

A study on the socioeconomic conditions of teachers in Primary and Secondary Public schools in Rwanda: Case study of Bugesera, Nyarugenge and Ruhango Districts

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Abstract

The present study investigates the socioeconomic problems faced by teachers in public primary and secondary schools, and looks into ways their living and working conditions could be improved. The guiding research question of the study is: "to what extent is the profession of teaching in Rwanda recognized as a pillar of sustainable development, are the teachers' living conditions decent enough as a key contributor to development?" the merging findings are quite significant and meaningful: Despite the law stating that any civil servant is entitled to annual appraisals and promotions for example, over 90% of teachers surveyed had neither been appraised nor promoted in the last three years. Their working conditions are still significantly below average standard public employees; their salaries are not sufficient to cover the essential needs to the extent that most of the teachers consume their salaries within a week, and find themselves in a situation of perpetual debt. Despite tremendous efforts made by the government of Rwanda to improve teachers' living conditions, they still complain that their salaries should be harmonized to those of other civil servants.

Key words: Educational sector, socioeconomic conditions, sustainable development, teaching conditions

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right of people and an essential tool to ensure that all Rwandans realize their full potential. It is in the same line that the Rwanda's Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (MINECOFIN, 2007) acknowledges that human resource development is one of the pillars of the national development, and in its national "Vision 2020" (MINECOFIN, 2000), the Government of Rwanda has resolved to develop a knowledge-based and technology-led economy. In other words, social and economic development of Rwanda is acknowledged as a direct outcome of its emphasis on all aspects of education.

The education sector like any other sector underwent tremendous reform in which the main objective was to reorganize and try to revive the system of education which had collapsed in the 1994 genocide (MINEDUC, 2003). In 1998 for example, the Government of Rwanda developed the educational sector policy which had the aims of providing solutions to problems experienced by the country before and during the 1994 genocide. One of the major objectives in this educational sector policy was to achieve Universal Primary Education by 2010. The Government of Rwanda has also identified strategies to improve secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational as well as special needs education, but did not specify the working conditions of teachers, as one of the key conditions and strategy to achieve this important development goal (MINEDUC, 2010).

The present study is of the view that the failure to take into account the working conditions of teachers in public primary and secondary schools as a developing strategy may as well act as a draw back to the education sector in particular, but also the country's economic development in general. This appears to be the preoccupation of

the Government of Rwanda as reflected by the then Minister of Education, when he announced in 2011 that there was a need to revisit policies concerning teachers' welfare. He added: *"There is need for the teachers to be motivated. It will help in improving quality. The Government of Rwanda is going to look into the possibility of increasing teachers' salaries in near future... There will never be quality when teachers who are supposed to ensure it are not happy"* (Mugarura, 2011).

It is in light of this background context that the Congress of Labour and the Brotherhood of Workers, COTRAF² Rwanda (2009), had conducted a study on the living conditions and the socio-economic status of teachers in primary and secondary public schools in Rwanda in its concern about the well being of workers in general. The Rwandan labour organisation conducted the study in a bid to answer the following pertinent question: *"to what extent is the profession of teaching in Rwanda recognized as a pillar of sustainable development, are the teacher's living conditions decent enough to enable him/her to contribute to the development?"* The criteria for decent work include among others: the ability to perform productively and fair income; safety and welfare for employees and their families, improving prospects for personal development and social integration; freedom for human beings to express their concerns, organize and participate in making decisions that affect their lives; equal opportunities and treatment for both women and men.

The present study thus, aims at analyzing the working conditions of teachers in public primary and secondary schools and their conditions of living. More specifically, it is intended to identify the income levels of teachers, assess their needs, identify their initiatives to diversify revenue, to show how socioeconomic problems faced by teachers also affect their contribution to quality of education in Rwanda, and discuss ways and means of improving the living conditions of teachers in order to promote service quality, and therefore increase their performance or contribution to economic development.

Like other employees, primary and secondary school teachers in Rwanda ought to be guided by the principles of decent work. The principles introduced and promoted primarily by the International Labor Organization (ILO) since 1999. According to ILO (1999), a decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for both men and women. Decent work sums up the aspirations of human beings, their aspirations to access employment and fair remuneration, enjoy their rights, expression and recognition; family stability and personal development, justice and gender equality. Decent work reflects the concerns of governments as principal policy makers that guide employment, employees and employers as implementers. It is this tripartite relationship that ought to provide a pathway for decent work for teachers, and thus, prompted and guided the essence of the research.

