



# Situating equity in the context of secondary teaching and learning in Rwanda

Summary of November 2020 learning webinar



Leaders in Teaching



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### Acknowledgements:

This work was carried out in partnership with the [Mastercard Foundation](#) as part of the [Leaders in Teaching](#) initiative. Leaders in Teaching supports teachers throughout their careers and prepares them to deliver high-quality education through a variety of interventions, with a focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in secondary education in Rwanda.

Laterite and the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge are learning partners for the Leaders in Teaching initiative, responsible for generating evidence on improved teacher performance and student learning in Rwandan secondary schools, particularly at schools where students are at most risk of not learning.

This brief reflects topics that were discussed at a Leaders in Teaching learning webinar hosted by the learning partners in November 2020. The learning partners would like to thank the Mastercard Foundation as well as representatives from the Leaders in Teaching implementing partners at the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS), Carnegie Mellon University Africa (CMU-Africa), Inspire, Educate and Empower (IEE) Rwanda, University of Rwanda College of Education (UR-CE), VVOB Rwanda, and UNICEF Rwanda for their time and engaged discussions during this session.

### About Laterite and the REAL Centre:

[Laterite](#) is a data, research and advisory firm dedicated to bringing high-quality research services to the most underserved markets. Based in East Africa, the firm strives to carry out impactful research that helps decision-makers find solutions to complex development problems.

The [REAL Centre at the University of Cambridge](#) pioneers research into overcoming barriers to education, such as poverty, gender, ethnicity, language and disability, and promotes education as an engine for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

### Suggested citation;

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## Introduction

In November 2020, Leaders in Teaching implementing partners came together with the learning partners, Laterite and the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge, to discuss how the Leaders in Teaching<sup>1</sup> initiative is addressing equity issues facing both teachers and learners in secondary education in Rwanda. The Mastercard Foundation's Leaders in Teaching initiative responds to the opportunities that a quality secondary education represents for the African continent. It supports teachers throughout their careers and prepares them to deliver high-quality, relevant education, with a focus on STEM subjects in Rwanda.

Across two days, partners discussed:

- The main issues that specific groups of teachers or learners face relating to disadvantages, drawing on evidence from the Learning Partner (Laterite and the REAL Centre), together with experience of Implementing Partners throughout the Leaders in Teaching programme.
- Looking forward, what Leaders in Teaching can do as an initiative to learn more and to address prevailing disadvantages of specific groups.

The Learning Partners presented preliminary findings from research conducted in early 2020 across three timeframes: before COVID-19 (using data from 2017<sup>2</sup> and early 2020), during school closures caused by COVID-19 (through a [phone survey of teachers and school leaders](#) in August 2020 (see Carter et al, 2020)), and predictions for the situation post-school closures<sup>3</sup>. Data collected in early 2020 included teacher and student assessments, surveys with teachers and school leaders, and classroom observations of mathematics teachers. The findings presented touched on diverse themes relating to how subgroups of teachers and learners (associated with gender, age, socioeconomic background, and disability) experience disadvantage. The learning partners will share full outputs from this research (in the form of research and policy briefs) in the coming months. Key takeaways include:

- A student's gender and the type of school they attend (day school or School of Excellence / boarding school) are associated with gaps in learning; and this is exacerbated by low numbers of female teachers and school principals.
- Similarly, a teacher's gender and type of school they work in are associated with disparities in terms of the type of support they receive (e.g. from head teachers), or provide to students, during school closures.
- The findings also predict that school closures caused by COVID-19 will lead to a double cohort of Primary 1 students in 2021, while dampening enrolment in secondary schools, leading to a potential shift of resources from secondary to primary through to ~2025.

## Main issues relating to disadvantages faced by teachers and learners taking part in Leaders in Teaching programmes

Through active discussions, Leaders in teaching partners identified equity issues across three main themes: **markers** of disadvantage; **structures** that enable disadvantages to persist; and **processes** that perpetuate such disadvantages. A common thread throughout these discussions was the role of COVID-19, which is not only disrupting the education system, but also exacerbating existing inequities, particularly for groups that were already at a disadvantage.

