



URUNANA

RW'ABAREZI

ISSUE 03 August 2016

Tackling Dropout



IN THIS ISSUE

Foreword by REB Director General	1
From the Editorial Team	2
Readers' feedback	3
Dropout, a serious issue	6
The impact of dropout on community development	9
Good practices in dealing with school dropout	11
Inclusive education and dropout	13
Dropout can be prevented: good practices in the fight against dropout in schools	15
Special education needs and dropout	17
Good practices in fighting dropout at a school level	19
Child labor and dropout	21
Dropout and its contributing factors	23
Inclusive education at Umutara Deaf School	27

Urunana rw'Abarezi is free of charge and is published on a quarterly basis. It is also available to download online: www.vvobrwanda.org/content/plnmag

Address:
REB: TDM building, School Management and Leadership Unit, P.O. Box 3817 Kigali, Rwanda.

WOB: P.O. Box 3776, Kigali

Contact *Urunana rw'Abarezi*:
E-mail: plnrwanda@gmail.com

THE EDITORIAL TEAM:

For REB:
RUKYEBA Eugene

For SEO's:
MUKAKANANI Marie Josée
MUZUNGU Dinah
NYIRABASHYIRAHAMWE Marie
MUREBWAYIRE Faina
MUTAYOBA Theogene

For Head Teachers:
NSHIMIYIMANA Jean Pierre
NKIZUMUREMYI Thadée
NAMBAJIMANA Christine
NKUZABAGABO Anicet

For Partners:
MURENZI Vincent
(Handicap International)
NABANJIMANA Lamech
(WINROCK)
NSENGIYUMVA Jean
Damascène (NUDOR)
KAYIGI Omar (UDF)

For VVOB:
MAHE MUKIZWA Alex
MUGENZI N. Leon
ZULT Hans

Editors:
NYEMBO Stephane
BWAKIRA Lydia (VVOB)

Design and Print:
DW LTD
dwltdrw@gmail.com
+250 787 024 880

You are welcome to use articles from the magazine. We would just appreciate you mentioning the source (*Urunana rw'Abarezi – The peer learning magazine for school leaders*) and letting us know at plnrwanda@gmail.com

FOREWORD



GASANA Janvier

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the third issue of *Urunana rw'Abarezi*, our magazine on Professional Learning Networks for School Leaders. We are pleased to confirm that 120 professional learning networks for school leaders are now operational. In every district in Rwanda, head teachers from 4 sectors are participating. And through these communities of practice, they are empowering one another, learning from each other, and committing to working together to find solutions to the challenges faced by their sectors.

These head teachers work together to become a healthy team that can be described as "a small group of people who are mutually accountable to achieve a common purpose and performance goal through the application of their collective talents using collaborative processes." We also consider the role of sector education officers (SEOs) very crucial as they play a prominent coaching role as team builders to ensure that quality education is developed.

As said in the previous issues, professional peer learning requires an appropriate platform that can allow experience sharing. And this *Urunana rw'Abarezi* magazine serves exactly this purpose. It therefore needs to spread to the whole country and be accessed by all head teachers and sector education officers of course, by other stakeholders too.

It is becoming more and more obvious that the problem of students dropping out of school has taken endemic proportions. And time after time, this problem has been raised and thoroughly discussed in many professional learning network sessions. Hence our decision to dedicate this third issue of *Urunana rw'Abarezi* to the problem of dropout.

We hope that examples of good practices to decrease the dropout rate will inspire many educators and will increase the awareness about the non-negotiable right to education for all.

Feedback from recent PLN sessions visits indicates that all PLN team members unanimously agreed to stand against the spin of student dropout from schools. This commitment from PLNs was then translated into detailed action plans that lead to developing appropriate campaigns in direct collaboration with key educational stakeholders in the community. As a result of these initiatives, a substantial number of students were successfully brought back to school.

This magazine offers you a platform where you can share and discuss the challenges you face or have faced, as well as potential solutions you have implemented in your pursuit of excellence in Education. As we share our experiences and best practices, we will create opportunities for learning from each other, and we will contribute to shaping a bright future for all our students.

It is therefore our hope that you will enjoy reading this magazine and that you will contribute to this platform for Professional Learning Networks by sharing your valuable experiences. ■

Sincerely,
Janvier GASANA
 Director General, Rwanda Education Board
 (REB)

Gasana Janvier

FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

Quality education, we can all agree, can only be achieved with the right pedagogy and didactic techniques. But in protecting all children's right to education and securing inclusive education for all, these important ingredients are far from sufficient. Simply put, pedagogy and didactics alone will not keep children in school.

Yes, no child should be out of school. We are all committed to that. But it is easier said than achieved. There are many and varied reasons why children are 'pushed out' or 'pulled out' of school. But whatever the reason, whatever the root cause, we call this phenomena 'dropout' and we recognize it as one of the greatest problems we face as educators.

Over the past months, dropout has emerged as a major topic of reflection and discussion during School Leadership Professional Learning Network sessions. And that is why we are dedicating an entire issue of this magazine to tackling the phenomena.

In this third issue of *Urunana rw'Abarezi*, different educators and actors' express some of their concerns on the topic and share their perspectives on how best to surmount it.

In addition to stories and experiences told by different head teachers and sector education officers, you will also find in this issue, thoughtful ideas and concepts from various experts and educators in the realm of inclusive education, education of children with special needs, and child labor prevention.

As a reference to just how serious the issue of dropout continues to be, we have also included tables and figures from the 2015 Education Statistical Yearbook.

Finally, and as per our usual practice, an article compiling some feedback and stories of some of our readers of the previous issue, is also included in this issue.

We hope you enjoy and gain from this magazine. Happy reading!■

Share your thoughts and experiences with us. Write to plnrwanda@gmail.com



READERS FEEDBACK FROM THE PREVIOUS ISSUE



Marie NYIRABASHYIRAHAMWE,
Sector Education Officer, KIRIMBI
Sector, NYAMASHEKE District

"When I read Urunana Magazine, I realized that it contains some relevant information that can be very helpful in quality education development in schools. I particularly liked the way the collaboration between parents,

school leaders and local leaders is depicted as crucial when it comes to quality education development. The magazine emphasized the importance of ensuring that all actors involved in education in the community are informed of what is going on at school. I liked the way the magazine encourages school leaders to do their best to ensure that parents are kept informed of all school matters including planning, budget, special projects so that they can be supportive as needed. I believe this magazine will allow school leaders to help the community and especially parents committees to have a deeper understanding of their role in school management. As they read the magazine, school leaders will also be encouraged to increase their involvement in community activities and meetings. These spaces can be good channels to share with the community national education agendas and priorities. I strongly recommend that all educators to read it since it contains very helpful information, and especially because it is endorsed by senior leaders of MINEDUC and REB". ■



Jean Pierre NSHIMIYIMANA,
Head Teacher NTSINDUKA
Primary School, CYATO Sector,
NYAMASHEKE District

"It was good to read the stories and opinions of different actors like SEOs, head teachers, teachers, etc. on various education best practices. The magazine can help foster collaboration by encouraging a holistic approach (school, community, local leaders) with regard to school management and quality. It says 'we have to work together if we want to succeed'. I especially enjoyed articles



that insist on the importance of involving families in the education of their children. Real education starts in families and children need parental support before they are sent to school. I learned from the magazine that I have to invest a lot of energy encouraging teachers to

teach children with love. I now have a deeper understanding of the importance of involving key community actors for the sake of children's learning. Most of these best practices can be found in this magazine". ■

**Faina MUREBWAYIRE, SEO
KIBEHO, NYARUGURU district**



"The magazine is so wonderful. It shares some good experiences from different

educators. I learned many things that can help me improve my leadership practices on a daily basis. Reading some of my peer colleagues' ideas was so inspiring. I learned the benefits of adequately approaching parents to ensure they get involved in school management matters. Yes, that's the purpose in reading this magazine. I once thought I should do everything myself or force my subordinates to execute my orders. But I learned in reading the magazines that teamwork is the right way of ensuring that everybody contributes. I used to give orders to subordinates. But I learned that all have something to share. All have great insight. I learned that when people are involved in solving their own problems, they find long lasting and sustainable solutions. These magazines contain great experiences, and helpful information shared in a concise and easy way to ensure that the reader can quickly understand the concepts and implement them immediately". ■

