

COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT: RWANDA

In this Spotlight, the main focus is on access to, and the quality of, early years education.

1. General country context and background

Rwanda is well known as a country that is making developmental progress. The national poverty rate has fallen from 45% in 2010/11 to 39% in 2013/14 and inequality has also been reduced in this period.¹ Tax revenues have increased significantly over the last decade contributing to a large increase in the government's budget and enabling strong investment in social sectors. This investment has translated into progress for children in many areas.

Rwanda's achievements in relation to child survival are well known. Infant and under-five mortality rates have dramatically decreased: the infant mortality rate fell from 86 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2005/6 to 32 in 2014/15; the under-five rate fell from 152 to 50 in the same period.² In addition there is evidence that the poorest children have seen the fastest improvements, effectively closing the equity gaps in this area.³ Improvements in the maternal mortality ratio are also notable with the number of deaths per 100,000 live births falling from 750 in 2005/6 to 210 in 2014/15. Rwanda has also made strong progress reducing fertility rates, increasing access to contraception, expanding its successful immunisation programme and increasing both the provision of ante-natal care and the number of women having assisted deliveries in child birth.⁴ In many areas evidence also shows that health inequalities are reducing.

There has also been a lot of progress for children in relation to education in Rwanda. Access to education is increasing, as demonstrated by rising enrolment and attendance rates. The net enrolment rate at primary level reached 97% in 2014. Rwanda has been ranked one of the top three performing countries globally with regard to achieving universal primary education goals.⁵ Gender parity, in terms of enrolment and attendance, has also been achieved.⁶

Although Rwanda has improved in many areas of its education system – particularly increasing access – the country still has a way to go in order to provide a quality education system that meets the needs of all children, especially the poorest. Service provision is limited when it comes to early childhood education (ECE) with the public system at pre-primary level far from accessible for all children. ECE services are, therefore, not available fee-free and access is largely dependent on parental capacity to pay. This means the poorest children are generally excluded. Data shows that children in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged and pre-primary enrolment rates are very low across the country apart from, mainly, the more wealthy urban locations. For example, Kicukiro, one of the Kigali city districts – and also the richest district in the country – has a pre-primary enrolment rate of 24.5%. Gisagara, one of the poorest districts has a pre-primary enrolment rate of only 4%.⁷ As a result of this lack of free service provision, poor children are routinely denied the early educational and developmental support that ECE could deliver.

Primary education is also facing many challenges. While infrastructure has been put in place and access has increased over the last decade, the quality of primary education is typically poor and attaining basic literacy skills is still a major issue in the country. There is little culture of reading in most classrooms and teachers at primary level are poorly prepared on literacy instruction. Generally the importance of emergent and early literacy has not been well recognised or prioritised by the Government of Rwanda (GoR) as the essential foundation for individual and national development. Data shows the number of over-age children in primary classrooms remains very high and completion rates, repetition rates and drop out rates at primary level are all worsening. Completion rates, for example, increased steadily, reaching a peak of 78.6% in 2011. They have since fallen back to 61.3% in 2014. Drop out rates also saw several years of progress – falling to 10.9 in 2011; however, these are on the rise again and reached 14.3% in 2013, the last year for which data was available.⁸ The pupil-teacher ratio also remains high at 58:1, the same level as that achieved in the primary education system in 2011.⁹ Overall children are struggling to learn, often in crowded classrooms, with insufficient learning

¹ NISR, *Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV 3) 2010/11* and NISR, *Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV 4) 2013/14*.

² RDHS 2005 and RDHS 2014/15

³ Data exists showing this for the period 2005 to 2010. Full data from the RDHS 2014/15 has not yet been released.

⁴ See Rwanda's Demographic and Health Surveys 2005 and 2014/15.

⁵ UNESCO, 2014, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2013/14, Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All*.

