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Research Report

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Prepared by Triple Line and FHI 360

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# Strengthening Inclusive Education in the Rwandan Education System

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# Document Control

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## List of abbreviations

BLF	Building Learning Foundations
COP	Communities of Practice
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities
CWD	Children with Disability
DEO	District Education Officer
EDT	Education Development Trust
EGMA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GoR	Government of Rwanda
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
HI	Humanity and Inclusion
IDA	International Disability Alliance
IE	Inclusive Education
IEFTs	Inclusive Education Focal Teachers
IEPs	Individual Education Plans
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LLL	Local Leader of Learning
LMICs	Low and Middle Income Countries
LwD	Learner with Disabilities
MINALOC	Ministry of Local Government
MINEDUC	Ministry of Education
NCDP	National Council for Disabled Persons
NESA	National Education Standards Agency
NLL	National Leader of Learning
NUDOR	National Union of Disabled Organisations of Rwanda
OPDS	Organisations of People with Disabilities

REB	Rwanda Education Board
RNUD	Rwanda National Union for the Deaf
RUB	Rwanda Union for the Blind
SEI	Sector Education Inspector
SEN	Special Education Needs
SIERES	Strengthening Inclusive Education in the Rwandan Education System
SNIE	Special Needs and Inclusive Education
SNECOs	Special Needs Education Coordinators
SNIE	Special Needs and Inclusive Education
TORs	Terms of Reference
TLMs	Teaching and Learning Materials
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNICEF	United Nations Childrens Fund
URCE	University of Rwanda – College of Education
UoR	University of Rwanda
VSO	Voluntary Services Overseas
WB	World Bank

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## Executive Summary

The primary aim of the Strengthening Inclusive Education in the Rwandan Education System (SIRES) study has been to **compile learning from the Building Learning Foundations (BLF) programme, to strengthen understanding on what works to promote inclusive education systems and improve learning outcomes for children with disabilities in Rwanda**. A key part of the study is an assessment on the roles of Special Needs Education Coordinators (SNECOs) and Inclusive Education Focal Teachers (IEFTs) and the capacity-development materials they have used.

This report consolidates **the findings of the study and provides recommendations for strengthening inclusive education** in Rwanda, with the intention that these findings may inform the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and other key stakeholder in inclusive education to advocate for, and support, government and partners with inclusive education policy implementation and development and inform future inclusive education initiatives in Rwanda.

## Research Objectives and Broad Questions

### Box 1: Research Objectives and Broad Questions

**Assess the effectiveness of BLF's SNECOs and IEFTs and identify inclusive education outcomes/impacts for teachers, parents, and children.** Investigate their value for children with disabilities, including through case studies. Consider the benefits more widely at different levels of the education system, including the national, district, sector, and school level.

**Provide recommendations and future considerations for the inclusive education model.** Consider how the SNECO and IEFT roles are incorporated into current Rwandan Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) policies and strategies, and how they fit alongside existing structures at the national, district, sector and school level (including with the Rwanda Education Board's Special Needs Inclusive Education unit- REB SNIE).

**Consider whether the SNECO and IEFT model requires any amendments going forwards in the absence of UK aid.** Investigate the process for institutionalising these roles within government structures, setting out budget considerations and more formally defining the scope and job descriptions of these roles. Explore the perspectives of various national, district, sector, and school/community stakeholders on their roles to inform institutionalisation and scale-up.

**Draw on learning from other countries around good practices in inclusive education systems.**

Incorporate international best practices around inclusive education structures, including the scope and contribution of SNECO/IEFT-type roles, or other alternative models, in other countries. Provide recommendations on best practices around the identification, assessment, and referral of children with disabilities. The key research questions are:

- What is the value of (a) SNECOs and (b) IEFTs for widening access to education outcomes for children (male/female) with disabilities?
- What is the value of (a) SNECOs and (b) IEFTs at the different levels of the education system (school, district, national)?
- What is the process and what are relevant considerations for institutionalising SNECOs and IEFTs?
- What can Rwanda learn from other countries on strengthening inclusive education structures, systems and processes?
- What learning can be drawn from the Rwandan education experience that might be relevant for other countries?
- Are there any evidence gaps in inclusive education structures that might require further analysis and research?

## The Building Learning Foundations Programme

The BLF programme (2016 - 2023), funded by UK Aid, through the FCDO, has been implemented by a consortium of the Education Development Trust, Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO), and the British Council, and in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and the Rwanda Education Board (REB). The BLF programme focused on lower primary level, and has three foundations:

- 1. Teacher training** (English and Mathematics), focusing on P1 – P3 teachers, aimed at improving the teaching of foundational skills (English and Maths), thus improving learning outcomes.
- 2. Leadership for Learning** training for head teachers, focusing on head teachers, and aimed at improving instructional leadership in schools, thus improving learning outcomes.
- 3. Education system strengthening.** focusing on several levels of the education system (school, sector, district and national), and aimed at strengthening performance management and planning.

The BLF programme implemented intensive inclusive education interventions focusing on selected schools in all districts, which included: Recruitment and training of 30 SNECOs (one per district in Rwanda), recruitment and training of IEFs in 476 schools; and development of a systematic model of early identification and assessment, as a foundation for inclusive teaching and support for children with disabilities (CWD) and those with learning difficulties.

### The Inclusive Education Landscape

The Government of Rwanda (GoR)'s policies - the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2018/19 – 2023/24 and the Special Needs and Inclusive Education (SNIE) Policy (2022) – outline government commitment to support inclusive education (IE) in Rwanda. Over the past few years, the GoR, working with development partners and local non-governmental organisations has made progress with setting up systems/structures at national and district level that can fully operationalise the ambitions of GoR policy.

- Partnering with the WB Inclusive Education Initiative, aimed at strengthening the education sector's responsiveness to the call for inclusive education, in line with priority focus areas outlined in the SNIE policy and the ESSP.
- Efforts to harmonise approaches and tools for identification, assessment and referral developed by BLF and UNICEF/Humanity and Inclusion and scale-up of training for teachers at pre-primary and primary level.
- Establishment by REB of a Special Needs and Inclusive Education Unit and setting up of a SNIE database (data portal).
- Development by REB of accessible digital versions of pre-primary, primary and secondary textbooks which are designed to overcome key barriers for CWDs' effective access of textbooks (especially visually and hearing impaired and those with intellectual disabilities).
- Establishment of the School of Special Needs and Inclusive Education at the University of Rwanda (UoR).
- Development by the National Examinations and Standards Agency (NESA) of a Rwanda National School Inspection Framework which is designed to enable inspectors to undertake a comprehensive inspection of the inclusiveness of schools and to provide a specific rating on that inclusiveness.
- Development by NESA and development partners of the Comprehensive Assessment Management Information System (CAMIS), focused on children's learning assessment data – which provides the capability to track the learning progress of CWD/SEN (children with disabilities/special education needs) at school, sector, district, and national level.

### Study Methodology



Qualitative data collection was conducted by a local consultancy team, FATE Consulting - in 10 BLF schools in three districts. Focus group discussions (FDGs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with head teachers, teachers, IEFTs, CWD, and parents with CWD. At district level, KIIs and FDGs were conducted with SNECOs, district education officers (DEOs), District Directors of Education (DDEs), District Disability Mainstreaming Officers (DDMOs), and Sector Education Inspectors (SEI). At national level, FDGs and KIIs were conducted with Government of Rwanda (GoR) representatives, development partners, and non-governmental organisations. Primary project and GoR documentation and secondary (international best practice) documentation was reviewed and key information/learning distilled.

## Study Findings

### The Impact of IEFTs and SNECOs

**School Level:** The qualitative data gathered from the majority of stakeholders, at school level described the positive benefits of having IEFTs in schools, supported by the SNECOs. Stakeholders who participated in KIIs and FGD highlighted the following:

- **Increased social inclusion for CWD and SEN in schools.** Numerous stakeholders at school and district level reported that CWD and SEN were felt more 'welcomed' in primary schools that had IEFTs being supported by SNECOs. Some parents of CWD/SEN noted that they had been encouraged to send their CWD to school and had noticed that their children were happier at school, because they could play with friends and were being well-treated.
- **Better progression of CWD and SEN from one grade to the next.** This was reported by a range of stakeholders, with teachers, for example, stating that CWD/SEN were now much more likely to transition from one grade to another, because of the training and support of the IEFT (in collaboration with the head teacher).<sup>1</sup>
- **Improved inclusive teaching practices by teachers.** Head teachers, IEFTs, the Sector Education Inspector (SEI) and teachers themselves reported that the IEFTs had a positive impact on the teaching methods used by teachers to, for example, differentiate teaching methods for CWD/SEN, adapt seating arrangements, and set assessment tasks appropriate for CWD/SEN.<sup>2</sup>
- **Increased enrolment of CWD and SEN.** The various stakeholders interviewed at school and district level reported that generally, there had been an increase in the number of CWD/SEN enrolled in school. Reasons given for this included better assessment and identification of CWD/SEN through the support of IEFTs and SNECOs, and, in some cases, because parents had been encouraged to send out-of-school CWD/SEN to school.<sup>3</sup>
- **Decrease in drop-out of CWD and SEN.** As noted above, various stakeholders reported a decrease in the number of dropouts of CWD/SEN, for similar reasons already discussed.<sup>4</sup>

**District Level:** In terms of impact, the various stakeholders at district level noted the following:

- **Development of positive mindsets** towards CWD /SEN by teachers and other children
- **Increased awareness of rights of CWD/SEN**
- **Teachers trained** on how to teach and interact with CWD/SEN

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<sup>1</sup> Noted that the FATE Consulting team were unable to see physical evidence of this in the form of school records etc.

<sup>2</sup> A number of teachers indicated that despite the training and support of IEFTs, it was difficult for them to give CWD and SEN the time and attention they required because of their large class sizes.

<sup>3</sup> The FATE Consulting teams did review examples of pupil records being maintained by the IEFTs, but these did not always report whether the child in question was progressing from grade to grade.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

- **Greater acceptance and socialisation of CWD/SEN.** Reasons given for this were similar to those given by school-level stakeholders. Unsurprisingly, the district-based personnel working most closely to the schools (including the SNECOs) had the most thorough knowledge of the IE work being undertaken, and the impact on learners. Of some concern was that at this level, many of the stakeholders were unable to quantify the number of CWD/SEN that had been identified in district schools.

**National Level:** The range of stakeholders consulted through KIIs included GoR representatives, international development partners and non-governmental organisations, to elicit their knowledge and expertise respecting IE interventions in Rwanda. All respondents, to one degree or another, are aware of the IE work being undertaken by the BLF and reported what they saw as positive effects of this work. However, regarding SNECOs and IEFTs, several of those interviewed noted that there is a need to substantively evaluate how those specific roles supported CWD at the school level in terms of social integration and improvement of their learning, and to share this widely with decision-makers. It was noted that there is further need for advocacy and evidence of impact for government to institutionalise the SNECOs and IEFTs at school and district level.

### **Institutionalisation of SNECOs and IEFTs**

The possibilities of institutionalising SNECOs and IEFTs are strengthened by a conducive environment, with the Government of Rwanda demonstrating that inclusive education is a central component of policy and programming. Notably, the GoR Special Needs and Inclusive Education policy includes specific reference to the SNECOs' role and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) includes reference to an IEFT role in Rwandan schools. Within this supportive environment, the BLF programme has demonstrated that it is possible to deliver an inclusive education approach to scale (in a set of schools in all 30 districts in Rwanda), incorporating an early identification and assessment approach; provision of on-site CPD for teachers in inclusive education and identification and follow-up support to CWD/SEN, utilizing specially trained fellow teachers (IEFTs); and provision of inclusive education specialists (SNECOs) at district level. In principle, there is "fertile ground" for the institutionalization of the SNECOs and IEFTs in Rwanda and the BLF model has demonstrated an approach to IE structures and staffing that is achievable.

Additionally, the BLF model has demonstrated an approach that could be adopted by government within their budget/financial resources. There would, however, need to be changes to institutional structures, particularly at district level, as SNECOs would be employed by the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) rather than the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC). Therefore, MINALOC would have to be convinced that additional expenditure and a change to local structures is worth it, and it would be helpful to be able to provide a substantive evidence base of positive impact (on enrolment, retention, progression and learning) than is currently available.

### **Learning from Other Countries**

For guidelines that could be utilised to assess whether inclusive education approaches can be deemed successful, the most useful is The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) 2017 Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education, which highlights that measuring the success of inclusive education should go beyond merely counting students to evaluate access, but should include measures of educational quality, outcomes, and experiences, and should incorporate a focus on concepts, policy, structures, and systems and practices.

In terms of good practice and progress internationally, the evidence is mixed. While progress is promising in some countries and suggests a move towards rights-based methods, disability identification systems that are based on functional difficulties are yet to be established in most countries. Most often, children with disabilities do not receive sufficient support, or if they do, the interventions provided are unsuitable for their actual needs. In some cases, screening and identification do not lead to the provision of interventions.

In general, despite an increase of research in the last five years, robust, empirical evidence for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is still lacking. Difficulties around clear definitions of inclusive education and comparability of data on education of children with disabilities, make it difficult to

assess to what extent they are still being left behind. There is more work to be done to achieve genuine inclusive education, with substantive evidence of impact.

A useful starting point could be to use the UNESCO inclusive education criteria for continuous evaluation and critical examination of education systems, including that of Rwanda, informed by the understanding that this should be a continuous process, rather than a goal.

## Study Recommendations

### Government of Rwanda

1. **Carefully review the evidence of value and impact of the BLF IE interventions**, to inform decision-making on whether to institutionalise its various components,
2. **Continue to provide leadership in harmonising the different IE interventions/programmes** in Rwanda,
3. Ensure that there are robust data management systems at national level in place to promote regular data collection and analysis.
4. **Support the further development of national assessment methods** that are appropriate for and accommodate the needs of CWD/SEN.
5. **Ensure good coordination between relevant personnel and stakeholders at school, district and national level**

### School/Districts

1. **Maintain the role of the IEFT in schools and consider ways and means of reducing** the regular teaching load of these staff.
2. **Continue, strengthen and scale up the head teacher professional learning communities (PLC).**
3. **Incorporate the BLF-designated LLLs and NLLs into district programming**
4. **Future Teacher Professional Development (TPD)** should include a focus on teaching strategies to CWD/SEN in large classes.
5. Ensure that there are robust data management systems at district level in place to promote regular data collection and analysis,
6. Establish an axis of **technical support from SNECOs to IEFTs** to teachers

### Development Organisations/Programmes

1. **Ensure future IE interventions by development partners should continue to work collaboratively with other organisations, local and international**, in the same field.
2. **Leverage the strong interest and support from the GoR for IE by** providing a solid evidence base of positive impact of IE interventions, as well as a fully costed model.
3. **Investment and support to MINEDUC and NESA should focus on further developing assessment tools for CWD, such as the ones that have already been developed for children with intellectual disabilities.**

Ensure that future programming around IE has a **crosscutting focus on safeguarding**

# 1 Building Learning Foundations: Project Background and Context

The BLF programme (2016 - 2023), funded by UK Aid, through the FCDO, has been implemented by a consortium of the Education Development Trust, VSO, and the British Council, and in partnership with MINEDUC and the REB.

The BLF has three foundations:

- **Foundation 1: Teacher Development:** focusing on P1 – P3 teachers, aimed at improving the teaching of foundational skills (English and Maths), thus improving learning outcomes. This has included provision of continuous professional development for English and Maths teachers, provision of self-and-peer focused toolkits, access to audio-visual Continuous Professional Development (CPD) resources on smartphones, and establishment of teacher communities of practice. This included: the British Council-developed English Toolkit and EDT-developed Maths Toolkit; two smartphones with SD cards supplied to each school for English and Maths teachers to access audio and video material modelling best practice for teachers to use for self-study, and as part of community of practice (COP) sessions. Also included was guidance on inclusive teaching which was mainstreamed across the English and mathematics teacher toolkits and used as a basis for training of all P1-P3 English and mathematics teachers. The guidance and training had the aim of supporting teachers to develop three aspects of inclusive teaching: (a) creation of a safe 'learner friendly' environment for all pupils; (b) ensuring tasks are appropriately challenging for all pupils (differentiation of teaching being essential for inclusive teaching), and recognition of pupils with SEN; and (c) providing them with relevant support.
- **Foundation 2: Leadership for Learning:** focusing on head teachers, and aimed at improving instructional leadership in schools, thus improving learning outcomes. This has included the provision of an accredited coaching and continuous professional development programme led by the University of Rwanda College of Education. A network of head teachers has also been established, as national or local leaders of learning, who come together regularly in communities of practice (COP). This included extensive leadership training for head teachers and distribution of the Leadership for Learning: A head teacher's professional companion materials.
- **Foundation 3: System Strengthening:** focusing on several levels of the education system (school, sector, district and national), and aimed at strengthening performance management and planning, again with the overall aim of improving learning outcomes, and through embedded technical assistance in REB.

The BLF programme implemented a system-strengthening and more intensive inclusive education intervention focusing on selected schools in all districts. The intervention had three sets of activities:

- 1. Recruitment and training of 30 SNECOs (one per district in Rwanda):** The SNECOs were recruited mainly from a pool of University of Rwanda School of Education graduates with degrees in special needs education and deployed as VSO national volunteers. They have worked closely with Head Teachers and Inclusive Education Focal Teachers, as well as with relevant district and sector staff. Since their deployment in all 30 districts in Rwanda, the SNECOs have provided support for the identification and assessment of children; support to teachers, head teachers and school leaders; and technical input into the local (district) government education teams.
- 2. Recruitment and training of IEFTs in 476 programme-supported schools:** These schools are led by BLF National Leaders of Learning and Local Leaders of Learning, who facilitated Professional Learning Meetings with their colleague head teachers. The total number of schools rose to 500, with schools remaining in the programme despite transfer and re-allocations of some head teachers. SNECOs trained IEFTs alongside their head teachers, in workshops and provided continuous school-based support, making monthly support visits to each school. During these visits, the SNECOs have supported the IEFTs to use the IEFT toolkit, to undertake core IEFT activities related to identification, assessment and inclusive teaching of CWDs/SEN and to build their capacity to train their colleague teachers and collaborate with them. The SNECOs also

mentored the head teachers on their role of mentoring the IEFs to undertake their core responsibilities, which included working with their fellow teachers (particularly P1-P3 teachers) to assess children for SEN and disability, and to train and support teachers in inclusive teaching methodologies for their classrooms. The SNECOs have also worked with head teachers and IEFs on how to engage with and support parents of children with learning difficulties, as well as with the wider community, including on getting CWD back to school after the Covid-related school closures.

### **3. Development of a systematic model of early identification and assessment, as a foundation for inclusive teaching and support for CWD and those with learning difficulties.**

The multi-stage process included:

- Collection of information from parents of children entering P1 on any difficulties or disabilities which may affect their learning using the short set of Washington Group Questions (WGQs). Collection of information from parents of children entering P1 on any difficulties or disabilities which may affect their learning using the short set of Washington Group Questions (WGQs). The WGQs are a set of questions designed to identify people with a disability. The questions assess whether people have difficulty performing basic universal activities such as walking, seeing, hearing, cognition, self-care and communication.
- Analysis of the information collected from parents of children entering P1 to inform observation and assessment of those children.
- Documentation of the learning difficulties of children based on information and observations of teachers and identified strategies for teachers and parents to adopt to meet needs of individual children on forms titled 'Pupil Record of Learning Difficulty/SEN'.
- Review of progress of individual children in relation to use of strategies to meet their needs and details of the review recorded on the pupil record forms.
- Process of identifying whether any CWD required a more in-depth and structured school-level assessment due to the severity or complexity of their disability or disabilities and/or due to a lack of progress being made despite implementation of strategies.
- Implementation of structured school level assessments by a team led by the IEF and including a nurse from the sector health centre and when possible, a teacher from a special school.
- Development and implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) based on findings from school-level assessments.

