

Towards Inclusive Education in Rwanda ***An assessment of the socio-political contributors to Inclusive Education developments***

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Abstract

The impetus of the Rwandan government in developing free and accessible 9 years of basic education for all children since 2007 has notably been remarkable. The commonwealth education award-winning policy seems to have drawn along the enthusiasm of the entire Rwandan community, in making schooling more accessible to even the most disadvantaged. The present paper is concerned that despite the innovative and pro-vulnerable policy initiatives, the support to learners with disabilities and other Special Educational Needs (SEN) remains comparatively low, leading to a persistently diminished proportion of learners with SEN accessing basic education. However, in few communities, agency-led inclusive education projects have seen notable school transformations towards improved accommodation of learners with diverse SEN even where resources and awareness is modest. Yet, in even many more communities, agency-led projects have perpetuated the tradition of leaving the children unschooled and/or dependent on charity and local perceptions on disability, often resulting in exclusion from skills development and social participation. The paper reflects on ways of achieving sustained education for all children with (SEN) vis-à-vis the prevailing socio-political dynamics. It explores the local community resources, as the source of local synergies and home-grown initiatives that could benefit both ordinary and disadvantaged learners in their neighborhood schools.

Key Words: *Inclusive Education, Local community inputs, development agencies, socio-political dynamics.*

Introduction

Like many practitioners within the Rwandan education, the author is inclined to reflect on the Rwandan Minister of State for Primary and Secondary Education's view on Special Needs Education when he addressed the National Parliament special session of 31st – May, 2012. He affirmed that '*Special Needs Education (SNE) in Rwanda aims at providing quality education not only to learners with sensory, mental and physical disabilities, but to all those who may, for any reasons, have temporary or permanent needs for adjusted education*'. He went on to add that '*Inclusive Education is the process of addressing all learners' needs in mainstream school*'.

Clearly, the Minister's perception of the two concepts appears to denote more of the growing Rwandan government policy preoccupations in its attempt to meet the required education standards, in which participation of all Rwandans children and youths, irrespective of the many socio-economic or functional setbacks (Republic of Rwanda, 2010). It is noted for example that the government of Rwanda has ratified a number of national and international policy documents, including the National Constitution of 2003 that provides for the education all children (Art. 40) and participation of Rwandan people with disabilities (Art. 76); the law N° 01/2007 of 20/01/2007 whose articles 11, 12 and 13 indicate the role of the government in catering for children and youths with disabilities' education; the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its protocol signed on 15th 12-2008, and a number of others that express the country's pledge to support its marginalized groups. It is indeed apparent that these and related policy commitments dominate education political leaders' views and public speeches, which do not necessarily have to reflect the reality in Rwandan communities and schools.

The overarching concern of the present article therefore, is the glaring gap between the policy commitments and the concrete practice of support to inclusive education that cater for a large group of learners who are unschooled because of their disabilities, or the persistent difference between the political rhetoric about equal opportunities for all children and youths, and the reality in schools and communities where basic education provisions and services continue to fall short of what is actually expected. The Minister's statement for example (above), seems to express more of the political visions and the expected national standards than the practical educational adjustments in place, and geared towards enabling all Rwandan learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) to access the same education services as their ordinary peers and siblings of the same neighborhood and homestead.

It is in view of this controversy thus, that the article brings out the place of inclusive education practice in Rwanda, while questioning the extent to which the envisioned policies and standards could work for all learners with SEN amidst the many national priorities, which are often mediated by many socio-political dynamics. It probes among others, the synergy of all actors in the Rwandan education that seems to steer the course of inclusive education developments for the last five years. The study relies particularly on the seven year field experiences and reports of the Task Force for the Development of Inclusive Education in Rwanda (TFDIER), to reveal the analytical assessment of the collaboration and contribution of varying partners in educating children with varying disabilities and/or related SEN. It analyses the partnership of the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and Civil Society agencies (UNICEF, ADRA-Rwanda, Handicap International and others), a purportedly progressive synergy aimed at counteracting the many socio-cultural and functional challenges at both community and school levels, to generate effective support that would foster developments of inclusive education that would cater for all the educationally vulnerable Rwandan children and youths.