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Methodology

The research on socioeconomic conditions of teachers was conducted in three districts of Rwanda, namely Bugesera District in Eastern Province, Ruhango District in the Southern Province and Nyarugenge District in Kigali City. The choice of these districts was based on random sampling technique, prioritizing rural districts, semi-rural or semi-urban districts and urban districts. In each district, the research was conducted in both primary and secondary public schools.

In the study, mixed methods research designs were adopted. The researchers gathered qualitative data to get an insight of the situation related to teacher's conditions in Rwanda. Similarly, in order to arrive at the intended interpretation of quantitative data, statistical analysis was done to provide graphical representations of different variables.

Regarding research techniques, library based documentation was used. This allowed researchers to collect data from books and other documents related to the subject of the research. The websites were also consulted primarily to fully understand the principles governing the decent working conditions.

The survey questionnaire is another technique that was used in the study to collect field data. Series of questions regarding socioeconomic conditions of teachers were designed following the main theme and research question, as well as the objectives of the study, and administered to respondents who provided information and data related to the study.

The semi-structured interviews as the third technique was also used in the study to obtain additional information to those collected through the questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with some resource persons including school administration authorities at the district and Ministry of Education levels, as well as officials of cooperative "*Umwalimu SACCO*"³ and loan officers of *Banque Populaire du Rwanda*.

Purposeful sampling techniques were used in the study to select the participants. It enabled the researchers to identify the people who responded to the questionnaire and subjected to interviews. This is because it was impossible to reach all teachers in the country due to time and financial limits. According to Quivy and Campenhoudt (1995), it is possible to collect reliable information about a big population by surveying a representative part of it. The sample was thus composed of 191 teachers in total, including 104 men and 87 women. This sample was purposively selected from primary and secondary public schools, and did not affect private schools because they are not of equal socio-economic status. The primary and secondary public school teachers were considered since their problems are almost the same.

³Savings and Credit Cooperative for Teachers

Results and discussions

As mentioned earlier, the research aimed at answering the following question: “to what extent is the profession of teaching in Rwanda recognized as a pillar of sustainable development, *are the teacher’s living conditions decent enough to enable him/her to contribute to the development*”? Below, an overall analysis and interpretation of the findings is provided, drawing from the data collected from the field survey. In general terms, the findings indicate that the income level of teachers in terms of net revenue differs significantly depending on their categorization. The primary school teachers who are paid less earn 22,454 Rwf while the highest paid earn 54,800 Rwf⁴ per month. At secondary school level, the minimum wage is 23,827 Rwf while the maximum salary is 153,450 Rwf per month. This had a significant relationship with the evaluation and promotion of teachers and their working and living conditions as explained in the next sections.

Evaluation and promotion of teachers

The evaluation and promotion of teachers contributed to a substantial increase in their wages, but as the present research noted, the majority of teachers are not evaluated and subsequently promoted regularly. Despite the existence of Law n° 22/2002 of 09th July 2002 governing the General Statutes for Rwanda Public Service which stipulates that any public officer is entitled to annual evaluation and promotions at work, most of teachers the researchers interviewed had not regularly received advantages of their evaluation. Asked if they were listed and promoted, the majority of teachers (88.5%) said that they were not listed in the last three years. For the promotion of teachers in primary schools, 89.8% of respondents were not promoted whereas in secondary education, 92.8% of teachers were not promoted.