The BLF team indicated that the engagement of parents of children enrolling in P1 was a major operation for the schools with the IEF and school leaders overcoming the challenges of reluctance of parents to visit the school and the limited literacy of many parents in completing the form. The sharing of learning and good practice by SNECOs in how to organise the collection of this information was important. Gaining support of a variety of local leaders and mobilising sufficient people to help parents to provide the information were key strategies for making the activity a success.

Pragmatic and nuanced approaches were also adopted for determining the learning difficulties of children and the strategies to meet needs which considered low level of relevant knowledge and practice of Rwandan teachers. Firstly, BLF developed a slimline '*Guide for teachers on identifying and helping pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs.*' Designed not to overawe teachers with too much detail which may have inhibited their use of the guide, it included key indicators of 12 learning difficulties and lists of strategies for teachers and/or parents to use to overcome the barriers associated with those difficulties.

Teachers were also not expected to develop IEPs for all identified children. IEPs are usually highly structured, with very specific objectives based on firm, well-informed assessment of the disabilities and or learning difficulties of children and their needs. This was seen as unrealistic for the teachers to achieve appropriately. Instead, BLF aimed to help teachers to develop pupil record forms in which they would note strategies they would implement from the guide and then adjust or change strategies

depending on whether they were having a positive impact on the child or not. This had a measure of trial and adaptation designed to build up understanding of the barriers affecting individual pupils' learning and their needs, and to give confidence to teachers to start trying to help the children without fear that they had to get things exactly right.

In addition to the school-level identification and assessment work, SNECOs were involved by UNICEF and Humanity and Inclusion in their piloting of MINEDUC's outlined system of referral and assessment. SNECOs provided technical leadership on educational assessment in District Multi-Disciplinary Teams.

The BLF intervention involved using existing government-approved tools and documents and aimed to influence government. The guide for teachers used information from the much longer MINEDUC/REB 'Guide for inclusive education for pre-primary, primary and secondary education' and a REB-approved tool was used for the structured school-level assessment of selected children both of which had been developed with the support of UNICEF. BLF's advocacy strategy focused on institutionalisation of the SNECO position and scale-up of IEFTs, and on incorporating aspects of the systematic and comprehensive approach to school-level identification and assessment into government policy.

It is important to note that the BLF programme has been implemented in Rwanda during periods of significant challenges. This has included the COVID 19 pandemic, which led to periodic closure of schools, beginning March 14, 2020. The GoR initiated a phased re-opening of schools in November 2020; whereby the students went back to the same grades as they were at closing, meaning that they repeated the year. During the closures various approaches were taken to enable remote learning (national TV and radio broadcasts, online resources for teachers, etc.). Research undertaken for EDT5 indicates that despite these efforts, many pupils experienced little or no education during the closure period, that fewer than half of teachers may have been able to support students' remote learning and that students from various disadvantaged groups, including CWD and SEN may have benefitted least from distance learning measures, due to factors such as that CWD, particularly those with visual and hearing difficulties, being unable to access radio lessons, or make use of printed learning resources.

Other challenges during the life of the project include the decision by MINEDUC to change the language of instruction in lower primary from Kinyarwanda to English, in December 2020, and a reduction in funding in the latter half of the implementation period, leading to cuts in programming meant to be extended to upper primary students.

## 2 Country Context

### 2.1 National Inclusive Education Landscape

The following is a brief outline of the inclusive education policy and institutional environment that the BLF programme has been working within.

#### 2.1.1 Policies/Strategic Plans

The GoR has made a commitment to uphold the right to education for all, including for the most vulnerable groups. This commitment is woven throughout national education policy. Two key GoR documents inform and guide the inclusive education environment in Rwanda: the ESSP 2018/19 – 2023/24 and the SNIE Policy (2022). Inclusive education features in the ESSP in Strategic Priority 7: Equitable opportunities for all Rwandan children and young people at all levels of education, and specifically, *Outcome 7.2. Increase the participation and achievement of children with disabilities and SEN at all levels of education*. Issues requiring attention are outlined, including the identification of learners with SEN.

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5 N. Kapur, School Closures in the Context of COVID-19: An Inequity Impact Assessment of Primary 2 and 3 in Rwanda, November 2020.

*“Strengthening the system to ensure the participation of LwD<sup>6</sup>, and to identify and meet the needs of the wider group of learners with SEN, will require collaboration with other ministries to develop a system of identification and referral, working towards providing a tiered system clear of support based on educational needs. In order to ensure the needs of all learners can be met, there is a need to not only look at visible disabilities, which may or may not have an impact on learning, but also focus on the identification and removal of barriers to learning.”<sup>7</sup>*

The ESSP highlights that *“within the education system there is a need for all teachers, trainers and higher education lecturers to be trained (both in pre-service and in in-service programmes) and supported so as to be able to include a diverse range of learners in their classrooms, whilst also training a cadre of specialists who can support learners and their regular teachers in mainstream classrooms.”*<sup>8</sup> ESSP activities planned to address these issues include equipping all schools with at least one teacher trained and competent in inclusive education and enabling teachers to identify learners with SEN and take action to ensure needs are met.

The SNIE policy describes a range of challenges for CWD and SEN relating to access to schooling and progression, quality and relevance of education provision, access to specialised instructional materials and support services, etc. The policy then goes on to outline 4 strategic goals:

1. Improved access, retention and completion of schooling,
2. Development of support services through schools of excellence in special needs & inclusive education
3. Capacity development for special needs & inclusive education quality services
4. Promotion of special needs & inclusive education quality services) and strategies to achieve these.

Examples of specific actions to be supported include: establishment of procedures and provisions for special educational needs identification and assessment services at school/community levels; provisions for training and deployment of personnel skilled in early special educational needs assessment, rehabilitation and related resource provisions; and provisions for itinerant teaching and services, as well as SNECOs in schools of the same communities.

## 2.2 National Education Structures

### 2.2.1 Ministry of Education (MINEDUC)

MINEDUC has overall responsibility for:

- Guiding and steering the stakeholders in the implementation of the special needs and inclusive education policy, ensuring quality services, and alignment with the government regulations and standards.
- Organizing, coordinating and promoting advocacy campaigns in relation to special needs and inclusive education
- Setting and reviewing regulations and standards of provisions to special needs and inclusive education services.

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6 Learners with Disability

7 GoR, Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018-19 to 2023-24, p. 43

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 43

- Providing technical guidance in all matters pertaining to special needs and inclusive education policy implementation.
- Developing and providing appropriate special instructional materials and services.
- Conducting regular updates on best practices for managing/implementing special needs and inclusive education
- Upgrading of equipment and materials to meet the appropriate standards required in education of learners with special educational needs.
- Licensing, regulating, registering and monitoring all special needs & inclusive education programs and service providers at all levels.
- Ensuring appropriate allocation of budget and timely support to special needs and inclusive education programmes, including in-service training for special needs & inclusive education personnel
- Ensuring adequate recruitment and deployment of appropriately skilled personnel in all special needs and inclusive education services in accordance to the guidelines of the Ministries responsible, and providing adequate infrastructure/ facilities and administrative structures.
- Ensuring that affirmative action for learners with special educational needs is implemented fairly in all education institutions in accordance to the set rules and regulations
- Ensuring that the budget allocation for special needs and inclusive education programmes is adequate.

MINEDUC has collaborated with international and national development partners, such as the World Bank on the Inclusive Education Initiative, and recently organised a workshop, which took place between 27<sup>th</sup>- 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, in Karongi, using the GPE Strategic Capacity Development grant, for harmonising approaches and tools for identification, assessment and referral developed by BLF and UNICEF/Humanity and Inclusion and scale-up of training for teachers at pre-primary and primary level based on the harmonisation. The harmonisation will be adapted from MINEDUC's outline of a system for referral and assessment which already reflects aspects of the VSO and UNICEF/Humanity and Inclusion interventions.

MINEDUC (in collaboration with the WB IEI), organised Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy Dialogues in May and June 2022. These served as fora to discuss the implementation status of the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy and ensure participants understood their roles in the successful implementation of the policy. These dialogues brought together different education stakeholders from local government, MINEDUC and its affiliated agencies, schools, Non-Government Organisations, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, and parents.

### 2.2.2 Rwanda Education Board

The REB has a central role in coordinating and leading basic education programmes and activities aimed at providing quality education in Rwanda, including inclusive education. Specifically, REB has responsibility for a range of activities, e.g. the preparation and distribution of curricula, teaching materials, teacher's guides, methodologies and establishment of teaching methods for nursery, primary, secondary, specialized schools and adult literacy schools; and the coordination of programmes and activities to ensure teachers' development, build their capacities and monitor their management. REB has now established a Special Needs and Inclusive Education Unit, and has set up a special needs and inclusive education database (data portal). With funding and technical support from World Bank and UNICEF, REB is developing accessible digital versions of pre-primary, primary and secondary textbooks which are designed to overcome key barriers for CWDs' effective access of textbooks (especially visually and hearing impaired and those with intellectual disabilities) and, with funding and technical support from World Bank, REB is developing edutainment episodes to support learning of children, incorporating accessibility features to enable their use by CWD.



### **2.2.3 University of Rwanda School of Special Needs and Inclusive Education**

The School of Special Needs and Inclusive Education (SNIE) focuses on reinforcing Inclusive Education within the Rwandan Education system through capacity building, framed within the College of Education's responsibilities as a Higher Learning Institution, including training quality educators, research and community support, and networking with partners in Inclusive and Special Needs Education. The School of Special Needs and Inclusive Education developed bachelor's and master's degree programmes in special needs education, and most SNECOs are graduates of these programmes. The University of Rwanda – College of Education (URCE) also gave technical support to REB for the development of in-service training modules on inclusive teaching, also funded by the WB's Inclusive Education Initiative.

### **2.2.4 National Examination and School Inspection Authority**

NESA has responsibilities to: set standards for accreditation of private basic education schools and technical secondary schools; monitor the implementation of norms and standards in public, government subsidised and private basic education and TSSs; ensure the quality of education in public, government subsidized and private basic education and TSSs; prepare, conduct and mark national examinations; publish national examinations results; and orient students of primary and ordinary level schools who passed the national examinations. NESA, with the support of the BLF programme, the REB SNIE Unit, and other partners have developed a Rwanda National School Inspection Framework which is designed to enable inspectors to undertake a comprehensive inspection of the inclusiveness of schools and to provide a specific rating on that inclusiveness. It includes a recommendation that SNECOs are institutionalised so that they can provide technical support to inspectors to inspect inclusiveness, and details of how IEFTs should be engaged in the inspections.

Additionally, NESA - with support from the BLF programme and other partners - has developed the Comprehensive Assessment Management Information System (CAMIS), focused on children's learning assessment data – which provides the capability to track the learning progress of CWD/SEN at school, sector, district, and national level. Teachers have begun inputting data into the system. However, there is more work to be done, with challenges with navigating the system and poor/lack of internet connectivity.

Generally, stakeholders at the various levels of the Rwandan education system have become more aware of the need for 'accommodations' to be provided for individual children to enable them to demonstrate their learning in continuous assessment, end of term/year tests and national examinations. However, more needs to be developed in terms of developing the accommodations and appropriate and fair systems for applying for accommodations and the assessment of the applications.

### **2.2.5 National Council for Disabled Persons**

The NCDP is a national organisation that serves a forum for advocacy and social mobilization on issues affecting persons with disabilities in order to build their capacity and ensure their participation in national development. The NCDP has been involved in the roll-out - so far in 15 districts - of a Disability Management Information System (DMIS) for inclusive development that will strengthen disability identification, registry, and case management, and the establishment of the district disability mainstreaming officers. The DMIS is meant to document all disability cases (including children) and establish case managers for each case. Noted that the intersection between DMIS and MINEDUC's harmonised approach to identification, assessment and referral, and use of the MINEDUC database still needs to be worked out.

### **2.2.6 Education Structures - Districts**

At the district (and sector) level, district administrations have responsibility for the delivery of education services. District Education Officers (DEOs) are employed by the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC). In each district, there is a DEO in charge of pre-primary and primary, a DEO in charge of secondary, a DEO in charge of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and a DEO in charge of infrastructure. DEOs are actively involved in the planning, delivery and monitoring

of education and training in their district. At the sector level, responsibility for overseeing the delivery of services and the running of schools is the remit of sector education inspectors (SEIs) – one per sector in each of the 30 districts. Districts also have a disability mainstreaming officer, with a range of responsibilities including coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating the interventions intended for people with disabilities and coordinating advocacy activities meant to improve the condition of beneficiaries.

### 2.2.7 National Organisations

A wide range of national organisations work to support persons with disabilities, including the Rwanda National Union of the Deaf (RNUD), the Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB), and the National Union of Disability Organisations of Rwanda (NUDOR). NUDOR, for example, is a union of 15 PWD organisations, established to represent and advocate for the interests and rights of PWD and to build the capacity of member organisations to better support PWD. With respect to inclusive education, NUDOR mobilizes parents to understand the importance of education especially for CWD; work with both government and private schools to advocate for inclusive facilities; and work with government, including REB, to represent the interests of PWD.

## 2.3 International organisations

A range of international organisations are supporting MINEDUC and REB to deliver inclusive education. These include:

The **World Bank** which, through a grant from the Inclusive Education Initiative (funded by a multi-donor trust fund), is supporting the GoR to make sure that children with disabilities are provided with equal opportunities to learn. The Quality Basic Education for Human Capital Development Project has, amongst other activities, helped to improve inclusive access to school facilities through the construction of 126 double story schools with accessible lavatories, as well as funding teacher development with CPD on inclusive pedagogy.

The **Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI)**, a multi-donor trust fund managed by the World Bank, which in Rwanda aimed at strengthening the education sector's responsiveness to the call for inclusive education, in line with priority focus areas outlined in the SNIE policy and the ESSP. With a focus on strengthening data and MIS systems in Rwanda, IEI Rwanda supported government and non-government capacity building efforts in developing data collection tools for disability disaggregated data from the school level for planning and monitoring. IEI also supported i) expansion of inclusive education infrastructure: double story schools with ramps, accessible blackboards, handwashing stations, and inclusive toilets ii) Development of inclusive edutainment programs iii) Support on procurement of assistive devices and inclusive teaching and learning materials (TLMs).

In terms of capacity development, key IEI Rwanda activities have included:

- The development of SNIE Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Diploma program to strengthen pre-service and in-service teacher training on inclusive education.
- Deployment of technical assistance and successful advocacy for a sustainable staffing structure for disability inclusion in MINEDUC and REB.
- Outreach through sub-national workshops to equip district level officers with knowledge around the SNIE policy and enhance stakeholder capacity and service delivery at the national and sub-national level.
- Design and implementation of the Rwanda Inclusive Education Policy Academy to equip policymakers and other key government stakeholders to foster systemic change and contribute to a more inclusive education system in Rwanda.

IEI Rwanda also engaged in the development of the Special Needs and Inclusive Education data and management and information system (MIS) tools for disability-disaggregated data from the school level to inform evidence-based policy, planning, monitoring, and decision making.<sup>9</sup>

IEI Rwanda worked with REB and with the BLF programme to provide training for end users of the SNIE data tool, aimed to build capacity and create awareness. The training was given to REB staff (in the SNIE unit and ICT department), SNECOs, and NLLs. In October 2022, 30 SNECOs from all districts were trained to support REB and districts in training education staff to conduct data collection and data management using the SNIE data and MIS tool of identification of students with disability. This training of trainers aimed contribute to the rollout of the tool to reach all schools for the maximum usage. Every SNECO pledged to collect data for at least 20 students with disabilities in their districts, which they successfully did.<sup>10</sup> After learning the basics of using the tool, the trained LLLs, in collaboration with the IEFTs, worked to identify students with disabilities in their schools, It is worth noting that the IEI Rwanda end-of- project report included some challenges and lessons learned, including: a lack of accurate data around inclusive education, including numbers of CWD/SEN, both in and out of school and staffing delays for the SNIE Unit in REB, meaning some activities also being delayed. The report noted the need for:

- strengthening the collection and use of SNIE data – and particularly, making use of the trained SNECOs, IEFTs, NLLs and LLLs.
- creating greater awareness of IE, including the SNIE policy, particularly at district and sector levels.
- budgetary allocations (capitation grants) being provided to schools to support CWD/SEN.
- more specialized training for teachers on how to develop and utilize individual education plans.
- selection and training of special education teachers in schools (as in the IEFTs)
- development of training materials for teachers on using sign language and braille.

**UNICEF, which has worked in partnership with Humanity and Inclusion (HI)** since 2015. At the policy level, UNICEF and HI developed different education materials that included a National Teacher Inclusive Education Guide, a National Training Manual, the National Inclusion Model and the National Curriculum of intellectual disability. At district level, they have implemented an assessment project for identifying children with disability who are in the community, by working with local leaders, health workers and community groups to provide children who need assistive devices like glasses and wheelchairs. At school level, they have supported 60 model schools in the country (two schools in each district), where they have built teachers' capacity on inclusive pedagogy, sign language, and disability identification in the mainstreaming schools. Teachers were trained on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for children with special needs. They have also promoted adaptive teaching and learning for CWD, with provision of appropriate teaching and learning materials, including digitalising textbooks. They have also improved school accessibility for CWD in project schools.

There have also been several successive **USAID-funded education projects** with inclusive education components, including Soma Umenye and Tunoze Gusoma. In the latter project, for example, they have worked with the National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA), to adapt the Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) and Early Grade Mathematics Assessments (EGMA) for use with CWD and SEN. Additionally, a collaboration of various development partners (including VSO, USAID Soma Umenye project, the WB's IEI, and the current USAID Itegere Tunoze project), a dictionary has been completed for Rwanda Sign Language (RSL) and government appear close to recognising RSL as an official language of Rwanda.

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<sup>9</sup> Inclusive Education Initiative in Rwanda; Final Report of Project Activities

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

Additionally, **the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHIA)** is a project focused on supporting Rwandan authorities to undertake early identification of CWD, provide access to the right assistive devices, and mainstream play and play therapy across services for CWD. This includes a more streamlined way of enabling children referred through the education system (e.g., by schools) to be assessed and speed up provision of assistive devices for children and other measures. Noted that SNECOs have supported in sharing information about individual children's needs and coordination of provision of assistive devices.

### 3 The BLF Programme Context

The **BLF programme aimed to establish a systemic approach to inclusive education capacity** development by pioneering the roles of SNECOs and IEFTs which were already found in policy (as noted above), but not yet operationalised. The SNIE policy in outlining provision of trained and specialized personnel proposed that SNECOs should support clusters of schools in the same neighbourhood community. BLF considered that a more realistic and effective arrangement would be for a SNECO to serve at district level who could support the development of competence in inclusive education of a teacher in each school, who could support their colleague teachers as indicated in the ESSP. Thereby, two key policy measures, the operationalization of the SNECO from the SNIE Policy, with some adaption, and the IEFT fulfilling the role outlined in the ESSP would combine to enable effective capacity-development at scale.

