

**The impact of gender quotas on women's socio-economic empowerment in rural Rwanda.**

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**MPhil**

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#### List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Explanation
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FPP	First Past the Post
FPTP	First-Past-The-Post
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MPs	Members of Parliament
MINALOC	Ministry of Local Government
NISR	National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda
DHS	Rwanda Demographic and Health Survey
PBV	Party Block Vote
PR	Proportional Representation
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
RISD	Rwanda Initiative for Sustainable Development
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## **Abstract**

**Seraphine Habimana**

### **The impact of gender quota on women's socio-economic empowerment in rural Rwanda.**

*Gender quotas have significantly improved women's socio-economic empowerment, political representation, economic opportunities, social status, and overall societal development. Rwanda's gender quota system has significantly enhanced women's representation in parliament and*

*decision-making positions. The rise in female representation in national governance has been accompanied by increased encouragement and mandatory participation in local leadership; with gender quotas applied to all local councils and governance structures. The impact of gender quotas on Rwandan society is not well-documented, with little evidence suggesting a negative effect on female economic and power autonomy. It suggests that urban men feel disadvantaged, leading to them withdrawing from civic life, while rural women face exploitation and unpaid work, and men prevent their wives from participating in politics. This study builds on fieldwork conducted in rural Rwanda for five months between June and November 2018. The research involves 56 survey respondents, 186 interviews, 28 focus groups, and 268 participants, including women local leaders, ordinary rural men, and rural women from 15 districts across four Rwanda provinces as of East, West, North, South, including Gakenke, Karongi, Rwamagana, Gatsibo, Gicumbi, Muhanga, Nyamagabe, Ngororero, Huye, Kirehe, Nyamasheke, Musanze, Rusizi, Burera and Nyaruguru. Districts were selected based on their outstanding achievements in economic, social welfare, good governance, justice, and gender equality-related programs as of Imihigo performance contracts' results of 2016 and 2017. Results from field research indicated that increasing rural women's political participation has boosted earned income, job opportunities, household incomes, and makes women more valuable and respected in rural society. While some men were positive about the recent changes in rural Rwanda, other men were negative and resented women's economic independence, claiming that empowering rural women socially and economically has led to women disrespecting men.*

## INTRODUCTION

It is believed that a critical indicator of women's increase in politics in Rwanda is largely due to gender quotas, rather than the 1994 genocide (Krook, 2006; Hunt, 2017). It has been suggested that high political representation of women in Rwanda's post-genocide has had symbolic value on women, increased respect, and given women a greater voice in family and community, autonomy in decision-making, and access to education, factors that have had a significant socio-economic impact on women's life and experience in Rwanda (Tripp, 2005; Burnet, 2011; Debusser and Ansoms, 2013; Abbott and Malunda, 2016; Hunt, 2017). However, most conclusions of existing literature on women's life and experience in Rwanda suggest that not all women in Rwanda have benefited from the changes from gender quota, particularly in rural areas where the majority of women live, concluding that only a little has changed in their lives and experiences (Burnet 2011; 2013; 2008; Abbott and Malunda 2016; Randell and McCloskey, 2014; Leander, 2007; McLean Hilker, 2014; Bayisenge et al., 2015; Bayisenge, 2018; Bayisenge, 2015).

At the national level, Burnet (2011) found out that Rwanda's high female political representation had not resulted in legislative gains for women as they often aligned with political party lines and supported legislation that reduces women's protection. Debusscher and Ansoms (2013) argue that Rwanda's gender quota policies and laws are more about public relations than real transformations, with the goal of winning international aid. They maintain that Rwanda's political will and target-driven gender policies have promoted gender equality, but have faced threats from economic rationales, lack of grassroots participation, and a focus on quantitative targets. Thus, they questioned whether these policies have had a significant impact on traditional gender relations in Rwanda, which culturally subordinated and exploited women. However, these findings about the status of women in Rwanda were primarily based on the experiences of women in Rwanda's urban community, but not *all* women in Rwanda. This thesis is specific to rural women in Rwanda in seeking to find out about the impact of gender quotas on women's socio-economic empowerment in rural Rwanda. More specifically, this thesis explores the daily impact of gender quotas on rural women's status socially and economically. It then contributes to Burnet's (2011) findings to understand the socio-economic and communal impact of quotas assessing the impact of the post-genocide changes vis-à-vis women's lives and experiences in rural Rwanda. The study conducted fieldwork in rural Rwanda, focusing on women local leaders, and then ordinary men and women through structured surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

### **Gender inequality prevalences**

Since the beginning of time, men have consistently dominated all leadership positions both within and outside home. This is mainly because previously history has often preserved the belief that women are incapable of performing tasks as efficiently as men; and this belief in gender inequality had been in existence for centuries (Andersen, 1991; Elder, 2004; Tripp, 2003; Hunt, 2017; Hughes, 2011; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). Men held decision-making, family leadership, primary income, and property ownership positions, while women were assigned subordination in social roles (Priebe, 2017; Adekunle, 2007). Women were required to handle household tasks and care for the children, and were prohibited from engaging in paid work as they had to live off their husbands (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Hunt, 2017). It is believed that the patriarchal society took centuries for women to become accustomed to and accept its existence until the early 20th century. International organizations have since been actively working towards promoting women's rights and ensuring equal opportunities for both men and women (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Bari, 2005; Bawa and Sanyana, 2013).

On the negative side, gender inequality had led to health issues, knowledge exclusion, poverty, and powerlessness (Kjosavik, 2021; Burawoy, 2006). It is believed that gender discrimination, subordination, and exploitation of women violate human equality and universal rights (Sultana, 2010). Thus, empowering women is a crucial step towards eliminating gender inequality (Abbott and Malunda, 2016). Empowering women is a comprehensive approach to women's social, economic, political, and legal empowerment, encompassing education, economic empowerment, political participation, health, legal rights, and cultural inclusions (Abbott, 2018; Bayisenge, 2015; Dahlerup, 1988; Dahlerup, 2006; 2013; Darhour and Dahlerup, 2013; Abbott and Malunda, 2016). More so, empowering women transform social relations and practices, transforming gender relationships, and recognizing the roles women and men play in the community ( Hunt, 2017). According to various research, families and society at large benefit from women's economic empowerment. It is believed that if and when a woman is empowered, it has a positive impact on the entire society ( Kagaba, 2015).