Progress towards Inclusive Education in Rwanda

In its issue 2, the Rwandan Journal of Education also published an extensive discussion of the background and development of Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Rwanda (Karangwa, Iyamuremye & Muhindakazi, 2013), maintaining that inclusion and full participation of all Rwandans, especially those with disabilities and other Special Educational Needs (SEN), is increasingly dominating education policy features (Republic of Rwanda,

2006) in comparison to the previous two decades (See Fig. 1), and points out that actual translation of the policies into functional inclusive education activities amidst many other priorities on the country's development agenda, still appears to be a challenging development feature. The article equally recognizes the persistence of

Figure 1: Development of Special Needs & Inclusive Education in Rwanda

1960 – 1990 Post-Colonial periods	1990 - 2000 Genocide & reconciliation periods	2000-2014 Post-genocide socio-econom Reconstruction periods
<p>Special Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Generalized ignorance about disability •Beginning of charitable organizations' support to Rehabilitation & Basic Education •Hardly any Government support 	<p>Special & Integrated Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Pockets of awareness on Education of Children and youths with Disabilities. •Persistent Charitable organizations support, and reinforced International Agencies' involvement. •Beginning of Government support 	<p>Special, Integrated & Inclusive Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Improved awareness about Rights of People with Disabilities •Increasing support by both International agencies & Rwandan Government

charitable organizations' services; the ever-growing civil societies' participation since 1990s; and the emergence of Government support (Fig. 1).

As indicated in Fig. 1, it is approximately 50 years since the first missionary introduced Rwandan children with disabilities to education and related services, and today, about three steps explaining the developments to the current stage of education, are distinctly traceable. One of the eminently historical reality is the fact that persistent marginalization of learners with SEN especially the disabled, is also owed to the colonial governments (German and Belgian 1894 – 1962) and even the post-colonial policies, both of which hardly accorded any consideration to the education of learners with disabilities and other SEN. Up to 2000, only five small centers were known to cater for basic education and rehabilitation of learners with disabilities in Rwanda, and run under charity services of missionaries. Home de la Vierge des Pauvres, (HVP) was reportedly one of the oldest, founded in 1960 (Karangwa et al, 2013: 20), and received the first government support in 2010 in form of support to the teachers' salaries and educational resources.

Today, over 53 special centers/schools for education and rehabilitation of children with disabilities are known to have developed around the country in the last five years only, especially through private initiatives; over 105 Nine Year Basic Education (9YBE) schools have developed Child-Friendly and Inclusive Education (IE) approaches in order to accommodate learners with SEN of their respective neighborhoods since 2007; and an average of 10 to 15 students with severe sensory (Visual & Hearing) disabilities, and at least 1 -2 wheel chair users graduate in Rwandan Universities each academic year since 2011, though government-fostered affirmative action. Basing on its wider experiences, this trend of events is actually cautioned by Save the Children's reports (2013) on Learning and Equity in post-2015 education, affirming with international evidences that:

"...the last decade has seen enormous progress with Million more children in school' ... 'there are over 130 Million children in school who are not learning the basics ... as well as the wider trends shaping the context and nature of education challenges, the situation within school systems themselves has changed rapidly and will change farther post-2015" (p. 5).

The same developments within the Rwandan context was equally understood through successive TFDIER Reports since 2008, which indicated that despite the obvious increase of learners with disabilities and other Special Educational Needs (SEN) in schools, the required educational adjustments of the learning and teaching environments are still far from being adequately inclusive or accommodative of the various educational needs. Many learners with various SEN are in dire needs of accessing school curriculums in the same way as their age-mates and peers; and educators and community members continue to demonstrate their legitimate demands for improved capacities to respond to the children's educational needs, and the school infrastructures and learning/teaching resources remain traditional, and therefore inappropriate for Inclusive education. Besides, the reports points out that by and large, the emerging Inclusive Education projects in Rwandan schools today are actually dominated by NGOs (notably HI and ADRA under the support of EU, UNICEF and DfID among others) as explained in the next section.

Collaboration for Inclusive Education development

The discourse on the growing participation of both local and international agencies in the Rwandan Special Needs Education developments raised above was brought to the author's attention when he was appointed to lead the Task Force for the Development of Inclusive Education in Rwanda (TFDIER) in 2007. His observations of the roles and potentials of NGOs in supporting the developments of Education in Rwanda like in similar socio-political contexts, also proximate Ainsow, Dyson & Weiner's (2013) view on school improvements towards Inclusive Education:

"... Inclusion is essentially about attempts to embody particular values in particular contexts. Unlike mechanic views of school improvements, they acknowledge that decisions about how to improve schools always involve moral and political reasoning, as well as technical considerations. ... Discussions of Inclusion and Exclusion can help, therefore, to make explicit the values which underlies what, how and why changes should be made in schools. Inclusive cultures, underpinned by particular organizational conditions, may make those discussions more likely to occur and more productive...." (p. 20).

