



POLICY BRIEF

ADDRESSING CORRUPTION AND PROMOTING
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN RWANDA: EVIDENCE FROM
HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS AND CITIZEN SURVEY

November, 2025



POLICY BRIEF

Addressing Corruption and
Promoting Inclusive Education
in Rwanda: Evidence from Higher
Learning Institutions and Citizen Survey

November, 2025



Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION.....	5
KEY FINDINGS.....	7
WHERE POWER MEETS VULNERABILITY: WHAT FUELS CORRUPTION IN HEIs AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS?	16
KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	18
CONCLUSION.....	26

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

POLICY BRIEF

Addressing Corruption and Promoting Inclusive Education in Rwanda:
Evidence from Higher Learning Institutions and Citizen Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent research conducted by Transparency International Rwanda reveals persistent, multi-layered forms of corruption affecting inclusive education in Rwanda. These challenges pose serious threats to accessing education, especially for women, girls, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and other groups of people at risk of discrimination.

The first study was entitled: ***“Invisible Barriers: Citizen Perceptions and Experiences of How Corruption in the Education Sector Undermines Access and Equity for Women, Girls, and other Groups at Risk of Discrimination***

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

reveals that although Rwanda has made significant strides in promoting inclusive education, corruption risks, poor infrastructure, a lack of resources tailored for people with disabilities, and gender-specific challenges, including inadequate menstrual hygiene facilities, remain a serious threat to inclusive education.

The second study (***An Impossible Choice: power plays and sexual corruption in Rwanda's higher education institutions***) uncovers sexual corruption (“sextortion”) in higher learning institutions in Rwanda, where power imbalances between lecturers and students, especially women, are exploited to solicit sex in exchange for grades or academic progression. The findings collectively demonstrate the critical need for change, including the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and procedures in institutional governance, accountability frameworks, reporting systems, and community education, particularly for parents and students.

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

INTRODUCTION

Rwanda's commitment to inclusive, high-quality education is reflected in its legal and policy, and institutional frameworks. Yet, corruption still impedes equitable outcomes.

The research reveals:

- Persistent cases of corrupt behavior in schools. Where respondents gave worrying accounts of persistent instances where power is abused by actors in the education system. Respondents gave detailed accounts of malpractice in secondary schools: placement of students in schools, changes in students' combinations, exams, and associated procedures, the school feeding program, and teachers' placement and transfers.
- Sexual corruption in higher education, enabled by steep power dynamics, a lack of anonymous reporting systems, and entrenched gender and cultural norms.

POLICY BRIEF

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

This policy brief summarizes these findings and makes specific policy recommendations to enhance accountability and safeguard student rights.

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

KEY FINDINGS

I. Corruption vulnerabilities affecting delivery of education

In the study titled *"Invisible Barriers: Citizen Perceptions and Experiences of How Corruption in the Education Sector Undermines Access and Equity for Women, Girls, and Other Groups at Risk of Discrimination,"* participating students and teachers perceived the level of corruption in the secondary schools to be relatively low in key service delivery chain. These include student placement (around 8%), getting improved grades (around 5%), school feeding (nearly 5%) and change a combination (nearly 5%). Despite significant efforts, including NESA's investment in automated placement services for students completing Primary Six and Ordinary Level, the procedures still face risks of corruption, particularly during the complaints-handling stage.

POLICY BRIEF

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

Interview participants recounted diverse accounts illustrating their experiences of corrupt practices encountered while seeking education services.

“As a teacher, I can testify that there are so many cases where students or their parents are demanded to pay bribes to get admissions in certain schools or get combinations of courses they wish to study in advanced level. For example, the fact that we have so few Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) while the government has provided school fees subsidies for students enrolled in TTC, students are demanded to pay bribes to get admitted. Only students who do not pay bribes are those selected by REB/NESA after the national exam. But of course, headmasters unofficially do remain with some places to bring in other students who engaged in corrupt practices prior to admission”.

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

II. Widening Inequality

Corruption often preys on women and girls. Students from low-income households who cannot afford bribe cost being disadvantaged and corrupt actors target people with disabilities.

The findings indicate that females (7.8%), members of low-income households (8.6%), persons with disabilities (9.2%), students with mental disabilities (46.1%), and students with stigmatized illnesses (10.2%) are more likely to pay bribes to secure placement compared to their respective counterparts.

Students with mental disabilities often encounter deep-rooted stigma and negative attitudes from school administrators and communities. This discrimination can result in informal barriers to admission, leading families to believe that bribing is the only way to secure a place for their child.

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

III. Gendered Barriers to Education Access for Women and Girls

Interviews with victims and witnesses show teachers misusing their authority to demand sexual acts in exchange for passing grades, access to exams, or academic progression. Some hold senior administrative positions, making reporting risky.

