

USAID/Rwanda

LEARN Project Gender and Social Inclusion Analysis

February 2021

Summary

The USAID/Rwanda Education Office conducted a desk review of the gender, disability, and social inclusion issues facing the Rwandan basic education sector, as well as the extent to which USAID/Rwanda's closed LEARN! Project (2015-2020) addressed these issues. The purpose of the analysis was to inform the design and implementation of USAID/Rwanda's new LEARN Project (2020-2025), and to generate recommendations to improve gender equity and social inclusion through USAID's investments.

One major finding was that the gender issues identified in 2015 remain relevant today, and there is a lack of updated data about gender disparities between then and now. Challenges are manifested in dropout and repetition among both girls and boys, and fewer women than men in high-level and decision-making positions.

The other major finding is that children with disabilities must be specifically targeted and monitored within USAID programming, so that their needs are not overshadowed. Challenges for children with disabilities include stigma, lack of access to services, lack of accessible teaching and learning materials, and insufficient specialized support at school. More systematic identification of children with disabilities will improve data quality, and more data collection - including about the learning outcomes of children with disabilities - is necessary to more fully understand the situation of children with disabilities and effectively track progress toward equitable learning outcomes.

Because of the limitations of a desk review, the major activities awarded under the new LEARN Project should be required to conduct a full gender assessment, as well as an analysis of the situation of children with disabilities. Both analyses should be focused on the implications of gender and inclusion issues for achieving the intended results of each activity, and result in specific and actionable recommendations to incorporate in activity work plans.

Introduction

Gender and social inclusion are cross-cutting priorities in [USAID/Rwanda's Country Development and Cooperation Strategy \(2020-2025\)](#), which will be supported through implementation of activities awarded under the LEARN Project (2020-2025). Planning for gender empowerment and inclusion of people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups is essential to achieve the LEARN Project purpose of improved literacy outcomes for all Rwandan children by the end of Grade 3.

Gender and inclusion of children with disabilities were also cross-cutting priorities under the closed LEARN! Project (2015-2020), which was also managed by the USAID/Rwanda Education Office and which also aimed to increase the ability of all Rwandan children to succeed at school.

The three major sections of this report are:

- 1) Review of interventions to support gender and inclusion of children with disabilities implemented under the LEARN! Project (2015-2020);
- 2) Synthesis of reports produced since 2015 to provide a snapshot of the current status of gender and social inclusion at the beginning of the LEARN Project (2020-2025); and
- 3) Recommendations to address gaps in gender equity and social inclusion through design and implementation of activities under the LEARN Project (2020-2025), including topics for further research.

The overall purpose of the analysis is to inform the design and implementation of USAID/Rwanda's new LEARN Project (2020-2025), and to improve gender equity and social inclusion through USAID's investments.

Methodology and Limitations

The following assessment questions oriented the analysis:

1. To what extent do current education policies and laws promote gender equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities? To what extent does the Government of Rwanda enforce the relevant policies and laws?
2. What are the enablers and barriers to access, learning, grade progression, and completion for both boys and girls at the pre-primary and primary levels?
 - a. What are some best practices to address the issues of customary beliefs and socio-cultural norms that may hinder boys' and girls' access to education, learning, and completion?
3. What are the enablers and barriers to access, learning, grade progression, and completion for children with disabilities¹ at the pre-primary and primary levels?

¹ USAID Disability Policy defines disability as "a physical or cognitive impairment that affects a major life function." https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDABQ631.pdf

- a. What are some promising approaches with demonstrated success that support access, learning, grade completion, and progression for children with disabilities?
4. What barriers do men and women, with and without disabilities, face as teachers?
 - a. Continuous professional development
 - b. Job performance
 - c. Career progression
5. What are the enablers and barriers to female participation in leadership roles in education?²
6. How does school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) vary by school level, geographic region, and/or economic status of a community? To what extent does SRGBV account for deficits in access and academic performance?
 - a. What are promising approaches with demonstrated success that address SRGBV in primary school and classroom environments, and school neighborhoods?
7. What are some promising interventions at the primary level that have addressed broader gender issues in Rwanda, including sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and GBV?

Initially, USAID/Rwanda planned to conduct a comprehensive Gender and Social Inclusion analysis by contracting a gender and social inclusion expert to conduct a desk review and some primary data collection. USAID/Rwanda's intention was to provide analysis of any improvements (or lack thereof) since the completion of the previous Gender and Social Inclusion Analysis for the LEARN! PAD in 2014 for each question.

Field work was not possible because of the Government of Rwanda's lockdown due to the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020. Adapting to the situation, USAID/Rwanda's Education Office decided to conduct a desk-review based analysis in-house. This adaptation allowed USAID/Rwanda Education technical staff to be actively engaged in the gender and social inclusion analysis in line with guidance in ADS Chapter 205, but it did not allow for the kind of data collection necessary to comprehensively answer a number of the assessment questions.