The TFDIER was commissioned by the Minister of Education in a consultative meeting of 24th May, 2007, and was accorded two key missions: **1.** Spearhead inclusion of students with disabilities in Higher Learning Institutions (HLI), **2.** Provide counsel to the education sector on the special Needs Education (SNE) and Inclusive Education (IE) developments. As Ainsow et al (2013) suggest above, gaining the collaboration and support of all education stakeholders in public and civil society on how and which procedure in order to achieve its goals was inevitable. However, though the initiative lead to the integration of about 87 students with profound functional difficulties in seven Rwandan Institutions of Higher learning (Five public and two Private) in the next five years, it was clear to the TFDIER that the collaboration between public and civil society is not necessarily always smooth and productive. In fact, only HI Rwanda was able to consistently collaborate with the TFDIER, through which, some achievements and positive changes in some communities were reported.

Among the realizations that were made evident to the Ministry of Education featured some of the pathways and setbacks to innovative development of sustainable inclusive education developments through collaboration in Rwanda. It was such TFDIER reports for example, that prompted the Minister of Education's correspondence of 07/10/2009 forwarded to all partners in education, reiterating the collaboration between local leaderships, Handicap International and public education organs in promoting inclusive education in Rwanda. It particularly drew their attention to the inclusive education programs in five Rwandan districts, where inclusive education perspectives were progressively becoming integrated within the social services, domesticated by the respective school communities and local leaderships in close collaboration with both the local and the international NGOs.

The successive TFDIER field reports since 2007 therefore, portrayed the developments of inclusion in key aspects and levels of the Rwandan education sector, ranging from community participation; educational resource provision in schools; teachers' developments, needs and initiatives; rehabilitation services; etc. Inclusive education was notably progressive in districts and school communities where both civil societies and local leadership were actively promoting joint dialogues focused on locally-lead solutions to exclusion of learners

with SEN in the local schools. The baseline study carried out by the author in June 2013 for example, indicated that the district of Kamonyi where the local leadership had been working closely with HI Inclusive education projects since 2010, indicated a higher number and variety of learners with SEN supported in schools than Rubavu district where they were not. It was particularly learnt through the widely ranging TFDIER field reports that, engagement into collaboration with all stakeholders and local education actors is more successful and productive when the collaboration is supportive of all levels of the education sector, ranging from school and community levels to the planning organs of the Ministry of Education. In other words, by purposively supporting both planning and delivery of all education activities, through a deliberately designed collaboration, sustainable inclusive education development is likely to be achievable.

Collaboration with international agencies for Inclusive Education development

A range of studies (Karangwa; Ghesquière, & Devlieger, 2007; Lancaster, 1999; Petras & Veltmeyer, 2004; Stiglitz, 2002) underscored the challenges and contradictions that could emerge through bringing together development agencies' services and public services in developing countries. They jointly revealed that these do not necessarily form a symbiotic teamwork, and/or a common mission of positively changing lives of disadvantaged groups as it is often believed. Rather, mismatch of program missions with target groups often results into perpetuation of ailed projects, especially when the local context is inadequate understood and/or implicated. In his work *'Aides to Africa'* for example, Lancaster (1999: 103) points out the challenges raised and faced by both international development agencies and benefiting countries, related to the persistent policies of *'earmarking'* and *'Locking'* support. He argued that *'when you go on to administer the program at country level, you find yourself all locked up with scores of restrictions and earmarks as to how the money will be spent... you do not have the kind of flexibility you need...'*

This trend of events seem to subsist within the international politics and continue to cast a shadow on collaboration initiatives of even the well-intentioned international NGOs' programs, which are often accused of presenting pro-people objectives but misguide services for the needy people (Mittler, 1993: 10). As they keep transplanting unsustainable project models from one social context to another or copying and pasting project proposals (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2004), They are reproached of inadequacy in local knowledge and experiences and therefore, often perceived as grassroots reactionaries in the service of imperialistic global funding agencies such as IMF and the World Bank (Jones and Vertemeyer, 2002: 128).

