

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

REVISED SPECIAL NEEDS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

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FOREWORD

The Government of Rwanda is committed to the principle of promoting equalization of opportunities for all its citizens. It is in this regards that it is also the mission of the Ministry of Education to educate and train all the marginalized groups of children and youths, to enable their ultimate inclusion and participation in all aspects and sectors of the society. These values also form the foundation of the Education sector policy strategic objectives, envisioning developing conditions that are adequately conducive for all learners and educators to interact in a barrier-free and child-friendly educational environment, where the consideration of merits, capabilities and potentials, override differences based on ethnicity, religion, socio-economic backgrounds; gender, disability, health status, or any other marginalizing distinctions.

The mission commits the Ministry of Education to putting in place the necessary provisions and support for the education of the educationally vulnerable children and youths, refereed to here as learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Accordingly, the present policy on Special Needs Education (SNE) and Inclusive Education (IE) is also a response to the National Constitution of 2003 as revised in 2015, which articulates the right to education for all, including the most vulnerable groups (Article 20); also translated for implementation by the Seven Year Government Programme: National Strategy for Transformation(NST1) (Priority area no 4, 62)), and subsequently by the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP - 2018/19-2023/24). In response to national economic development strategies, it is intended to reflect the education sector plan to privilege improved quality education, and render education services more accessible to all, and as such, more relevant to national development needs and goals. The previous special needs education policy was developed & approved in 2007. The policy was developed basing on the previous ESSP 2006-10 & the poverty reduction paper. There is need to review & up-date the previous policy as some gaps were identified in the policy & many changes have taken place since then.

It is in this context that the Special Needs Education (SNE) and Inclusive Education (IE) policy has been reviewed to provide the education sector direction and a renewed guidance for implementation. Hence, dynamisms and current demands in the delivery of SNE and IE services have been considered through consultations with key stakeholders and actors in the field, generating a more relevant and updated policy position, driven by the Ministry of Education focused concern on enhanced *access, quality and equity* in education services. The policy is concerned with education provisions and approaches meant to meet respective educational needs of all groups who require specialized interventions beyond the ordinary teaching/learning approaches, or those considered to have experienced barriers to participate in learning and development.

The Ministry of Education pledges its guidance and enhanced collaboration with education stakeholders in the public and private sectors, as well as civil society organizations, in the implementation of the policy for learners with Special Educational Needs. Public organizations, NGOs, Faith-based organizations and international agencies, are particularly appreciated with genuine indebtedness for their contributions to this SNE and IE policy reviews, and are especially called upon to renew their participations and collaboration in its implementation. In this way, centrally valued synergetic deployment of efforts will be ensured, taking cognizance of the national development agenda, as set in the prevailing Education Sector Policy guidelines. The Ministry of Education endorses the SNE & IE policy as a key input to education development in Rwanda, and urges all stakeholders and partners to use it as a reference while considering their contribution to the Education sector.

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Contents

FOREWORD	0
ACRONYMS	4
CONCEPTS AND TERMS USED	6
1. BACKGROUND CONTEXT	9
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	9
BACKGROUND TO SN & INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORK	10
1.2 STATEMENT OF POLICY INTENT	10
1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE POLICY	11
2. SITUATION ANALYSIS	12
2.1 EDUCATION SECTOR	12
2.2 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SECTOR	13
2.2.1 ACCESS AND PROGRESS IN EDUCATION	13
2.2.2. <i>Efficiency of the education system</i>	14
2.2.3. <i>Quality of education services</i>	14
2.2.4. <i>Relevance of education services for learners with Special educational needs (SENs)</i> .	15
2.2.5. <i>Equity on the basis of disability, gender and rural-urban dichotomies</i>	15
2.3 SPECIALIZED INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS AND SUPPORT SERVICES	16
2.4 SPECIALIZED PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT FOR SPECIAL NEEDS & INCLUSIVE EDUCATION	16
2.5 ACCESS TO EDUCATION SERVICES	17
2.6.1 <i>Special Needs Education Assessment</i>	18
2.6.2 <i>Early intervention</i>	19
2.6.3 <i>Special Needs Education Resource room services</i>	19
2.7 SPECIAL NEEDS & INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SUPPORT APPROACHES	20
2.7.1 <i>Child-Friendly School and Inclusive Education initiatives</i>	20
2.8 SPECIAL NEEDS & INCLUSIVE EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE, M&E	21
2.9 STAKEHOLDERS' ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION	22
2.10 DATA AND RESEARCH ON SPECIAL NEEDS & INCLUSIVE EDUCATION	23
3. POLICY VISION, MISSION & OBJECTIVES	23
3.1 VISION.....	23
3.2 MISSION	23
3.3 GENERAL OBJECTIVE	23
3.4 TARGET GROUPS	24
4. STRATEGIC GOAL	25
4.1 IMPROVED ACCESS, RETENTION AND COMPLETION OF SCHOOLING.....	25
4.3. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR SPECIAL NEEDS & INCLUSIVE EDUCATION QUALITY SERVICES	28

4.3.1. Training programs for the development of special needs & inclusive education skilled personnel	28
4.4 PROMOTION OF SPECIAL NEEDS & INCLUSIVE EDUCATION QUALITY SERVICES	29
4.5 PROMOTION OF INCLUSIVE AND CHILD-FRIENDLY APPROACHES	31
5. INSTITUTIONAL IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK.....	33
5.1 LOCAL COMMUNITY	33
5.2 EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	33
5.3 RWANDA EDUCATION BOARD (REB) & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (WDA)	34
5.4 HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS	35
5.5 THE SPECIAL NEEDS & INCLUSIVE EDUCATION TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP(SN&IE TWG)	36
5.6 MINISTRIES AND PUBLIC ORGANS	36
5.7 NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN (NCC)	39
5.8 NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (NCPD)	39
5.9 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS	39
5.10. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS IN SN & IE	40
6. STRATEGIES & COMMITMENTS	41
6.1. HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS.....	41
6.2. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND CHILD-FRIENDLY PROVISIONS	41
6.3 EARLY ASSESSMENT, PLACEMENT AND INTERVENTION	41
6.4 LICENSING AND ACCREDITATION OF SN & IE INSTITUTIONS	41
6.5 MEDIA OF COMMUNICATION	41
6.6. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS.....	42
6.7 PARTNERSHIPS	42
6.8 CURRICULUM ADAPTATION.....	42
6.9 SUPPORTING SN&IE PROGRAMS.....	42
6.10 POLICY POSITIONING.....	42
CONCLUSION	42

ACRONYMS

9YBE	Nine Year Basic Education
12YBE	Twelve Year Basic Education
ADL	Activities of Daily Living
ADRA:	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
CBO	Community Based Organization
CBR	Community-Based Rehabilitation
CFS	Child-Friendly Services
CoE	College of Education
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CwD	Children with Disabilities
CTRLRD	Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Resources Department
DEO	District Education Officers
DfID	Department for International Development
DHESL	Department of High Education Student loan
ICTED	ICT in Education Department
DPO	Disabled Peoples' Organizations
EAC	East African Community
EAL	East African Linkage
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EDPRS	Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy
ESAD	Examinations, Selections and Accreditation Department
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan
ESWG	Education Sector Working Group
EU	European Union
FBO	Faith Based Organizations
HD	Hearing Difficulties
HEC	High Education Council
FHI	Federation Handicap International
HLI	Higher Learning Institution
HVP	Home de la Vierge des Pauvres
GS	Groupe Scolaire
GER	Gross Enrollment Rate
IC	Intellectual Challenges
ICF	International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
MINEDUC	Ministry of Education
MINISANTE	Ministry of Health
MINALOC	Ministry of Local Government
MD	Multiple Disabilities
NCC	National Commission for children
NCPD	National Council for People with Disabilities
NER	Net Enrollment Rate
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NUDOR	National Union of Disability Organizations in Rwanda

PI	Physical Impairment
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategic Plan
PS	Primary School
PTA	Parents Teachers' Association
PwD	People with Disabilities
QEAD	Quality Education Assurance Department
QIWG	Quality Implementation Working Group
REB	Rwanda Education Board
RENCP	Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform
RHA	Rwanda Housing Authority
RSL	Rwanda Sign Language
SIE & SNES	School of Inclusive Education and Special Needs Education Services
SBR	School-Based Rehabilitation
SDMS	School Data Management System
SEN	Special Educational Needs.
SEO	Sector Education Officer
SNE/IE	Special Needs Education and Inclusive Education
SNECO	Special Needs Education Coordinator
SN&IE TW:	Special Needs and Inclusive Education Technical Working Group
TDMCGCD	Teacher Development & Management and Career Guidance and Counseling Department
TTC	Teacher Training College
TTRC	Teacher Training Resource Center
TVET	Technical and Vocational Training
UNESCO	United Nations Education Science and Cultural Organization
UPE	Universal Primary Education
UR	University of Rwanda
VI	Visual Impairment
WDA	Workforce Development Authority
WHO	World Health Organization

CONCEPTS AND TERMS USED

Accessible format: Refers to a communication mode for people with sensory dysfunctions (Visual or/and Hearing Disabilities) e.g. Sign Language and Braille.

Acoustic room: An acoustic treated room is a special room where a learner can be assessed for hearing levels. It is also a place where hearing impressions and moulds are fabricated.

Assistive devices: These are equipment and materials used to facilitate/ aid the functionality of a person with a disability. Example; hearing devices, lenses, Perkins Braille, talking calculators, audio and video systems, white cane, wheel chairs, tricycles and special seats, adopted software, among others.

Child-Friendly School (CFS): An educational setting characterized as "inclusive, healthy and protective for all children, irrespective of their differences in abilities, gender, social status, background and others. It is based on the principle that every child should study in an environment that is physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically enabling. The approach aims at developing a learning environment in which children are motivated and able to learn. The concept was introduced in Rwanda by UNICEF in 2005, and was implemented in a number of schools by ADRA and HI, in collaboration with KIE and the Ministry of Education.

Disability¹: This is the partial or complete loss of use (or ability) of a certain body part or organ. This leads to a reduction or loss of function of that body part or organ. This is also a social issue, because different societies interpret abilities or disabilities in accordance to their social norms and standards. ICF (2001) has changed this concept to 'Activity limitations, or difficulties an individual may have in executing activities'. It classifies the difficulties in 10 categories ranging from 0 to 9 (0% to 100%): **0.** No difficulty (none, absent, negligible,) 0% - 4 %; **1.** Mild difficulty (slight, low,) 5-24 %; **2** Moderate difficulty (medium, fair,) 25-49 %; **3** Severe difficulty (high, extreme,) 50-95 %; **4** Complete difficulty (total,...) 96-100 %; **8** not specified; **9** not applicable.

Impairment: This is the damage to a part of the body (organic system) caused by genetic factors, disease, accident or other causes, which may cause also disabilities. In this document, reference is made to Visual Disability, Hearing Disability, Physical Disability, Intellectual Challenges, and Multiple Disability. ICF (2001) classifies impairment according to its magnitudes, ranging from 0% to 100%: **0.** No impairment (none, absent, negligible 0-4 %; **1.** Mild Impairment (slight, low,) 5-24 %; **2.** Moderate impairment (medium, fair,) (25-49 %); **3.** Severe impairment (high, extreme, (50-95 %); **4** Complete impairments total, (96-100 %).; **8** not specified; **9** not applicable.