**Thadee NKIZUMUREMYI, Head
Teacher Group Scolaire FUYI,
NGOMA sector, NYARUGURU**

"I loved the magazine especially since it's an educational magazine that includes various ideas from colleagues, and many suggestions and insights from professionals. I liked the way teachers share their personal experiences regarding some challenges they went through and how they overcame them. In reading *Urunana* magazine, I could feel the joy from teachers to impact their peers by sharing their own stories. I also liked the way collaboration with parents, local leaders and school leaders, was



constantly underlined and emphasized. Now that I learned new insights from the magazine, I am committed to do advocacy to teachers especially in the arena of parental involvement in education. Although we have always invited parents to school meetings, we have not paid too much attention to visiting families. This is something I want

to foster in my school so that parents can have the feeling and the awareness that the school leadership counts on their contribution to develop and sustain quality education. These magazines are a real source of knowledge. It's an opportunity to learn from others' experiences, their successes, and their failures". ■

**Theogene MUTAYOBA, SEO
NGOMA, NYARUGURU district**

"Urunana rw'Abarezi is a great magazine containing relevant educative articles. I believe that implementing the lessons from these articles will boost quality education in schools and will make our students be more successful. The magazine explains the role of parents in ensuring that they are offered the needed support and the minimum requirement to go to school. But it also emphasizes how important it is for school leaders to develop consistent relationships with parents and to strengthen the communication with parents so that these ones are informed and aware of what the school really expects from them. The importance of parental involvement in the education of their children at home such as helping a child with their homework is also explained. The role of the community and local institutions is also emphasized. I have decided to adopt new practices such as encouraging parents to constantly visit schools and to follow up on the learning of their children. I will refine our communication methods by ensuring that every child has



a communication notebook that will be used to exchange information between the school and the child's parents. I encourage my peers and colleagues who will access this magazine not to just keep it on their shelves. They should instead read it since it contains innovative and community-based solutions to various issues like dropout, children and teachers' absenteeism, lack of parental involvement, etc". ■

NATIONWIDE LOWER SECONDARY PROMOTION, REPETITION AND DROPOUT RATE

	2012	2013	2014	2015
Promotion rate	76.10%	73.60%	74.00%	81.9%
Repetition rate	6.20%	11.60%	11.60%	11.6%
Dropout rate	17.70%	14.70%	14.40%	6.5%

Source: 2015 Education Statistical Yearbook

DROPOUT, A SERIOUS ISSUE

In his visits to both the districts of Rubavu and Kayonza early this year, His Excellency President Kagame expressed his deep concerns over school dropouts. While speaking to the residents of Mudende, he encouraged them to “send their children to study in school rather than to work in the fields”. His Excellency reiterated the same message to the residents of Kayonza district, in the sector of Mukarange: “Every Rwandan child should be in school; not on the street. The Government has provided free schools and no parent should stand in the way of their children’s education”.

In recent years, both the Education Statistical Yearbook and the Rwanda Statistical Yearbook have indicated in alarming

figures that much still needs to be done to tackle dropout.

As detailed in Table 1 (Page 7), a comparison of the numbers in a cohort of P1 pupils shows that 72.4% of pupils entering P1 in 2010 did not reach P6 in 2015. A similar comparison of a cohort of P4 pupils indicates that 73.5% of students in P4 in 2010 never made it to S3 in that time.

One way to calculate dropout per class level is to take the total number of students in that class level and subtract the number of newly promoted students and the number of repeating students.

Assuming the same number of pupils repeat a class as are promoted per year, primary dropouts in

2015 numbered 465,187 pupils compared to 2010 or a cumulative 72.4% over 5 years. This is equivalent to an annual dropout rate of a little over 14%.

Encouragingly, according to the latest Education Statistical Yearbook, the dropout rate for primary education has decreased to 5.7%, while promotion and repetition rates have increased to 75.9% and 18.4% respectively.

But even then, if those figures hold over the next 5 years, it can be deduced that of the 639,656 pupils in the P1 in 2015, only 476,985 of their cohort will reach P6 in 2020; a cumulative percentage loss of 25.4% pupils dropping out (Table 3). When analyzing the root causes of student drop out, researchers have

“Every Rwandan child should be in school; not on the street.”

come to differentiate between “pushed out” and “pulled out” factors.

A student is said to be pushed out when adverse situations within the school environment lead the student to drop out of school. On the other hand, students are said to be pulled out schools when factors external to

the school are the causes that prevent them from completing their studies.

Some lessons can be drawn from research carried out both in Uganda and in the United States (See Page 8). However, the ultimate wisdom about dropout in Rwanda can only be found at District and

Sector levels. Sector education officers (SEOs) and head teachers need to collaborate on ensuring that interventions and measures are efficient and compatible with the local environment. It is only when the local community is involved that real inclusive education for all can be achieved. ■

TABLE 1: P1 AND P4 COHORTS 2010-2015

		BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	LESS		BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL	LESS
2010	P1	324,865	317,960	642,825		P4	163,924	176,259	340,183	
2011	P2	237,137	237,043	474,180	26.2%	P5	143,184	161,373	304,557	10.5%
2012	P3	194,076	196,659	390,735	39.2%	P6	84,675	99,525	184,200	45.9%
2013	P4	165,367	176,087	341,454	46.9%	S1	68,371	79,176	147,547	56.6%
2014	P5	139,592	158,261	297,853	53.7%	S2	54,865	65,077	119,942	64.7%
2015	P6	80,543	97,095	177,638	72.4%	S3	42,161	47,995	90,156	73.5%

TABLE 2: CALCULATING PROMOTION, REPETITION AND DROPOUT

2010	P1	642,825	=	new enrolled	2010	+	repeaters	P1	2009				
2011	P2	474,180	=	promoted P1	2010	+	repeaters	P2	2010	-	dropped out	P1	2010
2012	P3	390,735	=	promoted P2	2011	+	repeaters	P3	2011	-	dropped out	P2	2011
2013	P4	341,454	=	promoted P3	2012	+	repeaters	P4	2012	-	dropped out	P3	2012
2014	P5	297,853	=	promoted P4	2013	+	repeaters	P5	2013	-	dropped out	P4	2013
2015	P6	177,638	=	promoted P5	2014	+	repeaters	P6	2014	-	dropped out	P5	2014

TABLE 3 : DROPOUT PROJECTION 2015-2020

		PUPILS		PROMOTED	75.9%		REPEATERS	18.4%		DROPOUT	5.7%
2015	P1	639,656	=	new 2015	517,643	+	P1 2014	122,013	-		
2016	P2	603,196	=	P1 2015	485,499	+	P2 2015	117,697	-	P1 2015	36,460
2017	P3	568,813	=	P2 2016	457,825	+	P3 2016	110,988	-	P2 2016	34,382
2018	P4	536,391	=	P3 2017	431,729	+	P4 2017	104,662	-	P3 2017	32,422
2019	P5	505,817	=	P4 2018	407,121	+	P5 2018	98,696	-	P4 2018	30,574
2020	P6	476,985	=	P5 2019	383,915	+	P6 2019	93,070	-	P5 2019	28,832
										Cumulative	162,671
										Cumulative%:	25.4%

LESSONS DRAWN FROM RESEARCH ON DROPOUT

PUSH FACTORS

- Repeated failures: children are said to drop out because they often failed and were continuously called to repeat a class which discouraged them;
- Absenteeism and lateness of teachers. This destroys the morale of children, who also start doing the same until they decide to abandon the school altogether since they are persuaded that the teacher will continue to be absent;
- Language barriers in grades where the mother tongue is forbidden and especially when parents can only speak the native tongue;
- Burdensome attendance and discipline policies, like denying school access to students who cannot afford school uniforms;
- Lack of consistent students' behavior management

PULL FACTORS

- Children who live in poverty usually choose to find any job that can bring in some income. With time, they get used to earning their own money and they decide not to go back to school anymore;
- Problems of food shortages at school and at home;
- Absence of real motivation from parents who do not encourage their children to go to school. Some children are denied basic school requirement.

