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TO OUR READERS

Important information on our education system is often buried in statistical tables or, worse still, on micro-computer disks where they are accessible only to odd computer freaks. To help remedy this situation, the Information, Statistics & Data Division (ISDD) will produce regular *Education Management Information Systems Bulletins*. This is the first one.

Each *EMIS Bulletin* will concentrate on a theme concerned with education in Namibia. Presentations will vary, some providing statistics and information of critical importance, others providing data that are simply interesting, while others may present figures designed to answer "what if?" questions. More often than not, few interpretations will be offered. We would hope, rather, that readers will be stimulated to think through various explanations for the trends, patterns and results revealed in the data. It would be great if readers could share their wisdom with us and let us know how they explain the phenomena shown in our statistics. Ultimately, we hope these *Bulletins* help to increase transparency and stimulate a desire to know more so that we can do our work better.

The great majority of information held by ISDD has been collected from schools during either the 15th-school day survey or the Annual Education Census conducted later in the year. Thousands of teachers, headmasters, inspectors and others contribute to these surveys, and we are extremely grateful to them for their hard work and the care they take in collecting and reporting information. The statistics and ideas reported in the *Bulletins* would not be available were it not for their efforts.

If we can provide more information, please contact the editorial team in the Ministry head office: Frank Bevacqua (tel. 293 3098), Sue Grant Lewis (293 3090), John Mendelsohn (293 3236), Dewald Nieuwoudt (293 3209), Friedhelm Voigts (293 3201).

This first *EMIS Bulletin* explores data on gender issues in Namibian schools. How do you explain the change from a slight male predominance in lower primary grades to a strong predominance of girls in higher grades in the Ondangwa Region? Why is this quite different "next door" in the Rundu Region?

Friedhelm Voigts: Chief, ISDD

GIRLS AND BOYS AT SCHOOLS IN NAMIBIA - IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

Considerable interest and concern for gender issues in Namibian schools has been shown during the past three years. Such concerns usually aim to ensure that perceived discrimination against young women is abolished in schools. This *Bulletin* presents a selection of data to evaluate patterns of gender differences in Namibian schools. Three aspects are considered: national patterns of enrolment of girls and boys, geographical differences in gender, and some possible reasons why gender imbalances appear in Namibian schools. Many other sets of data relevant to this issue are available for further investigation.

National patterns

Overall, there are more girls than boys in Namibian schools. At the beginning of 1992 there were 216 910 boys compared with 233 502 girls in Grades 1 to 12. Thus, 51,7% of the total school population consisted of girls. This slight predominance of girls could reflect the overall sex ratio in the Namibian population which, according to preliminary results of the 1991 Population & Housing Census, was 51,4% female. However, this similarity is perhaps coincidental. There are large regional dif-

ferences in the ratio of boys to girls at school, and national figures are particularly distorted by the large numbers of learners in the Ondangwa Region.

TABLE 1. NUMBERS OF MALES AND FEMALES IN GRADES 1 TO 12, AND THE PROPORTION OF FEMALES, AT THE BEGINNING OF 1992.

Grade	Males	Females	% Female
1	45 780	43 514	48,7
2	32 504	31 657	49,3
3	25 742	25 153	49,4
4	22 727	23 340	50,7
5	19 586	21 159	51,9
6	16 336	19 139	53,9
7	15 346	19 192	55,6
8	12 004	15 069	55,7
9	10 458	14 461	58,0
10	9 995	13 026	56,6
11	3 514	4 109	53,9
12	2 918	2 683	47,9

Although there is an overall predominance of girls at school, this predominance does not hold in all Grades (see Table 1). The proportion of boys appears to decrease progressively up to Grade 9, while the proportion of girls decreases thereafter. Participation of girls is lowest in Grade 12, 6% lower than in Grade 11. There are some indications that this reflects high rates of re-enrolment of boys in Grade 12, many of whom had left school earlier.

