

**REPORT ON THE PROJECT FOR THE MANUFACTURING AND DISTRIBUTION OF
336,000 SCHOOL DESKS BY THE GOVERNMENT OF BURUNDI: CURRENT
SITUATION, CHALLENGES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

UMUSEKE - JOINT PROGRAM LEAGUE ITEKA & KING UMURUNDI FREEDOM
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THE NEW ADMINISTRATIVE MAP OF BURUNDI

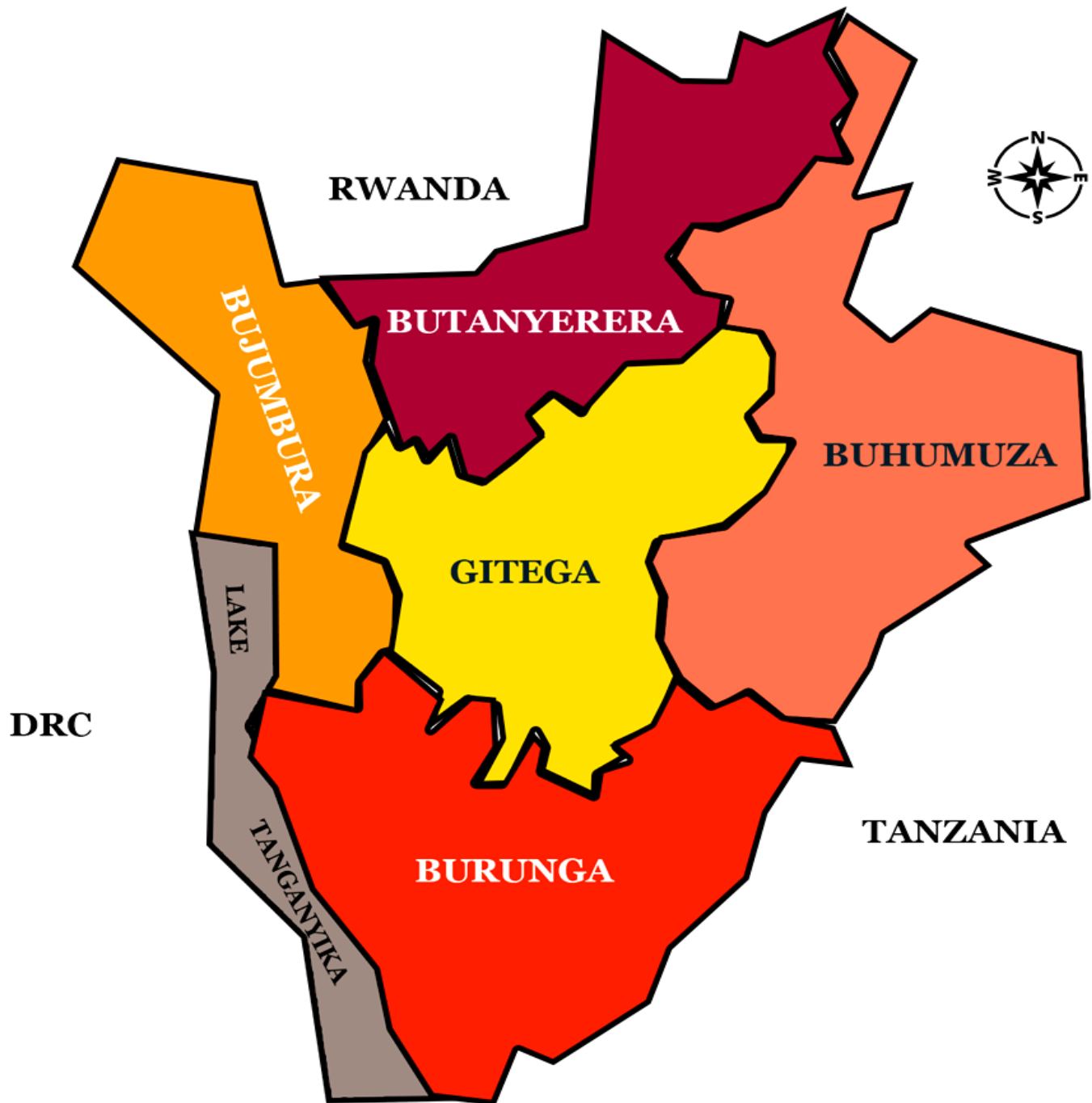


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ANALYSIS OF THE « ZERO CHILD BADLY SEATED» PROGRAM ACCORDING TO MANUMA ANTOINE, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS IN THE EDUCATION AND TEACHING SECTOR OF BURUNDI «FNASEEB.»



On the eve of the 2025-2026 school year, the Government of Burundi allocated funding for its "Zero Poorly Seated Children" Program, which aims to ensure that no student is forced to study in undignified conditions by providing schools with a sufficient number of desks to achieve the goal of two students per desk.

The implementation of the Program has experienced significant delays. Manufacturing workshops are now operational in several communes, and the first results are expected during the 2026-2027 school year.

In many primary schools, students have long attended classes in extremely precarious conditions: sitting on bricks or directly on the ground, standing during lessons, or crammed four or five to a desk designed for two. These conditions compromise concentration, limit note-taking, and considerably reduce the quality of learning.

The financial commitment of 18 billion Burundian francs, based on an average cost of 50,000 francs per desk, would allow for the production of approximately 360,000 desks. However, this effort remains insufficient. Previous estimates already indicated a need for nearly 600,000 desks. With the continued increase in school enrollment, the actual needs are now even greater. This makes a reassessment of the program's budget essential.