The USAID/Rwanda Education team will ensure that at least the two largest activities under the LEARN Project (i.e., the Schools and Systems and the Homes and Communities activities) will be required to conduct full activity-level gender and social inclusion analyses to inform their work planning, and to enhance USAID/Rwanda's understanding of the current landscape as necessary to guide design and activity management and promote achievement of USAID/Rwanda's CDCS goals.

² Leadership roles such as Head Teachers (HTs), chairs of School General Assembly Committees (SGACs), University of Rwanda College of Education (URCE) and Teacher Training College (TTC) faculty, and District Directors of Education/Sector Education Inspectors (DDEs/SEIs).

Analysis of Gender and Social Inclusion under the USAID/Rwanda LEARN! Project (2015-2020)

USAID/Rwanda's investments in basic education under the previous Learning Enhanced Across Rwanda Now! (LEARN!) Project Appraisal Document (2015-2020) aimed to strengthen Rwanda's lower primary school system with a focus on early-grade reading in Kinyarwanda and English. The LEARN! Project sought to improve the quality of education for all students in primary school – including girls, students with disabilities, children living in extreme poverty, and other vulnerable groups – so as to increase the ability of all Rwandan children to succeed at school. Gender and inclusion of children with disabilities were cross-cutting issues in activities designed under this project.

2014 LEARN! Project Gender Analysis and Recommendations

The 2014 Gender Analysis that was used to inform the now-closed LEARN! Project reported that gender parity had been achieved in primary education in Rwanda since 2001, and more women than men were primary school teachers. However, girls were less likely than boys to continue school through higher education, to be high academic achievers, and to assume leadership positions in the education sector.

Policy in Rwanda is gender progressive but a disconnection between MINEDUC/REB and the decentralized level hindered full communication, implementation, and monitoring, namely of the *Girls' Education Strategic Plan*.

Some of the most influential factors hindering girls' achievement and advancement were found to be the gendered norm of female responsibility for household tasks that diverts time and attention from school/teaching, unplanned pregnancy which leads to increasing childcare responsibilities, and environments that discourage the participation of girls. Expectations for the high academic achievement of girls was lower than for boys, and some teacher behavior was not conducive to encouraging the active participation and comfortable attendance of girls. In a counterproductive cycle, the lack of female role models in high-level and decision-making positions reinforced the tendency of girls not to pursue these positions, and the low number of women who completed higher levels of education limited qualifications necessary to reach higher positions in employment.

Major recommendations included the promotion of gender-sensitive and inclusive teaching environments and methodology, the implementation of school-based clubs supporting gender equality, and the incorporation of mentoring programs to support the professional development of female teachers.

While disability and social inclusion were addressed in the analysis, they were overshadowed by the content about gender.

During activity design in 2015, the USAID/Rwanda Education team was guided to focus more narrowly on Kinyarwanda classroom instruction compared with what was outlined in the LEARN! PAD. The result is that even though gender considerations were thoroughly integrated into work plans and implemented by activities under the LEARN! PAD (2015-2020), some recommendations presented in the PAD were not seen as within scope to pursue at the activity level. In the end, gender and social inclusion interventions focused on the experience of students in classrooms and at home, but did not significantly attempt to address broader, systemic issues.³

Activity-Level Work for Gender and Social Inclusion

Soma Umenye

The flagship activity under Project LEARN! was a \$72.4M contract called Soma Umenye (2016-2021), which aims to improve the reading outcomes in Kinyarwanda for at least 1 million children by improving classroom instruction in early-grade reading, and by improving systemic capacity for early-grade reading instruction. Gender and inclusion of students with special needs were cross-cutting issues. The implementer was required to design activities to facilitate the reading achievement of all students in the target grade levels, including girls and boys, children living in extreme poverty, and students with disabilities. The implementer was also required to design activities so that female teachers, tutors, lecturers, researchers and officials have equitable opportunities for professional development and advancement.⁴

Key activities for gender and social inclusion completed by Soma Umenye under the LEARN! PAD (2015-2020), include the following:

- Conducting a [gender assessment](#), as well as a [disability and inclusion assessment](#) and a [situational analysis about children with disabilities](#).⁵
- Convening a [workshop](#) to map existing support for children with disabilities and plan for implementation of MINEDUC's 2018 Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy;
- Verifying that girls and boys and children with disabilities are portrayed in positive and empowering ways in the textbooks and storybooks developed in collaboration with Rwanda Education Board;
- Integrating gender sensitive pedagogy into training modules, and also training teachers about general ways to support children with disabilities;
- Creating accessible and signed [digital versions of the Andika Rwanda storybooks](#);
- Developing a [teacher training program about the Universal Design for Learning approach](#); and

³ A full analysis of (lack of) implementation, conducted in 2018 can be found as Annex 1.