The **alternative of having a SNECO for each cluster of schools would require several hundred people.** The pipeline of personnel qualified for such a role was considered insufficient and the cost significantly prohibitive. Instead, BLF deployed 30 SNECOs, one per district, believing that it would be realistic for government to finance the role once the project had finished. Furthermore, at district level the SNECO could play a role in coordination for more inclusive education through working in collaboration with district education officials, the District Disability Mainstreaming Officer, and other stakeholders such as NCPD representatives.

**This relatively small number of SNECOs could be intensively trained and mentored to provide training and mentoring to IEFTs, establishing a systemic axis** of technical support from district to school level for more inclusive education. However, in the process of establishing this model rather than directing SNECOs to train and mentor IEFTs in all schools in their district, it was considered more strategic and pragmatic for SNECOs to work with IEFTs in schools led by NLLs and LLLs. The NLLs and LLLs were serving head teachers who had been selected, by district and sector officials in collaboration with BLF, as better performing head teachers, who were then being trained by BLF to facilitate Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, quarterly at district level, and monthly at sector level meetings reaching all head teachers. SNECOs would train and mentor the NLLs and LLLs, as well as the IEFTs, drawing on better school leadership to establish the model well with head teachers working in collaboration with IEFTs. As such, with 476 NLLs and LLLs involved, leading at least one school in every sector (sub-district division) of Rwanda, there would be a good basis for scaling up the approach using established IEFTs and NLLs/LLLs who were accustomed to supporting their colleague head teachers in PLCs.

At the same time **BLF aimed to engage government, strategic partners and NGOs in spreading awareness of** the two roles and advocating for the institutionalisation of SNECOs and scale-up of IEFT to all schools. VSO was already co-chairing the Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform (RENCOP) Equity and Inclusion Working Group and then in 2020 took on co-chairing of SNIE Technical Working Group with REB, which had been upgraded from taskforce level, putting BLF in a stronger position of influence.

## 4 Research Process

### 4.1 Sampling Strategy and Approach

As planned, a "deep dive" sampling approach for the SIERES research at the field level was utilised, with fieldwork undertaken in 10 BLF schools – NLL and LLLs - where the BLF inclusive education

interventions (SNECOS and IETFs) were implemented. This also included a number of schools where the IE interventions were first piloted before the approach was scaled up to all 30 districts in Rwanda. Schools were selected (Table 1) on the advice of the BLF team.

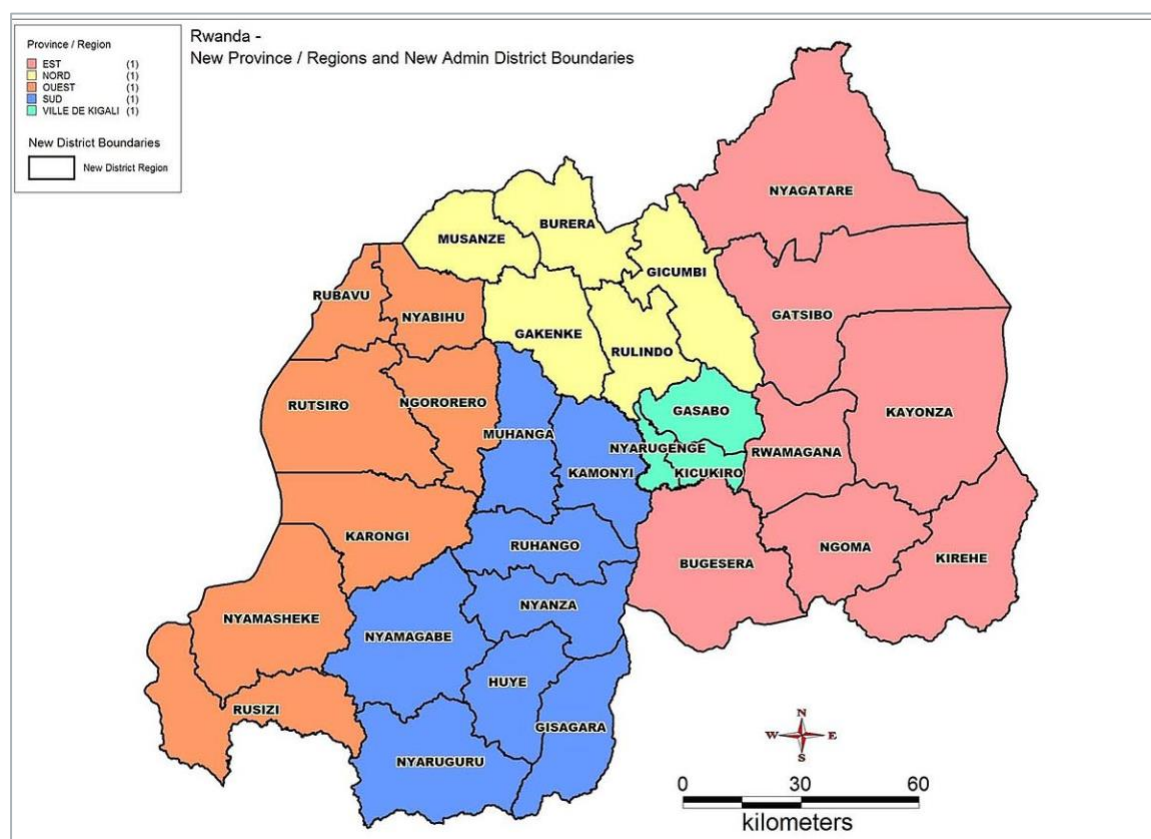


Figure 1 Map of Rwanda (Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rwanda\\_Districts\\_Map.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rwanda_Districts_Map.jpg))

**Table 1 Selection of schools**

District	Sector	School	Head Teacher Role	Pilot School
Kicukiro	Masaka	GS Rusheshe	NLL	Yes
Kicukiro	Kanombe	GS Remera	LLL	Yes
Kicukiro	Gatenga	EP Gatenga II	LLL	Yes
Muhanga	Muhanga	EP Gitongati	LLL	No
Muhanga	Cyeza	GS Cyeza	LLL	No
Muhanga	Kiyumba	EP Kayanza B	LLL	No
Musanze	Busogo	GS Rusanze	LLL	No
Musanze	Gacaca	GS Karwasa	LLL	No
Musanze	Musanze	CS Bukane	LLL	No
Musanze	Muko	GS Muko	LLL	No

The initial plan was for the FATE team to conduct visits to 10 schools and district education offices **over two weeks, conducting all FGDs and KIIs; managing logistics and arrangements at school and district level, and ensuring all documentation and submission of all completed data collection tools** (including translation of responses) to the team leader. However, the national exams schedule released by MINEDUC meant the FATE team had only a week to conduct the school and district level data collection before the exams began, which were followed by schools closing for the summer break. The FATE team reorganized the school and district visits to take place over five days (see **Annex 2** for research schedule).<sup>11</sup>

At the school and district level, the broad focus of the FGDs and KIIs included:

- Knowledge and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of IEFTs and SNECOs
- Knowledge and understanding of numbers and categories of CWD and SEN in schools
- Impacts of the IE interventions, including the work of IEFTs and SNECOs: for CWD/SEN, for teachers, and the wider school community (including other children, parents etc)
- Challenges and opportunities associated with implementation of IE interventions, including the work of IEFTs and SNECOs
- Issues relating to sustainability.

**Table 2 School stakeholders**

Schools	School Stakeholders	Planned Sample	Approach	Actual Sample
10	Teachers	30	FDGs	<b>53</b> (26 F, 27 M)
	Head Teachers	10	KIIs	<b>10</b> (3 F, 7 M)
	IEFTs	10	KIIs	<b>10</b> (6 F, 4 M)
	CWD/SEN	30	FGDs	<b>60</b> (27 F, 33 M)
	Parents of CWD	30	FGDs	<b>41</b> (26 F, 15 M)

### Children with Disability and Special Education Needs

The categories of disability are the four main categories used by MINEDUC and REB, as well as the development partners in Rwanda. For this study, disabilities were identified on the basis of IEFTs' assessment records of learners who participated in the FDGs at each school. It is important to note that this categorisation was based on the "dominant" disability, considering that a significant number of learners had multiple disabilities.

The categories of disability are the four main categories used by MINEDUC and REB, as well as the development partners in Rwanda. These categories are:

- Physical and sensory difficulties (hearing, vision, motor skills, hand/eye coordination)
- Cognitive and learning difficulties
- Communication and interaction difficulties (speech and language, social interaction and communication)

<sup>11</sup> For Parents with CWD/SEN, there was a question about any changes in the performance, behaviour etc. of CWD

- Behavioural, social and emotional difficulties (attention, moods and emotion, social skills and relationships)<sup>12</sup>

For this study, disabilities were identified on the basis of IEFTs' assessment records of learners who participated in the FDGs at each school. The process of assessment and identification of CWD/SEN utilised by the BLF programme (See

**Table 3**) is through the use of a parent survey, an individual pupil record, and basic hearing and vision checks. All parents fill a brief survey about their child/ren at enrolment in P1 about any disabilities or difficulties their children have that may affect their learning. The questions in the survey are informed by the Washington Group Questions for collecting information about disability. The WGQs are a set of questions designed to identify people with a disability. The questions assess whether people have difficulty performing basic universal activities such as walking, seeing, hearing, cognition, self-care and communication.

Teachers also observe children to see which children may have disabilities or learning difficulties and carry out education focused investigations into the hearing and vision of children suspected as having problems in this area. Teachers use information gathered from parents, their own observations and from the vision and hearing investigations to complete a pupil record form for each child for which there is some evidence of a learning difficulty. Details of the children's difficulties and actions to support their learning are included in the pupil record form. Teachers then implement the actions and periodically review progress, updating the actions accordingly and involving parents when possible.

**Table 3 Selection criteria of Children with Disability and Special Education Needs**

		Kicukiro			Muhanga		Musanze			Rusanze	
		Gatenga	Remera	Rusheshe	Gitongati	Kanyanza	Cyeza	Bukane	Karwasa		Muko
<b>Disability</b>											
<b>Physical &amp; sensory difficulties</b>	M	2	4	2	3	1	3		2	2	
	F	1	1	1	2	1	2	4	2	1	
<b>Cognitive &amp; learning difficulties</b>	M			1	1		2	1	3	1	2
	F	2		1	1		1	1	3		
<b>Communication &amp; interaction</b>	M	1	1								
	F		1							1	
<b>Behavioural, Social &amp; emotional</b>	M									1	
	F									1	
<b>Total</b>		6	7	5	7	2	8	6	6	8	5

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that this categorization was based on the "dominant" disability, considering that a significant number of learners had multiple disabilities.

## National Stakeholders

The national level data collection took place in the weeks following the school and district process, as this was not dependent on schools being open. The FATE Consulting team organised all the KIIs, managing logistics and arrangements with the key stakeholders, ensuring all documentation and submission of all completed data collection tools to the team leader. Data capture forms were developed for the national level to capture key data and roles/responsibilities of the respondents. The aim of the national level data collection was to gather the expert knowledge and understanding of inclusive education in Rwanda from key players in government and international organisations/donors, around: National policy on inclusive education; previous and existing national and local inclusive education programmes/projects; efforts to institutionalise inclusive education structures and staffing within the education system at national (, district (and school levels; financing and costs; and challenges and opportunities.

**Table 4 National-level stakeholders**

Stakeholder Organisation	Planned Sample	Approach	Actual Sample	Personnel
REB	2	KIIs	1	Acting Director
MINEDUC	2	KIIs	0	
BLF Team	4	KIIs	4	VSO Project Implementation Lead VSO Inclusive Education Lead BLF Education Technical Lead Leadership for Learning & MEL Lead
NUDOR	2	KIIs	2	Education Advocacy Advisor Programme Manager for Inclusive Education
NCPD	1	KIIs	0	
Humanity and Inclusion	2	KIIs	1	Inclusive Education Project Manager
UNICEF	1	KIIs	1	Inclusive Education Lead
Chance for Childhood	1	KIIs	0	
FHI360	2	KIIs	1	Deputy COP Tunoze Gusoma
World Bank	1	KIIs	0	

**Table 5 District-level stakeholders**

Districts	District Stakeholders	Planned Sample	Approach	Actual Sample
	District Director of Education	0	KII	1 (M)
	District Education Officer	3	KII	1 (M)



Districts	District Stakeholders	Planned Sample	Approach	Actual Sample
3	Sector Education Inspector (SEI)	3	KII	2: 1 F, 1 M
	SNECOs	3	KII/FGD	10: 6 F, 4 M
	District Disability Mainstreaming Officer	1	KII	

## 4.2. Research Limitations

Several factors had an impact on the SIERES research process, including:

- Constraints on the time available for the school and district data collection process.** The plan was for the data collection to take place over two weeks, before the national, end-of-school year examinations started (during which period MINEDUC has mandated that outside visitors to schools are not allowed). However, the exams were announced at short notice, with only a week available to organise the team of researchers, inform the selected schools, work out the timetable for visits, and arrange for the key stakeholders to be available for FDGs and KIIs. The FATE team moved swiftly to adapt the timetable for the school and district visits, which involved adding several team members so that all selected schools could be visited. However, the short time frames meant it was difficult to locate key stakeholders, particularly at district level (e.g. DEOs). It also may have impacted on the thoroughness of some data collection processes, given that the research teams had to conduct both school and district FDGs and KIIs in a single day.
- Difficulties in obtaining interviews with national stakeholders.** The time period scheduled for the national stakeholders' interviews was mainly during the school break. In some cases, this coincided with holidays for some of the stakeholders, who proved to be unavailable for interview. In particular, it proved very difficult to conduct interviews with MINEDUC representatives. Nevertheless, all relevant MINEDUC documentation regarding SNIE was reviewed as part of information gathering for this study.
- Lack of substantive quantitative data of programme impact on CWD and SEN at school level.** The FATE team were able to see a few examples of individual education plans developed for CWD and SEN, being maintained and followed up on by IEFTs and teachers. And various stakeholders including SNECOs, IEFTs, head teachers, teachers and children themselves could describe the positive impact of IE interventions. However, there was little quantitative evidence of impact provided in the form of, for example, pupil attainment records, records of transition from one grade to another, or increased enrolment of CWD/SEN over time. This means that the bulk of the data gathered at school and district level, and to an extent, at national level, is qualitative. To note, the BLF endline report provides quantitative data of, for example, improved learning outcomes over time for CWD/SEN.<sup>13</sup>
- Data collection factors that limited the opportunity to conduct disaggregated-by-gender analysis.** This is even though focus groups such as CWD/SEN, teachers, and parents of CWD were divided into male and female groups and the data collectors assigned to each grouping were male or female, depending on the gender of the group. Review of the data gathered from these groups did not pick up on any significant differences in responses between males and females.<sup>14</sup>
- Lack of details and breakdown on the budget/costs of delivery of the IE components of the BLF programme.** Efforts were made during this research to obtain a breakdown of the costs

<sup>13</sup> BLF Endline Evaluation, August 2023

<sup>14</sup> Except for a specific reference to potential safeguarding risks, which is discussed later in this report

associated with the delivery of the IE components from the BLF team, including the approximate cost per school (or per child) of providing SNECOs/IEFTs and to therefore address to what extent this is a constraint to the scaling of the intervention, and whether what (if anything) could be done to reduce costs of inclusive education interventions (i.e. linking up with national volunteer programmes).

## 5 Research Study Findings

### 5.1 Impacts of IEFTs and SNECOs

**This section seeks to address the following research objectives:** Assess the effectiveness of BLF's Special Needs Education Coordinators and Inclusive Education Focal Teachers and IEFTs to identify inclusive education outcomes/impacts for teachers, parents, and children; to investigate their value for children with disabilities, including through case studies; and to consider the benefits more widely at different levels of the education system, including the national, district, sector, and school level.

**The SIERES research questions relevant for this section are:** What is the value of a) SNECOs and b) IEFTs for widening access to education outcomes for children (male/female) with disabilities? And What is the value of a) SNECOs and b) IEFTs at the different levels of the education system (school, district, national)?

#### 5.1.1 School Level Findings

The qualitative data gathered from the majority of stakeholders, at the school level described the positive benefits of having IEFTs in schools, supported by the SNECOs. Stakeholders who participated in KIIs and FGD highlighted the following:

- **Increased social inclusion for CWD and SEN in schools.** Numerous stakeholders at school and district level reported that CWD and SEN were made more welcome in primary schools that had IEFTs and that were being supported by SNECOs. Some parents of CWD/SEN noted that they had been encouraged to send their CWD to school and had noticed that their children were happier at school, because they could play with friends and were being well-treated.<sup>15</sup>
- **Better progression of CWD and SEN from one grade to the next.** This was reported by a range of stakeholders, with teachers, for example, stating that CWD/SEN were now much more likely to transition from one grade to another, because of the training and support of the IEFT (in collaboration with the head teacher).<sup>16</sup>
- **Improved inclusive teaching practices by teachers.** Head teachers, IEFTs, the Sector Education Inspector (SEI) and teachers themselves reported that the IEFTs had a positive impact on the teaching methods used by teachers to, for example, differentiate teaching methods for CWD/SEN, adapt seating arrangements, and set assessment tasks appropriate for CWD/SEN.<sup>17</sup>
- **Increased enrolment of CWD and SEN.** the various stakeholders interviewed at school and district level reported that generally, there had been an increase in the number of CWD/SEN enrolled in school. Reasons given for this included better assessment and identification of CWD/SEN through

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<sup>15</sup> Note that some studies suggest that the benefits of social inclusion of CWD/SEN can be problematic. According to Masquillier, C, , De Bruyn, S & Musoke, D, in The role of the household in the social inclusion of children with special needs in Uganda – a photovoice study, social inclusion has the potential to both benefit and cause harm. The results show that when a disability is socially devalued to a certain degree, carers and their household members have to deal with the ongoing process of stigma management. Depending on the characteristics of the child, carer and household, this can lead to an upward spiral towards visibility or a downward spiral towards concealment – reinforcing social inclusion or stigma, respectively.

<sup>16</sup> Noted that the FATE Consulting team were unable to see physical evidence of this in the form of school records etc.

<sup>17</sup> A number of teachers indicated that despite the training and support of IEFTs, it was difficult for them to give CWD and SEN the time and attention they required because of their large class sizes.

the support of IEFTs and SNECOS, and, in some cases, because parents had been encouraged to send out-of-school CWD/SEN to school.<sup>18</sup>

- **Decrease in drop-out of CWD and SEN.** As noted above, various stakeholders reported a decrease in the number of dropouts of CWD/SEN, for reasons already discussed.<sup>19</sup>

What follows are more specific findings of the stakeholders who responded to the FATE Consulting data collection team, by role/designation:

### Headteachers

The most common head teacher response was that the presence of IEFTs in schools (and supported by SNECOs), had led to greater awareness of, and improved social inclusion for CWD and SEN. One head teacher stated that: *“Before this intervention, some teachers couldn’t even remember that they had them in the classes.”*<sup>20</sup>

Another common response was that CWD and SEN are now progressing from one year to the next. *“There is change in access to education because we improved in terms of grading the children with disability and transitioning them from one grade to another without letting them stay in the same grade for so many years. We improved to assess them, not based on only academic performance but also their social behaviours progress according to the case they have.”*<sup>21</sup>

The head teachers reported that they worked in collaboration with the SNECOs and IEFTs, to identify and support CWD/SEN in their schools, and that a focus on IE was an important component (See **Figure 2**) in their Leadership for Learning training.

