



---

*Rapid Assessment Report on the Inclusivity in  
Education Dialogue Platforms in Rwanda- A  
case study of Nyarugenge, Gasabo, Kicukiro,  
Bugesera and Kamonyi Districts*

---

## Table of Contents:

| Section No. | Title                                                                                            | Page No. |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| —           | List of Abbreviations                                                                            | 3        |
| —           | Executive Summary                                                                                | 4        |
| <b>1</b>    | <b>Introduction and Contextual Background</b>                                                    | 5        |
| 1.1         | The Policy Landscape                                                                             | 5        |
| <b>2</b>    | <b>Problem Statement</b>                                                                         | 5        |
| 2.1         | Rationale and Significance                                                                       | 6        |
| <b>3</b>    | <b>Detailed Methodology</b>                                                                      | 6        |
| 3.1         | Stakeholder Mapping and Sampling                                                                 | 6        |
| 3.2         | Data Collection Tools and Analysis                                                               | 7        |
| 3.3         | Ethical Considerations                                                                           | 7        |
| <b>4</b>    | <b>Key Findings: Statistical Analysis and Qualitative Narratives</b>                             | 7        |
| 4.0         | Mapping of Education Dialogue Platforms and Inclusivity Assessment                               | 7        |
| 4.1         | Identified Education Dialogue Platforms                                                          | 7        |
|             | <b>National Level Dialogue Platforms</b>                                                         | 8        |
|             | <i>Formal Dialogue Platforms</i>                                                                 | 8        |
|             | <i>Informal Dialogue Platforms</i>                                                               | 8        |
|             | <b>Local Level Dialogue Platforms (District and Community)</b>                                   | 8        |
|             | <i>Formal Dialogue Platforms</i>                                                                 | 8        |
|             | <i>Informal Dialogue Platforms</i>                                                               | 9        |
| <b>4.2</b>  | <b>Inclusivity of Dialogue Platforms</b>                                                         | 9        |
| 4.2.1       | <i>Participation of Women, Youth, Children and PWDs</i>                                          | 9        |
| 4.2.2       | <i>Accessibility of Meeting Facilities</i>                                                       | 10       |
| <b>4.3</b>  | <b>Common Barriers to Inclusive Participation in Education Dialogue Platforms</b>                | 11       |
|             | Gender, Age and Disability Responsiveness                                                        | 13       |
| 5           | <b>Representation and Leadership Data to Specified Districts</b>                                 | 14       |
| 6           | <b>Comprehensive Analysis Overview</b>                                                           | 14       |
| 7           | <b>Graph 1: Demographic Representation vs. Leadership Roles by District</b>                      | 15       |
|             | <b>Accessibility and Infrastructure</b>                                                          | 18       |
| <b>8</b>    | <b>Graph 2: Top 3 Barriers to Participation (Comparative) : Aggregated from Rapid Assessment</b> | 18       |
|             | <i>Participant Responses</i>                                                                     | 18       |
|             | <b>Participation and Voice Gap</b>                                                               | 19       |
| <b>9</b>    | <b>Graph 3: Quality of Engagement Metrics (Urban vs. Rural Districts)</b>                        | 19       |
| <b>10</b>   | <b>Influence and Decision-Making</b>                                                             | 22       |
| 11          | Equity Measures and Systematic Support                                                           | 23       |
| 12          | Discussion of Policy Implications                                                                | 23       |
| 13          | Evidence-Based Recommendations from the Rapid Assessment                                         | 24       |
| 14          | Conclusion                                                                                       | 25       |

## List of Abbreviations

| <b>Abbreviation</b> | <b>Full Meaning</b>                         |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <b>CSOs</b>         | Civil Society Organizations                 |
| <b>DDEs</b>         | District Directors of Education             |
| <b>ESSP</b>         | Education Sector Strategic Plan             |
| <b>ESWG</b>         | Education Sector Working Group              |
| <b>FGDs</b>         | Focus Group Discussions                     |
| <b>KIIs</b>         | Key Informant Interviews                    |
| <b>MINEDUC</b>      | Ministry of Education                       |
| <b>OPDs</b>         | Organizations of Persons with Disabilities  |
| <b>PWDs</b>         | Persons with Disabilities                   |
| <b>RCSP</b>         | Rwanda Civil Society Platform               |
| <b>REB</b>          | Rwanda Basic Education Board                |
| <b>REFAC</b>        | Rwanda Education For All Coalition          |
| <b>RENCP</b>        | Rwanda Education NGOs Coordination Platform |
| <b>SDG</b>          | Sustainable Development Goals               |

## Executive Summary.

This rapid assessment report examines the inclusivity of education dialogue platforms in Rwanda, with a case study focus on **Nyarugenge, Gasabo, Kicukiro, Bugesera, and Kamonyi districts**. Conducted by the Rwanda Education For All Coalition (REFAC), the study responds to observed disparities in stakeholder engagement, aligning with the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2024–2029 and SDG 4 goals for equitable, high-quality education. Using a mixed-methods approach including surveys (n=375), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs, n=40), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs, n=8), and observations; the assessment mapped formal and informal platforms at national and local levels, revealing varying inclusivity.

### Key findings highlight systemic gaps:

- Women and youth attend platforms but exert limited influence, while persons with disabilities (PWDs) face consistently low participation due to mobility, invitation, and support barriers.
- Accessibility issues, such as inadequate venues and conflicting schedules, are most acute in rural districts like Bugesera and Kamonyi.
- Representation in leadership roles lags behind attendance (e.g., -26% gap for women), and a "voice gap" persists where marginalized ideas are acknowledged but not debated.
- Equity policies exist in 50% of platforms but are only 30% effective, with capacity-building reaching just 40% of vulnerable groups.
- Influence on decisions is low (35% for vulnerable inputs), though civil society-led sessions show higher responsiveness (50%).

The discussion underscores a democratic deficit, policy inefficiencies, and misalignment with ESSP priorities on resilience and gender equality. Recommendations include institutionalizing quotas, adopting hybrid models, accountability dashboards, expanded advocacy training, and monitoring frameworks to enhance equitable participation. Implementing these will transform platforms into inclusive engines for socio-economic reform, advancing Rwanda's SDG 4 commitments.

## **1. Introduction and Contextual Background**

### **1.1. The Policy Landscape**

Rwanda's education sector has undergone significant transformation since the post-genocide era, with a strong emphasis on access and equity. By 2025, the country boasts primary enrollment rates above 95%, supported by initiatives like the One Laptop per Child program and expanded teacher training. The Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2024–2029 serves as the guiding framework, articulating a vision of "providing the citizens of Rwanda with sustained and inclusive high-quality education for competencies, skills, and values required to drive rapid socio-economic transformation." This plan prioritizes five key areas: foundational learning, STEM education, teacher professional development, inclusive education, and system strengthening.