Inclusive Education: This is the process of addressing all learners' educational needs in a mainstream education setting. It is based on the principle that all learners are different, and can learn and develop differently, and therefore, the education system is expected to flexibly be adapted to fit every learner's (child's) needs. In the Rwandan socio-cultural context, the concept is often interpreted as '*Uburezi Budaheza*' or '*non-exclusionary education*'.

¹ International classification of functioning, disability and health: (ICF) classifies '*Impairment, Disability, Handicap in terms of challenges in* Body structures, functions, activities and participation. *In the Rwandan socio-cultural contexts, the concept 'Ubumuga' often used to denote 'dysfunctions of a body, is also used to generally imply all the three concepts interchangeably.*

Itinerant educator/teacher: Also referred to as a "visiting" or "peripatetic" teachers, are traveling school teachers, often specialized in certain fields of Special Needs Education, who move from school to school, providing individualized support to learners with SEN, and/or supporting their teachers. In Rwanda, itinerant teaching is known to be practiced on a non-formal scale in schools where Inclusive Education and Child-Friendly School is practiced.

Handicap: This concept has been changed to ‘**Participation Restriction**’ by ICF (2001). It refers to the problems a person with a disability or other limitation faces when interacting with the *environment*. Thus, a handicapping condition in one’s environment may not necessarily be handicapping in another’s.

Mainstream schools: Also referred as ‘*Ordinary*’ or ‘*Regular*’ schools as opposed to ‘*special schools*’, are schools that educate learners that present no or minimal Special Educational Needs (SEN) and therefore do not require any exceptional educational adjustments. Most of mainstream Rwandan schools accommodate learners with a range of mild and moderate disabilities without any adjustment to suit their needs.

Multidisciplinary team: This is a team of experts that is involved in the education service delivery or/and programming for an individual (or group of) learner with Special Educational Needs.

Habilitation/Rehabilitation services: Experiences of practice in Rwanda indicate that the two terms are often used interchangeably, though they are actually defined differently. **Rehabilitation** refers to services given to newly disabled persons with the purpose of restoring some of the functionality they lost as a result of their disability. This is done mainly to help them acquire skills for independent living. **Habilitation** is like rehabilitation except that it is a service accorded to persons who had no functional skills in the first place at the time of acquiring the disability. It is about teaching new skills to people who never had them.

Resource room: This is a room in a school for supporting and teaching learners with SEN, equipped with specialised resources, various learning materials and support services. At times it is also used by teachers and other resource personnel, for other activities related to special needs education services.

Special Educational Needs (SEN): These are non-ordinary needs a learner may have in schooling as a result of intrinsic or extrinsic limitations/barriers. The learner with SEN will need extra attention / assistance from the teacher and/or the use of different educational approaches or/and tools.

Special Needs Education: This is an education that aims at providing education services to all children who may, for any reasons, have temporary or permanent needs for adjusted education, different from the ordinary education. Experiences in the Rwandan context continue to indicate that the concept is largely interpreted as ‘*Uburezi bw’abafite ubumuga*’ or education for those with disabilities.

Special needs education coordinator (SNECO): Are special needs education educators who coordinate special needs education activities within and outside a specified school community. They provide guidance and support to parents, community members and other teachers on how to help a child with SEN. The roles of these professionals depend on the referral problem and the needs of the child with special educational needs. SNECO also advise teachers who have learners with special educational needs in their classrooms, on the methods and appropriate resources to be used in teaching.

SNE Professional staff: These are professional service providers in the field of special needs officially recruited and paid by the government to offer specialized services that require specialized skills.

Specialized personnel: an individual who is specially trained in a specific area to competently handle learners with disabilities and related SEN.

Special School: A school that is set and organized to provide educational services to learners with one specific type of disability or Special Educational Needs. In Rwanda, there are schools for the Deaf, for the Blind, and other specifically defined groups of learners with SEN.

Support services: These are special services offered by professionals in support of ordinary teachers to learners with disabilities and related educational needs; such as speech therapy; occupational therapists; sign language interpretation; counseling, etc.

Individualized Teaching Strategies: These are the personalized instructional approaches or methodologies that cater for the learners with disabilities and related Special Educational Needs. They involve among others: support services using specialized teaching resources, structured teaching approaches using adjusted or/and functional curricular, etc.

1. BACKGROUND CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

The core mission of the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) is to transform Rwandan citizens into skilled human capital for socio-economic development of the country, by ensuring equitable access to quality education and training, focusing on combating illiteracy, promotion of science and technology, critical thinking, and positive values. This mission cannot be fully achieved without considering the average 15% (WHO,2011)¹ of people with disabilities in any given population and related Special educational needs. Among these are youths and children who require Special Educational adjustments in order to participate in the mainstream education services. This may entail among other provisions, putting in place school and community-based support services, and/or availing adequately accessible educational resources (specialized educational materials and skilled personnel), that render the teaching and learning environment barrier-free and accessible to all learners, especially those with special educational needs (SEN). The policy focuses on education of children with special educational needs (SENs) in Rwandan special & inclusive schools both (private & public).

It has been reiterated through national policy plans that the Government of Rwanda is committed to reducing poverty and improving the well-being of its population, as a means of responding to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically goals four, eight, ten, eleven and seventeen, specifically in parts related to education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, as well as data collection and monitoring. Thus, in support and compliance with the goals, the present Special needs & inclusive education policy is also guided by the Seven Year Government Programme: National Strategy for Transformation (NST1) envisioning economic transformations through a deliberate focus and investment in education of children and youths with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Rwanda's commitment to the education of disadvantaged children is well highlighted in the MINEDUC Education Sector Strategic Plan Framework for basic education (ESSP) 2018/19-2023/24 as a cross-cutting issue, which also resonates with article 40 of the National Constitution of 2003 as revised in 2015 article 20 stating that *“Every person has the right to education ... The State has the duty to take special measures to facilitate the education of the disadvantaged learners”*. The present policy document therefore, is deliberately focused on this category of educationally disadvantaged children and youths (up to 18 years of age), here-referred to as “learners with Special Educational Needs’ (SEN), seeking to remove barriers experienced in learning and participation in ordinary school system.

In Rwanda, Educational opportunities for learners with special needs and disabilities are a major challenge to the education sector. The national education system has been characterized by lack of systems and facilities that respond to the needs of learners with special needs like.

1. Insufficient number of qualified teachers to teach children with different special educational needs
2. Negative attitudes from the community towards children with special needs including those with disabilities
3. Lack of early identification, assessment, placement, enrollment and intervention criteria & procedures for children with special educational needs
4. Lack of assessment centers which would facilitate for appropriate referrals & placements for children with special educational needs.

In 2007, the special needs education policy was adopted to provide Government orientation in order to resolve issues faced by children & youth with special educational needs. After 9 years of policy implementation, educational problems faced by this category of learners are not yet fully addressed. The current policy is no longer relevant to the situation, that is why the revised policy with its implementation strategy for 2018 – 2023 were prepared to ensure that they are relevant and reflect the best international and national standards and practices. The previous document did not have a strategic plan to support its implementation. There are also new or revised National important documents the previous policy did not put into consideration like the 7YGP/NST1, revised Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, Integrated child Right policy, Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2018/19-2023/24 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Background to SN & Inclusive Education Policy Framework

This SN & IE Policy lies within the scope of international and national strategies; it refers to the recommendations from International Institutions but also refers to sector strategies, laws and policies in Rwanda.

International frameworks

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- The Jomtien Declaration on Education for ALL (1990)
- The World Conference on Special Needs Education (1994)
- The United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for PWDs (1994)
- The Dakar Framework for Action (2000)
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for action: Towards inclusive & equitable quality education & lifelong learning for all final draft for adoption)

National Frameworks

- The revised Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda (2015) Art 20
- Seven Year Government Programme: National Strategy for Transformation(NST1) (Priority area no 4, 62)
- Education Sector Strategic plan (ESSP) 2018/19 -2023/24
- Law relating to protection of Disabled Persons in General (2007)
- Integrated child Right policy of 2011
- Special needs & Inclusive education policy 2007 (revised in 2018)
- Education Sector Policy (2003)
- Ministerial order determining modalities of equal opportunities for PWDs in schools. (N° 007/2016 on 01/03/2016)

1.2 Statement of policy intent

The Special Needs and Inclusive Education (SN&IE) Policy intends to provide quality education to all learners who may, for any reason have temporary or permanent needs for adjusted educational services. It will be achieved by mitigating all factors that constitute barriers to the learners' participation in learning

and development, arising from both the individual learners (e.g. disabilities) and from the schooling environment.

1.3 Principles of the Policy

The policy is centered on the following principles:

1. Equal access to learning opportunities for all learners with varying Special Educational Needs, by benefiting from available educational and community services and resources.
2. Respect and facilitation to all learners with different Special Educational Needs,
3. Independence (autonomy) for learners with different Special Educational Needs, geared towards promoting good quality of life and equal participation in school experiences.
4. Partnerships with education stakeholders in all services related to education and rehabilitation of learners with Special Educational Needs.

1.4 Rationale for the policy

With all evident gaps surrounding Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Rwandan education sector, the need to put in place a guiding policy framework that will ensure equitable access to quality education for learners with Special Educational Needs, is a compelling imperative. It is a response to various barriers learners with Special Educational Needs continue to experience in education, arising from a range of limitations that include socio-cultural attitudes in relation to disabilities, socio-economic disadvantages, infrastructural and geographical barriers, and other forms of challenges. This policy thus, provides the overarching framework for the development and delivery of education services for this category of learners within the existing Rwandan education system.

1.5 Focus of the policy

This policy focuses on education provisions for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Rwandan special and/or inclusive education (public and private) settings.

1.6 Benefits of the policy

The present policy addresses exclusively educational needs of learners with Special Educational Needs, through deliberately set goals and strategies, and intends to achieve:

1. A basis for appropriate intervention in accordance with respective needs of the learners, and in respect of the national and international norms and standards,
2. Improved access to curriculum by learners with Special Educational Needs, and increased number of learners with SEN accessing and benefiting from available educational services and completing schooling.
3. Increased literacy and numeracy rates among the educationally disadvantaged learners
4. The set international goals (SDGs), as well as the national strategic programs (7-year Government program/NST1, as well as the, ESSP 2018/19 – 2023/24).
5. Education standards that meet the regional (EAC) and International requirements.

2. SITUATION ANALYSIS

2.1 Education sector

Since 1998, the Government of Rwanda has embarked on a development agenda geared towards transforming the country into a middle-income society by the year 2020. The long-term Vision has been implemented through the medium-term planning framework of the Poverty Reduction Strategies Plan (PRSP) since 2008, and the EDPRS2 intended to cover the next five-year period, has also provided a basis for the development of tailored education strategies which also appears in Seven Year Government Programme: National Strategy for Transformation(NST1). As such, the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) within the five-year period (2018/19 - 2023/24) resonates with the developments programs, privileging among other things, making all levels of education (including TVET), more accessible and more relevant to the national needs, and investing mainly in improving the quality of education across the board. It places the learners with Special Educational Needs in the first position of the sector's strategic goals, pledging *'Equitable access to free and compulsory primary and lower secondary schooling for all children, and expanding access to upper secondary, including children with special educational needs'*. The Rwandan government also appreciates different initiatives of people with disabilities & other stakeholders, like Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB), National union of disabilities' organisations of Rwanda established in 2010 & The National union of the deaf.

