



Institute of Policy Analysis  
and Research - Rwanda

## POLICY BRIEFING DOCUMENT

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### NEXT STEPS IN DEVELOPING RWANDAN BASIC EDUCATION

#### The purpose of this document

This briefing document is intended to inform discussion of future directions for development of Rwandan basic education (9YB). It focuses on primary education, which is the necessary foundation for entry to secondary education and for the skills which will lead to useful employment. It aims to discuss outstanding problems and suggest solutions.

#### The importance of education to Rwanda

Basic education is important to Rwanda:

- *Economic transformation:* primary education is the foundation for the transformation of Rwanda's economy. It is required to create citizens capable of working in non-farm jobs (or in modern intensive and efficient agriculture), capable of forming part of a middle class and an industrial/commercial private sector, capable of creating their own employment opportunities, capable of junior and middle-level management and appropriate as a labour-force which might attract both inward and internal investment.
- *Social cohesion:* the gap between rich and poor is socially divisive; as Rwanda grows in prosperity it will need to remain one unified country, and to achieve social cohesion education will be needed.
- *Social effectiveness:* educated parents make for educated children, they are more likely to be able to make a contribution to schooling (including pre-primary schooling), they are better able to look after their own and their family's health and know more about nutrition and healthy feeding, they are better placed to play their role in dialogue and consensus at local level, and they can make an informed and

#### **Key outcomes of good quality education include:**

- ☑ cognitive and language development
- ☑ literacy and numeracy
- ☑ relevant new knowledge and skills
- ☑ emotional development
- ☑ attitudes and values that reflect human rights
- ☑ ability to participate fully in the classroom and school
- ☑ ability to think critically, to question and be active citizens
- ☑ social development, including the capacity to function effectively in the societies and cultures to which they belong.

As well as enabling children to develop personally, this range of outcomes contributes to a country's economic growth, stability and good governance. **(Save the Children 2010)**

perhaps skilled input to national politics.

- *International acceptability:* Education is a human right for all children to which Rwanda is committed. Rwanda's adherence to the Millennium Development Goals also includes a commitment that all children shall be able to complete a full course of primary schooling, with specific targets of 100% net enrolment into primary school and 100% of children in P1 reaching P6.

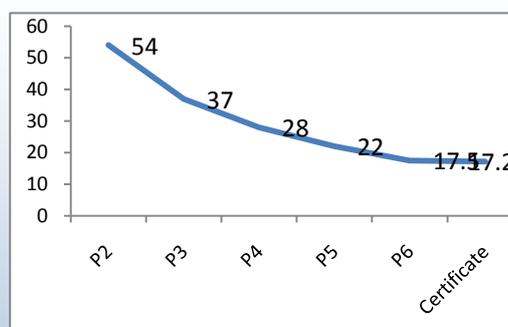
## Sources of information

The research on which this document is based comes from a number of projects carried out by IPAR-Rwanda, further analysis of the EICV surveys - both the published reports (e.g. NISR 2007, 2012a, b) and further analysis of these and other databases, and a number of other research projects carried out in Rwanda in recent years. Figures in the text are from EICV unless otherwise stated.

## Achievements so far

- *Near-100% primary-school enrolment;*
- *achievement of gender equity in the primary schools ;*
- *Involvement of parents in the management and monitoring of their children's schools;*
- *delivery of fee-free education (but the capitation grant is insufficient for providing high-quality education and the continued need for parental contributions is socially divisive);*
- *Provision of infrastructure for an expanding school population (though more remains to be done – provision is not yet adequate and does not yet meet Government's declared policy, in both physical infrastructure and supply of textbooks);*
- *Successful completion by the vast majority who reach P6;*
- *Formal qualification of nearly 100% of teachers;*
- *Substantial expansion of the school infrastructure: between 2009 and 2011 over 6,000 classrooms and 20,000 latrine cubicles were built following the introduction of the child-friendly standards, and by 2010/11 87 per cent of schools had separate toilets for boys and girls*

Figure 1: Retention 'on time' across the primary school career - 2009 pupils



Source: author's own analysis of the EICV3 dataset.