The production of desks alone will not be enough. In several schools, classes accommodate between 100 and 150 students, while classrooms lack the capacity to hold the number of desks necessary to meet the standard of two students per desk. The program's long-term success also requires the construction of new classrooms to reduce class sizes to approximately 50 students, thus creating a more conducive learning environment.

Furthermore, the project's implementation remains highly uneven across municipalities. While some have launched production, others have not yet started work or are progressing at an insufficient pace. The government itself has acknowledged that some municipal administrations have not spent the funds received. This situation is explained in particular by inadequate local planning, a lack of mastery of administrative procedures, and the project's absence from some municipal community development plans. This has led several officials to hesitate in committing expenditures.

In addition to these difficulties, there are institutional weaknesses. Municipal education officials are primarily under the authority of the municipal administrators. This limits the Ministry of Education's ability to effectively monitor the program and hold it accountable in cases of poor implementation. The risk of mismanagement of public resources remains a major concern. Previous cases of misappropriation leading to the dismissal of some municipal administrators demonstrate that this program is not immune to embezzlement or misappropriation of funds. The

success of the initiative will therefore depend as much on securing funding as on transparency, oversight, and good governance throughout its implementation.

The union recommends establishing a joint committee in each municipality, including parents and teacher representatives, to ensure transparency in the use of public funds. It also recommends revising the legal framework so that each ministry exercises effective administrative authority over the agents responsible for implementing its public policies.





According to Gabriel Rufyiri, President of the Observatory for the Fight against Corruption and Economic Misappropriation (OLUCOME), the issue of inadequate school desks cannot be analyzed in isolation from the structural challenges that characterize the Burundian education system. He believes that any state aspiring to sustainable development must make education a strategic priority, based on rigorous planning, a long-term vision, and effective governance. However, the Burundian education sector continues to face numerous difficulties,

including high population density, insufficient school infrastructure, limited teaching resources, and persistent weaknesses in public policy governance.

While acknowledging that the **"Zero Badly Seated Children"** program addresses a real need, Gabriel Rufyiri believes it does not tackle the root cause of the problem. In his view, the main difficulty lies in the rapid population growth, which leads to a constant increase in the number of students. With an average of about six children per household, educational infrastructure is struggling to keep pace with demand. Without effective family planning and population growth management policies, investments in school desks and benches are likely to have limited impact.

He also points out that improving learning conditions depends not only on the availability of desks and benches. It also requires a comprehensive strengthening of the education system, through the recruitment of a sufficient number of teachers, the provision of appropriate teaching materials, and the construction of new classrooms to reduce school overcrowding and provide a conducive learning environment.

On the financial front, Gabriel Rufyiri emphasizes the need for transparent and rigorous management of public resources. According to him, the allocation of funds to municipalities should be based on reliable statistical data that reflects the actual needs of each locality. He notes that several municipal funding programs have, in the past, been marred by embezzlement and mismanagement. To prevent these dysfunctions from recurring, he advocates for the implementation of robust control, audit, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms to ensure the efficient use of tax revenue.

Gabriel Rufyiri also expresses serious concerns regarding the use of communal forests for manufacturing school desks. According to his information, trees have been felled without respecting environmental management standards. Such an approach risks exacerbating deforestation and jeopardizing efforts to combat climate change. He believes this strategy should be abandoned in favor of more sustainable solutions, while ensuring that all forty-two communes

in the country have equitable access to school desks, regardless of their forest resources.

Beyond these issues, Gabriel Rufyiri laments a recurring weakness in the conduct of public policy in Burundi: the insufficient emphasis placed on technical expertise in the design, planning, and implementation of public programs. According to him, many initiatives are launched without thorough prior studies or sufficient technical analyses, which explains the trial and error, observed during their implementation and reduces their effectiveness.

He also emphasizes the lack of effective institutional mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and evaluation, learning, and capitalizing on experience. Without a system for regularly measuring results, identifying obstacles encountered, and integrating lessons learned into future decisions, the same mistakes risk being repeated from one program to the next. For him, a public policy can only produce lasting results if it is based on evidence-based planning, recognized expertise, ongoing monitoring, and regular performance evaluation.

Ultimately, Gabriel Rufyiri considers the **"Zero Dadly Seated Children"** program to be a relevant initiative that addresses a legitimate concern. However, its success will depend on its ability to be part of a more comprehensive reform of the education system, based on better control of population growth, strengthening of school infrastructure, transparent management of public resources, effective protection of the environment and governance based on expertise, monitoring and evaluation of public policies.



I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Access to a safe and suitable school environment is essential for realizing the right to quality education. In Burundi, despite efforts to improve access to education, many schools continue to face a significant shortage of school furniture. In several schools, students share a single desk with more people than its normal capacity, while others attend classes sitting on the floor or on makeshift supports. This situation compromises the quality of learning, affects children's health and dignity, and contributes to the rapid deterioration of available equipment.

To address this issue, the Government of Burundi has launched a national program to manufacture 336,000 desks, funded by an announced allocation of 18 billion Burundian francs (BIF), for public schools.

Given the importance of this public investment, the Burundian League for Human Rights “Iteka” and King Umurundi Freedom produced this report to assess the implementation process and the main challenges of the program. The objective is to contribute to strengthening transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the management of public resources allocated to the education sector.

