

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
B.P. 622 KIGALI**

**SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION
POLICY**

July 2007

Executive Summary

The Government Education Sector Strategic plan Framework (2006-10) reiterates commitment to basic education of all citizens and highlights acceptance of the responsibility for education for disadvantaged persons. Strategies for achieving education for all have been realised through Universal Primary Education (UPE), aimed at making schooling more affordable in the formal system, and complementary non-formal basic education programmes for those who cannot attend the formal schools due to various barriers.

Much as these strategies are intended to ensure equitable access to quality basic education, Government acknowledges that basic education for children with special needs in education will be achieved only through investment in the various stakeholders at all levels and democratizing education. The basic education policy for children with Special Educational Needs aims at minimizing the barriers to access and to optimal learning. It focuses on the following specific objectives;

- ❖ Ensure the conditions that permit learners with special needs education to enrol in, remain in and complete school;
- ❖ Promote quality education for learners with special educational needs;
- ❖ Mobilise a coalition in support of education for learners with special educational needs;
- ❖ Establish mechanisms for planning and coordination of efforts to improve educational outcomes for learners with Special educational needs;
- ❖ Establish a system of regular monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the implementation of the National Policy for learners with special educational needs;
- ❖ improving quality of delivery by ensuring appropriate infrastructure as well as curriculum content and methodology and provision of appropriate learning materials,

This policy is the outcome of countrywide consultation of stakeholders at various levels and reflects recommendations from various studies of the current education provision.

Effective implementation of this policy certainly requires careful monitoring of both human and material resources. While NGOs and the communities of beneficiaries have made commendable efforts in managing the non-formal complementary educational programmes, the Ministry of education recognises the challenge for establishing institutional framework to coordinate the programmes. It is in this regard, therefore, that this policy defines institutional framework for the implementation of this policy.

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Abbreviations

CBO	Church Based Organisation
CBR	Community-Based Rehabilitation
CFJ	Centre de Formation des Jeunes (Youth training centres)
CERAI	Centre d' Enseignement Rural et Artisanal Intégré (Rural & craft Training centre)
CRC	Convention of the Rights of a Child
CSIE	Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education
DfID	Department for International Development
DPO	Disabled People's Organization
ECVM	Enquête sur les Conditions de Vie des Ménages
EFA	Education For All
ESP	Education Sector Policy
FACHER	Fédération des Associations et des Centres des Handicapés aux Rwanda
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FRW	Rwandan Franc
IE	Inclusive Education
IL	Independent Living
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IQEA	Improving the Quality of Education for All
HIV/AIDS	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus/Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
HRD	Human Resources Development
G.S.	Groupe Scolaire
KIE	Kigali Institute of Education
MDG	Millennium development Goals
MINALOC	Ministry of Local Government
MINEDUC	Ministry of Education
MINISANTE	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NURC	National Unity and Reconciliation Commission
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PTTC	Primary Teacher Training College
PWDs	People With Disabilities
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNISE	Uganda National Institute of Special Education
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education

1.0 Introduction

Rwanda's commitment to the education of learners with special educational needs is well highlighted in the MINEDUC Education Sector Strategic Plan Framework for Basic Education (ESSP) 2006-10¹. It is also consistent with Article 40 of the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda 2003², which provides that "*Every person has the right to education ... The conditions for free primary education in schools will be subsidized by the Government and determined by an organic law ... The State has the duty to take special measures to facilitate the education of the disadvantaged.*" This means that, it is the responsibility of the state to provide education for all its citizens.

Comprehensive support for this category of learners is vital, without it, they are at risk of exclusion from schooling before completion due to both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence their ability to study, and would thus be subjected to social and economic marginalization. In response to both the national commitments evident in the EFA Plan 2003³, as well as the UNESCO guidelines on Inclusive Education of 2005, the Ministry of Education, is committed to respond to the needs of all those who have traditionally been marginalized and disadvantaged in education and training. Also apparent within the MINALOC policy on OVCs of 2003, this policy will particularly emphasize the educational needs of the groups of all learners with special educational needs as outlined in section below in accordance to the prior research recommendations by MINEDUC in 1999, 2000 & 2005⁴.

2.0 Background

Rwanda's commitment to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) has resulted in the implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE). The resultant surge in enrolment rose from 1.154.768 in 1996/7 to 1.534.510 in 2001/2, and these are clear indicators of increased access to primary school education⁵. However, though the repetition rate was reported to be on the decline, the 2006 reports show a significant rate of drop-out and repetition rate in primary schools of about 12% and 15% respectively and a completion rate of only 65%⁶, accounting for the high number of learners with special educational needs. The policy intends to address the national concern of the various barriers and limitation to children in and out of school. These range from factors related to:

- a) **Poverty.** Some parents cannot afford to pay for school uniforms, feeding and scholastic materials for their children.
- b) **Ill health and malnutrition.** Sickly children in families or those who have to care for sickly adults are irregular in school or do not participate actively when they attend.