## Problem areas

- *Late enrolment* – 25% of seven-year-olds are not yet in school. The main risk factors are ignorance of parents on the value of education, poverty, gender and location. Poor children are about twice as likely to start late, rural children are twice as likely and boys are a little more likely than girls.
- *Drop-out and temporary withdrawal:* the drop-out rate has declined, from 14.2 per cent in 2002 to 10.9 per cent in 2011, but this is still high – one in nine of enrolled children drops out

of school. Drop-out is strongly correlated with poverty and with repeated failure (repetition); gender is also a factor, with boys about 20% more likely to drop out than girls.

- *Living arrangements* – not being part of a two-parent family – also have some effect. There has been a decline in the proportion of children aged 7-15 who are in productive employment, from 21 per cent in 2005 to 6.4 per cent in 2010-11 (and only a third of these are not in school), but recent research suggests that the amount of work children put in on family farms may be much higher than is suggested by the surveys (IFC International 2012). Temporary withdrawal is less of a problem in terms of numbers according to EICV3, but Williams (2013) found that difficulty in meeting the costs of schooling caused children to have to withdraw for short periods while their parents found the money for e.g. examination fees. Any such interruption of schooling is quite predictive of repetition and eventual drop-out.
- *Attendance and/or lateness*: about one child in nine was absent from school in the week before EICV3 data were collected, for reasons other than school holidays. There is little else in the research literature apart from Williams (2013) that considers late arrival or poor attendance not amounting to temporary withdrawal, but some of the qualitative studies suggest there may be a problem with late arrival and children being tired when they arrive. Hunger may also be an element in poor performance, and Krishnartne *et al* (2013) found school feeding programmes one of the interventions that looked as though it might be having an effect where tried in developing countries.
- *Repetition* is a very serious problem, both for the schools and children and for the Government's proposed re-direction of funds from primary to TVET, which is predicated on reducing repetition and increasing on-time completion. The repetition rate for any given class has declined from 34 per cent in 2000 to 12.7 per cent in 2011, but this still translates as one child in eight repeating at an y given time. Further, more than one year may be repeated, or the same year may be repeated more than once; the average of repetitions at primary level is 1.6 per student. Over two thirds of learners attending school in 2010/11 had repeated at least one grade. Poverty is a strong predictor, but children in rural areas are about 45% more likely to repeat even after controlling for this.

#### **The cost of non-completion:**

“With a primary school drop-out rate of 65 per cent in 2007 in Malawi, it is estimated that nearly half a million school places were taken up by children who failed to complete primary school. In monetary terms, this broadly represented an annual expenditure of 60 million dollars on the education of children who probably left schooling without any basic skills.” **(Sabates *et al* 2010, speaking of the low completion rates in Malawi)**

#### **The fallacy of repetition:**

“The factors that make children fail don't go away the following year when they repeat...Teachers think repetition will improve performance. They need to see that they are part of the problem if there is poor performance” **(national-level stakeholder interview, quoted in Musker *et al* 2014)**

- *The very high repetition rate in P1* is of particular concern. In EICV3, of the children in P1 in 2009 only 54% made it through to P2 in 2010; 46%, nearly half the class, repeated the year.
- *Pre-primary education* is rightly seen by the Government as an important corrective to the problem of delayed school enrolment and failure in P1: it gets children into the habit of attending school and instils basic knowledge and skills that will make 'real' schooling much easier. Over 15 per cent of children who were aged seven at the time when EICV3 data were collected (2010/11) and nearly 5 per cent of eight-year-olds were in pre-primary education in 2010, which is a reasonable predictor of their being in primary school in the next year. Lacking resources, however, the Government does not cover the whole cost of pre-primary education; it expects parents to do any building that is required and to pay a teacher's salary and the running costs, though it will provide building materials and educational materials if these cannot be sourced through an NGO or other charitable donor. This policy exacerbates social inequalities, because poor and themselves ill-educated parents cannot afford these costs, and Janet Finch (1983, 2013) has demonstrated that it is the more affluent middle class that have the prerequisite skills and knowledge to set up and maintain pre-school provision on a sustainable basis, rather than impoverished and working-class or peasant communities.
- *Quality of teaching:*
  - *Teacher competence to teach English and to teach in English:* Language is clearly important, given that instruction is now entirely in English. A baseline survey of teachers' English proficiency commissioned by the British Council (Simpson 2013) found that the vast majority of teachers currently possess only a basic level of English language. About forty per cent were considered 'beginners', only three per cent had reached an intermediate level and -one demonstrated effective operational proficiency or mastery. This is in line with the qualitative fieldwork undertaken by Musker *et al* (2014): findings from 38 lesson observations confirm that teachers struggle with English, especially spoken English. District officials and school-level informants described the 'linguistic community' as Kinyarwandan, with English generally spoken only in school or even only in class. Furthermore, as one of their national-level key informants pointed out, the English becomes worse the further you get from Kigali, which is divisive.
  - *Teacher competence and training in student-centred methods,* to deal with large and heterogeneous classes: the Government has input-related strategies designed to improve teacher performance (Ministry of Education 2013) - expanding the teacher workforce, funding training of teachers and providing one textbook per child in each subject together with manuals for the teachers. Results for Development Institute (2012, 2013) found that there is some way to go, however, before all children have their own textbooks; some children do not have access to one at all in some subjects. Even if textbooks were available in schools this would not necessarily mean that teachers would use them in their teaching. Musker *et al* (2014) found that even where textbooks were available they were rarely used; other research has found the same (DeStefano and Ralaingita 2011; Results for Development Institute 2013). This seems to be because teachers have not had sufficient pre- and in-service training in using student-centred methods (Results for Development Institute 2013).
  - *Teacher motivation* is another important factor. A key indicator is absenteeism, and Bennell with Ntagaramba (2008) reported that 40 per cent of teachers think that