- Girls especially are affected by this problem since they are forced to handle domestic duties or to look after their siblings depending on families' circumstances like a mother who is unwell or a sudden death of a key family member.
- Negative influence from peers and the desire to imitate peers' lifestyle;

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO CURB DROPOUT?

- Sensitizing parents on the importance of sending their children to school;
- Strengthening and enforcing child labor laws and policies;
- Improving adequate tracking of those who dropped out;
- Improving school environment: recruit more teachers and improve their learner centered teaching skills;
- Ensuring that that schools provide co-curricular activities to make the child be interested in going to school;
- Involving community members: former students and role models to provide talks in schools to explain why education is important;
- Ensuring all schools provide midday meals;
- Even though tuition fees have been abolished in some schools parents are still burdened by mandatory fees covering scholastic materials, examinations, uniforms, and school development funds. It is therefore important to identify ways to make schools really and freely accessible to all students.■

SOURCE: *Out of School Children Study in Uganda*, Unicef: Christine Mbabazi Mpyangu, Eric Awich Ochen, Eria Olowo Onyango, Yovani A Moses Lubaale, March 2014. *Understanding Why Students Drop Out of High School, According to Their Own Reports: Are They Pushed or Pulled, or Do They Fall Out? A Comparative Analysis of Seven Nationally Representative Studies*, Jonathan Jacob Doll, Zohreh Eslami, and Lynne Walters, SAGE Open, October-December 2013: 1–15.



THE IMPACT OF DROPOUTS ON THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Dinah Muzungu is a passionate educator who serves as Sector Education Officer of Ntongwe Sector in the district of Ruhango since 2012. As a key education leader in her sector, she has faced the challenges brought by dropouts in schools. She believes that there should be no tolerance in dealing with dropouts in schools.



And among the troubling consequences, we could mention cases of banditry, or child labor issues in the community as a result of our weakness to address the problem of dropout adequately and consistently," Dinah said.

Dinah described some of the main root causes of dropouts:

"One of the main reasons that lead children to drop out of school is the lack of passion from parents. Some parents are not passionate about the education development of their children because they believe that it pays off after a long period. Some parents expect immediate outcomes from their children studies. Their inability to understand that the first objective of educating a child is not about financial gratification but instead empower the child

"Dropout is a very dangerous thing. Some people don't seem to bother about how it can ruin lives and the Country. Dropout destroys a child's chances to be educated, preventing him to earn the right knowledge and skills he or she will need later either to win his or her bread to empower

the community and the Country. So the impact is not only limited to one child or a group of children. It touches many families, communities and the Country. When a child loses the opportunity to be educated, it means that the community and the country have lost a considerable potential.



with competencies and skills, keep them from motivating their children to go to school or to keep going to school. As a result of this poor attitude, most children drop out of school, losing one of their unequivocal basic rights, the right to education. And this is a terrible misfortune for families, for the community and for the Country”, Dinah explained.

Another factor pointed out by the Education officer is the social conditions of poor families who prefer to have their children doing some jobs instead of sending them to school. To this, Dinah shares that *“poverty starts with the attitude. Most of the struggles some families go through can be addressed by using the wider community’s assets and wisdom. It is important that school leaders and local leaders understand that the community is powerful and that it has a great potential to take care of those among us who are struggling. And when it comes to issues that may endanger the right to education of a child, everybody in the community should be alerted”.*

Dinah also mentions the lack of appropriate ways to sensitize families and the wider community within their context:

“Each family has its own context and specific experiences. So before applying general sensitization techniques to a particular family, it is important to ensure you maximize the opportunities to listen to their realities for an adequate response. A way of doing it is to appoint ‘community counselors’ chosen from the community and who would voluntarily serve as connectors between schools and families. I have 10 schools in my Sector and I would be foolish to try to follow-up everything myself. And head teachers as well cannot do it alone. So this would help school leaders have accurate, updated information about what is really going on in the community and in families. This would also encourage parents who face social struggles to receive the right orientation and support allowing them to break the poverty cycle by proactively exploring income generating activities in their community. The worst form of poverty the community would ever face is a poor state of mind. The community is capable and it can develop solutions”.

A continuous community campaign on the role of all the community to fight dropouts is

also something Dinah advocates for: *“There are many bumping spaces where local leaders or school leaders have the opportunity to convey strong messages to the community about their roles in fighting dropouts. No opportunity should be ignored. Whether it is a village meeting, a community activity like Umuganda, etc., there should always be room to insert a clear and comprehensive message to the community”.*

All these practices however cannot be successfully achieved with poor school leadership and management and an inadequate pedagogical approach in classrooms:

“School leadership and management is the foundation of quality and inclusive education. When a school has a poor leadership and management, students will be taught by mediocre teachers who will have no idea about what ‘learner-centered methodology’ means. These teachers will be careless, especially given the tough conditions of most of our public schools. As an obvious result, slow learners and vulnerable children will realize that school is not their right place to be. And we all know what will unfortunately follow”, Dinah said.■



GOOD PRACTICES IN DEALING WITH SCHOOL DROPOUT

Christine Nambajimana is the Head Teacher of Nyamatete Primary school. Located in Rugendabari sector, Muhanga District, the school has nearly 400 students.



Having been in the education sector for over 11 years (as a teacher and now as a school leader), Christine strongly believes that *“children are a school’s greatest assets”*.

“Any genuine school leader or teacher should ensure that the risk of dropout is handled with the highest level of care and attention to ensure that all children are given the opportunity to access school and to stay in school until completion”, Christine said.

However, as Christine says, *“being aware of the dangers of dropout is one thing. Understanding how*

to prevent it or alleviate that pattern is another thing”.

So, what are some of the root causes of dropouts in schools and what kind of practices school leaders and teachers should foster to ensure that all children stay in schools?

Like many other educators, Christine also believes that parents’ role is important in dealing with dropouts in schools.

“In many cases of dropouts in schools, the lack of parental involvement in the education of their children was among the main causes of dropouts of the children. Some parents believe that since ‘Education is free’ and accessible to all, therefore they have nothing to do with their children’s education, which is a gross misconception. When possible, parents should be the ones who ensure that their children love going to school and that they are given

the basic tools to go to school within their means. Parents should also play a big role in motivating their children by displaying interest in their learning. It is therefore very important that school leaders and teachers build strong relationships with parents,” Christine said.

Christine also believes that another causal element of dropout is the tough socio-economic condition of some families:

“We have seen some poor families taking back their children so that they can assign them to some income generating work. This of course is not acceptable but it is a reality school leaders should tackle wisely with the support of the community. Among the ways to solve this problem, is the importance of encouraging parents to engage in groups or associations that strive to initiate income generating activities. School leaders should therefore ensure



that parents are given the right directions and advices on how to engage in those kinds of activities by helping them connect with the right groups”.

Family planning should also be a long term strategy, especially those living in tough socio-economic conditions: *“We all know that among the children who drop out of school, are those who are coming from families that are burdened by heavy responsibilities they carry.*

It is not wrong to have many children. But, in my understanding, continuing to give birth to children while you are facing unbearable struggles trying to raise the ones you already have seems to be an error of judgment. As a result of this complicated situation faced by some families, some children will eventually dropout of school

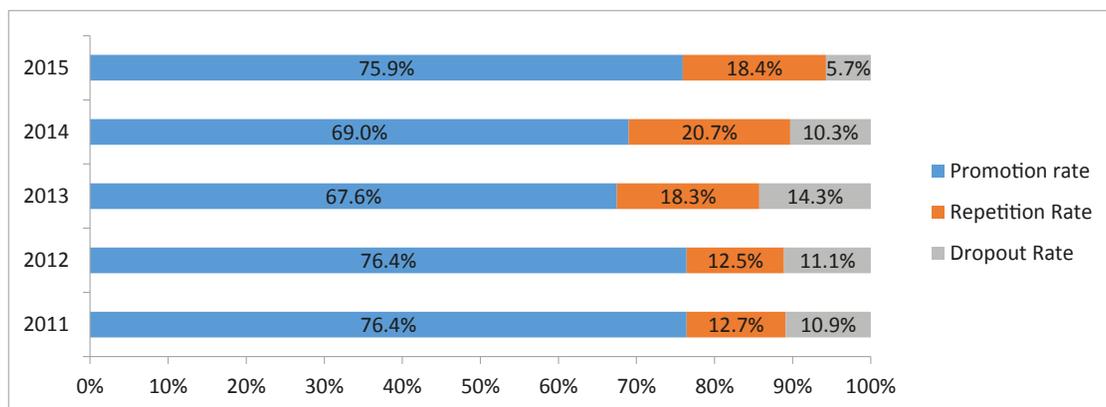
because the families they are coming from do not have the ability to ensure the children are decently supported in their education. And once children drop out of schools, some other terrible things may happen like petty banditry or crimes, or any other dangerous behavioral activities in the community. Therefore, relevant institutions and agencies as well as school leaders should play a considerable role in encouraging and in helping those struggling families, to embrace effective family planning practices,” Christine explained.