Women and Girls frequently face:

- Persistent sexual pressure, threats, or intimidation.
- Abuse concealed within mentorship, supervision, or internship processes.
- Unjustified academic penalties for rejecting advances.
- Cultural Silence: Victims fear retaliation, stigma,

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

"I got pregnant at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic when all schools were closed. After giving birth, I went back to school though my parents were hesitant. My father is still regretful, saying he is schooling a mother with no dignity. At school, I face so many cases of discrimination by students and sexual harassment by teachers. One of my teachers always harasses me because I refused to have sexual intercourse with him. He tells me: "You are a mature mother, aren't you nostalgic about having sex?" There are other cases where school officials harass me. For instance, when I am delayed in turning up at school on time (due to motherhood responsibility), one of the officials tells me: "You, grown woman, can't you come to school on time?" ~ A student and teen mother in the Kamonyi District.

- IV. Power Asymmetries: Teaching staff possess significant influence over grades, assessments, thesis approvals, and career pathways.

"I know a young orphan lady who is very intelligent in class but one of her teachers made her repeat a year after denying to have sexual intercourse with her. Because I knew that case where the lady repeated, when my daughter reported to me

that one of her teachers wanted to induce her into sex in exchange for marks. I

POLICY BRIEF

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

decided to take her to another school in Musanze where I have to pay RWF 155,000 per term while I used to pay only 89,000 at the previous school in Nyanza. I did this because my daughter told me that the teacher had already started asking her to give sexual favours in exchange for marks”.

A separate study entitled *“An Impossible Choice: Power Plays and Sexual Corruption in Rwanda’s Higher Education Institutions,”* examined related issues. The findings reveal deeply rooted gender discrimination, a culture of silence surrounding sexual harassment, and weak enforcement mechanisms that continue to limit the effectiveness of the laws. If left unaddressed, sexual corruption risks undoing the hard-won progress made in women’s access to education and the broader fight against corruption and injustice. The high degree of power and autonomy accorded to lecturers can enable corrupt practices. In addition to reports of monetary bribes being extracted from students, some respondents explained that lecturers abuse their position, and attempt to extort women into providing sex and other sexual acts.

Some participants in this case study (with names changed to protect their anonymity) highlighted recurring forms of gender-based corruption in delivery chain of service.

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

“Sonia” explained how her lecturer had attempted to coerce her into providing a sexual act in exchange for a passing grade for a test. While Sonia was initially told that she had passed the examination, after refusing her lecturer’s persistent sexual demands she was failed and forced to retake the module. Sonia explained that her lecturer unfairly failed her again on multiple subsequent occasions. This, ultimately, delayed her graduation and caused a great deal of stress and uncertainty in her life.

“Claudette” shared a similar story. She was invited to a lecturer’s office under the guise of discussing her academic performance, only for the lecturer to make sexual advances. She reported feeling trapped, as her academic future depended on the very person harassing her. Eventually, Claudette dropped out of university after the mental toll of repeated harassment and academic failures became too much to bear.

POLICY BRIEF

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

“Jovia” studied in a public university, and shared her experience regarding a lecturer in her first-year course. The lecturer requested Jovia’s phone number and subsequently began making inappropriate advances, repeatedly calling her and expressing a romantic interest. Feeling trapped and intimidated, she eventually blocked him, which led to the lecturer retaliating by publicly shaming her, ejecting her from his class, and denying her access to exams and continuous assessment tests (CATs), which put her academic career in jeopardy. Jovia said the lecturer had a reputation for such behaviour. For example, he had reportedly made sexual advances towards other women students, promising to give them the questions of upcoming exams.

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

“Teta” shared a distressing account of sexual corruption at a private university. During her studies, a Head of Department repeatedly harassed her, sending inappropriate messages, alongside explicit photos of himself. Despite Teta’s attempts to avoid him by rescheduling classes and avoiding interactions, the harassment escalated as he manipulated her grades, making them disappear from the system to pressure her into compliance. When she refused his advances, he claimed she had failed several courses, insisting that she would have to retake them or accept his conditions. Teta described the misery of feeling her academic success depended on someone misusing their power.

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

WHERE POWER MEETS VULNERABILITY: WHAT FUELS CORRUPTION IN HEIs AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

Corruption in higher education institutions (HEIs) and secondary schools is driven by a combination of structural weaknesses, power imbalances, and weak enforcement of the law, policies, and procedures. This leads to weak transparency mechanisms, ineffective anti-corruption measures, and thus, misconduct becomes normalized and difficult to challenge. Below are some identified gaps that might fuel corruption prevalence, as revealed in two research studies

- Inadequate independent oversight over academic staff misconduct: Lack of external oversight with the power to investigate and punish violations, cases of corruption or abuse are often handled internally, which results in unequal or insufficient responsibility

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

- Weak whistleblower protections within HEIs and Secondary schools: Clear protection of whistleblowers in HLIs and in secondary schools in Rwanda remains weak, leaving students, teachers, and staff exposed to retaliation when reporting misconduct. The absence of clear, enforced safeguards discourages individuals from disclosing corruption or abuse, particularly when perpetrators hold positions of authority.
- Limited gender-sensitive education for academic staff and administrators: Many educators lack the appropriate skills to detect gender-based vulnerabilities, respond appropriately to reported cases, or mainstream gender equity principles into teaching, supervision, and school management.
- Non-standardized disciplinary measures across institutions: In some private schools/universities, disciplinary actions are overlooked when the

POLICY BRIEF

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

perpetrators have family or friendly relationships with the institution's owners.

