

# IPAR Rwanda

## POLICY BRIEF 2015 No. 7



Institute of Policy Analysis  
and Research - Rwanda

## Next Steps in Developing Rwandan Basic Education

### The Purpose of this document

This briefing document is intended to inform discussion about future directions for Rwandan basic education (9YB). It focuses on primary education, the necessary foundation for entry to secondary education and for the skills which will lead to useful employment. The main point is that attention must be paid to ensuring that children start school on time and are supported to make their way through school. Late enrolment combined with repetition means that many children make slow progress and end up dropping out in their mid-teens without ever completing the primary stage. Under the 2003 Constitution primary education is mandatory and provided free by the Government. Under the 2011 Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child (Law No 54/2011 of 14/12/2011) parents are responsible for ensuring that their children attend school, but the Penal Code (Organic Law No 01/2012 of 02/05/2012) mandates no punishment for parents that fail to do so.

### The importance of Education to Rwanda

Basic education is important to Rwanda:

- 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.
- 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 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 to attract 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 are more able to make a contribution to schooling, they are better able to look after their own and their family's health, they are better placed to play their role in dialogue and consensus at local level, and they can make an informed and perhaps skilled input to national politics.

### 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 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-90 per cent net primary-school enrolment and nearly 100 per cent of children receiving some primary education;
- achievement of gender equity in the primary schools (though abuse and harassment still need to be monitored);
- involvement of parents in the management and monitoring of their children's schools;

- delivery of fee-free education (but the capitation grant is insufficient to provide high-quality education and the continued need for parental financial support is 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 per cent of primary school 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.

## Problem Areas

- Late enrolment – 25 per cent of seven-year-olds are not yet in school. The main risk factors, apart from disability, are poverty, gender and rural location.
- Drop-out and temporary withdrawal: the drop-out rate declined from 14.2 per cent in 2002 to 10.9 per cent in 2011 but increased to 14.3 per cent in 2014 (Ministry of Education 2015). This figure is still high; 1 one child in five of those who enroll drops out of school before completing primary education. A main reason given for early drop-out is lack of interest (over 40%) – the curriculum neither engages their attention nor appears relevant to their lives.
- **Completion:** there is also low on-time completion, with only 51 per cent even of 19-year-olds having achieved a primary certificate and the gross primary school completion rate being only 61.3 per cent in 2014 - an increase on 2000, when it was only 20 per cent, but a decline from the peak of 78.6 per cent in 2011. Of those in P1, less than 18 per cent will make it into P6 on time. Factors include Musker et al 2014; drop-out is strongly correlated with poverty and with

repeated failure (repetition); gender is also a factor, with boys about 20 per cent 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 rarer, but Williams (2013) and Williams et al (2014) 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, and any such interruption is

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

*"With a primary school drop-out rate of 65 per cent in 2007, 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)*

quite predictive of repetition and eventual drop-out.

- Poor attendance and/or lateness: about one child in nine was absent from school in the week before EICV3, 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 a few 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.
- 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 18.3 per cent in 2013 (an increase on 2012 when it was 12.5%) but this translates as nearly two children in 10 repeating at any given time, and children may repeat more than once in their school 'career'; the average number 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 per cent more likely to repeat a year even after controlling for this.

- The very high repetition rate in P1 is of particular concern. Of the children in P1 in 2009 only 54 per cent made it through to P2 in 2010; 46 per cent 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 (perhaps covering the cost of materials) and to pay a teacher's salary and the running costs; poor parents cannot afford to

#### **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)*

do this. 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.