⁶ MINEDUC, 2015, *2014 Education Statistical Yearbook*

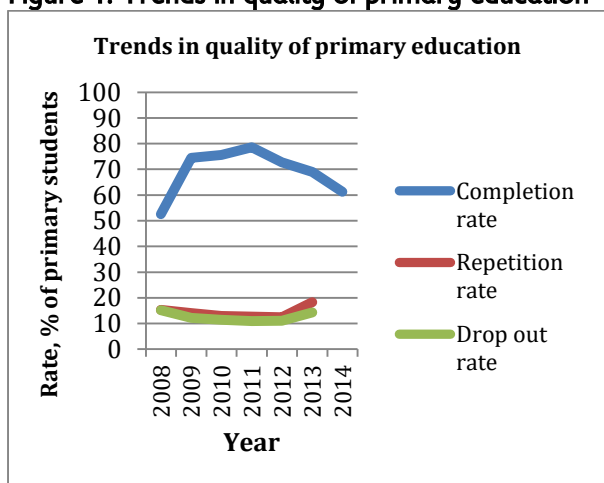
⁷ MINEDUC and UNICEF, 2015, *Analysis of the costs of Pre-Primary Education in Rwanda: a targeted expansion plan for pre-primary services*, October

⁸ MINEDUC, 2015, *2014 Education Statistical Yearbook*

⁹ MINEDUC, 2015, *2014 Education Statistical Yearbook*

materials and taught by under-qualified or poorly trained teachers.

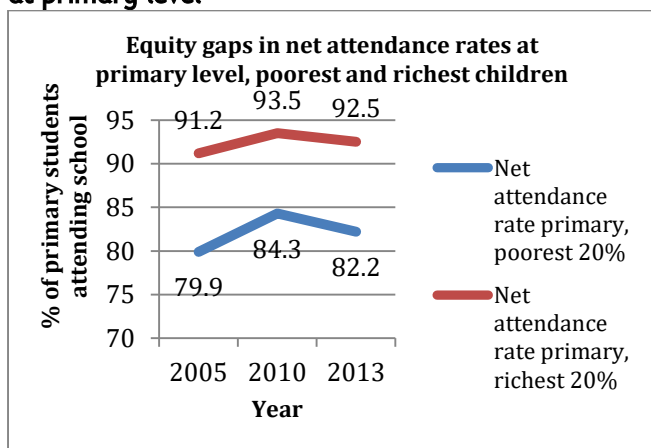
Figure 1: Trends in quality of primary education



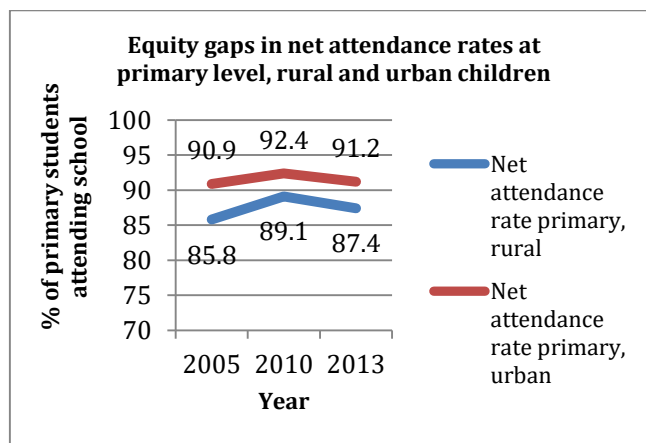
Source: MINEDUC, 2015, 2014 Education Statistical Yearbook

Equitable access is also a concern at primary level. Data previously showed that the poorest children and those living in rural areas had been catching up in their attendance rates at primary school: the 'equity gap' fell between 2005 and 2010.¹⁰ However, this picture is changing. The most recent data released shows the gap between the poorest and richest children, and children living in rural and urban areas is growing in relation to net attendance rates at primary level (see figures 2 and 3). After the positive progress that has been made, this is a concern to many.

Figures 2 and 3: Equity gaps in net attendance rates at primary level



¹⁰ NISR, Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV 3) 2010/11: Thematic Report on Education



Source: NISR, Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (EICV 4) 2013/14.