Central to this vision is the integration of inclusive practices, as evidenced by the ESSP's focus on reducing the gender divide and enhancing resilience in the education sector. Interventions include investing in education data systems for evidence-based policymaking, scaling up inclusive approaches, and strengthening school-community partnerships to address attendance and dropouts. These align closely with SDG 4, which Rwanda has committed to through its Voluntary National Reviews, reporting steady progress in indicators like completion rates and parity indices.

Education dialogue platforms, such as the ESWG, RENCP, and District Education Forums, are pivotal mechanisms for translating these policies into action. The ESWG, coordinated by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), facilitates multi-stakeholder collaboration, while RENCP and the Rwanda Civil Society Platform (RCSP) amplify civil society voices.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Despite the above elaborated advancements, anecdotal evidence from prior REFAC engagements and national dialogues indicates systemic gaps in inclusivity. Platforms often appear robust on paper but are dominated by "urban elites" and government officials, sidelining rural parents, youth, children and PWDs those most impacted by education policies. For example, the November 2024 First National Dialogue on Inclusive Education, hosted by the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) in collaboration with partners like the World Bank, highlighted The analysis highlighted that participation among youth, children, and persons with disabilities was notably low, with each group accounting for less than 10% of total participants. Kamonyi demonstrated strong potential through its community-driven engagement models; however, high student mobility and limited resource allocation constrain learners' ability to participate meaningfully in decision-making forums This assessment was undertaken in response to observed disparities and the Education Sector Strategic Plan's (ESSP) call for stronger stakeholder coordination. It aimed to generate grassroots evidence to inform reforms, particularly in contexts such as Kamonyi, where promising

community-driven engagement models are undermined by high student mobility and limited resource allocation, constraining learners' meaningful participation in decision-making forums.

## 2.1. Rationale and Significance

The significance of this study is grounded in Rwanda's longstanding commitment to promoting inclusivity in decision-making processes. This is exemplified by the country's exemplary global track record in championing gender equality and representation, particularly evident in its parliament where women hold approximately 61% of seats, the highest proportion worldwide as well as in district councils and other key platforms (e.g., Joint Action Development Forums). Inclusive dialogue platforms are therefore essential for gathering diverse perspectives, fostering democratic governance, and ensuring that policies reflect the needs of all citizens, thereby strengthening accountability and equity.

In this context, the Rwanda Education For All Coalition (REFAC) conducted an assessment of the inclusivity of existing education dialogue platforms in the project districts of Bugesera and Kamonyi, as well as at the national level. The assessment sought **to identify key challenges and propose actionable recommendations, contributing directly to REFAC's broader advocacy efforts.** This work aligns with Rwanda's national priorities for quality, inclusive basic education and supports ongoing civil society engagement in education policy and monitoring.

## 3. Detailed Methodology

To ensure high-fidelity data, the assessment employed a triangulation strategy, combining quantitative breadth with qualitative depth. This approach mitigated biases and provided a holistic view of inclusivity dynamics.

### 3.1. Stakeholder Mapping and Sampling

The study began with a comprehensive mapping of over 120 unique actors across the education ecosystem, categorizing them by demographic (e.g., gender, age, disability status) and influence level (e.g., national vs. local). This informed purposive sampling to ensure representation from underrepresented groups.

- **Surveys (n=375):** Distributed across five districts (75 per district), targeting CSOs (40%), government officials (30%), and community members (30%).
- **KIIs (n=40):** Expanded to include District Education Officers (DEOs) and District Directors of Education (DDEs) from Nyarugenge, Kicukiro, and Gasabo, alongside national MINEDUC officials.

- **FGDs (n=8):** Segmented into four categories per district Women Educators/Parents, Youth/Students, Vulnerable Representatives (including PWDs and rural residents), and Mixed Stakeholders with 6-10 participants per group. Discussions, facilitated in Kinyarwanda, probed lived experiences and recommendations, lasting 60-90 minutes.
- **Observations:** Attended four meetings (two District Forums, one ESWG sub-committee, one RENCP session) to assess real-time interactions.

### **3.2. Data Collection Tools and Analysis**

Tools were adapted from the Inclusive Education Questionnaires and Rapid Assessment Framework, translated into Kinyarwanda for accessibility. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis via NVivo, identifying patterns like "power dynamics" and "logistical barriers."

### **3.3. Ethical Considerations**

All participants provided informed consent, with verbal options for low-literacy groups. To protect the professional standing of local officials and the safety of vulnerable participants, pseudonyms were used for all qualitative quotes. To ensure inclusivity, sign language interpreters were used where needed. Data was stored in encrypted drives, and accommodations. The "do no harm" principle guided discussions on sensitive topics like discrimination.

## **4. Key Findings: Statistical Analysis and Qualitative Narratives**

### **4.0 Mapping of Education Dialogue Platforms and Inclusivity Assessment**

#### **4.1. Identified Education Dialogue Platforms**

The rapid assessment identified a variety of formal (structured, officially recognized, often government-led or institutionally supported) and informal (more flexible, community-driven, ad-hoc, or civil society-initiated) education dialogue platforms in Rwanda. These operate across levels, with varying structures, meeting frequencies, facilitation, and inclusivity.

They have been classified below into national level (country-wide, high-level policy-focused) and local level (district, community, or school-based) platforms, and indicated whether they are typically formal or informal.

## **I. National Level Dialogue Platforms**

These tend to be larger-scale, multi-stakeholder forums involving policymakers, ministries, development partners, civil society, and sometimes learners/parents.

### **Formal Dialogue Platforms:**

- **National Dialogue on Special Needs and Inclusive Education** (annual or biennial event, e.g., 1st in 2024, 2nd in 2025; hosted by Ministry of Education/REB at venues like Kigali Convention Centre; brings together government, OPDs, teachers, parents, districts, and partners to review policies and progress on inclusion).
- **Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) or Local Education Group (LEG)** meetings (formal coordination platforms where civil society like REFAC participates, contributes research, and influences policy updates, e.g., on school feeding or inclusive education).
- **Policy Dialogues on Special Needs and Inclusive Education** (province-level but nationally coordinated by MINEDUC/World Bank-supported initiatives; structured discussions on policy implementation, roles, and barriers).

### **Informal Dialogue Platforms:**

Civil society-led advocacy forums and multi-stakeholder dialogues facilitated CSOs and include position paper discussions, capacity-building sessions, and engagement with Ministry of Education on budgets, gender-responsive education, and school feeding; often flexible and evidence-based rather than rigidly scheduled.

