

Active civil  
society for  
inclusive  
digital  
education in  
Rwanda



## RESULTS AND LESSONS BRIEF

# Harnessing Education Technology as a Response to COVID-19

This Learning Brief was compiled by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) to spotlight the project work, results and lessons from Rwanda Education for All Coalition (REFAC) project entitled “*Active civil society for inclusive digital education in Rwanda*”. The project was designed and implemented within the framework of the Resilience to COVID-19 through Digitalisation (RESICODI) German BACKUP Initiative to follow up on the implementation of the Education 2030 Agenda and SDG4 targets. The content presented in this learning brief was generated from the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) activities set up by the GCE Secretariat for national coalition partners to report on the progress and results of their respective country-level projects. The end-of-project report submitted by REFAC to GCE has been the primary source of the lessons and experiences shared in this Brief.

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## Background of the initiative

The ‘Harnessing Education Technology as a Response to COVID-19’ is a GCE project funded by the European Union (EU) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through Enabel and the GIZ-BACKUP Initiative. In the framework of this action, GIZ, via the BACKUP Initiative, opened a call for proposals on fostering digital solutions for basic education to strengthen and develop the capacities of education partners. In response to the call, GCE designed a programme to support the uptake of digital solutions to improve the continuity and quality of education services and provide evidence of their potential and limitations in Africa given the contextual challenges faced by the education sector in the continent.

The GCE programme was complemented by country level projects, implemented by seven national education coalitions in Burundi, DRC, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, Rwanda, and Zambia and one Teachers’ Union in Namibia. In this project, GCE supported the eight national level project partners to engage in research, monitoring, and planning with government institutions: including evidence-based advocacy for education technology (EdTech) and digital solutions in public education settings.

## Rwanda Education for All Coalition (REFAC)

Rwanda Education for All Coalition (REFAC) is a Coalition of 23 local Civil Society Organizations working towards the promotion of quality basic education for all in Rwanda. It was established in November 2013 and officially recognized in Rwanda as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). REFAC has a mission of advocating for free qualitative and effective education for all through the participation of civil society organizations. REFAC’s education advocacy mainly focus on early childhood education, special need education, adult literacy, girls and women education as well as technical and vocational education. The Coalition is a member of the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and the African Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA) and participates in various regional policy fora and plays a crucial role in engaging governments in education policy processes at national level.

## Objectives and scope of the project

In line with the broad scope of the initiative, REFAC developed and implemented a country level project entitled “Active civil society for inclusive digital education in Rwanda”. The project aimed at promoting the design of low-cost technological interventions to facilitate continued learning within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and raising awareness on the value of online learning/ICT in education service delivery and access to digital education services for learners and/or education professionals. The project was designed and implemented through (a) Advocacy meetings and campaigns on development of accessible inclusive online teaching tools for all learners (b) Training of head teachers, school parents’ committees and local education leaders on ICT education policy in five districts (c) Provide trainings on policy advocacy and influencing as well as monitoring of e-learning outcomes amidst COVID-19 at different levels (d) Establish a virtual information hub (online portal) accessible to members and stakeholders and (e) Lobbying for the establishment of a national e-learning platform (online portal) based on the national education curriculum.



# Successes and results of the project

## Short term results and impact of the project

### 1. Improvement of digital skills of learners and/or education professionals

The measure successfully influenced the national e-learning efforts by equipping school managers, teachers, and students with digital skills in the targeted pilot schools located in 5 districts. REFAC members and its stakeholders were also equipped with digital knowledge and skills, best practices and an inclusive e-learning platform was developed and used by all members and other stakeholders operating in the education sector. The policy briefs and assessment reports as well as other reference documents on digital skills have been shared and uploaded on the REFAC learning platform for use by all interested parties.

### 2. Learning and network building on national and/or regional and/or international level in the area of digital solutions for education and COVID-19 resilience in general

REFAC coordination team managed to participate in learning visits to Zambia Education Coalition and Burundi Bafashebige-EPT as per the work plan regarding shared learnings on digital education. Participation in the various learning visits provided opportunities for learning, experience sharing and networking. Acquired information, knowledge and skills informed the delivery of REFAC members' organizational learning and development ambitions.

### 3. Collaboration with the private sector (e.g. telecommunications/IT companies)

Through this measure, REFAC managed to involve the mass media (community radio and TV sessions) to promote low-tech mobile solutions in response to the COVID-19 related learning crisis. The project stakeholders have leveraged the existing tools and infrastructure to unlock learning opportunities. When the government opted for the low-tech mobile solutions for education programmes and learning solutions to reach students, REFAC collaborated with TV and radio stations to help students gain access to various learning materials during COVID-19.

In addition, REFAC entered into partnerships with the media for the design and broadcasting of the educational content, deployment of e-Book solutions, accessible for a majority via feature phones, providing expertise in monitoring and evaluation, providing guidance on implementation of sustainable educational programmes. Broadcast necessitated strong collaborations between broadcasters, education authorities and educators.





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#### **4. Organisational development and visibility**

The design and development of REFAC's policy influencing strategy enabled the Coalition and its members to engage in policy dialogues and lobbying avenues to influence policies directed towards e-learning friendly methods. Building on the mapping of the current practices on policy and advocacy engagement processes among REFAC members, the strategy has been serving as a guiding document for future capacity strengthening and monitoring tool for their engagement with key education stakeholders at all levels, state agencies, civil society organisations and others. The monitoring and evaluation plan developed at the design of this measure has been a very helpful tool to track progress resulting from the implementation of policy influencing strategies beyond the project period.

