

# EDUCATION NGO PLATFORM SETS SELF COORDINATION EXAMPLE IN RWANDA

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<b>Sector: Education</b>

## CHALLENGE

The Government of Rwanda from time to time organises consultative meetings with the education sector partners. However, on account of the sheer numbers of the NGOs in the country, it has not been possible to involve all of them in these consultations. Over many previous years, very few NGOs participated in anyone consultation process. Furthermore, the participating NGOs had no mechanism for sharing the outcome of such consultations with the other NGOs, thereby leaving the vast majority of them in the dark with respect to government policy, strategies and priorities. The Rwanda Education NGOs Coordination Platform (RENCNP) was initiated by SNV and is seen as a solution to this problem. It seeks to become a point for coordinated efforts and for sharing information on education sector developments as well as to formalise NGO representation in education sector taskforces, workgroups and consultation forums involving the Rwandan government represented by the Ministry of Education (Mineduc), donors and other stakeholders.

## CLIENTS

SNV operates under a partnership Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Mineduc. The Mineduc is the government wing responsible for education provision in the country. Although education is decentralised and implemented through district local authorities in Rwanda, the Mineduc retains the overall responsibility for sector development including policy, strategy and implementation. There are a few departments existing at the ministry headquarters, including the planning, statistics. Also at the national level, the Mineduc has established semi autonomous agencies to oversee specialised components of the sector. These include the Rwanda National Examinations Council, (RNEC) Students Financing Agency (SFAR), the General Inspectorate of Education (GIE), the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) and the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC). Recent reforms have created the Rwanda Education Board under which all these semi autonomous bodies will operate. The ministry takes overall responsibility for sector coordination and resource mobilisation. For this purpose, the ministry convenes regular consultations with all the active major cooperating partners in the sector. There are a few major sector donors including DfID, UNICEF, World Bank, GTZ, BTC and USAID and many others who take a whispering donor role. In addition, there are many International NGOs supporting the sector in one or more ways.

*"We have been having problems with small NGOs wishing to be registered for tax purposes in Rwanda. With the creation of the RENCP, we foresee a situation where NGOs would get all the necessary information about registration formalities before coming to the Ministry. It is the Mineduc wish that the RENCP will hold supportive information for new NGOs to use in their formalisation purposes", remarked the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Education, Ms Sharon Haba at the launch of the Platform*

The SNV assignment was aimed at establishing a mechanism for the NGOs to effectively participate in policy and strategy formulation through a representative process. Thus far, only FAWE, SNV, Concern World Wide and VSO have been involved in formal sector discussions while the rest of the International and local NGOs remained in the background.

## METHOD / SNV INTERVENTION

Starting in May 2009, SNV entered in discussions with DfID and Unicef to try to secure a larger representation of NGOs in the Education Development Partners' (EDP) meetings. The EDP is the forum bringing together the major donors to the sector. It is being hosted by the lead education donor in Rwanda, DfID and co lead, UNICEF and incorporates a few International NGOs in its meetings. During

the discussions, it became clear that the EDP did not envisage any inclusion of additional NGOs in the group as the NGOs would swamp the EDP meetings. Further, there was a general belief that the NGOs pursued individual (and basic) agendas which may not be reconcilable with the strategic level focus of the EDP members.

NGOs are especially well placed to support national development strategies. Most of them have presence at the national level. Their actual work, however, is at various levels with some active at more than one level while others are at either school, *Umurenge* or district level. The NGO operations are also different and include school construction, teacher support, education provision, community mobilization and advisory services provision to mention but a few. This makes the NGOs particularly useful in monitoring education performance at all levels. By being able to share experiences with government and other cooperating partners, NGOs become a key asset to education policy development and performance monitoring.

Given this diversity and the limited opportunities for engagement with government, it became obvious that the best way to secure effective NGO involvement in the sector would be to organise them into a coordinated body that strategises together. SNV endeavoured to pursue this line of thought by developing the Platform concept into reality. The Education lead advisor developed a concept paper that was shared with the EDP members over the subsequent meetings. The concept paper outlined the reasons for a self coordination mechanism for NGOs among which were the following:

- There are many NGOs supporting education in Rwanda but most are working in isolation;
- The Mineduc wants better coordination for all actors, including NGOs and has set up 6 clusters in 2008 – with MINEDUC focal points;
- There are regular consultations taking place mainly between MINEDUC and major donors, also between donors but only a few NGO's participate.
- There have been created a number of donor co-ordination mechanisms at which NGOs should be represented: among these are: The Education Donor Group (EDG), Education sector cluster group (ESCG), and the Education sector working group (ESWG);
- There are a number of forums at which NGOs can effectively contribute as a group with a common voice as for example: Joint Review of Education Sector (JRES) meetings and taskforce, workgroups on various themes such as quality in education, girls' education, EMIS, 9YBE, higher education, TVET and others.
- Ground realities as experienced by NGO's are an important element of information for government, contributing to policy formulation and strategy.

