



PLATFORM FOR ENGAGEMENT

2015



THE IMPACT OF CIVIL SOCIETY ON EDUCATION
IN RWANDA: THE CASE OF RENCIP

RWANDA
EDUCATION
NGO
COORDINATION
PLATFORM

TITLE:

Platform for Engagement: The impact of civil society on education in Rwanda: The Case of the Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform (RENCP)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

- UNICEF for funding
- Wellspring Foundation for Education for hiring
- Report designer: Ryan Boden / Azizi Digital

**CONSULTING FIRM:**

This report was the product of Three Stones Consulting, Ltd - www.threestonesconsultingltd.com

**DATE:**

June 2015

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“RENCP has played an important role in several policy developments [...]. Thanks to this coordinated approach, there is now an increasing potential role for NGOs to support government to implement ESSP in areas where they have specific expertise and experience ...”

Rwanda Ministry of Education, Education Sector Strategic Plan (2013-2018)

INTRODUCTION

- HOW CAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS COMPLEMENT ONE ANOTHER'S WORK RATHER THAN COMPETE?
- HOW CAN THE EDUCATION AIMS OF GOVERNMENT BE HARMONIZED WITH THAT OF CIVIL SOCIETY?
- HOW CAN NGOS PARTICIPATE IN EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL?

The Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform (RENCP) is a complicated acronym with a simple goal: to improve children's education in Rwanda through coordinated service delivery, collaboration, and advocacy.

RENCP members provide education services to every district in the country. Over the last year, its members invested over 25 million USD to the education sector through programming, distributed over 6 million books and learning materials, trained 60 thousand teachers, sponsored 60 thousand students, constructed 600 classrooms, provided education to over 12 thousand children with disabilities, and established early childhood development centers that have served near 30 thousand young people.¹

RENCP also engages in advocacy. RENCP is formally represented in a number of education sector working groups. Its members have worked closely with Government to help establish and implement the goals of the education sector through collective advocacy and coordinated service delivery.

Since it was established in early 2010, RENCP membership has grown to over 70 local and

international organizations. This report has been prepared to coincide with RENCP's fifth anniversary to showcase its impact on education in Rwanda, to advocate for a continuing presence in government dialog, and for RENCP members to consider the road ahead.² This report examines the ways RENCP has operated and the contributions it has made to the education sector, and specifically how it has worked with government to achieve shared goals toward the improvement of the sector.



¹ Source: 2015 RENCP Collective Impact Survey

² This report draws from an online survey distributed to RENCP member organizations 2015 and 17 interviews with education stakeholders in civil society, development partners, and government.

THE BIRTH OF RENCNP

Something had to be done. That much was clear. In 2009 the Ministry of Education was moving ahead on a number of reforms to improve access and quality of the education sector. A basic education policy aimed to expand access to more schooling; the language of instruction used in schools had changed from French to English; and a new set of teaching qualifications stood to affect many teachers. Amidst these changes, NGOs were active in the education sector but they were not operating in a unified way. “They were just doing their own thing,” recalled Russel Mushanga, who was working with an NGO called SNV at the time, and who would later become the first Chairperson of RENCNP.

The approach of NGOs was not well-coordinated with the aims of the government or with one another. When services overlapped, nobody knew about it. “In the past we didn’t know who was working in the education sector,” said Janvier Gasana, Director-General of the Rwanda Education Board. Mr. Gasana said the government would hear “certain organizations were working here or there” but that there were no concerted efforts to coordinate the delivery of education-related services.



Holding discussions with other organizations working in education was difficult because there was no coordination, recalled Kirsten Mucyo of the Wellspring Foundation. “We used to basically cold call or email different organizations because we didn’t have a forum for regularly meeting,” she said. “Unless you were a large organization, it was hard to become familiar with other organizations working on education.”

Consequently, “NGOs were not being heard,” said Mr. Mushanga. It wasn’t the case that the government wasn’t willing to listen to the views of NGOs but rather that they couldn’t. NGOs had many independent voices but the voice of a unified civil society was absent from policy dialogue and debates.

In 2009, a series of meetings with NGOs was organized to see what could be done differently. “We just started meeting informally,” said Mr. Mushanga. The aim, he said, was to see how organizations working in education might better complement one another’s work rather than compete. Three NGOs attended the first meeting held in June of 2009.

“Originally we wanted to keep it simple,” recalled Alfred Mupenzi, formerly of Plan Rwanda and past RENCNP Focal Point. “We just wanted to figure out a way of raising one voice as NGOs in education, having clarity in representation, and having proper coordination of our activities in order to avoid the duplication of efforts by organizations.”

Subsequent meetings were held with members of the Ministry of Education and with Development Partners within the education sector, including UNICEF and DFID. If NGOs, Development Partners, and Government shared the goals of making education accessible, affordable, and relevant, reasoned Mr. Mushanga, “then why don’t we aim to hit these targets together?” If the goals for children’s education were to be more fully realized, a more thoughtful and coordinated approach was required by all those working in the education sector. “NGOs needed a platform,” said Mr. Mushanga. “We needed a platform that we could bring to the government.”

In December 2009, Mr. Mushanga and several colleagues from other organizations drafted a constitution. In 2010, UNICEF supported a one-year action plan to establish and formalize what came to be called the Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform (RENCP). In June of that year, RENCP was officially launched by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education. At the launch, Mme. Haba offered the following remarks:

“We [at the Ministry of Education] are pleased to see that the NGOs [...] have come up with this initiative for self-coordination. We shall always maintain an open space for their contributions to policy development processes. We will expect RENCP to facilitate the sharing of information from the grassroots to the policy level and vice versa.”