### Markers

Markers of disadvantage refer to observable characteristics of teachers and learners from which we are able to establish inequalities in education resources, inputs and outcomes. Markers may include factors such as gender, wealth/poverty status, whether the teacher or learner has a disability, and whether they are a refugee. For example, female teachers often have more family and household responsibilities than male teachers, and for this reason may be less likely to attend professional development during school closures. Evidence shows that there are more male than female teachers in STEM and ICT subjects in Rwandan secondary education, which may be due to barriers for entry into the profession for female candidates that need to be addressed.

Implementing partners are working to address inequalities across these markers. **IEE** is working with the Rwanda Education Board to expand its Teaching Assistantships Program (TAP) to all 30 districts in Rwanda. TAP provides opportunities for young people who have completed secondary education to develop an interest in teaching and education, and gain experience in the teaching profession. 70% of the positions in the upcoming round of assistantships will go to young women, the majority of whom will be paired with teachers in STEM subjects.

**VVOB** builds flexibility into their programming to ensure there is equitable access to continuous profession development (CPD), training including by working in accordance with a gender mainstreaming guide. For example, VVOB works to make sure the environment is favorable for breastfeeding women to follow the training while taking care of their children. **AIMS** provides gender-responsive pedagogical training in its Teacher Training Program that also responds to the changing context for teaching and learning caused by COVID-19, for example by using different platforms, such as WhatsApp groups, to connect teachers. **UR-CE** is working with a disability centre to ensure they can include students with disabilities and provide them with the support they need to have equal access to all services.

## Structures

Structures such as school type and location are the arenas in which markers of disadvantage are embedded. For example, in Rwanda evidence shows that teachers and students in urban schools – and in Schools of Excellence, which are also attended mostly by students from wealthier families due to selection processes into these schools - have better access to resources such as computers and the internet than those in rural areas. This may mean that teachers in rural areas are less able to access learning materials and ICT, or may have difficulty engaging with online learning with their students, or their own CPD.

Implementing partners are working to respond to these existing disparities at the structure level. For example, **UR-CE** noted differences in mentorship support provided to teachers between nine-year basic education schools and Schools of Excellence. To address this, they are working to organise mentorship training that is accessible to all mentors so that they can develop similar skills and learn from each other.

**AIMS** is working to equip schools with labs, and **UR-CE** is establishing smart classrooms and teaching labs on campus as well as purchasing computers for all academic staff, so they are in the best position to teach their students. As part of the Mastercard Foundation's COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience Program, **VVOB** is providing over 2,500 laptops to schools in Rwanda and **IEE** is supporting in delivering TV and radio lessons for secondary school learners to ensure continuous learning. Going forward, it will be important to prioritise those parts of the country and schools that lack resources, such as rural schools and day schools (schools that are not Schools of Excellence).

## Processes

Processes refer to the ways in which disadvantages are reproduced within the structures for certain groups. Processes help us understand *how* these markers of disadvantage perpetuate over time and space. Why does being female or living in a rural area put teachers and learners at a disadvantage? Understanding the answers to these questions supports Leaders in Teaching partners to respond to issues of equity at the appropriate level.

We already see examples of this. From **AIMS'** experience, girls in particular have been found to thrive in collaborative learning, which means that they are at a disadvantage in classrooms that are moving online and becoming less interactive during COVID-19. To address this, AIMS is working to reimagine pedagogy in the context of blended learning using a gender lens. **UR-CE** has noted that secondary teachers have limited skills in relation to teaching competency-based curriculum (CBC) pedagogies, so it is integrating the CBC into teaching and learning processes. Knowing which teachers in particular have limited skills in this area (for example, teachers in rural areas, or

teachers in schools that are not Schools of Excellence) will help UR-CE address processes that reproduce disadvantage. **VVOB** is working to understand why teachers drop out of or fail CPD programmes, including exploring markers and structures of disadvantage to inform how CPD programmes can support those at risk of dropping out in the future.