¹ The Government Education Sector Strategic Plan Framework for basic education 2006-10

² National Constitution of 2003

³ The national Education For All Plan of 2003

⁴ The SNE research reports concluded by Dr Kirten Kristensen for MINEDUC in March 1999, March 2000 & May 2005

⁵ Source: <http://www.mineduc.gov.rw/minenglish.htm>

⁶ Source: Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), 2006 -2010, p. 71-73

- c) ***Cultural Attitudes.*** Disabled children and Girls face specific barriers including stigma, early/forced marriages and unwanted pregnancies which often keep them out of school.
- d) ***Long distance to school.*** Some children live very far from school, which leads to drop out, late arrivals and late entry to formal school.
- e) ***Gender disparity.*** Some parents have a tendency of favoring/according priority to boys; hence, the girls may not have opportunity to education.
- f) ***Corporal Punishment.*** Although corporal punishment was abolished, some teachers still practice it. This scares off the children from attending school.
- g) ***Geographical isolation.*** Some children do not attend school due to harsh weather conditions. As a result of drought, children in areas such as Bugesera, have to go long distances in search of water, pasture and food.
- h) ***War and insecurity.*** Children who are caught in war/insurgency zones get internally displaced and suffer disruption in school attendance.
- i) ***Inadequate/inappropriate provision of infrastructure.*** Some schools lack sanitary facilities for girls or have structures that are unfriendly to the children with disabilities (ramps). This can lead to poor enrolment and dropout.
- j) ***Overage age.*** Overage children are barred from meaningful participation when teased about their age and size and are made to feel out of place.
- k) ***The need to work.*** Some children have to work to supplement the family income. This disrupts their attendance at school especially children from some child-headed households, nomadic families, poor families.
- l) ***Disability.*** Children with disabilities may be isolated because of the distance to school, discriminatory attitudes, and communication barriers for those who are deaf, lack of instructional materials, such as Braille, for children who are blind and inaccessible school infrastructure.

2.1 Definition of the sector

The present Sector Policy relates specifically to learners who are considered to special educational needs such as those with disabilities or with other educational needs. It recognizes that such categories require additional support, or special provisions in order to enable them to access and complete their education successfully. In responding to this category of learners, the sector policy fulfils the national obligation of addressing education as an equal right for every citizen and enabling those who have special educational needs to attain their full potential, it offers an equal opportunity in education in accordance to the National constitution of 2003 (Art. 40) relating to the right to education, and Law N° 01/2007 of 20/01/ 2007 of the Republic of Rwanda (Art. 11-13),

relating to the right of education and special support for those who are disadvantaged. The policy complements the general political nationally and international orientation of building fair and equal society which recognizes the value of every human being, irrespective of background, race, ethnicity, ability and disability; and in turn, the society benefits when more skilled educated workforce are enabled to contribute to the social and economic development of the country.

2.2 The framework of the sector

A framework related effort has been set out by successive Education Sector Policies (1998, 2002), with a broader view of the learners who have special educational needs. For the purpose of this policy, children/learners with special educational needs are all those “who are experiencing barriers (intrinsic and extrinsic) to learning, and are directly or indirectly excluded from or denied the chance to optimally participate in the learning activities which take place in formal or non-formal settings” They are disadvantaged by the social, cultural, regional, political and economic environments in which they live. (Age range discussed is 6-18 years.)

Throughout this policy, learners who require additional support for their education are referred to as children with special educational needs and among these feature the following categories in the Rwandan context.

1. Children with different disabilities
 - a. Children with physical disabilities/motor impairments
 - b. Children with hearing impairments
 - c. Children with visual impairments
 - d. Children with intellectual learning challenges/difficulties/MR
2. All other groups that face difficulties in education
 - a. Those with HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses
 - b. Traumatized children due to genocide, abuse or family conflict
 - c. Social& emotional problems
3. Children with learning achievement disorders
 - a. Gifted and talented children
 - b. Slow learners and underachievers
 - c. Speech and other communication difficulties
4. Gifted and Talented learners

There are other categories but the policy will focus on these four categories. Other remaining groups shall be attended to gradually as resources shall permit government to bring them full on board.

The categories of learners with special educational needs often coincide with descriptions of other vulnerable children. However, while this distinction is useful for communicating the intent of the policy, it is also recognized that a positive correlation exists between psychosocial and/or socioeconomic vulnerability that is often associated with all disadvantaged people.

3.0 International context

Today Rwanda does not have an official Government structure for provision of educational services for learners with special educational needs. However, the Government of Rwanda recognises the need to address the needs of children with special needs education, as both a National obligation and is also a commitment to international frameworks that include among others:

- The Vienna Conference on Human Rights Resolution of 1948
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989
- The Jomtien declaration on Universal Primary Education of 1990
- The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities of 1993
- The Salamanca Statement and its Framework of Action on inclusive Education of 1994
- The World Declaration on Education for All of 2000

The policy on special needs education is an instrument for full implementation of Article 40 of the 2003 constitution of Rwanda, with respects to access to education and provisions for education of all learners regardless of the nature of their needs. It is also in consonance with the national commitment to both the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of a Child.

International Development goals

The Government's EFA plan of Action (GOR 2003) puts into effect, the six goals arising from the World Education Forum (Dakar,2000) but also tries to limit the expansion of HIV Aids ensuring that;

- a) By 2015, all children, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality ;
- b) Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education at all levels of education not later than 2015

4.0 The national context

Barriers to accessing quality education to a number of children in Rwanda, who are considered to have Special Educational Needs is a result of three main factors: 1) the deep impact of the 1994 genocide in the Rwandan society, 2) Persisting high levels of poverty despite improvements in the economy, and 3) The impact of HIV/AIDS and other health-related hazards.