## **Empowerment**

Empowering women contribute to economic growth, guarantee better community, and foster more stable and inclusive governance, eventually benefiting the entire society. It is believed that increased women's autonomy has been linked to improved results for households and children for women are more able to act and make decisions if they have more control over their material resources (Bruce et al., 1995; Kagaba, 2015; Hunt, 2017; Kabeer, 2009). More so, women who contribute more to home income have healthier marriages and are respected in their families and communities (Kabeer, 2009; Hunt, 2017; Dahlerup, 2003; 2013). There is evidence that women can excel in some leadership positions ( Hunt, 2017; Dahlerup, 2013). Rwanda's women's empowerment has shown that they perform

better in decision-making due to their inherent compassion, understanding, and sensitivity to others' needs (Hunt, 2017). In Latin America, Dahlerup (2013) found out that women in decision-making roles outperformed males in their roles, women are less likely to be corrupt than men. Given the fact that in many places around the world women in decision-making tend to work on issues related to national crises and tend to resolve problems harmonized without causing violence or conflicts; they can also play a critical role in the reconstruction of the creation of the new government constructions (Domingo et al., 2015). More so, those women politicians tend to work and advocate for social and economic issues that would be in the interest of all. In many cases, when women got political offices, they would do whatever was needed to improve the lives of girls and women and those of men by responding to the concerns and issues of constituents and impacting legislation (Camissa and Reingold, 2004). Based on their long-term history of marginalization and discrimination against women, as it is believed that once women were allowed to get an office, they would not only represent the issues of women but also those of men (Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Hunt, 2017; Dahlerup, 2013). Therefore, empowering women is crucial for fostering a positive family and society.

Feminists and international women's groups tend to argue that women need self-belief and self-esteem to challenge male power and take on political roles, yet patriarchy remains deeply embedded in social relations worldwide (Jefremovas, 1991; Randell and McCloskey, 2014). More so, top-down gender mainstreaming often fails to deliver gender transformation due to its focus on changing women and girls and its lack of attention to changing gender relations and structural inequalities. Overall, quota systems are considered to be potential solution to eradicate gender inequality (Dahlerup, 2007). Many scholars have viewed quotas as the surest and fastest method to improve female political representation (Ballington 1998; Jaquette 1997, Jones 1996; Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Tripp 2003; Yoon 2004; Franceschet et al., 2012; Krook, 2010; Hunt, 2017).

### **Gender quotas**

The 19th century saw the industrial revolution transform the nature of agriculture employment in Europe and Western countries, granting women the right to work in agriculture (Scott and Tilly, 1975). Women started working for a wage, and later a salary, and then became a routine in urban life (Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Tripp 2003; Yoon 2004; Franceschet et al.2012). Women's rights activists demand global change in agricultural work, recognizing their capabilities. The early 2000s saw women's liberation, emphasizing equality between men and women, despite women's ability to perform similar tasks (USAID, 2012; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). As a result, in many societies, women have been granted provisions not only to ensure their participation in agriculture but also in

politics. Therefore, the adoption and implementation of the quota were crucial for its success (Krook, 2006; Karam and Ballington 2005; Powley 2008).

Across the world, the status of women has changed dramatically due to the implementation of the gender quotas, which can be perceived as a "fast-track" system that enables women to fully enter or participate in politics (Dahlerup, 2006:6). It has been argued that quota systems have become an undeniably visible solution to the under-representation of women in legislative decision-making across the world (Krook, 2006). Quotas, which are reserved seats quota, party quotas, and legal quotas have been adopted by many countries and have become a part of the electoral systems across countries. Thus, these types of quotas have replaced and challenged the so-called archaic electoral systems gender norms, and traditional belief systems found in many countries that were identified by male dominance and female subordination (Schwindt-Buyer 2010; Krook 2007; 2006; Dahrerup 2006; Tripp and Kang, 2008; Adekunle 2007; Devlin and Elgie 2008; Kagaba 2015; Bayisenge 2015; Franceschet et al.,2012). It is perceived that high percentage of female politicians has had symbolic significance, increased respect for some women, and granted them more autonomy in family decision-making, greater influence in the family, and better access to education (Abbott and Malunda, 2016; Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Debusser and Ansoms, 2013, Jefremovas, 1991). Thus, the transformed gender quota policies and laws around the world can be considered as the foundation that brought women to the leadership, and gave them a voice in society. However, the debate revolves around the effectiveness of reserve seats quotas, their prevalent adoption, and whether the United States should continue to consider them persist (Jones, 1998; 2009; Kittilson, 2005; Krook, 2006). However, despite existing theories suggesting both negative and positive impacts of quota, on one a positive side, women have made extraordinary progress concerning representation in both national and local government. Worldwide, women's political representation has increased gradually over the last two decades. More so, women's economic rights have also improved both in law and practice (Mageza-Barthel, 2015).

Today, the world is witnessing a gradual improvement in women's political representation as a result of gender quotas. Women's representation in parliament has now reached an average of 24.3 percent worldwide (IPU, 2019). The number of women in national politics increased tenfold between 1997 and 2019, shifting from 11.3 percent in 1997<sup>1</sup> to 24.5 percent in 2019 (IPU and UN Women, 2019). The biggest increase occurred between 1997 and 2017 when women's representation in the national parliament rose from 11 percent to 23.5 percent.<sup>2</sup> This change has happened because many countries adopted gender quota policy following the 1995 World

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<sup>1</sup> Archives of data on females in National Parliaments

<sup>2</sup> Archives of data on females in National Parliaments

Conference on women held in Beijing, while other countries especially African countries adopted their quotas during the political transitions to democracy and in the aftermaths of conflicts (Elbadawi and Sambanis; 2000). Following the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, women in new African governments began to gain rights and freedoms to vote and run for office (Tripp et al. 2012; Bauer and Britton, 2006; Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2000).

Since the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, women's political under-representation has been universally addressed, with equal opportunities in education, leadership positions in decision-making bodies, and property ownership (Hunt 2017, Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Tripp 2008; Dalherup and Freidenvall 2006). It is well known that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have universally agreed to include women in decision-making at all levels, leading to significant results.<sup>3</sup>

Nordic countries, including Norway, Sweden, Finland, France, Spain, and Germany, have implemented gender equality policies, increasing female representation in parliament and implementing parity laws (Christmas-Best and Kjaer, 2007). Rwanda, Uganda, and South Africa have high female parliamentary representation, with Rwanda leading the list with 61.3 percent of lower house seats held by 2019.<sup>4</sup> Latin America's Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil have implemented gender quota laws to boost women's political participation, with Argentina's 1991 law mandating 30 percent female candidates on party lists and Mexico's 2014 law ensuring gender parity (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). Since 2003, countries like Tunisia and Jordan have implemented gender quota laws in the Middle East, guaranteeing 50 percent female representation in political party lists and legislature seats while Asia, including India and Nepal, is still lagging behind in implementing such systems.<sup>5</sup>

Rwanda has been a leading country in women's empowerment since the 1994 Genocide, with women occupying thirteen out of 26 cabinet seats (IPU, 2019; UN Women, 2018). Internationally, Rwandan women have seen significant transformation in their lives, including extended economic rights and legal control over incomes and resources (Burnet, 2008; 2008a; 2008b; 2011; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Powley, 2004; 2006; Hunt, 2017; UN women, 2018; Mageza-Barthel, 2015). It is believed that the adoption and implementation of gender quotas have led to rapid change in Rwanda (Hunt, 2017). The Rwandan 2003 Constitution which adopted gender quotas also in many ways was a fresh start for the post-genocide Rwanda's reconstruction

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#notes>

<sup>4</sup>

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#notes>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.parliament.gov.rw/women-representation>

(Rwanda's Constitution, 2003; Kagaba, 2015; Burnet, 2011; 2008; Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Hunt, 2017). As well as Rwanda's gender quota policy included many gender sensitive laws and policies that sought to remove the gender tradition norms and to apply equal power relations between women and men, (USAID, 2012), radically changing the status of women in Rwandan society compared to pre-genocide Rwanda.