True or false allegations about international agencies however, the present paper is also aware of successful internationally-supported projects where, amid challenging deprivations and socio-economic disadvantages (Stabs, 2002; EENET, 2003; Vaneste, 1997; Kisanji, 1993), some international NGOs have demonstrated symbiotic collaboration with public institutions and local communities to initiate and sustain inclusion of children in contexts similar to those in Rwanda. In all cases, the TFDIER has observed two key things about successful Rwanda-based collaborations: **1.** a commonly shared and indigenously-led strategic stand of all partners, **2.** deliberately open and mutually-supportive collaboration involving civil society agencies; public services and the local community actors and leaderships. Indeed, where similar projects have failed

disastrously, or where they have only been sustained during the project funding period only, and faded away as soon as the funding ended (in most cases), are also evident lack of such synergies, strongly buttressed on realistic domestic inputs and ownership. The collaboration between HI and the TFDIER has continuously taken heed of these crucial ingredients, drawing along the support of both government services and the local capacities and willingness wherever possible, as the potential for continuity after the international agency-supported project.

Understandably, what it takes to develop successful inclusive education projects may not necessarily be guided by the pre-designed international guidelines or NGO project proposals as such, rather, on the patient and innovative assessment of what works best for the target groups, grounded in a locally informed foresights of all those involved; and on how to get there with the minimum setbacks. In essence, drawing from the local knowledge and experiences is an imperative prerequisite for international agencies to operate successful projects in local education settings, and doubtlessly, HI-Rwanda inclusive education projects seem to draw from its background experiences in order to build relatively progressive inclusive education programs in various Rwandan Districts,.

Spearheading change towards inclusion

Experiences in the field of disability and education in Rwandan communities like in similar ones of the sub-region, continue to point out the persistent high level misinformation about the educational needs of children and youths with disabilities, even among the key decision making community members. The situation seems to account for the continued misdirection of important education projects and support services designated for them (Ingstad, 1997; Karangwa, Ghesquière, & Devlieger, 2007, Kisanji, 1995). It was noted with disappointment for instance, that HVP Gatagara school for the Blind has continued to receive school materials of sighted learners from Rwanda Education Board (REB); and the Ministry of Education's 'One laptop Per Child (OLPC) project' continue to donate laptops and ICT equipments to schools without any software alternatives for schools with learners who require these.

Accordingly, the TFDIEDR notes that only foresighted civil society agencies, whose projects had been successful, had also included both awareness-rising and team-work among other key priority strategies to achieve inclusive education missions. Right on its initiation for example, the TFDIER had invited all NGOs operating in the field of disability and related services for a joint plan of action in collaboration with schools and community actors. However, as highlighted previously, only Handicap International opted for a sustained and relatively flexible collaboration with both the TFDIER and purposively selected education actors at all levels, which also lead to relatively successful and progressive community-lead inclusive education project developments. On the contrary, all the international agencies that opted to partner with local education actors without jointly planned community level activities seemed to remain alien to the beneficiary school communities, and maintained unsustainable project activities marred with unachievable goals.

The initial forum jointly organized by TDIER, KIE and HI in June 2008 for example, targeted awareness-raising and training of all key education stakeholders on a range of aspects in Inclusive Education and related provisions. It was noted that most of individuals and organs involved, have been part of all Special Needs

Education developments, and have continued to serve as the vanguards of the uphill, but unwavering changes towards sustained inclusive education developments. In essence, the forums planned by the TFDIER was about building a synergy that would bring change through collaboration and partnerships of the existing organs for inclusion of the marginalized learners with limited resources. A situation underscored by Belon & Peterson (2000: 23) on *'Building inclusive schools in poor and rural communities'*, maintaining that throughout the world, educators are struggling to shift their delivery of service from segregated to inclusive approaches, the shift that creates substantial opportunities and challenges. They conclusively advise that, *"If we care about children in poor communities and maintain our focus that the children's needs must come first, then collectively we must embrace the challenges to building inclusive school communities"*. Throughout the experiences of the TFDIER, the resourceful role of educators and beneficiary community members at all stages of collaborations and inclusive education developments was noted as an imperative contributing agent.