Rwanda is experiencing a second wave of orphans resulting from the consequences of HIV/AIDS as an extension of social dislocation due to the large number of children orphaned by the 1994 genocide. The total number of orphans under the age of 15 is projected to have increased to 1.5 million children by 2005 and by 2010; over half of orphans will result from HIV/AIDS. Some 250,000 adults and 26,000 children are

estimated to be living with HIV. It is also believed that Rwanda has the highest percentage of children under the age of 15 years who are orphans (data 2000). It is estimated that 7,000 children are on streets, 3,475 children live in centres/orphanages, 28,341 live in foster care, 900 are in prison, and 100,000 children live in child-headed households.

With 60% of the Rwandan population living below the poverty line, the capacity of the Rwandan households to absorb and support the larger numbers of vulnerable children is severely constrained. The 1994 genocide and the impact of HIV have resulted in a high dependency burden, with 52% of the population being under the age of 18. In 2002, 36% of Rwandan households already fostered children not belonging to the core family.

Figures concerning the numbers of children who are educationally disadvantaged are not currently available, since no reliable data has been collected, but this is planned for the near future. **However, it is estimated that 10% of all 2,019,991 learners in primary schools have a disability to a lesser or greater extent, which indicates that approximately 175,205 learners have some degree of disability.** In 2006, 1,713 pupils with a recognised disability were known to be cared for in schools or rehabilitation centres, which implies that the majority of children with a disability were either not attending school or their disability was not officially diagnosed.

The strategies outlined in this policy however, have consciously considered this context, and they have been drafted in recognition of the existing challenges, limitations, opportunities and resources for reaching the policy goal.

5.0 Specific policy orientation

The Policy subscribes to the Education Sector guidelines in promoting full inclusion and participation of learners with special educational needs since inception of 1998. The policy is not intended to stand in isolation but should be implemented alongside the Education Sector Policy and the Education Sector Strategic Plan. It also provides critical support to the poverty reduction measures contained in the Rwanda Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy. Meaningful and equitable growth of incomes and improvements in living standards cannot be accomplished unless the traditionally excluded children reach levels of education necessary to fully contribute to the economic development and social cohesion of the country. The National Policy for special needs education is instrumental in the achievement of these goals. Accordingly, it will in particular contribute to achieving the following:

- To educate a free citizen who is liberated from all kinds of discrimination including gender based discriminations, exclusion and favouritism.
- To contribute to the promotion of a culture of peace and to emphasize Rwandan and Universal values of justice, peace, tolerance, respect for human rights, gender equity, solidarity and democracy.
- To dispense a holistic moral, intellectual, social, physical and professional education through the promotion of individual competences and aptitudes in the service of National reconstruction and sustainable development of the country.
- Transform the Rwandan citizen into human capital for development, through acquisition of development skills.

- To eliminate all the causes and obstacles, which can lead to the disparity in education, be it gender, disability, geographical or social groupings.
- To develop in the Rwandan citizen, autonomy of thought, patriotic spirit, a sense of civic pride, love of work well done and global awareness

6.0 overall guidelines

6.1 Vision 2020

The National vision 2020 emphasizes the need to transform the population in order to make Rwandans more productive and economically competitive. It is largely believed that the human resources a country has are vital and central to its development efforts.

6.2 Economic Development and Poverty Reduction

The global goal of the government of the Republic of Rwanda is to reduce poverty and improve the well-being of its population. Within this context, the aim of the education is to combat ignorance and illiteracy and to provide human resources useful for socio-economic development through education for all its citizens. The magnitude to this economic transformation is not possible without sizeable investment into quality education. A distinct focus upon the education of learners with special educational needs (SEN) is imperative in order to achieve this transition.

6.3 National Investment Strategy

Rwanda government considers its people as the main resources and its development depends strongly on its investment in education and training. It is thus emphasized prominently in the National Education Strategies (ESSP, 2006-10) and the Nine Year Education Policy Strategy of April 2006 that by the year 2015, the drop out rate, repetition rate and transition rates to post-primary and Tertiary institutions will have been improved substantially.

The general national vision put in place measures to increase the number of children going through the complete cycle of education, by bridging the gap for those who are educationally disadvantaged. In this way, the government of Rwanda intends to achieve development by empowering with skills and knowledge, every potential contributor to its economy, and this plan naturally includes all those who are educationally disadvantaged.

6.4 Rwanda Government's Seven year Program

The national, like the international vision envisages that by 2015, over 90% of the barriers that contributes to access difficulties in education, especially at primary school levels, will have been substantially reduced. It is considered within the strategy therefore, that all learners with disabilities and other Special educational needs will be included effectively in the mainstream education with fewer barriers.

7.0 Statement of the problem

School enrolment has increased significantly in Rwanda since the 1994 genocide. The Net Enrolment Ratio for primary school has reached more than 90% in many parts of the country, though the Gross Enrolment Ratio at the secondary school levels remains less than 20%. A number of alternative programs have been developed by MINEDUC to support vulnerable children, especially those affected by the genocide and HIV/AIDS, and the NGO sector has been active in this area.

Nevertheless, such initiatives reach only a small minority of children with SEN. The lack of comprehensive support for all children who have special educational needs is a key factor influencing the high rates of school-drop-out. Less than 50% of the children who currently enter school successfully complete the primary level (of 6 years) and only about 20% of those who enter primary school enrol in 'tronc-commun' or lower secondary level, or almost 80% of children who enter primary one are excluded from the education system before they are able to access the lower secondary education level (3 Years)⁷.