The analysis by the Burundian League for Human Rights “Iteka” and King Umurundi Freedom highlights several key findings:

1. The program addresses a real and widely recognized need. The shortage of desks and benches remains a significant obstacle to the quality of education in many schools. However, simply increasing the number of desks manufactured does not, in itself, guarantee an improvement in learning conditions. A distribution of equipment based on the actual needs of schools is essential.
2. The implementation of the program raises several technical challenges. Adherence to the time required for tree felling, wood drying, processing, transformation, and transport is essential to guaranteeing the quality and durability of school desks. Compliance with manufacturing standards is also crucial to ensuring student safety and optimizing public investment. Insufficient planning of these various stages risks reducing the lifespan of the equipment and leading to additional costs for the government.
3. The information gathered during the study reveals concerns regarding the program's implementation. Informants reported that manufacturing contracts were allegedly awarded to individuals or operators whose technical experience in school furniture production was not always established. The report emphasizes that a selection process based on technical skills, experience, production capacity, and transparent procedures is essential for ensuring quality, efficiency, and good governance.
4. The analysis reveals significant variations in the manufacturing and transportation costs reported by informants. According to the information gathered, some desk benches were reportedly billed at up to 150,000 BIF, others at 130,000 BIF, while several manufacturers and industry professionals consulted during the study estimate that the manufacturing cost of a comparable desk bench would generally be between 70,000 and 80,000 BIF, excluding specific constraints. While these discrepancies do not, in themselves, constitute overbilling, they nevertheless justify an independent technical and financial audit of the cost structure, procurement procedures, transportation costs, and contract execution terms.
5. The report notes that the transparency of public information regarding the program's implementation remains limited. Regular publication of budget allocations, contracts, unit costs, quantities produced, beneficiary schools, and implementation reports, as well as quality control

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results, would strengthen accountability, facilitate citizen oversight, and improve monitoring by oversight institutions and technical and financial partners.

6. The report emphasizes the need for better documentation of the contributions of technical and financial partners supporting the education sector through the construction of classrooms, the provision of desks and other school equipment. Clarification is needed to determine whether these contributions have been included in the national target of 336,000 desks or accounted for separately. It is also important to examine the management of resources made available to municipalities benefiting from this support to ensure complementary and transparent use of public funding and partner contributions. Such a distinction is essential to avoid double counting of achievements, ensure better coordination of interventions, and allow for an accurate assessment of the financial contribution of the State and its development partners.

7. The report draws attention to the environmental challenges related to the implementation of the program. The manufacture of 336,000 school desks requires the harvesting of a significant volume of wood, raising concerns about the sustainable management of forest resources. While utilizing old-growth forests can help meet the program's needs, the lack of public information on a systematic reforestation or forest compensation mechanism is likely to increase pressure on the national forest cover. The report believes that any program of this scale should be accompanied by a clear strategy for the sustainable management of resources, including reforestation, the renewal of harvested plantations, monitoring the legal origin of the wood, and the promotion of environmentally sound practices. Such an approach would reconcile the objectives of improving learning conditions with Burundi's commitments to environmental protection and sustainable development.

In light of these findings, the report makes specific recommendations to the relevant ministries, provincial and municipal authorities, municipal education directorates, schools, oversight bodies, technical and financial partners, civil society organizations, and communities. These recommendations aim, in particular, to strengthen technical planning, transparency in procurement, cost control, quality control, monitoring and evaluation, publication of implementation data, and citizen participation.

The Burundian Human Rights League 'Iteka' and King Umurundi Freedom see this report as a constructive contribution to improving the governance of public investment in the education sector. Ensuring that every student has suitable school furniture is not just a material investment; it's a commitment to the right to education, good governance, and responsible use of public resources. Strengthening transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the program will help build citizen and development partner trust, while sustainably improving learning conditions for Burundian children.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In light of the findings, the Iteka League and King Umurundi make the following recommendations to strengthen transparency, efficiency, technical quality, and accountability in the implementation of the national desk-building program.

⇒ ***To the Government of Burundi:***

1. Establish a national program coordination mechanism bringing together the relevant ministries, territorial authorities, and representatives of civil society.
2. Publish information on program funding, achievements, and results periodically.
3. Ensure that any expansion of the program is based on an independent assessment of the actual needs of schools.

⇒ ***To the Minister of National Education and Scientific Research:***

1. Develop a needs assessment for each school based on the number of students, the number of classrooms, and the student-to-desk ratio.
2. Distribute the desks according to objective criteria to prevent some schools from being over-equipped while others remain severely under-equipped.
3. Define national standards for the dimensions, quality, and durability of school desks.

⇒ ***To the Minister of Finance, Budget, and Digital Economy:***

1. Publish the amounts transferred to each province and municipality.
2. Publish the unit manufacturing and transportation costs used by the program.
3. Commission an independent financial audit to assess the efficiency of the expenditures incurred.

⇒ ***To the Minister of Environment, Agriculture, and Livestock:***

1. Oversee the harvesting of timber for the program in accordance with sustainable forest management principles.
2. Strengthen reforestation programs to compensate for harvested timber.

⇒ ***To the Provincial Governors:***

1. Provide monthly progress reports on the program.
2. Organize coordination meetings with municipal administrators and municipal education directorates.
3. Publish provincial reports on achievements, challenges encountered, and corrective measures adopted.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS *(the following of page 10)*

⇒ ***To Municipal Administrations:***

1. Ensure that service providers are selected according to transparent and objective criteria based on their technical expertise.
2. Avoid any conflict of interest in the awarding of contracts.
3. Publicly display amounts received, contracts awarded, and completed projects.
4. Ensure close monitoring of the quality of the work.