But parents and the community are not the only groups that are expected to respond to the problem of dropout in schools:

The Head Teacher advises *“effective school leadership and*

management is an absolute prerequisite when it comes to fighting dropout. It is the primary responsibility of head teachers to ensure that the school environment is child-friendly, that teachers have big hearts to welcome children that are facing challenges in their families and to be gracious enough when their parents are not supportive. Children are not to be punished for their familys socio-economic conditions. I encourage head teachers and teachers to strive to have updated record of children in classrooms and to consistently follow up on absenteeism cases. When necessary, organized visits to parents should take place. I believe that school leaders and teachers should ensure that they fight foot and nail for a child to stay at school regardless of the obstacles”.■

PRIMARY PROMOTION, REPETITION, DROPOUT RATE FROM 2012 TO 2015



The figure shows that the repetition rate has improved from 20.7% in 2014 to 18.4% in 2015 and the current rate of the ESSP Targets has been not achieved. For instance high repetition rates of 18.4% in 2015 were observed against the 2015/2016 ESSP target of 9.7%. More effort is therefore required to reduce the repetition rate in Primary Education in order to achieve 2017/2018 ESSP target of 7.7%. The dropout rate varies from year to year: In 2015 the DR was 5.7% and thus the 2015/2016 ESSP target of 7.6% has been achieved

Source: 2015 Education Statistical Yearbook



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND DROPOUT

Vincent Murenzi is the Inclusive Education Programme Manager at Handicap International Rwanda.



students with special needs and children with disabilities. Most importantly, it is an alarming contributing factor of dropout by vulnerable students.

But what is it that causes children with special needs to drop out of school? How can inclusive education practices be used to prevent or alleviate the scourge of dropout in schools?

Vincent Murenzi of Handicap International says: *“Despite the Rwandan Government’s commitment and efforts to meet the global and national goals towards achieving the Education For All, dropout of students is still a reality in many schools within our communities. We still have children that are out of schools for many reasons, including inadequate and irrelevant inclusive education approaches”.*

Increased equitable access to education for students with special educational needs within both mainstream and special schools is one of the key outcomes of the Rwandan Education Sector Strategic Plan 2013-2018. This strong commitment to promote inclusive education is expressed in Article 216 of the 7-year Government

Plan 2010-2017 and is in line with the objectives of both Education For All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4).

Yet, a poor understanding of best inclusive education practices at schools and in the community, can be an obstacle to equitable access to education for all students, particularly

According to the inclusive education expert, there are behaviors, attitudes, practices, omissions or deficiencies that lead to the increase of dropout of



children, especially those with disabilities or special needs.

"It is generally believed that a school's physical location as well as its infrastructure are determining factors in whether a child with special needs will drop out of school. However, there are deeper and essential causal elements that have to be taken into consideration".

"First and foremost, the issue to address is parents' ignorance of how to take care of their children with disabilities or special needs. The involvement of the community through parental support is crucial when it comes to fighting dropout and championing the cause of children with special needs. When a child with a disability or with a special need feels or realizes that his or her parents are not supporting his or her educational rights and needs, the probability of their dropping out of school is more than certain", Vincent explained.

School leaders as well as teachers do also play a considerable role in preventing children with special needs from dropping out school:

"School leaders should encourage teachers not to consider children with special needs as a burden or as a problem. It is important to understand that most children with

special needs grew up with low self-confidence because of their rejection by the society they live in. Some of them view themselves as unworthy individuals, despite the gifts, talents and potential they have. Therefore, teachers' understanding and receptiveness to best practices in caring for vulnerable children is very important. It is crucial that teachers approach children with special needs with a positive attitude to ensure that children feel valued, loved and cared for".

Another important factor to consider is poverty and the socio-economic conditions of families: *"Children with special needs that come from poor families may lose the motivation to go to school because their families lack the proper resources to support them given their vulnerable conditions,"* Vincent added.

In addition to ensuring that schools are child-friendly and that infrastructure is not an obstacle to children with special needs and disabilities, Vincent suggests a couple of actions that have to be taken as soon as possible:

"We are privileged to be in a country where inclusive education is a nonnegotiable component of our educational strategies and policies. Norms and tools have been and

*are being developed to that effect. Yet, **efficient awareness campaigns on inclusive education** should continue to be run to ensure that educators, parents, children, institutions totally embrace the concept of education for all.*

The teacher's role in a classroom is more than vital. So disregarding **teachers' empowerment in terms of inclusive education** is absolutely unforgivable. Teachers should be taught how to welcome and to handle children in their diversity, particularly children with special needs or with disabilities.

The involvement of the community is also important. Parents should be approached, supported and encouraged to motivate their children who may have special needs or disabilities. Parents should understand that they are the first and the most powerful influences on their child's future, regardless of their socio-economic situations.

Finally, initiatives that **allow income generating activities** such as livestock projects, farming, small businesses, handcrafts etc. should also be highly encouraged to ensure that poor families are given the opportunity to break the poverty cycle and to take care of their children. ■



DROPOUT CAN BE PREVENTED

GOOD PRACTICES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST DROPOUT IN SCHOOLS

Marie Josée MUKAKANANI is the Sector Education Officer of MASORO sector. Located in the district of RULINDO in Northern Province, the sector has 4 Primary schools and 3 secondary schools. Marie Josée holds strong convictions on the importance of fighting for the right of children to be cared for: "Education, she says, is a nonnegotiable right of all children, regardless of their social situation or intellectual capacity".



We asked Marie Josée to share her perspective on dropout in schools and her opinion on some of the best ways of addressing this issue faced by many schools.

"Dropout creates a disoriented youth that has been robbed of its

right to reach its full potential. Children who drop out of school are at high risk of getting involved in destructive behavior such as prostitution, banditry, etc. A community that fails to prevent or to address the problem of school dropouts is digging its own education system's grave. Furthermore, the development of the country is impacted since the country loses great potential and undeveloped resources. At the end, neglecting to consider dropout as a serious problem, will turn into a heavy burden that sooner or later will have to be painfully dealt with", Marie Josée shared.

In Marie Josée's view, these are some of the key factors that encourage dropouts:

"Our society includes children who come from families with serious dysfunctions. Some parents fail to show their care and attention to their children and to their learning in school. This negative parental attitude destroys the morale of some children, who reach a point where they decide to completely abandon any effort to study. This is especially emphasized in certain situations where a child thinks that going to school is important in order to please parents. So when parents are careless, the child will



detect that lack of interest and will generally respond in the same way. It is therefore crucial to approach parents in consistent and innovative ways to ensure that parental involvement is secured and real. Another problem faced by our communities is the reality of some children looking after their siblings either on behalf of their absent parents or because they were orphaned, finding themselves in the difficult position of carrying heavy burdens while still very young”.

This is why Marie Josée champions the idea of not ignoring joint efforts of all the stakeholders in the community to solve the problem:

“As the Sector Education Officer, it is my responsibility to ensure that everyone is involved in fighting dropout in schools. So I have always encouraged schools to establish ‘counseling committees’ whose main mission is to conduct thorough investigation and follow up in cases of

dropouts and to provide guidance and counseling to both school leaders and parents. These committees include 2 teachers (male and female), the chairperson of the school parents committee, and the head teacher or the deputy head teacher. Depending on the issue to be addressed, the head of the village is also invited to offer the needed help, especially when it comes to approaching a family staying in his/her village”, Marie Josée explained.