Involvement of Educators

In studies that have lead to transformational strategies of education towards inclusive perspectives, also consider the role of local educators as the central and critical agents (Bishop, 1986; Dysone, 1999; Markee, 1997; Karangwa et al, 2007; Weightman, 1988). They jointly agree that educators are involved through their confrontation with challenges in the local schools and communities; they collect facts about the education practices, procedures and systems; try them out; consult those affected; and are able to follow up with *evaluations, etc.* The educators' importance in inclusive education program development is actually underlined by Sullivan-Owomoyela & Brannelly's (2009) studies, concluding that:

"Education programs provide 'neutral' spaces if educators and education authorities view all learners as equal... Revitalize traditional authorities and structures where appropriate, to ensure that culture and social dimensions are at the center of education community participation... strengthen local bonding and bridging social capital mechanisms by understanding each partner's assets... link global frameworks through the cultural conceptualization of activities ..." (p. 139-140).

It was equally observed by successive TFDIER reports since 2009 however, that the need to develop local educators' capacities and awareness about inclusion of learners was generally prioritized by NGO programs since 2009. The general trends observed in 19/25 international development agencies operating in the areas of disability and education, designing teacher training programs in which both the training curriculums and its delivery are planned, targeting educators for both mainstream and special schools. Accordingly, the following were noted by the inclusive education consortia (TFIER):

- The training programs are usually neither sustainable nor fully owned by local schools;
- The accreditation of the teacher's training is never valued by the Rwandan education sector because the training program does not follow the nationally recognized qualification frameworks;
- The beneficiary educators are not necessarily motivated by the training since they are not correspondingly rewarded with a pay raise or any other forms of motivating recognition of the training.

It was for these reasons that a Diploma-awarding training program known as the 'Continuous Professional Development Diploma in Special Needs Education (CPD SNE) was designed in accordance to the Ministry of Education's High Education Council (HEC) academic framework, and subsequently delivered and monitored by the then Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) in 2010, in collaboration with the TFDIER and HI. The latter sponsored the tuition of over 90% of beneficiaries (teachers, head-teachers and education planners), and the TFDIER ensured the development and delivery of the training programs. It was the first nationally accredited Special Needs Education teacher training program awarding a diploma.

The emerging field evidences have indicated that the graduates of the CPD SNE program play a leading role in the development of inclusive education in their respective schools and communities. Especially by organizing local sensitization and training sessions for educators and parents, and these have reportedly given rise to schools and community-based innovations, ranging from curricular adjustments to suit the needs of the school/classroom diversity; building supportive community and school partnerships and support to learners with SEN; to transformations of the teaching and learning environments from the traditionally rigid to the relatively barrier-free and learner-friendly educational settings. Examples of successful examples cited by the TFDIER reports of 2012 include among others:

- Shyogwe Nine Year Basic School (9YBS) of the Southern province which was recorded as having adapted the Sign Languages of the local social catchment area for the whole school, in order to include the hearing impaired learners⁴.
- Resource rooms have been developed and equipped with locally-made educational resources in over 27 schools as a means of providing effective support services to learners with varying SEN.
- Parents are known to take turns in school resource rooms to work with teachers in providing therapeutic services and developing educational materials for learners with different disabilities (See Figure 2).

In essence, these and other initiatives that emphasize collaboration through enhanced teacher training programs, actually value educators as key adopters in educational innovations, and for that matter, quite critical in the Rwandan inclusive education developments. Like Ainsow et al (2013) who emphasize discussions with local actors and Sullivan-Owomoyela et al (2009) who place educators centrally in all educational innovations, Markee's (1997) views on teachers' roles in curriculum innovation, also provides an orientation for Rwandan Inclusive Education:

" ... if teachers support the educational innovation, it will work, and if they resist, it will not succeed. They can only adopt it if they understand it or are part of the innovation planning process.... Besides, the teachers are part of and understand very well the socio-cultural system they are working in ... " (p. 43).

Accordingly, the collaboration used teacher training programs as the basis for change from the traditional practices that entailed teacher-centeredness to the relatively more progressive outlook on the roles of teachers as facilitators, resource persons and support persons, clarifiers, planners, stimulators, coordinators, and

⁴ Rwanda is not yet endowed with a nationally harmonized Rwandan Sign Language (RSL) for schools, in the absence of which, schools are compelled to find alternative communication modes for the Deaf learners.

evaluators in a given education context. In fact, based on the successful experiences with CPD SNE training programs as the 1st of its kind in Rwanda, it is observed that the University of Rwanda–College of Education (UR-CE) has equally learnt from the collaboration, and has developed even other credible training programs that have lead to the conception of the new school of Inclusive and Special Needs Education.