2. Diagnosis

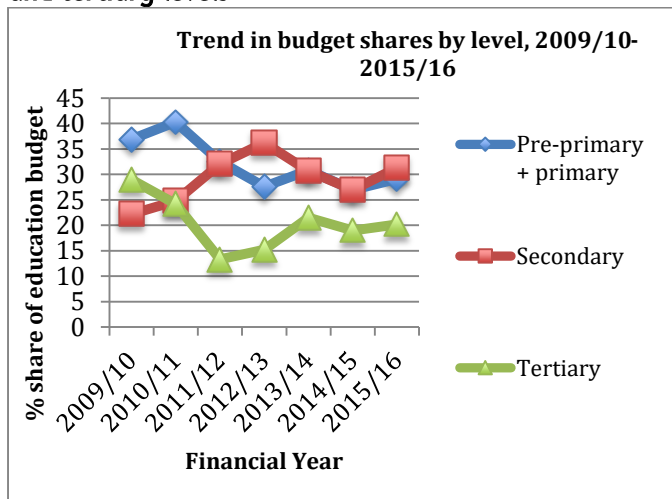
The problems facing early years' education in Rwanda are numerous. The priority has been to invest in primary level infrastructure while the quality of education has received little support. Even with the increased infrastructure investment primary classrooms are still often overcrowded and pupil-teacher ratios very high. Teacher training is still a major weakness within the system. There is no explicit focus on developing literacy competencies for teachers, no minimal time allocation for recreational reading in the classroom and little investment in supplementary materials and enabling access to books. The capitation grant provided for schools to invest in supplementary learning materials and other quality-related needs is minimal at primary level. This combined with small, centralised budgets for areas such as teacher development mean there are, overall, very limited funds for quality-related initiatives. While a sustained and consistent investment in the quality of primary education has not taken place, further investment of the system downwards to meet the educational needs of younger children (the 3-6 age group) has also been neglected.

These problems all stem directly from poor prioritization of ECE and consequently, poor investment. The education sector has been deprioritised as a sector for investment by the GoR: its share of the national budget has fallen from 21% in 2006 to 12.3% this year (2015/16). At the same time areas related to private sector development such as energy, transport and communications have been increasingly prioritised. This trend appears to be little recognised within the GoR, media and civil society in Rwanda. At the same time the financial environment in Rwanda is becoming increasingly difficult. While the GoR has made exceptional progress on tax in the past – raising its tax/GDP ratio from 10.8% of GDP in 2001 to 14.9% in 2013/14

– progress in recent years has been slow.¹¹ Aid budgets are also declining - contributing to a squeeze on national finances. Positively the GoR has an ambitious tax reform agenda. It includes abolishing many of the costly tax incentives that were contributing to revenue losses that were much higher than in its East African neighbours, as well as a series of other tax reforms. However, it is already clear that they are missing the ambitious targets laid out in conjunction with the IMF¹² and the Ministry of Finance is expected to continue to keep a tight reign on finances in the near future.

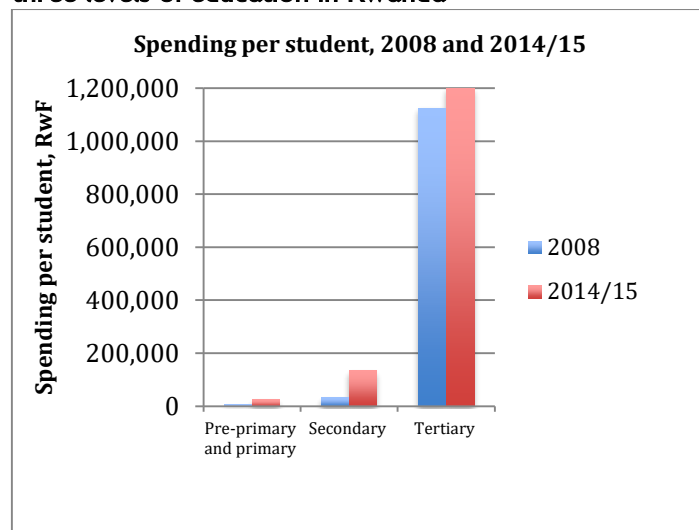
Save the Children’s budget analysis has found that within the education sector, budget priorities are also changing. Investment in primary education has been consistently reduced over the past 8 years while spending at secondary level has increased and the share for higher education has been maintained at a high level. This shift in spending means Rwanda’s education budget is increasingly regressive in nature, benefiting a small number of (generally more privileged) learners. Figures 4 and 5 show the trend in spending and the disparities in spending per student at different levels.

Figure 4: Trends in spending at primary, secondary and tertiary levels



Source: Save the Children Rwanda, 2015, *Investment in Children’s Education in Rwanda*.

Figure 5: Evolution of expenditure per student across three levels of education in Rwanda



Source: Save the Children Rwanda, 2015, *Investment in Children’s Education in Rwanda*.