Working conditions

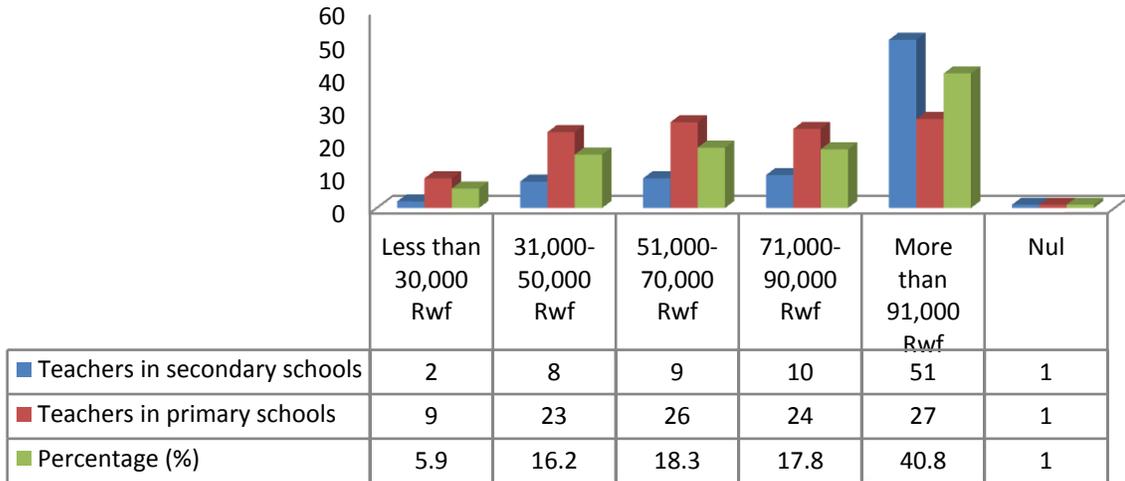
The socio-economic conditions of teachers analyzed were based on the wages they receive, the banks they use and other means used to meet their needs.

The working conditions of both primary and secondary school teachers are poor. This is reflected by their meagre wages that do not allow them to cover various needs such as food, family expenditure on children's schooling, housing, health care, communication, clothing, etc. Thus, 98.9% of primary and secondary school teachers surveyed, either rural or urban, noted that their salary is insufficient.

Low salary of teachers is linked to higher prices at the local markets and its proportionality with the wage increase, hence the low purchasing power and very limited appreciation of the needs mentioned above. In analysing the food basket, the study collecting the opinions of teachers on the use of their wages to cover basic needs such as food, clothing, housing, education of children, health care, budget travel for commuting and communication costs. The results are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

⁴Rwandan Francs

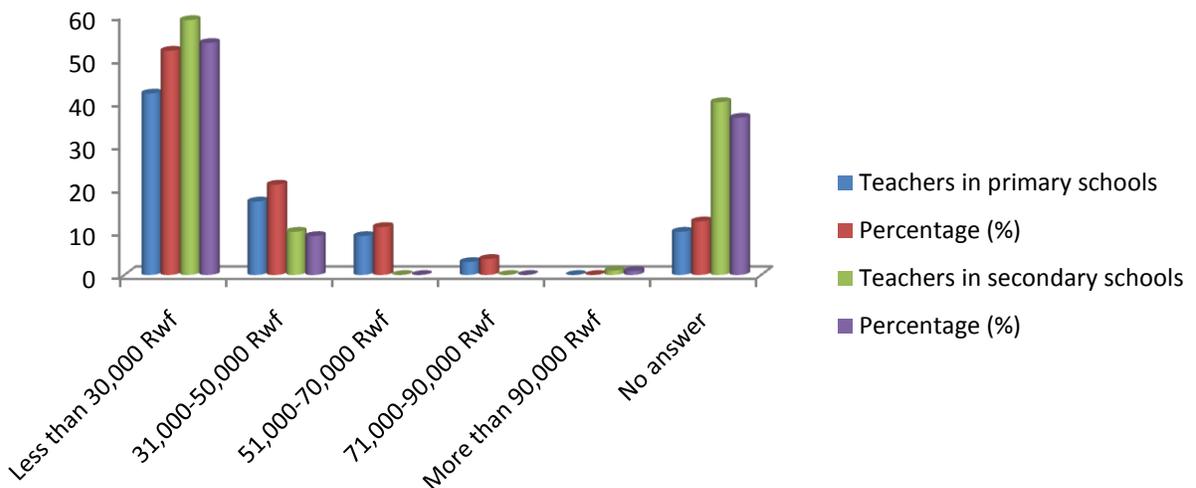
Figure 1: Monthly food and household needs (food, beverages, and hygienic products)



Source: Data from the field survey, of November 2009

As figure 1 above reflects, a proportion of 40.8% of teachers surveyed use more than 90,000 Rwf, and 17.8% spend between 70,000 and 90,000 Rwf per month on food. In the category of those who consume more than 90,000 Rwf months, are mainly teachers of secondary schools (65.4%) and less in primary schools (34.6%). This is due to the salary of secondary school teachers which is generally higher than that of primary school teachers. In general, 76.9% of the surveyed teachers spend more than 50 000 Rwf on food. If we consider the case of a teacher who has spent 10 years in the career and getting 30,000 Rwf, the salary does not even cover the food needs.