The Education sector recognizes that the Net Enrollment Rate (NER) is persistently a major challenge, and despite significant breakthrough since 2000, it has continued to stagnate around 95% for the last five years, revealing that Rwanda still has some way to go in ensuring that all its school-age children are indeed accessing school. Therefore, it is acknowledged that increasing the NER closer to 100% generally entails concerted efforts in facilitating enrollment and retention of boys and girls for whom schooling is more challenging. In general terms, these would constitute mainly children and youths who require educational adjustments (Special Needs Educational) in order to benefit meaningfully from educational services, with particular focus on those in disadvantaged areas, from socio-economically disadvantaged families, on children with disabilities and various other educationally vulnerable groups. ESSP 2018/19 – 2023/24 recognizes that disabilities are still a major factor affecting children's access to school in Rwanda. Affirming that, children with disabilities, in 2016 out of a total of 185,666 children enrolled in pre-primary education, just 1,545 children were identified as having a disability (MINEDUC, 2016*b*). In primary schools, however, data reveal those with disabilities to be 0.75% of the total number of children enrolled, a percentage which has not changed significantly over the last three years. This represents fewer than 1% of the enrolled students, falling far short of the expected numbers represented within the population. The numbers of students with a disability form just 1% of the total enrolled in secondary education in 2016 (MINEDUC, 2016*b*). Students with disabilities are under-represented, with just 432, or 0.48%, of all students enrolled in tertiary education having some form of disability. It farther asserts that ensuring that all schools in Rwanda are Child-Friendly and Disability - friendly is still a challenge and education for children with disabilities also demands strong coordination between different Ministries and agencies beyond the education sector, particularly those in the Health, Social Protection and Local Governance sectors, which itself contains the challenge of coordination across multiple sectors and Ministries.

The present policy is thus a reflection of the education sector's commitment to address the challenges in SN & IE, with the view of achieving the national development goals, for it is exclusively focused on promoting quality education for all categories of learners with special educational needs. It deliberately

takes into considerations the marginalized Rwandan children and youths within its transformational mission, through which, the latter are also expected to be made part of the skilled human capital development agenda, by ensuring their equitable access to quality education and training for their ultimate full participation in socio-economic development.

2.2 Challenges and Opportunities in the sector

Significant challenges and opportunities related to education of learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) are identifiable in many areas of the Rwandan education sector, including the following:

2.2.1 Access and Progress in Education

The ESSP (2018/19-2023/24) recognizes impressive strides made since 2000 by extending access to primary education by a Net Enrolment Rate (NER) of about 98 % in 2017. Accordingly, the primary school NER continues to improve for both girls at 98.1% and 97.8 % for boys in 2017 and has surpassed the 2012 target of 95%. It equally acknowledged that both the repetition rate (16.4%) and dropout rate (5.6%) continue to decline in 2017. However, though increase in the number of school age-children attending primary education has been observed from the last five years, inadequacy of educational provisions and support for a range of disadvantaged learners (with SEN), which are at the base of their poor access rates, raised drop-out rates, and more disturbingly, increased failure and repetition rates at all basic schooling levels.

In concurrence with the ESSP reports, the present policy affirms that children and youths with special educational needs constitute the majority of those who are deprived of opportunities to access educational services, mainly because of inadequacy of provisions at both school, community, and central levels. The Baseline study conducted by Handicap International in March 2013 on situation of Special Needs and Inclusive Education for example, indicated that only about 0.85% children with Special Educational Needs are registered in 12 schools of Rubavu Districts, while only about 1.5% are registered in 12 schools of Kamonyi District, in comparison to 10% of this category of children and youths recognized by the Ministry of Education documents. The field data highlighted among other explanations, wide gaps caused by the poor attitudes and awareness levels within the respective school communities while engaging with learners with special educational needs. Besides, the situation is aggravated by inadequacy of trained and informed educators, inaccessible and un-facilitating school and community environment, inflexible and rigidly Standardized school curriculum, and others.

According to Education Sector statistics, there are 30, 899 learners with disabilities from pre-primary up to secondary level, while NISR censuses of 2012 indicates that there are 87,239 between the ages 3-18. This indicates that there is a big number of children with disabilities who are out of school. Statistics shows also that among 91,193 learners enrolled in Higher learning institutions, 154 learners have special educational needs.

However, it is equally made evident by the same baseline survey, that relatively improved access rate of children with SEN has been made possible in Kamonyi district, through joint school and community awareness raising, teacher training programs, which have also given rise to community-based and home-grown initiatives and innovations.

It is evident however, that improving access for learners with SEN, is not solely dependent on the school and community-based capacities, but also in the planned and standardized programs deliberately put in place to identify and assess the educational needs of varying categories of the learners who require educational adjustments, and therefore make provisions adequately available for their schooling, alongside and at equal level with that provided to ordinary learners.

2.2.2. Efficiency of the Education System

The inefficiency of the education system at basic education levels is reflected by the persistent drop-out rates of 5.6.4 % and 4.4 % for primary and secondary schooling respectively as per MINEDUC EMIS/SDMS 2017, and repetition rates of 16,4 % in primary and 5,2. % in secondary schooling in the same year. Despite the reportedly significant improvements over the succeeding years reflected in primary school with the GIR (Gross Intake Rate) from 65.2% to 79.3% from 2016 to 2017 respectively the NIR continues to be very low (19.6%), though this is an improvement from 14.8% in 2016. the Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) of 139.1 % still indicates that Rwanda has an additional 39.1 % of learners to cater for at basic education levels.

It is deduced from the analysis therefore, that the 39.1 % include a significant proportion of learners who do not access school or who drop-out because they encounter difficulties at classroom, school and community levels or/and because they required appropriately trained personnel (educators), learning resources, and/or support provisions and programs that are inadequate within the Rwandan education system.

In essence, improving the efficiency of the education system in Rwanda would also entail providing standardized Rwandan Sign Language (RSL) skills and related teaching materials for example, to enable schools to accommodate learners with hearing and spoken language difficulties. It entails putting in place tactile materials for the visually impaired learners, a flexible and/or differentiated curriculum for learners with a different learning mode (learning difficulties, intellectual challenges, Gifted and talented and others), as well as other accessible format and assistive services geared towards enabling both educators and learners in Special Needs Education and Inclusive Education systems. These are not available in many schools of Rwanda, and where they are, they are generally privately procured and therefore not standardized. It is emphasized by the present policy therefore, that it is only by systemic quality improvements of the required education provisions and programs for learners with special educational needs, that the education system efficiency can also be improved to adequately accommodate the latter.

2.2.3. Quality of education services

Reducing class sizes through building new and renovation of old classrooms ; improving the specialization of primary teachers by reviewing the teacher training programs; reducing the number of core subjects in primary grades in order to increase the hours per subject taught; and increasing capitation grants as a means of improving provisions at school levels, all feature prominently among the Ministry of Education' initiatives deliberately put in place to improve the quality of education at basic education levels². However, though these initiatives have also account for the relative increase of access and retention of learners with special educational needs in the few Child-Friendly/inclusive schools and some special schools, there is

² ESSP 2018/19-2023/24

hardly any evidence yet of an equally deliberate provision to schools in order to improve their capacities to offer quality of teaching and learning to learners with Special Educational Needs.

The present policy suggests to the education sector a Special needs & inclusive education quality improvement measures in both public and private institutions. These ought to include standardized class sizes and pupil-teacher ratios; standardized and appropriate curriculum; supported by appropriate and adequately available teaching and learning materials; improved formative and summative assessment systems; better equipped and resourced special and inclusive schools; as well as trained, supported and motivated educators among other requirements, that are critical to quality education improvement.

2.2.4. Relevance of education services for learners with Special educational needs (SENs)

Rwanda's economic growth is also largely owed to the extent to which its education system is ably developed and managed to meet the ever increasing demands for diverse and competitive skills required by the local and the wider global labor market. The challenge for the education sector is to ensure that the curriculum and pedagogical practices are reformed to meet these ever changing training demands, including also enabling youths with special educational needs to acquire relevant abilities and required levels of competitive skills.

Experiences indicate that the Ministry of education enhanced its investment in inclusion of students with special educational needs in Higher Learning Institutions. From 2008 -2017 a number of 165 students with different special educational needs were awarded non- refundable scholarships.

However, it is equally reported that the students with hearing difficulties supported in universities register a high dropout rate³ due to communication barriers that has persisted in schools, since Rwanda education system is not endowed with any form of standardized Sign language and interpretation services. Those with visual difficulties are only able to progress in languages and arts-related courses and not in sciences, and the few students who are -wheel chair users are still largely limited to few educational institutions, and continue to face mobility challenges. In other words, relevantly planned education programs for a range of learners with special educational needs are still demanded at all levels of education.

2.2.5. Equity on the basis of disability, gender and rural-urban dichotomies

Inequalities on the ground of disability, gender and rural-urban dichotomies persist despite concerted efforts on the part of the Government of Rwanda to overcome these. Learners with disabilities continue to be the minority in the Rwandan education and among these, girls and those from poor families and socio-economically disadvantaged communities are particularly poorly represented. In 2016-2017, among 154 students with disability enrolled in Higher learning institutions, 64 students are females representing 41.5%.

Inequality is generally manifested on these grounds, largely in terms of inequitable access to educational opportunities with respect to Early Childhood Development, progress at upper levels of basic and secondary education, and training for skilled professions at tertiary levels. Education programs that are geared towards equalizing education and training opportunities are legitimately demanded by a range of

³ 3rd Report of the Task Force for Inclusive Education in Rwanda (TFDIER) for the Ministry of Education: June, 2009.

disadvantaged groups of learners with SEN, and the challenge for the sector entails a shift from the general and ordinary provisions, to more inclusive education measures that promotes access to quality education that is accommodative of the various pedagogically disadvantaged groups.

2.3 Specialized instructional materials and support services

Curriculum development and delivery for Rwandan schools, is controlled and monitored by the Rwanda Education Board (REB) for quality assurance and program evaluation. However, reports from the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Resources Department indicate that SN and IE-related curricula are mainstreamed within its activities and support services for Special and Inclusive Schools.

A range of specialized materials, equipment and services still need to be developed, procured and supplied to schools, because these are either inadequate, inappropriate, or are not known. Evidences from Special schools for learners with Visual impairment, confirm that REB has continuously procured educational materials for sighted students to the school, even with repeated claims for appropriate alternatives that could include Braille and other tactile materials. Unlike other Rwandan schools, those for learners with Hearing impairment choose freely any communication mode for teaching and learning because the standard sign language for schools is not yet in place. Centers & schools for learners with learning difficulties and intellectual challenges continue to request for standard curriculum and appropriate programs to cater for special educational needs of their learners. In all cases however, the situation of children included in mainstream schools becomes even more challenging to both their educators who are required to adhere to the ordinary education standards, and to the learners with SEN who are often not provided with appropriate instructional resources, services and approaches.

It is noted that categories of learners with special educational needs are widely ranging, and their learning and teaching also demand a range of educational resources and services. The present policy therefore, suggests to the education sector, a comprehensive education planning and administration system that takes special needs & inclusive education into consideration alongside the existing mainstream education.

2.4 Specialized personnel development for Special needs & inclusive education

Despite the challenges and the diversity of learners with special educational needs and related barriers, an increasing number of learners with special educational needs continue to access all levels of schooling in Rwanda. This trend continues to generate an equally rising demand for capacity building in order to realize the required minimum number of educators and related experts with specialized skills. There has not been any specific policy to address training needs to achieve the minimum teacher – pupil ratio in the domain of Special needs & inclusive education yet.

