

Education System in Rwanda

Abdus Sattar Molla

RWANDA is a republic (official name: Republic of Rwanda) located in Central Africa, east of Democratic Republic of the Congo, and is bordered by Uganda, Burundi and Tanzania on the north, south and east respectively. The country achieved independence in 1959 from Belgium and the majority ethnic group- the Hutus took over power from the Tutsi king. However, the Tutsi group was not defeated for ever; instead ethnic cleansing caused death of many from both sides. Now, there is Tutsi political dominance.

The total area of Rwanda is 26,338 sq. km (slightly more than 1/6th of Bangladesh) and it harbors slightly over 10 million (10,473,282; July 2009 est.) people (about 1/15th of Bangladesh population). Population growth rate is 2.78% that is more than Bangladesh's 2%. The per capita income in Rwanda is about US \$ 900 (2008 estimate). The literacy rate is about 70.4% (male: 76.3%, female: 64.7%). Rwanda spends about 4% of its GDP in education, which is more than 1.5 times of Bangladesh's 2.4%.

Education is the established route to enrich people with required knowledge, skills and attitudes in any nation. Requirement for these qualities changes over time and curriculum requires time to time revision. Bangladesh completed the third revision of the primary curriculum and such a revision was due on the lower secondary few years back, so no time to spare and the revision can be followed serially (cannot be other way round) by upper grades. Now we can have a look into the education system of this African small country influenced by the European system like ours to find some lessons for us. The description follows the usual format having Education Policy & Administration, the Structure, Program of Study, Assessment System and lastly Lessons for Bangladesh.

I-Education Policy & Administration

Education in Rwanda is managed by the Ministry of Education. The country has ratified the 1990 World Conference on Education for

All (EFA) and has established a target for achieving universal primary education by 2010. The global goal of the Government of Rwanda is to reduce poverty and in turn to improve the well-being of its population. Within this context, the aim of education is to combat ignorance and illiteracy and to provide human resources useful for the socio-economic development of Rwanda through the education system. The Government has also initiated a deliberate policy to encourage and mobilize the private sector and local communities to invest in the field of education.

II-The Structure

Rwanda follows the universal basic structure of elementary, secondary and higher education. Primary education is a 6-year long study. The 6-year secondary education is divided into two equal halves, each consisting of 3 years. The first cycle is termed junior secondary and that constitutes a part of the 9-year long basic education along with 6 years of primary. The second cycle of secondary education also lasts for 3 years and is termed senior secondary. The usual Bachelor Course lasts for 4 years; the duration of Masters Course is usually 2 years. Therefore, the structure becomes (6 + (3) + 3) + 2.

Higher Education

There are both non-university and university level higher education. The non-university level higher education is pertained in vocational institutes offering training in finance, management, computer science etc. University level first stage is Bachelor's Degree program in various disciplines that lasts for 4 years. The second stage is Master's Degree course having the usual duration of 2 years.

Teacher Education

Primary school teachers are trained in secondary school teacher training institutions (*Ecole normale primaire*) in a 3-year post-junior secondary course. They obtain an A2 Diploma. Secondary school teachers are trained for four years at the Faculty of Education of the *Université nationale du Rwanda* where they obtain the *Agrégation*. Since 1999, secondary school teachers

are also trained at the new *Institut supérieur de Pédagogie* (ISP) of Kigali. Higher education teachers are trained at the *Université nationale du Rwanda*. They must hold a Masters or a Doctorate degree. They often go abroad to complete their training.

III- Program of Study

The primary curriculum includes the subjects: languages (Kinyarwanda, French and English), mathematics, sciences and elementary technology, social studies, music, artistic initiation, religion and physical education and sport.

The secondary curriculum is unified at the junior half, i.e., up to Grade-9, because that is a part of basic education. A student studies nine subjects at this level. The senior secondary (Grades 10-12) curriculum is diversified having scopes for studying in specialized streams as preparation for higher education.

IV-Assessment System

In Rwanda, there are three public examinations held before entering the universities. The first one is on completion of the primary education at Grade-6. This is a competitive examination - the *Certificat national de sixième Année primaire*, to enter secondary school. The second one is in completion of the junior secondary at Grade-9. This is the national secondary Education Ordinary Level test. The third one is held in completion of the senior secondary at Grade-12 and is termed *Diplôme de Fin d'Etudes secondaires*; this is actually the national Secondary Education Advance Level exam.

Grading system

Rwanda follows a letter grading system for the successful candidates. The grades are: A (85-100%), A- (80-84%), B+ (75-79%), B (70-74%), B- (65-69%), C+ (60-64%), C (55-59%), C- (50-54%) and D (40-49%). Examinees obtaining marks in the range of 0%-39% are declared failed.

V-Lessons for Bangladesh

The major characters of Rwandan education system that Bangladesh can follow or adapt can be as follows:

Rwanda is a poor country as Bangladesh; yet she spends about 4% of her GDP in education. Perhaps our present

government realizes the essentiality of education, so it can easily reach the Rwandan mark (surpassing the present level of spending about 2.4%) and later can try to increase this ratio gradually to reach the UNESCO standard of 7%.

The duration of compulsory primary education is 6 years in Rwanda; but basic education is up to Grade-9. In Bangladesh, there's a plan of 8-year long primary education since 1974 and this was not implemented during this long 35 years. The present government is said to be trying that lengthy primary education. However, I think, that may not be a wise decision. Even if we can realize this, the standard of education would go further down because of long monotonous years with low-grade teachers in primary schools. Better we can just follow the Rwandan 6-3-3 plan.

In Rwanda, basic and integrated/unified education is up to Grade-9, keeping Grades 7-9 in secondary schools. We can also do this and make the 3-year higher secondary diversified to meet the needs of both a longer integrated education and provide sufficient time for group-based learning to prepare for specialized higher education.

Before higher education, Rwanda has provision for three public examinations having a gap of 3 years each. The first one is in completion of primary (Grade-6), the second one in completion of junior secondary (Grade-9) and the third one in completion of senior secondary at Grade-12. At present we arrange the first public examination after long 10 years of study and then two secondary examinations very close to each other. This arrangement has been depriving the students of proper learning at the so-called 2-year higher secondary that virtually receives only one year. Better we should just follow the Rwandan plan; this will ensure accountability of primary teachers and provide adequate time for higher secondary students to learn.

(The writer is a PhD Researcher in NIE, Singapore; e-mail: asmollal@yahoo.com.)