

Post-Basic Education and Training: Education and Poverty - Beyond the Basics

Beyond Basic Education in Rwanda: Balancing Medium-Term Goals and Long-Term Visions

Rachel Hayman

The Challenge

Rwanda has made good progress, since the 1994 genocide, in reconstructing and reforming the education system. This is helping the nation's efforts to transcend its history of conflict and discrimination and move towards long-term stability, security, and prosperity. Access to education has expanded rapidly, new tertiary institutes have opened, and school management and teacher quality are constantly improving. Rwanda is making progress towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on education and health.

Still, over 60% of Rwanda's (largely rural) population remain poor. Poverty is highest amongst those with the lowest educational achievement, amongst female-headed households and vulnerable groups. The education system has rid itself of ethnic discrimination but still allows class discrimination to persist. The Government's ambitious policy for 9-year basic education should improve access, but perhaps at the risk of rendering higher levels of education increasingly exclusive.

Recently, donors have focused on achieving the MDGs for poverty reduction, health, education and the environment. Agricultural development and infrastructure have received less attention, and there remains the crucial challenge of reconciling poverty reduction with longer-term development objectives.

Beyond Poverty Reduction to Social and Economic Development

With the adoption of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2002, human resource development has been closely associated with the drive to address poverty in Rwanda. Education and training are seen as having both direct and indirect impacts upon poverty:

- Increasing individual knowledge levels and improving livelihoods (health, employment, civic responsibility, etc.)
- Providing skilled workers for the education system, the public sector and economic transformation
- Developing research and technology adapted to Rwanda's needs

The PRSP has become the core policy paper of the Government, around which donors have pledged their support. However, education and training in Rwanda are expected to serve broader objectives beyond poverty reduction:

- To promote peace and reconciliation and forge national unity
- To support Rwanda's long-term vision to become an ICT- and service-hub in Central Africa, by promoting economic growth through human capital formation

The Government's long-term vision goes well beyond the MDGs and the Education for All targets, implying a difficult balance between basic education for poverty reduction, and higher technological education for longer-term economic transformation. There are related tensions between the desire to develop a service-based economy and the reality that the vast majority of the population are engaged in subsistence agriculture. Inadequate linkage is being made between ICT development and rural development. Poverty reduction and economic growth are only in part synergistic agendas, as they have different end-goals and resource needs.

The Benefits of Education for Poverty Reduction: what the research says

Many assumptions are made about how education and training contribute to poverty reduction and socio-economic change, but what does the evidence say in Rwanda?

Outcomes of education on...	What the statistics say in Rwanda
Income	Poverty is worst among the non-educated, and incomes increase with secondary and tertiary education. But not all ill-educated people are poor, nor are all the educated rich. Other variables are important.
Fertility and health	Women with more education produce fewer children.
Employment	The least educated are most likely to be active in the agricultural sector, low-skilled jobs or the informal sector.
Agricultural production	The higher the education levels, the less likely a person is to be engaged in the agricultural sector. Education has a limited impact on production patterns.

Unsurprisingly, low educational attainment is closely associated with poverty. This is further supported by research on education and poverty reduction in Rwanda:

- Primary education alone is not sufficient to change livelihoods; it is only with years of secondary education that significant changes become apparent. These outcomes may be improved with the

commitment to improving quality in primary and basic education.

- There are serious deficiencies in terms of education – labour market links.
- Little is known about how children/youths make the transition from education and training to meaningful employment and even less about those who fail in the system.

Post-Basic Education, Training and the Enabling Environment: bearing the context in mind

Poverty in Rwanda is linked to historical, structural, economic, environmental and demographic factors. For education and training to have the desired impacts, in terms of poverty reduction, socio-economic development or peace and reconciliation, various elements within a broader 'enabling environment' are necessary. This includes the:

- educational environment
- policy environment, e.g. in terms of prioritisation
- administration environment, e.g. management and capacity
- political environment
- economic environment, including the public and private labour markets
- regional environment, including regional peace, stability and trade opportunities
- social environment, e.g. attitudes to and expectations of education

In light of the Government's development goals, post-basic education and training play a crucial role in two ways:

- In supporting the Educational Environment: providing policy input, management skills, trained teachers, curriculum inputs, etc.
- In supporting the Wider Environment in which educational outcomes sit, notably facilitating the interaction between education and training and the social, economic and political environment.

