

## **Contemporary Education System of Rwanda**

### **Context**

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda devastated the nation's education system, resulting in the closure of over 600 schools and the death or exile of some 3,000 teachers. Since the cessation of hostilities the focus of the country's education policy has been twofold: the promotion of national unity and reconciliation, and the development of a skilled workforce that will enable Rwanda to become a middle-income country with a knowledge based economy. To achieve these goals, the government has embarked on an education policy that places a strong emphasis on universal primary education and technical training aligned with the country's labor force needs. The government has also established the goal of implementing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) throughout the education system, for example by serving as the largest partner of the *One Laptop per Child* program in Africa. Nonetheless, despite its ambitious plans, many hurdles continue to face students and educators in Rwanda, including a shortage of resources, trained teachers, and education infrastructure. In this paper we will examine Rwanda's current education policy, the structure of its education system, as well as proposed reforms in order to address existing challenges.

### **National Education Policy**

Rwanda's government remains committed to achieving the UN Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) number 2 and 3, which call for the opportunity for all children to complete a full course of primary education and for gender disparities in primary and secondary schooling to be eliminated by 2015 respectively. The country has made great strides in achieving these goals, with a net primary school enrollment rate of 91.7%, and a male to female student ratio of 1.02 as of 2010 (IPAR, 2012a). It appears that by 2015 Rwanda will have achieved or at least have come very close to achieving MDG 2 and the education aspects of MDG 3.

In addition to meeting the education policy goals set forth by international organizations, Rwanda maintains its own strategic goals which are discussed in two primary documents: *Rwanda Vision 2020*, and the *Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy*

(*EDPRS*). The former emphasizes education's role in creating human capital to bolster Rwanda's economy. The policy calls for training and educating people at all levels, including adults that lack the basic education and skills necessary for employment. The *EDPRS* policy echoes the need for access to quality education at all levels, with the addition of high level objectives related to educational effectiveness, the strengthening of science and technology teaching, and the widespread use of ICT.

In summary, the policy goals of Rwanda's education system are aimed at creating an educated workforce with the technological knowhow to engage in service sector employment. These goals reflect the government's overall plan for Rwanda to become a technology hub in Africa, which is based on the fact that the nation's limited stock of natural resources and arable land necessitate its transformation into a knowledge economy rather than one based on industry or agriculture.

### **Educational Institutions and Structure**

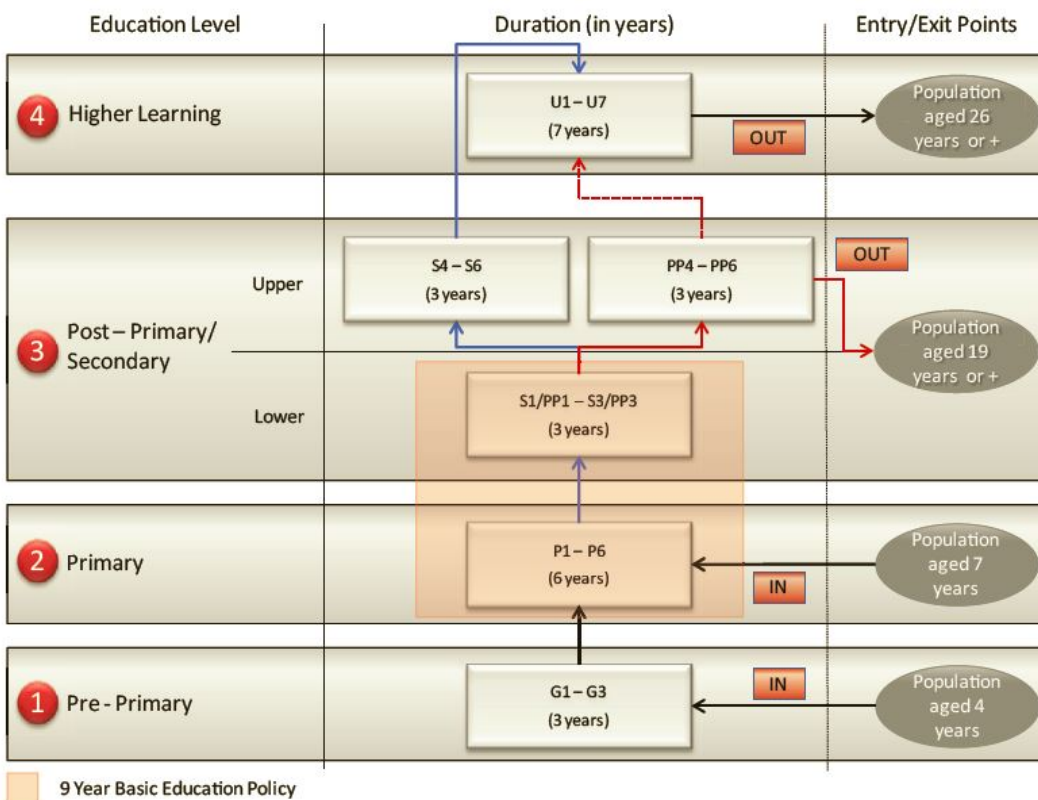
The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) is responsible for the development of national education policy. The Ministry's policies are implemented by the Rwanda Education Board (REB), whose mission is to "improve Rwanda's education quality by building the capacities and management of teachers, loans and scholarships, monitoring the distance learning program, and promoting the use of information and communication technology in education." (REB, 2013). Oversight of the national curriculum and education structure is highly centralized and governed by the Rwanda Education Board (See Appendix A). However, Rwanda's 30 districts retain some control over the management of schools at the local level. In fact, schools themselves retain a high degree of autonomy in the hiring and evaluation of teachers, with over 84% of schools having a Parent Teacher Committee involved in hiring and monitoring teachers, as well as being involved in budget setting (IPAR, 2012a). Furthermore, Parent Teacher Committees are able to supplement teacher salaries and school budgets through donations.