Compared with other African countries, female participation is quite high. The overall proportion of girls at school in Africa was only 43% in 1989 (UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1989). Amongst neighbouring countries (Table 2), Namibia is most similar to Botswana, females being well-represented in the school population. Botswana and Namibia also stand out as having higher proportions of girls in secondary than in primary grades.

TABLE 2. FEMALES AS A PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN AT SCHOOL

COUNTRY	PRIMARY GRADES	SECONDARY GRADES
NAMIBIA	50,7	55,9
BOTSWANA	51,2	53,7
ZAMBIA	47,4	-
ZIMBABWE	49,2	46,2
MALAWI	45,0	37,5
TANZANIA	49,7	37,5

DATA FOR OTHER COUNTRIES FOR 1986-1989, "THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN, 1992". UNICEF, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, NEW YORK, 1992).

Geographical patterns

Figure 1 compares the proportion of girls in Grades 1 to 12 in the six educational regions. Numbers of boys and girls in lower primary grades are about equal, a trend that continues into the upper primary grades in all except the Ondangwa Region. Here, the proportion of girls increases substantially from Grade 5 onwards, to peak at Grade 9 and declining thereafter. As suggested by other data, the increasing proportion of girls in Grades 5 to 9 is due to a substantial drop-out of boys, while more girls than boys drop-out in the higher secondary grades.

The Rundu Region shows a substantial decline in participation by girls from Grade 7 onwards. This suggests that large numbers of girls complete primary schooling, and then progressively drop out during years of secondary education - only about one in five Grade 12 learners is a female! A similar, but later, decline is evident in the