Whereas UR- Collage of Education (CE) has included within its teacher training programs, modules related to special needs & inclusive education, specific programs for training educators with different Special needs & inclusive education specializations and skills are still demanded. These ought to include programs to develop skilled personnel in the field of Rehabilitation to cater for different types of disabilities and other learning barriers; specialized personnel in educating learners with varying types of special educational needs (Autistic spectrum and other developmental disorders, Hearing difficulties and other sensory difficulties, etc.), specialized personnel in assessing Special educational needs and planning the corresponding educational interventions, skills in developing Specialized educational resources for teachers and learners with SEN, and others.

With efforts being made by both the Ministry of Education and CE to put in place a School for Inclusive Education and Special Needs Education services (within the University of Rwanda), able to respond to the skills demands above, it is critical to highlight that, capacity building for special needs & inclusive education has to take into consideration training needs at all levels of schooling and sectors of related services, ranging from pre-primary through Post primary education to tertiary levels, from community-based rehabilitation and related support services to the planning and administration related services at the central levels. Short, medium and long-term training programs, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs for In-service and pre-service training, deliverable in both long and close distance modes, are all crucially demanded.

2.5 Access to Education Services

Accessibility to education services by learners with SEN refers to the notion of enabling the latter to maximize their learning potentials, and benefiting fully from the available educational services. It also refers to equity and capacity to participate in all school activities, and entails the provision and appropriate use of assistive technology and related enabling equipment and services. For the purposes of the present policy therefore, accessibility to education services is analyzed through the following sub areas that include access to the physical learning and teaching environment, to information, and to the curriculum.

2.5.1 Access to physical environment

The Ministry of Education through the Department of Basic Education Quality Assurance, as well as the Ministry of Infrastructure through the Rwanda Housing Authority (RHA), have both put in place guidelines for building accessible environments for people with different disability-related needs.

However, observations made in relation to adherence to these, have indicated that:

1. Most of the schools including Higher Learning Institutions are yet to adhere fully to the accessibility standards. As such, standard ramps, toilets adapted with standardized supportive rails and space; landmarks and clear walkways and others, are not necessary part of all teaching/learning environments.
2. Learners with SEN still face obstacles on their way to and from school that includes long distances to and from school, non-adapted transport systems, ragged terrain, and others. This situation contributes to the high rate of school drop-out among this category of learners.

2.5.2 Access to information

Learners with Special educational needs, particularly those with disabilities find it difficult to access information due to their limitations in mobility, in communication and interactions, and in methods of accessing written and verbal information. This could be made more accessible by using Braille, large prints, audio-visual or standard signs and symbol systems, a range of assistive devices, and other approaches. Learners with Hearing difficulties are particularly challenged as explained above, because Sign language as a Language of instruction for schools, is neither fully recognized by the Ministry of Education, nor integrated in teacher training programs. Gaps have continued to exist in schools due to inadequacy of provision for Sign language interpretation services, Braille and tactile material transcription services, and supply of other assistive devices (Including adapted software) for communication and related services, the shortage of which, seriously impact negatively on equal access to education services by

learners with Special educational needs in Rwandan schools.

2.5.3 Access to the Curriculum

Adjustments and differentiation of the school curriculum can be made to help learners with Special educational needs increase their access opportunities to schooling by adapting the teaching and learning arrangements, classroom organization, timetabling, language and vocabulary, educational resources, etc. Much as they may not exhibit visible impairments, some learners may have serious challenges in accessing numeracy and/or literacy. Hence, the curriculum adaptation ought to take also into considerations, a range of cognitive development dimensions, including Vocational Training and Activities of Daily Living (ADL) as components of the curriculum for learners with different Special educational needs.

Adaptations of the curriculum for different learners' educational needs at different levels of schooling are critical requirements in Rwandan school systems. Existing guidelines for accessibility emphasize physical infrastructure and no other key educational services that may entail access to the curriculum and all other teaching and learning activities by a range of learners with special educational needs. Such learners may include for example the left handed learners and those with Dyslexia, Dyscalculia and others. It is thus critical that accessing numeracy, literacy and life skills by all categories of learners with special educational needs should form the core object of the curriculum development and adaptations.

2.6 Support services

Learners with Special educational needs (SEN) are often limited in their achievement with ordinary curriculum, because they may have difficulties in using ordinary instructional materials and ordinary approaches, and it is imperative that alternative support services are integrated within the school systems. These may include physiotherapy, occupational and speech therapies, guide services, tactile transcriptions, alternative communication mode, and a range of others that may be required to enhance or facilitate the teaching/learning processes. Like accessibility and assistive device provisions therefore, tailored support services are critical in enabling learners with SEN to succeed in education. At the heart of teaching/learning processes is the ability for learners to understand the concepts/content planned in the school curriculum, hence, the present policy is restricted to the support services in the following areas considered crucially key to special needs & inclusive education services in enabling teaching and learning:

2.6.1 Special Needs Education Assessment

Learners' abilities to perform any school tasks depend primarily on their functional status with respect to sensory, cognitive, physical and other capacities. In this regard, learners whose senses (vision or/and hearing) are impaired are more likely to perform visual or/and hearing tasks at a relatively lower level compared to peers with relatively less 'sensory difficulties'. Similarly, a learner with impaired limbs (upper or/and lower) may exhibit reduced fine or gross motor abilities during school activities, until alternative parts of his/her body are screened and enabled (through habilitation or/and rehabilitation) to perform the task. Hence, assessment (or screening) of learners' functional needs and abilities (at a very early age), is a fundamental step towards understanding and subsequent educational rehabilitation or enabling them to access and participate in learning activities.

Currently, Rwandan education system is not yet endowed with any formal functional assessment, carried out for early identification of learning needs upon school entry for appropriate school placements and support. Therefore, policy guidelines on this vital service are still required in the education sector, to equip it with standard assessment procedures and strategies (functional assessment) to support learners with a range of SEN.

2.6.2 Early intervention

Programs for Early Childhood Development (ECD) are expected to be strongly emphasized in special needs & inclusive education, because early mitigation of factors that form barriers (special educational needs) to children's development and learning is also of critical importance to their schooling and participation. In other words, development of different skills and capacities for any individual is important at the early stages of their lives, and if any one of the capacities is impaired, it may also impede the development of other capacities at the critical stage of development. A child with hearing impairment may also have difficulties in developing social abilities, because of his/her limitations in communicating with other members of the community.

So far, some limited information pertaining to special needs & inclusive education is incorporated in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs and TTC curriculum; however, the gaps are that; there are no known programs that encourage the development of schools that cater for early education and related services in special needs & inclusive education; and there are no educators and caregivers specially trained to respond to special educational needs at this level.

Early intervention programs in the area of special educational needs are among the least catered for by the Rwandan education sector, and for that reason, the policy guidelines are urgently required to enable educational practitioners and planners to play their role in this crucial area of education.

2.6.3 Special Needs Education Resource room services

Observations made in the few Child-Friendly schools and those with Inclusive education services indicate that rooms with specialized materials and services have been developing over the last five years in Eastern and Southern provinces. The educational materials include tactile and audio-visual teaching and learning aids, support provisions are made available for learners with epilepsy and other illnesses, and/or gender-related needs. In some primary schools like in Kamonyi district parents and teachers are known to meet on a regular schedule in the school resource rooms, to develop and produce teaching and learning aids for their children with disabilities, and other special educational needs.

Based on these observations made in the field however, the concept of the Special needs education resource room is apparently one of the support services that is instrumental in enabling learners with Special educational needs access and succeed in schooling, and it is appreciated by educators who have developed it and use it. However, it is equally observed that, the rooms are inadequately resourced and therefore, serve only a limited number of learners, mainly because of budgetary constraints of the schools and the parent community. Besides, limited services are offered by the existing resource rooms because specialized educators and other experts skilled in related services are not available to the schools.

2.7 Special needs & inclusive education support approaches

Two major schooling systems providing for learners with Special educational needs are known to operate in Rwanda:

- 1. *Special school settings*** that are traditional institutions established to cater for learners with certain disabilities, and endowed with specialized support services such as rehabilitation; teaching methodologies; specialized instructional materials and assistive devices.
- 2. Inclusive schools /or Child-friendly school settings**, which constitute ordinary schools that have adapted an accessible and barrier-free school policy, in order to accommodate learners with a range of educational needs.

Each of these approaches have indicated challenges that include staffing constraints, educational material inadequacy, needs for support services like sign language interpreters and others, but, they still remain the only schooling options for Rwandan learners with special educational needs.

2.7.1 Child-Friendly School and Inclusive Education initiatives

In Rwandan education practice, Child-Friendly School (CFS) and Inclusive Education (IE) initiative concepts are interchangeable in the Rwandan education practice. They are systematic ‘adaptations’ of the whole school system, as a delivery centre of a range of integrated educational and social services for all children, especially those with special educational needs. It is a system where, the school-family-community continuum functions in provision of care and educational support (of the children) for subsequent quality education, even in circumstances where the normal provision is under constraints. Both initiatives are expected to have far reaching solutions to a range of community and school-based limitations, because their whole school approaches are also capable of impacting on the entire education system. The key CFS quality dimensions include: 1. Psychosocial support; 2. Health, Water & Sanitation, food and nutrition promotion; 3. Safety & Security promotion; 4. Equity & Equality promotion, 5. Effective quality teaching and learning; 6. School-community partnership.

Besides, it has been observed that both of the above approaches are developed through foreign support and not necessary part of the mainstream education developments. All the special school provisions are private initiatives and have increasingly attracted the support of the Ministry of Education. The Child-Friendly schools and Inclusive schools’ concepts are initiated and supported by UNICEF, EU and DfID in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, former Handicap International (now called Humanity and Inclusion) and ADRA. However, these projects only operated at basic education levels, and not the full range of schooling (from Early Childhood Development Centers, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary and University) for learners with SEN.

According to ESSP 2018/19-2023/24, ensuring that all schools in Rwanda are Child-Friendly and inclusive of all learners with special educational needs, is still a challenge that demands to be addressed. It is in this respect that each of the above provisions and approaches has to be deliberately considered by the present policy, to guide the improved performance and services of special needs & inclusive education

2.7.2 Support to special needs & inclusive education through regional partnerships

The East African Linkage (EAL) in Special needs, inclusive education and Rehabilitation was created in 1999 to bring together resources, efforts and initiatives related to special needs education, inclusive education and rehabilitation within the sub-region. The primary goal of the initiators (KISE and former UNISE), was to develop a regional linkage program to support and strengthen the training programs, promote quality in special needs education, inclusive education and rehabilitation, research and institutional development. They envision to:

- Develop effective human resources, training and research in special needs education, inclusive education and rehabilitation through staff and student exchange program;
- Enhance maximum utilization of the East African experts in the area of special needs education, inclusive education and rehabilitation;
- Document, publish and share information in areas involving in special needs education, inclusive education and rehabilitation;
- Develop, implement, monitor and evaluate in special needs education, inclusive education and Rehabilitation training programs;
- Develop, produce and maintain educational and other resources materials on special needs;
- Create awareness, advocacy and instill positive attitudes for the development of in special needs education, inclusive education and Rehabilitation in the region; and

Since then, a number of other Institutions of Higher Learning in the Five East African countries and South Sudan have been associated with the linkage, have also signed its Memorandum of Understanding, and their respective Universities and/or Governments have allocated a budget for its activities.

Rwanda was associated with EAL program in its 12th annual conference of 2011, and participants were supported by the government. Hence, though the country's participation has not been regularly maintained, it is envisioned that the present policy will accord the linkage in special needs education, inclusive education and rehabilitation its due importance, and will also promote the development of similarly beneficial regional and international partnerships.