Traditional gender norms and social and cultural barriers in many societies continue to pose challenges for women in authority positions worldwide, despite shared similarities between men and women due to interconnected political power relations.<sup>6</sup> Gender quotas have significantly increased women's access to decision-making bodies, leading to global political system transformations. It addresses institutional barriers, empowering more women to engage in civic life and participate in political parties, national levels, and private sectors (UNDP, 2014; Republic of Rwanda, 2011; Rosenthal, 2001; Krook, 2006; Cammisa and Reingold, 2004; Dahlerup, 2013; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Hunt, 2017).

On the negative side, some believe that gender quotas may result in less qualified candidates, tokenism, cultural norms, identity politics, and polarization of political discourse, potentially hindering broader societal issues (Dahlerup, 1988; 2013; Billing et al., 1989; Lovenduski, 2005; Krook, 2006; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson, 2016; Elstad and Ladegard, 2012; Kunovich, 2005; Bligh et al., 2012; Phillips, 1998; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Hunt, 2017). The debate persists on whether women's political participation necessarily leads to more effective gender-specific policies, as female politicians may not always advocate for women's issues (Dahlerup, 2006; Moghadam, 2010).

In that time between 1997 and 2009, Burnet (2011) found that the Rwanda's government had made progress with many gender laws and policies that have had an impact on society. Ten years now since Burnet undertook this survey and this research builds on her work. While several research including Burnet's (2011) on women's rights in Rwanda primarily focused on the impact of gender quotas on women in national legislatures within urban areas, with few studies on rural women (Kagaba, 2015), this thesis investigated the impact of gender quotas on women's socio-economic empowerment in rural Rwanda.

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<sup>6</sup> Gender assessment report available here

<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Gender-Assesment-report-eng.pdf>  
<https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Gender-Assesment-reporteng.pdf>

Some scholars question Rwanda's quota for women's rights post-1994 genocide, despite rural women's increasing poverty and poor reputation (Bauer and Burnet, 2013; Mageza-Barthel, 2016; Burnet; 2008; 2011; Kagaba, 2015; Despite good salaries and reputations, some rural women argued women parliamentarians have not improved their situation (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013). Like Burnet (2011) argues the female majority in parliament, with gender rights enshrined in the constitution and laws granting women land, marriage assets, and credit, and equal access education, has significantly benefited urban women, but not rural women. It is in this regard; my research seeks to examine the socio-economic changes towards rural women in Rwanda. My findings broadly support the work of Burnet (2011) as it demonstrates there has been significant socio-changes to urban women even though the country is making progress, with urban women now making decisions in their families and the government, and being involved in every aspect of the country, however, her work dismisses the impact of a female-majority parliament on women's rural life, stating that they are not actively involved in tackling their issues.

The thesis is divided into five chapters: the first chapter discusses the impact of the political quota system on gender relations. In this chapter, the discussion focuses on the political quota systems and their many-sided impacts on gender relations. It covers the strategic reasons behind implementing quotas, their socio-economic implications, and the impending negative effects on society. The second chapter details the research methodology employed in the study, which involves a mixture of surveys, interviews, and focus groups. These methods were utilized to gather insights from a diverse range of participants and respondents, including women local leaders and representatives, ordinary women and men in rural Rwanda. The third chapter provides a broad analysis of the evolution and the status of women in Rwanda post-genocide, focusing on the socio-economic changes from independence to 1994, the impact of the 2003 Constitution, and the current position of women in the Rwandan state. The fourth and fifth chapters focus on data presentation collected from the fieldwork conducted in rural Rwanda between June and November 2018. The data provides an inclusive understanding of the findings, offering insights into various aspects of rural life, and community dynamics. By analysing the field data, the findings highlight the potential experiences, opportunities, and challenges faced by rural Rwandan communities and identify potential areas for intervention and development.

## **CHAPTER 1: THE IMPACT OF GENDER QUOTA ON GENDER RELATIONS IN SOCIETY**

In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in international advocacy and internal movements for gender equality. From the mid-1980s, quotas began to be implemented in national elections around the world (Krook, 2006). Between 1985 and 1994, 21 countries implemented gender quotas and affirmative measures to ensure women's fair political representation, as part of a larger movement for gender equality ( IDEA, 1994; UN Women, 2015). Between 1995 and 2004, 55 countries implemented quotas, while 84 adopted them between 1995 and 2006, with many more in the process. IDEA states that until 2019, 134 global countries have implemented quotas through public elections, constitutions, or political party quotas (IDEA, 2019). Despite a significant increase in women's political representation, Africa has the highest percentages of female representation in national and local legislatures.

The African Association (AU) urged for 50% representation of women in all political decision-making positions by 2005 (Yoon, 2011a; Tripp, 2005). Rwanda, Uganda, Namibia, and South Africa have implemented quota systems to ensure women's representation in administration structures (Burnett, 2008). Rwanda achieved the highest percentage of female legislators in 2018, surpassing even Nordic countries, with 61.3 percent of deputies and 53.8 percent of senates (IPU, 2019). Namibia, Uganda, Seychelles, South Africa, Mozambique, and Swaziland have female parliamentary representation exceeding the 25 percent threshold, with only the upper chamber having 30 percent female members (IPU, 2017). Between 1990 and 2005, the percentage of women in these bodies increased significantly, from 8 percent to 14.5 percent, partly due to legislative quotas for women (PU, 2019).

In Africa, there are two main types of quotas: constitutional or legal provisions quota for reserved seats and adopted voluntary quota for political parties, with about half of adopting countries falling into the latter (Tripp, 2005). Rwanda and Uganda have unique quota systems, with women running for reserved seats in each district, and a male-and-female electoral college in Uganda (Tripp, 2005). The women-only list allows women to run for political seats worldwide, regardless of party affiliation or district, as seen in Tanzania, where quotas are determined by contest proportions (Tripp, 2005). The second quota system allows political parties to increase female candidates proportion through voluntary measures like higher placement on lists and gender rotation (IPU, 2017; Tripp, 2005).

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has more countries with gender quotas, with at least 12 out of 48 using reserved seat quotas for women in parliament, cabinet, or government (IPU, 2019). Tripp et al. (2009) argue that the SSA is the only global group with a higher rate of political representation of women. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries are increasingly using reserved seat quotas to improve women's representation in legislatures, a tool that has been beneficial globally (IPU,

2017). Quotas have been suggested to be adopted in numerous sub-Saharan African countries after conflicts and political transitions to establish new governments, with one-third of these countries experiencing civil wars (Elbadawi and Sambanis, 2000). Sub-Saharan African countries, including Uganda, Mozambique, Rwanda, Eritrea, Burundi, Angola, Namibia, Lesotho, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Senegal, and Togo, adopted quotas post-civil wars (Bauer and Britton, 2006). In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in international advocacy and internal movements for gender equality.