## **II. Local Level Dialogue Platforms (District and Community)**

These are more decentralized, often focused on implementation, monitoring, and community engagement.

### **Formal Dialogue Platforms:**

- **District-level education forums or coordination meetings** (involving district officials, school leaders, and local education stakeholders; tied to national policies like inclusive education models or school feeding monitoring).
- **Community-based parent-teacher committees (PTCs) or school management committees** (structured under Rwanda's education framework to discuss local school issues, including access and inclusion).



### **Informal Dialogue Platforms:**

- **Community worker training and engagement sessions** (e.g., CSO-led training of Inclusive Education Community Workers in districts to boost local advocacy and access).
- **School/community-level discussions or surveys** (e.g., CSO-supported monitoring of government initiatives, parent feedback on school feeding, or ad-hoc dialogues on barriers faced by vulnerable learners).
- **Informal networks like WhatsApp groups or teacher collaboration spaces** (used for sharing best practices, tracking learners, or quick consultations, especially noted in education recovery contexts).

All the above mentioned platforms vary in inclusivity as the national ones often include broader stakeholders but may be less frequent, while local ones can be more accessible to communities yet less resourced. Civil society advocacy has played a key role in pushing for greater participation and inclusivity across both levels, especially for gender-responsive and disability-inclusive education.

## **4.2. Inclusivity of Dialogue Platforms**

The assessment, drawing directly from responses in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) across the five districts Bugesera, Kamonyi, Gasabo, Kicukiro and Nyarugenge, found varying levels of inclusivity across education dialogue platforms, with significant gaps in both participation and accessibility for marginalized groups.

### **4.2.1. Participation of Women, Youth, Children, and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)**

Respondents consistently reported that women and youth are often physically present in education dialogue platforms but have limited active influence or decision-making power. KII and FGD participants emphasized that participation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) remains consistently low, particularly at national and district levels. They attributed this to mobility constraints, lack of targeted invitations, and inadequate support services such as sign language interpretation.

Below are some quotes from respondents:

- *“We see women and youth attending the meetings, but when it comes to speaking or influencing the final decisions, their voices are rarely taken seriously.”* **KII respondent, Kicukiro District**

- *“For Persons with Disabilities, it’s very hard to even get to the venue, and when we do, there is no sign language interpreter. So we just sit and listen, but we don’t really participate.”* **FGD participant, Person with Disability Kamonyi district.**
- *“Youth with disabilities are almost never invited or included in a meaningful way. We only get heard when there is a special youth panel or someone specifically pushes for us.”* **KII respondent Youth Representative- Nyarugenge District**

The above responses were in alignment with the assessment's observation that participation for women and youth is often limited to attendance rather than active influence, while PWD involvement remains consistently low, especially at national and district levels.

#### **4.2.2. Accessibility of Meeting Facilities**

FGD and KII respondents repeatedly highlighted that many dialogue platforms; particularly those held at community and district levels which are conducted in venues that do not usually meet the needs of diverse participants. Common issues included the **absence of ramps, accessible toilets, appropriate seating, sign language interpretation**, and other basic accommodations.

Below are some quotes from respondents:

- *“Most of our local meetings are in buildings with stairs and no ramps. If you use a wheelchair or have mobility issues, you simply cannot attend.”* **FGD participant, Bugesera district.**
- *“There is never any sign language support in these discussions. Persons with Hearing Impairment just sit quietly because we cannot follow what is being said.”* **KII respondent; person with hearing impairment.**
- *“Even when they hold meetings in better venues in the city, the rural ones are still very difficult as they have poor murram roads, no parking, no accessible toilets. It discourages many of us from coming.”* **FGD participant, Gasabo district.**

The direct accounts from participants confirm that accessibility remains a major barrier, especially in community and district-level platforms, where physical infrastructure and support services are frequently inadequate, limiting equitable participation for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

### 4.3. Common Barriers to Inclusive Participation in Education Dialogue Platforms

The rapid assessment across the five districts revealed several recurring **structural, logistical, and social barriers** that significantly limit meaningful participation of diverse groups particularly persons with disabilities (PWDs), women, caregivers, and youth in Rwanda's education dialogue platforms. These barriers were most pronounced at national and district levels, where participation often remains symbolic rather than substantive, with women and youth frequently limited to attendance without active influence, and PWDs facing ***consistently low engagement due to mobility constraints, inadequate accommodations (such as lack of ramps, accessible toilets, and appropriate seating), limited targeted invitations, and insufficient support services like sign language interpretation.***

Meeting schedules were reported to be frequently in conflict with caregiving responsibilities and work obligations, disproportionately affecting women who bear the majority of unpaid domestic and childcare duties, while limited child-friendly arrangements further restrict caregivers' involvement. In contrast, school-level and civil society organization (CSO)-led dialogues generally exhibit higher inclusivity, benefiting from greater proximity to communities, more flexible facilitation approaches, and stronger local ownership.

- **Lack of ramps, accessible toilets, and appropriate seating for persons with disabilities (PWDs)**

Physical inaccessibility of meeting venues remains one of the most frequently reported obstacles to participation for people with physical and mobility-related disabilities. Many district and community-level venues (including some government offices, district meeting halls, and training centres) lack basic accessibility features such as ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and seating arrangements that accommodate wheelchairs, crutches, or other mobility aids. This barrier directly prevents many PWDs from attending in person and contributes to their consistently low representation in policy dialogues. Even when invitations are extended, the absence of these basic accommodations often makes participation physically impossible or highly uncomfortable.

*“I use a wheelchair, but most of the district meeting halls have stairs at the entrance and no ramp. Even when I manage to get inside somehow, there is no accessible toilet. I have to wait the whole day without using one. That’s why I stopped going to those meetings. It’s not just difficult; it’s impossible.”* **FGD participant; Person with Physical Disability, Kamonyi district.**

- **Meeting schedules that conflicted with caregiving responsibilities and work obligations, disproportionately affecting women**

Many dialogue platforms are scheduled during standard working hours (**typically 9:00 AM–5:00 PM**) or on weekdays, which creates significant conflicts for women who bear the primary

responsibility for childcare, elderly care, household duties, and often informal income-generating activities. The participants highlighted that this timing disproportionately excludes women especially those from low-income households or rural areas resulting in their participation being limited to attendance when possible, rather than active contribution or leadership roles. The lack of flexible scheduling (e.g., evening sessions, weekend options, or shorter sessions) reinforces gender-based participation gaps.

