ENGAGING TEACHERS IN PEACEBUILDING IN POST-CONFLICT CONTEXTS:

EVALUATING EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS IN RWANDA

POLICY BRIEF No. 1/2017

Overview

Globally research acknowledges that teachers are key determinants of education quality and play a crucial role in nation building, identity construction, and processes of peace and reconciliation. What teachers do with learning resources shapes what children and young people learn, influencing their identities as well as providing them with skills for employment and peacebuilding. Towards improving human capacity, the Government of Rwanda has called for the development of highly competent, skilled workforce, particularly for advanced technology, knowledge-intensive growth sectors mentioned in the long-term strategy plan, Vision 2020 (Republic of Rwanda, 2000). In achieving these goals, and towards encouraging lasting peace and social cohesion, education has played an important role in the reconstruction of Rwandan society as a post-conflict nation. Education's role in uniting or dividing has been well documented, and is especially salient in Rwanda.

This study considers the issue of teachers as agents of peacebuilding and social cohesion, investigating the conditions under which Rwandan education interventions support teachers towards this goal, including how teachers experience this support, how their practices and attitudes are influenced by national and international educational policies, and the reported outcome for the learners in their respective schools and institutions, as well as the communities in which they live.

"Education is responsible for everything that is likely to happen in a society - the good as well as the bad. Education is a double edged sword - it must be handled carefully to avoid leading the society into horrendous and inhuman catastrophes, such as genocide against the Tutsi in 1994."

Rwanda Education Board Official

Introduction

In the years since 1994, modern Rwandan education policy has focused on positive national values in stark contrast to the divisiveness inculcated during the colonial period and extended through the segregated policies of the past political regimes. In particular, the reformed system seeks to promote unity, social cohesion, and gender equality in all walks of life (MINEDUC, 2013). Recent policies simultaneously emphasize key national core values of unity, patriotism, selflessness, integrity, responsibility, volunteerism, and humility (NIC, 2011). Policymaker interviewees argued that this national identity, which seeks to disrupt previous values of separatism and ethnic hatred, nurtures citizens' beliefs, symbols, and sentiments about their country and themselves (Policy makers-NIC, NURC, RGB, and REB). Social cohesion is sought through a collective identity as 'Rwandan' rather than the previous ethnic divisions of Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. Durrani and Dunne (2010) emphasize the role of education in upholding national unity and acting as a potent tool of transformation towards changing mindsets and social relations among people. It can serve as an avenue for emphasizing values and attitudes in learners, teachers and community members that promote social cohesion and reconciliation.

For the Rwandan context, this translates to government policy which seeks to foster social transformation by encouraging integration of peacebuilding and equality issues into the school curriculum. Broad national policies, such as the Rwandan Constitution, Vision 2020, and EDPRS I & II, enshrine provisions for inclusive education and equitable practice. Within education in particular, policies such as the Education Sector plans, the Teacher Management and Development Policy, and the recently released competency-based curriculum, along with home grown interventions and

international NGO support, seek to embed peace education within the national curriculum.

Implementation of these policies requires a teacher workforce committed to values of peace and reconciliation. In the years preceding the genocide, education system in general and teachers in particular often acted as agents of division, encouraging the discriminatory practices and perpetuating hate speech. Thus, they wield an important power within their classroom environments, either as agents of change by promoting harmony between students, or as agents of conflict in perpetuating inequality and conflict.

This research frames teacher as possessing agency to act as peacebuilders in relation to their capacity to influence their conflict-driven surroundings. It is their ability to think, feel and act in order to foster "values and attitudes" that offer "a basis for transforming conflict itself" (Novelli and Smith, 2011, p. 7).

To what extent teachers in Rwanda are enabled, trained, and supported for this role is investigated via the methodology explained below.

