

UNICEF's work on gender and education in Rwanda

Iseult Kestelyn, Gender & Education Officer for UNICEF in Rwanda

Girls' education in Rwanda

The process of enhancing the rights of girls to education through the sector-wide approach (SWAp) in Rwanda began in 2004 with a national girls' education campaign under the patronage of the First Lady of Rwanda and in partnership with key stakeholders who today make up the National Girls Education Task Force (NGETF)¹. Since then this process has supported the Government of Rwanda to achieve almost universal primary school enrolment, with slightly more girls than boys now accessing primary education.

Enrolment has significantly increased since 2000, reaching a net enrolment rate (NER) of 94.2% in 2008 (95.1% for girls and 93.3% for boys). The basic gross enrolment rate (GER) dropped from 145% in 2006 to 127.9% in 2008, reflecting an improvement in the school-age enrolment pattern. Girls' GER in 2008 (128.5% representing 52% of total enrolment) was higher than that of boys. Completion rates have been improving steadily since 2000 but remain quite low at 53%, while drop-out rates have been falling steadily from 16.6% in 2001 to 13.9% in 2007 and repetition rates from 21% in 2002 to 17.7% in 2007. Despite the impressive participation of girls in the early primary school grades, a recent study carried out by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) in 2008 highlighted two major concerns.

- i) The proportion of girls accessing the full cycle of basic education is lower than boys and therefore correspondingly lower in upper secondary and higher learning institutions.
- ii) The performance of girls in most subjects, especially Science, Maths and Technology, is poorer than boys, resulting in a lack of female role models in these fields.

The Government of Rwanda has put in place a new Girls' Education Policy that targets teachers, communities and learning materials to improve self-esteem and confidence among rural girls in particular, while the Child Friendly Schools (CFS) strategy, introduced and adopted for the education system in Rwanda, addresses many of these issues.²

UNICEF's role in supporting girls' education in Rwanda

UNICEF Rwanda has helped the government and civil society to develop a three-pronged strategy that focuses on:

- i) advocacy and leveraging of resources for girls' education;
- ii) development of policies, strategies, norms and quality standards; and

- iii) development of a school campaign to mainstream 'best practices' for girls' education into education sector plans and budgets.

Sector support

As part of the first prong of the strategy, UNICEF signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Rwanda in April 2006, committing to a harmonised and coordinated sector support process by backing the capacity-building pool fund (total US\$569,842.280 for 2006–2009). This has effectively enabled the placing of the agenda for girls' education into the education sector plans and to influence resource allocation. In addition, there has been an increased partnership for girls' education among civil society partners within the sector through the national and district girls' education task forces.

The assessment of access to catalytic funds under the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Fast Track Initiative (FTI) funding enabled the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the World Bank and UNICEF to support the Government of Rwanda in elaborating important indicators and strategies to achieve results for girls; this contributed to Rwanda receiving \$105 million between 2006 and 2009 from the FTI.

Norms and standards for girls' education

The second initiative covers the norms and standards for girls' education within the minimum-quality package (MQP) in the five-year Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2010–2015. The plan provides the overarching framework for the development and delivery of education services in Rwanda. The ESSP's aim is to provide the objectives, priorities, strategies, key activities and indicative targets that will increase access to and quality of education for all children in Rwanda. The goal is to reduce poverty in Rwanda by enhancing Rwanda's human capital. Both the ESSP and Medium Term Expenditure Framework are guided by the education sector's Long Term Strategy and Financing Framework (LTSFF) 2006–2015.

The quality standards are based on Child Friendly School (CFS) principles, where gender sensitivity is a key principle. These quality standards focus on:

- i) improved school facilities, including separate toilets and washrooms for girls; and
- ii) care and protection guidelines specifying the different needs for girls and boys and facilitating access and integration of disabled students.

The CFS principles include:

- a gender-sensitive teaching methodology;
- incorporating a gender-sensitive code of conduct in school regulations;
- involving females in school management and in Parent Teacher Committees (PTCs);
- empowering gender clubs at school level;
- putting a sex desegregated data collection system in place; and
- allocating a gender-sensitive budget at school level.

In April 2008, the girls' education policy was approved by MINEDUC, and in July 2009, a girls' education strategic plan 2009–2013 was validated.

The five-year school campaign

The third initiative is a countrywide five-year school campaign that was launched in 2007. The campaign's aims were to improve the retention and academic achievement of girls in primary and secondary schools and to address barriers at national and district levels. These barriers to education for girls include: poverty; sexual harassment and violence; lack of female role models; gender bias in teaching and curriculum; the belief that girls were incapable of learning Maths or Science; cultural preference for educating boys; low self-esteem among girls; and even the lack of separate latrines (with water provision) for girls.