2.8 Special needs & inclusive education quality assurance, Monitoring and Evaluation

The Department of Basic Education Quality Assurance (BEQA) is expected to monitor, evaluate and ensure appropriate quality and standards of education services at all levels of basic education, while the Higher Education Council (HEC) and Workforce Development Authority (WDA) are entrusted with similar responsibilities in Higher Learning and Vocational Institutions respectively. However, reports from the field and observations made of the quality of services delivered in Special and Inclusive schools indicate that these are not adequately monitored and therefore, are not often of poor standard. This situation explains why the curriculum, resource provisions and support services highlighted above, are not standardized and developed like ordinary education programs. Thus, the present Special needs & inclusive education policy calls for emphasized roles of the organs responsible in Special needs & inclusive education quality assurance services.

2.9 Stakeholders' engagement and participation

The Ministry of Education recognizes the important roles of different actors in special needs & inclusive education services, and continues to assume its responsibilities of providing policy directions, allocation of necessary financial, material and human resources, quality assurance, capacity development, and monitoring of policy strategy outcomes. Stakeholders and partners of the Ministry of Education in delivering special needs & special needs education and related services range from Community-Based Organizations (CBO), Faith-Based Organizations (FBO), both local and International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO).

HVP Gatagara school for example, which was founded in 1962 and run by Brothers of Charity educates and rehabilitates children and youths with disabilities, is currently operating in five schools and centers, catering for learners with physical, visual, mental and hearing impairment. Since 2000, other local civil society groups have increasingly joined the initiatives, especially to support education services for children and youths with disabilities. '*Collectif Tubakunde*' for one, brings together over 43 initiatives and centers, attracting the attention of related services and supporting agencies. However, due to the lack of policy guidance in relation to Special needs & inclusive education service delivery, the quality of services and resources for education of children with special educational needs are still uncoordinated, not standardized, and reportedly in a needy state.

In addition, observations made in the field, as well as the former TFDIER annual reports indicate that support to special needs & inclusive education services and initiatives continue to be dominated by international agencies. Through UNICEF funding, ADRA was enabled to initiate and support over 85 Child-Friendly School projects since 2007, and through EU, UNICEF and DfID funds respectively, former Handicap International (renamed Humanity and Inclusion) has been able to initiate three special needs & inclusive education projects in the Southern, Northern and Western provinces. In all the cases however, it is observed that education service delivery and processes involving learners with SEN, still require coordination, streamlining and monitoring for quality assurance, and these are not provided by any of the NGOs.

The national constitution of 2003 as revised in 2015, in its article 20, pledges government support to learners with SEN, and law No. 1/2007 of May 2007, also commit the Ministry of Education to provide for learners with disabilities and related special educational needs in its articles 11 to 13. However, though the Ministry has been paying salaries of teachers in some special schools, and educational materials are provided in schools and Universities, a substantial support is still provided by civil organizations and individual groups.

This is also due to the fact that special needs & inclusive education is not yet fully mainstreamed in all the education sector planning, provisions and activities. It is thus the concern of the present policy to provide for increased support to enhanced quality services that are beneficial to all learners with SEN, and ensure conditions that promote productive partnership with all special needs & inclusive education stakeholders, fostering sustainability, coordination and quality of their special needs & inclusive education services. Besides, advocacy for improved quality in special needs & inclusive education services is equally expected from DPOs through the nationally recognized civil rights groups such as NUDOR and NCPD, which are mandated to look into issues related to rights of people with disabilities and related SEN.

2.10 Data and Research on special needs & inclusive education

The current situation regarding data in special needs & inclusive education is challengingly unclear. Different public and civil society sources continue to provide different information and statistical data regarding categories and groups concerned by special needs & inclusive education and this situation has generated both misconceptions and miss-coordination of related services. This is particularly due to undefined categorization of the target groups, coupled with the fact that special needs & inclusive education services have not been developing alongside the ordinary education system.

The view that special needs & inclusive education is largely restricted to the educational needs of learners with disabilities seems to be dominant, and the statistical information available about this group has put their numbers between 1% and 15% (See above) of the school age-youths in Rwanda. Current data seems to reflect only visible impairments/disabilities usually according to locally established beliefs and perceptions, which vary from community to community, and not categorized according to the educational needs. Data established by the baseline study conducted in Kamonyi and Rubavu Districts in March 2013 (See section 2.2.1 above), reveals that over 60% of the learners with mild physical disabilities, are able to benefit from services in the 24 schools without requiring any special adjustments are also categorized as learners with special educational needs. In other words, it is evident that data about any groups concerned with special educational needs within the Rwandan community continues to be subjected to culture-biased interpretations.

Besides, special needs & inclusive education services that have often been planned and delivered without comprehensive research information such as Sign language development will also require a country-wide data collection through a range of sign languages used in different deaf communities and schools of Rwanda. It is thus fundamental that a policy framework is put in place, within which, categories and groups concerned with special needs & inclusive education services are defined, and continued research in special needs & inclusive education should be promoted and supported to inform and guide related practice and planning.

3. POLICY VISION, MISSION & OBJECTIVES

3.1 Vision

Inclusion and optimum participation of all categories of learners with Special Educational Needs within the full range of educational services provided in Rwanda, and subsequently in the general socio-economic development of the country.

3.2 Mission

Provide a framework for the mainstreamed and coordinated realisation of quality special needs and inclusive education, buttressed on principles of equal opportunities in education and training services, and ultimate contribution to national development.

3.3 General objective

Put in place coordinated and appropriately resourced special needs and inclusive education services, underpinning the education sector goals, as well as the national strategies with respect to education for development.

Specific objectives

The present special needs and inclusive education policy is designed to realize the following objectives:

- a. Promote conditions that permit increased enrolment, participation and completion of schooling by learners with Special Educational Needs, in their neighborhood community whenever possible.
- b. Promote quality education through relevantly and appropriately planned special needs and inclusive education programs that entail accessible curricular and appropriately resourced service provisions.
- c. Establish mainstreamed and coordinated mechanisms for planning, monitoring and evaluating quality and outcomes in special needs and inclusive education programs and services.
- d. Strengthen and standardize the existing special needs and inclusive education initiatives and programs, and enhance the coordinated and managed participation of local stakeholders in the implementation of special needs & inclusive education programs.
- e. Promote and prompt the developments of collaboration and partnerships with stakeholders and actors in special needs & inclusive education, locally, regionally and internationally.

3.4 Target Groups

The Policy targets learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN), or/and who meet barriers within the ordinary Rwandan education system, therefore, are qualified (through standardized SEN assessment) for adjusted educational provisions. The groups shall include:

Learners with

- Physical and Motor Challenges
- Intellectual Challenges
- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Developmental Challenges
- Multiple disabilities/Difficulties
- Speech and Communication Difficulties
- Specific and General Learning Difficulties
- Gifted and Talented

- Orphans & unsupported/neglected and children from Broken homes
- Abused & neglected
- Displaced, refugees & returnees
- Children in Prisons
- Child soldiers, Child laborers
- Child heading families
- Street children
- Autistic Spectrum, Hyperactivity Disorder
- Children infected & affected by HIV and Other terminal illnesses
- Learners infected & affected by chronic illnesses

It ought to be noted that categorization at the present policy level takes a relatively widely encompassing range of special educational needs groupings (Not fully based on ICF guidelines), and does not necessarily focus on distinct categories or specific educational needs. The specific groups will be derived from the national special educational needs assessment strategies proposed in the next sections (Goal 4.2), through which specified education and support services will be developed. At the present stage therefore, the apparent overlaps across categories may inevitably arise due to the fact that the educational needs in many of the categories also cut across more than one group. Street children for example (not specified), constitute a category of children and youths who might demonstrate special educational needs, also shared by learners with disabilities, by learners with health problems, by those with social, emotional and behavioral difficulties. A range of learners with disabilities, are also known to require services provided to other categories because of the complexity entailed in their needs. Hence, though the grouping is formed with due consideration of the learners' shared functional difficulties, and/or provisions they may require in order to benefit from special needs and inclusive education services, specific categories of learners with special educational needs are expected to arise from each of the 5 groups, through special educational needs assessment and education placement strategies, or any other credible and standardized categorization strategies.

4. STRATEGIC GOAL

The present policy section focuses exclusively at the policy goals that are achievable through strategic implementation planning of quality SN&IE services and related provisions. Five goals and strategies to achieve them have been defined and are discussed in the next sections.

4.1 Improved access, retention and completion of schooling

Appropriate conditions will be put in place at all levels of schooling as the budget allows, (from pre-primary to 12YBE level geared towards facilitating access, retention and completion of schooling by learners with special educational needs in their neighbourhood schools. These will include among other strategies:

4.1.1 Facilitating learners with access challenges to attend and accomplish school

Many children and youths are unable to reach their neighborhood schools due to mobility and other challenges. The physical environment where learners with SEN operate should be accessible to them and disability friendly. This calls for adequate allocation of material resources to learning institutions to improve physical structures and provide to individual learners with SEN basic learning aids. These will be identified and assessed through standardized procedures, and then facilitated to access, attain and progress in school. The strategies will include:

- a.** Working with the local community to develop residential facilities to reduce distance between home and school.
- b.** Working with the local community to make the geographical environment and school infrastructure accessible to a range of learners with special educational needs.
- c.** Avail special needs & inclusive education guidelines, instructing local education leaderships and related stakeholders, in methods and requirements for facilitating access, retention and completion of schooling by learners with special educational needs in special, ordinary and inclusive schools.
- d.** Work with different stakeholders so that resource provisions such as wheelchairs, white cane and other assistive devices to facilitate mobility and accessibility are made available for learners with special

educational needs.

4.1.2 Provision of appropriate special needs & inclusive education facilitations in schools

Many school-age children and youths with special educational needs do not attend their neighborhood school, or drop-out at early stages of their schooling. Strategies will be put in place to develop provisions for comprehensive community and school-based facilities and services that are geared towards enabling access to local schools by learners with special educational needs. The strategies will include:

- a. Promoting a comprehensive school and community-based rehabilitation program.
- b. Promoting and facilitating resource room provisions in inclusive and Child-friendly schools.
- c. Provisions for itinerant teaching and services, as well as Special Needs Education Coordination (SNECO) in schools of the same communities.
- d. Promoting locally-initiated parents and teachers' partnerships in supporting activities and services that enhance improved access and retention of learners with special educational needs in neighbourhood schools.

4.1.3 Provision of alternative curricula and school programs

A big number of children and youths are known to persistently fail to enroll and/or to progress in their neighborhood school due to their limitations in accessing the ordinary school curriculum. They will be facilitated by providing for alternative curricula and school programs, to enhance curricular-accessibility, to enhance retention, progress and achievements of learners with special educational needs. The strategies will include:

- a. Inclusion of Activities of Daily Living (ADL) within basic education programs for some categories of Learners with special educational needs, who require these for independent living, and for active participation in schooling.
- b. Development and delivery of adapted vocational training curriculum for learners who might demonstrate difficulties to follow ordinary school programs at basic education levels.
- c. Provide for curriculum differentiation and alternative provisions, adapted to educational needs of some categories of learners with special educational needs.

4.2 Development of support services through schools of excellence in special needs & inclusive education (SESN&IE)

Planning and provisions for learning and teaching of learners with special educational needs ought to be based on specific assessment records of their learning abilities and difficulties. This should be considered as an integral aspect within Rwandan education system, which ought to entail assessment of special educational needs, and educational intervention services, delivered at the levels of the neighborhood school and community, and at the earliest possible stages of life and/or identification of the difficulties. In order to plan more effective educational interventions and related support services, school (*SESN&IE*) designed for the purpose will be developed to conduct special educational needs assessment, therapeutic services, resource provisions and others. These will be placed in schools and/or neighborhood communities, and will develop progressively from provincial to district levels, until they are able to serve all learners with special educational needs during their earliest possible stages of schooling.