Mme. Sharon Haba, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, June 2010³

Backed by Development Partners and endorsed by the Ministry of Education, RENCP assumed its role as a formal entity and stakeholder in the education sector.

Since that first informal meeting of three NGOs in June 2009, membership of RENCP has grown twentyfold.

In 2010, when RENCP was officially inaugurated, there were 18 organizations, mostly consisting of international NGOs. A year later, there were 24.⁴ As of May 2015, RENCP could count 71 organizations among its ranks. Its membership includes local and international organizations, teachers unions, faith-based organizations, and grassroots groups.

“The views of NGOs became a real item on the agenda,” said Mr. Mushanga. “Now when there are [education] sector working group meetings, the voice of NGOs is there. Their views count.”

EDUCATION SERVICES PROVIDED BY RENCP MEMBERS IN 2015

Collectively, RENCP members provide direct education-related services work in each of Rwanda’s 30 districts. Nearly half of member organizations have worked in Rwanda for nine or more years. Three in four have worked in Rwanda for at least five years.⁵

Most member organizations align their services with in accordance with the Education Sector Strategic Plan and its focus on improving access, quality, and relevance. RENCP member organizations who responded to the online survey reported providing the following education-related aggregate number of services over the past 12 months (April 2014 to March 2015):

TABLE 1. AGGREGATE SERVICES PROVIDED BY RENCP MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

(Source: 2015 RENCP Collective Impact Survey)

Teachers trained	47,644
Parent-Teacher Association members or other school leaders trained	10,397
Books/textbooks distributed to schools	6,419,108
Children sponsored for education	59,996
Children who have received early childhood care/development services	29,640
Children with disabilities who have received education-related services	12,347
Classrooms constructed	614

³ Mushanga, R. (2010)

⁴ Musengimana, S. (2011)

⁵ RENCP Collective Impact Survey 2015

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SECTOR

“Being a member of RENCP has greatly helped us to avoid duplication of efforts. For example, when we were planning to scale up our literacy program, we decided not to work in Gicumbi because we learned that [another organization] is already there. So we are now focusing our work on other regions.”

Member of RENCP Early Childhood Working Group

When asked to estimate their 2014 organizational education expenditure on the online survey, 34 organizations responded. Reported education spending from individual organizations ranged from USD 600 to USD 8 million. This illustrates the different capacities of member organizations. The aggregate contribution to the education sector from these organizations totaled \$25,276,493 USD. Large as this figure is, it is also a conservative estimate

given that half of RENCP member organizations are not accounted for in this figure. Nevertheless, it remains a strong testament to the financial investment member organizations have made toward improving education in Rwanda. To be sure, a large financial investment does not mean effective work is being done. But that is where RENCP membership helps: avoiding the duplication of services while also making sure that the services that are offered are directly contributing to the broader aims of the sector through the ESSP.

The services provided and financial investment in the education sector highlight some of the ways in which RENCP members have made tangible contributions to children’s education in Rwanda. At the same time, to limit the understanding of RENCP to the sum of the number of services it provides would be to miss its broader contribution. To better understand the collective impact of RENCP means also examining the ways the platform works for engaging with one another and with the government. These dimensions will be examined in the sections that follow.

AGGREGATE SERVICES PROVIDED BY RENCP MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS*