⁴ Task Order No. AID-696-TO-16-00001

⁵ The Situational Analysis of Classroom Support for Children with Disabilities is Annex E of [Soma Umenye's FY2018 Quarter 1 Performance Report](#).

- Developing [training](#) and [materials](#), and piloting the approach of Kinyarwanda reading camps to provide extra support to children who were not yet meeting grade-level benchmarks for reading.

Ongoing activities in the Soma Umenye's Year 5 work plan (which is covered by the new LEARN Project) include:

- Supporting finalization of the Rwanda sign language dictionary, in collaboration with the National Council of Persons with Disability (NCPD);
- Piloting and evaluating the Universal Design for Learning approach;
- Screening children in pilot classes to inform discussions about appropriate tools to identify children with disabilities;
- Supporting standardization and validation of a Kinyarwanda braille code, in collaboration with REB and the National Union of Disability Organizations (NUDOR);
- Printing and distributing braille versions of the Andika Rwanda storybooks; and
- Piloting the use of refreshable Braille devices (i.e., Orbit Readers) in schools for the blind.⁶

Mureke Dusome

The second largest activity implemented under the LEARN! PAD was Mureke Dusome (also referred to as School-Community Partnerships for Education), a \$10.8M cooperative agreement that aimed to improve the reading skills of P1-3 learners throughout Rwanda by complementing the improved instruction (implemented by Soma Umenye) with increased family and community support for children's reading. The objectives of Mureke Dusome (2016-2020) were 1) to strengthen the capacity of school leaders to promote school-community partnerships and improve student literacy, 2) to increase effective community and parental involvement to improve literacy skills, and 3) to strengthen the culture of reading. In 2019, the Mureke Dusome contract was extended until July 2021 with the objective to sustain previous results, as well as to promote equity in literacy work, with a focus on gender empowerment and the inclusion of children with disabilities.⁷

Key activities for gender and social inclusion implemented by Mureke Dusome under the LEARN! PAD (2015-2020), include the following:

- Building the capacity and incentivizing publishers to produce storybooks that portray girls and women, as well as people with disabilities, in non-traditional and empowering roles;
- Advocating with Rwanda Education Board to adjust the position description for Head Teachers to facilitate gender equity in hiring;

⁶ The quarterly and annual performance reports of all USAID-funded activities are posted on [USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse](#), and contain the details about these activities.

⁷ AID-696-A-16-00002

- Advocating to School General Assembly Committees and school leaders to appoint women to leadership positions on the committee, and to check for gender equality in selection of Community Education Workers (also known as Literacy Champions). Training also included discussion about promoting the role of fathers as well as mothers to support learning;
- [Conducting workshops with fathers to encourage men's support of their children's learning](#), both directly and [in partnership with local Faith Based Organizations](#);
- Working with local leaders and Community Health Workers to identify children with disabilities in their communities, and working through a local Disabled Persons Organization to support those children to improve their literacy skills and to go to school.
- Conducting a needs assessment of children with disabilities to identify those at risk of dropping out, and providing scholastic materials to enable their return after the COVID-related school closures;
- [Training youth facilitators with disabilities](#), and conducting reading awareness workshops for parents of children with disabilities and home visits to support families of children with disabilities;
- Working with Community Education Workers to ensure that reading clubs and other community reading activities are accessible and welcoming to children with disabilities, and for boys as well as girls; and
- Distributing books/reading materials that feature positive representations of children with disabilities to the families and orienting parents on how to use them with their children at home.

New LEARN Project (2020-2025)

Under the new LEARN Project (2020-2025), USAID will continue its partnership with the Government of Rwanda to achieve the goal of improved literacy outcomes for Rwandan children by the end of grade 3. This goal will not be achieved without ensuring that issues related to gender, disability, and social inclusion are meaningfully addressed in ongoing and new activities.

Current Status of Gender and Social Inclusion in Rwanda

Promotion of gender equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities in policies and laws in Rwanda

Rwanda has a number of policies in place that promote gender equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities, including the following that have a particular focus on equality and inclusion in the education system.

- The [2021 National Gender Policy](#)⁸ objectives directly relevant to implementation of the LEARN project include the following:

⁸ This policy was approved by the Cabinet in February 2021 and will be available soon at migeprof.gov.rw.