⇒ ***To Municipal Education Departments:***

1. Verify that delivered desks and benches meet technical specifications before acceptance.
2. Regularly update school needs.
3. Ensure distribution is based on the actual needs of students.
4. Document any difficulties encountered and report them to the appropriate authorities.

⇒ ***To Schools:***

1. Maintain a permanent inventory of school furniture.
2. Raise student awareness about protecting school equipment.
3. Promptly report any manufacturing defects or significant damage.

⇒ ***To technical and financial partners:***

1. Support the strengthening of transparency, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms.
2. Encourage independent technical audits and performance evaluations.
3. Assist the Government in developing national quality standards for school furniture.

⇒ ***To civil society organizations, including trade unions:***

1. Continue citizen monitoring of program implementation.
2. Raise community awareness of good governance principles.
3. Publish regular independent analyses of investments in the education sector.

⇒ ***To communities and parent committees:***

1. Actively participate in monitoring the distribution of school desks and benches.
2. Promote parental education on the protection and maintenance of school furniture.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS *(the following of page 11)*

3. Report any irregularities observed in the implementation of the program.
4. Encourage responsible management of public property within schools.
- ⇒ ***To the oversight institutions: the Court of Auditors, the Inspectorate General of the State, and the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (ARMP):***
 1. Conduct technical, financial, and performance audits of the program.
 2. Verify that manufacturing and transportation costs are in line with market prices.
 3. Review procurement procedures to ensure compliance with the principles of fairness, competition, and transparency.
 4. Publish the findings of their audits and any recommendations made.
- ⇒ ***To the National Assembly's Education Committee and the relevant Senate Committee:***
 1. Ensure regular monitoring of the program's implementation by periodically hearing from the relevant ministries and institutions to assess progress, challenges encountered, and results achieved.
 2. Demand that the Government publish periodic reports detailing, in particular, the resources mobilized, contracts awarded, unit costs, quantities of school desks manufactured and distributed, the municipalities and schools benefiting from them, and the contributions of technical and financial partners.
 3. Conduct parliamentary oversight missions on the ground to verify the quality of the school desks, their distribution according to the actual needs of schools, and the conformity of the projects to the Government's commitments.
 4. Ensure that budget laws allocate sufficient resources for the maintenance and replacement of school furniture and for reforestation programs designed to offset the exploitation of forest resources used to manufacture the school desks.



III. REPORT OBJECTIVES

1. Evaluate the implementation of the national program for the manufacture and distribution of 336,000 school desks and benches, analyzing the planning, production, procurement, and distribution mechanisms and their alignment with the actual needs of schools.
2. Examine the program's governance and financial management, including the alignment of expenditures with budget forecasts, manufacturing costs, procurement procedures, transparency in the use of public resources, and the risks of misappropriation, favoritism, or overbilling.
3. Analyze the program's impact on student learning conditions and the sustainable management of resources, considering the quality of school furniture, its impact on the educational environment, and the challenges related to forest resource exploitation and reforestation efforts.
4. Formulate recommendations for public authorities, control institutions, technical and financial partners, local authorities and school communities, in order to strengthen the transparency, accountability, good governance and effectiveness of future investment programs in the education sector.

IV. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH USED

This report is based on a qualitative analysis approach that relies on cross-referencing information from several credible sources. The information analyzed was gathered as part of the regular documentation and monitoring activities conducted by the Burundian League for Human Rights Iteka and King Umurundi Freedom.

The analysis draws on information collected from various stakeholders, observations made in several locations, accessible administrative and budgetary documents, official communications, and publications from technical and financial partners. To protect the safety of those who contributed to this study, the identity of the sources, the precise methods of information collection, and certain identifying details are not disclosed.

The information collected underwent systematic cross-checking to assess its consistency and reliability. When certain allegations could not be corroborated by multiple independent sources or supporting documents, they are presented with the necessary reservations and are not considered established facts.

INTRODUCTION

“A classroom only truly becomes a place of learning when every student can learn there in conditions of dignity, safety, and equality.” In Burundi, thousands of children continue to attend schools where the lack of desks and benches remains a daily reality. In many schools, three, four, or even five students share a bench designed for two or three people, while others attend classes sitting on the floor or on makeshift supports. Beyond the discomfort it causes, this situation compromises students' concentration, harms the quality of learning, and infringes upon their fundamental right to a quality education.

Aware of this problem, the Government of Burundi has launched an ambitious national program to manufacture 336,000 desks and benches, funded by an announced budget of 18 billion Burundian francs. This initiative represents a major public investment and raises legitimate

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expectations regarding its impact on improving learning conditions in public schools.

However, the scale of a public investment is not measured solely by the amount of resources mobilized or the number of pieces of equipment announced. It is also measured by the quality of governance, the transparency of procedures, the efficiency of management, the equity in the allocation of resources, and the capacity of public authorities to account for the use of the funds entrusted to them. In a context marked by limited budgetary resources and considerable needs in the education sector, every franc invested must produce a real, lasting, and equitable impact.

This report, prepared by the Burundian League for Human Rights Iteka and King Umurundi Freedom, offers an independent analysis of the implementation of this program. It examines the main challenges related to planning, manufacturing, procurement, financial management, the distribution of school desks, as well as the contribution of development partners and the environmental issues related to the exploitation of forest resources.

The aim of this analysis is not to question the relevance of the program, which addresses a genuine need, but to contribute to its improvement by highlighting best practices, observed shortcomings, and measures likely to strengthen the transparency, accountability, and effectiveness of public action. By fostering a debate based on facts and objective analyses, this report intends to contribute to better governance of public investments and the effective realization of every Burundian child's right to learn in a dignified, safe, and conducive school environment.