This is not a one-way but a two-way interaction in that post-basic education and training are both inherent to and dependent upon these environments.

In Rwanda, the potential benefits of education and training for poverty reduction are constrained by a range of problems:

- limited human and financial resources which affect the education system;
- structural weaknesses in the economy which impact upon the labour market and the environment within which graduates of the education system can ply their skills;
- regional stability questions which affect both political stability within the country and the prospects for economic development at a regional level.

The outcomes of education and training for poverty reduction cannot be divorced from these contexts.

Sector Wide Approach – which priorities prevail?

The SWAp aims to address the education and training sector in a holistic manner, bringing together core line ministries around a sector plan which has been carefully budgeted. The Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) was adopted in 2003 to cover the 2003-2008 period; an update to cover 2005-2010 was being prepared in 2005. This lays down the objectives for each sub-sector of the education sector – pre-primary, primary, secondary, technical, higher, teacher training, cross-cutting themes such as HIV/AIDS.

However, within the SWAp some areas have received greater attention than others, reflecting both Government and donor priorities and interests. The Government has placed significant emphasis on tertiary education and science and technology. This has raised concerns among donors, particularly the World Bank and DFID whose priority has been primary education.

While donor *policies* stress the need to focus on primary education in the interests of poverty reduction and attaining the MDGs, actual practice has seen funding going to a range of activities. Nevertheless, secondary education has been largely neglected, as has pre-primary education, technical and vocational training. The latter two sub-sectors have received some support from Belgium and Germany, but limited enthusiasm has been shown at ministerial level for these areas.

Under the planned 2005-2010 ESSP update, priority will be placed on expanding basic education to enable most children to complete nine years of basic education, on reaching vulnerable children, on addressing girls' education, on providing pre-primary education, and on providing adult education and training.

How wide should the SWAp go?

There is already good communication across the core ministries dealing with education under the SWAp: Education, Labour, Finance and Local Affairs. But what about the wider environment? For education and training to translate into poverty reduction requires much greater communication with, for example, the Ministries of Youth and Gender, Commerce and Agriculture at the very least, but this could go much further, e.g. to the Ministries of Health and Justice also which have a heavy stake in post-basic education and training provision. This is a complex issue, which blurs the lines of ministerial remit, but warrants serious attention.

Policy Priorities and Resource Constraints: addressing Rwanda's needs not donor interests

A huge amount of work has gone into reforming and restructuring the education and training system in Rwanda over recent years: the Ministry of Education has been reformed and consolidated, with new divisions and institutions created, and decentralisation of financial management for primary and secondary schooling to local authorities; new tertiary institutes have opened to bolster teacher training, nursing and science and technology; the curriculum has been reformed to reflect 'new' values and priorities; challenges such as HIV/AIDS and access for

vulnerable children are being addressed; and collaboration with non-state providers of education is improving.

However, financial, human and technical resources in Rwanda are scarce and Rwanda is highly dependent upon foreign aid to carry out its development strategy. This is evident in the education and training sector, where a wide range of multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental agencies are active, some collaborating closely to develop a sector-wide approach (SWAp) in education and to undertake joint reviews. Although donors and the Government share some priorities, there are some disagreements over the Government's prioritisation of tertiary education, trilingualism

in schools, and concerning the threat to quality posed by the new nine-year basic education system. Given aid-dependence, it is likely that donors will strongly influence resource allocation, which at present means favouring basic education.

Nine-Years Basic Education: reducing poverty or perpetuating the cycle?

The Government hopes to provide nine-years of quality basic education to all, which is intended to be terminal for most children. This leaves the challenge of ensuring that it is not only the most privileged who benefit from access to higher levels of education, with the poor left in a perpetual cycle of poverty and limited opportunities. Higher levels of education will continue to be the main means of providing access to better employment; so this could deepen Rwanda's socio-economic divisions.