4.2.1 Establish schools of excellence in special needs and inclusive education (SESN&IE) and procedures for early support services

In order to increase the number of children and youths with special educational needs accessing and progressing in schools, all children and youths identified with special educational needs will be subjected first to diagnostic educational assessment in schools for educational assessment, and other services for subsequent appropriate educational placements and intervention planning. The strategies will include:

- a.** Progressive development of schools for educational assessment, and other services able to serve all learners with special educational needs closest to their homes, and during their earliest possible stages of schooling.
- b.** Establishment of procedures and provisions for special educational needs identification and assessment services at school – community levels.
- c.** Provisions for training and deployment of personnel skilled in early special educational needs assessment, rehabilitation and related resource provisions.
- d.** Provision for special educational needs assessment and record keeping procedures, geared towards enabling follow-up planning of education and related services.

4.2.2 Established procedures for early intervention

Special educational needs assessment for children and youths with special educational needs is also a diagnostic educational assessment, which often prescribes (among others) rehabilitation and therapeutic services. These are always recommendable in the earliest stages of growth or/and schooling if they have to help the child's functional development. Procedures will thus be put in place to determine the therapeutic and rehabilitation services, appropriate educational placements and programs that suit the learners' educational needs. These will include:

- a.** Provisions for therapeutic, rehabilitation and habilitation services, complementing special educational needs assessment and alternative education programs.
- b.** Development and promotion of Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR), and/or School-Based Rehabilitation (SBR) services (including provision of assistive devices and related services).

4.2.3 Establish procedures for educational placements and provisions

As a procedural prerequisite that precedes diagnostic educational assessment conducted by qualified personnel in (SESN&IE), children and youths with special educational needs registered will subsequently be programmed for rehabilitation and/or for educational intervention. The placement for educational services is expected to depend on the special educational needs assessment results and recommendations (if any), on the parents'/guardians' decisions, and/or on the availability or proximity of educational and support services. Hence, the strategies will include among others:

- a.** Provisions for standardized procedures and guidelines for education placements of learners in special school, in inclusive /Child-Friendly schools, or Special Unit in ordinary schools, with respect to the assessed and categorized abilities and difficulties.
- b.** Provisions for standardized procedures in schooling progress and transition in different levels of schooling, for learners benefiting from alternative curriculum.
- c.** Ensuring adequacy and appropriateness of resource provisions in all assessment and intervention services.

In essence, provisions related to assessment, placement and interventions for learners with special educational needs should not be alienated to mainstream education services; on the contrary, efforts will be made to integrate them fully within the mainstream education system, and close to their families and communities.

4.3. Capacity development for special needs & inclusive education quality services

For special needs & inclusive education quality development, it is an imperative requirement to ensure sustainable provision of quality and appropriate special needs & inclusive education resources (skilled personnel, equipment and related services), required by the general education sector, schools and the general community. The present policy proposes a range of special needs & inclusive education capacity development strategies, especially under the University of Rwanda (UR) envisioning four key missions:

- 1.** Provision of a range of training programs for personnel required in special needs & inclusive education services for all levels;
- 2.** Creation of a center (s) for SEN referral services to support the communities and schools;
- 3.** Creation of a unit within UR for special needs & inclusive education resource production to design and produce educational resources for schools;
- 4.** Development and provisions for research and consultancy services to inform and support all SN&IE planning and related developments.

4.3.1. Training programs for the development of special needs & inclusive education skilled personnel

The demand for relevantly trained personnel in all Rwandan special needs & inclusive education services is growing. Developing and delivering training programs required by all levels of schooling (Pre-school to 12YBE levels), and by the general Rwandan education sector and communities, ought to be the obligation of the School for Inclusive Education and Special Needs Education Services envisioned under UR. The training programs should be developed and delivered in short, medium and long term modes, envisioning skills and capacities for:

- a. Early childhood assessment, rehabilitation and education planning.
- b. Inclusive and Special Needs Education for TTC tutors.
- c. Educators specialized in a range of skills required in schools and communities.
- d. Guidance and counseling programs for learners with special educational needs.
- e. Vocational training for people with disabilities and related Special Needs.
- f. Community-Based Rehabilitation and related services.

4.3.2 Building capacity for special educational needs assessment and referral services

Services for special educational needs assessment and referral will be established in the School for Inclusive Education and Special Needs Education services under UR. It will bring together multidisciplinary services to offer special educational needs assessment services, to support of the special needs & inclusive education training programs, and offer referral services to the general Rwandan community in special educational needs assessment and rehabilitation. It will:

- a. Provide special educational needs assessment services, offer training and referral services to schools and community-based assessment schools of excellence.
- b. Provide guidance and counseling services to learners with special educational needs, and related referral services to schools and the general community.
- c. Provide complementary support to the training programs by availing opportunities for special needs & inclusive education trainees, to observe and participate in practical activities related to special educational needs assessment, rehabilitation and counseling.

4.3.3 Building capacity for special needs & inclusive education resource production

Learners with special educational needs require a range of educational and assistive resources. In collaboration with its key stakeholders that include REB and School for Inclusive Education and Special Needs Education services in UR, the Ministry of Education will establish and support schools equipped for designing and production of local special needs & inclusive education educational materials for other schools and the general community. Its strategies and activities will include:

- a. Designing, production, maintenance and cataloguing educational and assistive resources for learners with a range of special educational needs.
- b. Providing complementary support to the training programs by availing opportunities for special needs & inclusive education trainees, to conceive, design and produce educational resources for learners with SEN.

4.3.4 Building capacity through Research and consultancy

Through the highly qualified and skilled personnel of the School for Inclusive Education and Special Needs Education services/University of Rwanda (UR) and their partnerships within the academic network, the Ministry of Education will provide opportunities for capacity development through research and data collection in the area of special needs & inclusive education. Strategies and activities will include:

- a. Providing empirical data required by the Rwanda society, addressing special needs & inclusive education issues, including *concerns often raised by DPOs in relation to equal access to education services*.
- a. Updating and dissemination of special needs & inclusive education -related skills, including the Rwandan Sign Language (RSL) for schools and the general society.
- b. Addressing gaps in special needs & inclusive education policy and practice, by providing research-based data to planners and practitioners in special needs & inclusive education services.

4.4 Promotion of special needs & inclusive education quality services

The quality of education is also judged in terms of its effectiveness in developing highly creative and skilled personnel, regardless of gender, background, religion, culture, disability, or social and economic status. It is often achieved by providing adequate support and appropriate conditions that promote learning and cognitive development at all levels of schooling and training (formal and informal). In this respect, promotion of quality in SN&IE services is envisioned in the following dimensions:

4.4.1 Provision of appropriate special needs & inclusive education instructional resources

Adequate and appropriate special needs & inclusive education instructional resources will be made available to schools through the specialized organs and institutions of the Ministry of Education. This

will be achieved through the promotion and support of resource room initiatives in schools of excellence in (*SN&IE*) and other schools for support provisions. The strategies will include:

1. Provision of adequate and relevant instructional materials

- a.** Provision of standardized and good quality special needs & inclusive educational materials for schools, and promoting mainly locally-made and innovatively-made educational materials.
- b.** Training educators in the production and maintenance of appropriate and locally-made educational materials.
- c.** Providing and supporting the development of resource room equipment in schools

ii. Provision of trained and specialized personnel

- a.** Promotion and support services and roles of SNECO and itinerant teaching in cluster schools of the same neighborhood community.
- b.** Provision and support of resource room staff in the mainstream education, especially in Inclusive and Child-Friendly Schools.
- c.** Provisions for multidisciplinary and support services of rehabilitation and health workers, social workers, sign language interpreters, resource room workers and other related personnel.

4.4.2 Development of accessible and flexible school curricula

Quality education is also strongly dependent on an appropriately planned and adequately supported curriculum for all levels of schooling. The Ministry of Education through the implementing organs (WDA, UR and REB,) department in charge of curriculum and pedagogical material development will support the adaptation of special needs & inclusive education services to benefit all learners including those with special educational needs, and this will be achieved through:

- a.** Provisions for the development of school curricula that allows diversity of teaching approaches, differentiation of the content taught, and use of different learning materials, as a means of accommodating the diversity of learners.
- b.** Provisions for the development of the school curriculum that is adaptable to diversity in learning abilities.
- c.** Provision for school curriculum and programs that promote inclusive education values, and accommodation of different levels of academic attainments.

4.4.3 Appropriate teaching and learning approaches

Achieving quality education is also strongly dependent on educators' abilities to translate appropriately the school curricula in the process of delivering it. In special needs & inclusive education services, this will also entail:

- a.** Promoting teaching approaches that are innovative and relevant, privileging learner-centeredness.
- b.** Promoting and accommodation of multi-disciplinary teaching and itinerant support approaches.

4.4.4 Supportive and conducive learning and teaching environment

Quality education is also achieved through the creation of a conducive and enabling learning and teaching environment at all levels of schooling, appropriately equipped to accommodate and support all categories of learning abilities. In special needs & inclusive education services, this will also entail:

- a. Promoting a school physical and social environment that permits free access and participation of all learners, irrespective of their difficulties, gender and status.
- b. Promoting a school physical and social environment that supports cognitive development, practices and programs that are friendly and inclusive.
- c. Availing support services that promotes a friendly and conducive learning and teaching environment.

4.4.5 Supportive community and school partnership

Experiences in some Rwandan communities have indicated that quality in special needs & inclusive education services can also be achieved through school and community partnerships, created with a shared view of supporting learning and teaching of the children with special educational needs of the locality. Strategies to achieve quality education may entail:

- a. Promoting and fostering locally initiated community-school partnerships in school activities that support learning and achievement of learners with special educational needs. *'Imboni z'uburezi'* or *Abajyanama b'uburezi*⁴ and similar initiatives, shall particularly be promoted in support of achievements of learners with special educational needs.
- b. Promoting and fostering all community–school partnerships that encourage enhanced access, retention and academic achievements of learners with special educational needs in their neighborhood schools.

4.4.6 Support services and assistive educational resources

In special needs & inclusive education services, quality education is also strongly dependent on provision of appropriate and adequate support services and assistive resources at all levels of schooling of learners with special educational needs. To achieve this, strategies may also entail:

- a. Integration, programming and standardizing assessment, rehabilitation and therapeutic services within the school and community services (See strategies in section 4.2).
- b. Promoting, programming and standardizing school resource room services to support learners with SEN (See strategies in section 4.4.1).

4.5 Promotion of inclusive and child-friendly approaches

It is through the promotion of six key CFS qualities (See also analysis in section 2.7.1) that inclusion of learners with special educational needs will be effectively achieved. These are: **1.** Enabling psychosocial support services; **2.** Promotion of health, sanitary and nutrition services in school communities; **3.** Promotion of safety & security in school communities; **4.** Promotion of equity & equality in school communities, **5.** Effective quality teaching and learning; **6.** Promotion of supportive school-community

⁴ *Imboni or abajyanama b' Uburezi* is a community-based initiative in some districts of the southern province of Rwanda, in which, parents or guardians of children with disabilities are elected to guide and advice the community members on issues related to disability.

partnership: These are expected to impact interactively on the whole school system through the following strategies:

4.5.1 Inclusion of CFS and inclusive education qualities in the school curriculum

Inclusive and Child-Friendly school qualities will be promoted, through deliberately designed formal and non-formal school curriculums (ordinary & extra and co-curricular) to guide education programs and practice in schools and teacher training institutions.