However, the school leader’s role is also a very important component that needs to be considered:

“When school leaders become nonchalant and indifferent, it’s easy to imagine the nature of the results we will get. School leaders’ bad attitude will affect the morale of teachers, even the best ones. So leadership, sound leadership does matter, especially when it comes to dealing with a tough issue like dropout. Some teachers remain unaffected and consistent regardless of the nature

of leadership offered to them. But other teachers, and unfortunately most teachers, certainly get discouraged and become cold and careless. They don’t care about their students’ personal lives and challenges such as family problems that can affect their learning. Furthermore, they don’t really value the learner. Teaching becomes a burden. They feel relieved when it’s time to close the daily business. The saddest part of this horrible situation is that children are very good at spotting a teacher’s attitude. Students may forget what you taught or told them, but they will never forget the way you made them feel in a classroom. Therefore, head teachers should encourage teachers to befriend their students, to adopt child-friendly methodologies and to follow up closely on any case of absenteeism that emerges. When a teacher calls all his or her students every morning, they each feel unique, recognized and valued”, Marie Josée concluded. ■

“Students may forget what you taught or told them, but they will never forget the way you made them feel in a classroom.”

SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DROPOUT

Jean Damascene Nsengiyumva is an engaged advocate for special needs education. He is the Executive Secretary of the National Union of Disabilities Organisations of Rwanda (NUDOR), one of the leading civil society platforms that support and champion inclusive education and children with disabilities.



Jean Damascene believes that special needs education starts with the attitude.

"When dealing with special needs in education, one has to start with the mindset and the perception. Schools accessibility and the infrastructure do matter. But the thing that matters the most is to change the perception of the society and of those who

shape the future of our children, namely parents and teachers" Jean Damascene stated.

Why is special needs education so important and how does it help in preventing dropout in schools?

"Education For All is about building societies that strive to ensure that no child is left behind with regard to equitable access to quality education. Our society should ensure that all children, especially those with disabilities and special needs, are well integrated and included in our education programmes and systems. Children do not have the same ability to learn. Some are advanced. Others have special and particular needs requiring our particular attention. When we fail to pay the right attention to

those special needs, we promote disparities and inequities in our systems and as a consequence, children with special needs give up and drop out of schools" Jean Damascene said.

According to Jean Damascene, Special needs education is not only about taking care of children with disabilities.

"Special needs education means 'we take care of all the vulnerable children whether they have disabilities or not. It is about ensuring that children that come from poor families receive the right support and care that will allow them to see their needs met. It is about ensuring that all the most vulnerable children in our classrooms are valued, supported to prevent them from dropping out of schools"

Jean Damascene emphasizes the importance of distinguishing inclusive education and “adaptation”.

“Inclusive education is about ensuring that all children, regardless of their conditions, have an equitable access to quality education. Special needs education is not about forcing children with special needs or with disabilities to cope with their environment. It is about easing their learning by ensuring that the learning environment and materials are friendly and compatible with their needs or their disability conditions”.

Developing an inclusive child-friendly learning environment is not limited to the physical environment:

“Modeling the community’s perception to ensure that special needs education concepts are embraced by all, is the biggest challenge we have to overcome. We need to ensure that people understand

that accessibility is not only about building wheelchairs ramps. It is about fostering a culture of care and love where vulnerable children are not despised or stigmatized. To the best of our capabilities, we need to ensure that, regardless of any kind of disability, all children access the needed information and learning materials equitably. If we do this, we will limit the risk of dropout for at least children with special needs and the vulnerable ones” Jean Damascene said.

In order to be successful, Jean Damascene encourages all the stakeholders to join NUDOR’s efforts towards the promotion of special needs education:

“It is important that school leaders, Districts’ and sectors’ education officers always ensure that statistics of children with disabilities or special needs are accurate and updated to facilitate the follow up and the required support. Educators and school leaders are

opinion leaders in their communities. Therefore, they should ensure that they become the champions and the messengers of special needs education in this battle against dropout in schools”.

While the hard work done by the Government and Development Partners has to be commended, sustainability still matters:

“We are aware that the journey is long and we are grateful for what has been achieved with regard to special education needs and inclusive education. Yet, we have to keep ensuring that special needs in education programmes are given a proper budget allocation and that relevant learning environments (culturally and physically) are fostered. We have to ensure that all key stakeholders, especially the civil society organisations and Non-Governmental agencies are given the chance to avail their resources (finance, expertise, and experience)”, NUDOR’s leader said.■

PRIMARY PROMOTION, REPETITION, DROPOUT RATE FROM 2011 TO 2015

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Promotion rate	76.4%	76.4%	67.6%	69.0%	75.9%
Repetition rate	12.7%	12.5%	18.3%	20.7%	18.4%
Dropout rate	10.9%	11.1%	14.3%	10.3%	5.7%

Source: 2015 Education Statistical Yearbook



GOOD PRACTICES IN FIGHTING DROPOUT AT A SCHOOL LEVEL

Anicet NKUZABAGABO has been passionately engaged in the education sector for more than 15 years. This veteran educator is currently Head Teacher of Groupe Scolaire GASETSA, in the district of Ngoma, Eastern province.

In his own words: *“There cannot be long term economic success or achievement while some children are still dropping out of school”.*

“Despite the horrible genocide against the Tutsi in 1994 and many years of social inequities that left our country with so many broken hearts, the Government of Rwanda has made strong and impressive commitments towards ensuring that no child is robbed of his or her inalienable right to free education. Our country firmly believes that real socio-economic progress cannot be achieved when some children have no access to education. So today, all children are offered 12 years of free basic education in keeping with the global Education For All (EFA) goals. Furthermore, our



country has ensured that what is happening in classrooms is not only consistent but also inclusive. This was made real by the development and implementation of a new curriculum which is competence-based, learner-centered, and

inclusive and values oriented”, Anicet explained.

Yet, Anicet is not ignorant of some of the toughest challenges schools are facing as they strive to deliver quality education to children.



“Most of our communities in Rwanda are burdened with too many children who drop out of schools. Dropout is a heartbreaking reality. Some people may not realize it now but it destroys the country’s great potential. Dropout kills the next generation of great leaders. We are losing future brilliant engineers, doctors, teachers, lawyers... It is therefore important to keep in mind that as we close our eyes to this serious problem, we are just postponing the painful consequences that we, as a country, will have to face”, he warns.

Anicet identifies three groups of actors that he considers to be key players in fighting and in preventing dropout:

Group 1: Parents

“Parents play an incredible role in supporting the education of their children. Although, schools are theoretically open to all children, there are certain duties and responsibilities that no one other than parents can fulfill to ensure that a child reaches school and that he or she stays there. Parents are the ones who should actively and deliberately send their children to school. To the

best of their capacities, parents should also ensure that a child is given the basic tools for school. But on top of that, it is the role of parents to ensure that the child is cared for, that he/she is followed up on on a daily basis. Parents should have an accurate knowledge of their children’s situation at school to be able to support them as a family whenever necessary. The lack of involvement of some parents has been identified as one of root causes of dropout”.

Group 2: Educators

“It is said that ‘good teachers are costly but bad teachers cost more’. In my experience as Head teacher, I am more than ever persuaded that the attitude a teacher displays in a classroom will have a serious impact on his or her students - especially vulnerable children who are coming from tough environments. When a teacher is not friendly, when the teaching approach is not learner centered, when inclusive education is not the spirit of the classroom, when slow learners are despised instead of being accepted and supported adequately. School leaders should therefore do their best to ensure that teachers respond

to the needs of all their students accordingly. The importance of following up on any case of absenteeism, or any reported family crisis that may impact the learning of the child, cannot be underestimated. Teachers are not just knowledge givers. They also play a great role in growing the hearts and the lives of their students. In many cases of dropout, it was because a teacher failed to fulfill this holistic role in the classroom and in the community”, Anicet noted.

Group 3: Local leaders

“Local leaders like heads of villages or cells should be at the forefront of community sensitisation and mobilisation to ensure that the community is alert and ready to respond to the problem of dropout accordingly. Community leaders should ensure that at every meeting, families are encouraged and motivated to adopt good practices to keep children at school. The limited involvement of the local community leaders has created an imbalance and it has proved an impediment to the efforts deployed by other actors as they strive to stop this plague that is ruining our country”.■



CHILD LABOR AND DROPOUT

Lamech NABANJIMANA is the Project Director of the Rwanda Education Alternative for Children in Tea growing areas (REACH-T), a project run by WINROCK International.