Methodology

This research project was funded by the ESRC/DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation in order to research the role of teachers in peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts in Rwanda and South Africa. The research adopted a qualitative, realist method exploring the intervention from conception to implementation and effect. Adopting such an approach facilitates an understanding of how the national political economy and policy as well as international actors and factors frame and shape teacher practices and student learning. It also sought to investigate how structural inequalities are understood and addressed in the discourses and practices of national and international policies and programs, and finally how teachers in schools exercise agency in diverse peacebuilding interventions.

The study employed mixed methods approach for data collection and analysis. Qualitative methods relied on interviews with key informants, including policymakers and other stakeholders in education, along with interviews with teachers, head teachers in schools, tutors and lecturers in working in initial teacher education (ITE) programs. Quantitative questionnaires were used to collect data among students, which were supplemented by focus group discussions with students and the observation of teachers within in their classrooms.

Theoretically, this research is informed by theories that explore sustainable peacebuilding in post-conflict environments, specifically the four dimensions of Recognition, Redistribution, Representation and Reconciliation (4Rs).

Redistribution concerns equity and non-discrimination in education access, resources, and outcomes for different groups in society; recognition affirms diversity in education structures. Representation calls for participation, at all levels of the education system, in governance and decision making related to human and material resources. Finally, Reconciliation deals with past events, injustices, and material and psychosocial effects of conflict (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo and Smith, 2015). This links the work of Nancy Fraser (1995, 2005) on social justice with the peacebuilding and reconciliation work of Galtung (1976) and Lederach (1997).

Findings

Rwanda's Education Policy: Decentralizing to Involve Parents

The decentralization policy in Rwanda is conceived as a tool for empowering the populace to participate in development activities and the promotion of social cohesion. This is operationalized by giving districts decision-making power in local schools and providing forums for parents to be involved in education decision-making processes. The purpose of this is to emphasise ownership among a variety of stakeholders, instill a sense of common belonging, and encourage volunteerism, community work, and self-reliance based on cultural and other values of collective responsibility, personal worth, and productive involvement (MINALOC, 2011). However, in decentralising some aspects of control to districts and individual school sites, respondents identified instances in which school management are failing to effectively engage parents in mandated parent-teacher feedback programs.

> **Box 1: Challenges with decentralisation and parental involvement:**
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> Some school head teachers do not form strong and well-informed parent committees to help them manage schools.
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> Other head teachers elect weak and elderly parents who lack capacity or personal sense of authority to question the head teacher.
>
> Common in rural areas, parents deemed to be "domineering" by head teachers are passed over in decision-making processes.

Teacher Recruitment, Gender, and Inclusive Education Policy

The Rwanda Education Sector Strategic Plan (2013-2017) recognizes rights in education by addressing barriers of access to education for vulnerable children, including adolescent girls, children with disabilities, children living with HIV, and children from poorer backgrounds (MINEDUC, 2013). The Rwandan constitution declares that every Rwandan has the right to education and the State has the duty to take special measures to facilitate the education of disabled people (Republic of Rwanda, 2003). While these policies seek to strengthen social cohesion and peacebuilding by emphasizing redistribution of resources and opportunities, the reality on the ground, especially in rural contexts, often presents a different narrative.

Gender parity in primary and secondary school enrolments has largely been achieved, with boys and girls enrolled at approximately the same rates. Ministry interviewees celebrated this success, but also indicated that current priorities lie with engaging female learners more effectively with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics subjects (STEM).

Despite these improvements with enrolment, aspirational policies that call for gender parity do not appear to be operationalised when recruiting teachers, especially for secondary school teacher posts, where men continue to make up a strong majority. Further, within education management, the gender gap is especially pronounced. In 2013, only 31 percent of females were in leadership positions as compared to 69 percent of their male counterparts. In the same year, at the secondary level, only 19.5 percent of school head teachers were female as against males' 80.5% (MINEDUC, 2016). This implies that affirmative policies have not necessarily translated into gender equality so that women are fairly represented in education management positions and are thus unable to provide female leadership role models for women for children enrolled in schools.