- Strengthen gender mainstreaming and accountability across national and district planning frameworks, including Sector Strategic Plans, District Development Strategies and imihigo performance contracts.
- Improve gender equality and equity in education, including by promoting engendered curriculums from primary school, by strengthening the capacity of teachers to implement gender-responsive pedagogy, and by promoting girls' participation in ICT, STEM and TVET programs. Scaling early childhood development centers to the village level is an action to enable mothers to engage in economic activities, as well as to promote positive parenting.
- Identify and map gender best practices and address persistent cultural norms, gender stereotypes and imbalances
- Ensure effective engagement of men and boys in programs and strategies for gender promotion; and
- Strengthen mechanisms to promote the meaningful participation of women in leadership and decision-making positions, including by enforcing the constitutional quota of at least 30% of women represented in such roles.
- The 2008 [Girls Education Policy](#) aims to integrate gender issues into national, district, and community programs. It emphasizes that gender parity in enrollment in primary schools must be accompanied by significant initiatives to improve the teaching and learning environment, including teacher skills and attitudes and the quality and availability of textbooks, in order to reduce gender disparities in performance, subject choice, and completion rates.⁹
- The [Law Determining the Organization of Education](#) (2021) allows for specialized education institutions that offer special education established based on the nature of the disability, talent, or unusual intellectual abilities, and entitles learners with special needs to special education with a special curriculum. The law also defines punishments for any person who employs a child or otherwise does not allow a child to go to school.
- The 2018 [Special Education Needs and Inclusive Education Policy](#) and [Strategic Plan](#) (2018/19-2023/24) provides strategies for increased enrollment, participation and completion of schooling by learners with disabilities and special educational needs, in their local community whenever possible. The policy defines special educational needs to be non-ordinary needs a learner may have in school as a result of intrinsic or extrinsic limitations/barriers. The learner with special educational needs will need extra attention/assistance from the teacher and/or the use of different educational approaches and/or tools.
- Gender and inclusion of students with special needs is a cross-cutting issue in the 2015 [Competence-Based Curriculum \(CBC\)](#).
- The [Law Relating to the Protection of the Child](#) (2018) sets punishments for harassing or imposing severe punishments on a child.

While the policy and legal framework in Rwanda is supportive of gender equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities, some of the laws are not fully enforced and policies are not fully

⁹ The 2017 revised Girls Education Policy has not yet been approved.

implemented. For example, the Government of Rwanda (GOR) has made significant progress in the provision of books throughout the country but without a focus on providing materials that are accessible for children who are deaf or blind. Another example is that although Rwandan law states that pregnant girls may return to school after giving birth, in practice often these girls are ostracized from their families and may not receive support for school fees. Furthermore, they may face stigma for teachers and other students when they do return to school.

The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) collects data about children with disabilities to monitor access to education and the implementation of inclusive education activities. However, MINEDUC statistics rely on reporting from schools about children with disabilities without the support of a specific tool or protocol for identification. The numbers of children with disabilities in Rwanda are likely under-reported because children with disabilities are not identified, as well as because of stigma. Children with disabilities account for 0.6% of students enrolled in primary school.¹⁰ The census in Rwanda found the disability prevalence rate for individuals aged 5 and above to be approximately 5% (4.8% female, 5.2% male),¹¹ whereas the World Health Organization estimates that approximately 15% of any population will have a disability. There is no data on the disability prevalence rates for children under 5.¹²

Enablers and barriers for girls and boys at the pre-primary and primary levels

The policies mentioned above offer the following strategies to promote gender equality in education:

- Addressing factors that prevent girls and boys attending school,
- Providing an hospitable environment that encourages students to stay in school and participate fully,
- Improving learning environments,
- Encouraging both boys and girls to take advantage of all opportunities that exist in the education system,
- Instituting affirmative actions to increase access and participation of girls in secondary and higher education, and
- Monitoring progress towards equitable results through institutions such as Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) and the Gender Monitoring Office (GMO).

Despite enabling laws and policies, barriers remain that prevent boys and girls from reaching their full potential in school.

¹⁰ [Ministry of Education. 2019 Education Statistics.](#)

¹¹ [National Institute of Statistics Rwanda. \(2012\) Fourth Population and Housing Census.](#)

¹² Additional disability data will be available soon when full reports of the [2020 Rwanda Demographic Health Survey](#) are released. Children with disabilities will also be identified through new USAID programs, such as the Integrated Nutrition activity in 10 districts. UNICEF in collaboration with the National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) and National Child Development Agency (NCDA) is also planning a national assessment.