4.5.2 The school environment that promotes CFS and inclusive qualities

Reinforcing Child-Friendly school and Inclusive Education (IE) environment is one of the key contributors to quality education and ensuring equal access and participation in learning/teaching processes by all. It is thus envisioned that the learning and teaching milieus of Rwandan schools, will be restructured into socially and physically barrier-free educational settings, that facilitate sufficient space, appropriate provisions and support to all learners in their natural diversities, enabling free interaction and participation during the learning and teaching processes.

4.5.3 Training programs that include CFS and inclusive education values

All educators will be expected to adhere and apply CFS principles and Inclusive Education (IE) methodologies, the Ministry of Education through teacher training institutions and UR, CFS modules and programs will be integrated in both pre and in-service teacher training programs for all levels of schooling. The strategies will include integration of CFS principles and Inclusive Education (IE) methodologies in both pre and in-service teacher training modules and programs, and reinforcing resource centers in TTCs, Colleges of Education and UR to provide support services that enhance CFS curriculum, practices and programs.

4.5.4 Community promotes that promotes CFS and inclusive education values

Experiences in CFS practice in Rwanda has shown that to ensure that all learners with special educational needs access education, and are enabled to progress and complete the full cycle of schooling, locally initiated and supported partnerships between the school and the local communities is essential. This entails that the full range of decision making parties, are actively and collaboratively involved in planning and facilitating the CFS and inclusive education programs. Their joint involvement generates community and school-based synergies that provides conditions and resources necessary for achieving the quality standards envisioned. Hence, the present policy envisions that parents through PTAs, local authorities and other partners will be encouraged and supported to play a leading role in awareness raising and in providing support to the CFS and inclusive education programs and practices within their neighborhood schools.

4.5.5 Integrating CFS and inclusive education values in education management

A deliberately planned collaborative management system that integrates CFS and inclusive education values and qualities will be developed within the mainstream education system. Hence, school leaders, PTA members and local education authorities will be encouraged to be actively involvement in joint planning, managing, mobilizing resources, and in reaching out for other partners in order to transform their schools, by integrating Child-Friendly and Inclusive Education Qualities.

5. INSTITUTIONAL IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

As maintained by ESSP 2018/19-2023/24, special needs & inclusive education services have traditionally been carried out mainly through partnerships with stakeholders, especially civil society operating at various levels. It is envisioned that work will be undertaken to increase the capacity of the education system (from pre-primary to higher education) to improve the accommodation of students with Special educational needs in neighborhood schools. It is however important that achievements already made through partnership with a range of stakeholders are reinforced, and the existing resources and services are espoused to enhance quality and coordinated special needs & inclusive education services. This section is focused on the envisioned roles and responsibilities of a range of stakeholders (in the public & civil society sector) in implementing special needs & inclusive education services.

5.1 Local community

At community levels, access to education and benefiting from related services by children and youths with SEN are known to depend greatly on the decisions of close, or/and extended family members, as well as the wider community members and leaders in various ways. Among the collaborative support expected include:

- a.** Raising awareness about educational needs and rights of children and youths with special educational needs in their respective communities.
- b.** Partnerships with educators in the neighborhood schools to support educational resources provisions, support rehabilitation and related services.
- c.** Partnerships with educators in the neighborhood schools to evaluate and monitor access, retention, educational services and related provisions for learners with special educational needs in their respective communities.
- d.** Partnerships with educators in the neighborhood schools to render the social and physical environment more barrier-free and friendly to learners with special educational needs in their respective communities.

In this respect, the present policy takes community members as resourceful allies of the education sector, able to generate critical support to a range of special needs & inclusive education services.

5.2 Educational Institutions

Schools, educational and training and other institutions will be entrusted with the crucial responsibility of delivering of key special needs & inclusive education services, and they will be required to:

- a.** Ensure adherence to basic requirements and minimum special needs & inclusive education standards as set by the Ministry of Education.
- b.** Ensure adequacy and appropriateness of provisions of SN & IE resources as per established norms and standards of the Ministry of education.
- c.** Ensure timely support to special needs & inclusive education services, and avail regular report of school-based activities to the relevant education authorities.
- d.** Provide for internal regulations, evaluation/ supervision and monitoring, geared towards ensuring quality of teaching/learning and other support services in the institution.

- e. Provide for and facilitate organization of in-service and continuous professional development programs for teachers and other support personnel in the institution.
- f. Sensitize, mobilize and collaborate closely with neighborhood community members/leaderships in enrollment, and planning some of the support services for the children and youths with special educational needs in their respective communities.
- g. Maintain up-to-date and related data records of learners with special educational needs in their respective communities.
- h. Design appropriate programs for learners with special educational needs in their respective communities.
- i. Ensuring that provisions for ordinary, extra and co-curricular programs are tailored to the needs of the learners' special educational needs in their respective communities.
- j. Link the institution to the community, government and other local and international partners in matters-related to special educational needs in their respective communities.
- k. In all matters that concern special needs & inclusive education services, educational and training institutions are expected to be centers of service delivery.

5.3 Rwanda Education Board (REB) & Workforce Development Authority (WDA)

Like all other implementing organs of the Ministry of Education at varying levels, the contributions of both REB and WDA is imperative for the successful development and delivery of special needs & inclusive education services. The departments concerned will be reinforced to ensure the development and achievements of the following services:

5.3.1 Curriculum and pedagogical Material Development

The departments concerned will ensure that:

- a. The special needs & inclusive education curriculum for schools is developed, standardized and reviewed on a regulated schedule.
- b. Both special and Inclusive or Child-Friendly schools are enabled to benefit from standard flexible curriculum and related provisions for learners with special educational needs.
- c. Self-Help and Vocational skills are incorporated into the school curriculums for some of learners with SEN who may require it.
- d. Special provisions are put in place to enable learners with special educational needs to access the full range of the curriculum.
- e. Schools and educational institutions are appropriately equipped with standardized resource room provisions and related services.

5.3.2 Examination and Accreditation

The departments concerned will ensure that:

- a. Appropriate and sufficient provisions are made to the departments in charge of examinations and accreditation, to enhance their capacities to assess achievements of learners with special educational needs at different levels of schooling.
- b. Assessment standards and regulations are set to cater for trans-level progression of learners with special educational needs.
- c. Standardized special educational needs assessment tools, regulations and guidelines are developed for schools to ensure standardized progression, recording and subsequent support of learners with special educational needs.

5.3.3. Teacher Development and Management

The departments concerned will ensure that:

- a. Development of special needs & inclusive education–related skills are developed through refresher programs and provisions for educators at various levels of service.
- b. Educational institution-based service provisions are adjusted to facilitate and accommodate multidisciplinary support services such as itinerant teachers, school resource room staff, Sign-language interpreters, school-based rehabilitation services, and others.

5.3.4. ICT in Education

ICT is valued for its capacity to facilitate a range of learners with special educational needs. Hence, through the following programs, the departments concerned will:

- a. Provide the different adapted software and hardware to schools to facilitate, and ensure that they enhance quality in special needs & inclusive education services.
- b. Promote special needs & inclusive education training, and ensure that it is accessible to learners and trainees with various SEN, through appropriate provisions and facilitations.

In all matters that concern special needs & inclusive education service delivery, REB and WDA organs are expected to guide the implementation process, and ensure quality of service and resource provisions.

5.4 Higher Learning Institutions

The need for enhanced involvement of Higher Learning Institutions (HLI) and related training and research centers is quite crucial in the development of special needs & inclusive education services. It is expected that they make substantial contributions in relation to:

- a. Training of relevantly skilled personnel through specialized institutions, including medical practitioners and rehabilitation workers; social workers; specialized educators; technicians, and others.
- b. Ensuring the development of training programs for skills related to special needs & inclusive education that are unavailable in Rwanda. e.g. Speech therapists, Occupational therapists, Sign Language interpreters, related ICT specialists, and others.
- c. Research and consultancy in issues related to special needs & inclusive education services and resources.

- d. Ensuring equal access and participation to facilities by both staff and students with special educational needs.
- e. Higher Learning Institutions are expected to provide expert support to special needs & inclusive education services, in all matters that concern skills development, research and consultancy.

The department concerned with Higher Education Students' Loans will ensure that:

- a. Criteria are set to guide the identification and selection of learners with special educational needs, qualifying for government sponsorships in tertiary education, basing on the special educational needs assessment records among other things.
- b. Criteria for affirmative action for learners with special educational needs are set, based on special educational needs assessment records and socio-economic status among other things.
- c. Guidelines are set to guide support services and provisions for specific groups of learners in higher educational institutions. These may include Sign Language interpretation services, adapted software, and others.

5.5 The special needs & inclusive education Technical Working Group (SN&IE TWG)

As underlined by ESSP 2018/19 -2023/24 providing education to learners with special educational needs is an important pillar for promoting social inclusion within Rwanda and for achieving the national educational goals of equitable access to basic education for all. It is thus suggested that support and operationalization of a cross-sectorial *SN&IE TWG* constituting of special education needs experts, representatives of DPs, Civil society organization, and community initiative representatives, to advise, support and link the Ministry of Education plans and the community-based initiatives and organizations. It does not interfere with the functions of the existing structures; rather it functions in close collaboration with these as well as the community level and technical working group, to spearhead the effective implementation of special needs & inclusive education strategies.

5.6 Ministries and Public Organs

Government ministries, public and civil society organs, all have important roles in guaranteeing and supporting the education of learners with special educational needs. Special needs & inclusive education policy defines some of their responsibilities in supporting the education sector to implement the special needs & inclusive education services:

5.6.1 Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education through its implementing organs and institutions will be responsible for:

- a. Guiding and steering the stakeholders in the implementation of the special needs & inclusive education policy, ensuring quality services, and alignment with the government regulations and standards.
- b. Organizing, coordinating and promoting advocacy campaigns in relation to special needs & inclusive education
- c. Setting and reviewing regulations and standards of provisions to special needs & inclusive education services.
- d. Providing technical guidance in all matters pertaining to special needs & inclusive education policy implementation.
- e. Developing and providing appropriate special instructional materials and services.

- f. Conducting regular updates on best practices for managing/implementing special needs & inclusive education
- g. Upgrading of equipment and materials to meet the appropriate standards required in education of learners with special educational needs.
- h. Licensing, regulating, registering and monitoring all special needs & inclusive education programs and service providers at all levels.
- i. Ensuring appropriate allocation of budget and timely support to special needs & inclusive education programs, including in-service training for special needs & inclusive education personnel.
- j. Ensuring adequate recruitment and deployment of appropriately skilled personnel in all special needs & inclusive education services in accordance to the guidelines of the Ministries responsible, and providing adequate infrastructure/ facilities and administrative structures.
- k. Ensuring that affirmative action for learners with special educational needs is implemented fairly in all education institutions in accordance to the set rules and regulations. Through its departments in charge of quality education assurance, the Ministry of Education will adjust the existing standards for ordinary education quality evaluation, to integrate special needs & inclusive education service requirements. This will entail among others, putting in place guidelines to ensure:
- l. Accessibility of infrastructure and of the general school programs to suit the needs of learners with special educational needs.
- m. Standards are set and monitoring and evaluation guidelines are in place to ensure quality services in all categories of special needs & inclusive educational settings (special schools, inclusive and CFS).
- n. Appropriateness and adequacy of educational resource provisions.
- o. Appropriateness adjustment, differentiation and accessibility of curriculum, made to suit the educational needs of learners with special educational needs
- p. Organization of resource rooms, and appropriateness of support services and programs in schools.
- q. Appropriateness of teachers' and related personnel's practices and approaches.