47,644

teachers trained



10,397

PTA members & other school leaders
trained



6,419,108

books or textbooks distributed to schools



59,996

children sponsored for education



29,640

children who have received early childhood
care & development services



12,347

CWDs who have received education-related
services



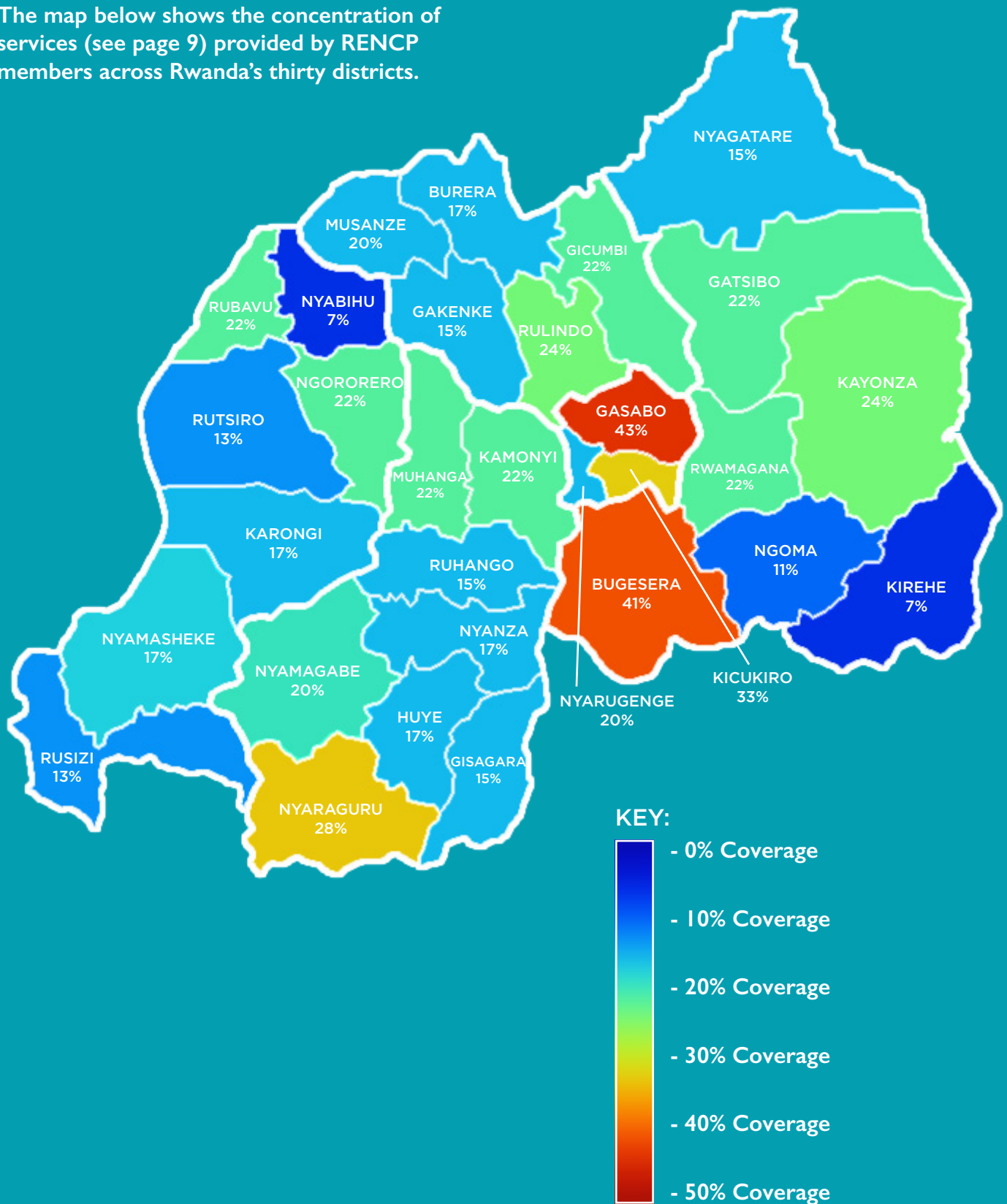
614

classrooms constructed

* Aggregate services provided between April 2014 to March 2015
(Source: 2015 RENC Collective Impact Study)

GEOGRAPHICAL COVERAGE OF THE AGGREGATED SERVICES OFFERED BY RENC P

The map below shows the concentration of services (see page 9) provided by RENC P members across Rwanda's thirty districts.



THE ORGANIZATION OF RENC P

RENC P membership is voluntary, free, and open to all NGOs active in the education sector. There are two basic requirements for membership in RENC P. First, an organization must be officially registered with the relevant government bodies. Second, the organization must be willing to be actively involved in RENC P activities by attending quarterly General Assembly meetings and participating in at least one of RENC P's working groups.

RENC P leadership is elected by its members. As current Chair and Co-Chair, Wellspring Foundation for Education and VSO Rwanda share the responsibility of fostering communication, coordination, and representation. They organize meetings and work to ensure RENC P is active and present in national-level education policy forums. They also take a lead in helping to establish some of the priorities within the RENC P.

While RENC P requires a certain level of leadership to cover administrative procedures and to steer the orientation of the Platform, its overall structure is not hierarchical. A good analogy is that of a literal platform or stage, one in which all member organizations have the opportunity to participate. There is no real struggle for recognition, said Mr. Mupenzi. This can be explained, in part, because NGOs already have their own mandates from their donors, partners, and beneficiaries. "They have so

many projects," he added. "They just wanted to know what was going on in the sector and how they can best contribute."

Ms. Mucyo of Wellspring echoed this perspective: "Sometimes groups of NGOs can be seen like a bureaucracy, but I can honestly say this is not the case with RENC P. It is extremely proactive. RENC P has developed a good level of respect as a useful platform for communication."

What united RENC P members is a mandate that is shared across member organizations: by meeting together, by sharing ideas and experiences, and through advocating as a united voice, more effective work can be done to improve education in Rwanda. These commitments are primarily carried out through the two core activities of RENC P: General Assemblies and Working Groups.

TABLE 2. RENC P CHAIR AND CO-CHAIR

YEAR	CHAIR	CO-CHAIR
2010-2011	SNV	Plan Rwanda
2011-2013	Plan Rwanda	Wellspring Foundation
2013-present	Wellspring Foundation	VSO Rwanda

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

On a quarterly basis, RENC P members hold a General Assembly. During this meeting, feedback is received from RENC P working groups, Development Partners, and invited guests. During this meeting, feedback is received from RENC P working groups, Development Partners, and invited guests. New opportunities for funding are introduced and members are provided with working group updates. Representatives from UNICEF, DFID, and the Ministry of Education attend on a regular basis to provide updates on new developments

in the sector. General Assemblies are a serious responsibility of all member organizations. Regular attendance of member organization representatives is required, in part, as Mr. Mupenzi put it, "to demonstrate that we need to keep our integrity with the Ministry of Education and to signify that we take our own commitments very seriously." A member organization that misses two consecutive GA meetings may find themselves receiving a phone call or visit from the RENC P Chair.

“The General Assembly is the highest decision making body of the RENCP and is the final authority in the management and administration of the affairs of the Platform. The General Assembly is the key forum for exchange and dialogue among delegates from different Member Organizations.”

RENCP Terms of Reference

Member organizations who have capacity take turns hiring a venue capable of hosting 50 or 60 RENCP members at a time. For example, when it was Chair of RENCP, Plan Rwanda had an organizational mandate to focus on evidence-based advocacy to improve the education sector, said Paul Bagambe, Education Program Manager at Plan Rwanda. “We wanted to see RENCP get stronger,” and supporting the activities of RENCP was one way this could be achieved. “It can get expensive,” he added, “but when you are an organization that has resources you are happy to do it.”

Minutes from meetings are publicly available on the RENCP website and are accessible via the RENCP website. The website, www.rencp.org, is maintained on a voluntary basis by the Wellspring Foundation and current RENCP Focal Point, Stephane Nyembo.

- The GA was attended by approximately 75 people.
- Sofia Cozzolino of Save the Children presented

evidence from the scientific literature to highlight the importance of reading for children’s cognitive development. She then described Save the Children’s work in this area through its own literacy project.