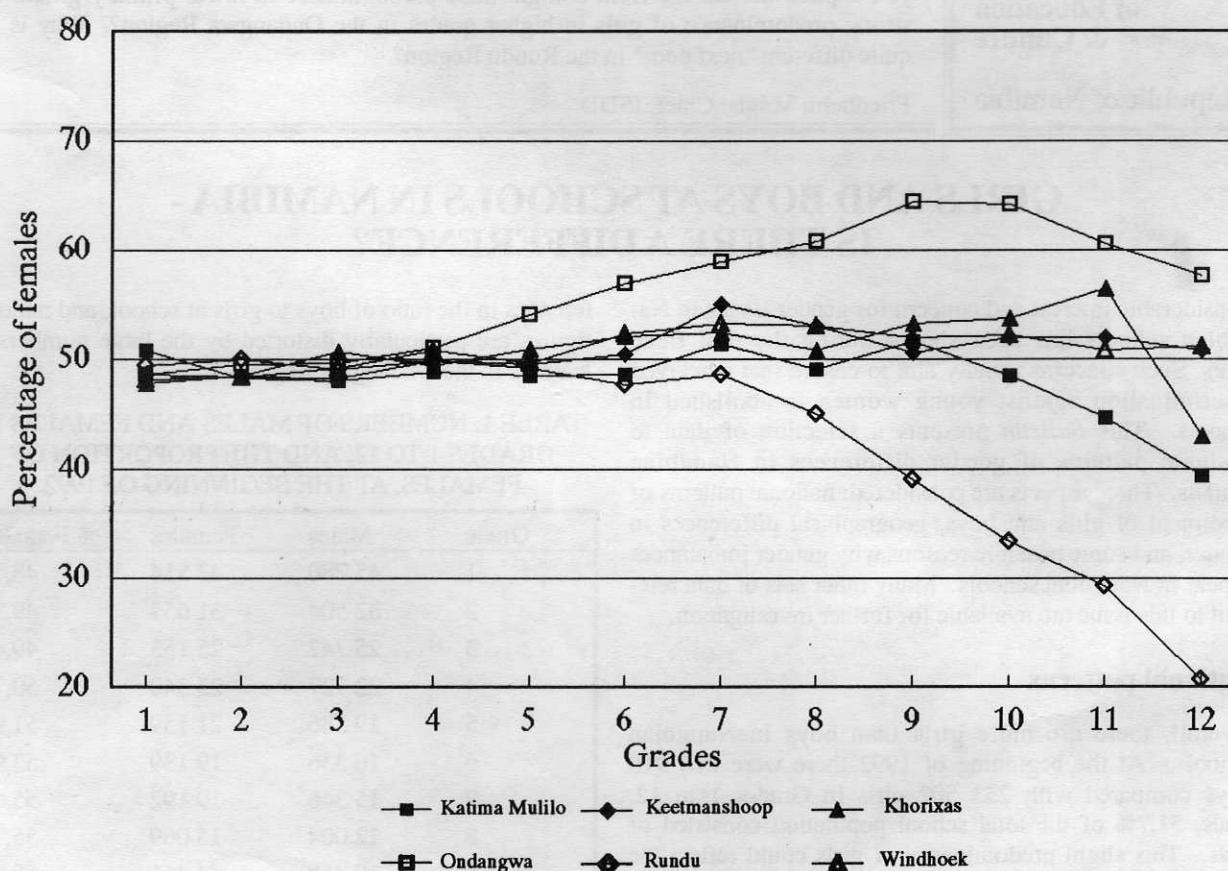


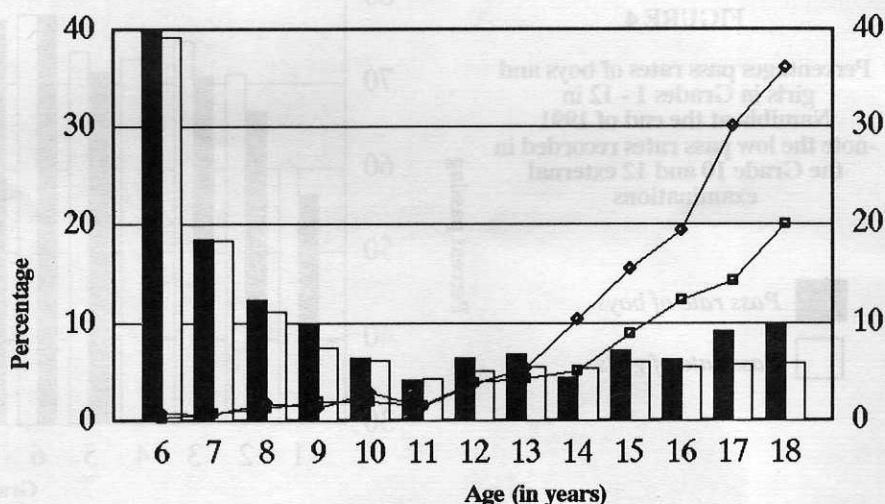
FIGURE 1

Percentage of female learners in Grades 1 - 12, 1992, in the six educational regions in Namibia

FIGURE 2

Percentages of boys and girls in the Katima Mulilo Region not at school, having either not been to school or having left school (from preliminary results of the 1991 Population & Housing Census)

- % boys never at school
- % girls never at school
- % boys left school
- ◇— % girls left school



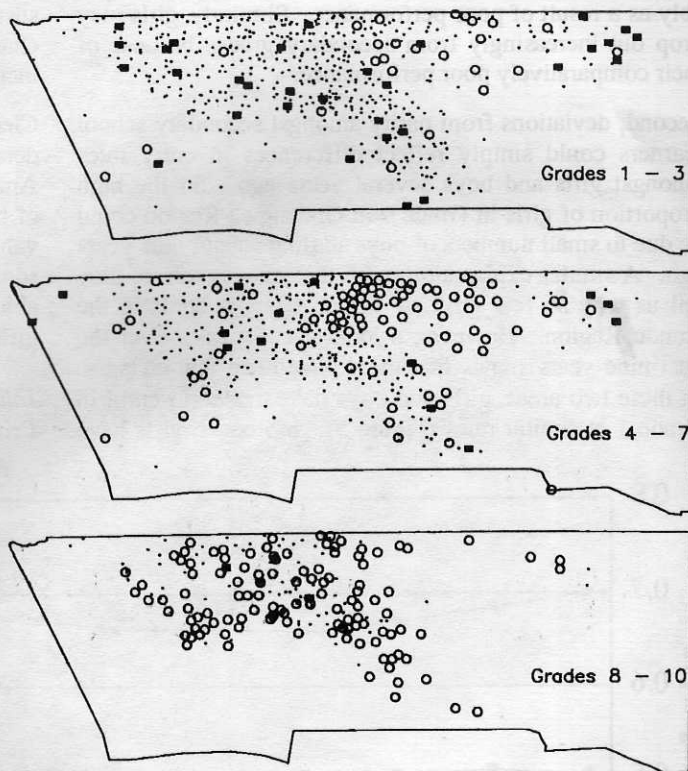
Katma Mulilo Region. Here the decline in proportion of girls really starts after Grade 9. Apart from small deviations, the general pattern of more girls than boys persists throughout the school years in the other regions. However, two of these deviations warrant comment. First, there is a very sharp decline in the proportion of girls in Grade 12 in the Khorixas Region. Second, there appear to be similar small increases in the proportion of girls in Grade 7 in Windhoek, Katima Mulilo and Keetamnschoop regions. Other data indicate that these increases are due to increased enrolment by girls, and not to lower enrolments by boys.