Figure 2: Estimated monthly cost on housing rent



Source: Data from the field survey, of November 2009

From figure 2 above, it should be noted that teachers of both primary (53.7%) and secondary schools (51.9%) rent houses which are below 30,000 Rwf per month. A teacher who has the cheapest rent more than other pays 4,000 Rwf per month. Accordingly, a house rented at 4000 Rwf is generally not conducive, for it lacks water; electricity, and in most cases not cemented. Such houses are afforded by teachers whose salaries are meagre. This is evidenced by 86% of the respondents who said that their homes are not convenient.

Cost of clothing

The clothing is a fundamental right for every human being. Some teachers manage to buy clothes though they hardly find sufficient food. Some have not hesitated to say that they are ashamed to be called teachers because they are nicknamed "*cyarukweto*" to mean that they wear worn out shoes.

Table 1: Differences about the annual cost of clothing

Category \ Rwf	Less than 50 000	51,000 - 70,000	71,000 - 90,000	91,000 - 120,000	More than 120,000	Without response	Total
Teachers in primary schools	22	24	11	20	6	27	110
Teachers in secondary schools	13	9	2	13	29	15	81
Total	35	33	13	33	35	42	191
Total (%)	18.3	17.3	6.9	17.3	18.3	21.9	100
Teachers in primary schools (%)	62.8	72.7	84.6	60.6	17.1	64.3	
Teachers in secondary schools (%)	37.2	27.3	15.4	39.4	82.9	35.7	

Source: Data from the field survey, of November 2009

The table above shows that the annual distribution of funds for clothing is different depending on individual income. In actual facts, those who teach in primary schools spend less on clothing compared to those who teach in secondary schools. Thus, among 18.3% of teachers who use less than 50,000 Rwf to buy clothes, 62.8% are primary school teachers and 37.2% are secondary school teachers; among 18.3% of those who use more than 120,000 Rwf, 82.9% teachers are in secondary schools whereas 17.1% are in primary schools. This means that the costs are proportional to income. The more one earns, the more he/she spends.

Ability to educate children

Education is expensive and 30.4% use more than 150,000 Rwf to pay school fees for their children. The teachers, who pay less money, pay 10,000 Rwf while those who pay much use 800,000 Rwf per year. The least amount of money teachers are likely to spend on school fees for children is 10,000 Rwf.

Comparing the primary and secondary school teachers, the data in table above shows that the majority (30.4%) pays more than 150,000 Rwf for the upbringing of their children, irrespective of whether they are primary school teachers (16.2%) or secondary school teachers (14.1%). In response to whether it is easy to find this amount of money, 77% of teachers affirmed that they cannot easily pay the tuition for their children and even those who manage to do so (7.3%), have to make considerable efforts. Those who did not answer the question are bachelors who have no children or young families whose children have not yet started schooling.

Table 2: *Estimated annual expenditure on children education fees*

Category \ Rwf	Less than 50,000	51,000 - 80,000	81,000 - 100,000	101,000 - 150,000	More than 150,000	Without response
Teachers in secondary schools	10	4	3	9	31 (16.2%)	24 (12.5%)
Teachers in primary schools	23	10	9	7	27 (14.1%)	34 (17.8%)
Total	33	14	12	16	58	58
Total (%)	17.2	7.3	6.2	8.3	30.4	30.3
Teachers in secondary schools (%)	30.3	28.5	25	56.2	53.4	41.4
Teachers in primary schools (%)	69.6	71.4	75	43.7	46.6	58.7

Source: Data from the field survey, of November 2009

Accessibility to primary health care

The costs of access to health care have been alleviated by the support of teachers for the assurance of primary health care through the Rwandan Health Insurance (RAMA). The table below indicates the money spent by teachers per year in order to access primary health care.