The effect of HIV/AIDS on households, especially through death or chronic long term illness of parents, other common congenital illnesses such as malaria, poor health services, poverty and illiteracy, types of household disruptions such as divorce and domestic conflicts have been identified as significant contributing factors to prevalence of special educational needs and poor achievement in schools. Most of the obstacles also manifest themselves as economic barriers to schooling. Even at the primary level where school fees have been eliminated, the direct and opportunity costs of schooling result in a significant number of children staying at home for domestic work or working outside the home for income. For a smaller but still significant number of children, trauma, incarceration of parents, migration, and other causes negatively affect participation in schooling even when the household is not among the poorest.

Learners with special educational needs often encounter additional barriers to inclusion in the neighbourhood schools. The capacity, ability and potential of learners who have special educational needs are generally overlooked and therefore little provision is provided for their inclusion in the schools. While a very small percentage of learners with special educational needs do enrol in regular schools, the vast majority of teachers with formal training lack necessary support in terms of skills and resources. Adults and peers in the school may also exhibit negative attitudes that promote exclusion of learners who have special educational needs from regular schools. In addition, the rugged nature of the Rwandan terrain and the unadjusted school infrastructure renders access to school difficult for learners with even mild challenges.

Technical support to schools and teachers in the area of special needs education is not yet mainstreamed at both the local level of school administration and at national level. Provisions for learners who have special educational needs is not yet provided in the National Curriculum, the National Examination council or the General Inspectorate, for neither special nor inclusive education settings. The existing services for learners who are often excluded (especially learners with disabilities) are predominately provided in private schools, which also lack an adapted nationally coordinated framework.

⁷ The Government Education Sector Strategic Plan Framework for basic education 2006-10

8.0 Constraints

There are a number of constraints in the implementation of a national policy on special needs education.

Barriers to learning and participation in schools in Rwanda arise from; Socio-economic deprivation, negative attitudes to and stereotyping of difference, an inflexible curriculum, inappropriate communication, inaccessible and unsafe environments, inappropriate and inadequate support services, inadequate policies and legislation, the non recognition and non-involvement of parents, and inadequately and inappropriately trained education leaders and teachers. Previously marginalised and disadvantaged children in Rwanda face particular challenges. Overcrowded classrooms, poverty stricken communities and a lack of resources place a strain on teachers that cannot be ignored, and all these factors are also counterproductive to the implementation of inclusive practices.

At the ministry level, only one trained official is in charge of planning and implementation of education of learners with disabilities nationwide. At the local level a single official is responsible for social affairs at the sector level and districts have two officials who oversee education as a whole, and none of these local officials are identified as having received training related to the education of learners with special needs education

Local authorities are increasingly assuming responsibilities and more direct roles in the delivery of local education; in consistence with the national policies on decentralization, but the level of strategic vision varies considerably from one location to another. Local authorities are generally aware that large numbers of educationally disadvantaged learners are absent from schools. However, some isolated efforts have been made in few sectors to systematically identify, quantify or locate these children

8.1 Opportunities

Education for all citizens of Rwanda is a constitutional right, and the government itself to render ‘Basic Education’ available to all its citizens irrespective of their sex, age, religion or disability by:

- Empowering the learners who are educationally disadvantaged to lead independent lives.
- Enabling all learners with special educational needs become productive members of their school, their communities and the Nation at large.
- A rise in enrolment, retention and completion of education cycles for all learners with special educational needs.
- Development of flexible and quality programmes for learners with special educational needs.
- Coordinate and strengthen the existing and future partnership in on-going

strategies for providing education to learners with special educational needs in Rwanda. The policy will provide practical means of putting in place a viable framework for the development and implementation of a genuine and sustainable education system

- Address the inclusion of out-of-school children, who are often excluded due the rigidity of the existing education system, by providing viable complementary Basic Education programmes that are responsive to the needs of all learners

However, implementation is facing the following challenges, which the policy will address.

- i. The need to put/improve the assessment modes to address learner's achievements and abilities
- ii. The need for a curriculum that comprehensively addresses the needs of learners with special needs and disabilities
- iii. The provision of appropriate instructional materials

9.0 Sector policy principles

Basic Education for learners with special educational needs will be attained only by adopting a renewed genuinely expanded vision of education, which trusts and invests in people in their capacities and potential, in the development and synchronisation of resources and in the efforts of society at large to work together to make a education a need and task for all.

The policy also recognises the decentralised nature of administration and governance under the Local Government (2002). It also recognises the role of various stakeholders. The operation of the policy will take into account the already establishment in the Ministry of Education such as structures in complementary basic education programs and Special Needs Education services at the Headquarters and to be expanded at the district levels

10.0 Sector Vision

The vision of the sector is to provide quality education to all learners including those who have special educational needs.

Vision for Education for learners with special educational needs

Successful implementation of this policy will lead to a Rwanda with literate and informed society, with Basic Education opportunities for all citizens, where good governance and human resources development and sustainability are enhanced, promoted and accelerated through a provision of Basic Education.

11.0 Sector Mission

The sector mission is to support, guide, co-ordinate, regulate and promote quality education to all Rwandans for National integration, individual and national development.

12.0 Sector Objectives

The overall objectives Policy are:

- To define the learners who are direct beneficiaries of this Policy, their needs and relevant interventions and their own involvement and participation in social, educational, economic, cultural and political aspects.
- To ensure that all categories of learners with special educational needs access meaningful educational services.
- To harmonise and perfect the education of learners with special educational needs service delivery systems.
- To mobilise and effectively utilise resources which will support all learners with special educational needs
- Promote educational empowerment to learners with special needs
- Initiate, strengthen and streamline all Basic Education programmes and services targeting learners with special educational needs

13.0 Special Objectives and Strategies

The goal of the National Policy for Learners with special educational needs is to promote quality education for all children in Rwanda through the eradication of barriers that result in inequity in education. The specific objectives and strategies have been developed in consultation with a wide array of stakeholders. They represent a consensus view of measures that are consistent with the present situation of the country and current Government of Rwanda development efforts and policies.