Another process-level issue raised by implementing partners is that teacher recruitment processes might contribute to existing inequities. For example, teachers may not see the value of participating in teacher training programmes and CPD if these programmes are not recognised in teacher recruitment or promotion frameworks, and thus do not lead to them being promoted or receiving higher salaries or recognition for their work.

Through their work on the Teacher Management Information System (TMIS) for Rwanda, **UNICEF and CMU Africa** ensure that teacher recruitment and allocation data can be actively used by policy-makers to understand and address nationwide gaps, including on equity.

### **What more can Leaders in Teaching do to tackle issues of disadvantage?**

In light of preliminary research findings from the Leaders in Teaching programme shared by the REAL Centre and Laterite at the event, partners discussed ways to be even more responsive to equity issues and barriers affecting teachers and learners in Rwandan secondary education. Partners came up with the below four points to guide thinking about how to address issues of equity in the Leaders in Teaching initiative.

#### **1. Be flexible and responsive**

Implementing partners have shown their ability to adapt to changing circumstances through their impressive efforts to continue providing support to teachers during COVID-19. Flexibility is also essential in responding to issues of disadvantage within programs, as it is important to understand the varying needs of participants to avoid exacerbating existing inequities. For example, some teachers identified they could not attend training scheduled on the weekend due to faith reasons; some have trouble engaging with online learning; and young female teachers in particular are often unable to join because they have young children to care for. Providing opportunities for teachers to attend training at different times or via different modalities (online / in-person) and providing bridging training to support teachers to engage with online materials are good examples of ways to incorporate flexibility into programming.

## **2. Be mindful of intersectionalities...**

Leaders in Teaching partners have a strong focus on issues of disadvantage in relation to gender, for example differing access to and confidence with using technology for women and men; and differences in the numbers of female and male teachers in secondary education. While participants identified this as an area that deserves more attention in the Leaders in Teachers programme given the low numbers of female STEM secondary teachers, for example, more needs to be done to build on this.

Notably, it is important to identify other forms of disadvantage, such as disability, poverty and location of schools as areas deserving more attention in the initiative. In considering ways to address these markers of disadvantage, we should think about aspects of disadvantage not as existing in silos, but as interrelated factors. For example, when thinking about gender, it is important to also think about how this intersects with other markers and structures - such as disability, poverty, and location - and the processes that connect them. The effect of poverty is often different for males and females, for instance. A deeper understanding of the different ways in which disadvantages intersect enables us to plan and deliver programmes more holistically.

## **3. ...while avoiding a deficit discourse when conceptualising inequity**

When addressing issues of equity, it is important to respond to specific concerns of equity without positioning individuals in a deficit discourse. For Leaders in Teaching partners, this means thinking about designing programmes that are responsive to the individual needs of those who are most likely to be excluded – without stigmatising them. This is a matter for further consideration as Leaders in Teaching partners look more deeply at ways to respond to issues of equity.

## **4. Understand the gaps**

One way to address issues of equity is to identify the structures and markers of disadvantage, and to understand the processes through which these factors perpetuate. To fully understand the processes, it is also important to pay attention to where data is missing. These gaps can help us understand where to focus future research to improve our knowledge, and to provide new insights and ways of thinking about how to address issues of inequity.

## References

Carter, E., Leonard, P., Nzaramba, S., and Rose, P. (2020) *Effects of school closures on secondary school teachers and school leaders in Rwanda: Results from a phone survey*. Leaders in Teaching Research and Policy Series, November 2020. Laterite, Rwanda and REAL Centre, University of Cambridge.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see: <https://mastercardfdn.org/all/leaders-in-teaching/>

<sup>2</sup> Drawn from Laterite. (2017) *A Situation Analysis on the State of Delivery of STEM and ICT prepared for AIMS and MINEDUC*. Kigali, Rwanda.

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.laterite.com/blog/predicting-the-impact-of-covid-19-in-rwandan-schools/>.






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