- Laura-Ashley Boden, Education Officer at DFID, provided updates on the new education curriculum. She also introduced members to a new online listserv, intended to improve communication between Development Partners and RENCP members.
- Emmanuel Muvunyi, Deputy Director General for Examinations and Accreditation at the Rwanda Education Board, briefed members on an Education For All report that the government prepared for UNESCO.
- RENCP working groups offered brief updates of their progress.
- New RENCP members were introduced.
- Closing remarks were offered by Ruth Mbabazi of VSO.

PARTNERING FOR EFFECTIVENESS: UMUHUZA AND SAVE THE CHILDREN



Umuhuza is a community-based organization established in 2005 to focus on literacy and peace education. Umuhuza does not have the same recognition of some of the larger international organizations working on education in Rwanda. Membership in RENCP has been a way for the organization to share its work, learn about the work being done by other member organizations, and explore opportunities for collaboration. “We wanted to share experiences with our colleagues who are also working in education,” explained

Eugene Ndagijimana, program manager at Umuhuza. Mr. Ndagijimana said that Umuhuza is a member of two working groups, including the Early Childhood Care and Development Working Group and Community Involvement Working Group. “We do tours to learn what type of work is being done by other organizations,” he said.

Since 2013, Umuhuza has embarked on a literacy promotion project in collaboration with another RENCP member organization, Save the Children. The partnership between the two organizations has allowed them to leverage one another’s strengths. “We combined our approaches,” he said. Save the Children has technical expertise in promoting children’s literacy, while Umuhuza has extensive experience in community mobilization. The partnership with Save the Children has also enabled Umuhuza to significantly build their capacity through the hiring and training of staff and the expansion of services.

“The partnership with Umuhuza has proven to be a mutually beneficial relationship that has resulted in higher quality program results than either organization could have achieved on its own. Additionally, we feel that working with Umuhuza and sharing our technical expertise with them is an important means of strengthening local civil society, which is a more sustainable approach to supporting education in Rwanda well into the future. I’m confident that Umuhuza now has the expertise to expand this work with the support of other partners or donors, and can effectively engage government to integrate successful initiatives into policies and plans.”

Bethany Ericson, Director of Save the Children’s ‘Advancing the Right to Read’ program, reflecting on the partnership

Mr. Ndagijimana said that Umuhuza is proud to see itself contributing to Rwanda’s national education goals by “promoting Education For All in Rwanda,” and also by “promoting a culture of reading in

Rwanda.” In this way, he sees the organization making direct contributions to the Education Sector Strategic Plan and, by extension, the social and economic development of the country.

WORKING GROUPS

TABLE 3. THE TOP THREE REASONS RENCP MEMBERS CHOSE TO JOIN RENCP

(Source: 2015 RENCP Collective Impact Survey)

1. Achieve shared goals through working groups
2. Joint learning and understanding
3. Strengthen organizational presence at national and international levels

While General Assemblies are an important time to explore issues of shared concern, it is the working groups that are the unequivocal heart of RENCP. Working groups present the time and space where substantive work gets done. In 2015 five RENCP working groups were in operation:

1. Teacher Development
2. Community Involvement
3. Equity and Special Needs
4. Early Childhood
5. Girls Education

Like General Assembly attendance, working groups are considered vital: “Active participation in at least one working group is a requirement of membership within the RENCP,” states the RENCP Terms of Reference. Working groups are established in accordance with the priorities of the Ministry of Education while also reflecting the programmatic commitments of individual member organizations. RENCP Working Groups exist to foster

collaboration for both programming and advocacy. Similar to the organization of RENCP, each working group is headed by a Chair and Co-Chair who help to organize site visits and provide input into policy dialogue. Working groups are one of the key mechanisms through which representation occurs at national levels. RENCP members join national-level and technical working groups for the purposes of advocacy, or as Mr. Mushanga put it, “To channel information to decision makers when they’re making policy.”



TABLE 4. WHAT ARE THE MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE WORKING GROUP(S) THAT YOUR ORGANIZATION IS A PART OF?

(Source: 2015 RENCP Collective Impact Survey)

SELECTED RESPONSES FROM RENCP MEMBERS:
"Harmonize practices related to special and inclusive education in Rwanda. Visits that support learning and experience-sharing among members."
"Frequent updates on the new developments in the sector to keep every member posted."
"We have been sharing experience of the work we do with other NGOs. It is also an opportunity to learn from others to improve our work. [...] Information sharing and keeping abreast with new developments in the sector. [RENCN working groups] make valuable contributions at the policy level through representation in [government] sector Working Groups."
"Advocacy on various issues concerning education quality—for example, on teacher training, roles and commitment of education leaders amidst competing demands and their line management through ministries such as the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Education. We focus on inclusion and provide feedback on budget expenditure and allocation."
"Our main achievement is the advocacy that has happened on early childhood development policy."
"We just joined [RENCN] and don't know a lot yet. However, the working groups have already been great forums for us to learn about national policies and to explore opportunities for collaboration."

"The Teacher Development Working Group has been particularly effective. They helped with the School-Based Mentoring Program. Working group members have worked closely with the Rwanda Education Board to develop strategies and tools to help improve this program."

Hugh Delaney, Chief of Education, UNICEF

One central function of the working groups is site visits. Site visits are important for learning about different approaches taken by organizations working on shared aspects of education. Site visits illustrate the genuinely collective approach taken by RENCP members, one that is aimed at improvement and delivery of quality education services by learning from one another. Aside from some notes posted on the RENCP website, site visits are rarely publicized. Their function is principally one of internal quality improvement and knowledge exchange on specific issues of salience to the respective working group.