**Table 1: Regional average of women in the national parliament**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Single House or lower house</b>	<b>Upper House or Senate</b>	<b>Both combined houses</b>
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	23.9%	22.2%	23.7%
<b>The Middle East and North Africa</b>	19.0%	12.5%	18.1%
<b>Asia</b>	19.7%	17.4%	19.4%
<b>Europe</b>	28.6%	28.0%	28.5%
<b>America</b>	30.6%	31.4%	30.7%

Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019

Powley (2008) stresses that quotas increase female representation in politics, highlighting the importance of diverse, gender-friendly representatives working together on gender issues. As suggested by Parpart (2008:355), empowering women is crucial for “those who have been denied power gain the ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied”.

Inglehart and Norris (2000) demonstrate the significant role women in political offices play in representing women's issues, fostering confidence and encouraging them to participate in legislative decision-making.

**Table 2: Percentage of women in the national parliament in SSA countries**

<i>Country</i>	<i>Election year</i>	<i>Electoral system</i>	<i>Type of quotas</i>	<i>% of women in parliament</i>
<b>Rwanda</b>	03.09.2018	PR	Reserved seats	61.3%

<b>Namibia</b>	29.11.2014	PR	Reserved seats	46.2%
<b>Senegal</b>	30.07.2017	Parallel	Reserved seats	41.8%
<b>Mozambique</b>	15.10.2014	PR	Executive nomination	39.6%
<b>Ethiopia</b>	24.05.2015	FPTP	Executive nomination	38.8%
<b>Tanzania</b>	25.10.2015	FPTP	Special seats	36.9%
<b>Burundi</b>	29.06.2015	PR	Reserved seats	36.4%
<b>Uganda</b>	18.02.2016	FPTP	Reserved seats	34.4%
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	30.07.2018	Parallel	Reserved seats	31.9%
<b>Cameroon</b>	30.09.2013	FPTP PBV -PR	Reserved seats	31.1%
<b>Angola</b>	23.08.2017	PR	Reserved seats	30%
<b>Sudan</b>	13.04.2015	In transition	Reserved seats	27.3%
<b>Djibouti</b>	23.02.2018	Mixed-Member Proportion(MMP)	Reserved seats	26.2%
<b>Somalia</b>	23.10.2016	No direct elections	Women-only list	24.4%
<b>Lesotho</b>	3.06.2017	MMP	Reserved seats	23%
<b>Eritrea</b>	01.02.1994	No direct elections	Reserved seats	22%
<b>Kenya</b>	08.07.2017	FPTP	Executive nomination	21.7%

*Source: International IDEA, Inter-Parliamentary Union, UN Women (2019).*

Gender quotas are significant institutional advancements in late 20th-century legislatures and electoral systems (Krook, 2009; Dahlerup 2006; Tripp 2003; Tripp et al. 2012; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Batliwala, 1994). They are divided into three categories: reserved seat quotas, legislative quotas requiring a specific percentage of women in political candidates, and voluntary party quotas (Bush, 2011). Legal quotas require amendments to constitutions or electoral laws (Bush, 2011).

Quotas are a type of political quota that can be applied at both local and national levels, and can also affect certain percentages of members of a specific body. Quotas, ranging from 5 percent to 50 percent, are a common size in many countries, with a maximum of 50 percent (Bush, 2011; Krook, 2006). Quota adoption debates often revolve around reserved seat quotas, as some argue they are weaker than other quotas (Bush, 2011; Krook, 2006).

The debate on reserving seats for women in democratic regions, ethnically diverse societies, post-conflict societies, and first world countries is a contentious and debatable topic. Reynolds (2005) found that reserved seats in developed and developing worlds, as well as post-conflict societies, are often adopted due to harmonious arrangements to end civil wars and to implement power-sharing regimes. On the other hand, quotas empower women and assist them in gaining full

rights and freedoms under the law (United Nations Population Fund, 2014; World Bank, 2001). Batliwala (1994) believes that equal opportunities and rights for women can help overcome inequalities and influence societal changes through laws and policies aimed at improving women's roles and rights. Dahlerup (2006) also suggests that gender quotas can address women's political underrepresentation and improve their representation in decision-making. In this way, gender quota systems are a process that empowers women through public spheres to demonstrate their abilities (Hunt 2017; Tripp et.al, 2012; 2003; Burnet, 2008; Dahlerup, 2006; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). Reserved seat quotas are widely considered to have significantly influenced women's representation in various countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since this study investigates the impact of gender quotas on women's socio-economic empowerment, we must also understand the global implications of gender quotas; it will be discussed in the following part.

## **RESERVED SEAT QUOTA SYSTEMS**

Reserved seats quota system is an important method for addressing social inequalities. The system determined the result of the allocation of seats in parliament as opposed to the percentage of female candidates who may be selected under voluntary party quotas (Tripp and Kang, 2008). As voluntary party quotas are commonly not adopted by all parties in a country; therefore, the overall percentage of women elected is not as certain as in the reserved seat system (Tripp and Kang, 2008). Reserved seat quotas not only enhance women's representation in decision-making and social legitimacy but also ensure administrative commitment towards political empowerment (Mansbridge, 1999; Goetz and Nyamu-Musembi, 2008). However, of all three categories of quotas, the reserved seat quota system is said to be a weak form of quota compared to the other two types of quotas (Nazneen and Tasneem, 2010). Nazneen and Tasneem (2010) argue that it can be hard to ensure that reserved seat quotas lead to effective representation of women and women's political empowerment. They argued this by using a case in Bangladesh, where they found that despite the seats to be allocated to women, which resulted in 21 percent of women in parliament, the outcome of these elections has not increased the visibility of women in this country. In addition to this, some studies have argued that women were given seats in parliament; women legislators have had no impact on the community as well as on women in changing society's gender roles (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Longman, 2006).

Related to this, Schwindt-Bayer (2009), argues that there is no weak or strong form of quotas, and that, the most important is the effectiveness of the type of quotas. She argues that the strongest and most effective type of quotas should depend on the size of the quotas rather than the type of it. Here, she explains that whether they are legislative quotas, voluntary parties, or reserved seats, the

strong type of quota should be the one that requires a large number of women on ballots, establishes placement mandates, and stipulates enforcement mechanisms. Thus, from her perspective, a reserved seat quota system that puts a lot of women in parliament would be a strong quota.