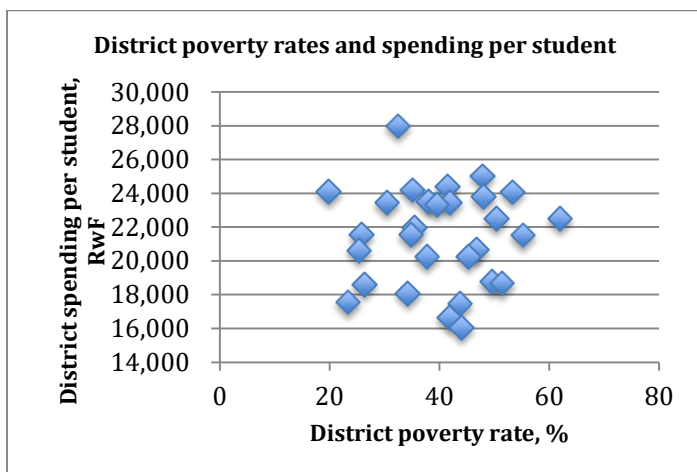
The difference between spending per student at different levels is dramatic. In 2014/15 higher education was allocated 19% of the education budget to serve only 1.3% of enrolled learners in the public system. This is a clear example of inequitable spending given that overall it is a very small number who benefit, as well as the fact that students from the wealthiest families are much more likely to attend higher education. Survey data shows that the likelihood of access to higher education is much higher (27 times to be precise) for students from wealthier families.¹³ These inequities are compounded by the large disparities between districts in terms of spending per student at primary level. In 2014/15 spending per student varied between a high of RwF 28,629 in Huye (one of the richest districts) and a low of RwF 16,249 in Nyagatare (the 11th poorest district, out of Rwanda’s 30 districts). This is a big variance with a difference of RwF 12,380 per student recorded. Given the average number of primary students per district is just under 80,000, this translates to a potential budget difference of RwF 990m (US\$1.3m) for the same number of students between the high and low-spend locations. Districts with high poverty rates are often disadvantaged, figuring much more prominently in the low-spending category.

Figure 6: Comparing district poverty rates and spending per student

¹¹ Save the Children, 2015, *Increasing Fiscal Space for Investment in Children in Rwanda: A Briefing Paper*.

¹² IMF, 2014, *Rwanda: First Review under the Policy Support Instrument – Staff Report*, IMF Country Report No.14/185, July.

¹³ EICV 4 data shows that in 2013 8% of the population aged 16-30 from the wealthiest 20% of the population attend tertiary level education, while the comparable figure for the poorest 20% is 0.3%.



Source: Save the Children Rwanda, 2015, *Analysis of District Education Budgets in Rwanda*

These budget disparities do matter. Save the Children’s new research into district education financing¹⁴ has found that educational outcomes are associated with budget: the worst performing districts for pupil-teacher ratios and drop out rates are more likely to have low budgets and the best performing districts for these indicators are the higher spending districts.¹⁵ Poorer districts are both more likely to spend less per student and to have lower teacher salary budgets. The main reason for this is that they are more likely to attract less experienced teachers (who command smaller salaries) when compared with wealthier locations. Together this is a negative picture. Poorer areas, where children are already affected in multiple ways by their socio-economic disadvantages are more likely to receive less investment than richer, more privileged locations and, as a result, to lag behind in educational performance.

Unfortunately these budget realities – and their impact on early years education – are not widely recognised by the GoR. There is still a lot to be done to change the terms of debate about the critical importance of investing in early years education and the current state of education financing in Rwanda.

3. Assessment of current plans and policies

Rwanda’s Nine Year Basic Education (9YBE) Policy made education fee-free and obligatory. Its implementation led to a country-wide system of double shifting to make school facilities and teachers available to larger numbers of students. It enabled a

¹⁴ Save the Children Rwanda, 2015, *Analysis of District Education Budgets in Rwanda: A Briefing Paper*

¹⁵ Even though these associations exist, however, higher spending does not guarantee good results. This is particularly the case for drop out. While one cannot expect higher spending to automatically deliver, it is still the case that low spending puts districts at greater risk of delivering poor results.

large expansion of the primary system, as well as greatly increased investment at the lower secondary level. More recently the GoR has instituted the Twelve Year Basic Education Strategy (12YBE) extending the enhanced investment in access to education to upper secondary level. The GoR has also made strong commitments to providing technical and vocation education and training (TVET) for young people to make Rwanda’s education system more appropriate and relevant for the jobs market. This shift in focus to the higher levels of education – upper secondary and TVET – has strongly influenced budget priorities.