The current education policy places the greatest emphasis on 9 year basic education (9-YBE), which is comprised of the full 6 year primary school curriculum (P1-P6) and the first three years of the secondary school curriculum (S1-S3). Students are not required to pay fees for these years of schooling, and schools receive their funding from the central government through a capitation system based on the number of students enrolled. Following the 9 year basic education curriculum, students may continue in the final 3 years of secondary school

(S4-S6), but must pay their own tuition. As part of the current administration’s strategic plan for education (last updated in 2010), the 9 year basic education program is being extended to include the final three years of secondary school. This new 12 year basic education policy (12-YBE) will offer the final three years as an “entitlement” program, rather than a compulsory educational requirement for all students.

For those students that complete secondary school and do wish to continue to University, there are 7 public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and over 20 private HEIs. All public HEIs are self-governing and independent, though the Ministry of Education provides oversight to ensure quality control and curriculum standards through its Higher Education Council. Private institutions are not subject to the same oversight, though they are still required to receive accreditation from the Ministry. For a flow chart of students’ progression through the general education system, please see figure 1 below.

**Figure 1:** Student progression through Rwanda’s general education system (National Institute of Statistics, 2011).



Students also have the option of enrolling in a technical training program known as TVET

(Technical Vocational Education Training), as early as immediately following completion of primary schooling. TVET is administered either at Vocational Training Centers, for those students completing their final 3 years of compulsory education, or at Technical Secondary Schools, for those students who have graduated from 9 year basic education and are seeking certificates in such trades as construction, carpentry and automotive repair. The TVET curriculum is also available for adults who have received little to no formal education. For adult learners, the Ministry of Education partners with non-governmental organizations to provide the training curriculum and instruction.

### **Emphasis on Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Education**

Rwanda's focus on ICT in education is a sector wide approach, reaching all levels of the education system. The rationale for expanding the use of ICT rests on the belief that this will allow the education system to ramp up its quality of instruction in the shortest amount of time. There is a dire shortage of teachers, with the primary school student to teacher ratio hovering at approximately 45 to 1. In addition, many teachers lack formal qualifications, often leading to low quality instruction. Rwanda does not participate in the PISA or TIMSS test, making assessment of learning outcomes difficult, but a new assessment test known as Learning Achievement in Rwandan Schools (LARS) administered to fourth grade students demonstrated that 33% are below grade level in reading (Education Sector Working Group, 2012). To bring these students up to speed the government is counting on such ICT tools as *One Laptop Per Child* reading programs which will allow students to learn at their own pace. An additional argument in favor of ICT is its potential benefit to the many children with disabilities in Rwanda, who often are unable to attend regular schooling but could use ICT to study in special distance learning centers (MINEDUC, 2008).

Innovative ICT programs are also being implemented to improve school management. One example is the attendance tracking program *Ndi Hano!* (Kinyarwanda for "I'm here"), which allows national administrators to monitor the attendance of teachers and students using SMS messages sent via cell phone. This program has proven effective in increasing teacher and student attendance in Sierra Leone, and will provide valuable statistics on which schools are failing to meet attendance targets and the potential reasons for these shortcomings.

There are of course many challenges surrounding the implementation of ICT in education, including infrastructure issues, lack of training among teachers, and no clear

consensus on what ICT in education is among stakeholders. Based on these challenges, the Ministry of education has developed short, medium, and long term goals for the implementation of ICT in education (Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Ministry of Education Goals for ICT in Education Implementation (MINEDUC, 2008b)