V. ANALYSIS OF THE PROGRAM AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

⇒ V.1. ANALYSIS OF THE ALLOCATED BUDGET

The Government of Burundi has allocated 18 billion Burundian francs (BIF) to the national program for the manufacture of school desks and benches. According to official information, this funding aims to produce approximately 336,000 desks and benches, with the goal of improving students' learning conditions and reducing the shortage of school furniture observed in public schools.

The size of this budget allocation reflects a political will to address a structural challenge in the education system. By dedicating specific resources to this program, the authorities recognize that the availability of adequate school furniture is essential to ensuring a favorable learning environment and improving the quality of education.

However, the budget analysis cannot be limited to the total amount allocated. It must also assess the coherence between the resources mobilized, the identified needs, the methods of allocating funds, and the mechanisms for monitoring their use.

Available information indicates that resources were allocated using a decentralized approach, with each municipal education directorate receiving 100 million BIF, divided equally between the manufacture of school desks (50 million BIF) and activities related to logging, transportation, and wood processing (50 million BIF). This approach promotes local implementation but requires robust coordination, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms.

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Particular attention should be paid, however, to the 50 million Burundian francs allocated to the harvesting, transport, and processing of timber. Unlike expenditures directly related to the manufacture of school desks, the results of which can be assessed through the quantity and quality of the equipment produced, logistical expenses are more complex to verify and audit. In the absence of a detailed breakdown of costs, tariff references, standardized supporting documents, and harmonized procedures, it becomes difficult to determine whether the amounts committed correspond to the actual costs incurred.

The report therefore concludes that greater transparency is needed regarding the use of these funds. The relevant authorities would benefit from specifying, for each municipal education authority, the volumes of timber harvested, the distances traveled, the unit costs of cutting, loading, transport, sawing, and processing the timber, as well as the criteria used to justify these expenditures. Such a breakdown would strengthen the traceability of public funds, limit the risks of overbilling or unjustified expenditures, and facilitate the work of oversight institutions and citizen monitoring.

Furthermore, given the size of this financial allocation, it would be advisable to subject these expenditures to enhanced technical and financial controls to ensure the efficient use of public resources and guarantee that every franc invested effectively contributes to achieving the program's objectives.

Moreover, the need for school furniture is not uniform across the country. Some provinces and municipalities have a much larger shortage than others due to the size of their school population, the condition of existing infrastructure, and student enrollment growth. In this context, allocating resources based on an up-to-date needs analysis would improve the equity and efficiency of public investment.

The analysis also highlights the need to strengthen budgetary transparency. As of the date of this report, public information regarding actual disbursements, unit manufacturing costs, expenditures per province, and budget execution rates remains limited. Regular publication of this data would facilitate citizen oversight, strengthen institutional accountability, and allow technical and financial partners to more accurately assess the results achieved.

Ultimately, the budget allocated to the program represents a strategic investment for the education sector. Its impact, however, will depend on the quality of its management, transparency in resource allocation, and the ability of institutions to demonstrate that the funds committed produce concrete and measurable results for the benefit of students.

⇒ V.2. ANALYSIS OF MUNICIPAL NEEDS AND BUDGET ALLOCATION

The comparative analysis of the needs for school desks and the resources allocated reveals a significant difference between municipalities. Official data shows that some municipalities have a shortage of more than 13,000 school desks, while others, such as the municipality of Cankuzo, only need about 2,000.

Despite these significant discrepancies, the adopted financing mechanism allocates an identical sum of 100 million Burundian francs (BIF) to each municipal education directorate, with 50 million BIF earmarked for the manufacture of school desks and 50 million BIF for the harvesting and processing of wood.

This approach has the advantage of simplifying administrative management and ensuring national coverage. However, it raises questions about its suitability to the actual needs of municipalities.

V. ANALYSIS OF THE PROGRAM AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION (the following of page 15)

Indeed, a municipality needing more than 13,000 desks faces significantly greater pressure than one whose needs are estimated at 2,000 desks, even though both have the same level of funding. This situation is likely to create disparities in municipalities' ability to effectively meet the needs of schools.

In light of the principles of fairness and efficiency in public spending, allocating resources based on objective criteria such as the number of students, the shortage of school furniture, the number of public schools, and the actual needs identified, would improve the allocation of funds and maximize the program's impact.

The Burundian League for Human Rights “Iteka” and King Umurundi Freedom believe that a revision of the budget allocation criteria, based on the actual needs of the municipalities, would contribute to a better use of public resources while reducing territorial disparities. Such an approach would also strengthen the transparency, fairness, and effectiveness of the program, in accordance with the principles of good governance.

⇒ V.3. RISKS OF FOREST RESOURCE MISAPPROPRIATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The national program for manufacturing school desks relies in part on the exploitation of forest resources intended to provide the wood necessary for the production of school furniture. According to available information, more than 19,000 trees have been identified to meet the program's needs.

However, the sheer volume of this wood creates governance risks that warrant particular attention. In the absence of a rigorous system of traceability, control, and independent monitoring, there is a risk that the number of trees actually harvested could exceed the officially authorized quantities. Such a situation could encourage unjustified harvesting, the use of timber for other commercial purposes (including charcoal production or the sale of lumber), or other uses that are inconsistent with the program's objectives.

Beyond the financial risks, uncontrolled exploitation of forest resources could have significant environmental consequences, including deforestation, ecosystem degradation, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and increased vulnerability of populations to the effects of climate change.

