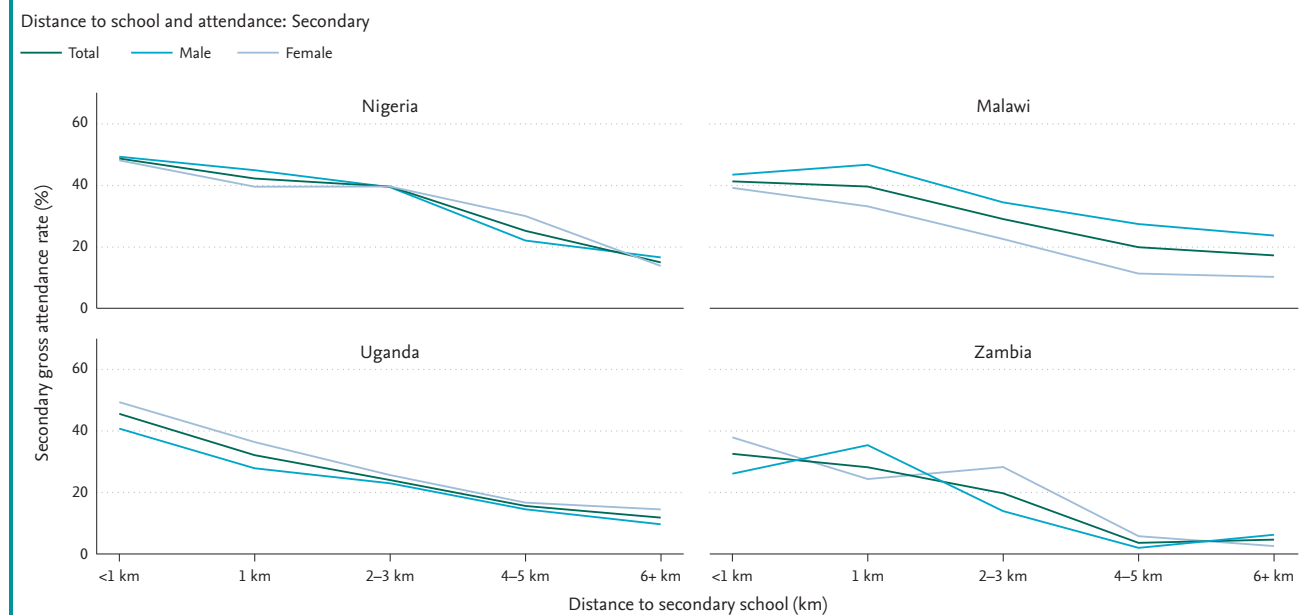


Figure 8.4.2 How distance affects secondary attendance in four sub-Saharan African countries