- **Poor quality of education:** Quality is not the same thing as completion, and in Rwanda it needs to be improved (see Ministry of Education 2013). The Government's own research (Ministry of Education 2012) show that only just over half of P6 pupils meet or exceed curricular expectations for reading, and the majority do not meet the expectations for numeracy. EICV data indicate that only 1.7 per cent of 16- and 17-year olds who had completed primary school and had attended school in the year prior to the survey could write English and 0.3 per cent French, compared with 1.9 per cent (English) and 4.7 per cent (French) in 2005/6 - the effect of the change of instructional language appears to have been a great decline in French literacy but no noticeable improvement in English. DeStefano and Ralaingita (2011) found poor attainment in Kinyarwanda, English and Mathematics in primary schools, and the research published by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact in 2012 found the same. The sheer extent of repetition and the fact that some students are staying in primary school long after the appropriate age without completing the syllabus also indicate that the system is failing its pupils.
- **Poor quality of teaching:** Teachers' ability to teach English and to teach in English is clearly important now. A British Council survey (2015) found that only 1.5 per cent of P4-6 teachers are 'proficient' users of the English language, while 46 per cent have only a basic command of it. This is in line with the qualitative fieldwork of Musker et al (2014) and Clist et al (2015), which confirm that teachers struggle with English, especially spoken English. The 'linguistic community' is Kinyarwanda, with English generally spoken only in school or even only in class. 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 this would not necessarily mean that teachers would know how to use them in their teaching. Research has found that even where textbooks were available they were rarely used (Musker et al 2014; DeStefano and Ralaingita 2011; 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 find teacher absenteeism a problem in their school. 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:

1. 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 qualifications, receives 41,334 RWF at the time of writing. A secretary with a diploma earns 108,877 RFW a month, and A-level school graduates working in the commercial sector in Kigali receive around 120,000 RFW. In 2008 it was estimated that an income of 48,750 RFW a month was necessary to keep an average teacher's household above the extreme poverty line (IBDR/World Bank 2011). The low level of remuneration not only demotivates the teachers but also makes it difficult to recruit the best to the profession.

2. 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 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 this may reduce the quality of education (Ministry of Education, 2013).

3. 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 and the initial emergency language training too general and not helpful for their teaching, and they reported an initial lack of English written materials (Pearson 2014).

- The ability to handle children living with disabilities – 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 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 and significantly less likely to complete their primary education. 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 stigmatization. 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, particularly in poor school in rural areas, is also important. 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 so. The former is a training issue but would also be made easier by the annual use of attainment tests standardized to inter-national 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: 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; IBRD/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 clean water but little increase in access to electricity. 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. 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.

## 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. 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 be priority targets in that their achievement is prerequisite for other improvements. Many of them are aimed at overcoming actual or potential differences in favor of more affluent areas, which amount to a form of structural discrimination.

- One-off funding is needed to improve infrastructure where needed (e.g. provision of classrooms, classroom furniture, even electricity where feasible).
- Teachers need to be trained so that they use student-centered teaching methods in the classroom, prioritize progress for all children in their class and deliver the curriculum so that it is self-evidently relevant in the eyes of pupils and their parents.
- Local communities need to take responsibility for ensuring that all parents understand their legal obligation for children to start primary school on time (7 years) and ensure that their children attend school. Local leaders need to ensure that they work with schools and parents to reduce absenteeism and dropout. Attendance is a legal requirement, and the

government as well as parents are responsible for ensuring they do so. Consideration should be given to imposing fines on parents whose children are persistently absent from school or drop out.

- Meeting the Government's target of one text-book per subject per child is essential if educational quality is to be improved, but the expenditure will be wasted if teachers cannot use them in their teaching and do not 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 teachers undertake when a child is repeating a year or obviously beginning to fall behind, and to explore why textbooks are not necessarily used when provided.
- The improvement of teacher English has to be a high priority, and also training and supervised practice in using student-centered methods and approaches, but the problem will need to be handled in such a way that it does not simply constitute yet another demoralizing burden for teachers. This is very urgent. 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 children with learning disabilities, with a light enough direct workload that he or she can work individually with the most disabled.
- 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.
- 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.

- Tests of attainment standardized 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-centered 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.

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The education statistics can be accessed on the Ministry of Education web site at <http://www.mineduc.gov.rw/resources/statistics/>

This document was prepared by Professor Pamela Abbott. The author alone is responsible for the content of the brief and the views expressed in it should not be taken to necessarily represent those of the Board of Directors of IPAR- Rwanda.

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