Girls progress through the primary grades with less repetition and dropout than boys, and they are more likely to complete primary school by the expected age of 12. In secondary school and from age 16, the trend reverses, with more girls dropping out. Girls drop out of school after the age of 16 not because of performance in school, but because of social norms and gender stereotypes, social expectations, and the value that families appear to place on the education of boys rather than girls. The issues affecting adolescent girls are relevant to lower primary school because of the high number of overage students in the education system. Nearly 30% of the students enrolled in Primary grade 3 were 13 years or older in 2017.¹³

Despite the Government of Rwanda's focus on establishing girls' rooms (*Icyumba Cy'Umukobwa*) in schools and separated toilets for boys and girls, these facilities may not be operational as intended in all schools.¹⁴ This barrier to girls' full attendance is important because reducing teacher and student absence is a key strategy to increase instructional time.¹⁵

Repetition rates are higher for boys than for girls at all levels. Repetition is likely associated with lower academic performance, as children who repeat have lower test scores, on average, than children who are promoted.¹⁶ More boys in Primary grades 1 and 2 are unable to read a single word compared with girls. By Primary grade 3, the gender differences in reading performance disappear.¹⁷ The primary school national exam pass rate is slightly higher for girls than for boys, whereas the pass rate for boys is higher than girls for the national exams at the lower and upper secondary levels.¹⁸

For primary-school age boys, reasons for dropout are primarily economic, as boys find opportunities to earn money outside of schools. Late start to schooling, temporary dropout, and grade repetition were also significant factors contributing to permanent dropout. Dropout for younger boys tends to disrupt their education and contributes to overage enrolment, whereas dropout for girls more often represents an end point in their education.¹⁹

Gender bias and gender-unequal sociocultural norms in the classroom, for example the expectations for girls to remain silent, hinder learning. Teachers noted a lack of hands-on training on how to use gender-responsive pedagogy in the classroom. Moreover, the lack of female role models in high-level and decision-making positions in schools reinforces the social norms of girls remaining silent or not seeking leadership roles themselves.²⁰

¹³ [MINEDUC, UNICEF, Laterite. \(2017\) Understanding Dropout and Repetition in Rwanda.](#)

¹⁴ 2021 National Gender Policy, Policy issue 3.4

¹⁵ [USAID Soma Umenye. \(2020\). Study on Kinyarwanda Instructional Time in Lower Primary](#)

¹⁶ [MINEDUC, UNICEF, Laterite. \(2017\) Understanding Dropout and Repetition in Rwanda.](#)

¹⁷ [USAID/Rwanda. \(2019\) 2018 Early Grade Reading Baseline Assessment.](#)

¹⁸ [Ministry of Education. 2019 Education Statistics.](#)

¹⁹ [MINEDUC, UNICEF, Laterite. \(2017\) Understanding Dropout and Repetition in Rwanda.](#)

²⁰ [USAID/Rwanda Gender and Social Inclusion Analysis. \(August 2019\)](#)

People who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, and intersex (the LGBTQI+ community) face increased vulnerability due to several factors: dropout from school if their parents refuse to pay school fees, forced marriage to avoid bringing shame on their family, harassment by neighbors and landlords, bullying, estrangement from or rejection by their families, lack of support networks, and lack of political voice.

Enablers and barriers for children with disabilities at the pre-primary and primary levels

Despite an advantageous legal and policy framework, numerous barriers remain that hinder educational outcomes for children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are more likely to be out of school compared to children without disabilities. Because of lack of identification, it is difficult to determine the percentage of children with disabilities who are enrolled in school. However when USAID Mureke Dusome conducted a community mapping exercise in 5 districts, only 56% of the children with disabilities who they identified were enrolled in school.²¹ This is in stark contrast with the very high primary school enrollment rate overall. Also unlike students without disabilities, girls with disabilities have lower enrollment rates; of children with disabilities were enrolled in primary school, 55.9% were male and 44.1% were female.²² There is little data about children with disabilities of pre-primary age.

Low expectations and negative socio-cultural norms keep families from encouraging their children with disabilities to attend school. Children with disabilities also face obstacles on their way to and from school including long distances, non-adapted transport systems, and rugged terrain.²³ In 2019 only 23% of primary schools had adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities.²⁴

Low participation in school is also a component of the general difficulty that people with disabilities face in access to services to meet their basic needs. USAID Mureke Dusome's 2020 survey about the needs of children with disabilities found that children with disabilities lack assistive devices and medical support. When the families of children with disabilities are also living with extreme poverty, they cannot afford scholastic materials and lack knowledge about referral systems. Children need a disability card to access services, but many families do not know how to get one.²⁵ The role of District Disability Mainstreaming Officers is to identify families of children with disabilities and to help them access services to meet basic needs, but

²¹ [USAID Mureke Dusome FY 2020 Quarter 4 Performance Report](#). See Annex 5. - Note that additional children were identified in subsequent months; the school enrollment rate cited here reflects the 3698 children with disabilities identified.