For example, Save the Children recently hosted five representatives from members of the Community Involvement Working Group.⁶ Members of Concern Worldwide, Wellspring Foundation, Umuhuza, Club Pesct, and PACE traveled to the Northern Province to visit one of Save the Children's early childhood and development sites. The group visited a school to understand its activities. Meetings were held with school authorities, local government officials, and members of a Parent Teacher Committee. The visitors learned about the different approaches and materials that Save the Children was using, how this was understood by local stakeholders, and what challenges still remained to the delivery of high quality services. The Working Group concluded their visit by writing a brief report summarizing their observations and lessons learned. The site visit was an opportunity for a diverse group of large and small RENCP member organizations to visit an early childhood program with a strong reputation for providing evidence-based programming to children.

⁶ RENCP (2014)

The Girls Education Working Group is the Platform's most recently-introduced working group. It came about because of the government's strong interest in promoting girls' education as well as the observation by RENCP members that this issue required more focused attention. The working group began with 6 members but quickly grew to 18. "It has been great to see other members of RENCP start to come on board," said Paul Bagame of Plan Rwanda. Plan chairs the working group, and Girl Hub serves as Co-Chair. Mr. Bagame said that a lot of the momentum and enthusiasm about this

working group can be attributed to the support has received from the Ministry of Education. Members of the Ministry attend the meetings hosted by the RENCP working group. The group's most recent achievement has been a collaborative effort, spearheaded by Girl Hub, to prepare a situational analysis of the 2008 Girls Education Policy and with the encouragement of the Ministry of Education, who are, according to Mr. Bagambe, "very much in support of this project." This effort is expected to culminate with policy recommendations for how to improve the situation of girls' education in Rwanda.

HOW RENCP WORKS WITH GOVERNMENT

The Government of Rwanda has a clear plan for what needs to be done to develop the country and how it sees the role of the education sector in contributing to that plan.⁷ Given this focus, one may wonder what space or influence even an organized civil society platform can bring to education policy debates. Yet, as ambitious and focused as the government is, the Ministry of Education has embraced RENCP as a legitimate entity in the policy-forming arena. RENCP is seen as a key partner in both planning and implementation of education sector-wide strategies.

The relationship between RENCP and government can be best characterized as an ongoing dialogue. Permanent Secretary Mme. Sharon Haba said it is now "difficult to imagine" the landscape of the education sector in which an organized civil society did not play an influential role.

"[NGOs] are there to support and to help us to move forward. And we [at REB] are there to define what we want. The NGOs are there and we help to show them the way."

Dr. Joyce Musabe, Deputy Director-General,
Rwanda Education Board

Meetings between government and RENCP are not only called when there is an urgent problem or pressing issue that needs to be addressed. That is because regular meetings are already scheduled.

"We have regular forums where issues of concern are brought up," said Kirsten Mucyo of Wellspring. Put simply, the role of civil society has been built into the architecture of the education system. Feedback from civil society to the Ministry is not only accepted. It is expected.

RENCP representation occurs at the highest levels of the sector where decisions are made. RENCP members are officially represented at the Joint Review of the Education Sector and Education Sector Working Group. Depending on the meeting, different member organizations might attend but there is always a designated RENCP member who champions the collective concern of the Platform or a particular RENCP working group. This approach "enables the government to not have to necessarily engage with civil society on a bilateral basis, but rather as a collective," said Hugh Delaney, Chief of Education at UNICEF. "An NGO that is present at a working group representing RENCP means they are representing the shared interests and needs of a broader constituency of organizations."

⁷ MIGEPROF (2000)

PERSPECTIVES

RENCP AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNER PERSPECTIVES



“At the beginning, the relationship was not good because MINEDUC and NGOs were not really in sync, but now a mutual understanding has developed. We all have the same goals of improving and promoting education. There is a really good understanding between MINEDUC and RENC because RENC currently receives invitations to attend meetings on education policy. Members of RENC were also involved in helping up with the new curriculum. This happened because there is clarity of RENC’s mission and objectives and that of MINEDUC.”

Richard Taylor, RENC Chair, Wellspring Foundation

“RENC is a strong coalition. They have good leadership and organize themselves in such a way to engage effectively with both development partners and government. RENC has a voice at the level of the education sector working groups. As Co-Chairs of the working group, UNICEF and DFID both make sure RENC has the opportunity to share the core issues that it is concerned with. They have been able to draw from their experience to advocate for issues related to Parent-Teacher Committees, school feeding programs, and school-related costs. In these ways, RENC has been able to make important contributions to ongoing policy discussions and debates.”

Gemma Wilson-Clark, Education Advisor, DFID



“RENC has become a crucial source of engagement at the sector level in a coordinated way. They are extremely present at the sector level through working groups. Their participation in these groups feeds into the highest levels of government decision-making. They provide a way for members of REB and MINEDUC to engage with civil society in a coordinated way.”

Hugh Delaney, Chief of Education, UNICEF

GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES



SHARON HABA

Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Education

Sharon Haba, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Education, formally launched RENCP in June 2010. In an interview carried out on April 27, 2015, Mme. Haba was asked to reflect on the role of RENCP in the education sector since its inception. She stated, “I can say that our expectations of RENCP have been exceeded.”

There have been “many major changes” to the education system, she said. Mme. Haba drew attention to the shift in language of instruction, the new curriculum that was launched in 2015, and the introduction of the 12-Year Basic Education program. Mme. Haba praised the role NGOs have played in coming alongside the government to embrace and implement these changes.

The government’s policies have resulted in “huge gains in access to schooling within a short period of time,” Mme. Haba said. RENCP had played an important role amidst this expansion by contributing to the development of infrastructure and contributing efforts to improve quality. “The role of RENCP has stood out.” She noted, for example, that “the rapid levels of improved access [to schooling]” have coincided with “new incidents of dropout.” In response, she applauded the efforts of several RENCP member organizations “who have really made it their mandate to curb that problem.”