It is argued that reserved seat quotas create a second class of political representation, and thus explain why the impact of women representatives has been weaker than anticipated (2006). This was reflected in women in African countries with reserved seats quota systems; where women have not achieved as much as they expect, even if they are the majority in the parliaments (Devlin and Elgie, 2008). In Mozambique, Disney (2006) found that with the reserved seats quota system women's increased participation has not yet converted into significant outcomes and that women representatives appeared to be less active, and in contrast, women in civil society organizations were the most influential regarding law-making and its implementation. For example, the law on the 2003 Family Act, women in civil society organizations played a key role in the passage of this law, when compared to the role of women deputies (Disney, 2006). In Uganda, what was expected of women's increased participation was not done (Tamale, 1999). The study by Goetz (2003) on Uganda also supports this as women deputies failed to pass several national laws including the provision of a 1998 Land Bill to guarantee that women had equal rights with men over joint property. It is well known that reserved seat quotas in Africa are weak as they require women to align with dominant political parties, while male legislators act in the interest of their constituents (Powley, 2005; Tripp, 2006; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013). It has been argued that reserved seat quotas in parliament enhance social legitimacy, but men still hold leadership roles in women's issues, despite influencing women's aspirations, some argue (Nazneen and Tasneem, 2010).

Some argue that women in parliament, despite having a reserved seat quota, are more reliant on the ruling party than MPs elected in constituency seats (Longman 2006; Burnet 2008; Burnet; 2011; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013). Since 1994, Rwanda's tyrannical regime has been criticized for often treating women as mere tokens in the national government (Longman 2006; Burnet 2008; Burnet; 2011; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013). It has been argued that women in Rwandan decision-making are viewed as mere products of the ruling party RPF, and thus, they are unable to represent women due to their reflection on authority. Schwindt-Bayer (2010) identified challenges and barriers for women legislators serving in authoritarian states like Rwanda. She also argues that challenges in Rwanda may be due to the governing party prioritizing specific issues but ignoring women's issues, as the president is responsible for mandating policies at all levels. The existing literature generally agrees on the reasons behind African governments' adoption of gender quotas, particularly reserve seats quotas.

## STRATEGIC REASONS FOR ADOPTING GENDER QUOTAS

Scholars tend to argue that the adoption of quotas in Africa came from the pressure from the international bodies together with grassroots women's movements that have pressured governments to improve women's representation (Tripp et al., 2012, Tripp, 2012, Longman, 2011; Reyntjens, 2011; Dahlerup, 2006). In Africa, both grassroots and national women's movements in collaboration with international women's organizations played a role in advocating for women's rights, pressing the government in the country to adopt quotas through the new constitution or new electoral laws (Bauer, 2016). This was mainly because, for the past decades, women on the African continent were excluded from politics while men were empowered to take the lead in all legislative decision-making (Yoon, 2001). Mostly because most African governments applied the patriarchal systems based on traditional norms that guaranteed men all socioeconomic and political positions and assigned women including mothers and daughters to social positions of subordination (Dahlerup 2006; Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Tripp et.al, 2012; 2003; Krook 2009; 2007; Burnet 2008; 2011; Uwineza and Pearson 2009).

Approximately twenty-three African nations (or half of all African nations) had implemented legislative quotas for women by 2005; other countries are in the process of adopting quotas (Tripp, 2005). With a few notable exceptions, the majority of African countries that imposed quotas did so after the UN Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995 (Burawoy, 2005; Tripp, 2005; Hughes, 2003). The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action from the UN Conference on Women in 1995, and other UN documents were frequently mentioned by the countries and parties that imposed quotas. These documents outlined recommendations for increasing women's political representation. The global women's movement has significantly impacted the implementation of quotas in Africa, as evidenced by the following signs (Gender Monitoring Office, 2011; Dahlerup 2006; 2006a; Tripp et al. 2012; Tripp 2008; 2003; Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Bauer and Britton 2006; Powley 2005; 2007; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2006; Longman 2006). Since the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, numerous countries have improved female political representation, addressing the issue of women's political participation (Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Tripp 2008; Dalherup and Freidenvall 2006). Following the UN Beijing Conference, governments and political leaders worldwide aimed to improve women's representation in legislatures by promoting gender equality in all government institutions (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Tripp, 2008). The same platform also prompted domestic women's movements worldwide to demand improved representation of women, leading to gender quota campaigns and equal legislative decision-making bodies. The 1995 Platform of Action, promoting women's representation, led to numerous

countries implementing gender quota laws and policies, enhancing women's political participation (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Tripp, 2005).

African countries adopted quotas due to constant wars, independence quests, and genocide. International pressures and genocide-related factors also influence adoption, as seen in Rwanda's 1994 genocide, where women led households (Hunt, 2017). In 1996, the Rwandan government conducted a demographic survey and found that 34 percent of households were headed by women and that 54 percent of the population was female (Tripp, 2005). The latter figure is significantly higher than the 25 percent of households headed by women that existed before 1994 (Tripp, 2005). While other countries have adopted quotas that are said to be post independent, post-conflict countries such as Djibouti, Algeria, Ethiopia, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Malawi, Cameroon, Senegal, and Tanzania (Tripp, 2005). In these countries, after independence, after wars or conflicts, they began to introduce and apply quotas in all government branches and created some gender policies and mechanisms that gave women the right to vote and to run for office (Tripp et al. 2012; Bauer and Britton, 2006). Even though most African countries with quotas have experienced one form of civil war such as political instability and ethnic conflicts as well as wars of independence or liberation. In these countries, there are similar factors that led to the adoption of quotas such as new government structure, mostly offered by political transition and this entailed the adoption of new constitutions and electoral laws as was the case for South Africa and Kenya, Tanzania, Eritrea, Namibia (Bauer and Britton, 2006; Bauer and Tripp, 2003).

The new Constitutions and laws in post-conflict and independent countries opened up political opportunities for women to run for elections and hold leadership positions in reconstruction (Bauer and Burnet, 2013). The adoption of gender quotas in Rwanda has been argued to be a government initiative, not a demand from the women's movement (Kagaba, 2015; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Burnet, 2011; 2008). Above all, African countries adopting quotas are home to powerful women's movements, with countries like Botswana, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Mozambique, Uganda, and Mali actively promoting women's rights and implementing quotas globally (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2005; Tripp, 2003). A country like South Africa is said to have an active women's movement, the Women's National Coalition (WNC), that has worked hard to raise their voices in advocating for change for women in this country (Meintjes, 1996).

It is believed that quotas' impact can be weakened when adopted due to external pressure or to impress external actors or improve a country's external reputation (Dahrelup, 2006; Verloo, 2005; Baveridge and Nott, 2002). This can be true even if the introduction of quotas has the support of women's organizations at the elite level (Sacchet, 2008; Pippa and Dahlerup, 2015; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Kagaba, 2015; Hunt, 2017). This is because the use of quotas in these circumstances has not been supported by the majority of citizens (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Dahrelup, 2006; Verloo, 2005; Baveridge and Nott, 2002).