It will be crucial, therefore, to facilitate **clear pathways for the poor through the education system and into remunerative employment**. Opportunities beyond basic education cannot become the domain of the rich, nor should alternatives such as vocational training remain the 'dustbins' of the system. Current thinking in Rwanda on education and training demonstrates a strong, and justifiable, concern with girls and the vulnerable. However, there is nothing explicitly **pro-poor** about this approach.

Moreover, the drive to a 9-year system should not detract from the need for an integrated approach which ensures adequate expansion of higher levels of formal education and alternative training opportunities, as far as resources allow, to ensure that there is equity of access on the one hand, and to ensure that the benefits of basic education can be fully realized on the other.

Building up the Knowledge Base

This research project has examined the existing literature and evidence on education and poverty in Rwanda. The research demonstrates that there is a need for greater empirical evidence from Rwanda about the poverty reducing impacts of education. However, there are also deeper attitudinal issues to tackle.

Making the transition from education to work

A key problem in Rwanda is the lack of knowledge about how pupils and students make the transition from education and training to employment: what are the main obstacles; what contextual factors facilitate or obstruct the transition (access to resources, family connections, ability to move, etc.); how are qualifications viewed by employers; how easy is it for graduates of technical and tertiary education to start their own businesses, etc.? This information is weak in Rwanda. The initiation of **tracer studies** would allow authorities to better provide for career guidance and support to ensure that the social and economic benefits of education and training for individuals and for wider society can be fully exploited.

Attitudes towards education

On the one hand, this research reveals that there is a great hunger for education in Rwanda, with people eager to take

up the new opportunities for gaining knowledge. Primary school enrolment rates are high, parents are willing to invest in vocational training courses despite the weak outcomes in terms of gaining decent employment afterwards, and adults in the towns and cities are enrolling as private students in night classes at tertiary institutions. How can this hunger be encouraged without creating frustrations? How much are families investing in education and training as a proportion of their income? And why? Is it to improve their life chances, to retain their jobs in an increasingly competitive and diploma-oriented society, or for the intrinsic personal benefits of gaining knowledge? These questions remain unanswered.

On the other hand, even those heavily engaged in the education and training sector demonstrate poor knowledge about what happens to pupils and students when they leave the system, and particularly about those who fail to enter or who drop out of the system. Connected to this are worrying attitudes about low educational achievement. Too often those who fail in school are condemned to 'returning to the hills' or 'to getting by' in the informal sector. In the minds of the educated, low educational achievement appears to be considered of little value. Which raises questions about the expected impact of even a few years of education on agricultural and socio-economic transformation.

In a country where most children will not progress beyond primary or basic education, changing these attitudes is paramount. Knowing more about how what happens to children leaving the system could help.

Encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit and filling the skills gap

There are concerns about saturation of the employment market for skilled workers; however, Rwanda relies greatly on imported skills – construction workers, technicians, hotel and catering staff, university professors. The problem would appear to be less that of a saturated labour market but rather gaps in skills being produced in Rwanda. How can these gaps be filled? How can those exiting the education and training system become employment creators, not employment seekers? And how can the transition from education and training to the world of work be facilitated, be it in terms of finding employment or creating employment? A comprehensive labour market study would help understandings of these issues.

Guidance and Counselling services in Rwanda tend to focus on psychological and health issues. Options for career guidance also need to be explored, including engaging the private sector in this process. Greater communication across ministries is required.

Social Change

Education and training have two core objectives in Rwanda – to promote peace and reconciliation and to promote socio-economic development. Little is known about whether the first of these objectives is being attained. Are children learning new values beyond hatred and discrimination and is this having a knock-on effect in the wider community? Research is required on this.

Further information sources

This briefing note draws on a fuller country study on Post-Basic Education and Training in Rwanda, as part of a 6-country study coordinated by the Centre of African Studies at the University of Edinburgh and funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). The Policy Brief does not, of course, represent the views of DFID. The full paper 'Beyond Basic Education in Rwanda: Balancing Short-Term Goals and Long-Term Visions', by Rachel Hayman is available in electronic format from www.cas.ed.ac.uk/research/projects.html. More information on the full project, as well as country studies for Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa and India can also be obtained from this address.