teacher absenteeism is a problem in their school and 42 per cent that teachers are only sometimes available. DeStefano and Ralaingita (2011) found that 71 per cent of primary schools had at least one teacher absent on any given day. Major elements of the problem are:

- *Primary-school teachers are very poorly paid.* A teacher with a degree receives 123,850 RWF net per month, but a primary teacher, probably with A-level equivalent qualifications, receives 41,334 RWF at the time of writing. A secretary with a diploma earns 108,877 RWF a month, and A-level school graduates working in the commercial sector in Kigali receive around 120,000 RWF. In 2008 it was estimated that an income of 48,750 RWF a month was necessary to keep an average teacher's household above the extreme poverty line (International Bank for Reconstruction/World Bank 2011). This level of remuneration not only demotivates the teachers but also makes it difficult to recruit the best to the profession.
  - *Double-shifting* – teachers delivering the same curriculum to morning and afternoon school streams - is also a problem. This practice was introduced originally as a short-term measure, but budget reallocations mean that it will continue in all primary schools during the next planning cycle. This reduces costs in terms of the infrastructure and the number of teachers but exhausts teachers and lowers their morale. The Government acknowledges that the continuation is a reversal of the previous policy of phasing it out by 2015 and may reduce the quality of education (Ministry of Education, 2013).
  - *The change in language of instruction* has been another demotivating factor; while teachers say they do their best to comply, they thought the change abrupt and arbitrary, found the initial emergency language training too general and not helpful for their teaching, and reported an initial lack of English written materials (Pearson 2014).
- *The ability to handle people with handicaps* – particularly learning disabilities. This is not a large problem in terms of numbers, but the provision falls far short of the Government's policy in the area. A third of children with (mostly) learning disabilities and 12.4 per cent of children with physical/sensory disabilities (one in eight) have never been to school, compared with 1.3 per cent of children with no declared disability. If they do attend, disabled children are 65 per cent more likely to have periods of temporary withdrawal than those with no declared disability. They are significantly less likely to complete their primary education; 21 per cent of those with no declared disability completed according to EICV3, compared with 16 per cent of those with physical disabilities and only 13 per cent of those with mental disabilities. Although the poor enrolment may be due in part to parents' realistic decisions about where to spend limited resources to best advantage, it may also owe something to cultural stigmatisation of disability. The same factors are likely to be responsible in part for poor completion among attenders, but inadequate training of teachers to cater for learners with disabilities is also likely to be a factor. There is a severe shortage of special needs teachers and infrastructure.
- *The ability to identify the best pupils* and make the most of their gifts in particular areas or their overall ability, particularly in poor school in rural areas, might also be seen as important. Rwanda is a small country and needs to develop all its talent fully. There is no evidence at present that teachers are succeeding in picking out talented pupils,

particularly in poor and rural areas, and it is not clear what they could do about it if they did succeed in this. The former is a training issue but would also be made easier by the annual use of attainment tests standardised to international norms for the school stage; the latter might need further resources – possibly distance learning materials, if numbers in a category merited the investment.