In addition, the advocacy meetings and round table meetings organised during the reporting period with diverse education stakeholders including Government institutions (Ministries, government agencies, district authorities, etc.) and civil society organisations increased the visibility of issues in ensuring inclusive education and elicited the formulation of related recommendations such as development of accessible inclusive online teaching tools for all learners.

#### **5. Gender equality in the use of digital solutions in the education sector as a COVID-19 response**

This intervention enabled REFAC to raise awareness on the potential to integrate gender perspectives in ICT related strategies, policies, plans, and budgets. Various project stakeholders benefited from capacity building in using gender analysis, as well as the active involvement of women throughout the design, implementation and monitoring of strategies and policies. This project has been able to promote the review of existing ICT in education policies for gender responsiveness as well as inclusive digital learning in Rwanda.

In addition, REFAC managed to make the community and schools aware of the threats that arise from ICTs and address inequalities that hinder girls and women from fully participating in and benefiting from the information society. Together, Civil Society Organizations embarked on the journey to challenge stereotypes in ICT, push back against negative representation of women online, and committed to provide digital avenues for women's realities, perspectives and tackling offline gender-based barriers such as access to resources and education.





## Long term results and impact of the project

### *Strengthened collaboration and engagement of Ministry of Education*

#### 1. Access to digital education services for learners and/or education professionals

Before the project kicked off, various meetings were organized to have the buy in of policy makers and government agencies and to ensure they have common understanding on the project roadmap and identifying beneficiaries. Joint monitoring of project activities was collectively organized and delivered. It is worth mentioning that, from the advocacy meetings, majority of the education policy makers and enforcers were engaged, and the measure created lasting relationships that will remain after the project completion.

This project enabled REFAC to influence the government, especially the Ministry of Education and affiliated institutions, to equip the education professionals with the necessary technology skills and provide learners with affordable and easy access to internet and hardware to enhance these e-learning platforms. The Ministry of Education and other education stakeholders became more cognizant of the effects of COVID-19 on education and committed to strengthening existing strategies, accordingly. The Ministry also committed to the adoption of better e-learning friendly methods during and after the pandemic and pledged to harness the capacity of teachers in ICT as a solution to promote EdTech in the education sector.

*As a result of the project interventions, the Ministry of Education is now conscious of the need to and has committed to:*

- ◆ Ensure extensive consultation in the development of policies and guidelines on the use of ICT in education and the wide dissemination of adopted policies.
  - ◆ Develop guidelines on the use of e-learning platforms.
  - ◆ Strictly follow up and monitor the use of ICT and ensure this is institutionalized in schools.
  - ◆ Support schools, teachers, and learners to access digital equipment/devices, and ensure inclusive use of ICT in education.
2. In addition, REFAC managed to establish and nurture a good relationship with the government as the responsible institution to ensure ownership, successful implementation and sustainability of the outcomes. In this regard, REFAC made sure to target and engage the Ministry of Education, the Rwanda Education Board and targeted District Education Officers. The latter played a significant role in putting into practice the project recommendations.

Notwithstanding the successes realised in harnessing education technology in Rwanda, the coalition noted limitations relation to lack or limited knowledge on e-learning policies and regulatory frameworks, lack of technological ICT infrastructure to translate policy into practice, limited internet connectivity in education facilities and schools (rural vs urban); and limited knowledge and skills to use ICT, including EdTech, in teaching and limited availability of digital gadgets. Few teachers reported prior relevant experience of engaging in teaching and learning activities remotely: around 18% of teachers and 41% of head teachers reported online experience of learning, teaching or online school management prior to the pandemic.





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## Lessons learned and recommendations from the project

### Lessons learned and recommendations from the project

- ◆ The project had a strong gender component in the provision of digital skills and participation in policy engagement which ensured that both male and female participants were represented in trainings and meetings.
- ◆ Through advocacy meetings, printing and distribution of information, education communication materials, by using media coverage and press conferences, using television and radio experiences and lessons learned were shared with policy makers, direct beneficiaries, and the general public.
- ◆ REFAC adopted a staggered approach in developing a good working relationship with the Government. Involving them from the onset was both strategic and pragmatic in ensuring that the Ministry of Education and its sister departments understand the use of EdTech, initiate discussions among themselves, and finally putting into practice REFAC's project recommendations.
- ◆ Through the project's capacity strengthening efforts and shared-learning groups and communities of practice, REFAC members and its stakeholders gained knowledge and skills necessary to engage with national processes, and the production of evidence-based advocacy. Indirectly, this contributed to ownership of the measure's interventions by all those involved and created synergies and linkages with similar actors, who will remain active after the project completion and will contribute to sustainability and scaling of the project initiatives.
- ◆ There is need to equip trainers with the necessary technology skills, avail learners with affordable and easy access to the internet and ICT hardware to enhance e-learning platforms and to also have a uniform and informative assessment procedure for learners, which can follow the e-learning platforms.

### Way forward

To ensure that the project is sustainable and continues into the foreseeable future, REFAC will:

- ◆ Add learning events as a standing agenda on the members meetings and coalition general assemblies to keep the momentum and update each other on the project's achievements.
- ◆ REFAC Coordination team will continue to mobilize resources to support follow-up activities.

### Contact Information about the project

Rwanda Education For All Coalition <a href="http://www.refac.rw">www.refac.rw</a>	Global Campaign for Education <a href="https://campaignforeducation.org/en">https://campaignforeducation.org/en</a>
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