Report on status on inclusion at Higher Education level in Rwanda - D8.3

WP8 – SYSTEMIC IMPACT

Task 8.3 – National Policy Analysis

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Document prepared by Ministry of Education Rwanda

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Ministry of Education

UWEZO Youth Empowerment

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1. Introduction

Inclusion in higher education seeks to provide equal learning opportunities for all students irrespective of their background, abilities, or disabilities. The Government of Rwanda has taken huge steps towards promoting inclusion at all levels of education. Challenges, however, still exist, especially in higher education, where there is limited participation by students with disabilities. This report gives an overview of the status of inclusion in Rwandan higher education, including achievements, challenges, and areas that demand urgent attention. Rwanda has reiterated strong commitments towards inclusive education through various policy initiatives around access and equity.

2. Legal framework

2.1. Institutional policies

○ **Policy and Guidelines on Inclusive Learning and Teaching Services, University of Rwanda[1] (2015)**: These guidelines emphasize strategies for inclusive pedagogies and student support.

○ **Quality Assurance Guidelines for Students with Disabilities and Special Needs for Higher Education in East Africa, IUCECA (2017)[2]**: These guidelines

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[1] https://ur.ac.rw/img/pdf/policy_guidelines_on_inclusive_learning_teaching_services.pdf
[2] https://www.iucea.org/mdocs-posts/quality-assurance-guidelines-on-disabilities-and-other-special-needs-2/

provide a regional framework for ensuring equity and inclusion in higher education.

○ **Special Needs and Inclusive Education policy, MINEDUC (2018)[3]**, although not specifically tailored to higher education, this strategy outlines general approaches for supporting students with diverse needs.

2.2. National policies

○ **National Policy of Persons with Disabilities and Four Year Strategic Plan (2021-2024)[4], Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC)**

○ **Law No. 1/2007 of 2007 relating to the protection of people with disabilities[5]** in general in articles 3, 18 and 27 which states that persons with disabilities shall be entitled to equal rights with other people and that any form of discrimination or any form of violence against people with disabilities will not be acceptable.

○ **Law No. 10/2021 determining the Organisation of Education[6]**, which assures equal rights to education.

○ **Handbook for Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement and The Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education, Higher Education Council**

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[3]https://www.mineduc.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=5823&token=30ac75706c41dd0b8f196645c96 9d2ddcf928d99
[4]https://www.minaloc.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Minaloc/National_Policy_on_Disability_and_Inclusion_fi nal.pdf
[5] https://rwandalii.org/akn/rw/act/law/2007/1/eng@2007-05-21
[6] https://rwandalii.org/akn/rw/act/law/2021/10/eng@2021-02-18

(2007)[7], including guidelines for accommodating students with disabilities in higher learning institutions.

2.3. International policies

⭕ **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)[8]** of 2006 Ratified by Rwanda on 15th December 2008 committing to inclusive education

⭕ **Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled[9]** of 2013 signed on 7th September 2020, to facilitate access to published works for works for people with visual impairment and other disabilities.

These frameworks lay a strong foundation for promoting inclusion, but gaps remain in their implementation.

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[7]https://www.hec.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=85314&token=841c25bea703f265d6b098cc4cfebe6acfef0e07
[8]https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-articles
[9] https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/marrakesh/

3. Curriculum and teaching

3.1. Progress

○ **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)**: Increasing awareness and usage of UDL principles that encompass multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression.

○ **Inclusive Pedagogies**: Modules on differentiated instruction and inclusive pedagogies should be incorporated into teacher training.

○ **Accommodations**: Modifications such as extended time, alternative tests, and notetaking accommodations that have been implemented at some institutions.

3.2. Challenges

○ Limited capacity among lecturers to adapt teaching methods to suit the diverse student needs.

○ Uneven comprehension and implementation of inclusive education policies.

○ Insufficient resources for individualized instruction and support services.

4. Achievements

○ **Increased Awareness**: The lecturers have embraced inclusion into everyday teaching and supported other staff in inclusive practices; most of them started doing this after attending ANSWER Project training.

○ **Infrastructure Development**: Some universities began to work on physical accessibility by constructing ramps and building accessible toilets/washrooms.

○ **Support Services**: A few higher learning institutions, mainly the Rwanda ANSWER HEI project partners (UR, INES-Ruhengeri and EAUR) have established resource rooms or units to address students' different needs.

○ Collaborations with the universities of Alicante and Macedonia in the framework of the ANSWER project.

5. Challenges

Despite great improvement, full inclusion into higher education faces some obstacles:

○ lack of comprehensive data about students with disabilities creates problems in planning and distributing resources, hence leaving their needs unprovided

○ resource constraints due to lack of assistive technology, specialized tools, and instructional materials remain big barriers when trying to accommodate students in their needs for learning.

○ Faculty capacity gaps are also evident, with many lecturers lacking training in inclusive pedagogy and strategies that will help them support students with disabilities.

○ Social and intellectual marginalization perpetuates the stigmatization of students with disabilities through negative stereotyping that enables exclusion.

○ Inconsistencies in the provision of support services at institutional level exacerbate inequities, where some have established disability units while others lack such essential services.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to enhance inclusion in higher education. Altogether there are 20 measures to start working for an inclusive university in a realistic way. The recommendations have been divided into six groups or areas, where each one shows the most specific measures:

1. Policy implementation to clearly outline monitoring and evaluations mechanisms for effective application of inclusive education policies.

