

Statement from the Government of Mozambique

Delivered by Zeferino Martins, Minister of Education

Narrowing the gender gap in our rapidly expanding education system has been one of our biggest successes over the last years. In 2011, around 47% of the students, in both primary and secondary education were girls, against 45% in 2004 (primary education) and only 40% in secondary education. Over the last years, not only more girls have entered school; they have also been more successful in staying in school and continuing their education at secondary level.

Key to this success has been our focus on ***getting children to start school at the right age!*** This strategy benefits particularly girls: if we can get girls to enter school early enough, they are much more likely to stay in school and continue their education, even after they have reached puberty.

Currently, around 70% of the six-year old and 97% of the 7-year olds are in school, while in 2004 these percentages were 45% and 73% respectively. This progress resulted from the following key interventions:

- The construction of more schools, closer to the communities;
- The annual mobilization campaigns that involves district officers, school staff and school council members, as well as public media (radio and tv), encouraging parents to enroll their children that are 6 or turn 6 in coming school year;
- Abolition of school fees for primary education.

Other interventions have contributed to more children, *and particularly more girls*, staying in school and continue their education:

- More female teachers are being hired, particularly at the lower primary level. In 2011 around 44% were female, against only 30% in 2004. Female teachers can serve as role models for young girls;

- The introduction of the new curriculum in 2004 has contributed in its early years to the reduction of repetition rates and drop outs. This new curriculum also addresses more explicitly gender issues;
- Direct support to schools is provided to all schools to compensate for their loss of income due to the abolition of school fees (primary schools) and to facilitate the acquisition of basic learning materials for the most vulnerable, specifically amongst girls;
- More attention is paid to making schools child friendlier, healthier and with a safer environment, through amongst other things, the construction of sanitary facilities, ramps for children with disabilities, no-tolerance policy for (sexual) abuse, etc.

Despite the enormous progress towards gender parity, our main concern remains with the quality of our education: do the children, *boys and girls alike*, actually learn what they should learn in our schools? This concern is at the core of our next 5-year strategic plan, and is being translated through strategies aimed at:

- A particular attention to early childhood development;
- Better prepared, motivated and supported teachers;
- Improved monitoring of learning outcomes;
- More effective school management;
- Increased involvement of parents and communities in the education of their children.

I am a strong believer that there will be no quality in education without gender equity.