SNV convened several meetings with other international and umbrella NGOs to share national level policy information and at the same time sell the concept of a coordination platform. The coordination idea eventually took root and many NGOs agreed to establish the platform. Starting with 3 NGOs that attended the initial meeting in June 2009, there were 15 by the end of 2009 and 19<sup>1</sup> in June 2010. Terms of reference for the operation of the platform were developed and adopted in December. They set the mode of operation, including membership criteria for the platform. In addition, the members have developed a work plan of activities to undertake together in the first year. SNV, which has been facilitating all these developments, was overwhelmingly chosen to lead the platform in the first year, with a possibility to hand over the lead position after one year.

RENCP's mandate is to serve as a body for NGO representation, information sharing and coordination. The 2010 RENCP work plan reflects this mandate as it includes, lesson-sharing field visits to member operating areas, an annual national level NGO workshop along a selected theme, and capacity building of local

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<sup>1</sup> Action Aid International, ADRA Rwanda, Aegis Trust, Care International, Catholic Relief Services, Concern Worldwide, FAWE Rwanda, Imbutu Foundation, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), International Education Exchange, Millennium Villages, PLAN Rwanda, Right to Play, Save the Children, SNV, VSO, Wellspring Foundation for Education, Winrock International/REACH, World Vision International

education NGOs to ensure sustainability, among other activities. Each of the major work plan activities has a sub committee made of volunteer members overseeing its implementation while SNV facilitates the functioning of these sub committee. Therefore no single organisation is over burdened as responsibility is shared.

Within the framework of representation in the platform, SNV is the international NGO representative in consultations with the Mineduc, EDP and the Joint Reviews of the education sector (JRES). VSO represents RENCPC in the Quality Education Implementation Working group, while other representation arrangements will be determined as needed. So far, government has provided space for the RENCPC representatives to participate effectively in government organized forums. At the JRES of September 2009, the RENCPC members made two presentations; one on 'community mobilization in education' and the other on 'a reflection from field trips on the implementation the 9 year basic education reforms'. During the April 2010 JRES, the RENCPC chairperson co chaired the discussion on the 'Girls education and budgeting' topic. These opportunities have enabled the RENCPC to influence decisions on governance and accountability measures within the sector.

## OUTCOME

The foreseen benefits of better NGO coordination include:

- Having one NGO contact point for MINEDUC (i.e the Forum)
- Creation of a stronger contribution to the sector by NGOs – Stronger voice
- Good publicity for NGO work including during Joint reviews in Education Sector
- Reduction of duplication of effort through increased joint planning and division of labour
- Platform for sharing important analysis of budget and policies with government and donors
- NGO M&E and reviews will effectively inform policy about the realities on the ground.
- Potential for attracting operational funding from other agencies
- High level support was secured from the Country Directors of chief executive officers (CEO) of the NGOs as a result of the rotating meeting hosting approach. The CEOs made organisational presentations to the visiting members and in all cases assured their support for the platform. So far, SNV, VSO, PLAN Rwanda, Wellspring Foundation and the Millennium Villages have successfully hosted the RENCPC meetings in 2010.
- Members have established partnerships along specific themes. PLAN Rwanda channelled funding through FAWE after it became clear that FAWE were planning a research along similar lines. VSO shared completed research studies on gender based violence that PLAN Rwanda used in its 'because I am a Girl campaign', shelving plans to undertake their own research.
- NGO country directors and CEOs are now on routine speaking terms, having met at the launch of the RENCPC in June 2010.
- The visibility of NGOs in policy formulation has increased. NGO representation is now formally sought in the JRES, cluster meetings, ESSP appraisal and others. SNV has been on many occasions given responsibility for chairing some sessions of policy meetings, such as the JRES, Teacher development summit and the ESSP appraisal, enabling great potential for agenda setting. Through the RENCPC, the representation of NGOs in major sector policy events has increased by an average of two members.

The participation in the RENCPC has become a much anticipated occasion by many members. The work plan agreed by the NGOs to strengthen cooperation amongst the members included visitations to each other's operational areas to exchange experiences and to widely publicise member activities so as to reduce misunderstanding. There was a fear by some that the work plan may not be fully accomplished as they did not have budgetary provisions for the activities. To alleviate this, SNV prepared funding proposals and submitted to cooperating partners, with the result that Unicef agreed to finance the work plan to the tune of US\$ 87,120. In addition, members volunteered to undertake some aspects of the work plan using their own resources. For instance, the Wellspring Foundation for Education has taken up the challenge to host and facilitate the platform website

## IMPACT

(RENC.org) which is currently under development and will host member pages with links to all the members' individual websites.

