

# VSO Rwanda Education Programme

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## Country context

### Background to the Rwandan education sector

Rwanda is ranked as a country of low human development in the Human Development Index – it ranks at 165 out of 179 countries<sup>1</sup>. The population in 2011 was 10,932,000<sup>2</sup>. Adult literacy stands at 64.9% of the adult population 59.8% of female adults are literate; while 71.4% of male adults are literate.

On education specifically:

- In 2010, 5% of GDP in Rwanda was allocated to education.
- In 2009, adult literacy was 66% for women and 74% for men.

Net enrolment (that is, numbers of children who start school at the right age) is good – around 95.4%. The number of girls completing primary education is also slightly higher than the number of boys completing: 79.8% of girls against 71.4% of boys. The overall figure on completion has improved significantly – from 52.4% of all children in 2008, to 75.6% of all children in 2010. This is largely as a result of the nine-year basic education strategy, which means that the exam at the end of P6 is no longer a determining factor in children progressing to lower secondary school. MINEDUC statistics on repetition rates are unfortunately not disaggregated – the overall repetition rate is 13%. The World Bank, meanwhile, has the repetition rate for girls as slightly lower than for boys: 14.45% for girls, 15.11% for boys.

The dropout rate is also only available overall, not disaggregated for girls and boys. The overall rate was 11% in 2010.

Gross national income per capita was \$1,130 (compared to a global average of \$10,240, with 90 of the population living on less than \$2 a day. Rwanda is still a largely rural nation, though the numbers of people living in urban areas is increasing. In 1975, just 4% of the population lived in urban areas, increasing to 18.9% in 2010. It is also the most densely populated country in Africa, with number of people per square kilometre rising from 183 per square kilometre in 1981, to 430 per square kilometre in 2010.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Rwanda is a rather unequal country in terms of wealth distribution. The Gini coefficient, which measures income distribution, has Rwanda as the most unequal country in the East African Community.

Life expectancy is 55.9 for women, and 53.4 for men. In Rwanda, 50.9% of MPs are women, the highest percentage in the world, and the only country that has a majority of female members of parliament. Drop out and repetition rates are relatively equal for girls and boys. These figures are encouraging – but during the lifetime of this programme area plan, we will be exploring what gender issues in education may exist in Rwanda, and how VSO might be positioned to support greater gender equity. Currently, it appears that the disparity between rural and urban is a more major issue in defining life chances.

### Rwandan government policy on education

VSO's education programme supports the Government of Rwanda's objectives and priorities in education, as elaborated in the education sector strategic plan, the long term financing framework and other policy documents.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all figures from the Human Development Index - [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDI\\_2008\\_EN\\_Tables.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDI_2008_EN_Tables.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Population Reference Bureau (<http://www.prb.org/DataFinder/Geography/Data.aspx?loc=286>)

<sup>3</sup> All data from World Bank DataBank ([databank.worldbank.org](http://databank.worldbank.org))

Education is a high priority for the Rwandan Government, with most policies spelled out in the EDPRS (Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy) and the ESSP (Education Sector Strategic Plan). In recent years however, several major changes have happened: First, in an effort to achieve nine-year basic education, the Ministry has introduced the following changes:

- all primary schools are now required to implement 'double shifting' (some students come to school in the morning, and others come in the afternoon) – this entails a heavy workload and little preparation time for teachers, and hence low motivation levels risk dropping further;
- specialisation of teachers – a long term measure to create specialist 'language' or 'maths' teachers who would then teach these subjects to a number of years of students; and reduction in the number of courses taught in basic education to five – English, Maths, Science, Kinyarwanda and General Paper.
- The language of instruction in the early years of primary education (P1 to P3) is Kinyarwanda; from P4 onwards it is English
- In 2010, the Government of Rwanda committed to achieving 12 year free education by 2017.
- There is a renewed emphasis on the importance of early childhood development

In 2008, the Government of Rwanda released a Girls' Education Policy, which aims to:

- Integrate gender issues into national, district, and community programmes and plans;
- Establish a legislative and institutional framework to initiate, coordinate, monitor and evaluate programmes aimed at promoting gender equality in education and training;
- Stimulate collective and concerted efforts, at all levels, to eliminate gender disparities in education and training<sup>4</sup>

### What successes have there been in education?

There have been large gains in net enrolment rates, from 73.3% in 2001 to 95.9% in 2011 and the major aim behind nine-year basic education is to ensure that all Rwandan children have access to a full nine years of education at minimum. The Ministry of Education is keen to move things forward quickly. In 2010, the government announced the start of a 12 year basic education programme by 2017. This would give access to an upper secondary education for all who want it. Like nine-year basic education, the aim is that it will be fee-free, but unlike nine-year basic education, it will not be compulsory.

Teacher salaries were increased in 2007 in an important step towards motivating teachers to remain in the profession. While no research has yet been carried out on whether teachers remained in the profession as a result of this change, informal discussions with teachers point to teacher pay and conditions being the biggest challenge for teachers remaining in the profession. It follows that improved teacher pay and conditions will encourage teachers to remain in the profession. Although secondary school teachers do receive a living wage, for primary school teachers the wage is still far too low. Data from 2008 suggests that the primary school teacher salary in Rwanda is among the lowest in East Africa – below that of Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The government has increased salaries several times since then the latest was announced in 2011, but it is still too low.