Annually, health care uses less than 50,000 Rwf for 55.5% of teachers following the mechanisms of social protection (RAMA, Health Mutual Insurance) established by the Government of Rwanda. The latter has had a positive impact both in urban and in rural areas. Comparing costs in urban, semi-urban and rural area, the present research proves that they are almost on the same level. For example, 54.5% of teachers in urban schools use each year, between 91,000 and 120,000 Rwf and more than 120,000 Rwf for health care, whereas those in rural area (45.5%) use from 91,000 to 120,000 Rwf.

Table 3: Annual expenses of access to primary health care

Category \ Rwf	Less than 50,000	51,000 - 70,000	71,000-90,000	91,000 - 120,000	More than 120,000	Without response
Teachers in urban area	43	14	0	6	6	12
Teachers in mi-urban area	25	7	0	0	3	5
Teachers in rural area	38	8	1	5	2	16
Total	106	29	1	11	11	33
Total (%)	55.5	15.1	0.5	5.7	5.7	17.2
Teachers in urban area (%)	40.5	48.2	0	54.5	54.5	36.3
Teachers in mi-urban area (%)	23.5	24.1	0	0	27.2	15.1
Teachers in rural area (%)	35.8	27.5	100	45.5	18.1	48.5

Source: Data from the field survey, of November 2009

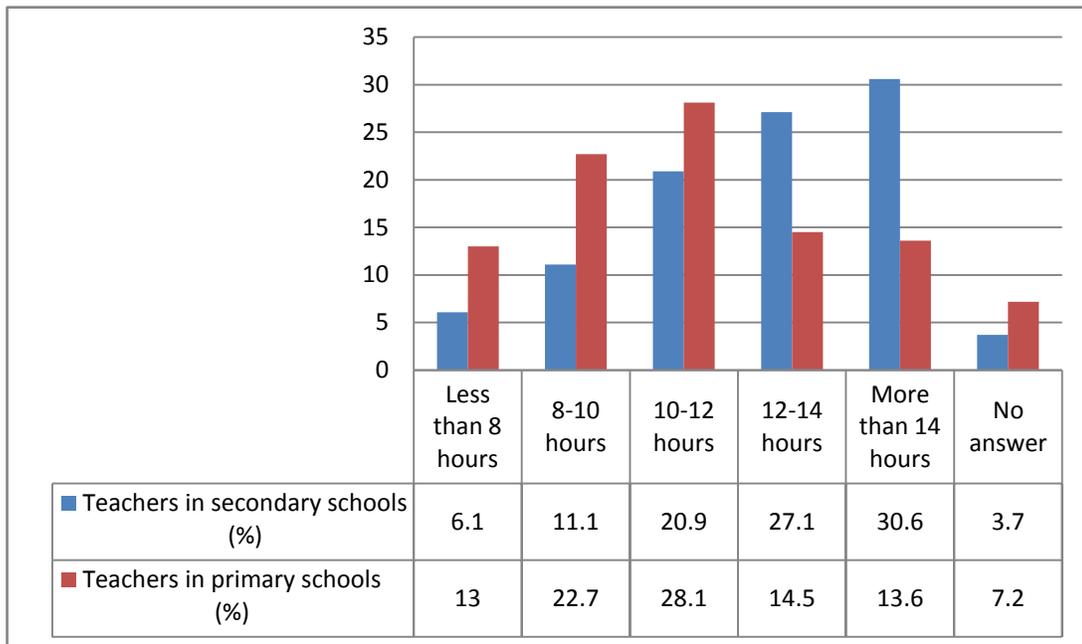
Concerning the questions of knowing whether teachers and members of their families have easy access to health care, 52.4% responded positively while 43.5% had difficulties. Although the Government has institutionalized the RAMA system, sometimes they lack the expense of access fees, and therefore, make use of traditional medicine especially for children.

The use of time by teachers

The research was intended to know the schedule of the day for teachers. The research revealed that only 10.4% use less than 8 hours per day, and 62.9% use between 8 and 14 hours per day teaching, preparing lessons and marking student homework and examinations. The proportion of 20.9% use more than 14 hours per day, which means that they only have 10 hours to rest.

