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Unpacking the indigenato: the evolution of primary school

enrolment rates in Mozambique, 1947-1962

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ABSTRACT

Educational development in Mozambique, and other low-income countries, cannot be fully understood by looking at country-wide aggregate measures for the present-day. Instead, we must analyse colonial systems of education and their legacies, documenting differences across regions, gender, and population groups, to discover the long-term structural factors that may still affect educational outcomes today.

This paper combines yearbook and census data to reconstruct and analyse the regional and gender distribution of primary school enrolment rates in colonial Mozambique under the racial discrimination system of the indigenato. I focus on the black children enrolled in ensino primario rudimentar, or rudimentary schooling, between 1947-1962. This type of education was of very low quality, barely allowing for the acquisition of literacy, and its purpose was state control and indoctrination rather than the social advancement of the children enrolled. Indeed, Catholic missions controlled by the Portuguese Estado Novo ran the majority of these schools, and students were often required to work on the mission farms.

In 1947, enrolment rates for black children in rudimentary schooling were generally low but presented a clear North-South divide, with a cluster of high levels of schooling in the southernmost tip of the colony and low levels of schooling in the rest of the territory. At this time, the majority of the regions in the colony favoured the enrolment of boys. However, regions in the southern cluster of enrolment were relatively close to



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gender parity and, in many cases, presented greater enrolment rates for girls than for boys through the end of the period in 1962. By the end of the indigenato in the early 1960s, however, there had been a relative convergence in enrolment rates from a regional and a gender perspective.

I use qualitative analysis and OLS regressions to explore the historical factors behind these patterns. Firstly, I look at supply side factors such as the six-year investment plan implemented by the colonial state, or the incentives faced by Catholic authorities when deciding where to locate missions and invest in schooling. Secondly, I look at factors influencing local demand for schooling from African parents, and how these differed for girls and for boys, which ranged from the changing quality of rudimentary education to the pull exerted by migratory flows to the mines in the Transvaal.