As different stakeholders in education are combining their efforts to alleviate the menace of

dropout in schools, they identified child labor as one of the main factors or catalysts of dropout in schools, especially in areas where casual labor is most solicited. This is why WINROCK's REACH-T initiative focuses on Tea growing areas.

"The Government of Rwanda has made tremendous efforts to ensure that all children access education in an equitable way. No child

should be out of school. Furthermore, relevant policies and strategies to protect children's right, including child labor policies and guidelines, have been developed to considerably reduce and limit the causes of dropout. Yet, a lot remains to be done to ensure that all the actors and the community are accurately informed of the danger of child labor", Lamech explained.

Combatting child labor starts with an accurate understanding of cultural values regarding children's rights and protection:

In Lamech's view: *"Hard work is among our core societal values. Labor is a nonnegotiable condition to any socio-economic development. And I believe this concept should be consistently*

taught to our children. However, our society also believes that 'the child is king' ('Umwana ni umutware'). This means that the child should be given our highest care, treatment and protection.

And all these mean ensuring that we prevent children from engaging in heavy or hazardous labor or any other activity that can not only harm the child but also impede on his/her educational development".

But what are the main determining factors of child labor and how can child labor impact a child's education development?

"One of the biggest challenges we face regarding child labor is

the lack of awareness of what 'child labor' really is by many people, including

the educators, education leaders, local government agents, various civil



society organisations and religious groups, and the wider community. It is therefore extremely important to invest a lot of energy developing awareness-raising campaigns to help the population gain a clearer idea and understanding of the existing policies on child labor. It is particularly important to ensure that school leaders understand why a child would dropout out of school to join the workforce. But most importantly, school leaders should be trained on how to approach parents whose children are assumed to have dropped out of school to engage in child labor", Lamech stated.

"When it comes to the community, the challenge is to ensure that parents are given the chance to understand that although sending and keeping

a child at school often requires a lot of sacrifices, those efforts definitely pay off. Some parents know that schooling is important. But they still need to have a solid understanding of what that means from a long term perspective, to encourage them not to let their children drop out of school for child labor", he added.

Lamech sees the difficult financial situations of many families as a possible determining factor in pupils dropping out and looking for jobs in the community:

"Poverty is a reality of many families. And for some heads of household, using family resources to send a child to school is not the right thing to do when the family is struggling to feed its members. Of course

education is free. But the school does not give away free uniforms to children. And studying materials are also costly. And in some places, children whose parents don't contribute to the school feeding programme, cannot eat at school. All these kinds of pressures may result in the child giving up on going to school and responding to other alternatives like laboring instead of going to school. We therefore encourage stakeholders, local leaders and school leaders to model innovative social solutions aimed at encouraging the community, especially struggling families, to engage in financial education programmes, and to help them embrace income generating activities to ease their burden", Lamech advised.

What role should school leaders play to prevent child labor?

"School leaders should ensure that no child is expelled from school because they lack uniforms, etc. Instead, they should carefully approach the child and his/her family to inquire more about how they can work together toward a win-win solution. When a family feels obliged

to bear a burden that is beyond its capacity, it ends up giving up, and this usually leads to a child dropping out of school. And when a child drops out of school, he or she will likely be used as labor. School leaders should also collaborate with teachers to monitor children's absenteeism at school to

ensure that no situation becomes out of control". But on top of that, Lamech strongly advocates for the integration of child labor aspects in all social policies to ensure that there is a persistent and deep sensitization of the population and of all institutions, in both the private and public sector.■



DROPOUT AND ITS CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

The capacity of countries to compete in the global knowledge economy depends largely in their working population's ability to meet an ever growing demand for high level skills. "This, in turn, hinges on improvements in the quality of learning outcomes and a more equitable distribution in learning opportunities" (Andreas Schleicher Head, Indicators and Analysis Division Directorate for Education, OECD, 2007).

Success of our knowledge-based economy will be dependent on the creation of a competent and highly productive workforce with the right knowledge, skills and attitudes. Developing such a workforce requires investment in education from early childhood to higher education - and beyond. Priority 1 of the latest Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) promises that: "Effort will be made to improve completion rates, particularly for the poorest and to reduce repetition and dropout."

However when, in some districts, only three out of ten students complete primary on time, quite a number drop out, and a further seven out of ten complete primary with very limited literacy and numeracy skills, it is obvious that our ability as individuals and as a country to compete in the global knowledge economy remains a challenge. Concerted effort is required to overcome that.

For purposes of this article, we'll consider a primary school dropout a student who was enrolled in a primary school (public or private) in Grades 1 to 6, who does not return to school the following term or the following school year, was not expelled and did not continue school outside the school system, begin college or die.

Government has shown great concern about student dropout and much attention has been given to it. This year, figures coming out from the Education Statistical Yearbook

indicate improvements in curbing the dropout rate. But much still needs to be done to ensure the formation of the envisioned knowledgeable, skilled, highly productive and competitive Rwandan population.

Educators, parents, School General Assemblies and Committees (SGACs) and local education leaders must work hand in glove to stop school dropout in its tracks if we are to realize our goal of a highly skilled and competitive workforce able to support the Rwandan knowledge economy to thrive. However, in order to properly address dropout rate, we must identify the factors contributing to it.

Factors contributing to school dropout are many and multifaceted. The following explores various factors that can be considered to be the cause for many students leaving schools, leading them to lose the opportunity to be educated. Suggested solutions are also presented to reduce the dropout rate.

SCHOOL FACTORS

Teacher absenteeism and dropout

When the head teacher is frequently absent, the teachers follow suit and the students stay at home to do some more useful work. As clearly stated by Grace, a 13-year old pupil: "There was no teacher for our class, so teachers from other classes came to teach us; but there were times when we went to school and for three days, no teacher came to our class to teach – sometimes other teachers came to cane us for making noise... It is just a waste of time and it is better to stay at home and do something else".

Relevancy of education services and dropout

Parents of children in failing schools do not consider the education offered by their community schools to be useful because the quality of most rural and some urban schools is usually not high enough to warrant the investment of time, energy and economic resources. High rates of student failure in some schools of disadvantaged communities make parents jump to the 'incorrect' conclusion that attending school is a waste of time.

While on a school visit last April, a fellow educator told us a story of two brothers who went to seek employment in a road construction company. One was a senior six graduate while the other had never attended school at all. The company employed the two brothers but there was no difference in pay. The uneducated one could not see the point of his brother 'wasting time' in school - forgetting that the educated brother has other job opportunities that the uneducated one couldn't qualify for. Parents need to see examples of tangible and convincing benefits of education that can influence them to send and keep their children to school. Influencing and persuading them is the job of teachers, school leaders, local leaders and more enlightened parents who fully understand the benefits of education.

Poor academic results

Persistent poor student performance together with little support and encouragement from both parents and teachers as well as the feeling of shame that accompanies academic failure pushes the affected student to the conclusion that, probably, they are wasting their time in school and opt for

leaving school for other/ better life preparation opportunities.

Head teacher and teacher indifference towards school dropout

In some schools, teachers and school leaders show little concern or care about student learning, attendance and dropout. The attendance register is used irregularly to monitor student attendance and where it is used regularly there is rarely concern and action for absent and dropout students.

Bagarira yose ntuzi irizera. The Rwandan proverb cautions us to help everyone, because you never know who will make a difference. In biblical terms, educators can be considered shepherds guiding their flock of students. And as Luke 15:4 teaches: 'Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it?'

In other words, every student matters.

The frequently absent student and the school dropout deserve more attention and effort from the teacher than the upright, diligent student



because the former are more 'exposed to certain ruin' if not helped to engage in learning. If every teacher follows up absent students immediately after they miss class and works with parents, school community members and local leaders to bring them back to school, the dropout rate will be sure to decrease.

HOME AND FAMILY FACTORS

Household poverty

As Abraham Maslow observed, "It is quite true that man lives by bread alone — when there is no bread." Nothing else, including education, is important when the bodily needs have not been satisfied.