“When you’re writing an agenda for [an education working group meeting], you can’t forget about the role and perspective of RENCP because they’re so visible.”

On a more general basis, Mme. Haba noted that the Ministry of Education’s “successes and failures really rely on engagement at the grassroots level.” The fact that the presence of RENCP member organizations are “literally everywhere” mean that “they have to be part of the picture” for how the Ministry’s goals can be further realized, she said.

Mme. Haba also pointed out how RENCP has mobilized into a formidable advocacy organization. “By coming together, RENCP has a stronger voice.

The sector wouldn’t be the same otherwise. As government, we feel that the platform is extremely well-coordinated.” RENCP has played an active role in education sector decision-making processes, she said. “The nature of the engagement of the sector has been impressive. [...] That is the biggest story for me. All of this has happened in coordination with the government,” she said. “It is hard to imagine this [coordination] happening without RENCP. They know all the stakeholders in the education sector.”

She also pointed to the ways in which RENCP members are active in government-led education sector groups, such as the Joint Review of the Education Sector and education cluster meetings. “The role and perspective of RENCP comes out [of these meetings],” she said. “When you’re writing an agenda for [an education working group meeting], you can’t forget about the role and perspective of RENCP because they’re so visible.”

Mme. Haba indicated her approval of the progress RENCP has made in the education sector, but noted there is more work to be done, particularly around implementation. “Of course everything looks good on paper,” she said. “But it is on the ground that you get the reality. Implementation means getting to understand the details. It means linking to the ground. RENCP members have done an excellent job of harmonizing their national education programs to national education goals, she said. The next step for the collaboration between MINEDUC and RENCP is to more closely tailor programs with respect to the needs of particular districts. “This is one specific area where a new role can develop,” she said. “RENCP members could then help districts and education officers with the particular needs facing their constituency in order to more fully achieve the goals and objectives of ESSP.”



JANVIER GASANA

Director-General, Rwanda Education Board

The Rwanda Education Board (REB) is the implementation arm of the Ministry of Education. Its stated mission is to “fast-track education development in Rwanda by enabling education sector growth.” On April 17, 2015, an interview was held with Janvier Gasana, Director-General of REB, to explore his views on the role of RENCP in advancing the aims of the education sector.

Mr. Gasana said that RENCP as a coordinating entity has helped to enhance the work of REB, because REB now knows which organizations are doing what and where and the ways in which they are contributing to sector-specific goals delineated in the ESSP. “I can say there is a synergy between [REB and RENCP members] [...] Through RENCP, we now know who is doing what. RENCP makes working in the education sector a lot easier.”

RENCP member organizations are an important ally in REB’s efforts to implement the goals of the education sector. Ideas and strategies can be openly discussed. “We see [RENCP] as a forum,” he explained. “We sit down with member organizations and plan together. We discuss implementation of different activities in the sector.”

Part of the reason that RENCP has effectively worked is that it fosters an environment of transparency, such that members of REB know what NGOs are doing, and NGOs are also informed what strategies REB is undertaking. This type of open dialogue “gives us confidence” Mr. Gasana said. “We hold them accountable and they hold us accountable.”

“[RENCP members] have experience and we recognize that. We pay attention to that and that improves the capacity and knowledge of our own staff.”

In some countries, NGOs might operate independently of the government but Mr. Gasana said this is not the case in Rwanda.

“Here in Rwanda, things are different. Everything that we do, we do it together. [...] Whether it is local or international NGOs, we do interventions together. We have nothing to hide. We give confidence to donors that their investments are being used well. [...] Working with RENCP is leading to greater capacity for REB. We work hand in hand. [RENCP members] have experience and we recognize that. We pay attention to that and that improves the capacity and knowledge of our own staff.”

Mr. Gasana emphasized that the government is still very much in charge of the trajectory of the education sector. However, because of the strong relationship that REB has with NGOs, Mr. Gasana and his colleagues are very willing to discuss strategies or approaches to accomplish its aims. “NGOs approach REB about new projects. Then REB implements.”

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE ESSP

An important way through which RENCP has worked alongside the government was through the development and implementation of the 2013-2018 Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP). The ESSP is the framework which is used by the Ministry of Education to accomplish the government's multi-sectoral aims contained within its Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2. The ESSP delineates the Ministry's goals and targets for expanding access, improving quality, and strengthening the relevance of education to labor market needs over a five-year period.

“Through RENCP, we have empowered other members working in special and inclusive education and have, subsequently, enabled Rwanda to adopt inclusion as a cross-cutting issue in the ESSP and the new curriculum.”

Vincent Murenzi, Handicap International, Chair of the Equity and Special Needs Working Group

RENCP members demonstrate a high level of awareness about how their programs relate to the targeted outcomes of the ESSP (see Table 5 below). This is not a product of chance.

RENCP members had an important role in the development of the specific objectives of the ESSP through their participation in working groups to develop the objectives, said Mr. Delaney of UNICEF. “They helped with strategies and provided technical support through, for example, budgetary considerations,” he said. “They were able to play a key role based off of the knowledge and technical expertise that they have.”

Similarly, Permanent Secretary Haba suggested that it is no coincidence that the activities of RENCP members are aligned with the objectives of ESSP. “We developed [the ESSP] together,” she said. “The goals [of individual RENCP member organizations] are either explicitly or implicitly aligned with the ESSP.” She added, “You won’t find an education organization in Rwanda that is not linked to the ESSP.”