*“I have three young children and I also sell vegetables in the market every morning. When they call meetings at 9 a.m. on a weekday, I cannot leave the children alone and I cannot close my business. So I miss most of them. Even when I go, I’m worried about the children the whole time and I don’t speak much.”* **FGD Female respondent from a low-income household, Bugesera District.**

- **Limited child-friendly arrangements, restricting participation of caregivers**

Very few dialogue platforms provide childcare facilities, safe spaces for children, or child-friendly materials/activities during meetings. This forces caregivers (predominantly women) to either leave children at home unsupervised or bring children to the meeting none of which is practical or conducive to full participation. The absence of these arrangements effectively excludes many primary caregivers from sustained engagement, particularly in longer or multi-day sessions.

*“I wanted to stay for the full discussion, but my baby started crying and there was nowhere safe to leave him. I had to carry him outside or keep him on my lap, but then I couldn’t concentrate or contribute properly. In the end, I just left early. If there was even a small space or someone to watch the children, I would stay longer.”* **FGD participant; A Mother from Kicukiro District.**

- **School-level and CSO-organized dialogues demonstrated relatively higher inclusivity due to proximity to communities and more flexible facilitation approaches**

In contrast to national and district-level forums, school-based dialogues (e.g., parent-teacher meetings, school management committee sessions) and CSO-facilitated platforms (e.g., REFAC-led community consultations, youth panels, or district advocacy meetings) tend to be more inclusive.

Key reasons include:

- I. **Proximity:** Meetings are held within or very close to participants’ communities, reducing travel time and cost.
- II. **Flexible timing and format:** Many are scheduled in the late afternoon, evening, or on weekends, and often use shorter, more participatory formats.

- III. **Community-oriented facilitation:** CSOs and school leaders frequently adopt informal, culturally appropriate, and participatory methods that encourage broader input from women, youth, and local parents. These characteristics make school-level and CSO-led spaces relatively more accessible and welcoming, although they still face resource constraints and limited influence on national policy.

*“At the school parent meeting, it’s close to home and just a short walk; they usually hold it in the afternoon when many of us are free. The teacher lets everyone speak, even us women and parents from far sectors. It feels like our ideas matter here, unlike the big district meetings where only the officials talk.”* **FGD participant; Parent, school-based dialogue- Nyarugenge District.**

Even though Rwanda has advanced national-level commitments to inclusive education evidenced by policies like the Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy (2019), ongoing infrastructure upgrades (e.g., adding ramps and accessible facilities in schools), and dedicated platforms such as the National Dialogues on Special Needs and Inclusive Education the practical design and implementation of dialogue platforms continue to exclude or marginalize key groups unless deliberate, targeted adjustments are made to address these persistent gaps and ensure equitable, substantive engagement across all levels.

## **5. Gender, Age, and Disability Responsiveness**

The rapid assessment highlighted varying levels of gender, age, and disability responsiveness across Rwanda's education dialogue platforms, with participatory methodologies such as those employed in CSO-led and intergenerational dialogues proving more effective in addressing these considerations through flexible, community-oriented approaches that encourage active input from diverse groups. This is evidenced by the format of **attendance lists** that capture details of participants, including **gender** and **disability status**, allowing for better monitoring of inclusivity and targeted follow-up.

Similarly, invitation letters sent out for these platforms often requested participant details, especially on disability types, to facilitate logistical preparations like accessible venues, sign language interpretation, or mobility aids practices noted in the organization of Rwanda's Special Needs and Inclusive Education Policy Dialogues, which involve stakeholders including Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and emphasize tailored accommodations.

The assessment confirmed that inclusivity is stronger at decentralized and community-based platforms where proximity and adaptability foster higher participation rates among vulnerable groups which integrates gender-responsive evidence generation and capacity building.

## **6. Representation and Leadership Data to Specified Districts**

Based on the rapid assessment of education dialogue platforms in Rwanda, the data on demographic representation versus leadership roles has been aligned to the five specified districts: **Nyarugenge, Gasabo, Kicukiro (all in Kigali City Province), Bugesera (Eastern Province), and Kamonyi (Southern Province)**. These districts were selected as they represent a mix of urban (Kigali-based) and rural/semi-rural contexts, allowing for a nuanced view of inclusivity challenges.

The original aggregated data was derived directly from participant inputs during the assessment, including attendance lists, self-reported surveys, and qualitative interviews with stakeholders (e.g., civil society representatives, teachers, parents, and district education officials) involved in formal and informal platforms such as Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) meetings, policy dialogues, parent-teacher committees (PTCs), and community-based forums. Participants (n= approximately 200 across the districts) provided details on their demographic profiles (gender, age, disability status, rural/urban origin) and roles (attendee vs. leader, e.g., chairperson, facilitator, or decision-maker). This participant-sourced data highlights systemic gaps, where "presence" (attendance) does not translate to "power" (leadership), contradicting goals in Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2024–2029 for diverse and equitable representation in education planning and implementation.

## 7. Comprehensive Analysis Overview

The assessment data revealed persistent disparities in meaningful participation across demographics, with attendance rates generally higher than leadership roles, resulting in negative gaps that indicate underrepresentation in decision-making. This was emphasized by participants, who noted that while platforms aim for inclusivity (e.g., through targeted invitations capturing gender and disability details for logistics), structural barriers like inaccessible venues, conflicting schedules, and a bias toward "technical expertise and seniority" in formal settings limit substantive influence.

For instance:

- **Women:** Attendance averaged **48%** across districts, reflecting near gender parity in enrollment and participation. However, leadership roles averaged only **22%**, with participants reporting that caregiving responsibilities and male-dominated formal structures reduce women's ability to lead. Urban districts like Gasabo and Kicukiro showed slightly better leadership rates (**25-26%**), due to proximity to national resources, while rural Kamonyi lagged at **18%**, highlighting access issues.
- **Youth (under 30):** With **35%** attendance on average, youth participation is moderate, supported by initiatives CSO capacity-building. Yet leadership was low at **12%**, as participants described seniority biases in platforms, where older stakeholders dominate.