- *The infrastructure for quality in education:* quality is judged by outcomes, not inputs, but adequate infrastructure is nonetheless essential if pupils are to be retained, teachers motivated and quality achieved. However, the number of primary schools and classrooms declined between 2007 and 2011 and the pupil-classroom ratio increased from 70 to 81 (Ministry of Education 2012; International Bank for Reconstruction/World Bank 2011). In 2008 66 per cent of primary schools had access to water and 25 per cent to electricity. More recent data suggest that there has been an increase in the proportion of schools with access to water but little increase in the proportion with access to electricity. DeStefano and Ralaingita (2011) found that most classrooms had a good blackboard and adequate lighting, but that many did not have enough desks, with children simply crowded onto the available benches. A survey in 2012 (Results for Development Institute, 2013) found that the majority of schools had improved infrastructure, mainly sanitation and construction of new classrooms (mostly by parents), but around a third still did not have electricity. Computer laboratories had been installed in 48 per cent of schools, with a lack of electricity supply being the main barrier to their provision in more. Seventy-five per cent of classrooms have equipment and materials such as teachers' manuals, chalk, desks, chairs and chalkboards. However, one in four classrooms did not have a teacher's desk, one in five did not have sufficient chairs and just under a fifth did not have adequate learning materials.

### Areas for urgent action

As with any system that is growing and changing there are many areas which might be seen as important for investment in the future. We believe that it is important to get primary education right first, however, in order to lay the foundations for all further learning. Within primary education, the following seem to us to be priority targets in that their achievement would seem prerequisite for other improvements. Many of them are aimed at overcoming actual or potential differences in favour of more affluent areas which amount to a form of structural discrimination, in the interest of social cohesion.

- In the more affluent areas a sufficient parental contribution can be levied to increase teachers' pay substantially, thereby raising motivation and making it easier to attract the best in the profession. In the poorest areas, however, parents are able to contribute very little to the school's budget. (This, with the cost of uniforms and materials, is the major impact of poverty on schooling.) It may be necessary to pay a differential and higher capitation grant to the poorest areas to offset their inability to make up what is needed from parental contributions, if the current disparity between the most affluent and the poorest areas is to be overcome.
- One-off funding is needed to improve infrastructure where needed (e.g. provision of classrooms, classroom furniture, even electricity where feasible).

- Meeting the Government's target of one textbook per subject per child is essential, if educational quality is to be improved, but the expenditure will be wasted if teachers do not involve them in their teaching practice and know how to instruct children in their use.
- Further qualitative research into teachers' attitudes and practices is urgently needed, to assess the effects of workload and double-shifting, to assess motivation and explore why there is absenteeism, to ascertain what remedial work they undertake when a child is repeating a year or obviously beginning to fall behind during a year, and to confirm that textbooks are not necessarily used when provided and explore the reasons.
- The improvement of teacher English has to be a high priority, and also training and supervised practice in using student-centred methods and approaches, but the problem will need to be handled in such a way that it does not simply constitute another demoralising burden for teachers. This is very urgent – no improvement can be made until teachers are uniformly competent to use and teach the language of instruction. It might be an area where expert advice is needed, and a taskforce or consultancy might be the appropriate way forward.
- Every school needs at least one teacher trained in teaching people with learning disabilities, with a light enough direct workload that he or she can work individually with the most disabled to support them in their learning.
- Some degree of similar training needs to be given to all teachers, so that they can offer remedial support to those who are learning slowly and would be at risk of having to repeat a class, and the teaching establishment needs to be large enough that individual help can be offered.
- The curriculum is currently under review. The revised curriculum needs to be adaptable to student-centred methods and to relate to students' immediate lives as well as their eventual employability, to retain their interest and involvement. The curriculum needs to be self-evidently relevant in the eyes of their parents.
- Further qualitative research is needed on pupil absenteeism and late arrival, how applicable their schooling is to their lives and social context and why they drop out of school.
- Standardised tests of attainment set to international age/stage norms are needed, particularly at P6 (to test readiness for secondary school) and at P3 (to test readiness for the second half of primary education, when children begin to be taught in English). Given its importance for student-centred learning, competence at aural and oral English is particularly important at these two stages.

**The pitfall to be avoided** is making some of the problems worse while tackling the others – for example, reducing repetition at the cost of putting children into classes where they stand no chance at all of succeeding and without special support for those who are behind in their achievement of learning outcomes.

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- EICV and a number of other Rwandan databases can be accessed via the NISR website at <http://statistics.gov.rw/surveys>

This document was prepared by Professor Pamela Abbott.