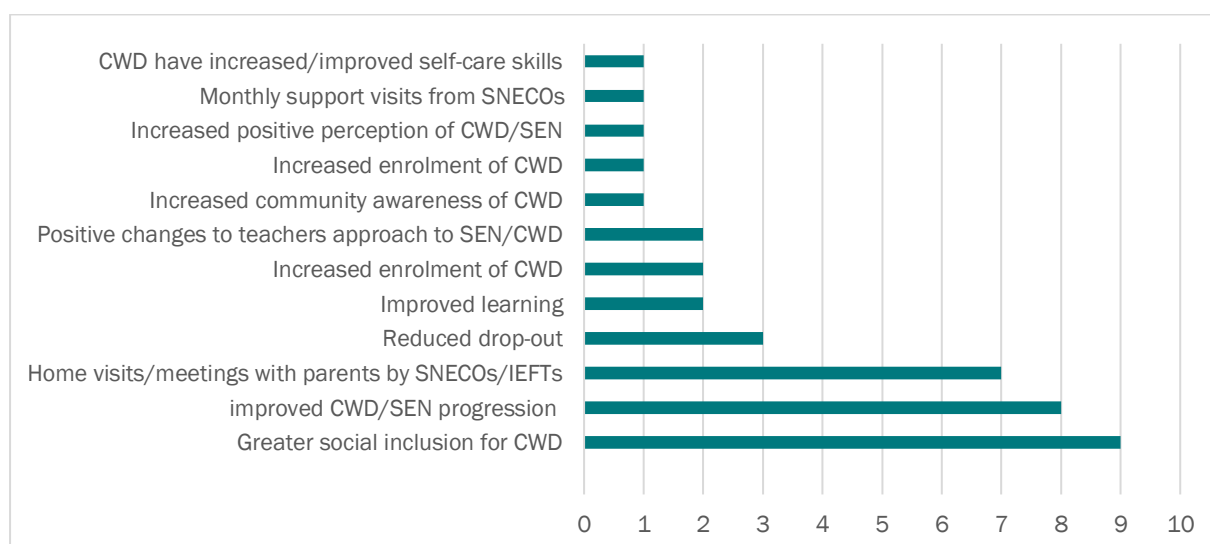


Figure 2 Head Teachers - Impact of SNECOs and IEFTs

Head teachers noted that: *“they (teachers have changed the way they interact with CWD, and don’t treat them harshly” and “they try different teaching methods, depending on the needs of the child.”*<sup>22</sup>

A head teacher reported that: *“At the school level, we used to retain the students in the first grade for a long time, even though they are not really earning any academic skills. But this has improved, because we now*

<sup>18</sup> The FATE Consulting teams did review examples of pupil records being maintained by the IEFTs but these did not always report whether the child in question was progressing from grade to grade.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Head teacher, GS Rusheshe, Summary Head Teacher Form

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

<sup>22</sup> Head Teacher, GS Remera, Summary Head Teacher Form

*understand that some CWD, especially those with mental disability, may not learn academically. It is all about improving social behaviour, such as using the toilet by themselves, or cleaning themselves. That is what we call success for them.”<sup>23</sup>*

Over 80% of head teachers interviewed knew how many CWD they had identified in their school and in some cases, they noted that:

*“The number of children with disability enrolled in school has increased. Last year we had 3 CWD and this year we have 9.”*

## Teachers

Teachers reported that working with and being trained by the IEFs had led to a positive change in their teaching practice, including adapting teaching practice to accommodate CWD/SEN, referencing the implementation of inclusive approaches in the classroom and teaching according to the capacity/level of the students etc (See Figure 3).

These modifications resulted in some positive outcomes for the CWD and for other students. One teacher reported,

*“Teachers used to give zeros to children with disability in class which would make them cry, but after various trainings by an IEF, they are now able to give them fair marks. For example, when teaching them, they try to give them simple exercises that are easy for them to do. The children are able to get fair marks instead of zero, from such exercises. After getting such marks, children with disability feel happy and don’t feel isolated.”<sup>24</sup>*

Another teacher reported that:

*“Before we used to focus on students who have the capability and who succeed in the class but now we care about all students especially those who have disability and difficulties in learning. We use different games and songs so that they can gain something in return.”<sup>25</sup>*

Like the head teachers, the most common response from teachers on the impact of IEFs and SNECOs is that there was improved social inclusion for CWD/SEN. One teacher noted that,

*“Other children also have understood how to take care of children with disability. They no longer laugh at them nor tell them bad words. All this makes children with disability feel loved and cared for. This is shown through the interactions between children with disability and other children whether in class or outside the class.”<sup>26</sup>*

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<sup>23</sup> Head Teacher, GS Cyeza, Summary Head Teacher Form

<sup>24</sup> Teacher, EP Gatenga, Teacher Summary Data Capture Form

<sup>25</sup> Teacher, CS Bukane, Teacher Summary Data Capture Form

<sup>26</sup> Teacher, EP Gatenga, Teacher Summary Data Capture Form

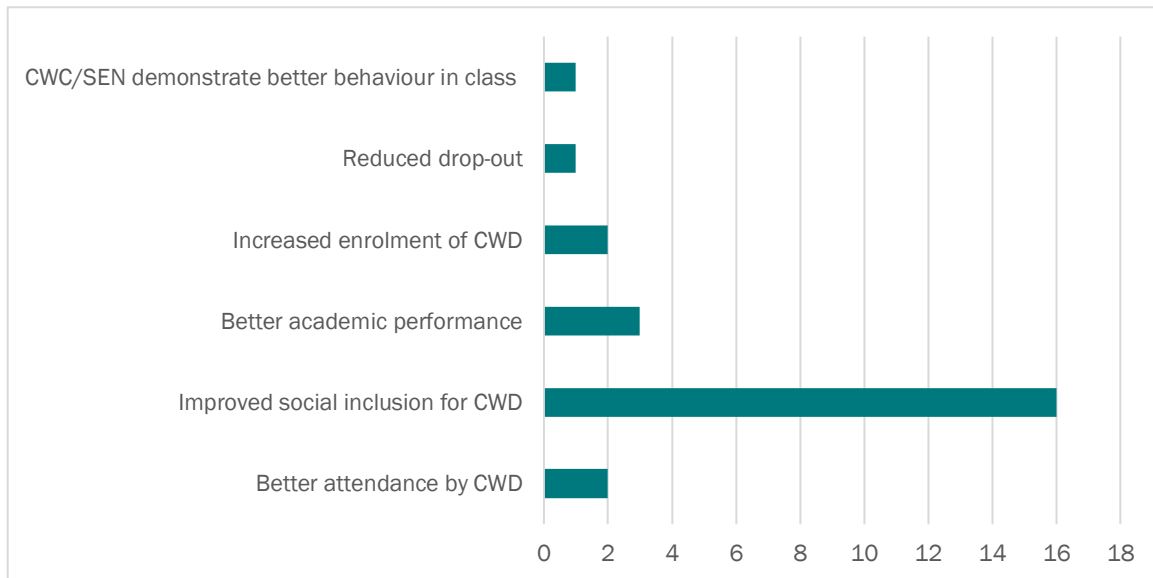


Figure 3 Teachers - Impact on CWD/SEN

### Parents of CWD

The responses from the parents of CWDs were mixed. On the one hand, about a quarter of parents noted that the work undertaken in schools by the IEFs and SNECOs created increased social inclusion for their children, in common with other stakeholders. Parents also spoke of their children developing better self-care - defined variously as being able to keep clean, look after school materials and their uniform etc. as well as basic skills – defined variously on a continuum from being more focused and better behaved in the classroom, to being able to participate in group activities (see [Figure 4](#)).

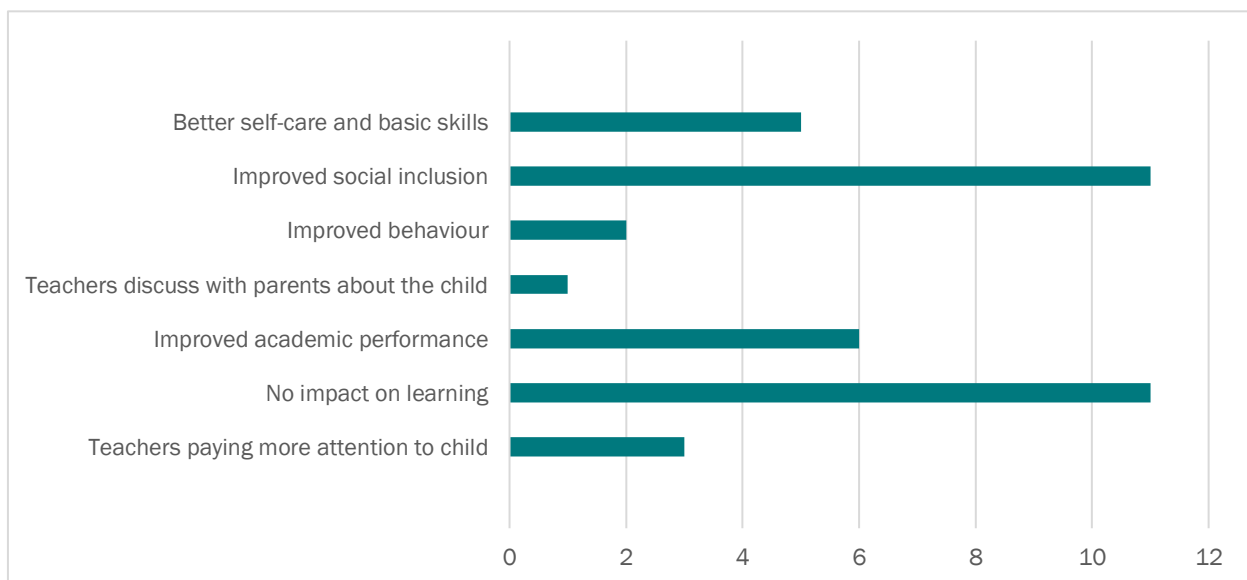


Figure 4 Parents of CWD - Impact of IEFs and SNECOs

However, an equal number of parents (around a quarter) reported no noticeable impact on their children’s academic learning, in particular for CWD with more severe disabilities. Parents’ noted the following:

*“Dorcas can speak a word in English. If the teacher shows her a picture of a pot she knows what is it and when she reaches home, she repeats what the teacher said. She showed me that this is a pot, this is a paper in English but she cannot write it.”*

*“Henriette just likes to go to school. She can wash herself, do cleaning, prepare food. But I don’t see any change in her academically.”<sup>27</sup>*

*“The challenge I face is that my child will not be able to do anything to support herself in the future. This is because her brain doesn’t really improve even a little bit. In 2016, she started the school and failed. Till now, she is still in P2 but doesn’t even know to write her name, yet it is very easy. In addition, she doesn’t know how to maintain her materials because when I provide a notebook and a pen, she doesn’t know where she put them, and tears off all papers in the notebook. Then due to insufficient financial capacity, I fail to provide materials every day and she spends some days without them.”<sup>28</sup>*

This reflects that, while parents appreciated that their children were better accepted/welcomed into the school community, they were still not convinced that their children were learning/gaining skills that would enable them to be independent following their education.

A few parents also noted that sometimes their child was still being bullied and harassed at school, suggesting that inclusiveness may only go so far, and that more work is needed to change mindsets and behaviour. One parent also expressed fears about the safety of her daughter, noting that:

*This child is quiet; if other students hit her, she can’t speak. This makes me worried thinking that when she faces any type of violence, including sexual violence, I won’t be able to know because she doesn’t speak.”<sup>29</sup>*

This highlights the particular risks and vulnerabilities to which CWD may be subjected and may also explain why parents are hesitant to send their children to school.

## Children with Disabilities/SEN

The focus of the FGD with CWD and SEN included:

- Differences between home and school;
- Experiences of school (interactions with teachers and children, safety etc.);
- Accessibility of school facilities;
- Learning and doing well; and
- Challenges and difficulties.

Most responses from the children participating in the FDGs were positive. They spoke of enjoying being at school, playing with other children, feeling safe, being helped to learn by the teachers, and other children helping them during lessons. Girls frequently said they liked school because it gave them time and space to play and be free from household chores. Many girls mentioned that their teachers and classmates were kind and helpful.

*“At school we feel secure because we feel loved, cared for and other children don’t beat us nor abuse us. We play with them during break times and its always fun.”<sup>30</sup>*

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<sup>27</sup> Parents of CWD, EP Bukane Parents with CWD Data Capture Form

<sup>28</sup> , EP Gitongati, Parents of CWD Summary Data Capture Form

<sup>29</sup> Parent, EP Gitongati, Parents of CWD Summary Data Capture Form

<sup>30</sup> CWD, GS Remera, CWD/SEN Summary Data Capture Form

*“Being at school is better than being at home because at school, we are free, we are happy, and we play with other children whereas at home we are only helping our parents to do home chores.”<sup>31</sup>*

*“We feel safe because no one attacks us and no one who misuses our rights. We get the same help.”<sup>32</sup>*

Boys who participated in the FDGs frequently mentioned that one of the things they liked about school was being able to play football with their classmates. Most boys and girls reported that the latrines and school facilities were accessible (Figure 5). When asked about whether they were learning and doing well, both boys and girls spoke about their favourite subjects and said they were moving up in class positions.

As for challenges, the most common response from both boys and girls was difficulty getting to and from school.

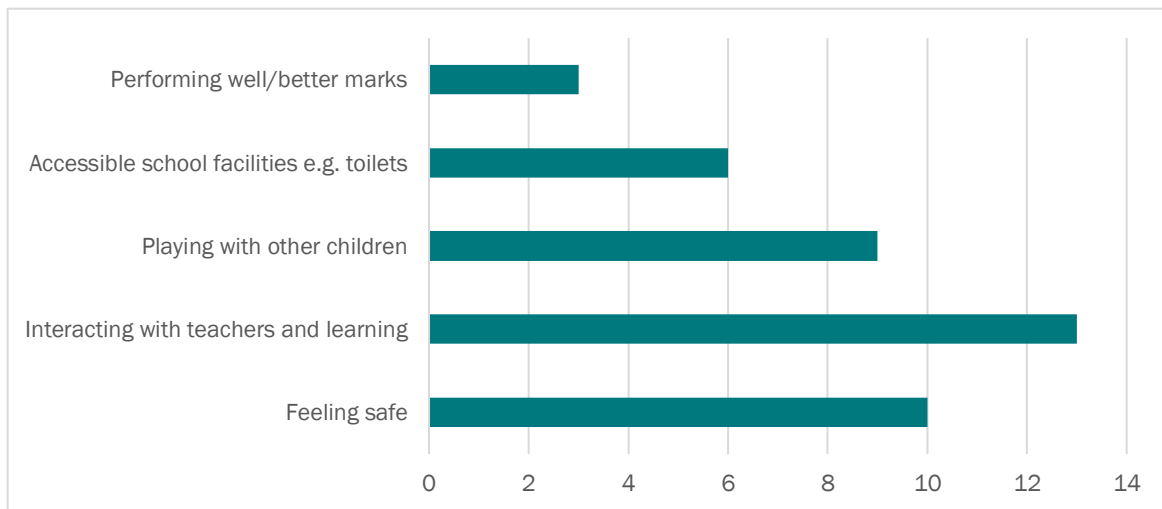


Figure 5 CWD - Experiences of School

### Box 2: CWD Case Study - Eveline

<sup>31</sup> CWD, GS Remera, CWD/SEN Summary Data Capture Form

<sup>32</sup> CWD, GS Rusheshe, CWD/SEN Summary Data Capture Form

Eveline was born with a physical disability in her legs that affected her ability to walk. Eveline felt self-conscious and fearful of social situations due to her physical limitations. However, with the support of her family, the IEFT, and teachers and a determined mindset, she has overcome her fears and gain confidence.

When Eveline was in lower primary at GS Muko, she couldn't walk. She went to hospital for surgery and spent a long time there. When she returned, she was able to walk on crutches, but she was enrolled in P3, she found that all her friends had progressed to higher grades and some had taken the National Exams.

At first, she struggled to see herself in a class that was not her age and felt discouraged. However, with the help of the IEFT, and her teachers who received IE training, Eveline got used to it and decided to put more effort into her study. She developed the desire to learn and slowly gained confidence because of the inclusive education program activities and teachers that encouraged and supported her in her studies. She started to gain good grades, which helped her overcome her fear. She realized that her disability did not define her and that she could achieve great things.

Eveline faced challenges in her everyday life. She struggled with public speaking and was often too afraid to express herself or share her ideas. However, with the newfound confidence she gained from the help of teachers and family members who support her, she wrote a poem, "I AM ABLE," and an art game that talks about the ability to achieve great things by people who have disabilities. To inspire other students who have disability, Eveline was given the opportunity to read the poem and play the art game on the International Day of the African Child held on June 16, 2023, in front of all students, teachers, and parents at her school.

### Inclusive Education Focal Teachers

The IEFTs described their roles and responsibilities as including working with other teachers to identify and support CWD, providing IE continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, and providing ongoing support and follow-up for CWD and SEN in schools. In terms of positive impact, the IEFTs discussed their impact on teachers and on CWD and SEN.

The IEFTs articulated their responsibilities with CWD, with teachers, and with parents. They emphasized how much they valued the training they received from the SNECOs, the follow up refreshers and support from SNECOs, the communities of practice (virtual and in-person) with other IEFTs, and the collaboration with parents, teachers, head teachers and district staff in the identification and support of CWD and SEN.

In terms of impact on teachers, the most common responses from IEFTs were increased knowledge and confidence of teachers to interact with and support CWD/SEN; teachers now providing extra support for CWD/SEN; changed mindsets of teachers towards CWD/SEN; and setting goals appropriate for CWD/SEN. An IEFT reported that,

*"Teachers were able to feel confident on how to take care of children with disability, know how to teach them in class with other children as well as love them and take them as their own. This made children with disability feel free in our school society and also be able to learn."*<sup>33</sup>

This was repeated by other IEFTs, including one that noted:

*"We have changed the mindset of teachers by not just focusing on the well performing children but also to focus the vulnerable ones especially those with disabilities."*<sup>34</sup>

IEFTs in FDGs talked about how teachers were trying harder to make the CWD/SEN feel more comfortable and welcome in their classrooms by changing the seating arrangements of CWD; actively

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<sup>33</sup> IEFT, EP Remera, IEFT Data Capture Form

<sup>34</sup> IEFT, GS Karwasa, IEFT Data Capture Form



encouraging them to participate (e.g., answer questions) in lessons; ensuring that they are included in group work activities; and setting differentiated tasks and assessments according to the different learning levels of the children. However, there have been challenges from some teachers, who have regarded the CWD/SEN as “their (the IEFT’s) children”, and some who have been reluctant to take up new teaching strategies.