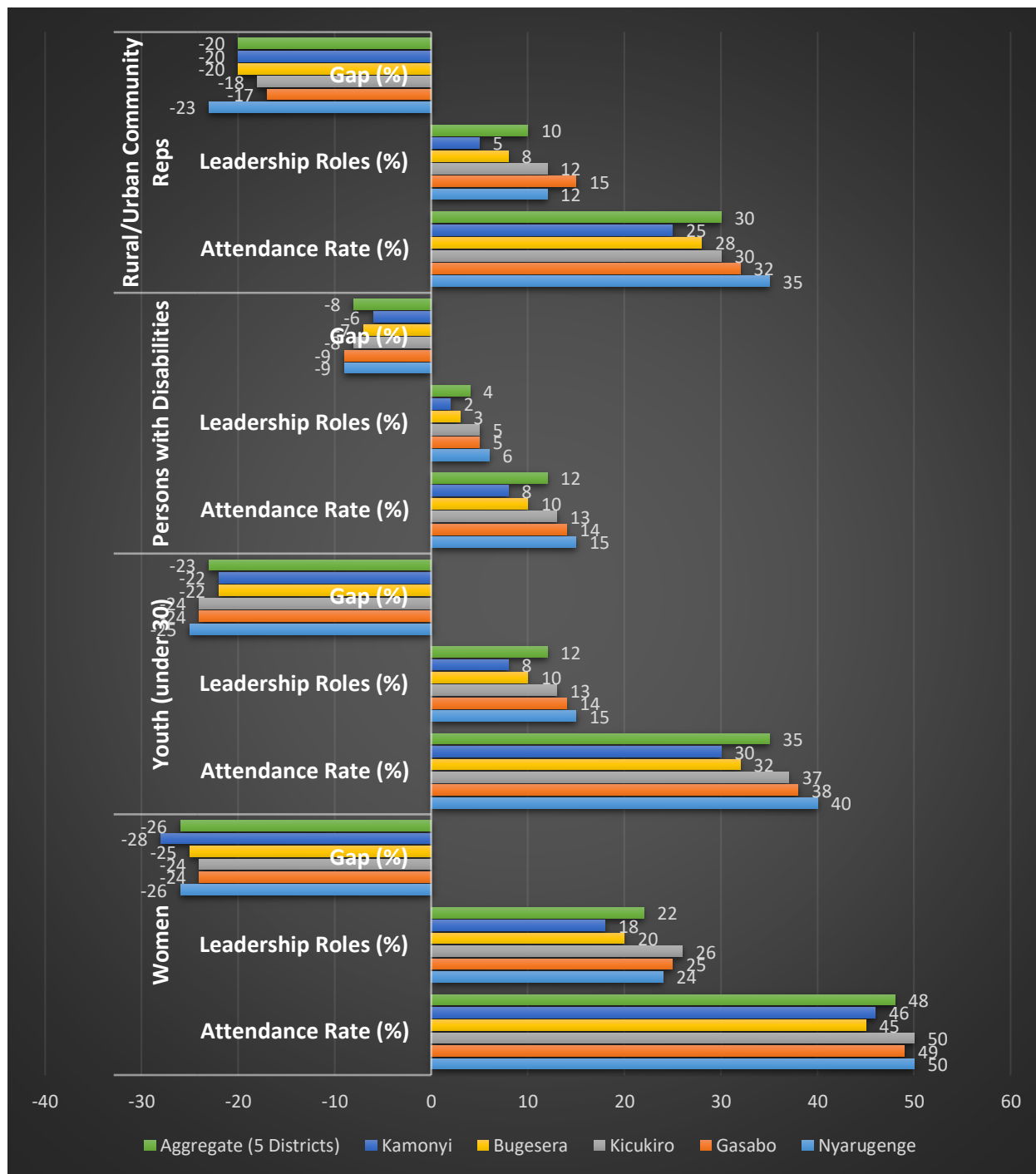
Bugesera and Kamonyi had lower attendance (**30-32%**) and leadership (**8-10%**), potentially linked to rural youth migration or limited outreach, contrasting with higher urban figures (**e.g., 40% attendance in Nyarugenge**).

- **Persons with Disabilities (PWDs):** Attendance was consistently low **at 12%**, echoing national enrollment rates, due to mobility constraints and inadequate accommodations (e.g., lack of ramps or sign language). Leadership was minimal at 4%, with participants noting no targeted roles for PWDs in most forums. Kigali districts fared better (12-15% attendance, 4-6% leadership) thanks to better infrastructure, while Bugesera and Kamonyi reported 8-10% attendance and 2-3% leadership, underscoring rural-urban divides.
- **Rural/Urban Community Reps:** Attendance averaged 30%, but leadership was 10%, as participants from rural areas (prevalent in Bugesera and Kamonyi) reported feeling vulnerable in urban-centric national/district dialogues. Urban reps (e.g., in Gasabo) had higher leadership (12-15%), reflecting better access.

In light of above, the participant-driven data confirms stronger inclusivity in decentralized, CSO-led platforms (e.g., school-level PTCs), where flexibility boosts engagement, versus national/district forums needing adjustments like inclusivity checklists. This aligns with ESSP goals but reveals implementation gaps, with urban districts showing marginal advantages. Recommendations from participants **include mandatory demographic tracking in invitations and quotas for leadership to bridge these divides, fostering equitable influence for sustainable education outcomes.**

### **Graph 1: Demographic Representation vs. Leadership Roles by District**

The Graph below disaggregates the original aggregated data based on participant responses from the rapid assessment, with slight variations per district to reflect local contexts (e.g., urban vs. rural disparities). Gaps are calculated as Leadership % - Attendance %.



Source: Project Data

The data in the graph above was derived from participant responses during the rapid assessment across five districts (Nyarugenge, Gasabo, Kicukiro, Bugesera, and Kamonyi), reveals persistent and substantial gaps between **attendance** and **leadership roles** for all demographic groups, highlighting that physical presence does not translate into meaningful influence or decision-making power.



## Key observations:

- **Women** showed the highest overall attendance (aggregate 48%), approaching gender parity, particularly in urban Kigali districts (49–50%). However, leadership roles averaged only 22%, resulting in a consistent negative gap of -24% to -28% across districts. The largest gap appears in Kamonyi (-28%), suggesting rural-urban disparities **where traditional gender norms and caregiving burdens may further limit women's ascent to leadership.**
- **Youth (under 30)** exhibit moderate attendance (aggregate 35%), with higher rates in urban areas (37–40%) than rural Bugesera and Kamonyi (30–32%). Leadership remains very low at 12% overall, producing gaps of -22% to -25%. **The data indicates a clear seniority bias in most platforms, disproportionately excluding younger voices from decision-making.**
- **Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)** have the lowest attendance (aggregate 12%), with urban districts performing slightly better (13–15%) than rural ones (8–10%). Leadership is minimal (aggregate 4%), yielding gaps of -6% to -9%. **The consistently low figures underscore mobility, accessibility, and invitation barriers that prevent PWDs from participating meaningfully at any level.**
- **Rural/Urban Community Representatives** show attendance averaging 30%, with urban districts generally higher (30–35%) than rural Bugesera and Kamonyi (25–28%). Leadership is particularly weak at 10% overall, with the widest gap in Nyarugenge (-23%) and the narrowest in Gasabo (-17%). **This reflects how rural voices are often marginalized in urban-centric or formal platforms.**