- 1.A. Develop a national evaluation framework with specific indicators to measure the impact of inclusive education policies. For example, this could involve creating a national document that standardizes monitoring procedures, ensuring that all universities involved in the project follow the same evaluation criteria regarding the degree of implementation.

- 1.B. Establish a multisectoral working group that includes universities, ministries, and NGOs to oversee the implementation of these policies. Information exchange should be promoted, and regular meetings should be scheduled. It is essential to define the structure of this group or forum, which could involve working committees, for instance.

- 1.C. Organize annual meetings (or consider whether biannual meetings might be more appropriate) at universities to ensure compliance with accessibility standards. Responsibilities could be delegated to the above-mentioned forum/group, or to the accessibility committee within the forum/group, or to NCPD to schedule visits to universities to assess aspects

such as classroom accessibility, availability of assistive technologies, academic support for students with disabilities, or other items as determined.

2. **Capacity building through regular training on inclusive pedagogy and student support strategies for faculty members and other staff.**

- 2.A. Design and implement continuous training programs for all faculty staff and management staff on disability awareness, inclusive education, and the familiarization and use of assistive technologies.

- 2.B. Create specific guides and apps, as well as standardized channels, for administrative staff to address the needs of students with disabilities.

- 2.C. Promote university associations and student participation on social issues on campus for diversity and inclusion. This approach allows student activism to become diverse and contributes to pedagogy through participation.

- 2.D. Include activities (workshops, conferences, courses, etc.) on inclusion, accessibility, diversity, and related topics within university extension programs, lifelong learning initiatives, and other complementary activities to ensure that the entire university community has access to content on inclusion. These efforts could help dismantle prejudices, stereotypes, and biases.

3. **Increasing funding, there is a need to allocate more resources to assistive technologies, infrastructure improvement and specialised instructional materials.**

- 3.A. Negotiate and subsequently consolidate with the Ministry of Education the establishment of a National Fund dedicated to the acquisition of accessible educational resources.

- 3.B. Create a bank of assistive devices (potentially managed by the Ministry of Education or another designated body) that functions as a library, lending items, devices or equipment to universities based on students' needs.

- 3.C. Create a shared repository as a centralized digital library containing accessible educational materials that students from all universities can use. This measure may require agreements with publishers to donate or provide educational books and materials in accessible formats to include in the library and make them universally available.

4. **Conducting a national survey to collect comprehensive data on students with disabilities to inform planning.**

- 4.A. Design and implement a data collection system for students with disabilities accessing university education. The system should generate

representative and disaggregated data to publish periodic reports and relate findings to the implementation of policies. It is necessary to decide who will oversee the data collection system (NCPD, MINEDUC & the Higher Education Council, or maybe other agent).

- 4.B. Consider whether an existing survey could be updated to include disability variables. So, re-elaborate or rework existing surveys to update them with new questions or items that can provide a new perspective on the data to be collected.

5. **There is need to advocate for awareness creation to help reduce stigma and promote inclusion in higher education institutions.**

- 5.A. Launch national awareness campaigns using digital and traditional media to promote the rights of people with disabilities. Official organizations should lead this overarching campaign.

- 5.B. Implement educational programs in pre-university educational institutions to begin addressing attitudinal changes and promoting awareness.

- 5.C. Collaborate with civil society organizations to amplify the impact of these campaigns. Joint efforts could include commemorating international days, publicizing success stories, organizing joint fundraising campaigns, and promoting inclusive employment opportunities while showcasing the talents

of university graduates with disabilities to employers, companies, recruiters, etc.

6. **All higher institutions should be encouraged to establish a disability unit or resource centres to ensure equitable support.**

- 6.A. Establish support centres or units in all universities, equipped with specialized staff and assistive technology. Ensure these centres are prepared to implement curricular adaptations.

- 6.B. Establish mentorship programs where students with disabilities can receive personalized guidance and participate in specific welcome programs, volunteer opportunities, peer mentoring, or other tailored programs based on identified needs.

- 6.C. Ensure the sustainability of these centres by developing long-term funding strategies.

- 6.D. Foster an inclusive education philosophy and inclusive campus environments across the university community.

- 6.F. University graduates with disabilities should have the same opportunities for qualified employment as other graduates. Inclusive

internships and specific career guidance for students with disabilities should be promoted.

As it can be seen, several of the 20 measures can be worked on together, but they have been outlined in this way to express the interrelation that exists in social policy issues.

7. Conclusions

Rwanda has done much in promoting inclusion within higher education. However, several challenges still exist, especially about policy implementation, resource availability, and capacity building. Closing these gaps through exploitation of existing frameworks could see Rwanda develop constructively into an inclusive and equitable higher education system where all students, irrespective of ability or disability, compete on an equal footing. It requires the commitment of the government, institutions, and the communities for no student to be left behind in the inclusion process.

8. References

- Inter-University Council for East Africa: Quality Assurance Guidelines on Disability[10]

- University of Rwanda Policy and procedures for inclusive teaching & learning[11]

- Highlights for Disability audit across eight (8) UR campuses

- O Sipuka 'Country report: Rwanda' (2018) 6 African Disability Rights Yearbook 213-231[12]

- Rwanda Legal Information Institute[13]

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[10] https://www.iucea.org/mdocs-posts/quality-assurance-guidelines-on-disabilities-and-other-special-needs-2/
[11] https://ur.ac.rw/img/pdf/policy_guidelines_on_inclusive_learning_teaching_services.pdf
[12] https://www.adry.up.ac.za/country-reports-2018/rwanda
[13] https://rwandalii.org/

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