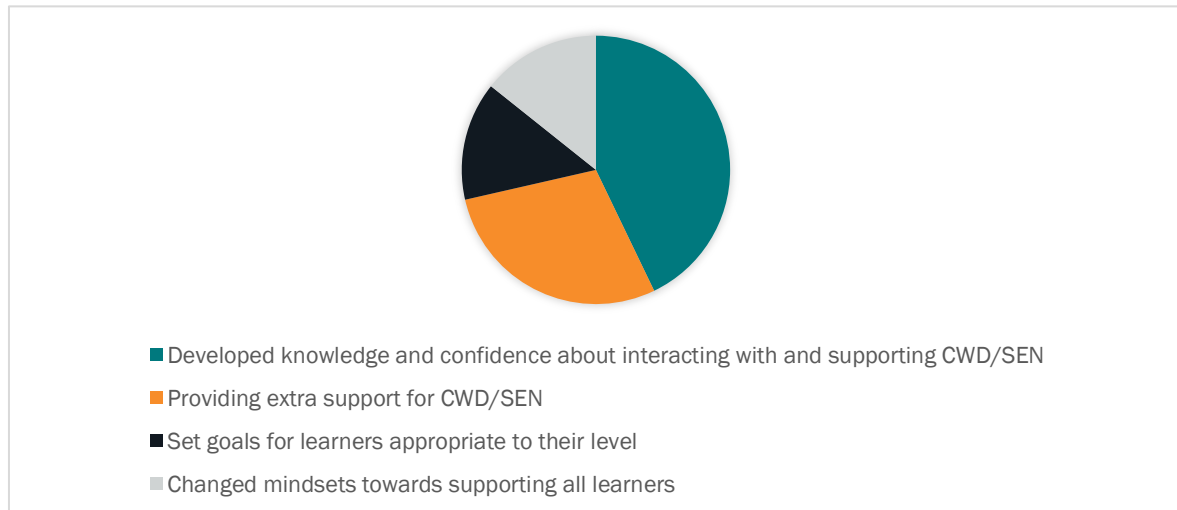


Figure 6 IEFTs - Impacts on Teachers

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### Box 3: Case Study: An IEFT's Story - GS Muko

"I'm a teacher at GS Muko. I was lucky to be selected to be an IEFT, to provide support to CWD/SEN and other teachers on inclusive education. I received training from the SNECO, who has continued to support me to do my work.

One day, I was heading home from work. Along the way I met a boy eating sugarcane. I realized that he had a problem of socializing. I talked to him, but he couldn't answer because he had social communication problems. I decided to ask the neighbours where the child lives. The next day morning, I went to their home to find the boy and talk to his parents.

When I reached their house, I talked to his mother and asked her about her son, named Etienne, and why he wasn't going to school. The mother replied that the boy can't speak properly, can't take care of himself, and can't understand what people are saying. I talked to her about sending her child to school and how important it was for him to have a chance to learn and socialize with other people. I told her that the teacher would take care of him. The mother told me that she would think about it and let me know her decision. I visited her again, and she agreed to send Etienne to school. Because of the family financial difficulties, they struggled to pay for school materials and a uniform, so we helped to raise some funds to help them.

Etienne started in P1 and has progressed to P2. He attends regularly. He doesn't excel in the class compared to other children who don't have problems but, on his level, he tries his best. Etienne is happy and every time he comes to school, he comes to greet me so that I know that he is there. He knows that there is someone who takes care of him, and this motivates him to attend regularly.

Now Etienne has friends, and they play football together. I have also assigned one of his friends to sit with him in the class and help him. He's really doing well at school. Etienne's parents have also seen the changes in their child, and they support him with school fees and school materials. "

In terms of impact on CWD/SEN, the most common responses from KIIs with IEFTs include: improved social interaction with other children; improved interaction by teachers with CWD/SEN; and increased enrolment of CWD/SEN. An IEFT noted:

*"Regarding the impacts of SNECO, and IEFT activities, they are more associated with social impact. The children with disability feel more comfortable at the school. For example, we have mentally disabled students who come to hug me wherever I am. This happened because of good treatment of those children. Not only by other teachers, but their fellow students."<sup>35</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> IEFT, EP Gitongati, IEFT Data Capture Form

### Box 3: Case Study: Samuel – GS Karwasa

NIYIGENDA is a student in G.S Karwasa in P6. He has Albinism. When he got to school, he used to wear a cap to reduce sunburn to the face. Normally, students are not allowed to put on a cap while you are in the class, but he allowed to. Little did they know the problems he really had. When he was sitting in class. He couldn't see the board well, nor could he read what the teachers wrote. This resulted in poor academic performance in class.

Through the BLF intervention, the IEFT has trained fellow teachers on how to support children with disabilities. So, teachers started to help Samuel so that he can improve his performance. They started to put him at the front where he could clearly see the board. Teachers with the help of head teacher started to print test papers with big characters that he could easily read and during exams he is given extra time, and this has been done by every teacher he has worked with since P4. Children also in school started to embrace and accept him, regardless of his disability.

All these things have positively impacted the life of Samuel and he started to improve his performance. Samuel has moved from P3 to P6. His performance has improved significantly due to these interventions. Previously, he couldn't even write well but now he is able to do so. He has improved academically, and has made good progress. Since he will be undertaking national examinations this year, the IEFT advocated for the school to apply for him to get a special exam written with big characters he will be able to read. He is currently performing well in class and is confident to pass the national exam.

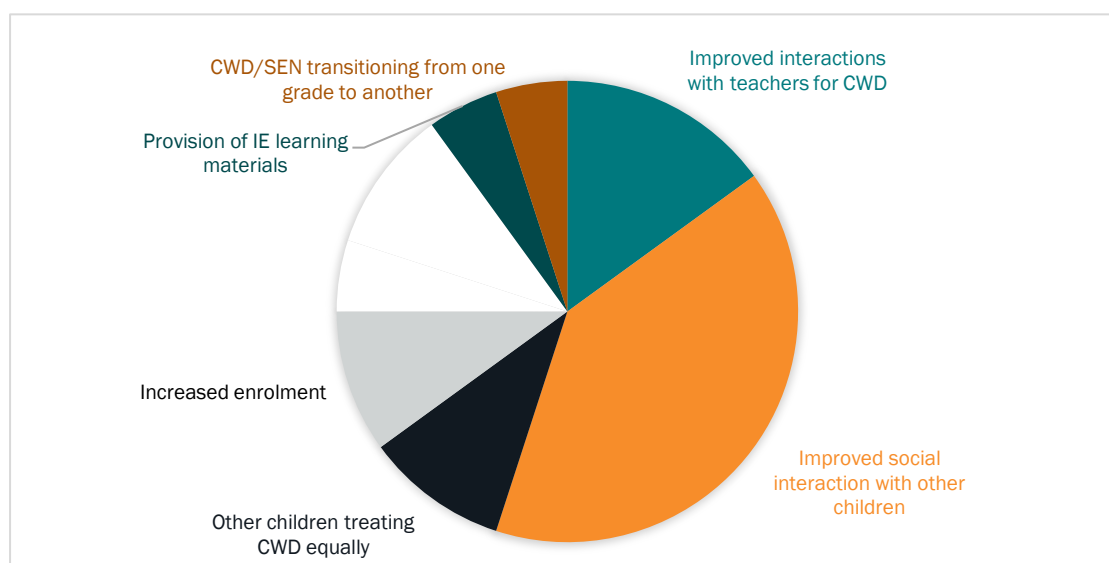


Figure 7 IEFTs - Impact on CWD/SEN

### 5.1.2. District Level Findings

The district level KIs took place with various stakeholders at that level, including District Directors of Education (DDEs), District Education Officers (DEOs), a District Disability Mainstreaming Officer (DDMO) and ten SNECOs (three from the districts selected for data collection and five additional SNECOs from other districts).

All of the district officials interviewed were aware of the SNECOs and IEFTs and reported that they had worked with them to build awareness of the needs of CWD/SEN, including, in some cases, participating in SNECO-led training workshops and school visits.

One DDE defined their own roles and responsibilities as:

*“to mobilize and coordinate all activities related to education, including this BLF programme on inclusive education. We work with sector officials who are in*

*charge of education, head teachers and also the teachers in CPD learning to strengthen education provisional capacity of teachers especially for those children with disability. We work hand in hand with the SNECO and IEFTs to implement inclusive education.”<sup>36</sup>*

The DDMO reported working with the SNECO in his district to gather information about CWD in the district, as well as providing advice for the parents of CWD.

In terms of impact, the various stakeholders at district level noted that there was development of positive mindsets towards CWD /SEN by teachers and other children, increased awareness of rights of CWD/SEN; teachers trained on how to teach and interact with CWD/SEN; and a greater acceptance and socialisation of CWD/SEN. One respondent noted that they have not been able to determine whether there has been improved learning because the national exams are not adapted to CWD.

The SNECOs, based at district level, reported that they worked closely with district officials, including the DEO and the DDMO as well as the Sector Education Inspector (SEI) in different activities – to coordinate school visits, to advocate and support CWD requiring assistive devices, to support the schools with IEFTs under their remit. One SNECO noted that:

*“We hold quarterly meetings with district officials and the BLF team to present the quarterly report and discuss challenges and how to address these.”<sup>37</sup>*

#### **Box 4: Case Study: What Do SNECOs Do?**

“After I completed my studies in Inclusive Education at the University of Rwanda, I was recruited by the BLF programme to be a SNECO. Along with other SNECOs, I received many trainings, which started with one month of induction, including an introduction to the project. After that we received the training on safeguarding, on identification of children with difficulties, how to support children with disability and difficulties, to assess the children, usage of toolkit, and to use the REB inclusive education guidebook. We received training on the forms to be used at school level such as the pupil record form, parent survey and assessment, as well as developing an individual educational plan. Other training included how to use the BLF toolkits for English and mathematics.

My job is to identify and select the IEFTs at intervention schools and to train and mentor them (as well as the LLLs). I plan and conduct field work at schools for monitoring and supporting the IEFTs and CWD/SEN. I also conduct home visits to talk to parents of CWD and sometimes I’m involved in community mobilisation events to raise awareness of the needs and rights of CWD. I also work at the district level with the District Training Team (DTT).

I have worked on “back to school campaigns” which led to many children with disability who were hidden in the households by their parents being identified and sent to school. Over my time, I have seen that CWD have been made to feel included. I’ve seen a reduction in absenteeism and drop-out of CWD, more children receiving assistive devices, and some CWD developing academic and life skills. The mindsets of teachers have been changed and schools have become more accessible and accommodating for CWD.”

### **5.1.3. National Level Findings**

The range of stakeholders consulted through KIIs included GoR representatives, international development partners and non-governmental organisations, to elicit their knowledge and expertise respecting IE interventions in Rwanda. All respondents, to one degree or another, are aware of the IE work being undertaken by the BLF and reported what they saw as positive effects of this work.

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<sup>36</sup> DDE Summary Data Capture Form

<sup>37</sup> SNECO Summary Data Capture Form

Regarding SNECOs and IEFTs, however, several of those interviewed noted that there is need to substantively evaluate how those specific roles supported CWD at the school level in terms of social integration and improvement of their learning, and to share this widely with decision-maker. The BLF programme team has made considerable efforts to do so through participation on several Education Sector Working Groups (including the SNIE ESWG), by drawing up position papers and briefs, and now with the publication of the BLF endline evaluation, which is being shared widely in the education sector, and which may go some way in terms of advocacy and evidence of impact for government to institutionalise the SNECOs and IEFTs at school and district level. The REB Director General (Acting) identified several challenges with respect to IE including:

- Low capacity of schools to accommodate CWD.
- Schools were really delivering integrated education, rather than inclusive education, because CWD had to adapt to the school, depending on the circumstances.
- Lack of trained teachers.
- Lack of TLM for CWD.

She noted that:

*“The Government of Rwanda (GoR) has no funds for CWDs, and if you see, partners come and do not really address the real question. For example, they can come and do a mobilization workshop, but it is not a matter of awareness; it is a matter of affording the needs of those CWDs.”*

## 6 Learning from Other Countries

**This section seeks to address the following research objective:** Draw on learning from other countries around good practices in inclusive education systems, to incorporate international best practices around inclusive education structures, including the scope and contribution of SNECO/IEFT-type roles, or other alternative models, in other countries; and provide recommendations on best practices around the identification, assessment, and referral of children with disabilities.

**SIERES research question: What can Rwanda learn from other countries on strengthening inclusive education structures?**

### 6.1. Defining Terms

Often, the term **‘inclusive education’** has been defined as synonymous with education for children with disabilities. Whilst this may still be the primary motivation for inclusive education, successful inclusive practice will be successful for *all* children with many different attributes such as ethnicity, language, gender, and socio-economic status. In some countries, inclusive education is still thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a principle that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners.<sup>38</sup>

Inclusive Education policies define **‘learners with special educational needs’** as those who need something which is over and above what is generally provided as standard in the education system. Learners with disabilities are one of the major groups that fall into this category. The importance of including disabled children is an essential strand within the international education policy agenda.

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (UNCRPD)** defines non-inclusion, or segregation, as the education of students with disabilities in separate environments (i.e. in separate special schools, or in special education units located with regular schools). It commits to ending segregation within educational settings by ensuring inclusive classroom teaching in accessible

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<sup>38</sup> Mel Ainscow (2020) Promoting inclusion and equity in education: lessons from international experiences, *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 6:1, 7-16, DOI: 10.1080/20020317.2020.1729587.

learning environments with appropriate support. This means that education systems must provide a personalised educational response, rather than expecting the student to fit the system,

## 6.2. How do we know that inclusive education is successful?

The **United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)** has summarised successful inclusive education implementation into five main components: inclusive policies that promote high outcomes for all students; flexible and accommodative curriculum; strong and supportive school leadership; equitable distribution of resources; and teachers who are trained in inclusive pedagogy and view it as their role to teach all learners in a diverse classroom.

The **UNESCO (2017) Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education**<sup>39</sup> provides the clearest conceptualisation of how inclusive education can be judged as successful. The Guide highlights that measuring the success of inclusive education should go beyond merely counting students to evaluate access, but should include measures of educational quality, outcomes, and experiences.

Criteria to be considered include:

### Concepts

- Inclusion and equity are overarching principles that guide all education policies, plans, and practices.
- The national curriculum and its associated assessment systems are designed to respond effectively to all learners.
- All partners who work with learners and their families understand and support the national policy goals for promoting inclusion and equity in education.
- Systems are in place to monitor the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners within the education system.

### Policy

- The important national education policy documents strongly emphasize inclusion and equity.
- Senior staff at the national, district, and school levels provide leadership on inclusion and equity in education.
- Leaders at all levels articulate consistent policy goals to develop inclusion and equitable educational practices.
- Leaders at all levels challenge non-inclusive, discriminatory, and inequitable educational practices.

### Structures and Systems

- There is high-quality support for vulnerable learners.
- All services and institutions involved with learners and their families work together in coordinating inclusive and equitable educational policies and practices.
- Resources, both human and financial, are distributed in ways that benefit potentially vulnerable learners.
- There is a clear role for special provision, such as special schools and units, in promoting inclusion and equity in education.

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<sup>39</sup> UNESCO (2017) A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education. Paris: UNESCO. Last accessed 14 April 2021: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254>.

## Practices

- Schools and other learning centres have strategies for encouraging the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners from their local community.
- Schools and other learning centres provide support for learners who are at risk of underachievement, marginalization, and exclusion.
- Teachers and support staff are prepared to respond to learner diversity during their initial training.
- Teachers and support staff have opportunities to take part in continuing professional development regarding inclusive and equitable practices.

It should be possible to use these criteria to measure the progress of education systems towards achievement of successful inclusive education. However, it is important to note that **most accepted definitions of inclusive education recognise that it is a continuous process, rather than a goal**. The dimensions of the UNESCO Guide can therefore be considered as criteria for continuous evaluation and critical examination of education systems, including that of Rwanda.

### 6.3. What progress has been made?

The evidence for progress is something of a mixed bag. The most recent synthesis, that is highly relevant to this study, is found in a **UNICEF** study on disability inclusive education.<sup>40</sup> This maps the progress of countries in Eastern and Southern Africa region in advancing inclusive quality education for all children with a particular focus on children with disabilities at pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary levels. This provides a comprehensive analysis of successful practices, innovative approaches and gaps in the programmes considered (largely Government and UNICEF Country programmes).

The aim of this study is to inform the development of a roadmap for UNICEF's regional work on inclusive quality education; its findings show how well, against each area, specific country progress has been rated. Thus, the study presents a comparative analysis of the progress made across all 21 countries of East and Southern Africa Region, including Rwanda. This includes preserving the rights (to protection and non-discrimination) of persons and children with disabilities through legal and policy frameworks; approaches to education provision for children with disabilities; resourcing and long-term commitments to funding this work.

Countries vary in the approach currently adopted to strengthen teachers' professional development – from testing approaches to inclusive teaching in six pilot schools (Lesotho) to offering teacher training to all teachers to meet the learning needs of children with disabilities (Somalia). Rwanda explicitly mentions special education as a means for children with disabilities to access education. Special and inclusive schools are run in parallel, wherein special schools cater to children with blindness, hearing disabilities, and severe intellectual disabilities.<sup>41</sup>

While progress is promising in some countries and suggests a move towards rights- based methods, disability identification systems that are based on functional difficulties are yet to be established in most countries.<sup>42</sup> Even where the Washington Group Questions are used to achieve this the lack of follow-up support after screening and identification is one of the challenges faced by children with disabilities and their families. Most often, children with disabilities do not receive sufficient support, or if they do, the interventions provided are unsuitable for their actual needs. In some cases, screening and identification do not lead to the provision of interventions at all.

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<sup>40</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/12201/file/Full\\_Report\\_Mapping\\_of\\_Progress\\_towards\\_disability-inclusive\\_in\\_ESA.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/esa/media/12201/file/Full_Report_Mapping_of_Progress_towards_disability-inclusive_in_ESA.pdf) Accessed 15 October 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, pg 18.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, pg 24.

Positive effects were most common in studies where support for students with disabilities in the inclusive classrooms was well-managed through adaptive instruction and there was collaborative consultation and cooperative teaching of special and general education teachers.<sup>43</sup>

In general, **despite an increase of research in the last 5 years, robust, empirical evidence for low- and middle-income countries is still lacking.** Difficulties around clear definitions of inclusive education and comparability of data on education of children with disabilities, make it difficult to assess to what extent they are still being left behind. In particular, there is limited long-term data and evidence around learning achievements and outcomes for learners with disabilities, making it difficult to enact systemic changes to the education system.

That there is more work to be done to achieve genuine inclusive education (and substantive evidence of impact), is demonstrated by a recent compilation of evidence from the Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) from five regions and thirteen countries on progress towards SDG 4 and CRPD Article 24 focused on education, published by the International Disability Alliance (IDA), which shows: a) significant gaps in legislation and strategies for inclusive education across LMICs; b) low rates of enrolment of learners with disabilities at all levels of education, high dropout rates, and a higher rate of illiteracy among people with disabilities; c) a lack of teachers trained on inclusive education, particularly for people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities; d) limited published information on budgetary allocations for inclusive education, and where information is available, allocations are inadequate; e) a high prevalence of exclusionary, special and segregated education; f) widespread stigma and discrimination against learners with disabilities, especially girls with disabilities; and g) a lack of accessibility standards for schools and transport. **See full report in Annex 4.**

Many teachers interviewed as part of the SIERES study reported the same constraints.

## 7 Institutionalisation of SNECOs and IEFTs

*“An education systems approach to inclusive education needs to be applied to delivering inclusion for all. Legal and policy frameworks; public sector financing and using data-based evidence to drive adoption are all equally important alongside the learning environment in schools, in-service professional development and support for teaching staff and school leadership.”<sup>44</sup>*

This section seeks provide recommendations and future considerations for the inclusive education model and consider how the SNECO and IEFT roles are incorporated into current Rwandan Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) policies and strategies, and how they fit alongside existing structures at the national, district, sector, and school level (including with the Rwanda Education Board’s Special Needs Inclusive Education unit- REB SNIE).

The section also considers what amendments might be required for the SNECO and IEFT model to be incorporated into nationally owned and led education systems and processes and the degree to which the various national, district, sector, and school/community stakeholders can inform institutionalisation and scale-up.