Through a number of initiatives – development partner meetings, cluster meetings, quality implementation working group and the RENCP (Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform, networking between organisations working in education and relationships with the ministry have improved.

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<sup>4</sup> Girl's Education Policy, GoR, April 2008

In terms of gender, the government has made a positive step by requiring all Parent Teacher Associations to have a female and a male student representative. The gender gap in basic education has narrowed significantly over the last five years – the statistics above from the 2010 JRES point to this improvement. However, it would be fair to say that a gender gap still exists in tertiary education – just 33% of students in tertiary institutions are female, compared with 67% male, and the number of women in private tertiary institutions where fees are high and standards are lower than in public institutions is far higher than the number of men.

### What challenges remain to be tackled to meet targets?

Major issues exist around quality of education. The major push in the sector since the end of 1994 has been on access to education – quality is now beginning to be addressed, but there is little understanding of the factors that influence quality education.

VSO internationally works with the Dakar Framework for Action definition of quality education:

“All children, young people and adults have the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term, an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. It is an education geared to tapping each individual’s talents and potential, and developing learners’ personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies”<sup>5</sup>

What quality means in the Rwanda context has not yet been analysed. However, a piece of research is currently underway. In the meantime, VSO Rwanda believes that quality education could be achieved through the following:

- high-quality pre-service teacher training which focuses on producing people who can teach, rather than academics.
- consolidated in-service teacher training, ideally linked to career progression for teachers
- benefits for teachers that are at least in line with teacher benefits regionally
- responsive relevant curriculum, which is appropriate to the needs and aspirations of children and society
- sufficient resources for schools – textbooks in line with the curriculum; as well as infrastructure
- exams that are in line with a responsive, relevant curriculum
- schools that are accessible and child-friendly for all
- schools that are well led by competent and well-trained school directors
- a system of inspection which ensures that all schools, and especially the most rural, disadvantaged schools, are visited on at least an annual basis
- incentives and recognition for teachers so that they remain in the teaching profession
- clear management of schools through sector, and district education offices
- continuing low rates of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) among the youth, young people aware of all their options for HIV prevention and empowered to make the decisions that are right for them
- continuing commitment to addressing gender and inclusion issues throughout the education system
- active, engaged Parent Teacher Associations which are representative of the communities they serve
- clear and timely communication between and within different levels of the education system, from Ministry through district and sector to school and community level
- children and young people aware of the world outside Rwanda and able to interact with it on an equal basis
- teacher proficiency in English language to enable the change of language of instruction to English to be effective

<sup>5</sup> The Dakar Framework for Action, 2000, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147E.pdf>,

- donor and international non-governmental organisations (INGO) activity which clearly meets needs of the sector, maximises complementary work and minimises doubling-up of work.

We believe that the changes above would mean lead to higher retention rates for children in school, and that school itself would become more responsive to children's needs. Children would be more likely to develop the skills and attitudes they need to become active, engaged citizens. Children will be empowered to reach their full potentials, and able to contribute to Rwanda's development.

VSO recognises that issues around methodology, teacher motivation and retention, and effective school management are crucial to quality of education. Other key issues are around the relevance of the curriculum and the appropriateness of examinations.

The figures on repetition rates illustrate lack of quality education. In 2001, 36% of primary students repeated at least one year of school<sup>6</sup>. This has decreased (to 17% in 2008, and to 14% in 2009). However, that 14% of children repeat at least a year of primary school is still not an acceptable figure.<sup>7</sup> This figure is due to a number of factors, most important of which are an overburdened curriculum and exams that are not clearly linked to curricula.

A proxy indicator is pupil-teacher ratio. In primary education, this increased dramatically with the introduction of nine year basic education from 62 pupils per teacher in 2004, to 69 pupils per teacher in 2007. Since then, it has reduced, with the latest figure at 58:1. If we take into consideration the 'double shift' introduced with nine year basic education, that means that the average teacher has to teach 116 students a day – 58 in the morning and another 58 in the afternoon. On the one hand, this illustrates a larger number of children enrolling in primary education, but unfortunately, this is not being matched by a big enough increase in the numbers of qualified teachers that the system is producing. A teacher dealing with large numbers of children means less individual attention for students, and less recognition that students learn in different ways. It results in lower quality education.

Education should also be inclusive of disadvantaged groups. For example, there are major disparities between the quality of education available in Kigali and other major towns such as Ruhengeri, Gisenyi and Butare, and that available in rural areas. In general, better opportunities for self-development exist in the capital and urban areas than in rural areas, and it is the gap between urban and rural which is the main barrier to holistic development for Rwanda. There are also disadvantaged groups, for example those marginalised by history (the Batwa), but this is more because they live in very rural areas than because of discrimination as such.