The setting up of the RENC was an example of collaboration across many actors. The team work amongst the SNV education advisors helped in ensuring that the facilitation process was focused. All advisors profiled the RENC highly, and participated actively in its meetings and organisation, including taking minutes and following up on agreements. The SNV advisors were persistent in ensuring that all NGOs had the opportunity to participate, by sending invitations to meetings well in advance and following up with phone calls and personal reminders when ever possible. Minutes of previous meetings were quickly prepared and circulated to all members, including those who had not yet started participating. Furthermore, following up on agreements was seriously pursued to ensure that all the pledges were fully met by the members. SNV participated in several Mineduc consultations and ensured that briefing notes were circulated to all the members in a timely manner. In short, all members now feel that they know what is happening in the sector unlike before the RENC's creation. Some members had never seen the education policy, or Education Sector Strategic Plan, let alone the Fast Track Initiative process for Rwanda, but with the RENC, these became regular issues for updates.

The involvement of the Mineduc at the onset provided a conducive environment for progress. The former Permanent Secretary and director of planning bought into the idea, although they had a feeling that this would be a way of resuscitating the defunct clusters established earlier in 2008 by the Mineduc. The Mineduc support has continued although management has changed and in May 2010, a senior official was appointed as the liaison person for the Platform. Labelled 'NGO contact focal point', his role is to provide another channel over and above formal processes, for NGOs to interact with Mineduc management and various departments. At the May 2010 meeting of the Education Development cluster group, the Permanent Secretary declared that the update by SNV on the developments in the education sector should become a permanent agenda item. She emphasised the same at the ceremony marking the launch of the platform on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2010.

Another facilitative process was the Education Development Partners who embraced the idea of a coordinating mechanism from the beginning and ensured that SNV gave a status update at every EDP meeting. They helped to include SNV updates about the RENC formation on the consultation agendas with the Mineduc and appreciated the results.

Finally, the participation of senior staff in RENC meetings assures the feasibility of decisions made. Around 40% of the participants to RENC activities are Country Directors of their organisations, while the rest are senior members who have decision making mandates on their education programmes.

Although it is too early to speak about impact, the following positions show promise and give cause for 'watching this space.'

- There is now the beginnings of a multi stakeholder style mechanism amongst NGOs in education, unlike in the past when NGOs missed valuable opportunities to sit down with government and other cooperating partners to determine policy and review progress. NGOs' involvement has now become routine in education policy discussions leading to policy profiling of NGO governance for empowerment agendas including voice and accountability and addressing the needs of vulnerable children.
- Government and other cooperating partners now have one consultation point for the international NGOs. They only have to contact the lead organisation, currently SNV, and all NGOs make a coordinated response. This joint action reduces duplication and brings in a higher level of efficiency and effectiveness with the consequential rationalisation of use of resources.

- The involvement of host Country Directors and management staff during the rotational meetings has increased the ownership for the platform. It is now easy to get information from the NGOs on their investments in the sector. The concept of self coordination is now being considered by other sectors, such as health and agriculture.
- Sharing the agenda for representation processes allows members who would otherwise not participate to share their ideas based on their experiences on the ground.
- It is important to agree on the Platform work plan before the end of the year to allow member organisations to budget for the activities they wish to be involved in. The strength of the platform will be enhanced when it raises its operational finances from the members.
- In the initial stages of the RENCP formation, some organisations tended to be represented by alternating personnel. This had the effect of hindering progression as new participants needed to be briefed on the concept and the 'modus operandi' thereby delaying progress. During such meetings, progress was usually slow and characterised by 'two steps forward, one step back' processes.

*"We welcome the RENCP plan to assess the needs of local NGOs and build their capacities. We would however also want to see an assessment of the practices and operations of the International NGOs, most of which are RENCP members, to see how relevant their operations are to our national education strategy."* **Dr. Charles Muligande, Honourable Minister of Education, at the Mini JRES, April 2010.**

*"NGO coordination has been a long time coming in the education sector, thanks to SNV and the other partners, it is now a reality,"* - **Richard Arden, the Senior Social Sector Adviser for DfID in Rwanda.**

*"In the past, only a few NGOs were able to participate in education reviews and other important consultative forums, and these few had no mandate to speak on behalf of the remaining NGOs. With the birth of the RENCP, we expect that the NGO representatives to the various forums will effectively represent the views of their platform members".* **Ms. Maniza Ntekim, Unicef Chief of Education, speaking at the closure of the mini JRES, April 2010**

*"This (coordination) is a good example to other sectors, where actors compete rather than complement each other. Combined with donors, NGOs are now major players in policy determination than before. They have already effectively contributed to the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) and other policy forums. Being at the operational level, NGOs have a major role to play in the decentralization process over the next few years and I therefore call upon government to embrace this initiative".* **Richard Arden, at launch of RENCP, June 2010**

*"We (Mineduc) are pleased to see that the NGOs, through SNV facilitation, have come up with this initiative for self coordination and we shall always maintain an open space for their contributions to policy development processes. We will expect the RENCP to facilitate the sharing of information from the grassroots to the policy level and vice versa".* **Sharon Haba, the Permanent Secretary of the Mineduc at RENCP launch, June 2010**

No. of PP days - 23 (up to May 2010)