In the online survey, RENCP members were asked to indicate how much their organization works in each of the following ten ESSP targeted outcomes listed in Table 5 below on a scale of 1 (“Never”) to 5 (“All of our work”).

TABLE 5. RENCP MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS TO ESSP TARGETED OUTCOMES

(Source: 2015 RENCP Collective Impact Survey)

% OF RENCP MEMBERS WHO INDICATE “MOST” OR “ALL OF THEIR WORK” FOR EACH ESSP TARGET OUTCOME	
Target 1: Increased equitable access to 9 years of basic education for all children and expanding access to 12 years of basic education	41%
Target 2: Increased equitable access to education for students with special educational needs within mainstream and special schools	27%
Target 3: Improved quality and learning outcomes across primary and secondary education	74%
Target 4: Qualified, suitably-skilled and motivated teachers and trainers to meet demands of expanding education access	81%
Target 5: Increased equitable access to relevant, high-quality, demand-driven TVET programs	32%
Target 6: Increased equitable access to affordable, relevant, academically excellent higher education that also delivers quality research outputs	13%
Target 7: Improved access to school readiness programs by 2017/18, accompanied by expanded access to three-years of early learning for four-to-six-year olds	39%
Target 8: Strengthened performance in science, technology and innovation at all levels of education, and application of science, technology and innovation in relevant sectors of the economy	16%
Target 9: Increased access to Adult Basic Education to improve adult literacy and numeracy	16%
Target 10: Improved administrative and management support services, including the management of policy, information, finances, and human resources across the education sector	17%

ADVOCACY THROUGH EVIDENCE

“Most major studies involving education now involve RENCP members.”

Russel Mushanga, RENCP patron

The Ministry and Education, along with its Development Partners, have expressed a commitment to continue to develop programs and policies that are evidence-based. To be sure, RENCP members have routinely taken up evaluation components in their work, but historically these efforts have tended to be inward focused, aimed at improving the programmatic effectiveness.

More recently, however, RENCP members have participated in more outward-looking research, aimed at contributing evidence to inform national-level policy debates. Reports and publications produced by RENCP members are able to be used in national-level working groups with the Ministry of Education and Development Partners. In addition, RENCP provides an opportunity for information-sharing. Reports written by members are posted on the Platform’s website and discussed at General Assemblies so that all members can benefit from this work. Table 6 below lists a small selection of recent research reports prepared by RENCP member organizations and its affiliates.

TABLE 6. EXAMPLES OF RECENT REPORTS PRODUCED BY RENCP MEMBERS

(Source: 2015 RENCP Collective Impact Survey)

“Baseline survey about the situation of special and inclusive education in Rubavu and Kamonyi.” <i>Handicap International. (2013).</i>
“The role of headmasters in successful implementation of One Laptop per Child Program. A case study in Rwanda.” <i>One Laptop per Child. (2015).</i>
“Gender equity in teaching and education management.” <i>VSO; Pro-Femmes. (2013).</i>
“Community-based barriers and opportunities to promote reading attainment among early grade learners in the rural Southern Province of Rwanda.” <i>Concern Worldwide; Centre for Global Development through Education; Rwanda Education Board. (2012).</i>
“Impact assessment of the TVET communication campaign in Rwanda.” <i>Ishya Consulting for USAID/Global Communities—Higa Ubeho. (2014).</i>
“A political economy analysis conducted for Save the Children Rwanda—Advancing the Right to Read. Save the Children.” <i>Ishya Consulting. (2014).</i>
“Literacy Boost Rwanda: Reading Assessment Report.” <i>Stanford University; Rwanda Education Board; Save the Children. (2014)</i>
“Endline assessment of English language proficiency of school teachers in Rwanda.” <i>British Council. (2015).</i>
“At what cost? The untoward costs of children’s schooling in Rwanda: An in-depth case study.” <i>Plan Rwanda; Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform. (2013).</i>
“Supporting disability inclusion schools and school communities in Rwanda.” <i>VSO; Plan Rwanda. (2013).</i>

PROFILE: AT WHAT COST? A REPORT BY RENC

“The research was created as an advocacy tool that we could use with MINEDUC. The report gave us, as RENC, something tangible to say. MINEDUC wouldn’t be able to listen to us unless we could provide them with evidence. With the report, it gave us evidence.”

Paul Bagambe, Plan Rwanda

The majority of the reports listed in Table 6 (page 20) were written for the purposes of advocacy by specific organizations. However, as RENC has assumed a more prominent position in national-level advocacy, efforts are now being made to identify shared issues of concern and then to commission research done explicitly on behalf of the collective. This approach is best illustrated in a 2013 report, entitled “At what cost? The untoward costs of children’s schooling in Rwanda.”⁸ The report was first informed by an observation made by many RENC members: many children were continuing to contend with a range of school-related expenditures despite the government’s 2003 fee-free education policy. This issue posed challenges to the government’s goal of universal access and completion of basic education. After consultation with members of the Ministry of Education, it was agreed upon that the issue of the hidden costs of children’s schooling could benefit from further research. Plan Rwanda, who was Chair of RENC at the time, commissioned a researcher to explore this issue. The resulting study provided strong evidence

for the ways that unaccounted for school-related expenses impacted upon enrollment and completion rates—and affected some of the country’s most important education-related indicators.