**SIERES research questions: What is the process and relevant considerations for institutionalising SNECOs and IEFTs? And what learning can be drawn from the Rwandan experience that might be relevant to other countries?**

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<sup>43</sup> Hehir et al (2016) [https://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A\\_Summary\\_of\\_the\\_evidence\\_on\\_inclusive\\_education.pdf](https://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf). Page 9

<sup>44</sup> Enfield, S. What is the learning from other low-and-middle income countries around good practices in inclusive education systems? Annex 2



## 7.1 Progress in institutionalisation of SNECOs and IFTs

The GoR has made progress in recent years in terms of demonstrating that inclusive education is a central component of policy and programming.<sup>45</sup> BLF has therefore been operating in a supportive environment. Examples of this include:

- **The implementation of policies and strategies**, including the SNIE policy being passed into law and a clear focus on strengthening inclusive education incorporated into the ESSP. The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is funding MINEDUC to implement the Strategic Plan.
- **The establishment of a specific unit within REB with a focus on IE.**
- **A SNIE database**, a system being developed by the World Bank as part of the Inclusive Education Initiative (IEI) to be used by school leaders to record information about CWDs. This is still a work in progress. However, the acting Director of REB reports that there is an idea of combining it with the identification assessment tools so that it can be one system with the aim to help the user to know the type of disability each child has and what support they require.
- **The establishment of the school of inclusive and Special Needs Education at the University of Rwanda**, providing a pool of graduates with special needs expertise (from which BLF recruited the SNECOs).
- **Coordination events organised by MINEDUC**, such as the Harmonization and Operationalization of Identification, Assessment and Referral System for Children with Disabilities event in March 2023 to: bring key stakeholders together to review the existing tools for identification, assessment and referral for children with disabilities, with the purpose to come up with one tool which will be used by all education stakeholders.

**Within this conducive policy environment, the BLF programme has demonstrated** that it is possible to deliver an inclusive education approach to scale (in a set of schools in all 30 districts in Rwanda), This included;

- An early identification and assessment approach for children with disability and learning difficulties and those with learning difficulties at the school level, involving parents, teachers, head teachers, health centre nurses, and teachers from special schools;
- provision of on-site CPD for teachers in inclusive education and identification and follow-up support to CWD/SEN, utilising specially trained fellow teachers (IEFTS);
- leadership for learning training, encompassing IE for head teachers, to establish leadership knowledge and support for CWD/SEN in schools; and
- provision of inclusive education specialists at district level to provide expert advice and support on IE to schools and districts.

**The advocacy work undertaken by the BLF programme significantly influenced GoR policy and approaches, as well as those of other development partners.** This is evidenced by:

- The inclusion of deployment of SNECOs in the **Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP)** strategic implementation plan
- Inclusion of a recommendation in NESA's Rwanda National School Inspection Framework that the SNECO position should be institutionalized, with details on how SNECOs would support inspection and how IEFTs should be engaged during inspections.
- MINEDUC's outline of a system and set of tools for identification, assessment and referral including the role of SNECOs, reference to IEFTs and inclusion of the BLF Pupil Record of Learning Difficulties/SEN

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<sup>45</sup> <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/education/documents/Learning%20from%20Innovation%20for%20Education%20in%20Rwanda.pdf>  
Accessed 14 October 2023

- UNICEF/Humanity and Inclusion's (HI) request that SNECOs be included in the piloting of the MINEDUC system/tools for identification, assessment, and referral of CWD, which resulted in a collaboration with BLF/VSO
- World Bank's (WB) request to train SNECOs to lead at the field level on the piloting of government-led, in-depth data collection on the needs of children with SEN and measures schools are taking to be more inclusive, and the uploading of data on an SNIE MIS to inform government planning, budgeting and support for individual children at national and local levels. This led to a collaboration between WB and BLF, with SNECOs playing a central role and the WB acknowledged the value of the SNECOs' knowledge and skills.
- MINEDUC - in its communication about the GPE identification, assessment, and referral (IAR) activity - acknowledged the effectiveness of the BLF approach and the aim to blend the approach with that adopted by UNICEF/HI in the harmonization of approaches.
- Reference in the draft REB teacher development policy guidelines to the role of IEFTs
- 610 schools (in addition to those directly supported by SNECOs) selected IEFTs and self-funded their initial training, demonstrating the demand for the IEFT role which also suggests that the NLLs and LLLs influenced their colleague head teachers.

The **institutionalisation of SNECOs and the scale-up of IEFTs to all schools to carry out similar roles as those developed in the BLF programme may represent an opportunity for the government to establish several best practices** in inclusive education development, particularly in the areas of training and support for teachers and head teachers; attitudes and practices of leaders, coordination on the ground of provision of more inclusive education, collection and use of data, and generally having a systemic approach to inclusive education interventions and development, driven and sustained by committed and focused staff with technical proficiency at the local level.

The research strongly highlights the **need for effective and continuous training and support for teachers to adopt inclusive practices** to meet the needs of children with special educational needs. The use of SNECOs and IEFTs in system positions may provide a systemic and sustainable approach to providing such support to teachers, drawing on the home-grown expertise of the SNECOs as graduates from the URCE's bachelor and masters' level special needs education degree programmes. The SNECOs would be able to provide continuous support to IEFTs through training and targeted on-site support to build the necessary IEFT capacity to provide continuous support to their colleague teachers and coordinate inclusive activities in collaboration with school leaders.

The **capacity-development needs of teachers to become inclusive practitioners are very significant and demanding**, including knowledge and skills related to identification and assessment of children having a wide-range of disabilities and learning difficulties, detailed knowledge of teaching and learning methods to meet their very varied and specific needs involving flexible implementation of curricular, and engagement of parents to gain their support in providing relevant information and support for learning.

The findings also highlight the **importance of data to drive inclusive education development**. Much important data can only be derived from all children with SEN having been identified and assessed. SNECOs in working effectively with IEFTs to establish a comprehensive, sustainable systematic approach to early identification and assessment of children with SEN would be in a good position to drive at the local level the scale-up of identification and assessment to all schools to ensure the data is available. Through the continuous training and support of teachers in collaboration with IEFTs, it could be ensured that identification and assessment leads to teachers using the associated information to adapt their planning and teaching to meet the needs of children, which the research suggests can be lacking.

In addition, UNICEF recognised the **value of the technical knowledge of SNECOs** in giving them a role in technically leading District Multi-Disciplinary Assessment teams as part of the piloting of the MINEDUC draft outline of a system for referral and assessment of children with SEN. Furthermore, the

WB gave positive feedback, having tasked SNECOs with building capacity and providing school-site support for head teachers and teachers in providing data on individual children with SEN and the school-based support for those children and its uploading onto the Special Needs and Inclusive Education (SNIE) data platform, which MINEDUC intends for use to track provisions for individual children and inform planning and budgeting at central and local level to meet needs. As such, SNECOs could be in a good position to support and ensure provision of data required to have the concrete targets, indicators, measures, and outcomes necessary for inclusive education development. If they were deployed at district level, as they were in the BLF programme, their expertise and understanding of the data could also be leveraged to inform district planning and budgeting to meet needs.

Having **personnel, such as SNECOs and IEFTs, dedicated to inclusive education can influence the vision and commitment of leaders and attitudes of others towards inclusion**. SNECOs have trained head teachers alongside head teachers alongside IEFTs and regularly engaged with them on school visits, resulting in head teachers collaborating with IEFTs in coordinating inclusive education activities in the school. District officials also reported working in collaboration with SNECOs in building awareness of the needs of CWDs and noted that teachers and children had developed a more positive mindset towards CWDs. The efforts that SNECOs and IEFTs also make to engage parents and CWD in those homes, including as part of campaigns to get children into school, could also have a positive effect on the demand for education by parents of CWD.

**SNECOs and IEFTs have a potentially key role to play in the success of specific interventions** planned by government, such as the planned scale-up of identification, assessment, and referral to all schools. Moving beyond limited traditional training approaches, SNECOs and IEFTs, in their work with a full range of stakeholders at various levels, can ensure that interventions are fully supported and sustained in the long run. Moreover, the possibility of establishing connections between the Director and technicians in REB's new Special Needs and Inclusive Education Unit at the national level to SNECOs at the District Level who connect with IEFTs and Head Teacher at the school level who reach all teachers, may provide the potential for REB to achieve strategic aims for inclusive education. This will help to overcome the common disconnect between national level plans and strategies and local level action that can be a by-product of decentralised systems of government.

## 7.2 Evidence Gaps

Through findings highlighted in the previous sections, we note that there are two main evidence gaps:

### 7.2.1 The lack of comprehensive data on numbers of CWD/SEN, including data on types/categories of disability.

While teachers and head teachers were at least informed about numbers in school – based on the assessment processes undertaken to identify CWD - other stakeholders reported that they didn't have accurate data about the numbers of CWD in communities. One national stakeholder noted that:

*“When you compare data from surveys, and that of the census or even the yearly statistical data book, the numbers are different: The numbers for children with disability recorded are different yet they should be the same.”<sup>46</sup>*

Several district officials stated that they did not have information about the number of CWD in their district, one saying:

*“When we do inspection in class, we ask teachers if they have children with disability and do a list and their type of disability. The teachers are the one who explain to us that a given student has a given type of disability.”<sup>47</sup>*

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<sup>46</sup> National Summary Data Capture Form

<sup>47</sup> District Summary Data Capture Form

Stakeholders noted that the MINEDUC annual yearbook and the national census provided some information but there are concerns about comprehensiveness. There are challenges with the gathering of accurate numbers of CWD, with constraints such as the lack of a nationally recognized (and understood) set of criteria for identification of disabilities, as well as the continuing issue with discrimination and social stigma towards CWD, which means the underreporting by parents and guardians of the disability of children. It is to be hoped that the REB SNIE database will rectify this.

### 7.2.2 The lack of substantive data on the enrolment, retention, progression and learning for CWD and SEN.

In the face of considerable challenges of implementing the programme during COVID-19 and funding cuts, it is encouraging that there are quantitative findings of improved learning for CWD/SEN in the BLF Endline Report and qualitative findings of positive impact, especially around increased social inclusion for CWD/SEN of the SIERES research. This is a good start. However, what is needed now is more substantive, longitudinal information about enrolment, retention, progression and learning for CWD and SEN that can clearly demonstrate, for example, the positive impact of IEFTs and SNECOs as a part of an overall education systems approach for inclusion in Rwanda. This evidence needs to be gathered rigorously and over time. It would be useful for future programming to have an increased focus on (and adequate funding for) monitoring and evaluation, to gather such data.

## 8 Conclusion and Recommendations

### 8.1 Conclusion

There is strong evidence that the introduction of SNECOs and IEFTs by the BLF programme has had important positive consequences for CWD/SEN. The following are key takeaways from the FGs and KIs and are by no means exhaustive:

- Schools have **become more supportive and welcoming spaces for CWD/SEN**. Other children have been taught to be more accommodating to children with differences, the vast majority of respondents noting that there is greater social inclusion for CWD/SEN.
- Teachers at **lower primary level have received training and support from the IEFTs** in their schools, which has helped them to be more inclusive in their teaching practices, including adaptation of lessons, teaching methods, and assessment processes.
- Teachers have **received CPD at school level on a regular basis** and have had the opportunity to go to IEFT on-site for advice and guidance when they need to.
- IEFTs and head teachers have **more effectively reached out to parents of CWD/SEN**, through the use of the parent survey but also through home visits – encouraging them to send their children to school and supporting their efforts to learn.
- IEFTs have been **capacitated with the knowledge, skills and tools needed to identify CWD/SEN**, to help these children and to help the teachers working with them in the classroom.
- The SNECOs were **recruited mainly from the UoR with degrees in special needs education**, and then received intensive training from the BLF team, to support both district structures and schools to work collaboratively to assess and identify CWD/SEN.
- Assessment teams have **incorporated different services at district level** – educational, social, medical, etc. – to support CWD and their families.
- Community mobilisation activities **have taken place, to build knowledge of, and support for, CWD/SEN beyond the school gates**.

Overall, this research found that the BLF programme, built around the introduction of the IEFTs and SNECOs, has provided **an effective, working inclusive education support system or model, that links together children, parents, teachers, schools, communities, and districts**. The programme has further demonstrated that it is possible to take the model to scale, having implemented it in all 30 districts in Rwanda.

## 8.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been derived from the information gathered during the SIERES research and are divided up into the different levels of leadership and responsibilities in the Rwandan context.

### Government of Rwanda

- 1. Carefully review the evidence of value and impact of the BLF IE interventions**, to inform decision-making on whether to institutionalise its various components, including ongoing provision of IE guidance and training for teachers and head teachers and the permanent establishment of the SNECOs and of IEFTS across Rwanda.
- 2. Continue to provide leadership in harmonising the different IE interventions/programmes** in Rwanda, such as the efforts being made to agree a common approach to assessing and identifying CWC/SEN in the country,
- 3. Ensure that there are robust data management systems at national level in place to promote regular data collection and analysis**, to provide accurate information on the number and types of CWD/SEN, both in and out of schools, and – importantly - disaggregated by gender,
- 4. Support the further development of national assessment methods** that are appropriate for and accommodate the needs of CWD/SEN.
- 5. Ensure good coordination between relevant personnel and stakeholders at school, district and national level.** SNECOs, building on their work in BLF, should be able to coordinate with relevant personnel and stakeholders such as District Disability Mainstreaming Officer; health, social protection, and child protection officers; NCPD representatives; SEIs; and with school and more local level officials regarding the provision of assistive devices and referral of CWDs. Such coordination will be especially valuable as the GoR develop more systemic and structured approaches across the country to meeting the needs of CWD, for example in relation to the provision of assistive technologies, teaching and learning materials, and identification, assessment, and referral.

### School/Districts

- 6. Maintain the role of the IEFT in schools and consider ways and means of reducing** the regular teaching load of these staff, so that they can manage their time to further support teachers to effectively deliver inclusive teaching and learning, and further support CWD/SEN in schools.
- 7. Continue, strengthen and scale up the head teacher professional learning communities (PLC)** that have been established during the BLF programme. These have proven to be a valuable tool for head teachers to learn and share experiences and expertise, including a focus on inclusive education.
- 8. Incorporate the BLF-designated LLLs and NLLs into district programming** and support these head teachers and schools to demonstrate and share best practice regarding inclusive education.
- 9. Future Teacher Professional Development (TPD)** should include a focus on teaching strategies to CWD/SEN in large classes, particularly as many of the teachers interviewed noted

that they faced challenges supporting CWD/SEN in their classrooms, with so many students. They appreciated the advice and support of the IEFTs but struggled to find the time to spend with the special needs children that they needed.

- 10. Ensure that there are robust data management systems at district level in place** to promote regular data collection and analysis, to provide accurate information on the number and types of CWD/SEN, both in and out of schools, and – importantly - disaggregated by gender,
- 11.** The establishment of an axis of **technical support from SNECOs to IEFTs** to teachers would avoid the significant limitations of cascade training highlighted in the findings, enabling the provision of continuous on-site support to benefit all teachers in alignment with REB Teaching Development and Management policy which emphasizes the value of school-based professional development of teachers. Furthermore, sustaining the deployment of SNECOs and scale-up of IEFTs would be an investment for equitable provision of education, but with a likely broader impact that results from teachers who meet the needs of children of SEN becoming better equipped generally in meeting the needs of all children.

### Development Organisations/Programmes

- 12. Following on the good practice of the BLF programme, any future IE interventions should continue to work collaboratively with other organisations, local and international,** in the same field. This includes non-governmental organisations, government structures (including at different levels), and international organisations – with the aim to avoid duplication, to pool resources if possible, and to collaboratively influence policy.
- 13. There is strong interest and support from the GoR for IE and this should be leveraged by providing:**
  - A solid evidence base of the positive impact of IE interventions, like that of the IEFTs and SNECOs. This depends on well-resourced monitoring and evaluation systems that can capture data over time on enrolment, attendance, progression and learning.
  - A fully costed model that answers questions such as: How much would it cost to recruit and train IEFTs for every school in Rwanda? Primary only? Secondary as well? How much would it cost to recruit and employ SNECOs as part of existing district structures? What additional resources would be required for these personnel to do their jobs?
- 14. Investment and support to MINEDUC and NESA should focus on further developing assessment tools for CWD, such as the ones that have already been developed for children with intellectual disabilities.** Many respondents at school level expressed concerns that the annual national examinations were not adapted for use with CWD/SEN and therefore were not necessarily good assessment tools to measure their learning attainment.
- 15.** Any future programming around IE should have a **crosscutting focus on safeguarding**, since CWD/SEN can be particularly vulnerable, and this should be monitored and reported on regularly.

# Annexes

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## Annex 1. List of references

- BLF, Supporting an Inclusive Return for Children with Disabilities in Rwanda, 2020
- BLF, Building Learning Foundations in Rwanda Programme Summary
- BLF, Baseline report, June 2018
- BLF, Progress Assessment, June 2019
- BLF, 2nd BLF Progress Report, February 2020
- BLF, 3rd Progress Report, December 2021
- BLF, BLF Disability Assessment Report Phase 1, 2018
- BLF, BLF and Strengthening an Assessment and Referral System, March 2020
- BLF, Head Teachers and Focal Teachers Orientation 2 days, December 2019
- BLF, Inclusive Education Focal Teachers' Orientation 2 days, August 2019
- BLF, Guide for Orientation of Multi-Disciplinary Teams,
- BLF, Guidance and report sheet for vision and hearing investigation
- BLF, Vision and hearing investigation - guide for SNECOs
- BLF, Supporting an Inclusive Return to School for Children with Disabilities in Rwanda, Dec 2020
- BLF, Building Learning Foundations in Rwanda Brief,
- BLF, Disability Assessment Report Phase 2, January 2019
- BLF, BLF development of identification, assessment and referral (IAR) for CWD (GPE IAR Harmonisation Activity) PPT presentation, 2023
- BLF, BLF Disability Intervention (2019-2022) Concept Note
- BLF logframe, October 2022
- BLF Annual Review, April 2022
- BLF, Annual Review, April 2023
- BLF, Inclusive Education Focal Teachers' Toolkit, November 2021
- BLF, Building Learning Foundations Endline Evaluation, August 2023
- BLF, Progress Report: Teacher Competencies, 2019
- Government of Rwanda, Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2018-2019 to 2023-23
- MINEDUC, Special Educational Needs (SEN) Referrals and Assessment
- MINEDUC, Special Needs and Inclusive Education Strategic Plan, 2018-19 to 2023
- REB, Harmonization and operationalization of Identification, Assessment and Referral System for children with disabilities, March 2023
- REB, Guide to Inclusive Education in Pre-primary, Primary and Secondary Education, 2016
- REB, Training Manual on Special Needs and Inclusive Education, November 2019
- REB, Education Referral System for Rwanda PPT, August 2020
- REB, Guide to Identifying and helping pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs (SEN),
- REB, Leadership for Learning: A head teachers professional companion, May 2019
- REB, Teaching and Learning materials to support learners with special educational needs and learning difficulties



REB, Training Manual on Special Needs and Inclusive Education, November 2019

REB, Event Report: Using the Washington Group Questions: Disability in Rwanda, March 2019

Tunose Gusoma, School Census 21-22

VSO, Job Pack: SNECOs

## Annex 2. Research Schedule

Dates	Activity	Outcomes
12 <sup>th</sup> to 19 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	Lead consultant visit to Kigali	Meetings with FATE Consulting, <sup>48</sup> discussion and revision of tools, prepping of the team, piloting of tools.
13 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	Meet with FATE Consulting Meeting with NUDOR	Discussion and revision of tools; training Discussion with NUDOR education leads
14 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	Meet with FATE Consulting Meet with BLF	Discussion and revision of tools; training Discussion with BLF re. IE interventions
15 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	FCDO meeting Prep for school level piloting of data collection tools	Plan for piloting of tools drawn up Translation of data collection tools to Kinyarwanda
16 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	Piloting of school data collection at GS Masaka	Trialling of data collection tools with school-based stakeholders – head teacher, teachers, parents of CWD, CWD, IEFT, etc.
17 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	Revision of tools and prep for data collection process	Data collection tools revised in advance of district and school visits. Prep for district and school visits completed.
19 <sup>th</sup> to 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2023	School and district data collection	Data collection completed for 10 selected schools in 3 districts – Kicukiro, Muhanga, Musanze
26 <sup>th</sup> June – 18 <sup>th</sup> July 2023	Translation and collation of school and district level recordings and data collection capture forms	Data collection completed, findings translated and summarised for schools and districts.
July – August 2023	National stakeholder data collection	Data collection completed, findings translated and summarised.