Barriers that exclude children from entering school, remaining in school and having success in school are a violation of a child's right to education. The inequalities that result pose a serious threat to the development of a prosperous and cohesive Rwanda. Through the implementation of the policy for learners with special educational needs, the Government of Rwanda demonstrates its commitment to the rights of children, social equality, and the reduction of poverty

13.1 Specific Objective 1: Ensure the conditions that permit educationally disadvantaged learners to enrol in, remain in and complete school.

Many learners with special educational needs perform poorly in school and abandon school early because the conditions necessary for their success are absent in schools and communities. For large numbers of children the lack of material support is a major obstacle to inclusion. While school fees have been eliminated for primary the direct costs of essential items like uniforms, materials and books force children out of school. For the most vulnerable children the high opportunity costs of attending school rather than working in the home or earning

needed income outside the home result in early abandonment of schooling.

Children with disadvantages associated with physical disabilities or impaired vision often experience the additional barrier of difficult physical access to the school building and grounds. Even when physical access is adequate children with some kinds of disabilities may not be able to benefit from the school program without additional support that enables them to fully participate and engage in school and classroom activities.

Children who are not from the very poorest households and do not have a disability may also find that the school does not provide the necessary support for full inclusion and participation. Children suffering from trauma due to conditions like chronically ill or dying parents, family dislocation, divorce, migration, or violence against the children themselves may find attending school difficult or impossible without specific support to make school attendance possible.

Strategy 1: Reduce the distance to school and ensure full physical access to school facilities for all children with disabilities.

Travelling long distances to school creates obstacles to regular attendance for children who must have time for working in the household or working for income. Long distances are especially difficult for children with physical disabilities that limit their mobility. School infrastructure that is inaccessible can also be a barrier to inclusion for some children with disabilities.

Schools that are welcoming to learners with special educational needs must be able to provide an appropriate classroom environment. This often requires that some children be taught in classes with smaller numbers of learners (especially for learners with disabilities). Schools that are inclusive for learners who have special educational needs must have sufficient numbers of classrooms to permit some children to study in smaller classes.

Children with severe learning difficulties face the most significant barriers to accessing an appropriate and quality education. Only a few centres accommodate children with severe and profound learning difficulties, meaning that they must travel long distances, board at the centre or remain at home where they receive no education.

To reduce distances to school and ensure an accessible environment the number of schools will be increased and additional classrooms will be provided in existing schools. Both new and existing schools will be made accessible for children with physical disabilities and visual impairment.

Children with severe disabilities must also have access to education. Through various means the education sector will provide access to an appropriate and quality education for children with severe and profound disabilities in every province.

Strategy 2: Provide a minimum package of material support to learners with special educational needs that make possible attendance and retention in school or alternative educational program.

Many aspects of vulnerability manifest themselves as poverty. Whether vulnerability results from the death of a parent, giving birth at an early age or from some other cause, the first effect is often a significant deterioration of economic status. When schooling competes with immediate physical survival participation in school often suffers.

Some children may enter school but still encounter barriers that do not allow them to fully participate in the school program. Some learners who have special educational needs may have conditions like visual or hearing impairments that prohibit them from genuine participation in school unless they have appropriate compensatory aids.

The education sector will establish a scheme to provide material support to children with special educational needs for maximizing their inclusion in the education system in formal or alternative programs. The Ministry of Education will identify the parameters of a basic minimum package of material assistance and establish criteria for the determination of eligibility for support.

While the Ministry of Education will determine the kinds of support that may be provided in a minimum package, the elaboration of the specific packages most likely to help children in a community improve their participation in school will be determined by local authorities.

Strategy 3: Ensure that formal education institutions and alternative education programs provide effective psychosocial support for children.

For some children material needs may not be the only or the most important barrier to full inclusion in school. These children include children suffering from trauma or other difficulties that hinder their participation in school and inclusion in the community.

The education sector will establish capacity for addressing the psychosocial needs of children in all educational institutions. Specific attention to psychosocial support will be included in pre-service training programs for primary and secondary teachers. In addition an in-service program will be initiated that provides some skills and orientation to all educators at all levels of the system. Special training programs that prepare educators for work in alternative programs will also include specific training in psychosocial support.

The education sector will provide additional advanced training so that each primary and secondary school has at least one male and one female teacher with additional skills in support and counselling. Selected educators at the tertiary level and in vocational centres and alternative programs will also receive the additional advanced training in psychosocial support and counselling.

Strategy 4: Provide flexible and accessible alternative opportunities for learners with special educational needs

The long term goal of MINEDUC remains the promotion of full enrolment and completion of formal schooling and the elimination of child labour. However, it is recognized that for some time schooling will conflict with the need to work for some vulnerable children. Other children may already have assumed caretaking roles for siblings, chronically ill parents or for their own children. The education system must recognize and accommodate the needs of these children by providing an alternative opportunity for education that can be combined with other obligations.

The education sector also strives for maximum inclusion for learners who have special educational needs in inclusive formal schools. Unfortunately there are a small number of learners who have special educational needs who cannot benefit from an inclusive school. For these children the education sector will provide an accessible alternative program in their best interest.