To mitigate these risks, it is recommended to:

- ♦ publish the list of authorized logging sites and the number of trees allocated to each province or municipality;
- ♦ implement a traceability system to track the timber from felling to the manufacture of school desks;
- ♦ Involve forestry services, regulatory bodies, and civil society organizations in monitoring operations;
- ♦ Conduct regular audits to verify compliance between permits issued, volumes of timber harvested, and the actual number of school desks/benches produced;
- ♦ Strengthen reforestation programs to compensate for the harvesting carried out under the program.

These measures would help reduce the risks of misuse of forest resources while reconciling the program's objectives with the principles of sustainable environmental management.

⇒ **V.4. ANALYSIS OF THE TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

The success of the national school desk manufacturing program depends not only on the availability of financial resources but also on compliance with the specific technical requirements for manufacturing school furniture. The analysis highlights several technical challenges that could affect the quality, durability, and effectiveness of the program.

A. Insufficient Planning of the Production Process

Manufacturing high-quality school desks requires adherence to a rigorous technical process. This includes, in particular, the selection of appropriate wood species, tree felling during recommended periods, sawing, natural drying of the boards for a sufficient period, treatment of the wood against insects and moisture, as well as assembly and finishing.

The information analyzed suggests that the deadlines set for completing the program may not always be compatible with the technical requirements for preparing and drying the wood. The use of insufficiently dried wood increases the risk of warping, cracking, shrinkage, and a reduced lifespan for the school desks.

B. Transport Constraints

Transport is a critical step in the production chain. School desks are often transported over long distances, sometimes to schools located in hard-to-reach areas.

When the boards are not sufficiently dried or when handling conditions are unsuitable, the risk of damage increases considerably. Cracks, deformations, or loosening of joints can appear even before the furniture is put into service, leading to additional repair or replacement costs.

C. Technical Capabilities of Manufacturing Supervisors

The quality of the products depends directly on the technical skills of those responsible for their manufacture and supervision.

Information gathered by the Burundian League for Human Rights “Iteka” and King Umurundi Freedom indicates allegations that certain responsibilities related to the implementation of the program have been entrusted to communal administrators, zone chiefs, or individuals with close ties to public officials, without their experience in manufacturing school furniture always being demonstrated. If substantiated, such practices could compromise compliance with technical standards, the quality of the products, and the efficient use of public resources.

In the interest of transparency and equal treatment, it would be advisable for the authorities to publish the selection criteria for those awarded contracts or production responsibilities, as well as the required technical qualifications.

D. Quality Control

The analysis also highlights the importance of establishing an independent quality control system for school desks before their final acceptance by schools.

V. ANALYSIS OF THE PROGRAM AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION (the following of page 17)

This control should focus on:

- ♦ the quality and drying rate of the wood used;
- ♦ the sturdiness, stability, and safety of the school desks to prevent any risk of accidents for students;
- ♦ the suitability of the school desks to the age and height of the students (preschool, primary, and secondary schools) to ensure their comfort and promote optimal learning conditions; and
- ♦ the quality of the finishes and protective treatments.

E. Potential Consequences

When technical requirements are not fully met, several consequences can be observed:

- ♦ reduced lifespan of the school desks;
- ♦ increased maintenance and replacement costs;
- ♦ waste of public resources; and
- ♦ decreased trust among citizens and development partners. Maintaining unsuitable learning conditions for students.

⇒ V.5. SIGNIFICANT VARIATIONS IN MANUFACTURING AND TRANSPORTATION COSTS

Information gathered by the Burundian League for Human Rights “Iteka” and King Umurundi Freedom from several field observers reveals significant discrepancies in the manufacturing costs of school desks between different communes.

According to this information, some manufacturers reportedly charge 150,000 BIF for a school desk, while others charge 130,000 BIF for a product with similar characteristics. Furthermore, several local sources, including carpenters and professionals in the sector, estimate that the manufacturing cost of a school desk meeting standard technical specifications is generally between 70,000 and 80,000 BIF, excluding specific constraints related to the local context.

These significant discrepancies raise questions about the existence of uniform pricing criteria, the transparency of procurement mechanisms, and the efficiency of public resource use. While they do not, in themselves, constitute proof of overbilling, they warrant a thorough investigation by the relevant authorities.

Observers also noted particularly high transportation costs in certain areas. While geographical constraints, road conditions, or the distance to schools may explain some of these differences, the lack of a publicly available benchmark for transportation costs makes it difficult to assess their reasonableness.

From a good governance perspective, it would be advisable for the relevant authorities to: publish the reference unit costs used for manufacturing school desks;

make public the criteria for setting prices and the procedures for awarding contracts;

publish transport costs by province or municipality, as well as the elements justifying these amounts;

carry out independent technical and financial audits in order to verify the conformity of the costs incurred with market prices and the services actually provided.

Such an approach would help to strengthen transparency, prevent the risk of waste of public

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resources and increase the confidence of citizens as well as technical and financial partners in the management of the program.

⇒ V.6. DISTRIBUTION OF DESKS AND ADEQUACY TO THE REAL NEEDS OF SCHOOLS

Observations collected in the field show that the difficulties encountered in schools do not only result from an overall shortage of desks, but also from a sometimes inappropriate distribution of available equipment.

In some schools, classrooms have a relatively large number of desks and are even saturated. However, the number of students is so high that each bench accommodates a number of students greater than its normal capacity. The result is high crowding, a reduction in learning comfort, premature wear and tear of furniture and difficulties for teachers in organizing educational activities.

Conversely, other establishments continue to record a significant deficit in school furniture, which highlights disparities in the distribution of equipment.