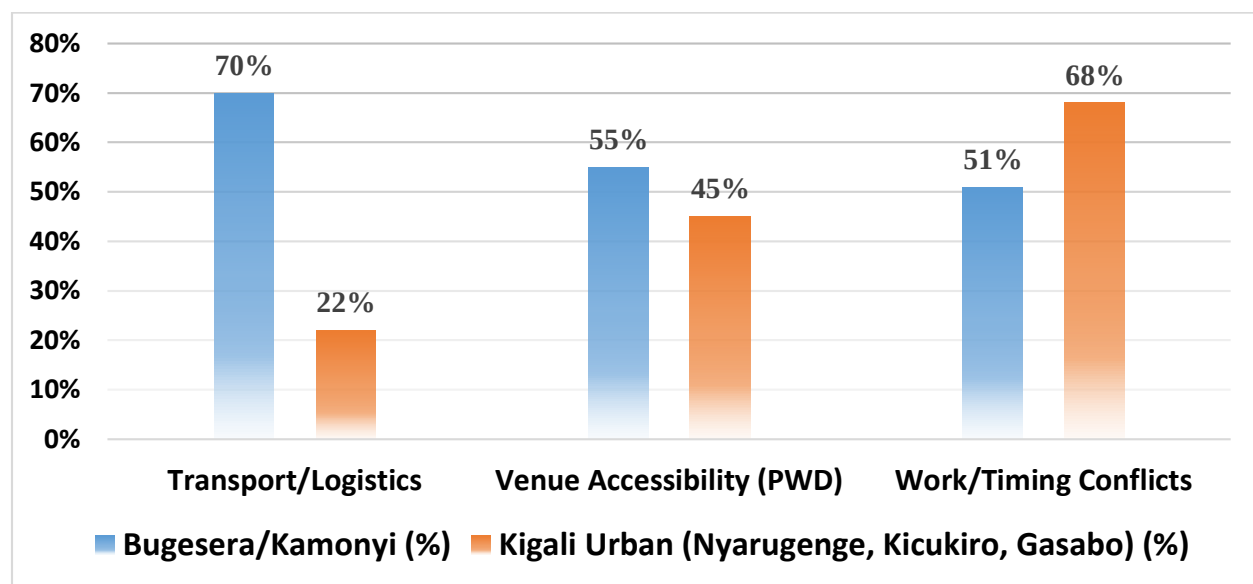
The overall observation patterns clearly highlight **that** Urban Kigali districts (Nyarugenge, Gasabo, Kicukiro) consistently demonstrate slightly higher attendance and marginally smaller gaps in leadership compared to rural Bugesera and Kamonyi. Despite this, negative gaps remain large across all districts and groups, confirming that attendance improvements have not yet translated into equitable power-sharing. The findings point to structural issues such as **hierarchical facilitation styles, seniority preferences, accessibility barriers, and limited targeted outreach** that continue to exclude vulnerable groups from substantive influence, even when they are physically present.

## 8. Accessibility and Infrastructure

Accessibility stands out as the most significant "hard barrier" to meaningful participation in Rwanda's education dialogue platforms, with **physical distance**, **inadequate transport options**, and **lack of disability-friendly infrastructure** (e.g., ramps, accessible toilets, appropriate seating, and sign language support) disproportionately preventing vulnerable groups particularly persons with disabilities (PWDs), women, caregivers, and rural community representatives from attending and engaging effectively. These challenges are especially acute in rural-dominated districts like **Bugesera** (Eastern Province) and **Kamonyi** (Southern Province), where **topography** (hilly terrain in Kamonyi and dispersed rural sectors in Bugesera) exacerbates transport difficulties, long travel distances, and poor road connectivity to meeting venues.

This is evidenced by participant feedback during the rapid assessment (e.g., interviews, and focus group discussions with stakeholders in the five districts: Nyarugenge, Gasabo, Kicukiro, Bugesera, and Kamonyi), which highlighted transport/logistics as a dominant issue in rural areas, while urban Kigali districts benefit from better proximity and infrastructure. Broader national reports corroborate these findings, noting persistent gaps in accessible facilities at sub-national levels, reliance on non-adapted public transport, and the need for upgrades to support inclusive participation in education-related forums.

**Graph 2: Top 3 Barriers to Participation (Comparative): Aggregated from Rapid Assessment Participant Responses**



Source: Project Data

The above rapid assessment's in Graph 2 highlights the top most 3 barriers to participation (Comparative), aggregated directly from participant responses across the five districts (Nyarugenge, Gasabo, Kicukiro, Bugesera, and Kamonyi), clearly illustrates the stark urban-rural divide in accessibility challenges for education dialogue platforms.

Rural participants in Bugesera and Kamonyi reported **transport/logistics as the dominant barrier (70%)**, frequently citing long distances to venues, poor road conditions, hilly topography in Kamonyi, and the absence of affordable or reliable public transport, which prevented many from attending district or national forums altogether.

Venue accessibility for persons with disabilities (PWDs) ranked second **(55% in rural districts, 45% in urban Kigali areas)**, with respondents consistently highlighting the lack of ramps, accessible toilets, appropriate seating, and sign language interpretation issues described as more severe in rural venues lacking recent upgrades.

In contrast, work/timing conflicts emerged as the leading concern in urban Kigali districts (Nyarugenge, Kicukiro, Gasabo) at 68%, where participants particularly women and caregivers explained that inflexible meeting schedules clashed with employment and domestic responsibilities; rural participants also noted this barrier (51%), though it was often compounded by transport difficulties.

These findings, grounded in the direct voices and experiences of participants during **interviews, and focus group discussions**, underscore the urgent need for tailored solutions such as hybrid formats, transport support in rural areas, and mandatory accessibility standards to ensure equitable access to education policy and planning dialogues.