The education sector will provide for the expansion of quality alternatives by offering opportunities for flexible provision of the formal school program like evening primary schools, secondary schools through distance education or formal school programs offered in alternative settings like work places among other possibilities. The sector will also develop alternative programs for learners who cannot attend any formal school and deploy those programs where they are readily accessible to the learners who need them.

Strategy 5: Increase the opportunities for vocational training for learners who have special educational needs

Many children who leave school early express a desire for vocational training but current opportunities are limited and fees act as an additional barrier. Consistent with other existing initiatives, the number of vocational training centres will increase. Support for fees for vocational training as part of the basic minimum package of support for learners who have special educational needs will permit more vulnerable children to access the formal vocational centres.

The curriculum for formal vocational courses will be adapted and modified to facilitate greater inclusion for learners with special educational learners. In addition, the vocational centres will develop additional formal programs, which provide a variety of vocational options and where access for the disabled is possible.

The education sector will use the existing vocational centres as a means for developing alternative short duration programs and deploying them away from the existing centres in areas where local officials can identify high demand for particular skills and trades with good potential for improving incomes through the training.

Strategy 6: Provide preferential access to all levels of education to learners who have special educational needs

Global experience suggests that providing expanded opportunities and increased support for learners with special educational needs is necessary but not sufficient for eradicating barriers to schooling. Even when opportunities are increased and support is provided, many years of accepted practice, attitudes and beliefs must be overcome.

The Ministry of Education will assist educational institutions in developing plans appropriate for each type of institution to provide some degree of positive discrimination in favour of learners with special educational needs. The institutions will report annually on their progress with respect to these plans and the impact on the number of learners with special educational needs who regularly attend the institution.

These mechanisms of preferential access do not replace the other initiatives that provide support to learners with special educational needs. The children who enter institutions through these preferential mechanisms will still receive a basic minimum package of support. These mechanisms will remain in place until it is determined that preferential access is no longer needed to ensure full inclusion.

13.2 Specific Objective 2: Promote quality education for learners with special educational needs

Strategy 7: Train, deploy and support teachers and technical staff in special needs education.

Teachers are a critical factor in the provision of quality education. The skills or methods a teacher has mastered influences the quality of education provided. Some groups of learners with special educational needs may require specific teaching/learning modes which ordinarily trained teachers may not possess.

To ensure provision of inclusive education across the country all educators and inspectors in the system will receive an orientation to the education of learners with special educational needs through either pre-service or in-service training. A cadre of Rwandan specialists will be created by instituting a specialization in the education of learners with special educational needs in a tertiary level institution. In addition to producing tertiary level graduates in specialisation this institution will also provide short term training for other relevant stakeholders in the areas of: classroom practice, assessment, supervision, curriculum and educational materials development.

Teachers who work with learners in classroom settings will receive additional support from more thoroughly trained specialists. Clusters of schools will be supported by teachers with specialized training working as itinerant specialists. Technical support to teachers in schools will also be strengthened through the

addition of a special needs education expert at the district level to coordinate assistance to classroom teachers and to provide ongoing training and support to other entities that serve children with disabilities like health workers and social workers. The district level specialist will also be trained in initial assessment and be responsible for the assessment and placement of children with special educational needs.

At the central level additional experts specializing in particular disabilities will be added to the Special Education Department in the Ministry of Education. These central level experts will provide support to the relevant units within the Ministry of Education including those entities involved in adapting curriculum and examination methods. The central level experts will also liaise with other ministries to ensure the holistic needs of children with disabilities are met, for example the Ministry of Health who is responsible for providing mobility aids.

Learners with special educational needs often require greater attention and support from teachers. Qualified teachers will be deployed so that schools can provide the appropriate student teacher ratios for the various kinds of special educational needs. For children with severe and profound disabilities the Ministry of Education will adopt international norms for student–teacher ratios. For inclusive schools the Ministry of Education will develop guidelines on student teacher ratios for classes that contain children with special educational needs.

Given the critical need for developing capacity in the area of special needs education, the Ministry of Education will organize periodic national level meetings of experts and practitioners. These meetings will bring together teachers and specialists for the purpose of sharing effective practices. The meetings will also incorporate experts from outside of Rwanda in order to accelerate the development of effective practice in the country.

Strategy 8: Modify or adapt curriculum, methodologies and materials for learners with special needs education

For children in inclusive environments a teacher’s guide for adapting teaching methods will permit a trained educator to provide access to the regular formal school curriculum. For the severely and profoundly handicapped each learner must have an individual learning plan designed to maximize their independence. For children with severe and profound disabilities the Ministry of Education will develop program standards for application to public and private institutions as well as a set of norms and standards for the elaboration of the individual learning plan for each child who cannot be incorporated into an inclusive school.

Pupils with special learning needs require relevant teaching and learning materials to enhance their education. These materials will be developed or procured in conjunction with modifications and adaptations to the curriculum.

13.3 Specific Objective 3: Mobilize a coalition in support of education for learners with special educational needs

Strategy 9: Implement a permanent campaign of sensitization on the importance of education for learners with special educational needs.

Despite the widely acknowledge plight of learners with special educational needs, very few children receive needed support. The campaign will sensitize communities to the benefits of full inclusion of learners with special educational needs into the education system and community. The campaign will focus on strategies for providing needed support to this group of children

Sensitization is particularly important with respect to children with special educational needs. In some cases even the parents of these children do not recognize their potentials to learn and to integrate into the community.