Language of Instruction Policy in Rwandan Schools

The decision to use English as a medium of instruction in Rwanda in 2008 was viewed as necessary for education, business and trade, and regional and international relations as information and communication technology development propels Rwanda's economy to a middle-income status by 2020. English functions as the medium of instruction from Primary 4, with Kinyarwanda, the

mother tongue of nearly 98% of Rwandans, used in lower primary years.

Interviewees commented on the increased challenge that language posed for teachers attempting to implement a new and ambitious curriculum. One identified issue centred around switching from Kinyarwanda to English mid-Primary, while others reiterated the obstacle that incompetency English as MOI poses to teachers and teacher trainers.

> **Box 2: Parents' view on English and Kinyarwanda policy**
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> *Many parents consider English as a language of opportunities and question the use of Kinyarwanda in early school years. One interviewee commented: "Where will my child use Kinyarwanda when applying for either a job or scholarships? I want my children to enjoy East African Community fruits, go overseas and compete internationally-----can that happen with weak English that will start in upper primary? I doubt."*
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> *Further, the ability of teachers to effectively teach when they lack proficiency in English was questioned. One interviewee impugned the current system: "Above all, many of both teachers and learners have not yet mastered English language and therefore face difficulties in expressing themselves properly in classroom. So the later use of English will exacerbate heavily and affect learners' use and mastery of English language since they are being taught by equally linguistically weak teachers."*

Rural and Urban Teacher Deployment in Rwandan Schools

Social cohesion quite often goes hand in hand with equal and fair access to social amenities. Throughout rural areas, teachers and students both endure long distances between homes and school sites, along with water shortages, poor sanitation facilities, insufficient pedagogical materials, and poor on-site school management. Combined with poor access to health facilities and other urban amenities, few teachers are willing to accept and remain in rural posts. At present, there is no dedicated intervention sponsored by the government to incentivize such rural postings.

Rwandan teachers receive low salaries, even in comparison with other African standards, and often expect for these salaries to be supplemented through parental contributions. In the poorer rural areas, parents cannot afford to supplement or "top up" teacher salaries.

This situation undermines the effort of social cohesion among teachers who have the same qualification and experience as their colleagues working in more urban settings, and yet experience different treatment. The result is a situation where teachers in rural schools feel demoralized and seek employment outside of teaching.

Teacher Trust and Accountability

Accountability in education is important to ensure quality education for all. Rwanda Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) calls for teachers, school authorities, and education agencies to be accountable in order to fulfil educational goals: the accountability of teachers is at the heart of effective implementation of educational policy initiatives in Rwanda since the real materialization of education policy intentions takes place in classrooms. Rwandan teachers are required by the Ministry of Education to carry out their work in a trustworthy manner and they are held accountable by REB, District Education Office, School Leadership, and the community at large through parental involvement in schools. Quality is especially import in considering teachers as agents of social cohesion, and monitoring of classroom practice is one tool to ensure that teachers are working to teacher cohesive and peaceful values.

Viewed on par with other civil servants, Rwandan teachers annually sign performance contracts and these contracts are held as a debt to pay by respective institutions to objectives they have set for themselves and schools. Performance contracts are measured against a set of fulfilling responsibilities which are drafted by the Rwandan Education Board.

> **Box 3: Unrealistic targets?**
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> *Despite these ambitious goal targets, a majority of head teachers, teachers, lecturers and principals interviewed ascertained that despite the performance contract process, teachers were unable to meet the unrealistic targets due to a lack of both financial and material support to carry out the set objectives in their daily work. Further, schools lacked the capacity or willingness to monitor to ensure that those targets were met.*

Parental and Community Participation in School Governance

Through school leadership, teachers communicate regularly with parents and guardians, sharing school concerns and supporting teachers for students' effective learning, while also helping to monitor learners' behavior and participation in school programs. Beyond parental involvement in school accountability, schools are exhorted to maintain close relationships with different both private and public local institutions such as vice mayors who are in charge of social affairs, along with the police, military, and locally-operating NGOs. Such institutions and agencies come to schools and talk to both teachers and learners in view of enhancing social cohesion and peace values. In so doing, Rwandan teachers and learners are given an opportunity to listen to a number of speakers on peacebuilding needs. As the community retains contact with teachers, teachers, in return, feel supported by the community to carry out their responsibilities.