Comparing teachers in primary versus secondary, it was found that the majority of teachers in primary schools (28.1%) use between 10 and 12 hours while those in secondary schools (30.6%) use more than 14 hours per day. If multiplied by 5 days of work, there are 70 hours per week.

Figure 3: Use of time by primary and secondary school teachers



Source: Data from the field survey, of November 2009

In other words, from the results of the above chart, secondary school teachers work longer hours than primary school teachers.

Due to low salaries, some teachers find it is difficult to satisfy their basic needs of life. Therefore, in order to survive, some of the teachers, in addition to the meagre salary advances and overdrafts seek other occupations and / or other income generating activities. To complement their meagre wages, teachers engage in agriculture, livestock, farming, small trade, handicrafts and contractual tutoring. As it was noticed, contractual tutoring is the primary source of income among urban teachers while livestock ranks first among teachers in rural areas.

Despite all these occupations outside of teaching work, the average income of teacher still falls far below that of other public servants. Teachers' meagre wages have a negative impact on their socio-economic conditions. In addition to the perpetual debt of teachers, they fail to satisfy basic needs and they still feel complexes and less than other state officials, hence the inferiority complex in general within the Rwandan society.

The findings revealed that the difficult conditions in which teachers work significantly demotivate them and this culminated in their decreased efforts to achieve better results at work. This is reflected by the instability of teachers in career education, absence of teachers from work while searching for other activities generating income, the lessons preparation sometimes limited, and all this leads to the failures of students especially in national examinations. To improve the working conditions of teachers, the Government of Rwanda has made numerous efforts including the establishment of the National Commission of Teachers, the introduction of insurance system

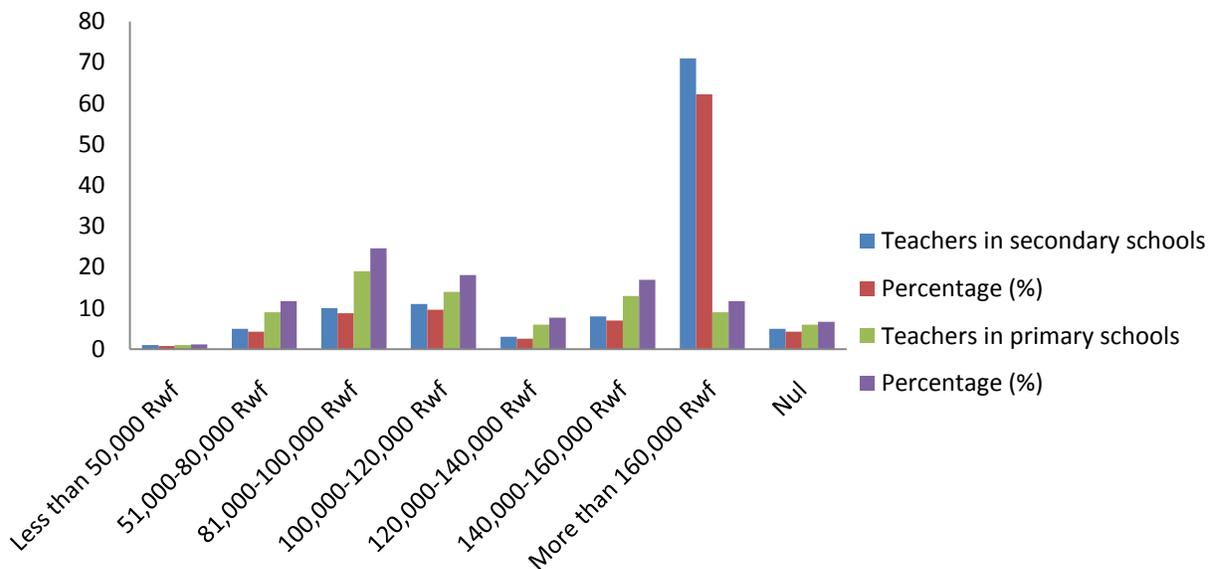
diseases (RAMA), the establishment of savings and credit cooperative "Umwalimu SACCO" and the introduction of the premium of 12,500 Rwf monthly to individual teachers especially in primary schools. (MINEDUC, 2010).

