Overview of the innovation
This project developed and tested a set of national standards for the education of children with disabilities and other special educational needs (SEN) to provide a framework for quality inclusive education. In the long term, it was hoped that the common set of standards would enable better retention rates, improve learning outcomes and improve post-primary transition for children with SEN. At the local level, parents, learners, teachers and head teachers were involved in 24 schools across the districts of Kamonyi and Rubavu. A broad package of support was provided in these 24 schools, including (i) support to schools to create a supportive physical school environment for children with disabilities, (ii) community outreach work to make sure children with disabilities go to school, (iii) development and monitoring of individual learning plans for children with SEN, (iv) support to teachers to address individual learning needs of children with SEN in mainstream classrooms, (v) assist parents to support the education of their children and to engage in education friendly income generating activities to help cover the additional expenses for the school, (vi) provide other support and tools to children with SEN.

The HI project reached 37,391 primary students and 642 teachers and 362 parents were trained through the project.

Total budget was GBP 578,691.

Grant Recipient:
The project was led by Handicap International, an International NGO, in collaboration with Voluntary Service Overseas, another INGO.

Contact:
Vincent Murenzi: cdp-eikr@hi-rwanda.org
Gallican Mugabonake: coordo-dii@hi-rwanda.org

What makes it innovative?
This approach had been widely implemented by Handicap International in 17 countries across Sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia and South-East Asia. However the approach for developing and introducing national standards for inclusive education was new to the Rwandan context. The national standards were combined with support for the application of these standards in a number of pilot Districts.

Relevance to education priorities:
Main Theme: Inclusive education
Special needs education is a cross-cutting priority for the education system (ESSP 2013-18).

Project Learning(activity/output to outcomes level)
- Teachers who teach in pilot classrooms clearly try to apply the skills they acquired during their training and try to address the learning needs of children with SEN in various ways. Working with individual learning plans provides a strong element in dealing with the individual learning needs of the students.
- Parents and stakeholders from the wider community are very much involved in the programme, and have a real focus on improving the learning experience of their children.
- The schools participating in the pilot support the inclusion of children with SEN in their schools with great commitment and enthusiasm, even if the intervention clearly resulted in a disproportionally high number of children with special needs enrolled in the schools. This is a very positive outcome but it raises some questions about whether the pilot schools can maintain this absorption capacity, and whether this may be to the disadvantage of the
students without special learning needs.

- In fact, the project at the school level has the potential to go beyond children with disabilities only, as the methods are focused on helping teachers to deal with individual learning needs of their pupils, which is relevant for all children in a school.
- The project worked well with REB during the pilot, with a need now for HI’s role to evolve from implementer to capacity builder of GoR institutions. HI must develop a vision around this.
- The support package at the school level is broad in scope and intense in terms of external support needs. The question is how this can be delivered without NGO implementation and budgets.
- The development of the norms and standards at central level appears to be disconnected from the resource intense support package at the school level, and there would be benefit in the school-based work being presented more clearly as the logical result of the central-level work.

**Project outcomes and reflection on monitoring and evaluation**

The evaluation design is descriptive with baseline and end-line, with a questionnaire being used for teachers and head teachers and unknown data sources for enrolment, promotion retention and repetition of children with disabilities and SEN children. Focus Group Discussions were used to evaluate parent and pupil understanding of inclusive education. Through questionnaires, interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, it emerged that parents, teachers and REB inspectors were in support of the new standards. 85% of teachers and all REB inspectors stated that the standards were both accurate and applicable. Interaction with REB was important for securing this support. All teachers stated that they felt supported by headteachers in applying the standards in their teaching. They also report improvements in their practices. Community engagement was mainly responsible for the large increase in the number of children enrolled in the 24 schools with 1,296 children enrolled by the end of the project (380 at baseline). This is a poorly designed evaluation with instruments that have no demonstrated validity and reliability, and with data reported in an unclear fashion. This undermines the claims of the report.
**Conditions for success**

There was very little written about the processes of innovation encountered by this project making it difficult to assess the conditions for success. However, it seems that the successful implementation of this project relied upon the involvement of stakeholders at all levels, from the national, district, school to the family. In developing the national standards, there was significant advocacy work needed across these levels for defining and shaping the tools. Building a meaningful conversation between the different levels is difficult and relied on substantial input from the project team. The ability of REB to take on this connector role will be a scale up issue.

**Scale up and sustainability considerations**

The model that has been implemented by HI in the pilot context has been adapted for scale-up by reducing the intensity of the package and adjusting the roles of the many actors. If the next stage will be ‘project-based’, the model can indeed be implemented in other geographical locations. However there are still concerns, mainly about:

The unclarity about what the scale up model entails exactly. The documents set out four scale-up pillars (i) institutionalisation, (ii) capacity development, (iii) application of Standards, Tools, Roles and Norms (STRN) and (iv) class supervision, but these are not consistently used throughout the analysis, which makes it difficult to gather what exactly is planned to be scaled up (i.e. what the model is). It is also not clear how the four pillars will be linked together. This lack of conceptual clarity will need to be further addressed. One suggestion to simplify the approach to scaling up could be to look at the initial pilot structure of (i) STRNs and their formal adoption within the system and (ii) the actual delivery at decentralised levels, being presented as the actual application of STRNs, within the selected locations.

There still appears to be a wide range of activities that need external support, at relatively high cost. There is a need for more reflection on what is feasible in the short run, as well as on a long term sustainable basis.
A strategy on how to increase systems involvement over time will be useful. In terms of future institutionalisation within government, the innovation builds on excellent cooperation with the GoR and shows a commitment for GoR actors to be involved and for HI to take a different role. This focus on the system and actors from the system is good. A process view is required in terms of achieving the required system readiness and systems strengthening.

The difference between reaching all Districts over a certain time period and the longer term sustainability beyond the scale up phase needs further analysis to determine what the GoR will need to sustain after having ensured the required reach. This vision for long-term sustainability should inform the immediate next steps.

Finally, given the ongoing discussions between HI and UNICEF Rwanda there are real opportunities for this innovation to be scaled up, or at least to move to the next stage of piloting an adjusted implementation model in an increased number of geographical areas, based on the learning from the IFE pilot.

**Cost Considerations**

It is good that the economic analysis indicates that the model is lighter than the pilot model and referenced to the numbers of beneficiaries to be reached. However, (i) it still requires major resources and (ii) the analysis is not linked to anticipated outcomes. It needs to be clear whether there is any expectation of ‘diluted impact’ due to a changed model.

At the moment the HI economic analysis reads too much as a project budget with some indications of efficiency and effectiveness. More in-depth analysis of unit costs per school/teacher/student is required. It also seems expensive at more than GBP 800,000 for the first year and GBP 1,800,000 for 3 years.

There is need to reflect on the implications for the Government, if scale up should take place with increased levels of GoR ownership: what will be the costs to the system and what are the implications for anticipated budgetary decisions to be made by MINEDUC/REB?

**Immediate Next Steps**

- Ensure the full adoption of the – possibly adjusted - norms and standards by REB and make sure that field-based activities effectively implement these national standards.
- Continue the discussions with UNICEF about scaling up the IFE pilot through an adjusted package based on the learning from IFE. Specific attention should be given to: (i) MINEDUC/REB ownership and the implications for the role of HI, (ii) budgetary issues, (iii) the scope of the model as far as school-based activities are concerned and (iv) the capacity and budget of the government to sustain such an intense support package in the long run (need for prioritisation).
- Implement the new project with UNICEF support and with full ownership of the GoR.

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