<sup>48</sup> FATE Consulting, a Rwandan consultancy firm, was recruited to undertake the field work/data collection at school, district and national level, including conducting all FDGs and KIIs with the stakeholders at all levels.

## Annex 3. KII and FGD Questions

### Data Capture Questions

#### REB

##### Introductory Details

- Date
- Name
- Gender
- Designation/Roles/Responsibilities
- Number of years in post

##### Interview Questions

- What are the Rwandan government policies with respect to inclusion/CWD?
- What development partners does REB work with around inclusive education? Programmes? Interventions? Please describe.
- In your opinion, how well do they work together?
- How do REB's roles and responsibilities regarding Inclusive Education differ from MINEDUC's?
- What data does REB have on the number of CWD in Rwandan schools?
- What data is available on numbers out of school?
- What information do you have about the types of disability and how is this determined?
- How is the SNIE data tool working? Please describe.
- What is your understanding of the IE components of the BLF programme (as in, what has the programme been implementing to support the education of CWD)? SNECOs? IEFs?
- The SNECOs were recruited from graduates of the University of Rwanda Special Needs course and were paid during the BLF as VSO volunteers. Is there a plan for the GoR to incorporate the SNECOs into government-funded education structures?
- The BLF programme developed teacher training materials and head teacher (school director) training materials, which incorporated inclusive education, which have been approved by REB. Have these been distributed to all schools in Rwanda? If not, are there plans to?
- Have you been informed about the impact of the interventions? For CWD? For HTs? For teachers? For others? What evidence have you been informed about for this impact?
- Are you aware of whether there were any challenges in implementing these interventions?
- Are there aspects of the BLF programming that you would like to see continue once the programme ends? Please describe.
- How could these be sustained? By whom? What would be required for sustainability?

#### MINEDUC

##### Introductory Details

- Date

- Name
- Gender
- Designation/Roles/Responsibilities
- Number of years in post

#### Interview Questions

- What are the Rwandan government policies/strategies with respect to inclusion/CWD?
- What development partners does MINEDUC work with around inclusive education? Programmes? Interventions? Please describe.
- How do MINEDUC's roles and responsibilities regarding Inclusive Education differ from REB's?
- What data does MINEDUC have on the number of CWD (and types of disability) in Rwandan schools?
- What data is available on numbers out of school?
- How is the REB SNIE data tool working? Please describe.
- What is your understanding of the IE components of the BLF programme (as in, what has the programme been implementing to support the education of CWD)? SNECOs? IEFs?
- The SNECOs were recruited from graduates of the University of Rwanda Special Needs course and were paid during the BLF as VSO volunteers. Is there a plan for the GoR to incorporate the SNECOs into government-funded education structures?
- The BLF programme developed teacher training materials and head teacher (school director) training materials, which incorporated inclusive education, which have been approved by REB. Have these been distributed to all schools in Rwanda? If not, are there plans to?
- Have you been informed about the impact of the interventions? For CWD? For HTs? For teachers? For others? What evidence have you been informed about for this impact?
- Are you aware of whether there were any challenges in implementing these interventions?
- Are there aspects of the BLF programming that you would like to see continue once the programme ends? Please describe.
- How could these be sustained? By whom? What would be required for sustainability?

## National Council of Persons with Disabilities (NCPD)

#### Introductory Details

- Date
- Name
- Gender
- Designation/Roles/Responsibilities
- Number of years in post

#### Interview Questions

- What is the remit of the NCPD?
- What areas do you work in regarding disability (e.g. advocacy, provision of services, etc.)?
- Do you work in the education sector – with schools etc.?

- Do you work with other partners/organisations/government institutions?
- How/in what ways do the various IE organisations work together/coordinate efforts?
- Are you familiar with the issues and challenges of CWD in accessing education and progressing with learning? Please describe. What is being done to address these (government/other organisations)?
- Are you aware of the Building Learning Foundations programme? If yes, can you describe what you know?
- Do you think that inclusive education initiatives are sustainable without external funding? What would be required to make these sustainable?

## A. Disabled Persons Organisations

### Introductory Details

- Date
- Name
- Name of Organisation
- Gender
- Designation/Roles/Responsibilities
- Number of years in post

### Interview Questions

- How long has your organisation worked in Rwanda?
- Does it work in all districts?
- What areas do you work in regarding disability (e.g. advocacy, provision of services, etc.)?
- Do you work the education sectors? In schools? With children?
- What is your relationship with government?
- Are you aware of other organisations/projects that are working in the field of inclusive education in Rwanda?
- How/in what ways do the various IE organisations work together/coordinate efforts?
- What do you think the main challenges of CWD for learning and progressing in school and what actions should be taken to help them succeed?
- Have you heard of the Building Learning Foundations Programme? If yes, what can you tell me about it?
- If yes, what is your understanding of the IE components of the BLF programme (as in, what has the programme been implementing to support the education of CWD)? SNECOs? IEFTs?
- What do you think could be done to sustainably support the education of children of disabilities and who/what structures should be involved in this?

## SNECOs

### Introductory Details

- Date

- Name
- Gender
- District
- Number of years in post
- Education

#### Interview Questions

- How were you selected for the role?
- How long have you held it?
- What training did you receive? Length? Content?
- Have you had any refresher training? Length? Content?
- Did you/how have you interacted with the community of SNECOs? If yes, was this helpful?
- Who did you work with at district level? DEO, SEOs, disability officer? Others? In what way did you work with them?
- How many schools did you work with?
- How many IEFs did you work with? With what frequency?
- How many CWD are attending school in your area? How were they identified? What types of disability are there? Numbers of male and female? Were you involved in identifying them?
- Are you aware of CWD who were not in school who are now enrolled in school (has enrolment of CWD increased)?
- What impact(s) have your (and the IEFs) work had for CWD? Improved academic performance? Improved social inclusion? Increased enrolment? Increased access to education? Other? What evidence do you have for this?
- Have teachers' teaching methods/approaches/record-keeping changed with respect to how they work with CWD? Describe.
- What have been the challenges for you and your responsibilities? How could these be resolved? What could be done to improve the programme?
- Are you aware of a plan to continue this programme/these interventions? If not, are you aware of what is being done to sustain interventions through knowledge transfer etc.?

## SEOs/SEIs

#### Introductory Details

- Date
- Number interviewed
- Name(s)
- Gender
- Sectors
- Number of schools
- Time in post

#### Interview Questions

- How many schools do you work with? How many IEFTs do you work with?
- How long has the SNECO and the IEFTs been working in your district/sector?
- How many schools do they (SNECOs and IEFTs) work in?
- How many CWD are enrolled in your schools? What types of disability? How was this determined? Were you involved in this process? Was the district disability officer involved? Numbers of males and females?
- How is the information about CWD collected? Who has been involved in that?
- How have you engaged with/worked with the SNECO and the IEFTs?
- Did you receive any/participate in training provided to the SNECO/IEFTs? Length? Content?
- Are you aware of CWD who were not in school who are now enrolled in school (has enrolment of CWD increased)?
- What impact(s) have your (and the IEFTs) work had for CWD? Improved academic performance? Improved social inclusion? Increased enrolment? Increased access to education? Other? What evidence do you have for this?
- Have you seen a difference in teachers' methods/approaches/record keeping with CWD? Describe.
- What have been the challenges for this intervention How could these be resolved? What could be done to improve the programme?
- Are you aware of a plan to continue this programme/these interventions? If not, are you aware of what is being done to sustain interventions through knowledge transfer etc.?

## Head Teachers

### Introductory Details

- Date
- Name
- Gender
- District
- Number of years in post
- Education

### Interview Questions

- Are you a Local Leader of Learning or a National Leader of Learning? How were you selected as a LL?
- Did you receive leadership training from the BLF programme? Did it include content around CWD? Have you received follow-up support?
- Have the SNECO and the IEFT been working in your school?
- How was the IEFT selected? Did they receive any training? Length? Content?
- Does/how does the IEFT work with the other teachers in your school? Are you involved in that process? Have you noticed a difference in the way teachers work with CWD? Please explain.
- How many CWD are enrolled in your schools? What types of disability? How was this determined? Were you involved in this process? Was the district disability officer involved? Numbers of males and females?

- How have you engaged with/worked with the SNECO and the IEFTs?
- Did you receive any/participate in training provided to the IEFT? Length? Content?
- Are you aware of CWD who were not in school who are now enrolled in school (has enrolment of CWD increased)?
- What impact(s) have the SNECO's and IEFT's work had for CWD? Improved academic performance? Improved social inclusion? Increased enrolment? Increased access to education? Other? What evidence do you have for this?
- What have been the challenges for this intervention How could these be resolved? What could be done to improve the programme?
- Are you aware of a plan to continue this programme/these interventions? If not, are you aware of what is being done to sustain interventions through knowledge transfer etc.?

## IEFTs

### Introductory Details

- Date
- Name
- Gender
- District
- Number of years in post
- Education

### Interview Questions

- How were you selected for the role?
- What training did you receive? Length? Content?
- Have you had any refresher training? Length? Content?
- Did you/how have you interacted with other IEFTs? If yes, was this helpful?
- Who did you work with at district level? DEO, SEOs, disability officer? Others? In what way did you work with them?
- Have you linked with/worked with parents of CWD? How and in what ways?
- What are you supposed to do with the other teachers in the school? How are you supposed to help them? How frequently have you been able to do this?
- How many CWD are attending your school? How were they identified? What types of disability are there? Numbers of male and female? Were you involved in identifying them?
- Are you aware of CWD who were not in school who are now enrolled in school (has enrolment of CWD increased)?
- What impact(s) have you and your fellow teachers had for CWD? Improved academic performance? Improved social inclusion? Increased enrolment? Increased access to education? Other? What evidence do you have for this?
- What have been the challenges for you and your responsibilities? How could these be resolved? What could be done to improve the programme?
- Are you aware of a plan to continue this programme/these interventions? If not, are you aware of what is being done to sustain interventions through knowledge transfer etc.?



## Teachers

### Introductory Details

- Date
- Number of participants
- Names
- Gender
- District
- School
- Number of years in post (for each)

### Interview Questions

- Do you know who is the IEFT in your school?
- Does/how does the IEFT work with you and the other teachers in your school?
- Do you have CWD in your classroom? What types of disability? How was this determined? Were you involved in this process? Did you work with the IEFT? Others? Numbers of males and females?
- How have you engaged with/worked with the SNECO and the IEFTs?
- What have you learned about working with CWD in your classroom from the SNECO/IEFT? Have you changed your teaching methods for these children? Describe in detail.
- Are there challenges in teaching CWD? Has the SNECO/IEFT helped you with these challenges? How?
- Are you aware of CWD who were not in school who are now enrolled in school (has enrolment of CWD increased)?
- What impact(s) have the SNECO's and IEFT's work had for CWD? Improved academic performance? Improved social inclusion? Increased enrolment? Increased access to education? Other? What evidence do you have for this?
- What have been the challenges for this intervention How could these be resolved? What could be done to improve the programme?
- Are you aware of a plan to continue this programme/these interventions? If not, are you aware of what is being done to sustain interventions through knowledge transfer etc.?

## District Disability Advisor

### Introductory Details

- Date
- Name
- Gender
- District
- Number of years in post
- Education

### Interview Questions

- How were you selected for the role?

- What training did you receive? Length? Content?
- Have you had any refresher training? Length? Content?
- How have you interacted with the community of SNECOs? If yes, was this helpful?
- Who do you work with at district level? DEO? SEOs? Others? In what way do you work with them? Who do you report to within the district structure?
- Do you work directly with schools?
- Have you worked with IEFTs? What do you understand their responsibilities to be?
- Are you aware of many CWD are attending school in your area? How have they been identified? What types of disability are there? Numbers of male and female? Were you involved in identifying them?
- Are you aware of CWD who were not in school who are now enrolled in school (has enrolment of CWD increased)?
- Has teaching and learning improved for CWD? In what ways? Improved academic performance? Improved social inclusion? Increased enrolment? Increased access to education? Other? What evidence do you have for this?
- What have been the challenges for you and your responsibilities? How could these be resolved? What could be done to improve support for CWD?
- Are you aware of a plan to continue this programme/these interventions? If not, are you aware of what is being done to sustain interventions through knowledge transfer etc.?

## District Education Officer

### Introductory Details

- Date
- Name
- Gender
- District
- Number of years in post
- Education

### Interview Questions

- How long has the SNECO and the IEFTs been working in your district?
- How many schools do they work in?
- How many CWD are enrolled in your schools? What types of disability? How was this determined? Were you involved in this process? Was the district disability officer involved? Numbers of males and females?
- How have you engaged with/worked with the SNECO and the IEFTs?
- Did you receive any/participate in training provided to the SNECO/IEFTs? Length? Content?
- How many IEFTs?
- How many CWD are attending school in your area? How were they identified? What types of disability are there? Numbers of male and female? Were you involved in identifying them?
- Are you aware of CWD who were not in school who are now enrolled in school (has enrolment of CWD increased)?

- What impact(s) have your (and the IEFs) work had for CWD? Improved academic performance? Improved social inclusion? Increased enrolment? Increased access to education? Other? What evidence do you have for this?
- Have you seen a difference in teachers' methods/approaches with CWD? Describe.
- What have been the challenges for this intervention How could these be resolved? What could be done to improve the programme?
- Are you aware of a plan to continue this programme/these interventions? If not, are you aware of what is being done to sustain interventions through knowledge transfer etc.?

## Parents of CWD

### Introductory Details

- Date
- Number of participants
- Names
- Gender
- District
- School

### Interview Questions

#### For each participant:

- Can you tell us a little bit about your child: what is his or her name? how old is he or she?
- Which disability is present? Can you describe that a little? Can your child walk, for example? How does your child move? Does your child talk? What impression does your child make?
- When was the disability first noticed?
- Does your child need "all-around care"? Who mainly provides that?
- Has your child received special support and care from medical personnel? Clinic? Nurse? Assistive devices?
- What grade is your child in?

#### With the group

- What have been the challenges been for your child in school? Getting to school? Being able to learn? The school environment? People's attitudes to your child? Other?
- Has your child's experience of education changed in the past 2 years? Positive or negative? Please explain how and why. What evidence do you have for this?
- Did the school staff interview you/ask questions about your child when they enrolled or began to attend in school? When?
- Did you receive training (from the school? From others?) about how to support your child?
- Are you aware of CWD the community who were not in school who are now enrolled in school (has enrolment of CWD increased)? Are there still CWD in the community who are not attending school?
- Do you think that schools/education authorities could do more to support CWD to go to school and do well at school? What more could they do?

# Children with Disability

## Pre-Interview Protocols

- Find out how many CWD are going to participate
- Find out age levels and types of disability
- Find out whether any will require assistance to participate. e.g. sign language interpreters etc. and whether these are available.
- Ensure that you are not conducting the interviews alone with the children
- Ensure that parental permission has been given for the children to participate
- Establish rapport with the children before launching into the questions
- Probe gently; do not be aggressive. The aim is to explore the world of the children and their experiences.
- If possible, make the interview into a game: e.g. have a ball and toss it/roll it to the participants in turn, when asking questions.

## Introductory Details

- Date
- Number of participants
- Names
- Gender
- District
- School
- Grades

## Interview Questions

- Is being at school different from being at home? Are there things you can do at school that you can't do at home (or vice versa)?
- What do you like about school? Teachers? Fellow students? Other things?
- Do you feel safe at school? Why? Why not?
- Do you get the same help and support as the other children in the classroom? Do you get more help and support than the other children in the classroom?
- Do you get to play and be friends with the other children? Please explain.
- Are there any teachers who are especially helpful for you? How and in what ways are they helpful?
- What is your favourite subject in school? Why?
- Do you think you are learning well? How do you know if you are doing well?
- Is there something you can do this year at school that you couldn't do last year? Please explain.
- Is it hard for you to get to school? Why/why not?
- Are there any difficulties for you to get into and out of the classroom? The latrines?
- Have you received any help from the local clinic/nurse? Have you been provided with an assistive device?

- What is the best thing about school? What is the worst thing about school?
- If there is one thing you could change to make school better, what would that be?

## Annex 4. Literature Review on Good Practices in Inclusive Education from other Low and Middle-Income Countries

### Summary

Several meta reviews bring together data from a wide range of evaluations making clear that an education systems approach to inclusive education needs to be applied to delivering inclusion for all. Legal and policy frameworks; public sector financing and using data-based evidence to drive adoption are all equally important alongside the learning environment in schools, in service professional development and support for teaching staff and school leadership. No recent specific studies or learning around the scope and contribution of peripatetic support (SNECO/IEFT type) roles was identified. Just one similar example of work in six pilot schools in Kenya was found with learning limited to an executive summary (the full evaluation report could not be identified).

The barriers to inclusive education are well-understood now, and include inadequacies in policy and legal support, resources and facilities, specialised staff, teacher training, pedagogical techniques, flexible curricula, supportive leadership, and cultural attitudes. However, current thinking suggests that it is perhaps more useful to think about ways in which existing successful inclusive education practices can be identified and scaled up, rather than focusing attention on deficiencies.

The key elements of successful inclusive education implementation are:

- A clear concept and definition of inclusive education;
- Concrete inclusive education targets, indicators, measures, and outcomes;
- An understanding of existing structural, educational, and cultural challenges to successful implementation;
- well-designed implementation strategy that includes a clear plan, evaluation, and school review process;
- Providing inclusive education training, sustained support, and resources for all teachers and school leaders; and
- National leadership on inclusive education policy, education management information systems, curricular-reform, and coordinating social systems such as inclusive education and inclusive employment.

It is important to emphasise that inclusive education means that all children are together in mainstream classrooms for the majority of their day. This has demonstrated positive effects on student achievement and social wellbeing – for *all* children – and is far more efficient and effective than special schools and special classrooms. Often, the term ‘inclusive education’ becomes synonymous with education for children with disabilities. Whilst this may still be the primary motivation for inclusive education, successful inclusive practice will be successful for *all* children with many different attributes such as ethnicity, language, gender, and socio-economic status.

Inclusive education is a continuous process of educational transformation, and a clear set of equity indicators – such as from UNESCO (2017) – can support inclusive education implementation. Measuring the success of inclusive education should go beyond merely counting students to evaluate access, but should include measures of educational quality, outcomes, and experiences.