In Rwanda, based on the 2002 census, there are more than 100,000 child-headed households as a consequence of the genocide, AIDS and high maternal mortality rate. Traditionally, girls are expected to take care of the household, even when both parents are present. Girls spend hours cooking, cleaning and caring for babies. In short, many girls have little time to study.³

Through active, grass-roots partnerships, the school campaign directly influences the attitudes and practices of schools, local

authorities and the wider communities. It also helps schools to improve the quality of their environment, teaching methods and extra-curricular activities. See Box below for some of the standards of quality.

A priority of MINEDUC's National Girls' Education Taskforce (NGETF), and defined in the FTI assessment, is that the school campaign is now to be integrated in the sector's three-year Medium Term Expenditure Framework. The campaign is supported by UNICEF and involves a unique partnership between MINEDUC, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), and the First Lady's Imbuto Foundation, which awards annual grants and prizes to schools that excel in retaining girl pupils. These prizes range from new science laboratories and sports facilities, to ICT equipment, school gardens, school fees and a monetary award to improve the learning environment that focuses on girls' attendance.⁴ The campaign thus recognises schools that improve teaching, school environment and governance, and that measurably increase girls' achievement, retention and completion. However, it is worth noting that the criteria of selection have to be approved each year by the NGETF so as not to reward the same schools each year.

While it is initiated and launched at the national level, the campaign is locally driven, operating in all of Rwanda's 30 districts. MINEDUC, together with the districts, selects the schools based on the criteria agreed by the NGETF. After the schools have been selected, UNICEF and MINEDUC reward the schools at national and district level, and the NGETF, at national and district level, facilitates this. The district-level NGETF committees include representatives from civil society, the army, the police and district officers for planning, education and health.

The main goal of the school campaign is to achieve quality education for all, including girls. Educated women's contributions will be essential if Rwanda is to achieve its vision of having a healthy, knowledge-based society and economy by 2020. The current ESSP 2010–2015 has the goal that 'every girl and boy in

Standards of quality as defined by the Ministry of Education

- To create a gender-sensitive school environment that encourages girls to speak out and participate in the classroom and become involved in after-school activities.
- To create a gender-sensitive school environment that prohibits sexual harassment and violence through a code of conduct within the school regulations.
- To put together a well-documented school population profile (gender, orphans, impaired, etc.) and data on retention and achievement for girls of each grade collected (sex disaggregated data also for teachers and school management).
- To offer psycho-social support to students, such as mentoring and counselling.
- To provide adequate water and sanitation facilities, separated for girls and boys.
- To put special protection measures in place for girls, orphans and other vulnerable children.
- To encourage healthy practices, such as hand washing, and providing potable water for school children, waste management and protection of the environment.
- To improve school governance, with increased participation of student representatives or clubs, parents and teacher associations, and other relevant community members.
- To provide an improved school environment and facilities, including sports facilities – and sports teams for both boys and girls.
- To create an improved school curriculum, including life skills and other relevant topics.



Award ceremony for best performing girls' school, 2009

Rwanda completes quality basic education and performs well', and also encompasses the new policy of providing nine years of fee-free basic education.

The lesson learnt

One lesson learnt from engaging in the SWAp process is that coordination and partnerships between government, non-government and civil society agencies can provide advantages that no single organisation can offer in terms of targeting of resources, the ability to scale up activities beyond single projects, and improved support to national girls' education programming. However, the increased time and effort needed to coordinate partnerships and achieve consensus on key points must be taken

into account. The partners should consider additional administrative work to coordinate planning and interventions. Funding of nationwide programmes are usually resource demanding, while SWAp activities can be prioritised in terms of spending. For example, the five-year school campaign was instantly attractive to the government and development partners because of the nationwide system implications of its gender-sensitive and inclusive quality standards in schools.

The way forward

The process has been implemented over a five-year period and the services data indicate improvement. Despite this, however, there is still a need to undertake an evaluation that provides better documentation for sharing with other countries and to inform programming.

Endnotes

¹ The National Girls Education Task Force (NGETF) is composed of the following members: MINEDUC (including NCDC and the IGE), the Ministry of Gender & Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), FAWE, PRO-FEMMES/TWESE HAMWE (national coalition of NGOs working on gender), the IMBUTO Foundation (an NGO founded by the First Lady of Rwanda), the National Youth Council (NYC), the National Women's Council (NWC), UNICEF, DFID, SNV and MINICYOUTH.

² MINEDUC data, 2008.

³ MINEDUC data, 2008.

⁴ NGETF evaluation report on school campaign implementation through joint study visit, 2009.