²² [Ministry of Education. 2019 Education Statistics.](#)

²³ [National Union of Disabilities' Organizations of Rwanda. \(2015\) Fact sheet about persons with disabilities in Rwanda.](#)

²⁴ [Ministry of Education. 2019 Education Statistics.](#)

²⁵ This report is available as an Annex to the Mureke Dusome FY 2021, Quarter 1 report. The DEC link will be added here when received.

the resources to support these officers is limited. There is not yet a functional system in place for early identification and referral for support for children with disabilities.²⁶

Once children with disabilities reach school, they are more likely than children without disabilities to repeat grades and/or dropout.²⁷ This is likely due to the lack of special support at school to meet their needs, such as accessible and adapted teaching and learning materials, assistive devices (e.g., tape recorder, Braille writer), teachers skilled in special needs and inclusive education, and support personnel (e.g., notetaker, sign language interpreter). According to 2019 MINEDUC statistics, less than ten percent of primary school teachers have been trained in special needs and inclusive education.²⁸ Home and community factors such as low expectations for children with disabilities among their parents, and lack of knowledge in families about how to support learning for children with disabilities, also contribute. The lack of data about the learning achievement of children with disabilities is a significant impediment to informed decisions about how best to support their learning needs.²⁹

In recent years the Government of Rwanda and partners have begun to address some of those issues. REB has begun to demand digitization of textbooks, and UNICEF supported REB's development of some [accessible textbooks](#). REB has produced an adapted curriculum for children with disabilities.³⁰ University of Rwanda College of Education (URCE) includes a course on [Special Needs and Inclusive Education](#) within its teacher training programs, and REB has provided in-service training to an inclusive education focal point in schools using the 2016 Guide to Inclusive Education in Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education. The URCE School for Special Needs and Inclusive Education also offers a program to prepare specialists, though specialists often cannot find employment in that area because schools don't have funds to hire additional staff.

Promising approaches to support children with disabilities

The Building Learning Foundations program in Rwanda created a position called [Special Needs Education Coordinator \(SNECOs\)](#), which is primarily filled by graduates of the specialized URCE program. Each of the targeted schools has identified one Inclusive Education Focal Teacher. The Special Needs Education Coordinator mentors the focal teacher to promote inclusive teaching methodologies.

²⁶ The National Child Development Agency and Ministry of Education have both initiated work to strengthen systems for early identification and support, so this is a quickly evolving area.

²⁷ [MINEDUC, UNICEF, Laterite. \(2017\) Understanding Dropout and Repetition in Rwanda.](#)

²⁸ [Ministry of Education. 2019 Education Statistics.](#)

²⁹ The USAID Soma Umenye endline assessment of early grade reading skills will include learning outcomes disaggregated for children with disabilities as well as sex, and is expected before December 2021.

³⁰ While the curriculum for learners with disabilities exists, it is not posted on the REB website with the other curriculum documents, and at least some specialized schools for children with intellectual disabilities are unaware of it.

USAID Soma Umenye has developed training materials to support teachers to apply the Universal Design for Learning approach to teach Kinyarwanda at the lower primary levels.

Barriers faced by teachers, men and women, with and without disabilities

At the pre-primary/nursery school level, where the majority of the teaching staff is not yet on the government payroll, 85% of teachers are female.³¹

At the primary school level, there are more female teachers than male teachers in public and government-aided schools (55.5% F, 44.5% M). However, males outnumber females at private primary schools, and when considering administrative staff (37.4% F, 62.6% M), as well as teachers at secondary schools (28% F, 72% M) and staff at tertiary institutions (25.6% F, 74.4% M). This disparity may be partially because there are more male graduates of higher education (52.7%, 47.3%).³² Barriers to female representation in tertiary education include early marriage and childbearing, which increase the workload and responsibilities of both female students and female teachers.³³

USAID Soma Umenye monitoring data indicates that there may be a gendered disparity in application of evidence-based reading instruction. For example, in Fiscal Year 2020, 68% of male grade 1-3 Kinyarwanda teachers surveyed demonstrated essential skills in teaching reading, compared with 78% of female teachers surveyed.³⁴ Overall, evidence about the enablers and barriers for the continuous professional development and job performance for male and female teachers, with and without disabilities is lacking.³⁵

The Government of Rwanda's [Teacher Statutes](#) require the completion of professional development courses for promotion. The Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) plans to digitize these courses to enable distance learning for teachers. Gender disparities in access to ICT devices as well as ICT knowledge and skills will need to be addressed to ensure that both male and female teachers can meet this requirement for career advancement.

Enablers and barriers to women's participation in leadership roles in education

Strategies that could enable improved women's participation in higher-level positions and leadership roles include affirmative action strategies, and identification and training for promising female candidates at entry level or middle management to fast track them into educational management.

³¹ [Ministry of Education. 2019 Education Statistics.](#)

³² [Ministry of Education. 2019 Education Statistics.](#)

³³ 2021 National Gender Policy, issue 3.1

³⁴ [USAID Soma Umenye FY 2020 annual performance report](#)

³⁵ In January 2021, Cambridge University, with funding from British Council, reached out to development partners for assistance to identify teachers with disabilities, in order to consult about their experiences.