Successful inclusive education requires school transformation and systems change. Much of this reform is design-focused, and not necessarily resource-intensive. Understanding and evaluating teaching practices is also critically important. Key factors in inclusive education implementation include school and classroom level implementation such as school reviews and plans; training and supporting all teachers in inclusive practices, not just ‘specialised’ ones; and supporting school leadership to enact an inclusive vision for their schools. National-level implementation requires enabling policy to clearly articulate and support inclusive education; having strong systems of data collection and management; providing flexibility in curriculum; and coordinating with other aspects of society in which inclusive education factors, such as subsequent employment.

This summary is based on rapid review of recent evidence found in published academic literature; grey literature from implementing organisations was considered and sector experts consulted. The report provides a summary of 3 days' work.

## Defining Terms

Often, the term 'inclusive education' becomes synonymous with education for children with disabilities. Whilst this may still be the primary motivation for inclusive education, successful inclusive practice will be successful for *all* children with many different attributes such as ethnicity, language, gender, and socio-economic status, Schuelka (2018). In some countries, inclusive education is still thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a principle that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (Ainscow, 2020).

Inclusive Education policies define learners with special educational needs as those who need something which is over and above what is generally provided as standard in the education system. Learners with disabilities are one of the major groups that fall into this category. The importance of including disabled children is an essential strand within the international education policy agenda; framed in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2008). This states: 'The right to inclusive education encompasses a transformation in culture, policy and practice in all educational environments to accommodate the differing requirements and identities of individual students, together with a commitment to remove the barriers that impede that possibility'(General Comment No 4).

The UNCRPD defines non-inclusion, or segregation, as the education of students with disabilities in separate environments (i.e. in separate special schools, or in special education units located with regular schools). It commits to ending segregation within educational settings by ensuring inclusive classroom teaching in accessible learning environments with appropriate support. This means that education systems must provide a personalised educational response, rather than expecting the student to fit the system, Ainscow (2020).

## How do we know that inclusive education is successful?

UNESCO (2017) has summarised successful inclusive education implementation into five main components:

1. inclusive policies that promote high outcomes for all students;
  1. flexible and accommodative curriculum;
  2. strong and supportive school leadership;
  3. equitable distribution of resources; and
  4. teachers who are trained in inclusive pedagogy and view it as their role to teach all learners in a diverse classroom.

## Theoretical Frameworks from Reviews of Practice

There are various ways to define ‘success’ in inclusive education; the UNESCO (2017) *Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education* outlined in table 1 provides the clearest conceptualisation of how inclusive education can be judged successful (Schuelka 2018). The Guide highlights that measuring the success of inclusive education should go beyond merely counting students to evaluate access, but should include measures of educational quality, outcomes, and experiences. These dimensions can be thought of as criteria for continuous evaluation and critical examination of education systems.

### Concepts

- Inclusion and equity are overarching principles that guide all education policies, plans, and practices
- The national curriculum and its associated assessment systems are designed to respond effectively to all learners
- All partners who work with learners and their families understand and support the national policy goals for promoting inclusion and equity in education
- Systems are in place to monitor the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners within the education system

### Policy

- The important national education policy documents strongly emphasize inclusion and equity
- Senior staff at the national, district, and school levels provide leadership on inclusion and equity in education
- Leaders at all levels articulate consistent policy goals to develop inclusion and equitable educational practices
- Leaders at all levels challenge non-inclusive, discriminatory and inequitable educational practices

### Structures and Systems

- There is high-quality support for vulnerable learners
- All services and institutions involved with learners and their families work together in coordinating inclusive and equitable educational policies and practices
- Resources, both human and financial, are distributed in ways that benefit potentially vulnerable learners
- There is a clear role for special provision, such as special schools and units, in promoting inclusion and equity in education

### Practices

- Schools and other learning centres have strategies for encouraging the presence, participation, and achievement of all learners from their local community
- Schools and other learning centres provide support for learners who are at risk of underachievement, marginalization, and exclusion
- Teachers and support staff are prepared to respond to learner diversity during their initial training



- Teachers and support staff have opportunities to take part in continuing professional development regarding inclusive and equitable practices

Most accepted definitions of inclusive education recognise that it is a continuous process, rather than a goal. The dimensions of the UNESCO Guide can therefore be considered as criteria for continuous evaluation and critical examination of education systems.

Key findings from a recent review of the literature (Schuelka, 2018) also illustrate this concept highlighting that key factors in inclusive education implementation include:

- School and classroom level implementation such as school reviews and plans;
- Training and supporting all teachers in inclusive practices, not just ‘specialised’ ones;
- Supporting school leadership to enact an inclusive vision for their schools.
- National-level implementation requires enabling policy to clearly articulate and support inclusive education;
- Having strong systems for data collection and management;
- Providing flexibility in curriculum; and
- Coordinating with other aspects of society in which inclusive education factors, such as employment.

Drawing from international experience (consideration of approaches to promoting inclusion in education in the Global North and the Global South) Ainscow formulates the framework below for thinking about how to promote inclusion and equity within education systems and suggests that taken together the five interrelated factors can determine ‘levers for change’

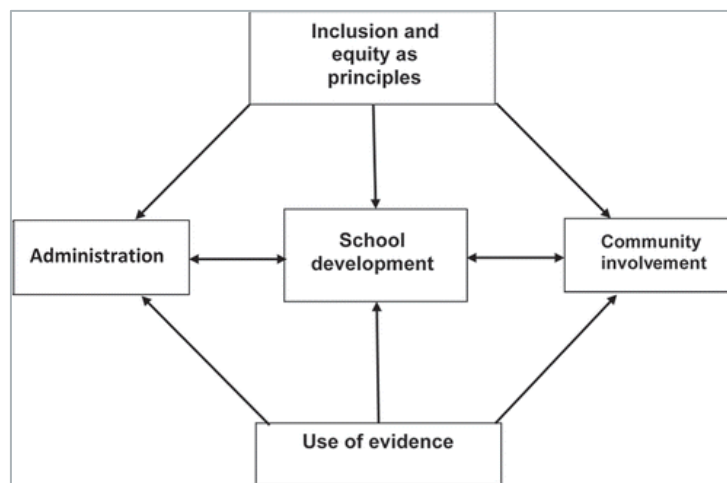


Figure 8 Review framework (from Ainscow, 2020)

Each of these influences may provide support and encouragement to those in schools (teachers, school leaders, learners) who are wishing to move in an inclusive direction. However, the same factors can act as obstacles to progress. Put simply, efforts to address these barriers will leverage change and promote inclusive practice.

A consistent theme across each of these reviews is that inclusive education is a process; it should target all children in schools; and, while teaching skills, in-service professional development and learning resources (including time) are extremely important, they are not sufficient to adequately address all barriers and deliver inclusive education.

## What progress has been made?

The most recent synthesis, that is highly relevant to this study, is found in a UNICEF study on disability inclusive education (Grimes & dela Cruz, 2023). This maps the progress of countries in Eastern and Southern Africa region in advancing inclusive quality education for all children with a particular focus on children with disabilities at pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary levels. This provides a comprehensive analysis of successful practices, innovative approaches and gaps in the programmes considered (largely Government and UNICEF Country programmes). Only some countries are able to provide additional qualitative appreciations through the involvement of DPO and/or the conduct of FGD with parents and learners with disabilities. This is a weakness in terms of judging effective progress from the perspective of service users.

A resulting framework organises the conditions necessary to fulfilling the rights of children with disabilities to education, through four dimensions or key change strategies: (UNICEF, 2023:11)

- **Enabling environment.** This includes conditions that facilitate an inclusive education system including legal framework, sector plan and financing, the conceptualization of disability, data on children with disabilities, and governance.
- **Supply.** This domain focuses on the availability and accessibility of educational and support services for children with disabilities.
- **Demand.** Demand-side conditions pertain to social norms, awareness and attitudes, and participation of persons with disabilities and their families in inclusive education.
- **Cross-cutting issues.** In this study, cross cutting issues look at gender and humanitarian situations that, in interaction with disability, cause further exclusion of children with disabilities from quality education.

The aim of this study is to inform the development of a roadmap for UNICEF's regional work on inclusive quality education; its findings show how well, against each area, specific country progress has been rated. Thus, the study presents a comparative analysis of the progress made across all 21 countries of East and Southern Africa Region, including Rwanda. This includes preserving the rights (to protection and non-discrimination) of persons and children with disabilities through legal and policy frameworks; approaches to education provision for children with disabilities; resourcing and long-term commitments to funding this work.

Countries vary in the approach currently adopted to strengthen teachers' professional development – from testing approaches to inclusive teaching in six pilot schools (Lesotho) to offering teacher training to all teachers to meet the learning needs of children with disabilities (Somalia). Rwanda explicitly mentions special education as a means for children with disabilities to access education. Special and inclusive schools are run in parallel, wherein special schools cater to children with blindness, hearing disabilities, and severe intellectual disabilities. (UNICEF, 2023:18)

While progress is promising in some countries and suggests a move towards rights- based methods, disability identification systems that are based on functional difficulties are yet to be established in most countries (UNICEF, 2023:94). Even where the Washington Group Questions are used to achieve this the lack of follow-up support after screening and identification is one of the challenges faced by children with disabilities and their families. Most often, children with disabilities do not receive sufficient support, or if they do, the interventions provided are unsuitable for their actual needs. In some cases, screening and identification do not lead to the provision of interventions at all.

## Do we know that inclusive education is successful?

The evidence is mixed. A systematic review of 280 studies from 25 countries (89 studies provide relevant scientific evidence) shows that *there is clear and consistent evidence that inclusive educational settings can bring substantial short- and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities*. A large body of research indicates that included students develop stronger skills in reading and mathematics, have higher rates of attendance, are less likely to have behavioural problems, and are more likely to complete secondary school than students who have not been

included. As adults, students with disabilities who have been included are more likely to be enrolled in post-secondary education, and to be employed or living independently (Hehir et al: 2016).

The review finds consistent evidence that inclusive educational settings—those in which children with disabilities are educated alongside their non-disabled peers—can confer substantial short- and long-term benefits for children’s cognitive and social development. This issue has been studied in many ways with many different populations of students. The magnitude of the benefits of inclusive education may vary from one study to another, but the overwhelming majority either report significant benefits for students who are educated alongside their non-disabled peers or, at worst, show no differences between included and non-included students.

Positive effects were most common in studies where support for students with disabilities in the inclusive classrooms was well-managed through adaptive instruction and there was collaborative consultation and cooperative teaching of special and general education teachers (Hehir et al (2016: 9). For example, in an Australian study involving six primary and high school classrooms, researchers found that teacher attitudes were crucial to effective inclusive practice (Carlson, Hemmings, Wurf, & Reupert, 2012 cited in Hehir et al, 2016). In the study, they suggest that the inclusive attitudes of the teachers towards supporting students with a range of learning needs created the conditions necessary within the schools to foster inclusion in practice, which in turn resulted in more inclusive attitudes of other teachers, school educators, parents and students. Something of a virtuous circle is found.

This is nevertheless balanced by constraints also expressed:

- Although trainings can help provide teachers with specific instructional strategies, many teachers suggest that they do not have the necessary time and resources to effectively include students with disabilities
- Concerns regarding resources were specifically noted in surveys of teachers in Hong Kong, South Africa, Ghana and Spain. More generally, providing targeted support for students with disabilities within a general education classroom will require additional time from teachers.
- Research suggests that it is through the development of this culture of collaborative problem solving that the inclusion of students with disabilities can serve as a catalyst for school-wide improvement and yield benefits for non-disabled students. The skills teachers develop to support students with disabilities help them to better address the unique needs of all of their students.

Other summaries of the evidence on inclusive education fail to capture areas of clear learning or analysis or are based only on a small finite number of studies. The varied nature of interventions and project designs may prevent like for like comparisons. Some evaluations simply fail to report on effects; and the desirable impacts for children are not always agreed from the outset of the intervention. For example, retention of children with disabilities and progression in line with their peer group may be considered success; in other cases, improved understanding and performance in English and Maths is a generic goal (for all learners).

For example, a closer look at implementation of inclusive education in developing countries over the 10 years prior to 2015, examined projects undertaken by governments and international organisations to include students with disabilities in regular education and also examined the effects of these projects in terms of an increase in the number of students with disabilities in regular schools (Meenakshi et al, 2015). Analysis focusing on projects including the following four factors: external, school, teachers and parents found among fifteen empirical studies/reports only two studies reported their effects.

Another review of recent evidence on the effectiveness of inclusive and special education approaches in improving learning and behavioural outcomes, with a focus on developing countries, highlights the lack of research about education in these countries (Price, 2018). Despite an increase of research in the last 5 years, robust, empirical evidence for low- and middle-income countries is still lacking. Difficulties around clear definitions of inclusive education and comparability of data on education of children with disabilities, make it difficult to assess to what extent they are still being left behind. In particular, there is limited long-term data and evidence around learning achievements and outcomes for learners with disabilities, making it difficult to enact systemic changes to the education system

that would improve learning achievements for children with disabilities (Schuelka, 2013 cited in Price, 2018).

Kuper et al (2018: 16) argue that the lack of data comparing different approaches/interventions that try to improve educational inclusion and outcomes for children with disabilities makes it difficult to judge what is optimal. They further elaborate that most studies have focused on comparing enrolment in school for children with and without disabilities. This metric alone ignores the importance of frequency of attendance and progression through the system, or academic achievements (such as graduation). There has also been little focus on the classroom experience of the child, such as whether they are provided with a quality education, are socially included, and feel safe at school, and whether they experience stigmatising attitudes.

Ganimian & Murnane, (2016), present a narrative review of the evidence from 223 rigorous impact evaluations of educational interventions in pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools conducted in 56 low- and middle-income countries from 2000-2015. Analysis focuses on studies that appear to have reached seemingly conflicting conclusions about which interventions improve educational outcomes. Conclusions bring attention to the aspects of the design and implementation of successful educational interventions which foster or favour inclusion. By grouping interventions based on their theory of action, four lessons emerge from this review:

- First, reducing the costs of going to school and expanding schooling options increase attendance and attainment, but do not consistently increase student achievement.
- Second, providing information about school quality, developmentally appropriate parenting practices, and the economic returns to schooling affects the actions of parents and the achievement of children and adolescents.
- Third, more or better resources improve student achievement only if they result in changes in children's daily experiences at school.
- Fourth, well-designed incentives increase teacher effort and student achievement from very low levels, but low-skilled teachers need specific guidance to reach minimally acceptable levels of instruction

Despite the comprehensive range of this analysis there is no specific mention of interventions that promote the inclusion and retention of children with SEN or disabilities. Nonetheless these generic factors that promote educational access, attendance and attainment provide lessons for all school learners, *including* those with SEN or disability.

## Other Promising Projects

There are many other examples in the literature, particularly grey literature, of case studies, projects and pilot approaches implemented where success at some level is reported. Description and analysis of the particular approaches used and the intervention logic is less often highlighted though broadly these examples substantiate parts of the system wide learning above.

The five-year Pamoja Inclusive Education Project (PIEP) implemented by Sightsavers and partners in six pilot schools in Homa Bay, Kenya used a similar approach to the BLF programme in Rwanda: the appointment of one or more SENCOS (Special Educational Needs Coordinator) from the existing teaching staff in each pilot school and close collaboration with referrals from EARCs (Education Assessment and Resource Centres) staffed by teachers, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers and psychologists to make initial assessments of children. The project aimed to improve retention and transition rates and influence enhanced policy development and implementation to provide quality education for children with disabilities/special educational needs.

Project success is reported in terms of

- Training of teachers, SENCOS and EARC assessment officers (99% of targeted teachers trained; 89% of EARC officers trained)
- Enrolment of girls and boys with disabilities and special education needs in pilot schools (349 children enrolled; exceeded target by 11 children or 3%)

- Retention and transition rates of girls and boys with disabilities and SEN in pilot primary schools (average retention 92%; average transition to next class 92%)

Learners benefitted from accessibility improvements, the provision of learning materials and assistive devices. However, there is ongoing need and a lack of funding to fully address this. Inclusion in education has led to improvements in learner wellbeing including increased confidence, self-esteem, self-care and positive behaviours. However, stigma persists and affects children with disabilities both attending school and who remain out of school.

Quantitative research across 77 government schools in the Maldives highlights the importance of teachers' knowledge, understanding, skills, abilities and attitude in further enhancing the inclusive educational opportunities for students with special needs (Adams et al, 2021) Teacher readiness for inclusive education is influenced by academic qualification, teacher training, teachers' teaching experience and actual involvement in teaching students with special educational needs.

Kuroda et al (2017) critically consider the premise from published literature: that research in developed countries has consistently demonstrated that training and experience are factors that strongly influence teacher attitudes toward inclusive education. Empirical studies have pointed to a positive causative relationship between the experience of teaching students with disabilities and teachers' perceptions towards their inclusion in classrooms, with the exception of two studies carried out in the 1980s. In the first, a positive causative relationship was not found in the case of students with severe disabilities, and in the second, the inverse relationship found was attributed to inadequate support services and lack of teacher decision-making (Kuroda et al 2017: 10).

Given the implications for teacher-related policies on inclusive education this study seeks to empirically determine and verify the impact of training and experience in Cambodia. Surveys involving 448 teachers of children with and without disabilities, were conducted to find out how their training and experience influences their perspectives on how children with disabilities should be educated. Twenty-four were then selected for focus group interviews.

Perceptions were analysed by disability categories and statistical analysis revealed that neither training nor experience in teaching children with disabilities significantly influences teacher perceptions of inclusive education in Cambodia. Qualitative responses pointed out that not only is the current cascade teacher training system ineffective in reaching out to all teachers, the message of inclusive education—its purpose and methods—is also not effectively transmitted to all teachers.

The responses show that the lack of quality training and on-site support negatively affected teacher experience of teaching and meeting the educational needs of children with disabilities. The results also showed that the inclusion of severe sensory impaired children in such programmes is perceived much more negatively in Cambodia as compared to developed countries. The findings of this study thus have implications for 'light touch' teacher training programmes, their resources, and the subsequent support for teachers that is required to facilitate the inclusion of disabled students, particularly for students with severe sensory impairment.

## Concluding Remarks

Lessons from published literature are varied. A good number of studies were found with meta-analysis or a synthesis of learning across many countries and different programme approaches. Analysis from these develops frameworks (composed of four or five key thematic areas) all of which are essential to delivering inclusive education. Teacher skills, schools' leadership and resourcing, and attitudes towards children with disabilities in classrooms are always found to be important within these education system frameworks. Addressing these elements will not however on their own deliver a fully inclusive education system.

This is echoed in a recent compilation of evidence from Organisations of People with Disabilities (OPDs) from five regions and thirteen countries on progress towards SDG 4 and CRPD Article 24 focused on education, published by the International Disability Alliance (IDA). Evidence from OPDs shows: a) significant gaps in legislation and strategies for inclusive education across LMICs; b) low rates of enrolment of learners with disabilities at all levels of education, high dropout rates, and a higher rate of illiteracy among people with disabilities; c) a lack of teachers trained on inclusive education, particularly for people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities; d) limited published

information on budgetary allocations for inclusive education, and where information is available, allocations are inadequate; e) a high prevalence of exclusionary, special and segregated education; f) widespread stigma and discrimination against learners with disabilities, especially girls with disabilities; and g) a lack of accessibility standards for schools and transport. The report provides a set of recommendations from OPDs to governments and civil society. It complements IDA's Inclusive Education Global Report published in 2020. (Cited by SDD, 2021).

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