Involving community actors

It is underlined through evidences raised previously, that Inclusive Education initiatives grounded in local realities is increasingly emerging as the guiding principle in successful projects of Rwanda. In other words, partnerships with parents, local educators and other



Figure 2: A group of parents of children with disabilities working with teachers in making educational materials in Kamonyi Primary school resource room

actors in the local community are taken as a critical resource for sustainable development of inclusive education programs. It has been learnt for example that teachers and parents' partnerships are able to contribute cost-effective and home-grown inputs to their children's schooling, that may also include sustaining and protecting the inclusive education projects, because it is a product branded through their own efforts (See Figure 2).

Observations and studies from those that have worked in proximity with disadvantaged communities and rural schools in Africa and Asia (Stabbs, 2002; EENET, 2003, Geert, 1997), have testified that inclusive education initiatives have emerged successful where they are able to identify and tap the resourceful efforts of the local communities. Through a number of case studies reflecting phenomenal success stories in Africa and Eastern Asia for example, Sue Stabbs (2002) affirms that Inclusive Education has been more practical even in countries with few resources and many social challenges, asserting that *"some of the best examples of Inclusive Education are based in poorer countries of the South. ... It is far more practical than just excluding groups of children and then having to deal with the consequences of high rates of illiteracy and passive, dependent citizens..."* (p. 45). Accordingly, successful experiences observed in some of the Rwandan schools with similar challenges, appear to serve as inspiring testimonies of the future of inclusive education in Rwanda.

The experience is supported by the Chinese experiences (Stratford & Hannah, 2000: 13), which prove that 'joining with professionals; parents can be a powerful force with which slender resources can be appropriately directed towards the development of services for children with disabilities', as well as Vanneste's (1997: 37) long experiences in East African communities, who maintain that *"by far the most positive resources are those already existing in the hearts and minds of African mothers, sisters, grandparents, neighbors, disabled persons themselves ... programs must study, value, enlist and enhance these vital existing community resources...a small amount of input can bring into play a much larger amount of latent energy"*. Such important lessons based on lived experiences and field studies; seem to continuously shape the current development of the inclusive education project in Rwanda. It ought to be noted though, that the progress seems to be

considerably dependent on the well planned collaboration with targeted educational stakeholders, and able to develop productive link with the local social inputs (See Figure 2).

The ideas is echoed through studies related to community-supported Inclusive Education (Rieser, 2012; Rouse, 2010; Karangwa, Miles & Ingrid, 2010) that advance the view that educationally vulnerable learners are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of their educational needs as such, but mainly because reasonable accommodation of the pupil's requirements are not provided for. Hence, development towards their successful inclusion in Rwandan school communities can be achieved by putting in place enabling measures that maximize participation in academic and socio-economic activities. The stance underlines the basic principal of adapting educational services and provisions wherever necessary, as a transformational strategy of the national education system towards sustainable inclusive education developments, as discussed in the next section.

The wider school approaches to developing inclusive education

The post-genocide Rwandan education learns from findings from post-apartheid South African studies across different socio-economic groups (Smith, 2011: 79), which point out that policy focus should be wider than just resourcing deprived groups, but developing alternative interventions and strategies to overcome some of the acute social disadvantages that pupils bring with them into schools. This does not necessarily disagree with the

issue of school adjustment and accommodation raised above; it actually resonates with voices of advocates of inclusive education as the shift from the focus on personal factors to the general educational environment that needs to be adjusted in order to be more accommodative, and enabling learners with SEN to participate fully as active and legitimate members of the educational setting (Charlton, 2000; Kerzner,

& Gartner, 1999; UNESCO, 2005).

Though these voices have often been

heard from the civil rights group dominated by DPOs' struggles for equal rights, their input into education have increasingly been acknowledged and expounded within global policy tools and guidelines of inclusive education (UNESCO, 2009). It is generally suggested that the educational program that considers effective schooling for learners with SEN should also be able to restructure the entire education system, with a range of enabling inputs and process within the entire learning and teaching environment (education policy and practices), as illustrated in Fig. 3.