These findings underline that the effectiveness of the program should not be evaluated only on the total number of desks manufactured, but also on their ability to meet the real needs of each school establishment.

In order to improve the impact of the program, the Burundian Human Rights League “Iteka” and King Umurundi Freedom recommend that the distribution of desks be based on an objective assessment of the needs of each school, taking into consideration:

- ♦ the number of students registered per establishment;
- ♦ the student/bench-desk ratio;
- ♦ the number of functional classrooms;
- ♦ the condition of the furniture already available;
- ♦ forecasts for changes in school enrollment.

Such an approach would ensure a more equitable distribution of equipment and guarantee that each student benefits from learning conditions that meet educational standards.

⇒ V.7. ANALYSIS OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF PARTNERS TO THE MANUFACTURING AND DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM OF BENCHES-DESKS

The analysis of the national program for the manufacture and distribution of desks cannot be complete without taking into consideration the significant contributions of technical and financial partners who, for several years, have supported the education sector in Burundi through the construction of classrooms, the supply of desks, school equipment and other educational materials.

Key partners include UNICEF, which serves as the main technical partner in several school equipment projects; the Global Partnership for Education (GPE); the French Development Agency (AFD); the European Union; Education Cannot Wait (ECW); and other partners who have supported the construction, rehabilitation, and equipping of schools.

These interventions have enabled, according to the programs, the construction of hundreds of classrooms, their equipping with desks, tables, and chairs for teachers, as well as the development of water, hygiene, and sanitation infrastructure. For example, the Twige Neza and Komez Wige projects resulted in the construction of 497 classrooms and the production and distribution of 15,893 desks in several provinces across the country.

These achievements, however, raise several legitimate questions regarding governance and

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transparency. For example, do the 331,956 to 336,000 school desks announced in the government program include those financed by development partners, or do they refer exclusively to those financed by the public treasury? Were classrooms built and equipped with partner funding taken into account in the national needs assessment before public resources were allocated?

Similarly, were the budget allocations adjusted accordingly for municipalities that received partner support to avoid double funding, while less supported municipalities received more public resources? Without such coordination, some localities risk receiving funding from multiple sources while others continue to experience a significant shortage of school furniture.

The report also deems it necessary to examine the management of funds transferred to municipalities. The amounts received, allocation criteria, monitoring mechanisms, procurement procedures, and implementation reports should be made public to ensure transparency and accountability in the use of resources.

Finally, it is essential that official reports clearly distinguish between:

- ♦ desks financed by the state budget;
- ♦ those financed by technical and financial partners;
- ♦ those acquired through contributions from municipalities or communities; and
- ♦ classrooms built and equipped with the help of partners.

Such a distinction would allow for an accurate assessment of each stakeholder's actual contribution, prevent double counting of achievements, strengthen the transparency of public finances, and improve the planning of future investments in education. This approach would enhance transparency, avoid duplication of interventions, improve future planning, and ensure that every resource mobilized effectively contributes to addressing the shortage of school furniture in Burundian schools.

⇒ V.8. DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL DESKS: BETWEEN A PERSISTENT DEFICIT, GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES, AND TRANSPARENCY REQUIREMENTS.

Despite the launch of the national project to manufacture 336,000 school desks, the shortage of school furniture remains a serious concern. According to data released by the Minister of Education, 34% of Burundian students still do not have a seat at a desk, a situation that jeopardizes the effective exercise of the right to a quality education.

The Burundian education system today welcomes several million students in primary and post-primary education. If nearly a third of them still don't have desks, that potentially means more than a million students are forced to attend classes in extremely tough conditions. In many schools, students sit right on the floor, on stones, bricks, or pieces of wood, while others have to share a single desk with four, five, or even six students, even though it's meant for two or three people. This situation affects the learning environment, concentration, health, and dignity of the children. However, to ensure transparency and facilitate citizen oversight, it would be helpful for the authorities to publish a detailed breakdown of the overall budget of 18 billion BIF, specifying in particular the amounts actually transferred to municipalities, the resources managed centrally, and their intended use. Such clarification would allow citizens, oversight bodies, and development partners to better understand the program's financial structure and ensure rigorous monitoring. These questions are all the more important given that the distribution phase of school desks is currently the subject of numerous concerns expressed by school officials and other local stakeholders. During this survey, several school principals stated that they had not received any desks, even though their schools are among those experiencing a significant shortage. Others

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assert that the allocation criteria are not clearly defined or applied uniformly.

Testimonies gathered also report allegations of favoritism, cronyism, and, in some cases, undue demands for financial compensation in exchange for the allocation of school desks. At this stage, this information should be considered allegations requiring independent investigations to establish their veracity and, where appropriate, to identify those responsible.

A program funded by public resources and designed to guarantee the right to education, transparency in distribution is a fundamental requirement. Allocation criteria should be made public, lists of beneficiary schools published, the quantities allocated to each institution made known to all, and accessible appeal mechanisms for schools that believe they have been unfairly excluded.

Transparent management, based on the actual needs of schools rather than subjective considerations, is essential to guarantee fairness, strengthen public trust, and ensure that every child has the same opportunities to learn in dignified conditions

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⇒ V.9. INDICATORS OF MALFUNCTIONS THAT RAISED CONCERNS OF CORRUPTION

Several elements observed in the implementation of the project to manufacture 336,000 school desks have raised questions about the transparency of the program's management. In Bujumbura Province, during his May 2026 meeting with school officials from the communes of Bukinanyana, Cibitoke, and Mugina, the Minister of National Education and Scientific Research,

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Dr. François Havyarimana, himself expressed his concerns regarding certain observed practices. Upon learning that the workshop manufacturing the desks intended for the commune of Cibitoke was located in Murwi, approximately 25 km from the commune's main town, he suggested that this choice might reflect a desire to shield the activities from the scrutiny of the authorities responsible for monitoring and supervision. The vague answers provided regarding the number of benches already manufactured, their actual cost, and their progress only reinforced the participants' questions.