In Namibia, there was a coalition of women's organizations called the Namibian Women's Manifesto Network (NWMN). The women's network aims at mobilizing gender equality in

politics, encouraging political parties in the country to provide women with a chance by placing them on the lists of the candidates running the elections. As a result, in the 2000 elections, at least 50 percent of candidates running elections were women in which 26.4 percent of women won parliamentary seats, shifted from 12.5 percent women in 1994 (Bauer, 2003). In Kenya, after finding out the issues women have in this country, the issues include women's subordination as well as being excluded from politics and voting, some women's movements since 2004, under the Women's National Convention began the activism process of voting for women. Initially, this WNC movement used law enforcement agencies, members of parliament, and media agencies including lawyers to challenge discrimination against women enforcing gender equality in the constitution. Thus, thanks to the WNC's advocacy, Kenya's Constitution was passed in 2010. The constitution contained national legislation and policies that were mainly in the interests of women including increasing women's representation in parliament; and guaranteeing women 48 percent of parliamentary seats (Berry et al, 2017; Kelly, 2016). Although Kenya still has few women in parliament, these acts performed by women's movements in Kenya gave the start for women to participate in politics, and for the Kenyan government to start to consider women in decision-making (Ndinga, 2019).

Although in many colonized countries, women were granted some opportunities such as access to education and employment in post-independence, women in Kenya continued to be restricted from many opportunities even after independence in 1963 and they continued to be banned from entering politics (Kamau, 2010). It is argued that women in Kenya began to enter politics in 2010 after the Constitution 2010 which set aside seats for women and guaranteed more than two-thirds of reserved seats for women (IDEA, 2019; Kamau, 2010).

Existing literature has framed the impact of gender quota policy processes as essential to post conflict reconstruction and often invokes the Rwandan experience as an example of a successful story of empowering women in a post-conflict situation by giving them the same rights and opportunities as men through a gender quota policy (Powley and Anderlini, 2003; Powley, 2008; Burnet, 2008; Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Hunt, 2017). As in all other domains of life in Rwanda, it is clear that women's rights are at the forefront. In education, the Rwandan government guarantees a special policy and implementation plan for females. From preschool to higher education, females are now just as likely as boys to be enrolled in school, and they do better in primary and junior secondary education than boys do (Ornert, 2018). Studies show success in promoting women's empowerment in post-genocide Rwanda through political representation and legal reforms, but some have unintended impacts on Rwandan society. As suggested by the Burnet (2011) study on the impact of the increased number of female politicians in Rwanda, there had been little evidence that the observed trend of increasing female's economic and social autonomy was as a result of

changing roles after the 1994 Genocide as a result of this country's gender quota policy has had an unpredicted negative impact on the family. Some studies have suggested the disadvantages of gender quota and related laws and policies.

## **THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF INCREASING WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION THROUGH THE USE OF QUOTAS**

It is argued that increasing women's political representation through the use of quotas also has a wider social impact. In some societies, particularly in rural areas, women legislators have played a role in raising gender awareness including equal access to education, health, and employment (Abbott and Mugisha, 2018; Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Burnet 2011). More so, women in parliament and other parts of the government have had a positive effect on gender equality laws (Powley 2008; Schwindt-Bayer 2010). In the Nordic parliaments, increased women's political representation has brought a positive impact in terms of changing the political culture (Dahlerup, 1988; 2006; 2013). In Scandinavian parliaments, Schwindt-Bayer (2010) found that Women legislators prioritized women's issues in their political agenda, ensuring their representation and raising their concerns. She also argued that the same women spent more time visiting constituents, working with them to create projects benefiting women in their communities, and promoting women's issues in debates.

A study by Devlin and Elgie (2008:248,249) on the impact of increased women's representation in parliament in Rwanda shows that increased women's political participation in this country "has changed policy outputs including raising issues of equality, violence against women and property rights". In 2009, women cited joint decision-making over domestic violence as part of the "*increased autonomy of women as economic subjects*" Burnet (2011:319). The evidence from the interviews by Devlin and Elgie (2008) shows that on parliamentary agenda, women parliamentarians focused on women's issues where Rwandan women deputies have dedicated themselves to work on grassroots issues working in community work supporting women's groups and providing post-genocide counselling while other women deputies use their time in the parliament dedicated to law-making. Many women deputies, who had worked with civil societies before being elected to parliament, were dedicated to working on grassroots issues due to their awareness of grassroots problems. Devlin and Elgie (2008) argue that African women parliamentarians have brought many positive changes in ways that have not been found in Western settings. In Africa, women MPs have an agenda that is more extensive than the legislative stages of their counterparts in the North (Bauer and Britton, 2006). These authors also argue that African women legislators focus mainly on issues related to land rights; poverty; HIV/AIDS, gender, and violence against women. These are the most important issues for women legislators in African

parliaments, while women in the West are not required to deal with these issues (Bauer and Britton, 2006). Women in South Africa have made extraordinary changes in the regulation of legislation relating to abortion and employment equality (Devlin and Elgie, 2008). Meintjes (2003) supports the adoption of the 1998 Domestic Violence Bill by South African women legislators who joined gender activists. In Namibia, women legislators have significantly contributed to the passage of numerous laws, primarily in the interests of women. (Bauer, 2006).

Recent research on women in Rwanda has examined the increasing women's political representation in Rwanda's society by looking at what female elected officials do in office (Longman 2006, Devlin and Elgie 2008; Burnet 2008, Powley 2008, Debusscher and Ansoms 2013), but have done this by looking at women only, rather compared to women and men, and have been based on women in national leadership, rather than those in local leadership. Other scholars have emphasized the role women in local government have played in restoring the country after the 1994 genocide. Yet, their role in Rwandan society has been paid only limited attention (Burnet, 2008a, 2011; Enda, 2003). Rather, most research on increasing women's political participation in Rwanda has focused on women's influence in making the country democratic (Longman, 2006; Burnet, 2008; Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Reyntjens, 2006; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013); The fate of women in office and their movements, as well as the ongoing pressure from women politicians and women's groups for democratic government, remains unknown (Hunt, 2017; Levit et al., 2016; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Dahlerup, 2006; Longman 2006). Studies on Rwandan politics have primarily focused on the increase in women elected to office, focusing on their roles and responsibilities (Newbury and Baldwin, 2000; 2001, Longman, 2006; Powley and Anderlini, 2003; Powley 2006; Dahlerup, 2012; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Devlin and Elgie; 2008; Reyntjens, 2006; Mageza-Barthel, 2015; Burnet 2008; 2008a; 2008b; 2011; Powley 2003; 2004;2006). This research examines the socio-economic impact of quotas on rural women in Rwanda, highlighting the significant role of grassroots women's movements in rebuilding the country post-genocide.

## **NEGATIVE IMPACT OF QUOTA ON SOCIETY**

Gender quota has been beneficial for women, but some men perceive it as a threat to them (Dahlerup, 2006; 2013; Burnet, 2011; Kagaba, 2015; Hunt, 2017). Rwandan men are expressing concerns that new gender quota laws, including gender equality, are causing conflicts within their families and communities (Kagaba, 2015). Many men in Rwanda believe that the government reform program has led to ongoing family and community conflicts (Kagaba, 2015). Some Rwandan men mentioned that the positive aspects of the gender quota policy that included new laws included the rights of inheritance, employment opportunities, access to assets, and household

equal power relations for women that have increased the family assets and lessened the burden of men of providing for the family alone. However, they believe that even though women earned income and contributed to the family, these benefits have also diminished men's interests and made men lose influence in the family and community (Kagaba, 2015).