5.6.2 Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning

- a. Ensure that the budget allocation for special needs & inclusive education programs is adequate and regular depending on what is available.
- b. Ensure that the budgeting and planning for the education sector are inclusive of special needs & inclusive education

5.6.3 Ministry of Public Service and Labour

Through its specialized organs, will ensure that the personnel implementing special needs & inclusive education services are part of the public service and are appropriately facilitated.

5.6.4 Ministry of Local Government

Through its specialized organs, the Ministry in charge of local government will be responsible for:

- a. Interpreting the special needs & inclusive education policy to local authorities, NGOs and related civil society stakeholders.
- b. Carry out advocacy and resource mobilization in relation to special needs & inclusive education program at community levels.

- c. Ensuring that special needs & inclusive education services are also facilitated through community – based programs such as ‘*Umuganda*’, ‘*Ubudehe*’, ‘*social protection units*’, and others.
- d. Maintaining up to date records of all institutions implementing and contributing to special needs & inclusive education programs.
- e. Providing support to district offices in matters related to special needs & inclusive education services and ensuring that basic requirements and minimum standards are adhered to.
- f. Including special needs & inclusive education programs in its development work plans.
- g. Monitoring and evaluation of all centres that cater for children and youths with special educational needs, and sharing reports on the services provided with all line ministries on a regular basis.

5.6.5. Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion

Through its specialized organs, the Ministry in charge of gender and family promotion will:

- a. Run advocacy programs to promote equity in accessing basic services by all children and youths irrespective of gender, disabilities and related Special Educational Needs.
- b. Engage communities in issues regarding development activities / programs for children and youths with Special Educational Needs.
- c. Incorporating special educational needs, – related issues in its activity plans.

5.6.6. Ministry of Health

Through its specialized organs, the Ministry in charge of Health will:

- a. Provide personnel for SEN Diagnostic assessment and referral services.
- b. Provide medical treatment and support services to learners with SEN.
- c. Provide and fit some of the assistive devices for learners with SEN.
- d. Provide and support therapeutic and rehabilitation programs in schools, training centres and communities.
- e. Provide and support Guidance and Counselling services in schools, training centres and communities.
- f. Support and provide for community-based rehabilitation (CBR).
- g. Provide and disseminate guidelines for standardized categorization of People with disabilities and related functional difficulties.

5.6.8 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and East African Community will:

- a. Oversee the activities of international NGOs providing SN & IE–related services, through aligned specialized organs.
- b. Facilitate in collaboration with the Ministry in charge of Education, the integration of public organs that have SNE and IE programs into the East African Linkage in SNE, IE and Rehabilitation.
- c. Facilitate in collaboration with the Ministry in charge of Education, the harmonization of SN and IE programs in the East African sub-region

5.6.9 Ministry of Justice

Through its specialized organs, will:

- a. Ensure the legal protection and social support to children and youths with SEN.

- b. Sensitize and facilitate the National Police force, including provision of legal and security support to children and youths with SEN in schools and larger community.

5.6.10 Ministry of Infrastructure

Through its specialized organs, will ensure that the infrastructures in place and the geographical environment are accessible for learners with disabilities and related SEN.

Through its specialized organs, ensure that public transport, roads and pathways, are accessible and considerate of the various needs of all categories of PwD and related SEN.

5.6.11 Ministry of sports & culture

Through its specialized organs, ensure that cultural activities for the public and for schools:

- a. Are inclusive of all categories of learners with SEN, and considerate of the necessary adaptations and assistive devices, to ensure their participation.
- b. Promotes a culture of inclusiveness and respect for all, including 'Deaf Culture'.

Through its specialized originations and sports federations, ensure that sports and games activities are inclusive, and beneficial to all categories of PwD and related SEN.

5.7 National Commission for Children (NCC)

Being responsible for the promotion of children's rights, NCC will, in collaboration with the Ministry of education, and through its offices responsible for disability and education:

- a. Provide for monitoring and evaluation of services related to rights of children with SEN.
- b. Advocacy for needs, support, and provisions in relation to the rights of children with SEN.
- c. Coordinate all activities related to rights of children with SEN.
- d. Provide counsel in all activities related to rights of learners with SEN.

5.8 National Council for People with Disabilities (NCPD)

Being responsible for the promotion of rights of people with disabilities, NCPD will, in collaboration with the Ministry of education, and through its responsible offices:

- a. Follow up of services related to rights of learners with disabilities.
- b. Advocate for needs, support, and provisions in relation to the rights of learners with disabilities.
- c. Provide counsel in all activities related to rights of learners with disabilities.

5.9 Civil society organizations

Since education and related services for learners with SEN continue to be delivered with the support and in close partnerships with both local and international Organizations, ranging from family and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), Disabled-People's Organizations (DPOs), to Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) and agencies, it is envisaged that the partnership and contribution of the civil society services will be organized to promote:

- a. A productive partnership with the Ministry of Education and related public organs, in supporting SNE & IE services.
- b. A coordinated and visionary contribution to SNE & IE services that enhance sustainability and quality.

5.10. Regional and international collaborations in SN & IE

5.10.1. The EA Linkage in SNE, IE and Rehabilitation

The East African Linkage (EAL) in Special Needs Education, Inclusive Education and Rehabilitation is a regional consortium that brings together related resources, programs and initiatives of the East African sub-region. It is envisioned that related offices within the Ministry of Education, REB and UR will be enabled to participate and benefit from the regional organization. The strategies will include:

- a.** Signing the MoU and the Strategic Plan of the EAL by the Ministry of Education and UR.
- b.** Organizing, participating and budgeting for the annual EAL activities and programs by the Ministry of Education, REB and UR.

5.10.2. International exchange in SN and IE

It is envisioned that related offices within the Ministry of Education, REB and UR will be enabled and encouraged to actively participate in international forums and exchanges in relation to SNE & IE activities.

6. STRATEGIES & COMMITMENTS

6.1. Home and Community-based programs

The present policy does recognize that some learners will require support services at home and in their communities, that include health, rehabilitation and therapeutic services. It is thus committed to promoting home and/or community-based service provisions that are beneficial to learners with SEN's schooling and development.

6.2. Inclusive Education and Child-friendly provisions

The present policy is based on the principle that all learners with SEN are above all human beings and citizens of Rwanda, entitled to equal access and support in the neighborhood schools, where they are accorded opportunity to participate optimally in schooling as their siblings and peers as a matter of right and/or entitlement. The present policy is thus committed to putting in place optimum conditions and facilities to accommodate all learners with SEN in their neighborhood schools. It however, recognizes that some special learning needs may require specific settings and resources; in which case, guidance will be sought from SN & IE experts to ensure availability of appropriately adapted provisions. The decision that may entail shifting to another educational setting will be the choice of the parents, guardians, and/or the learner, whose consents will be documented wherever necessary.

6.3 Early Assessment, placement and intervention

To ensure optimum development of learners with SEN and effective benefits from SEN & IE service provisions, early and accurate identification and assessment of learners with SEN shall be carried out to determine service provisions, or/and correct and effective interventions in special needs & inclusive education. The present policy is committed to '*Functional Assessment*', which will be conducted for educational purposes and related services at earliest possible stages of entry into schooling, by qualified experts, and periodically during the schooling time. It does not however, preclude other forms (continuous & competency-based) of assessment. The assessment records will be used in all ultimate schooling intervention services for the learners with SEN.

6.4 Licensing and accreditation of SN & IE institutions

Private and public educational institutions that opt or/and which are established to provide SN & IE services, shall be licensed and accredited by Rwanda Education Board / Workforce Development Authority in consultation with the Ministry of Education

6.5 Media of Communication

The persons with hearing difficulties, visual difficulties, and people who are Deaf-Blind do have unique communication media (Signs language, Braille, and Tactile Signing). The present policy is committed to the provision of appropriate media for such learners where possible, and shall be standardized for teaching/learning purposes.

6.6. Professional Development Programs

Training programs will be designed to meet the wide range of skills required in education and related SN & IE services. Specialized SN & IE teachers, Sign language interpreters, Mobility and Orientation instructors, Rehabilitation workers, social workers, therapists and a range of others, shall be recognized as resources critically required in schools and communities by learners with SEN. Training programs shall continue to be delivered through in-service and Pre-service modalities, and the University of Rwanda (UR) shall be supported to design and deliver SN & IE training programs for all levels and ranges of related professional development.

6.7 Partnerships

SN & IE service provisions entail widely encompassing aspects, and call for a range of specialized resources. Because of the complexity of the discipline and methodologies involved, it will be important to promote, coordinate and guide partnerships of stakeholders (local and International). The Ministry of Education will remain the lead coordinator, and will guide partnership with all stakeholders at all levels and aspects of SN & IE services.

6.8 Curriculum adaptation

Accessing curriculum by all learners is core to the mission of the education sector. However, there is need to ensure that all the learning materials are friendly and adapted to individual learners with SEN. The responsible offices within the Rwanda Education Board (REB) and Workforce Development Authority (WDA) will be responsible for guiding the adaptation of the curriculum (including extra and co-curricular) at basic and secondary schooling levels, including Early Childhood Development (ECD) /Nursery school level.

6.9 Supporting SN&IE Programs

The Ministry of Education shall ensure that through partnership with public and civil society stakeholders, all the support services (Health care, habilitation & rehabilitation, tuition/fees, instructional material provisions and related services) are met. The respective organs (educational institutions, relevant ministries and public organizations) shall allocate appropriate resources to SN&IE services, in accordance with the prevailing national regulations and policies.

6.10 Policy Positioning

The services for learners with SEN cuts across the education sector programs and levels (Gender, ICT, Basic and tertiary, etc), and it interfaces with all relevant Ministries' services that impact on the needs of learners concerned. The present policy shall thus be implemented in interplay with all organs and departments in the education sector, and in close collaboration with relevant Ministries and stakeholders.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Education in collaboration with key stakeholders will review the SN and inclusive education policy every (5) years to ensure that the policy remains relevant to changing national and international environments. Reviews shall incorporate emerging issues and trends, both local and global that impact on special needs and inclusive education services. Specific policy provisions may be reviewed from time to time in circumstance where there is a major legal and policy shift that requires

government ratification and inclusion in the national legal framework. Review of part of or whole Special needs education and inclusive education policy shall remain the entitlement of the Government of Rwanda through the Ministry of Education

It is maintained by the Government of Rwanda that education for children with disabilities and other SEN is a priority that has direct bearing to the country's development. For that reason, education of learners with SEN is a crucial component of the national education for all programs that has drawn the attention of the Ministry of Education. The present policy therefore, offers direction to all the education services, in the continued efforts of the Ministry to find and foster far reaching solutions to a range of challenges and limitations to SN & IE. It considers among others, practical-oriented as well as indigenous and school-community-based approaches, capable of generating sustainable outcomes that can impact positively on the wider education system of Rwanda. The policy envisions education services for children and youths with disabilities and other SEN that are fully integrated in the mainstream education system, and is complementary to the national education for all plans. It deliberately targets marginalized groups of learners, as a means of raising their standards of living and enabling their socio-economic participation. It is designed to equalize opportunities, and is an instrument to render the education sector policy operational for the national development vision. In essence, the education sector is positioned as a precursor to national economic development and poverty reduction strategies, in which all Rwandans are expected to be transformed into skilled contributors to development, indiscriminate of their background, abilities and disabilities.