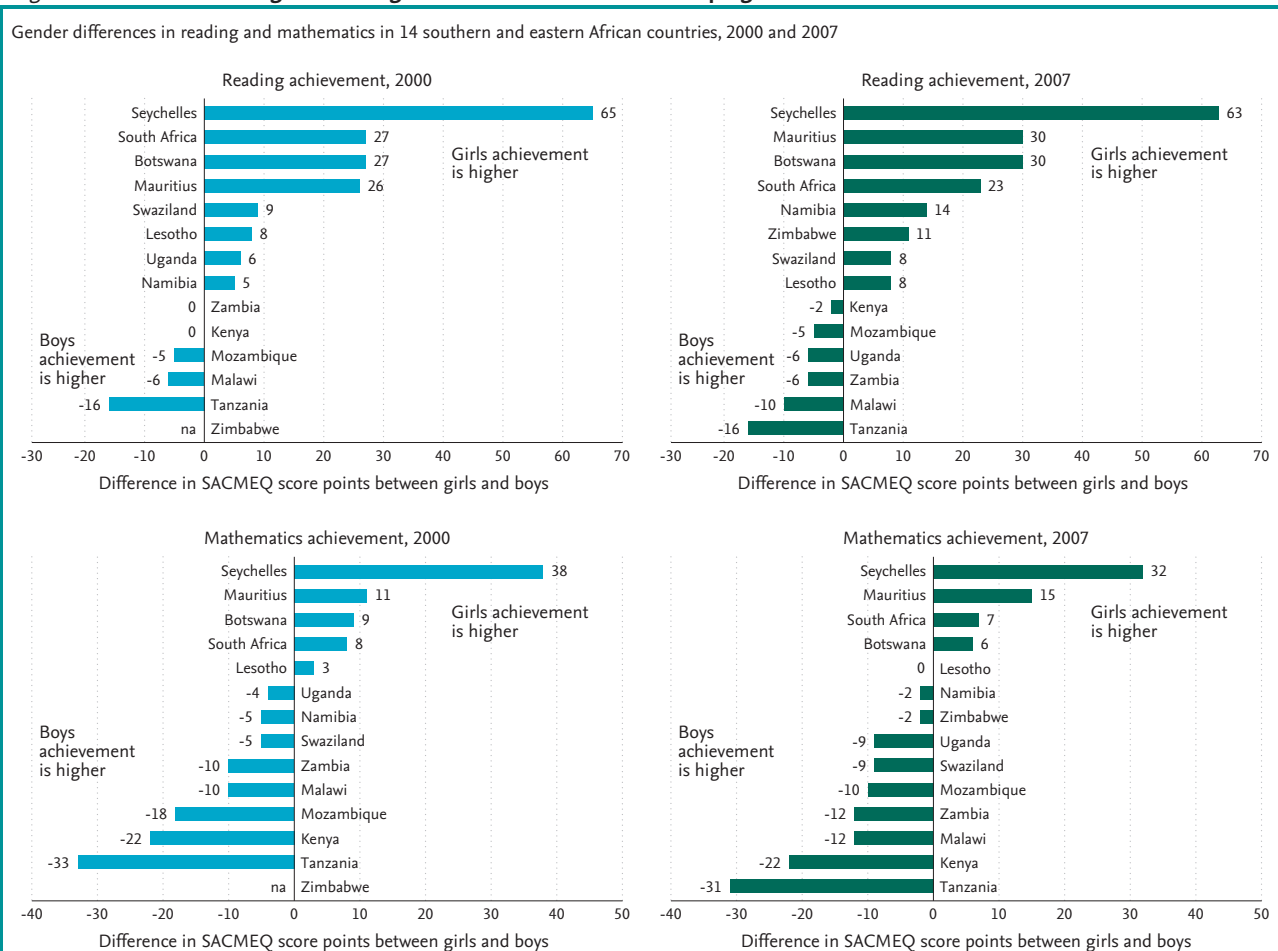


5. Females have edge over males in learning achievement

Abundant evidence exists in countries around the world of significant gender differences in learning achievement. Specifically, girls tend to have an advantage in reading achievement compared to boys, while boys have historically held an advantage in mathematics and science.

In many countries girls have been narrowing the gaps in these areas of study, but recent evidence from the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) suggests that these gender differences are persisting.

Figure 8.5.1 Girls have edge in reading and mathematics in 14 developing countries



Note: Countries are sorted on the basis of gender differences for each subject in 2000. SACMEQ score points are standardised based on a SACMEQ mean of 500 and a standard deviation of 100. For further documentation regarding the assessments please see www.sacmeq.org.

Source: Saito (in preparation). Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ). For more information, see www.sacmeq.org.

Figure 8.5.1 presents data from a SACMEQ study of educational achievement among girls and boys at the end of primary schooling in 14 sub-Saharan African countries for 2000 and 2007. The figure shows that in 2000, girls performed better than boys in a majority of countries in reading, while boys did better than girls in a majority of countries in mathematics.

Comparable data for 2007 is remarkable in that the sets of countries in which boys outperformed girls and vice versa were virtually the same as in 2000. So, too, were the magnitudes of the differences.

Conclusion

Participants of the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 and in subsequent international assemblies embraced an ambitious vision of a world in which all children would have access to an education that would enable them to realize their highest potential as individuals, parents, citizens and workers. Over the last two decades much progress has been made toward achieving this vision.

Enrolments at all levels, from pre-primary through tertiary, have increased at rates well above the growth of the relevant school-age population, meaning that the number of out-of-school children has declined. Three-quarters of the world's children now reside in countries with near-universal primary enrolment, and there has been a general upward trend in participation in secondary school in all regions. School-life expectancy rates are on the rise throughout the world for both males and females. Youth literacy rates are well above those for adults – a development that portends well for adult literacy rates in the future.

Progress has also been made toward the goal of gender parity. Female enrolments have increased faster than those for males at all levels, most dramatically in tertiary education. Two-thirds of countries have achieved gender parity at the primary level and one-third at both the primary and secondary levels.

Whereas the challenge of gender equality was once seen as a simple matter of increasing female enrolments, the situation is now more nuanced, and every country,

developed and developing alike, faces policy issues relating to gender equality. Girls continue to face discrimination in access to primary education in some countries, and the female edge in tertiary enrolment up through the master's level disappears when it comes to PhDs and careers in research. On the other hand, once girls gain access to education their levels of persistence and attainment often surpass those of males. High repetition and dropout rates among males are significant problems.

Despite these achievements however, most of the developing regions still fall behind on several aspects of gender equality. It is often the case where a better level of education doesn't necessarily translate into better employment opportunities. Even though women outperform men in education, they still face significant shortfalls and discrimination in the labour market and end up in jobs where they don't use any of their skills. However, even though education is not the only input into women's empowerment it is nonetheless a central one.

Some years ago Neth Din, a 77-year old farmer in Kandal Province, was asked why he and his wife were so committed to educating their three granddaughters. He said, "We have two hands, and if one hand is weak we can do nothing. The two hands must be strong. We must use both hands."

The same could be said of all regions and nations.