For many men in both rural and urban Rwanda women's income, assets, and power have made men feel that they are losing a tradition of dominance and authority over land and women, leading to household conflicts (Burnet 2011; Kagaba 2015). More so, given that in the past household conflicts were to be resolved by men in the family as were the heads of the households, while nowadays, men are no longer involved in these family matters as the laws state that the national police must intervene in the family matters, men, therefore, have felt losers and diminished (Burnet 2011; Kagaba, 2015). It has been suggested that some Rwandan men are living with anger and confusion; and this has resulted in a new form of domestic violence where husbands use psychological strategies such as cheating on their wives or refusing to eat their food to avenge themselves on their wives and to regain power in their families (Kagaba, 2015).

It is argued that women in Rwandan governmental institutions, including those who have won positions, are facing a 22catch, similar to other women in politics. As argued by Lovenduski (2005), Mansbridge and Shames (2008), Sanbonmatsu (2008) and Thomas (2008), universally, women in decision-making often face a backlash against their presence. Women must overcome workplace backlash and reinforce masculinist preferences to succeed. It is believed that women politicians face challenges in effective representation, as they seek ways to escape these obstacles, leading to discrimination and marginalization of women in representation (Duerst-Lahti, 2005). The unanticipated negative outcomes in Rwandan rural society may be due to the traditional male-dominated domination, which hinders women from fully achieving their rights (Kagaba, 2015). Otherwise, Rwandan women might have been kept from practicing those rights and enduring significant social objections (Kagaba, 2015). Some studies suggest that Rwanda's quota for rural women's rights may not guarantee gender equality due to cultural, social norms, and perceptions, making it challenging to assess its impact (Kagaba, 2015, Kagaba, 2015a; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013). This has undermined the transformation potentials of gender quota policies in post-genocide Rwanda (Debusscher and Ansoms 2013; Kabaga 2015a). Therefore, gender quota policies in Rwanda may have hindered women's lives by creating family conflicts, uncertainties for leadership, and socio-economic suffering in rural areas (Kagaba, 2015a; 2015; Bayisenge, 2015; Burnet, 2008, 2011; Longman, 2006; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013, Hunt, 2017).

Some studies indicate that many women in Rwanda express dissatisfaction with the gender equality policy, claiming it has led to women disrespecting men in rural areas. Men preferred their

wives to do housework and farm work, as it freed them up for outdoor activities or paid work. A recent research about Rwandan women's situation indicates that women in Rwanda face unfavourable life situations, feeling tired and old before their time, while their husbands appear young and energetic. *"In our research women in rural areas across Rwanda have compared their life situation unfavourably with that of men. They have told us that they are constantly tired from the hard work in which they have to engage and say that they feel and look old before their time while their husbands look young and are full of energy"* (Abbott and Malunda:573).

Men in rural Rwanda are concerned about domestic violence due to women's economic and political empowerment, withdrawing from urban civic life, and preventing wives from entering politics due to wealth disparity (Kagaba, 2015, 2015a; Burnet, 2011). Domestic violence in Rwanda has been linked to a higher rate of household homicide cases, according to some reports. As per the reports by the Rwandan national police report in 2009 and 2010, the cases of murder of women who were murdered by their spouses in the home shifted from 38 in 2009 to 83 cases in 2010. The gender quota policy in post-genocide Rwanda has led to debate and delicate situations for both women and men, causing new issues in rural areas and affecting many families (Kagaba, 2015a). Urban women benefit from gender quota policies and related laws, often working, entrepreneurs, and business-women, owning properties and driving cars (Burnet, 2011; Hunt, 2017; Mageza-Barthel, 2015). Gender quotas at the national level have significantly improved the lives and experiences of women in Rwanda, despite the cultural challenges and barriers they face.

Despite numerous efforts to address gender-based violence, it remains a significant issue in Rwanda. As an example, according to the 2005 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 41 percent of females aged 15-49 had experienced physical violence since age 15. While the 2010 DHS survey showed up to 56 percent of females aged 15-49 had experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence by a partner. While the recent DHS survey as of 2020 shows that 35 percent of females aged 15-49 had experienced physical violence, and 22 percent had experienced sexual violence. However, just as shown in these statistics these numbers decrease over time.

It is believed that most cases of gender based violence in Rwanda mostly come from rural areas where traditional traditions and values remain. Some studies on Rwanda's gender after 1994 clearly show that in many cases before 1994, women were used to violence even though it was not considered violence but was considered a correction towards a wife/daughter. It is believed that men have a right to beat their spouses if they act inappropriately and that men are in charge of making sure that wives and daughters behave well and that to comply with it was necessary and expected for them to be beaten (Burnet, 2011; Hunt, 2017; Kagaba, 2015; 2015a). Rural women were supposed to be morally upright, daughters to be virgins, and widows to be upright.

It is well known that out of five rural women, at least two were sexually abused by their husbands, as it is widely accepted in rural areas that a husband's right to have sex is respected. In Rwanda, young, unmarried women are accused of being prostitutes and thrown out of the family, while unmarried wives are attributed to dependability and divorce. Even legally co-owners' land belongs to the husband ( Abbot and Malunda, 2016).

Rwanda has been consistently praised by the international community for its efforts in promoting women in various aspects of life, despite facing criticism for its gender-based discrimination. Rwanda's patriarchal society has hindered the full implementation of gender equality policies, particularly in rural areas, despite the country's historical struggle for gender equality. Gender quotas in Rwanda have led to more equal power relations between men and women at both household and community levels (USAID, 2012; Kagaba, 2015). Rwanda's government has launched awareness campaigns across the country, particularly targeting rural residents, on gender laws and related policies (Hunt, 2017). The government has established gender units, implementers, public education programs, and gender awareness at all governance levels to eliminate gender inequalities in the country (McAuslan, 2010). Rwanda has implemented gender programs to enhance gender relations in line with Rwandan culture, aiming to reduce conflict over gender and cultural norms among women parliamentarians (Powley, 2008). Women parliamentarians have advocated for financial support and small business establishment to assist women in forming associations and organizations (Hategekimana, 2011). Rwandan women's economic groups has been argued to empower them, their families, and their community in generating income (Hategekimana, 2011; Hunt, 2017).

This study builds on existing research but differs from previous studies on the impact of quotas in some aspects. This research contributes to the literature by providing new information from rural areas across the country. This research explores the impact of quotas on women's empowerment in local government and recent social and cultural changes at grassroots levels in a country known for its women in national legislatures. Second, this research examines the impact of the gender quota policy on women's empowerment in Rwanda, focusing on local leaders, ordinary individuals. With recent social and cultural changes which mainly began in 2016 after the introduction of the new law on the family and persons in Rwanda (Law Governing Persons and Family).