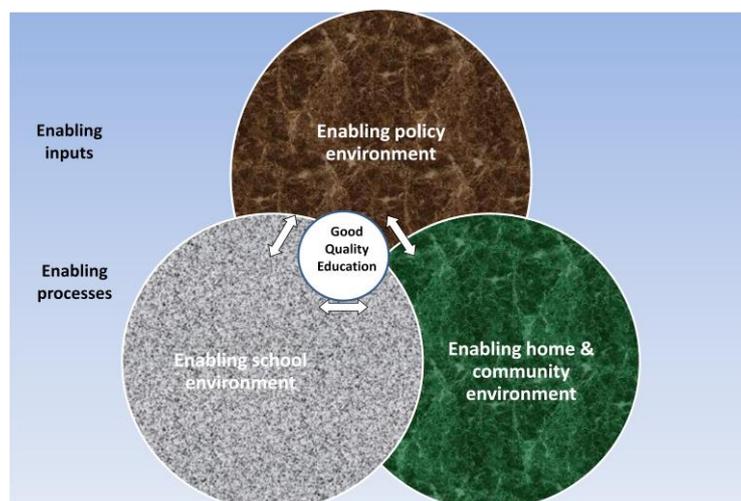


Figure 3: Adjustments of education systems for Inclusive Education developments may also entail enabling inputs and process within the education policy, school and community settings

It is in the same vein that Bolton (1999) suggests that inclusion concerns education wherever it is being given and to whomever it is being imparted, irrespective of his/her ability, and is expected to allow every individual a contribution to the world. It goes beyond disablements and involves identification and removal of all barriers or challenges to participation, which include social, cultural, ideological and physical factors. Kerzner et al (1999), contend that if inclusion is realistic, even terms like *inclusion, integration, mainstreaming* should not be mentioned. Inclusion ought to be a unitary system that has educational benefits for both the ordinary students and those with educational needs, where all learners should be termed as *full members* of an educational system, contextualized as:

"... providing to all students, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with needed aids and services, in age-appropriate classes and in the neighborhood school, in order to prepare them for productive lives as full members of the society..."(p.13).

In other words, inclusive education is widely encompassing, not only because it concerns a wide range of learners' needs, but because it has to be part of the wider educational programs, within which all learners irrespective of ability and educational needs will find an equally place within a uniting educational system or policy.

It ought to be admitted here though, that on average, the suggested shifts towards accommodation of learners with a range of special educational needs has continuously remained alien to both pre and post-genocide Rwandan education practice and policies. It is the current Education Sector Strategic Plan 2013-2014 (ESSP, 2010: 18) that has recognized the persistent misunderstandings between Special Needs and Inclusive Education, and pledges renewed redress of key aspect of the wider education continuum that include resource provisions, teacher training, flexible curricula and others to cater for inclusion of all categories of disadvantaged learners. Once again, the post-genocide Rwanda ought to take a good lesson from the South African post-apartheid experiences through Christie' s (1999: 277) warning that '*educational reforms go well beyond the rationale of producing legal and policy frameworks*'. The author's personal experience in Rwandan educations adds that educational reforms are complex, contradictory and often marred with unpredictable processes, for it is also mediated by unforeseen attitudinal, social, economic and political factors, as well as the powerful global influences, especially in conditions of resource constraints, fragile policies and administrative structures.

The future of Rwandan Inclusive Education

The Rwandan government reaffirms that for sustainable Economic Development and Poverty Reduction, the country counts primarily on its human capital to constitute a knowledge-based Service Sector (Republic of Rwanda, 2003; Republic of Rwanda, 2007; Republic of Rwanda, 2010). It is maintained in its strategic plans which is guided by the national Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS, 2008-2012) for example, that "*in order for Rwanda to achieve the structural economic change implied by the targets of Vision 2020, the country must develop a wide range of skills of its labor force within a relatively short space of time*" (p. 34). In other words, the strategy underscores the underlying national program of educating all young Rwandans

irrespective of their abilities and disabilities; background or gender, to fittingly complement the country's economic development visions.

Accordingly, the Special Needs and Inclusive Education initiatives developing around the country, in both ordinary and special schools, seem to be inspired and fit within the national development plans. The present study however, continue to contend that despite the clearly expressed government commitments and obvious developments of some inclusive education projects, learners with Special Educational needs, will continue to be marginalized in the general education (Karangwa et al, 2013), until key contributors to inclusive education development are clearly defined and are appropriately fitted within the whole education system. When learners with SEN are persistently deprived of the level field on which they are enabled to participate in all learning opportunities as their peers, they are subsequently deprived of opportunities for equal participation in economic development. The present study is prompted to affirm with conviction that without proactive alternative and widely encompassing educational strategies, that target this category of learners, the Rwandan education sector will also continue to miss its development missions.