Since 2006, the premium amount was released to the administration of primary schools under the Government "capitation grant" component and distributed to teachers. From the beginning of the school year 2012, the premium amount has been included in the payroll of primary school teachers, plus an increment of 10% to their net salary (MIEDUC, 2006).

Proposal on wage levels of salary

Despite all these efforts to support the education sector, the present research proves that teachers lamented that the Government has not done much to improve their living conditions, particularly by increasing their salaries to the same footing as the other officers of the Public Service. They then propose other initiatives that would contribute to improving their living conditions. They suggested the following wage increases among both teachers of primary and secondary public schools.

Figure 4: Proposed wage levels to improve the teachers' welfare



Source: Data from the field survey, of November 2009

The majority of secondary school teachers (62.2%) would like to have a monthly salary ranging from 80,000 Rwf to over 160,000 Rwf, while for primary schools, 65.5% of teachers wish to receive a monthly salary between 80,000 and 100,000 Rwf. This would allow them to meet at least the basic needs, thereby increasing work motivation. The findings of the present research therefore prompt the authors to consider the following as plausible recommendations:

- To make teaching more efficient, it is appropriate to provide teachers with sufficient teaching aids to allow them achieve their teaching goals effectively.
- Teachers do not have access to bank loans due to lower wage guarantees and lack of collateral. The Government of Rwanda should establish a guarantee fund within the network of local financial institutions such as *Banque Populaire du Rwanda* and *Umwalimu SACCO* to enable easy access to investment loans, hence increasing family incomes.
- As the Government of Rwanda has improved the lives of officials of central and local governments, it should do the same for teachers and facilitate their transportation and housing so as to help them reach the workplace very easily.
- It should provide teachers with regular training to equip them with new methods, learning techniques and new technologies.
- Teachers do not receive regular annual appraisal, which causes delays in the promotion of teachers in grades, and consequently, the stagnation of wages. This would require the responsible personnel to regulate the situation of teachers.
- Teachers would like to use update resources such as ICT and its accessories to achieve the quality of education. As we introduced a system of "*one laptop per child*" should also be another parallel program of "*one laptop per teacher*".
- In conclusion, the present study is tempted to concur with Nzabwirwa's (2010) work that notes if necessary, education could be done without school buildings, without teaching aids, without inspectors, but never without teachers. Teachers are the engine of any education system and development for that matter, and hence need to be fully empowered.

Conclusion

The study on the socioeconomic conditions of teachers in primary and secondary public schools in Rwanda had the overall objective to analyze the working conditions of teachers and their socioeconomic welfare. The analysis of responses to questions as submitted to 191 teachers were surveyed indicated that the working conditions do not allow respondents to meet their basic needs. Actually, 83.8% of teachers who responded to the questionnaire cannot afford a balanced diet, 86% do not have adequate housing, 75.4% do not have enough clothes of their liking and 77% can hardly get school fees for their children, and 43.5% find no access fees for medical care despite efforts by the Government of Rwanda in the field of health care by establishing the Rwanda Medical Insurance (RAMA).

This is due to low teachers' salaries which are inadequate and hence do not meet teachers' needs. 73.9% said that they spend their wages within two weeks and some say, in this respect, that they receive the wages to pay debts. A respondent says that he/she uses all his/her salary just to pay off debts on the payment day, and a week

later he will have already contracted the same amount of debts. In fact, the majority of teachers live in a situation of perpetual debts to survive.

Despite the Rwandan Government's efforts to improve the living conditions of teachers like the establishment of the healthcare scheme (RAMA), the Cooperative Savings and Credit "Umwalimu SACCO", the Teacher service Commission and the payment of bonus to most performing teachers, 20% of respondents noted that the government has neglected the education sector since it does not increase teacher's salaries on the pretext that their big number requirements go beyond the possibility of the national budget allocation. As a matter of fact, because of the little salary they earn, some teachers cannot afford to pay a 50 kg sack of rice.

In regard to these findings, it would be fitting to conclude that the socioeconomic conditions of teachers are not decent and the Government of Rwanda ought to make efforts to render the teachers' career more attractive in this country where education is most needed. Trade unions should play an advocacy role to concerned institutions so as to improve the socioeconomic conditions of teachers and enable them feel decent workers and equal contributors to their country's development.

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