It is often difficult to know if a deviation from a balanced sex ratio is due to an excess of females or a shortage of males, or vice versa. Information from the Population & Housing Census for the Katima Mulilo Region demonstrates clearly that the declining proportion of girls in secondary school is due to more girls leaving school at an earlier age than boys (Figure 2). Although boys and girls apparently enter the school system at about the same age and rate, female drop-out increases sharply at age 14, while an increased drop out of boys only starts at age 15. There are more late teenage boys than girls who have never been to school, presumably as a result of some historical factor that tended to exclude boys from school.

In the Ondangwa Region girls increasingly dominate the school system (Figure 1). However, this trend varies within the region (Figure 3). Along the Angolan border, in the vicinity of Ondobe, Eenhana and Omundaungilo, girls predominate right from the earliest grades. The predominance of girls appears to spread further from this area in upper primary grades, while the whole region is predominated by girls in junior secondary years. By contrast, boys tend to be in the majority throughout the primary school years in the far east, near Okongo. We invite explanations for these patterns.

What of the causes?

It is beyond the scope of this *Bulletin* to consider factors that distort sex ratios in schools. Thorough research on these issues is needed. However, two sets of data may lead in the direction of possible answers.



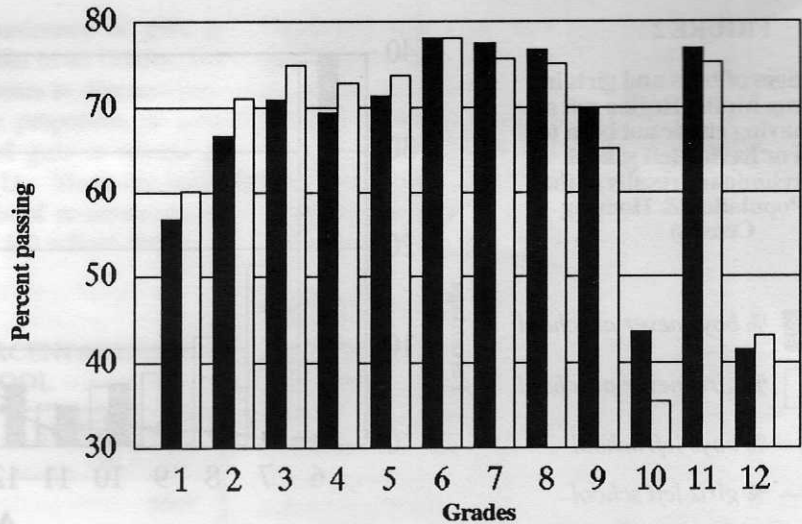
- schools in which more than 60% of learners are girls
- schools in which girls make up 40 - 60% of learners
- schools in which more than 60% of learners are boys

FIGURE 3

Proportions of boys and girls in different grades at schools in the Ondangwa Region, 1992