- Lack of digital or anonymous reporting channels: These studies showed that sexual corruption, harassment, and other abuses are still prevalent in HLIs in Rwanda, and that existing complaint channels often fail survivors due to their lack of confidentiality, hard to access, or fear of retaliation
- Gender imbalance in leadership: Male-dominated academic setting exacerbates unchecked authority.

Addressing corruption and promoting Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

SN	Identified gaps	Recommended Solutions	Responsible institutions
1	Inadequate institutional governance mechanisms for preventing and addressing corruption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a Sexual Misconduct and Ethics Committees within each institution • Ensure these committees operate separately from university management to avoid conflicts of interest and cover-ups. • Mandate annual reports on cases handled, outcomes, and preventive actions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Learning Institutions (both public & private) • Higher Education Council (HEC) • Office of the Ombudsman

POLICY BRIEF

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and support student-led anti-corruption committees/clubs. 	
2	Inadequate independent oversight over academic staff misconduct	<p>Conducts periodical ethics audits assessing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevalence of sexual corruption Compliance with anti-GBV policies Transparency in disciplinary procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher Learning Institutions (both public & private) Higher Education Council (HEC) Office of the Ombudsman MIGEPROF/GMO
3	Weak whistleblower protections within HEIs and Secondary schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish confidential, anonymous reporting systems (online platforms, hotlines, independent officers). Guarantee non-retaliation measures for victims and whistleblowers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher Learning Institutions (both public & private) Higher Education Council (HEC)

Addressing corruption and promoting Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Ombudsman • Civil Society/Media Partners • MIGEPROF/GMO
4	<p>Limited gender-sensitive education for academic staff and administrators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory annual training for staff and students on sexual corruption and gender equality. • Consistent Orientation sessions/public lectures explaining rights, reporting mechanisms, and laws. • Develop and provide gender sensitive anti-corruption visibility materials to all academic staff, general staff, and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Learning Institutions (both public & private) • Higher Education Council (HEC) • Office of the Ombudsman • Civil Society/Media Partners • MIGEPROF/GMO

POLICY BRIEF

Addressing corruption and promoting Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

		<p>students, including Posters with key messages, Flyers/Brochures explaining types of corruption, how to report, and students' rights, Stickers with short slogans promoting integrity, Banners placed at campus entrances, halls, libraries, and dormitories, etc.</p>	
5	<p>Non-standardized disciplinary measures across institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalize and rigorously enforce a zero-tolerance policy in all HLIs, accompanied by the consistent application of sanctions for perpetrators in line with established institutional policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Learning Institutions (both public & private) • Higher Education Council (HEC) • Office of the Ombudsman • Civil

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply sanctions to corruption perpetrators in strict accordance with Rwanda’s legal framework and established procedures • All HLIs partner with the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB), the Office of the Ombudsman, or TI-Rwanda to handle investigations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RIB • RNP
6	Gender imbalance in leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt recruitment and promotion practices that actively promote gender equity. • Ensure balanced gender representation by actively appointing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Learning Institutions (both public & private) • Higher Education Council (HEC)

POLICY BRIEF

Addressing corruption and promoting Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

		women in examination bodies, research committees, and faculty leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Ombudsman • Civil Society/Media Partners • MIGEPROF/GMO
7	Some lecturers misusing their authority to demand sexual favors in exchange for passing grades, access to exams,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and require all teaching staff to use a digitized grading system, peer-reviewed assessments procedures, and archived evaluation records to reduce manipulation. • Establish and reinforce a policy/procedure on multi-level approval for any grade modification, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Learning Institutions (both public & private) • Higher Education Council (HEC) • Office of the Ombudsman

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

	or academic progression	<p>and Clear timelines for grade release and appeals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and reinforce a policy/procedure on sharing in advance, Rubrics, marking schemes, syllabi and Standardized assessment methods across departments/classes 	
8	Lack/limited Support Services to corruption victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish gender desks and counseling units in all HLIs and secondary schools Allocate resources for prevention, reporting, and victim support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher Learning Institutions (both public & private) Higher Education Council (HEC) Office of the Ombudsman

POLICY BRIEF

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Civil Society/Media Partners• MIGEPROF/GMO |
|--|--|--|---|

Addressing corruption and promoting
Inclusive education in Rwanda: Evidence from
Higher learning institutions and citizen survey.

CONCLUSION

Corruption, especially sexual corruption, poses a threat to Rwanda's progress in gender equality, high-quality education, and anti-corruption initiatives. To dismantle this form of authority abuse, stakeholders must prioritize prevention, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and ensure protection for victims. Ending all forms of corruption in HLIs and secondary schools is essential for ensuring that no student is denied their right to education or forced to choose between their dignity and quality educational services.



TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL RWANDA

P.O. BOX 6252 KIGALI-RWANDA

E-MAIL: info@tirwanda.org

Website: www.tirwanda.org

www.ifatetirwanda.org

PHONE: +250 788 30 95 83

2641 (TOLL FREE)