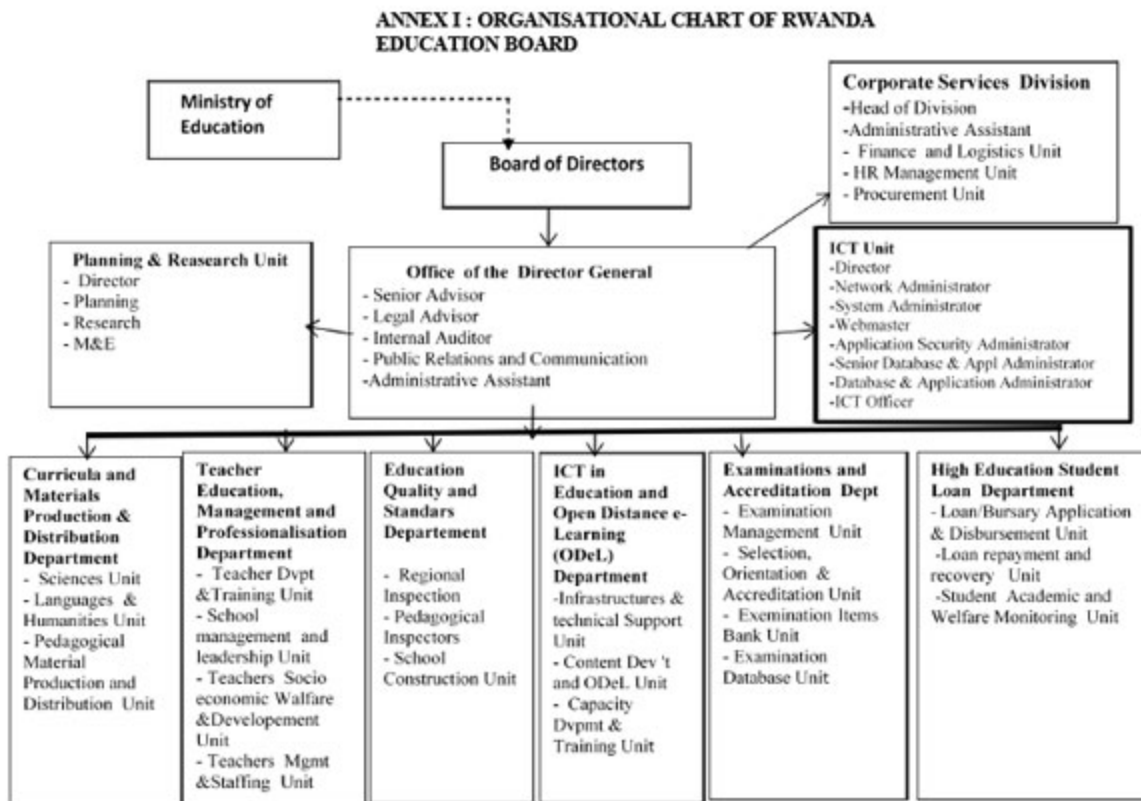
Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
Policy development and review of strategy	Infrastructure for teacher training	New content for Rwanda
ICT competencies for teachers	Procurement support and maintenance of infrastructure	Evaluation of classroom performance
Affordable connectivity	Pre-service training for teachers	Cisco/Microsoft academies
Procurement of existing e-content	Contextualization of content	

### Conclusion/Future Directions

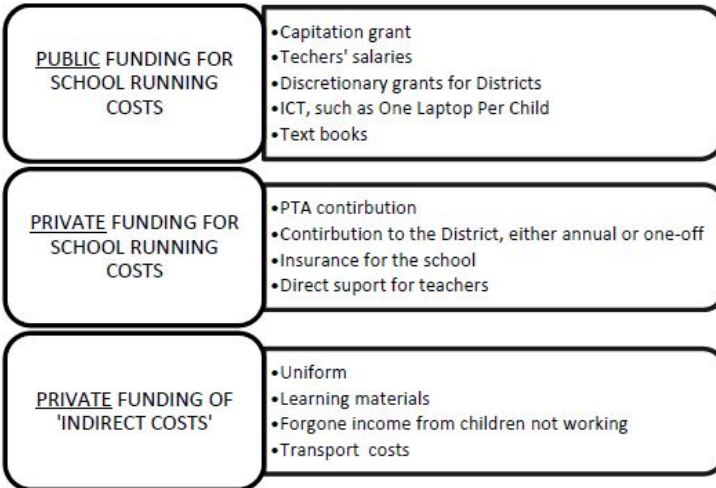
The Rwandan government has made tremendous progress in modernizing its education system and providing access to basic education for all its citizens. The planned expansion of 9-YBE to 12-YBE should allow students who currently cannot pay tuition to complete their secondary education, creating the possibility for them to attend university. However, the number one challenge facing the Rwandan education system at this point is a lack of qualified teachers, with only 65% of primary school teachers and 33% of secondary school teachers holding credentials (IPAR, 2008b). A greater focus on teacher training will therefore be required on the part of the Ministry of Education, especially if Rwanda is to maintain educational quality considering the increased numbers of students who will be attending upper secondary school under 12-YBE. Additionally, the Ministry of Education must take steps to address equity issues which have arisen in response to the accepted practice of parents supplementing local school budgets and teacher salaries. This practice has led to widening inequalities between urban and rural schools in recent years, with teachers in the former earning up to three times as much as those in the latter as a result of parental contributions. Possible policy options to address these inequalities include imposing limits on the size of parental contributions, or changing the capitation grant to provide greater assistance to those schools that receive the least amount of parental funding.

The need to remedy this situation is vital as anger over inequality in the education system was a contributing cause of the 1994 genocide, and despite Rwanda's best efforts to promote peace through reconciliation education, growing inequality is likely to have the opposite effect.

**Appendix A: Rwanda Education Board Org. Chart (Rwanda Education Board, 2013)**



**Appendix B: Funding Sources for Education (IPAR, 2012b)**



## References

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