Hungry children are more likely to drop out of school because they are unable to concentrate in class. One dropout narrated to me how he heard echoes whenever a teacher was teaching only because the gnawing pangs of hunger racked his stomach and diverted his attention from learning. He decided to leave school for good and become a hired herdsman.

"When you go to school on an empty stomach, staying in school till home time becomes difficult.

You cannot go for lunch with your friends because you do not have any money; meanwhile, you are hungry. Sometimes, there is no breakfast in the house and my parents are not able to give me any pocket money to take to school either; so, I skip school to work in order to make money to support myself", recounted Ananga, a dropout.

Poor health and dropout

Poor health and nutritional deficiencies in children and associated stunted growth is directly correlated with late enrolment, irregular attendance, repetition and eventually dropout. Poor health makes it impossible for children to maintain motivation for learning and high levels of concentration.

Overage in grade and dropout

There are any number of reasons for a child to be overage for his grade level. Late enrolment may be attributable to the child's poor health or nutritional status; gender; household conditions; or, in certain cases, distance to school (Brock & Cammish, 1997; Pridmore, 2007). Overage children may find schooling unappealing owing to the pressure of feeling inferior to younger classmates.

Should the teacher's attitude towards overage pupils create an unfriendly classroom environment that combines with the feeling of inferiority, the overage children may feel pushed out of school.

Older children, particularly boys, are more intolerant of punishment particularly corporal punishment in the presence of younger children which they view as humiliating and embarrassing. Refusal of punishment combined with the available opportunities to work, pushes older students to stop attending school because there are other attractions from the informal labor market to engage them.

Child labor and dropout

Children engage in economic activities because of the existence of a labor market for children. The informal job market is a major force pulling children out of school. Children labor is less costly than adult labor. Thus communities can influence dropout rates by providing employment opportunities to school age children during school terms. This is certainly the case for mine workers in Rongi sector, domestic workers in Kigali and other towns as well as 'herdsmen'



in Nyagatare district. In pursuit of cheap labor, adults prefer child to adult labor. Besides, families may engage the labor of their own children seasonally to protect rice, sorghum and other crops that are in danger of being consumed by birds or to work for food during seasons of food shortage.

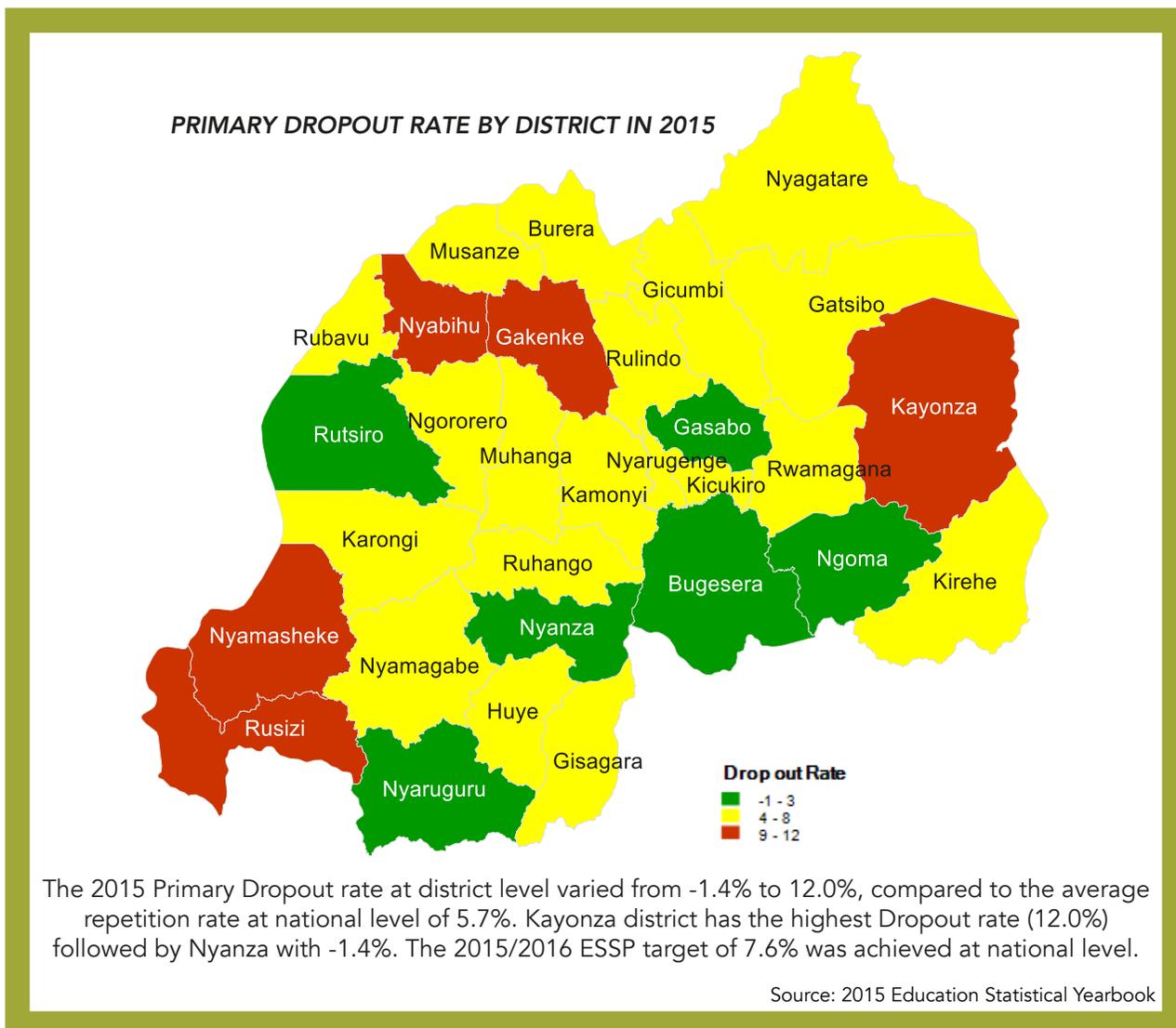
Uneducated parents and dropout

Ersado (2005) argues that parents' education is the most consistent

determinant of a child participation in education. It has been documented that the higher the education of the parent or the household head, the greater the chances of increased access, regular attendance and lower dropout rates (Ainsworth et al., 2005; Connelly and Zhen, 2003; Duyear, 2003).

Therefore, the current high rates of dropout threaten to swell the numbers of future parents with little education thus

perpetuating the problem of absenteeism, dropout, poor skills, low labor productivity and poverty. It is important therefore, that we support every child to stay in school and attain sufficient knowledge, skills and attitudes. It is the only way for the country to achieve its aspiration of producing highly skilled and productive citizens able to produce quality goods and services and in turn earn high incomes to help them provide for the wellbeing and education of their children. ■



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AT UMUTARA DEAF SCHOOL

Umutara Deaf School's (UDS) core mission is to provide support to children with hearing impairment. Launched in 2006, the school is located in Gatunda, one of the sectors in Eastern Province hosting Professional Learning Network (PLNs) sessions.

UDS offers education at different levels. At the primary level (which is mostly composed of hearing-impaired students), the main language of instruction is Kinyarwanda. Once students reach secondary level, they are exposed to a special methodology that focuses on inclusive education. The same methodology is applied to vocational training as well.

This approach is in line with key national education policies that emphasize a crucial aspect of inclusive education: ensuring that even children with disabilities are given the chance to go to regular schools in their communities.

How does inclusive education work?

The purpose of inclusive education is to ensure that children with special needs attend classes alongside non-disabled children. At UDS, efforts are made to ensure that children with hearing impairments sit together with other children of the community. This means that the teacher needs to use relevant methods to ensure that all students learn comfortably.

Two years after UDS started to fully implement this methodology, a number of innovations were brought into the classroom, including active learning, social skills development, increase of deaf awareness education, and community involvement.

The role of the new curriculum

In light of the Rwanda Education Board's recent launch of the competence-based curriculum, Rwanda's Education system will be able to adequately respond to its socio-economic demands. More specifically, this

competence-based curriculum offers the possibility of integrating inclusive education into the pedagogy, unlike the previous curriculum. The new curriculum insists on the uniqueness of each child in a classroom, regardless of whether he/she has a disability. And in addition to its learner-centric nature, the new curriculum gives to the students the opportunity to relate what they learn to their practical life in the community.