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV)

Data on GBV in primary schools is lacking, but likely because of the high number of overage students who reach puberty in primary school. 23.9% girls and 9.6% boys aged 18-24 said that they had experienced some form of sexual abuse before the age of 18. 11.7% girls and 5.4% boys aged 13-17 said they experienced some form of sexual abuse in the past 12 months. Available data do not indicate differences according to school level, geographic region, or economic status of a community.³⁶ Children with disabilities, and moreover girls with disabilities, are particularly vulnerable to violence.³⁷ Some bullying among students is also gender-related, including bullying targeting LGBTQI+ students. While evidence about the effect of SRGBV on access and achievement in Rwanda is lacking, a survey about the use of physical or humiliating punishment by teachers at school found that higher student perceptions of safety at schools are associated with higher Kinyarwanda literacy levels.³⁸

Promising approaches with demonstrated success that address SRGBV

Save the Children's Schools for Change project aims to reduce violence against children in schools by:

- Training teachers on child protection and positive discipline;
- Training community-based reading club facilitators about positive discipline practices;
- Providing reading materials that incorporate child protection themes to reading clubs; and
- Strengthening child protection reporting mechanisms in schools and communities.

While this project addresses physical and humiliating punishment, and not gender-based violence, the findings of the endline assessment, which was delayed because of COVID but is expected soon, might still be useful to inform additional interventions.

Promising interventions at the primary level that have addressed broader gender issues in Rwanda

Successful gender integration and inclusivity within education requires engaging a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, men and boys, the community, potential employers, the government, and more. One example is [USAID Mureke Dusome's engagement of fathers in discussions about gender roles](#), which has since been expanded through faith-based organizations, particularly the Anglican Church in Rwanda.

³⁶ [UNICEF Rwanda, Government of Rwanda, US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\), International Development Research Center of Canada \(IDRC\). \(November 2017\) Violence Against Children and Youth Survey.](#)

³⁷ International Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation (2017). Rwanda Disability Situation Analysis Report. UNICEF Rwanda.- As cited in [Rwanda Ministry of Health. \(2018\). Violence against children with disabilities in institutional settings in Rwanda.](#)

³⁸ Laterite. (Nov 2019). Evaluation of Save the Children's Schools for Change program in Rwanda: Baseline Report.

Recommendations

Intermediate Result	Recommendations
IR 1. All children have safer, healthier, and more stimulating home and community environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organize community awareness activities to promote retention in school for both boys and girls. ● Advocate for sexual and reproductive health education for adolescents (even if they are still enrolled in lower primary grades) in order to reduce early pregnancy. ● Address menstrual hygiene management barriers that contribute to girls' absences from school each month. ● Challenge expectations of masculinities that hinder boys' attendance and achievement, including time spent in school and homework. ● Develop programs for mothers, fathers, and other family members to engage with the school. Encourage the participation of fathers as well as mothers.
IR 2. Children with disabilities have improved access to quality learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide doctors, clinics and community centers with training about the early identification of children with disabilities and the programs and services that are available to support their learning in the community. ● Increase knowledge among parents of children with disabilities about how to access available government assistance, acquire assistive devices and receive medical care. Familiarize Community Education Workers with local government referral mechanisms so that they can offer guidance to parents/caregivers. Also work through the National Council of Persons with Disability (NCPD) coordinators and youth with disabilities. ● Challenge disabling social norms and negative stereotypes about persons with disabilities through messaging using existing platforms in the local community. ● Include girls and boys, men and women with disabilities as leading voices in program activities. ● Involve parents and community members in monitoring and evaluation of the inclusive education effort. ● Work with communities to increase access to school for children with disabilities through improvements to school infrastructure. ● Provide assistive technologies to support access to learning for children with disabilities.
IR 3. School and classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify gender- and disability-specific indicators that will facilitate identification and analysis of disparities, and include these in activity MEL plans.