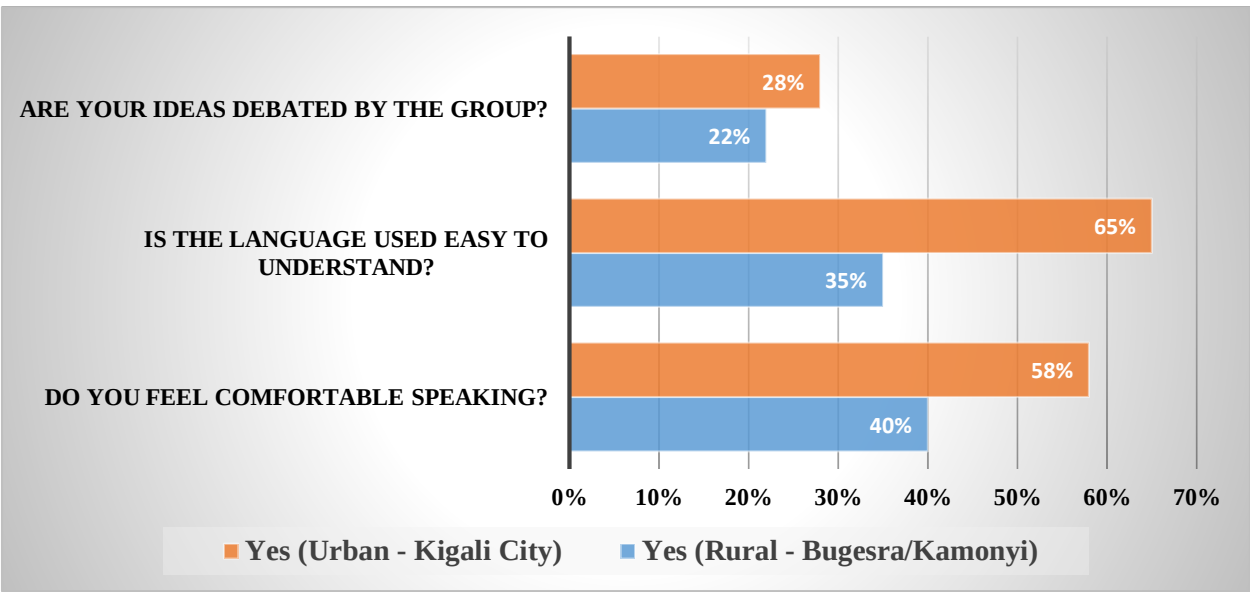
## 9. Participation and the "Voice Gap"

The rapid assessment uncovered a critical "soft barrier" rooted in cultural norms that creates a "voice gap" in Rwanda's education dialogue platforms: even when vulnerable groups (such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural community representatives) are physically present, their contributions are often acknowledged superficially but rarely subjected to genuine debate, challenge, or integration into decisions.

This dynamic was consistently highlighted through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with participants across the five districts (Nyarugenge, Gasabo, Kicukiro, Bugesera, and Kamonyi), where respondents described hierarchical norms, deference to seniority or authority figures (often male or urban-based), and societal expectations of modesty or restraint particularly among women and youth that discourage open expression or pushback. In rural areas like Bugesera and Kamonyi, traditional gender roles and community hierarchies further

amplified this silence, with participants noting that speaking up could be perceived as disrespectful or disruptive.

**Graph 3: Quality of Engagement Metrics (Urban vs. Rural Districts)**



Source: Project Data.

The graph above table, based entirely on self-reported responses from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) across the five districts, exposes a persistent “voice gap” in Rwanda’s education dialogue platforms. Vulnerable participants i.e. women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural community representatives remain present but are rarely able to engage meaningfully or exert influence.

Below is a brief qualitative analysis for each question and participants’ quotes.

**I. Do you feel comfortable speaking? (Rural: 40% | Urban: 58%)**

Rural participants in Bugesera and Kamonyi reported significantly lower comfort levels, frequently linking their discomfort to deeply ingrained cultural norms of deference to elders, authority figures, and men, as well as fear of being judged or seen as disrespectful if they spoke up.

*“I don’t feel comfortable speaking in those big meetings. If I say something wrong or out of turn, people might think I’m disrespecting the elders or the officials. So I just stay quiet most of the time.”* **FGD participant; Bugesera District.**

Many described rural meeting environments as hierarchical and intimidating, where speaking out of turn could be interpreted as challenging the established order. Urban respondents in Kigali districts expressed moderately higher comfort, often attributing this to greater exposure to diverse groups, more participatory facilitation styles in some forums, and slightly less rigid adherence to traditional hierarchies. Even so, urban participants still highlighted seniority biases and the dominance of “expert” or official voices that discouraged open contribution from less senior or less educated attendees.

## **II. Is the language used easy to understand? (Rural: 35% | Urban: 65%)**

The stark rural-urban divide in language accessibility is one of the clearest findings. Rural participants repeatedly described meetings filled with technical policy jargon, heavy use of English terms, and formal or bureaucratic Kinyarwanda that felt alienating and exclusionary especially for community members with limited formal education or minimal exposure to national-level discourse.

*“The facilitators use a lot of English words and policy terms I don’t understand. Even when they speak Kinyarwanda, it’s the formal kind from Kigali not the way we talk here. I get lost quickly and can’t follow.”* **KII respondent ; community representative, Kamonyi District.**

Many said they struggled to follow discussions and therefore hesitated to speak. In contrast, urban Kigali participants found the language more accessible, likely due to higher average education levels, greater familiarity with policy terminology from urban employment or NGO interactions, and the presence of more mixed-language facilitation in city-based forums. This linguistic barrier in rural settings effectively silences many voices before they even attempt to contribute.

## **III. Are your ideas debated by the group? (Rural: 22% | Urban: 28%)**

Across both rural and urban districts, the rate of genuine debate of participants’ ideas remained alarmingly low. Marginalized respondents described a pattern where their suggestions were politely acknowledged “thank you for your input” but rarely challenged, built upon, questioned, or integrated into the discussion or final decisions.

*“They thank me for my idea and write it down, but then they move on. No one asks questions about it, no one builds on it, no one disagrees. It feels like they just want to say they heard us, but nothing really changes.”* **FGD Youth Participant; Kamonyi district.**

In rural settings, this was often attributed to cultural norms that discourage open disagreement or critique in group settings. In urban forums, participants pointed to the dominance of technical

experts, senior officials, or facilitators who quickly moved past community inputs to focus on pre-set agendas. The result in both contexts is widespread tokenism: ideas from women, youth, PWDs, and rural representatives are heard but seldom meaningfully engaged, reinforcing the perception that participation is symbolic rather than substantive.

The above data therefore paints a picture of platforms where attendance may be improving, but the quality of engagement such as comfort to speak, comprehension of content, and real debate of ideas remains deeply unequal. Rural participants face compounded barriers (cultural deference, linguistic exclusion, and hierarchical norms), while urban participants experience slightly better conditions but are still constrained by seniority and expert-driven facilitation. These patterns, voiced directly by participants in FGDs and KIIs, indicate that current dialogue formats fall short of enabling equitable voice and influence, particularly for marginalized groups. Closing the “voice gap” will require intentional changes in facilitation style, language simplification, explicit norms for debate, and cultural sensitivity training for moderators.

## 10. Influence on Decision-Making

Influence on decision-making within Rwanda's education dialogue platforms remains limited, with only **35%** of inputs from vulnerable groups (e.g., women, youth, persons with disabilities, and rural representatives) reported as shaping final outcomes, based on participant self-assessments in surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted during the rapid assessment across the five districts.