It is equally maintained that, since there is sufficient proof that even in under-resourced communities, mainstreaming services for learners with SEN have been known to be effective (Ingstad, 1997; Helander, 1993; Stubbs, 2002; Vanneste, 1997), any reasons for Rwandan education planners to divert education services and resources away from the inclusive education perspectives would be unfounded and unfortunate. Whittaker & Kenworthy (1995: 10), affirming that inclusion works for all irrespective of the circumstances, warns that argument of resources as constraint is actually one based upon fear and ignorance rather than any serious study of the issue. They add that the cost of including a disabled learner is quite easily measurable, but the cost to the community of excluding the same learner from their peers is incalculable.

Accordingly, the role of the community around the school ought to be taken as a key resource for effective support to education of children and youths with disabilities in societies like Rwanda, because when community members are made to feel their responsibility to support all the children in their differences, they are also able to operationalize and complement the National Plan of Education for All children. The present study joins Kisanji (1995), Vanneste (1997) and Ingstad (1997: 7–8), for their experiences in the sub-region's community-based services for people with disabilities, to argue that a system of '*natural integration*' or '*cultural inclusion*' is omnipresent in Sub-Saharan African communities that include Rwanda, stemming from the culture of mutual community and family support to the disadvantaged, in which every members of the family lineage feel indebted to one another. Hence, support for each other in building houses and farm land for each other ('*Ubudehe* or '*Umuganda*' or mutual community-based support), maintaining community security, justice, peace and reconciliation (e.g. '*Gacaca*' or



Figure 4: The community of Muganza Sector in Gisagara District of Southern Rwanda are participating in Umuganda to grow Casava for the 101 disabled community members, and support their literacy and numeracy education (Kigali today of 28-01-2013).

community judiciary, 'Ironto' or community policing, etc.) known in Rwandan communities, also naturally enlists the culturally inherent support to the disabled and other disadvantaged family or community members (See Figure 4 above for example).

Noting that the review of the policy and its strategic plan on Inclusive Education which was concluded in July 2013 by the Ministry of Education however, to guide all Special Needs and Inclusive Education programs in the next five years, the present study also predicts a positive future for inclusive education in Rwanda. Among the emerging field experiences that seem to have shaped the policy document for example, are the prominent roles of Rwandan families and community members in all educational settings (especially schools), as the indispensable resource that will ensure sustained enrolment, access and support to retention of all learners with SEN. In other words, the effective roles of the wide range of all education stakeholders, that takes into consideration indigenously motivating factors within the whole education system, is possibly a way forward towards realizing inclusive education that contributes to Rwandan development.

Conclusion

It could as well be affirmed at this juncture that the past five years have seen remarkable trends in the developments of Special Needs and Inclusive Education (SNE/IE) in Rwanda, but have equally drawn important lessons for SNE/IE policy planners and practitioners of the country. The SNE/IE programs and projects that were run during the period for example, also met a number of setbacks because they were made to operate under education policy strategies and social structures with hardly any preparations and understanding of their missions and potential contributions.

It was equally noted however, that the purposive collaboration with key education stakeholders in both local communities and civil society, also complemented the Inclusive Education initiatives when continued evaluation and monitoring of every step made, pitfalls met, and by noting every achieved success, on which the vision for further developments was clearly perceived, and the threshold for further developments of the next Inclusive education project would be established to guide a more sustainable *"Inclusive Education future for Rwanda"*.

It is affirmed now that the present periods is characteristically a turning point in the development of inclusive education in Rwanda, for it constitutes decisive contributions stemming from lessons drawn from field experiences. These included sustained joint planning of the Ministry of Education and collaborators within both local community and civil society organs, as key stakeholders. These have continuously fostered educational initiatives with far reaching solutions to a range of inclusive education limitations, and have proved the capacity to generate sustainable synergies, that could impact positively on the wider education system of Rwanda.

The conclusive analysis being that, the effective inclusive education projects suiting the educational needs of all young Rwandans will depend on the clear-sightedness of the planners, the implementation mechanism thoughtfully put in place to counteract the ills of *'flaw policy strategies and ineffective management'*, while promoting healthy partnerships with resourceful education stakeholders that responds accurately to the

local needs and demands, in sustained forward-looking strategies, designed to equalize opportunities for all, and render the Education Sector more instrumental for national development.

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