These concerns do not appear to be isolated. In the south of the country, the provincial governor of Burunga also reportedly expressed his concerns about alleged irregularities in the project's implementation, calling for greater transparency and oversight in the management of public funds allocated to this initiative.

The information gathered during this investigation highlights several concerns related to the management of contracts for the manufacture and distribution of the school desks. It reveals indications that, in certain provinces, particularly Cibitoke, substantial contracts were awarded to a limited number of beneficiaries, allegedly dignitaries.

In the north of the country, particularly in the former Kirundo province, widely circulated local reports indicate that a contract for the manufacture of school desks was awarded to a company owned by the wife of a member of parliament. If confirmed, this information would raise questions about compliance with the principles of equal access to public procurement, prevention of conflicts of interest and transparency, equal treatment of bidders, and fair competition in the awarding of public contracts.

The report deems it essential that the competent authorities make public information relating to procurement procedures, manufacturer selection criteria, amounts allocated to each supplier, and the control mechanisms governing contract execution. Such transparency would dispel doubts and strengthen public confidence in the management of resources allocated to education.

Furthermore, several school principals interviewed indicated that they had been forced to bear the costs of transporting the school desks from the manufacturing sites to their schools themselves. However, according to the information gathered, these costs had already been included in the budgets allocated to the manufacturing and delivery contracts.

If this practice is proven, it would lead to double payment for the same service: first by public funds under the contract, second time the responsibility falls on schools, to the detriment of already limited resources, often relying on contributions from parents. Such a situation would constitute an unjustified financial burden for schools and would be contrary to the principles of good governance, efficient public spending, and accountability.

The project plans to use old communal woodlands to finance the production of school desks. However, this approach does not sufficiently consider the disparities between municipalities. Indeed, **the municipalities within the Bujumbura city council, as well as other sparsely wooded municipalities or those lacking old-growth forests**, do not have the same forest resources as rural municipalities. It is therefore necessary to examine the financing mechanisms planned for these communities. Will municipalities without exploitable woodlands receive compensatory funding from the state? If not, how can they contribute to the program without compromising their other budgetary priorities? This situation risks creating inequalities in the project's implementation and delaying the provision of equipment to schools located in municipalities with the fewest natural resources. It is therefore recommended that the

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Government clarify the solidarity and financial compensation mechanisms designed to guarantee equitable implementation of the project across the entire national territory.

Taken individually, each of these elements does not constitute proof of corruption. However, their accumulation highlights warning signs that justify a thorough and independent audit of the entire process. Publishing the contracts, award criteria, amounts committed, beneficiaries of the contracts, and performance reports would help dispel doubts and strengthen public trust in the management of public resources.

VI. CONCLUSION

Improving learning conditions is a strategic investment for Burundi's development. Ensuring every student has a safe, dignified, and suitable school environment is not only a pedagogical requirement but also a fundamental responsibility of the State and all stakeholders in the education sector.

The national program for manufacturing school desks reflects a political will to address a real need that has affected public schools for many years. The mobilization of significant financial resources demonstrates a commitment to improving the quality of education and combating the problem of <<children sitting improperly.>>

However, the analysis conducted by the Iteka League and King Umurundi shows that the success of such a program cannot be assessed solely by the number of school desks manufactured or the amounts invested. It also depends on the quality of the planning, adherence to technical standards, transparency in the management of public resources, equity in the distribution of equipment, the competence of those involved, and the capacity of institutions to report on the results achieved.

The report highlights several challenges that warrant particular attention, including the need to strengthen procedural transparency, improve the traceability of financial resources, ensure competency-based selection of suppliers, guarantee compliance with technical manufacturing standards, and implement an effective monitoring and evaluation system. The observed discrepancies in manufacturing and transportation costs, as well as the inequalities in the distribution of school desks among schools, illustrate the importance of having mechanisms for monitoring, verifying, and publishing data to ensure the optimal use of public resources.

This report is not intended to question the relevance of this national initiative, nor to make accusations against individuals or institutions. It constitutes an independent and constructive contribution aimed at promoting governance based on the principles of transparency, accountability, efficiency, integrity, and citizen participation. In this context, the observations and recommendations made should be considered as avenues for improvement aimed at strengthening the program's impact for the benefit of students and society as a whole. The Burundian League for Human Rights "Iteka" and King



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Umurundi Freedom believe this initiative offers a unique opportunity to demonstrate that public investment can be conducted according to the highest standards of good governance. Regular publication of information regarding financing, contracts, costs, achievements, and results would strengthen the confidence of citizens, oversight institutions, and technical and financial partners.

Finally, the two organizations reaffirm that every Burundian franc invested in education must generate tangible added value for children. A school desk is not simply a piece of school equipment: it represents an essential learning tool, a symbol of dignity, and an investment in the country's future. Ensuring that these investments are rigorously planned, executed, and monitored is a prerequisite for building a more effective, equitable, and resilient education system.

Strengthening governance in the education sector should not be seen as a constraint, but as an opportunity to build trust between public authorities, citizens, and development partners. Only then will public investment fully contribute to realizing the right to quality education for all children in Burundi.