Learning is a partnership

Students enter secondary school at UDS based on their P6 national exams results. To ensure equity and inclusion, a child's disability is also considered. Teachers encourage students who are relatively more advanced academically to collaborate with all their classmates so as to build strong partnerships and ensure that all learn at the same pace.

Inclusive classrooms

The concept of inclusive classrooms refers to the learning environment where hearing-impaired

students are completely part of the learning process. It means that all children are valued and that they are given the right to learn, to discuss,

to share their ideas, and to play with their peers. The nature of the school learning environment, combined with appropriate and inclusive

extra-curricular activities provided by the school, have led many parents to express their interest in enrolling their children at UDS.

Despite remarkable achievements, some challenges to Inclusive education remain:

- Lack of proper teaching aids in the learning process
- Inability to consistently replace experienced teachers who leave the school to pursue other opportunities
- Lack of standardized books and specific approaches designed for inclusive education in particular.
- Lack of good networking with sister schools to foster synergy and experience sharing
- Lack of partners focusing on this domain of education especially in private schools.

UDS has made a number of recommendations to the Rwanda Education Board on improving inclusive education. Among them: the need to continue to design and develop relevant and contextual teaching materials that meet the needs of the national educational system.

UDS and dropout

Dropout is a serious challenge in our country. Indeed, when children leave school, they eventually end up on the street engaging in unlawful activities that can ruin their future. Despite the frequent discussions among key decision makers and the development of strategies to halt dropout in schools, there are still real challenges regarding the implementation at the local level. A lot remains to be done by school leaders, educators, local government and the community of parents.

CAUSES OF DROPOUT AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDRESSING THEM

Lack of involvement of some parents in their children’s education especially for single parents or illiterate parents who lack proper skills to support their children, particularly those with special needs

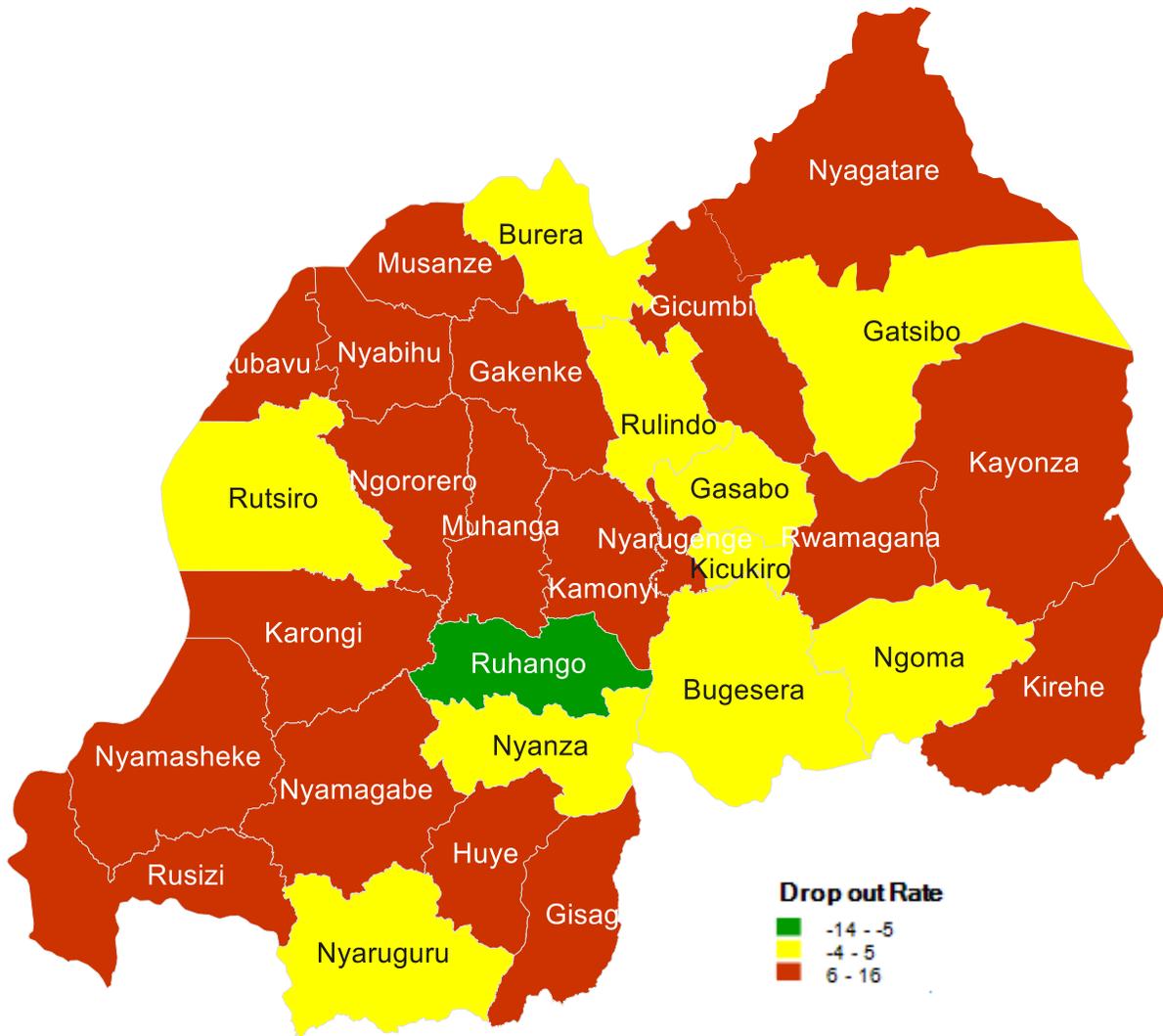
Desperation of some students who perceive the future as holding no hope in light of their current situation. It is therefore important to strongly motivate children and to affirm to them that the future is bright.

Poor School leadership and management:

Some school leaders need to be empowered and trained on how to ensure that parents are more involved in their children education. But also, schools should be child-friendly. And this is the result of effective leadership.

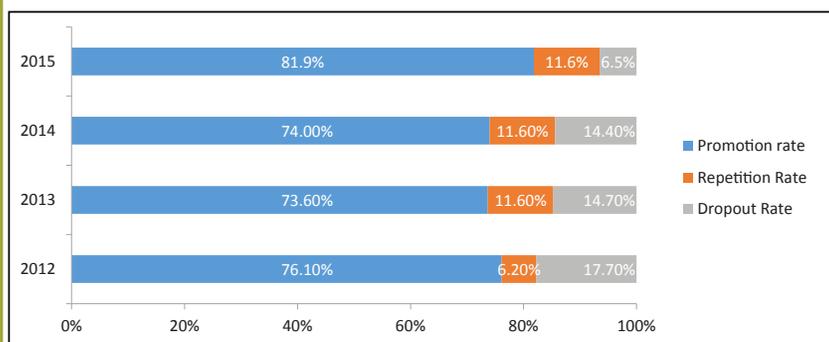
Lack of community engagement: Whenever the community is not present where key school decisions are made, the community engagement decreases considerably. ■

LOWER SECONDARY DROPOUT RATE BY DISTRICT IN 2015



The 2015 lower secondary dropout rate at district level varied from -13.6% to 15.6%, with the average dropout rate at national level being 6.5%. Ngororero district has the highest dropout rate (15.6%), while Ruhango Districts have the lowest dropout Rate (-13.6%. The 2015/2016 ESSP target of 3.1% was not achieved at national level

LOWER SECONDARY PROMOTION, REPETITION AND DROPOUT RATE



This figure shows that the repetition rate is slightly improving towards the achievement the ESSP Targets. The repetition rate was stable at 11.6% in both 2014 and 2015. The 2015/2016 ESSP target is 3.1% and therefore more effort is required to reduce

the repetition rate in lower secondary schools in order to achieve the 2017/2018 ESSP target of 2.6% in 2018. The dropout rate has improved from 14.4% in 2014 to 6.5% in 2015. The 2015/2016 ESSP target of 12.4% was not achieved.

Source: 2015 Education Statistical Yearbook



REB: P.O.Box 3817 Kigali, Rwanda.

VVOB: P.O.Box 3776, Kigali, Rwanda.

E-mail: plnrwanda@gmail.com