However, interviewees noted that out of the various stakeholders involved in decentralized education governance and support, parental follow-up with their children's education is generally weak. Parents blindly over-trust teachers to do everything for their children, which unbalance accountability.

In particular, parents from urban schools are occupied with seeking a living. On the other hand, in rural areas, the lack of parental guidance is attributed to the low education of parents and their lack of knowledge about how their children are to be taught. They appear reticent to engage in discussions about their children's learning and are less engaged with the problems faced by school leadership, some interviewees noted. Some claim that their work is to pay school fees and the rest is for the teachers and head teachers. For those whose parents actively acknowledge the value of education, parental involvement is more frequent and meaningful.

In-Service Teachers' Access to Continuing Professional Development

Continuing professional development (CPD) plays an important role for teachers around the world: through CPD, teachers improve their knowledge and skills for fostering social cohesion among learners in their classrooms and across the curriculum. CPD can also empower teachers to ably facilitate the development of peacebuilding and social cohesion skills, especially when focused on skills such as negotiation, problem solving, collaboration, and critical thinking as well as attitudes such as empathy, tolerance, and compassion among learners.

However, Rutaisire (2012) reported that, despite the widespread recognition of the need to accelerate or intensify in-service teacher training, the current REB provision for CPD is ineffective since it is largely

supply driven, with little or no reinforcement. This was reiterated by interviewees as well, who noted that CPD was either offered on an ad-hoc basis or not at all.

Improvements to CPD offerings would have a direct impact on teachers' readiness to act as agents of social cohesion. A substantial number of teachers indicated that they didn't feel comfortable while teaching the issue of genocide ideologies since they consider this to be a sensitive issue. Respondents claimed that some tragic and traumatizing events could affect learners psychologically and for this in particular; teachers claim that they are not well trained to deal with such issues. Consequently, a majority of teachers expressed desperate need for CPD on issues such as peace values, equity, negotiation skills, critical thinking skills, and tolerance, among others.

It is recommended that a CPD Advisor should be appointed in each district that would be responsible for developing a CPD strategy and plan for each district as well as directly facilitating district and school-level training activities, especially in teaching methods.

At present, there are a few interventions which currently offer both ad-hoc CPD and peace education for teachers. Two interventions are mentioned here.

First, Aegis Trust is an international non-government organization working to prevent genocide. AT offers Onsite Peace Education programs at the Kigali Genocide Memorial site, and Outreach programs, known as Community Peace Education. For teachers, these programs provide methodology and practical knowledge using proven peace education theories, relevant practice and inspiration from stories and testimonies from the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi as well as peacemakers' stories. After the training, teachers are given educational support materials that they can use to teach the peace component in class but also to drive a conversation in their communities. This is viewed as a potential response to teachers' lack of comfort with teaching about the genocide directly.

Second, the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP) seeks to contribute to the construction of peace through the establishment of neutral political space which is used to debate issues related to peacebuilding contribution. It is the promotion of critical thinking among youth both in schools and in villages. Teachers are key partners within the program, as they play also the role of debate facilitators in their respective schools. For this, they engage in reflective group training sessions and discussions surrounding how aspects

of the teaching field, such as implementing the new competency-based curriculum, can be congruent with teaching values of peace.