<p>environments and safer, more inclusive, and better focused on learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Measure changes among children, teachers, school leaders and parents in gender and social inclusion perceptions, norms, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that have a negative impact on access and performance. ○ Monitor the extent to which classroom management demonstrates equitable gender practices and uses a gender responsive pedagogy. ○ Collect gender- and disability-specific learning outcome data. ● Build the capacity of schools and local leaders to collect and analyze data about access and learning for boys and girls and children with disabilities, in order to identify barriers. Engage communities to expand local strategies to prevent, mitigate or respond to these barriers. Address barriers or violence that might affect teachers, as well as barriers and violence affecting children. ● Facilitate discussion among students, pre-service and in-service teachers, School General Assembly Committees, school leaders and parents to understand their personal biases related to gender and disability, as well as perceptions of violence and GBV. ● Support the development of a specific policy and/or component of the teacher code of conduct to reinforce and communicate prevention measures, reporting procedures, and sanctions related to all forms of violence against children in and around school, including SRGBV. ● Mentor, counsel, and inform learners, especially girls and young women, about aspirations for their educational and personal future. Establish peer mentorship relationships with older female students. ● Encourage education stakeholders to work collaboratively with parents to understand and cater to individual students' learning styles.
<p>IR 4. Teaching workforce has improved quality, motivation and respect</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Through both pre-service and in-service teacher education programs, prepare teachers to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop social and emotional skills among boys and girls, such as positive self-concept, self-efficacy, confidence, social and communication skills, organizational and presentation skills, expressing opinions, critical thinking, participation in decision making, voice and assertion, setting and pursuing goals. ○ Use positive discipline. ○ Recognize signs of trauma, and provide psychosocial support and/or referrals to learners. ○ Recognize violence, including SRGBV. Understand the teacher code of conduct and mandatory reporting related to violence against children. ○ Apply gender-sensitive pedagogy, which responds to the specific learning needs of girls and boys in lesson planning, teaching, classroom management and evaluation.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Apply the Universal Design for Learning approach to improve teaching and learning for all children, including boys and girls with disabilities. ● Model inclusive practices by creating safe learning environments for teacher training. Ensure that male and female teachers in all pre-service and in-service training programs are able to attend and fully participate by providing safe transportation and lodging, offering safe and geographically close locations for on-site teacher training sessions to support, providing ICT skills training so that male and female teachers benefit equally from ICT-supported professional development opportunities, and encouraging the participation of female teachers and school leaders.
IR 5. Children enter P1 with improved school readiness skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitate early identification and supports for children with disabilities. ● Collect data to better understand disability prevalence among young children and the needs of young children with disabilities.
IR 6. Teaching and learning materials are higher quality, more accessible, and more readily available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Incentivize publishers to produce more reading materials in a variety of accessible formats. ● Continue to encourage publishers to produce materials that challenge gender norms and promote the empowerment of people with disabilities. ● Finalize and disseminate the Rwandan sign language dictionary. Advocate for the GOR to adopt Rwanda Sign Language as an official language, and follow-up with policies calling for resources to support its use. ● Provide equal access for girls and women, boys and men, to digital resources and new and scalable reading instruction and assessment technologies such as audio, video, computers, internet, mobile devices and assistive technology. ● Verify that curriculum materials, textbooks, and teacher guides demonstrate gender-responsiveness, meaning content and stories that refer to safety, self-protection, and safe behaviors.
IR 7. Education systems and finances are more effectively managed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Address the inefficiencies of dropout and repetition in the education system by supporting community-led efforts to ensure that all boys, girls, and children with disabilities enroll at the right age, stay enrolled, and participate with good attendance. ● Strengthen community- or school-level referral protocols to connect girls and boys facing extenuating family difficulties to social services to alleviate gendered reasons for dropout. ● Study underlying social norms that inhibit girls and women from advancing through schooling and into leadership roles within the education system. This could be part of a Mission-wide gender study on social norms.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advocate for policies and procedures to balance the recruitment of female and male curriculum writers, editors, administrators, coaches, and mentors. ● Advocate for the development of education sector disaster preparedness and response plans that address safety, especially for girls and learners with disabilities. ● Provide technical advice to the Ministry of Education to improve collection of data about children with disabilities. Advocate for the collection of better data about disability in the upcoming 2022 Population and Housing Census. ● Advocate for the use of disability- and gender-sensitive data in national and local decision-making processes, including District Development Strategies and national policies.
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Areas for further analysis

USAID/Rwanda should require gender and social inclusion analyses at the start of both the Schools & Systems activity and the Homes & Communities activity. Suggested topics to explore further, including through primary data collection, include the following:

Schools & Systems Activity

- How have things for teachers changed since 2014? How do female teachers find career development and progression?
- Are there any gender- or disability-specific barriers that keep teachers from benefiting from professional development opportunities, USAID-funded and otherwise?
- Explore teacher motivation and incentives more generally, including gender- and disability-specific issues. Understanding teacher motivation will facilitate interventions better targeting behavior change.
- Investigate the degree to which SRGBV is an issue in Rwandan primary schools, and its effect on access and achievement. This study could be expanded to also look at teacher discipline practices.
- Explore enablers for boys' learning and grade promotion in primary school.
- Conduct an in-depth assessment and gender-sensitive analysis to further understand the situation of children with disabilities both in and out of school. Examine the reason for gender disparity and its implications for policy and other interventions targeting children with disabilities.

Homes & Communities Activity

- Effective ways to challenge harmful socio-cultural norms in communities.
- Desk review of Mureke Dusome's lessons learned in support for children with disabilities in communities, as well as their work to increase equitable participation of boys and girls, and to encourage parental support by fathers as well as mothers, and their work with SGACs to promote more women in positions of leadership and decision making