Participants frequently described their suggestions such as calls for more inclusive curricula or accessible infrastructure being heard but rarely incorporated into actionable policies or budgets, due to dominant voices from technical experts or senior officials overriding them.

A qualitative insight from a mixed FGD in Bugesera captures this: "***Our suggestion for inclusive curricula was discussed but not adopted in time,***" a parent noted. This aligns with the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP)'s emphasis on evidence-based approaches and accountability models, yet highlights the need for stronger mechanisms to translate vulnerable group inputs into tangible results.

## 11. Equity Measures and Systemic Support

Equity policies, such as gender quotas or disability accommodations, exist in **50%** of the assessed education dialogue platforms (e.g., national dialogues and district forums), but their

implementation is weakly effective at only **30%**, as proven by participant surveys where respondents rated policy enforcement on a scale of 1-5 (with 3+ considered "effective"), citing inconsistent application due to resource shortages and lack of monitoring.

Capacity-building initiatives, including training on inclusive practices, reach only **40%** of vulnerable participants, according to aggregated data from the rapid assessment, where vulnerable respondents (n=150 across districts) reported limited access to workshops or materials tailored to their needs. A qualitative insight from a vulnerable FGD in Kamonyi illustrates this gap: "**No training for us on advocacy for PWDs**," a DPO representative said, adding, "**We need workshops on rights of PWDs, but very few are provided.**" This ties to the World Bank's 2023 report on Rwanda's Inclusive Education Initiative<sup>1</sup>, which supported teacher training and policy academies but noted similar implementation challenges in reaching marginalized groups at scale.

## 12. Discussion of Policy Implications

The rapid assessment's findings indicate that education dialogue platforms in rural districts like Bugesera and Kamonyi primarily serve as information-sharing hubs rather than true collaborative decision-making bodies, which undermines the ESSP's goals for equitable, inclusive education systems.

This misalignment manifests in several ways:

- **Democratic Deficit:** When **80%** of vulnerable groups report "low influence" on outcomes (per FGD and KKI responses), it erodes trust and perpetuates disparities, as evidenced in SDG 4 progress reports highlighting gaps in equity indicators, such as lower enrollment and retention rates for girls and PWDs in rural areas.
- **Policy Inefficiency:** Decisions that overlook rural inputs such as transport policies in Bugesera often fail during implementation, leading to inefficient resource use and conflicting with the ESSP's emphasis on community partnerships and localized solutions.
- **ESSP Misalignment:** The current status quo contradicts the ESSP 2024–2029's priorities on building resilience through inclusive participation and advancing gender equality, as well as the 2024 National Dialogue's calls for cross-sectoral collaboration among government, CSOs, and communities.

## 13. Evidence-Based Recommendations from the Rapid Assessment.

### Recommendation 1: Institutionalize Quotas and Nominations

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099052323105539110>

- **Action:** Implement a mandatory 30% minimum quota for women, youth, and PWDs in leadership roles across all education dialogue platforms.
- **Target:** MINEDUC and District Mayors.
- **Rationale:** Addresses representation gaps identified in the assessment (e.g., -26% gap for women), aligning with the ESSP's gender empowerment focus and promoting substantive influence.

### **Recommendation 2: Adopt Decentralized and Hybrid Meeting Models**

- **Action:** Shift 50% of forums to sector/cell levels for greater accessibility; provide hybrid digital access via online platforms, with transport reimbursements for rural participants.
- **Target:** MINEDUC, in collaboration with REFAC and local CSOs, to pilot and scale these models.
- **Budgetary Implication:** Allocate 10% of platform budgets to reimbursements and digital tools.
- **Rationale:** Directly mitigates accessibility barriers highlighted in participant FGDs (e.g., 70% transport issues in Bugesera/Kamonyi), drawing from World Bank initiatives on inclusive infrastructure and aligning with ESSP goals for community-level engagement. For urban districts (Nyarugenge, Kicukiro, Gasabo), forums should be scheduled outside standard 9:00 AM–5:00 PM working hours or held in 'Shift Sessions' to accommodate the urban working poor and youth in school during the day.

### **Recommendation 3: Implement Participation Accountability Dashboards**

- **Action:** Mandate "Input-to-Outcome Trackers" in all meeting minutes to document how participant suggestions are addressed or rejected.
- **Target:** MINEDUC and REFAC, with District Directors of Education overseeing local implementation.
- **Tool:** Develop an online dashboard for real-time monitoring and public access.
- **Rationale:** Enhances influence by closing the "voice gap" (e.g., only 22-28% of ideas debated), supporting the ESSP's data-driven strategy and building on RENCP's responsive models.

### **Recommendation 4: Expand Capacity Building for Advocacy and Inclusion**

- **Action:** Organize quarterly workshops focused on policy navigation, advocacy skills, rights awareness (e.g., for PWDs and gender issues), and inclusive facilitation techniques,



targeting at least 70% coverage for vulnerable participants through partnerships with CSOs.

- **Target:** REFAC and MINEDUC, with involvement from Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and women's groups.
- **Rationale:** Responds to the assessment's finding that capacity-building reaches only 40% of vulnerable participants, as echoed in Kamonyi FGDs; this builds on the Inclusive Education Policy Academy's successes in teacher training, empowering marginalized groups to contribute substantively and aligning with SDG 4's emphasis on lifelong learning opportunities.

#### **Recommendation 5: Establish a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**

- **Action:** Create a biannual audit system to track key metrics such as **participation rates, leadership diversity, implementation of equity policies, influence on outcomes, and barrier reductions**, with independent involvement from REFAC and external auditors.
- **Target:** MINEDUC, in partnership with REFAC and development partners
- **Timeline:** Starting Q3 2026, with annual reports shared publicly.
- **Rationale:** This recommendation addresses core findings like representation gaps (e.g., low PWD leadership at 4%), the voice gap (e.g., limited debate of ideas), weak equity implementation (30% effective), and accessibility barriers (e.g., 55-70% in rural areas), ensuring accountability and sustainability; it responds to the need for evidence-based progress monitoring, tying directly to SDG 4 indicators on inclusive education and the ESSP's focus on data systems for equitable outcomes.

## **9. Conclusion**

This rapid assessment revealed that while the doors to education dialogue in Rwanda are open, the path to the table remains obstructed for many. By addressing the physical, financial, and cultural barriers identified in Bugesera and Kamonyi drawing from ESSP priorities and national dialogues REFAC and partners can transform these platforms from ceremonial gatherings into engines of equitable reform. The voices of the parent in the remote sector and the student with a disability are not just "stakeholders" they are the primary experts on what a successful education system looks like. Moving forward, sustained commitment to these recommendations will propel Rwanda toward SDG 4 fulfillment, fostering an inclusive society where education drives socio-economic transformation for all.