Rwanda National School Curriculum and Text Book Analysis

In the Rwandan Education system, school curriculum and text books both colonial and post-colonial emphasized the teaching of divisionism based on ethnic affiliations manipulated by the colonial. This was accomplished through elements such as an explicitly divisive curriculum and textbooks written to aggravate social tensions and encourage violence against Tutsis in particular. Towards this, reforms to the curriculum and textbooks following 1994 are viewed as essential for inculcating values of peace and social cohesion. At present, the country is undergoing a shift to a competency-based curriculum (CBC).

> **Box 4: Shift to competency-based**
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> *Compared to colonial and post-colonial curriculum which basically emphasized purely academic knowledge, competency-based curriculum aims to teach skills and right attitudes through; critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, citizenship, national identity, genocide studies, comprehensive sexual education, decision making and financial education.*
>
> *Head teacher interviewee*

Analysis of textbooks' content and images provided a look into the operationalization of the curriculum. Textbooks were developed for the country's needs, and thus included content relevant to Rwandan learners. The analysis revealed some portrayals of diversity within gender and social roles, and espoused national values and a commitment to human rights. While dedicated sections on human rights, gender equality, and peace values were explicitly taught, themes of peace and cohesion were less visible in material for mathematics and science. This was underscored by teachers, who expressed their uncertainty with how to incorporate social cohesion and peace values into natural and mathematical subjects, which is expected within the curriculum. Additional training and adjustment of materials to adequately reflect this was recommended. One teacher offered a creative solution for this, indicating the value of including teacher voices in materials development.

Further, the issue of textbook distribution means that even if they were adequate tools for teaching social cohesion, they continue to be not available to many learners. Schools in the more remote rural areas of Rwanda and in upper secondary particularly face an acute shortage of both prescribed textbooks and other supplementary reading materials for the smooth delivery of the CBC. Some teachers indicated that they would use materials from the internet when textbooks were unavailable, compromising curricular standardization and potential quality of education for rural learners.

Rwandan Teachers' Classroom Room Experiences

Learners' school experience is to the largest extent shaped by their classroom experience. The competency-based curriculum calls for an increased focus on learner-centered strategies, a change from the traditional teacher-centered pedagogical style in which much of the teacher workforce was trained. Learner-centered pedagogy is seen as a way to provide a safe space for all Rwandan learners and youth to explore active and holistic learning and engagement with classmates. This has importance

for questions of peacebuilding and social cohesion, as the teacher, while functioning in a facilitator role, can oversee active and holistic learning via engagement with both curriculum materials and interpersonal communication between learners. One teacher reported: "I found out that, through group learning in classrooms, every learner learns from each other by sharing constructive ideas and experiences and it creates a peaceful atmosphere among learners."

However, English as the medium of instruction continues to cause difficulties in implementing a learner-centered classroom. Given that Rwandan teachers continue to struggle with the language themselves, students are similarly stifled and prevented from actively engaging due to their own lack of language abilities. Thus, for the curriculum to be effectively implemented, more training of teachers is required, paying attention to the daily needs of classroom language use.

Conclusions

In spite of the many challenges facing Rwandan teachers, this research demonstrates that teachers do act as agents of social cohesion and peacebuilding, a partial solution towards addressing Rwanda's social problems peacefully. Rwandan policy, drafted after the horrific events of 1994, emphasizes human rights and the value of each life, and these values are similarly present in education-specific policies and the resulting materials and curriculum. However, as this research demonstrates, more attention to problem areas is needed to support teachers within this role.

An ideal teacher, then models traits of fairness and equity in their behaviour by treating all learners equally, demonstrating willingness to discuss learners' problems and needs, and seeks to find community-based solutions.

Policy Recommendations

To strengthen teachers' abilities to act as agents of peace and reconciliation, this research offers the following suggestions for improving both the narrowed school and classroom environments and the broader context in which teachers live, work, and participate in communities.