This campaign must reach all sectors of Rwanda: decision makers at all levels, parents, teachers, local communities, learners with special educational needs themselves and their peers.

The education sector and local authorities have limited ability to interact directly with children and households. Local committees will support the efforts to include vulnerable children by assuming the critical roles of identifying and locating children, determining their needs, making links to special services and monitoring progress.

Strategy 10: Develop and nurture partnerships between government, communities, NGOs and the private sector for supporting the inclusion of learners with special needs education in the education system.

Government efforts by themselves cannot meet the needs of all learners with special educational needs. A concerted effort must be made to link all possible resources and to use them efficiently to reach all the affected children. The education sector will make a systematic attempt to develop effective partnerships that avoid duplication of efforts and competition among partners, yet will maximize the impact of the available resources. This effort will include a comprehensive cataloguing of resources and services available at the sector and district level, an analysis of potential partners and the formalization of joint service agreements between different government entities and the NGO partners providing services in a particular area.

13.4 Specific Objective 4: Establish mechanisms for planning and coordination of efforts to improve educational outcomes for learners with special educational needs

Strategy 11: Establish national and district level multi sectoral advisory committees.

The multisectoral committees will mainstream issues of disability and other vulnerable groups by advising national and district decision makers and ensuring holistic coordinated responses for children with special educational needs. The committees will report to stakeholders and serve as a coordination forum for NGO partners.

Strategy 12: Develop and annually review a District Strategic Plan for learners with special educational needs

An annual Strategic Plans for learners with special educational needs will be developed in each District. These plans will provide a clear vision of how the barriers to education will be addressed for the various kinds of learners with special educational needs in the District. The strategic plan also includes formal agreements with partners for provision of services and annual targets and indicators. The plans are reviewed each year by MINEDUC and the multi sectoral advisory committees.

An important support for the development of effective district plans is capacity building in planning and delivery of services for learners with special educational needs at all levels of the system. The capacity of local government and District Advisory Committees to develop a strategic vision, to coordinate efforts and to measure and analyze results will be strengthened by MINEDUC. Districts will provide the necessary technical support and capacity development to local committees to facilitate their participation in monitoring the status of children.

Developing strategies and assessing the effectiveness of actions requires systematic and comprehensive information about the status of children in the District. Each District strategic plan will incorporate a periodic survey or mapping of learners with special educational needs as part of the planning and review process. The database developed through the survey and mapping process will be dynamic and updated on an ongoing basis.

13.5 Specific Objective 5: Establish a system for regular monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the implementation of The National Policy for learners with special educational needs (educational outcomes for learners)

13.6 Specific objective 6: Attention to Gifted and talented learners

Definition:

Gifted: Refers to the a child who has broad range of achievement at a level well above average, typically in more academic subjects.

Talented: refers to a child who excels in one or more specific fields, typically performance skills like music, sport but does not necessarily perform at a high level across all areas of learning.

Basically, Gifted and talented learners are those that well exceed the expectations for their age group, either in all subjects or just one. The gifted and talented group are a diverse group and their range of attainment will be varied, some do well in statutory national curriculum tests or national qualifications. However, being gifted and talented covers much more the ability to succeed in tests and examination.

Gifted and talented learners can be grouped into 3 groups:

- i. Identified gifted learners who have subtle learning disabilities
- ii. Unidentified learners whose gifts and disabilities may be masked by average achievements
- iii. Identified learning disabled learners who are also gifted

The earliest identification of gifted and talented children takes place by simple observation of the child's behaviour by an educational professional, or a parent. Identification by characteristic traits is generally accurate, and is less intrusive or conspicuous than other methods. It also readily allows types of giftedness to be detected, and is often valuably used with young children.

The special needs education Policy will be evaluated on a continuing basis. Progress reports on the impact of the policy will be included in regular Ministry of Education reporting. The evaluation will provide a periodic overview of the impact of the policy as well as a formative evaluation for ongoing refinement of the policy strategies.

Strategy 13: Define outcome measures and develop tools for evaluating the impact of the policy on the educational outcomes for learners.

The Ministry of Education along with the National Advisory Committee will elaborate a set of measures for assessing the impact of the policy on educational outcomes for learners with special educational needs. The Ministry and the Advisory Committee will also develop a set of measurement tools and protocols for the monitoring and evaluation strategy. The Ministry and the Advisory Committee will provide training to Districts for implementation of the monitoring and evaluation strategy. Results of the evaluation will be incorporated into each District's annual review of the strategic plan.

Strategy 14: Develop terms of reference for an external evaluation of the special needs education policy

An external evaluation will be performed in the second or third year of policy implementation. The external evaluation will incorporate local and international evaluators and provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the policy and recommendations for refinements in the policy strategies. The external evaluation will also present an opportunity to incorporate new approaches from other countries and to raise the profile of the policy

Strategy 15: Sensitize and train teachers and parents to gain skills or frame to identify gifted and talented children at an early age.

Strategy 16: Classroom teachers can be better educated about tests of identification and their proper use

Strategy 17: Establish an educational assessment centre

Strategy 18: Create options for accelerated learning for learners with gifts and talents

Strategy 19: Have provision and structures to manage the transition of learners with gifts and talents.