FIGURE 4
Percentages pass rates of boys and girls in Grades 1 - 12 in Namibia at the end of 1991
 -note the low pass rates recorded in the Grade 10 and 12 external examinations

■ Pass rate of boys
 □ Pass rate of girls



First, pass/fail rates differ between boys and girls. Results from the end of 1991 show that girls had higher pass rates in primary school, while the reverse held in secondary school (Figure 4). The differences are of the order of 4-5% more girls or boys passing in the two respective phases. These trends follow the overall changes in sex ratios, so that increasing proportions of girls in primary grades probably reflect high rates of drop out amongst boys, presumably as a result of poor performance. Similarly, girls may drop out increasingly from secondary grades because of their comparatively poor performance.

Second, deviations from parity amongst secondary school learners could simply reflect differences in entry rates amongst girls and boys several years ago. So the high proportion of girls in Grade 9 in Ondangwa Region could be due to small numbers of boys starting school nine years ago. A similar explanation, with the sexes reversed, may tell us why so few girls are in secondary schools in the Rundu Region. However, a look at entry rates over the past nine years shows that there have been few changes. In these two areas, girls and boys have tended to enrol in Grade 1 at similar rates (Figure 5). Moreover, girls have

tended to predominate in secondary schools in the Ondangwa Region for a long time. Likewise, girls have been in the minority in the Rundu Region for many years. These trends do not seem to be changing in the Rundu area, but a slight decline in the proportion of girls may be evident in the Ondangwa Region - about 70,1% of Grade 9 learners were girls in 1984, while the proportion was 64,5% in 1992. Whether this change is real and will be sustained remains to be seen. More importantly, does this change reflect improved attendance by boys at school or increasing exclusion of girls?

Clearly, much more work is required before we fully understand why the performance of girls and boys differs. Amongst many issues requiring investigation are the roles of boys in tending livestock, teenage pregnancies and the value parents attach to an education for their daughters or sons. Until answers to these and other issues are available, it will be difficult to provide education to boys and girls equally.

*John M Mendelsohn, Ministry of Education & Culture
 Private Bag 13186, Windhoek, Namibia*

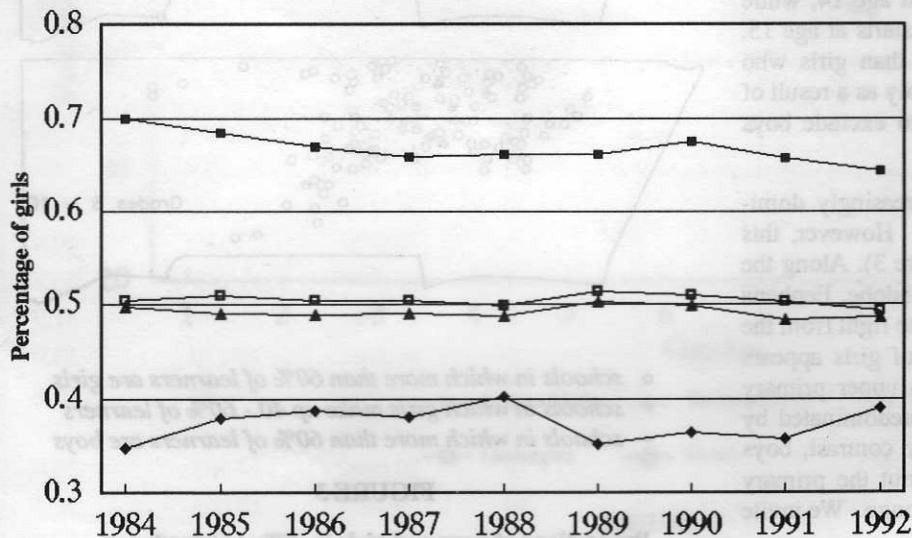


FIGURE 5
Percentages of girls in Grade 1 and Grade 9 in the Ondangwa and Rundu Regions over the past nine years

■ Grade 9 - Ondangwa
 ◆ Grade 9 - Rundu
 ▲ Grade 1 - Ondangwa
 □ Grade 1 - Rundu