Education sector coordination

Enhance coordination of educational activities at local levels is needed to address the confusion

sometimes caused by the lack of clear definition of departmental boundaries. This is important for questions of educational quality in particular, and how criteria are being operationalised to review and evaluate teachers' classroom practice. There should be clear, concrete indicators showing the extent to which educational quality standards are being met and how they should be achieved, and teachers should be actively involved in the drafting of such quality indicators.

Peace values as cross-cutting

There is a need to mainstream peace values across the curriculum, especially in the natural sciences and mathematical subjects. In particular, teachers in these subjects need training to be able to incorporate peace values in their everyday teaching, as is more easily accomplished in arts and history subjects.

Reduce class sizes and provide materials

There is a need to reduce the excessive number of learners in Rwandan classrooms, especially in rural areas, and avail the necessary prescribed textbooks and relevant instructional materials that are fit for purpose. Smaller classes, a near requirement for effective learner-centred pedagogy, allow teachers to have increased contact with students and thus allow for increased monitoring of how students are reacting to and applying values of social cohesion and peace.

Ongoing curriculum review

There is a need for both teachers and policy makers to constantly review the curriculum, textbooks, and teaching methods in order to promote critical thinking and problem solving skills among Rwandan learners.

Enhance teacher participation

Teachers' participation in decision-making processes that affect their profession needs to be enhanced; they deserve recognition for their experience, professional judgment, and the valid contribution they bring to educational debate and policy formulation as a group, but also as individuals. Further, their on-the-ground experience can inform the success and failure of peace-oriented materials and interventions.

Improve training and access to CPD

Rwanda needs teachers who are well trained, trusted and accountable and who can demonstrate rigor in their search for common good, in order to transcend the events and prejudices of the past.

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LIST OF RESEARCH OUTPUTS

Rwanda Country Report - Ndabaga, E. et al (2017): *Engaging Teachers in Peacebuilding In Post-Conflict Context: Evaluating Education Interventions in Rwanda.* Rwanda Country Report, ESRC/DFID Research Report, University of Sussex, UK

Rwanda Executive Summary - Ndabaga, E. et al (2017): *Engaging Teachers in Peacebuilding In Post-Conflict Context: Evaluating Education Interventions in Rwanda.* Rwanda Executive Summary, ESRC/DFID Research Report, University of Sussex, UK

SA Country Report - Sayed, Y. et al. (2017): *Engaging Teachers in Peacebuilding In Post-Conflict Context: Evaluating Education Interventions in South Africa.* South Africa Country Report, ESRC/DFID Research Report, University of Sussex, UK

SA Executive Summary - Sayed, Y. et al. (2017): *Engaging Teachers in Peacebuilding In Post-Conflict Context: Evaluating Education Interventions in South Africa.* South Africa Executive Summary, ESRC/DFID Research Report, University of Sussex, UK

Synthesis Report - Sayed, Y. et al (2018) *The Role of Teachers in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion in Rwanda and South Africa.* Synthesis Report, ESRC/DFID Research Report, University of Sussex, UK

Policy Brief No. 1- Policy Brief No. 1 (2017) *Engaging Teachers in Peacebuilding In Post-Conflict Context: Evaluating Education Interventions in Rwanda*'. University of Sussex, UK

Policy Brief No. 2 - Policy Brief No. 2 (2017) Engaging *Teachers in Peacebuilding In Post-Conflict Context: Evaluating Education Interventions in South Africa*'. University of Sussex, UK

Policy Brief No. 3 - Policy Brief No. 3 (2017) *Engaging Teachers in Peacebuilding in Post-conflict context: Curriculum and Textbooks in Rwanda and South Africa*'. University of Sussex, UK

Policy Brief No. 4 - Policy Brief No. 4 (2017) *Professional Development for Teachers for Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion in Rwanda and South Africa*'. University of Sussex, UK

Policy Brief No. 5 - Policy Brief No. 5 (2018) *The Role of Teachers in Peacebuilding & Social Cohesion: Synthesis of Insights from South Africa and Rwanda*'. University of Sussex, UK