Children with special needs are still not integrated into mainstream education. According to a recent study done by the Union des Personnes Handicapées dans le Lutte contre le Sida (Union of People with Disabilities in the fight against AIDS), there are 32 centres for children with special needs nationwide, with much better coverage of Kigali and the Provinces of the South and West than the East and North. Disabled respondents felt that they were largely left out of the education system (77% of blind people, 79% of deaf people, 70% of people with a learning disability and 76% of people with a physical disability responded that they felt left out of education<sup>8</sup>). Many children with special needs are not recognised as such and are not catered for in mainstream schools. There is little reliable data on the numbers of children with disability who are in school or out of school. Some districts collect what data they can. Others do not. The data that is collected may be problematic - for example, one district appears to have included all children with epilepsy in their data on children

<sup>6</sup> Figures from UNESCO - <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/tableviewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143>

<sup>7</sup> -Bank DataBank: [data.worldbank.org World](http://data.worldbank.org/World)

<sup>8</sup> Mapping of Associations of Disabled People and Interventions in the domain of Disability, UPHLS, 2009.

with special needs. Moreover, there is no disaggregated data to show whether there are gender aspects to this exclusion as well. Many children with relatively mild disabilities are placed in centres when in fact their special needs could quite easily be catered for in mainstream schools, but their learning needs are not recognised nor are teachers able to adapt teaching styles to take into account those needs. There are also many children with special needs who do not go to school at all. Teachers are currently not given any training on recognising a child with special needs, or in how they learn differently. There remains a great deal of stigma towards children with disability, at all levels.

Gender disparities continue to exist in school management - the majority of head teachers both in primary and secondary schools are male, whereas most teachers are female. At the District level too, anecdotal evidence shows that most DEOs are male. There are questions too as to how much decision-making power women who sit on PTAs have, particularly since PTAs tend to attract relatively influential men from the surrounding community.

## VSO's Education Programme in Rwanda

### Background

VSO started working in Rwanda in 1998. Until 2006, we mostly brought in volunteers to teach English, Maths, and Science in secondary schools. After 2006, we started working with districts, sectors, and dioceses, and we gradually stopped placing volunteers directly in schools. From 2010, we have stopped working with dioceses and most education volunteers are now placed with district education offices and Teacher Training Colleges.

### What are we trying to achieve?

VSO is working with the Government of Rwanda to help it achieve **quality basic education for all**.

Our main objectives are:

- To improve school leadership in basic education schools in target districts which will have impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- To impact on quality education through ensuring teachers in primary and lower secondary schools in target districts are using child-centred learning methodologies; locally-made resources are being used by teachers and support is given to national schemes that ensure that teachers are able to teach well through English.
- To impact on quality education through support to the L3 project, which focuses on improving early literacy and numeracy.
- To improve the quality of teaching in primary and lower secondary schools through work at pre-service level (the CAPACE project) and advocacy on quality of education.

What this means in practice is that we are **working at a number of different levels**:

- District/Sector level – VSO works through volunteers at these levels. Volunteers work with staff at their districts and sectors, and directly with teachers and head teachers in basic education schools (basic education is 6 years of primary school and 3 years of lower secondary). Volunteers' work focuses on working with teachers to help them use active/child centred methodologies in their classrooms; and with head teachers to improve their management and leadership of their schools. All of the work done by volunteers at these levels informs the work done at the central level (see below) – VSO is in a unique position in being able to feed in what is happening out in rural areas to policy debates and dialogues, through the experiences of volunteers, and this information is invaluable to these discussions. Equally, we change the way we work as policy changes so that we are always working with the Government to help them achieve their aims. In addition, working with Government increases the likelihood that our work will be sustainable.

- National level – advocacy and input into government policy around quality education. VSO participates directly in policy discussions and debates at national level in Rwanda, and has excellent links with the Ministry of Education and other key stakeholders in the sector. We represent civil society on the Quality Implementation Working Group, a high level Ministry of Education group which is focussing on strategies for improving the quality of education on a number of levels. VSO is a member of the Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform which tries to coordinate the inputs of different NGOs in education.
- Within the education programme, we also run two specific projects which contribute towards our programme objectives:
  - The L3 project – this is a project funded by USAID, and implemented by the Education Development Center (EDC) in partnership with VSO, Concern Worldwide, and the International Education Exchange. Our work within it focuses on increasing the number of Kinyarwanda and English reading books available for children; supporting School Based mentors through development of video modules; and ensuring that primary school teachers are well trained in how to teach literacy and numeracy to children.
  - The UNICEF CAPACE project, in which we are working with Primary Teacher Training Colleges to help train teachers before they start teaching in child centred methodology and resource development, and supporting UNICEF’s child friendly schools to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

### What successes have we had?

Quality education is the major priority of the government – in the past most emphasis was placed on children accessing school. District offices that we’ve worked in are much clearer about how they can be involved in school management. Teachers that we’ve trained are able to produce their own teaching materials and use child centred methods in their classrooms – which is huge progress in a country which has relied almost exclusively on ‘chalk and talk’ teaching methods until very recently. In addition, VSO has a very strong reputation for the quality of the work that volunteers do at all levels – including government and major donors to the sector, such as DFID (the UK Government’s aid agency); UNICEF (The UN Children’s Fund) and USAID (the US Government’s aid agency).