“That study was a landmark in the work RENC has been doing,” recalled Mr Mupenzi, who spearheaded the project. The report has been used in numerous national-level advocacy efforts. In 2013, findings were presented to the top three officials at the Ministry of Education, as well as the Director General of the Rwanda Education Board. The report was also highlighted in education sector working group meetings. It has also been cited in a number of education-policy reports, including Rwanda’s 2015 Education For All briefing to UNESCO. Study findings from this RENC project have also extended beyond Rwanda’s borders. Findings have been used in advocacy efforts at the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, presented at an international conference, and published in a leading academic journal.⁹



⁸ Williams, T.P. (2013)

⁹ Williams, et al. (2014)

THE ROAD AHEAD

Some may argue that being a member of a national civil society entity like RENCP may not fall within the mandate of an individual organization—yet, this report has presented evidence to the contrary. As part of RENCP members’ desire to do good work, to do so more effectively and efficiently, and to offer a meaningful voice to the most pressing issues facing the sector, it must necessarily be done in concert with other key stakeholders in the education sector. Being part of RENCP obliges organizations to take a broader, sometimes critical view of their own work in order to locate their efforts onto the broader landscape of services and priorities as delineated by the ESSP.

RENCP is also more than the sum of its parts. Its contributions amount to more than those services that are able to be calculated. Through working groups and regular meetings, RENCP has contributed to the priorities of the sector through evidence-based advocacy. As the Permanent Secretary Mme. Haba stated above, it is now “impossible to forget about the role and perspective of RENCP because they’re so visible.”

Since the Platform was established in 2010, membership has dramatically expanded. RENCP members are now characterized as much by their diversity as by their shared commitment to improving education. This trend is expected to continue. International NGOs now work alongside teachers’ unions and community-based groups. Conversations will need to be held to be sure that the Platform can more fully benefit from its increasingly diverse membership to carry out its shared goals. For example, one of the strengths of RENCP is that it has not had to rely on core funding to carry out its work, relying instead on the support of member organizations to host meetings or commission reports. It has meant that RENCP’s principal strategy and accountability are not linked to a particular donor entity or funding source but rather to RENCP members, the Government, and the shared goals of the education sector. On the other hand, several individuals interviewed for this report suggested that core funding may help to improve the operations of RENCP. For example, smaller member organizations that do not have a dedicated advocacy or research budget may be able to take on different roles in RENCP. Additionally, working groups might find it advantageous to commission policy reports on an as-needed basis if there was a dedicated budget.

To be sure, the Rwandan government has a strong vision for the country. Its political will is strong. It has a proven track record of delivering development to its citizens. In this way, its leadership is exceptional compared to many of its neighboring countries. The concern may be that the lessons learned from the experience of RENCP may not be applicable to other settings. Yet, we must remember that the emergence of RENCP was, in some ways, a product of chance. Five years ago, the prominent role of an organized civil society did not exist in Rwanda’s education sector. It took individuals like Mr. Mushanga (who had previously participated in a similar collaborative in Zambia), the backing of Development Partners, and the enthusiasm of the Ministry to transform the Platform from an idea into a reality. The lessons learned from the experience of developing RENCP could potentially serve as a model for other sectors in Rwanda—or other country contexts that do not yet have a well-coordinated civil society platform.

Perhaps the best way to grasp the significance of RENCP is to imagine an education sector in which a well-coordinated civil society entity was not present—one in which NGOs operated in silos overly driven by external mandates, where duplication of services was commonplace, where organizations participating in an unhealthy spirit of competition, and where government and NGOs merely tolerated one another.

RENCP members aspire to do things differently. By operating as a collective, collaborative, and complementary entity, RENCP has been able to come alongside the Government to help it more fully realize the shared aim of delivering accessible, equitable, and relevant education for all young people in Rwanda.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 7. RENCP MEMBERS (CURRENT AS OF MAY 2015)

1. Action Aid	2. Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)
3. Aegis Trust	4. African Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries
5. Akilah Institute for Women (Akilah)	6. A Partner In Education (APIE)
7. Arise Rwanda Ministries	8. Bridge2Rwanda
9. British Council	10. CARE International
11. Catholic Relief Services	12. CHABHA (Children Affected By HIV/AIDS)
13. Chance For Childhood	14. CHF International
15. CLUB-Promotion pour l'Education Socio-Culturelle et de la Technologie	16. Concern Worldwide Rwanda
17. Education Development Center	18. Educat Rwanda
19. Educate!	20. Eos Visions
21. Esperance Education Institute (EEI)	22. Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)
23. Food For the Hungry (FH)	24. FHI 360
25. Fight Illiteracy Youth Organization (FIYO)	26. Friends Peace House
27. Generation Rwanda	28. Girl Hub Rwanda
29. Handicap International	30. Help a Child
31. HOPE: Rwanda	32. International Education Exchange
33. Jesuite Refugee Service	34. Kigali Women Book Club (KWBC)
35. Kunda Umwana	36. Millennium Villages Project
37. Mindfulness Without Borders	38. National Union of Disabilities's Organizations of Rwanda
39. One Laptop Per Child	40. Peace and Hope Initiative
41. Plan International Rwanda	42. Ready For Reading
43. Right to Play	44. Root Foundation
45. Rwanda Education Assistant Program	46. Rwanda Girls Initiative
47. Save the Children	48. SINAPISI-RWANDA
49. SNER (Syndicat National des Enseignants du Rwanda)	50. Strive Foundation Rwanda
51. Sustainable Health Enterprises (SHE)	52. TEACH Rwanda
53. Umuhuza	54. Urugero Rwiza Support/Foundation
55. Uyisenga Ni Imanzi	56. Vision of Hope Rwanda
57. Voluntary Service Overseas	58. VVOB
59. The Wellspring Foundation for Education	60. Wir Fur Rwanda
61. World Vision Rwanda	62. Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA-Rwanda)

AFFILIATES:

1. Grace Rwanda Society	2. IDEMBE Ltd
3. Ishya Consulting	4. Padeco Co. Ltd
5. Steam Rwanda Ltd	6. Thousand Hills Literacy
7. ETN Ltd	8. House of Technology Ltd
9. Three Stones Consulting Ltd	