Strategy 20: Have a differentiated curriculum

Management Strategies for gifted and talented learners

- a. Monitor planning to ensure that suitable tasks and activities are being undertaken across all curriculum areas by the higher achievers
- b. Regularly review the teaching arrangements for these particular children
- c. Support staff in the identification of gifted and talented children
- d. Monitor their progress through termly discussion
- e. Provide advice and support to staff on teaching and learning strategies
- f. Liaise with parents and education officers on related issues.

Programs of the sector

- a) Affirmative action for children with special educational need
- b) Institutional Framework for policy Implementation
- c) Ensure conditions that permit children with special educational needs to enrol and persist in school
- d) Train and deploy teachers and technical support staff in special needs education
- e) Modify and adapt the curriculum for children with special needs education
- f) Well designed sensitization programmes to parents, teachers, press, and the community on the education of children with special educational needs

Institutional Framework for policy Implementation

Government line ministries, local government and the NGO/CBO sectors all have important duties in guaranteeing the right to education. The National policy for learners with special educational needs complements the actions of other stakeholders and describes how the education sector will discharge its duties in guaranteeing the full participation of all learners in the education system.

The policy is also a means for realising particular National objectives identified in the Education Sector Strategic Plan. The Education Sector Strategic plan specifies the required investments in the sector for addressing these priorities and makes projections of financial requirements. The education of learners with special educational needs complements the Education Sector Strategic plan by defining the specific strategies within that plan necessary for full inclusion of these groups of vulnerable children.

The uniqueness of the management function in these programmes is that it is largely in the hands of NGOs and communities. Much as these have done exceptionally well, an institutional framework should be established to guide the provision of Special Needs Education

The National policy for special needs education recognises the distinct roles of different actors in an environment of decentralised governance. **MINEDUC** assumes the role of providing overall policy direction, allocation of necessary financial and human resources, quality assurance, capacity development, monitoring and evaluation of results and Administrative support. It shall have the power to delegate responsibilities, and roles of supporting organisations or institutions that have the responsibility of delivering Special Needs Education. The Ministry of Education shall promote provision of quality Basic Education through:

- i. Systematic training of teachers/instructors/Supervisors
 - ii. SMART partnership with stakeholders
 - iii. Harmonising/streamlining activities of Basic Education with emphasis on inclusiveness.
- **Districts and local authorities'** responsibilities include prioritising among the policy strategies, to increase the number of children with Special Educational Needs in schools and ensure that they are fully included in the education system
 - Advise the Ministry of Education on the implementation of the Basic Education programmes
 - Provide data of children with Special Needs Education
 - Receive and analyze reports about Basic Education from districts
 - Provide support, supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the complementary Basic Education programmes
 - Carry out identification, documentation of actual numbers, location and situations of disadvantaged children.
 - Support and participate in mobilisation for Basic Education

Parents and community

- Ensure that all children receive Basic Education
- Be sensitized on the value of Basic Education
- Provide basic requirements for all children to receive Basic Education
- Parents with deaf children to offer rudimentary sign language

Rwanda National curriculum Development centre

- Review and harmonise the syllabi for Basic Education from time to time in consultation with stakeholders to ensure its flexibility.

National Examination Board

- Ensure that standardised examinations are set and managed to identify the strengths and weakness of the learners under complementary programmes

General Inspection

- Monitor and supervise to see that both the special schools/centres and ordinary schools fulfil the requirements of all schools
- Monitor special schools to ensure that children get equality education.

KIE and other training institutions

- Organise training/certification equivalences for instructors, teachers, in complementary Basic Education programmes
- Review curriculum of TTCs to include components for SNE/IE and complementary Basic Education approaches

To train/retrain teachers, tutors and centres co-ordinating tutors on the methodologies and the necessary skills for managing Basic Education provisions.

NGOs

- Partners jointly with government can be involved in the establishment of complementary centres
- Be involved in community mobilization and needs assessment
- Provide Assistive devices
- Participate in the development of teaching and learning materials
- Directly finance activities of complementary programs
- Share some of their best experiences and lessons about complementary Basic Education programs with government wider dissemination.

Ministry of Health

- Offer health services to all children to eradicate diseases that cause handicaps in children
- Offer verification certificates to see that children have been immunised.
- Provide assistive devices

Ministry of Gender

- Liaise with the Ministry of Education to monitor the implementation of mechanisms to engage communities in identifying children with special educational needs and addressing some of the legal issues relating to the circumstances of the children who are disadvantaged in education.

Ministry of Infrastructure

- This Ministry will ensure adequate and accessible buildings in public places. It will work closely with the Ministry of Local Government, Good Governance, community Development and Social Affairs.

Ministry of Public, Service, Skills Development, Vocational Training/Labour

- This Ministry will ensure that the appropriate policies, codes of conduct and programs are in place to combat all forms of discrimination against learners with special educational needs and other disadvantaged groups

15.0 Conclusion

Traditionally, disabled children and those with other special educational needs have experienced exclusion, discrimination and segregation from mainstream education and their peers. Some are placed in separate classes or schools. Many are still denied access to education of any sort. The policy will help contribute to the National Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS), by availing education to all Rwandans that had traditionally been excluded from the mainstream education.

The establishment and implementation of the policy of educationally disadvantaged learners is a key ingredient of Universal Primary Education because it recognises the serious challenges faced by the vast majority of children. The implementation will also help the Ministry of Education in achieving the goals established by the ESSP, 2006-2010, it will also guide all the stakeholders and partners in contributing towards the National plan for Education for All. Therefore, all stakeholders and partners in education of Rwanda are urged to support all activities related to special needs education/inclusive education.