However, alongside the prioritisation of secondary and TVET the current Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) also committed to much higher spending for the pre-primary level – between 3% and 6% of the education budget over the period of the plan (2013/14 – 2017/18). This shift in spending was to be facilitated by a greatly reduced share for higher education. Unfortunately it is these commitments that have not been met. Pre-primary education has been allocated just under 1% in the this year’s education budget, while higher education received a 20% share (rather than the 12% pre-determined for this level of education for 2015/16 in the strategic plan). The strategic plan of the Ministry has not been carried through into budget reality in this case. This is an area the GoR continues to look at, encouraged by the advocacy of Save the Children, other NGOs and donors such as UNICEF, who sit together on the ECE Technical Working Group. The Ministry appears committed to some expansion of pre-primary and has recently finished a costing exercise for pre-primary scale up. Meanwhile a new curriculum has also been designed and will be implemented from January 2016. This includes a focus on play-based learning at pre-primary level and will entail the development and implementation of new teaching methodologies.

While the process to introduce a transformative new curriculum has been positive there are fears that financing will fall far short of what is needed at this critical time. Key budget lines related to quality – such as investment in curriculum, learning and teaching materials, teacher training and quality oversight and standards – have suffered a series of budget cuts since 2013/14, including in this year’s budget. Even at such a significant moment it appears the investment in quality education is likely to remain under-financed and there are serious questions about what can be achieved in terms of quality improvements this year.

4. Recommendations and campaign asks

Save the Children has continually sought to support early years education and particularly literacy improvements for young children. Consistently Save the Children has found that in Rwanda it is inadequate investment – both generally in education and specifically in early years education – that is a critical barrier to improving educational outcomes for poor children. Uptake of proposals for improvement whether related to fee-free access to pre-primary or addressing quality challenges in early years education have been limited by these financing challenges. The solution clearly lies in increasing the budget for early years education as well as a more rigorous focus on the quality of teaching and the learning environment. This will be the central focus for the campaign. The main campaign asks will be:

1. **A call to urgently increase the share of the national budget being allocated to education and for this to directly enable increased spending at pre-primary and primary levels.** Investment in pre-primary should be significantly increased from its current very low level and there should be a reversal to the de-prioritisation of spending at primary level, particularly given the evidence that educational outcomes at primary level are worsening.
2. **A call to ensure the provision of pre-primary services are fee-free at least for the poorest children in Rwanda.** The lack of budget for the pre-primary level is an extremely critical funding gap within the sector. In the context of limited funds for pre-primary the Government of Rwanda (GoR) should take steps to target its investment to ensure access for children of the poorest families as the priority.
3. **A call to the GoR and bilateral donors to put equity at the heart of education financing model in Rwanda.** The GoR should reform its budget allocations between education levels and investigate, design and implement a new education-financing model to ensure budget equity across locations. This will enable the most disadvantaged areas to increase their investment in early years education and help ensure the poorest children are able to catch up.
4. **A call to the GoR to ensure there is sustained action and investment to improve the quality and effectiveness of early years education.** The GoR should invest to properly train and support teachers, provide enhanced learning and teaching materials for pre-primary and early

primary grades and to ensure consistent learning assessments and systems for quality oversight are in place. Only then will the necessary improvements in literacy and educational outcomes at primary level become a reality.

Save the Children has already been a very active participant in crafting policies and approaches to early literacy within the new curriculum, as part of its Advancing the Right to Read Education Signature Programme. It has contributed to designing the pre-primary curriculum, particularly incorporating play-based learning, as well as developing best practice regarding literacy instruction in the early grades of primary. Save the Children will continue to work with the GoR to develop policies in this area and to implement the new curriculum. Specifically Save the Children has already committed to training the Rwanda Education Board's inspectors in relation to the pre-primary level and to working to support teacher training for pre-primary in a number of priority districts. As part of its budget advocacy Save the Children will also support the Ministry of Education in making the case for a higher share of the national budget, providing evidence-based budget analysis to support a call for budget reform in this area. In addition Save the Children is committed to providing more technical assistance in relation to budget equity and education-financing models to help reform sector budgeting and to ensure resources are used to benefit the greatest number of poor and vulnerable children in Rwanda.