The literature on the impact of quotas largely indicates positive outcomes, as they significantly increased the number of women in parliament and facilitated their participation in political decision-making (IPU, 2019; Hunt, 2017; Schwindt-Bayer, 2010; Dahlerup, 2006; 2012; Tripp and Kang, 2008, Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Powley, 2008; Krook, 2006; Bauer and Britton, 2006; Dahlerup, 2006; Kabeer, 2005; Tripp, 2003). Gender quotas have been criticized for not always

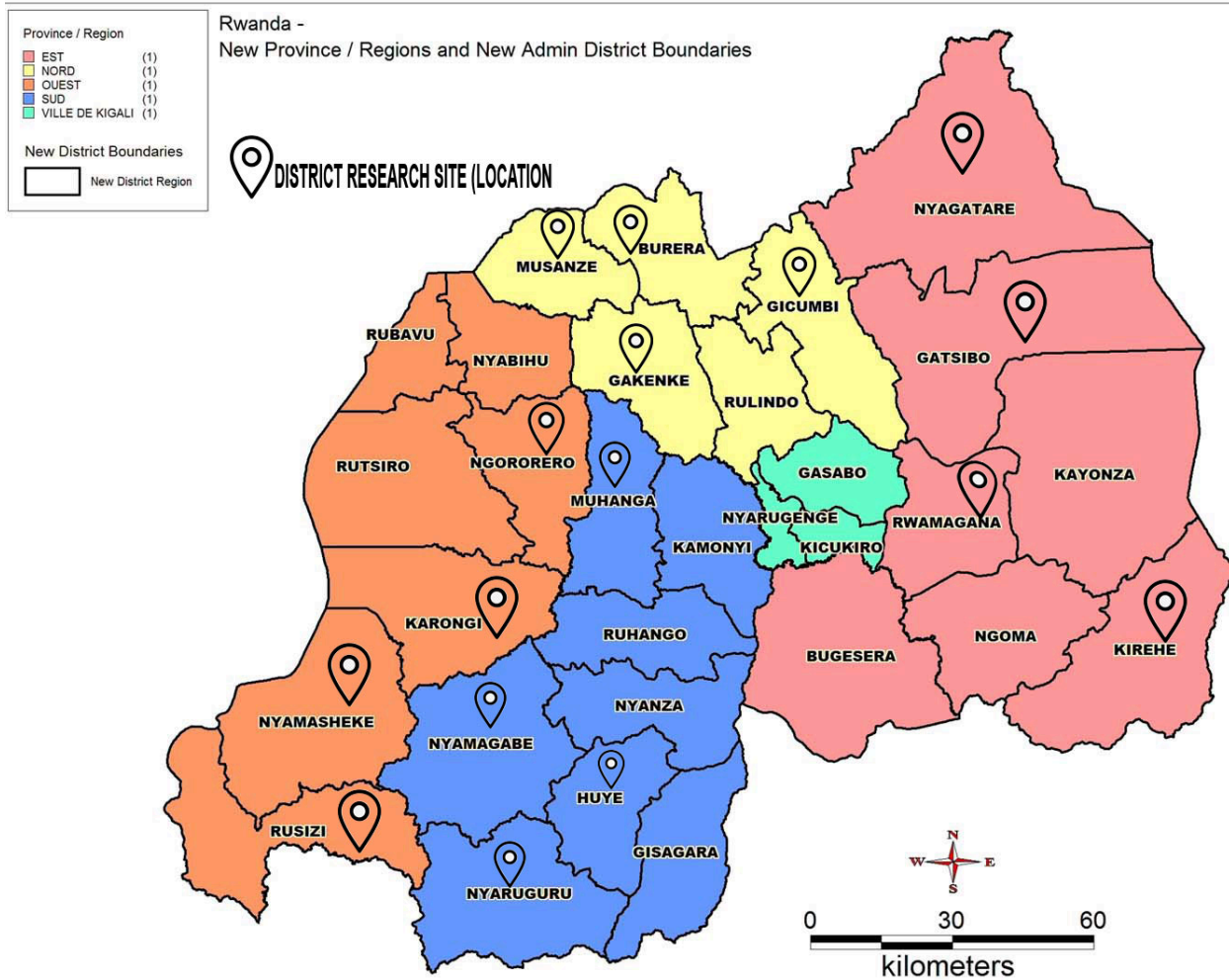
significantly increasing the number of women in parliament (Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Burnet, 2008; 2008a; Longman, 2006). In some instances, even increasing the number of women in parliament may not significantly enhance the representation of women's interests (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Disney, 2006; Longman, 2006; Goetz, 2003). The government party may not permit dissent or hand over women MPs who support the government (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Longman, 2006; Burnet, 2008). Few studies have examined the potential 'backlash' that may result from increasing the number of women in parliament (Lovenduski, 2005; Mansbridge and Shames, 2008; Sanbonmatsu, 2008; Thomas, et al., 2008) but few studies have examined the broader social implications of quotas. (Hunt, 2017; Burnet, 2011; Powley and Anderlini, 2003; Burnet, 2011; Dahlerup, 2012). More so, their research built on the limited number of studies that have examined the social and communal impacts of gender relations in Rwanda. The next chapter explores the methodology employed in this research.

## **CHAPTER2: METHODOLOGY**

The research methods used for this research are based on surveys, interviews, and focus groups with women local leaders and representatives, and with ordinary women and men in rural Rwanda. It studies the impact of gender quotas on women's socio-economic empowerment in rural Rwanda. It asked questions about the impact of the Rwandan government's gender quota policy on women's socio-economic empowerment. The study of the impacts of quotas on women's socio-economic in

post-genocide is exciting because it shows the socio-economic behaviors and political attitudes at this time. Gender quota rights and related laws in post genocide Rwanda have been influenced in visible ways. From a positive perspective, Rwandan women have enjoyed the rights and they have been significantly privileged from the gender sensitive laws. Among many gender-sensitive laws that have given women potential economic independence and improved their autonomic power whether inside or outside the household. However, on the other hand, Rwandan women have experienced negative outcomes emerging from practicing their rights ( Kagaba, 2015, Burnet, 2011; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013).

## The map of Rwanda and research sites



The research was conducted over 18 months in rural Rwanda, built on fieldwork in four provinces, excluding the City of Kigali province. The study was conducted in 15 districts, including Rwamagana, Musanze, Huye, Gakenke, Gatsibo, Kirehe, Burera, Gicumbi, Nyamasheke, Karongi, Rusizi, Nyaruguru, Ngororero, Muhanga, and Nyamagabe. The field research was divided into two parts, with the first part involving surveys for data collection. The second part generated data through focus group discussions and interviews from ordinary rural women and men.

**Table 3: Districts' performance in implementing IMIHIGO during 2016–17**

Position	District	Province	Score %
1	Rwamagana	East	82.02
2	Musanze	North	81.28
3	Huye	South	80.55
4	Gakenke	North	80.12
5	Nyarugenge	City of Kigali	79.71
6	Gatsibo	East	79.55
7	Kirehe	East	79.39
8	Burera	North	79.33
9	Gasabo	City of Kigali	79.27
10	Gicumbi	North	79.19
11	Nyamasheke	West	78.74
12	Rutsiro	West	78.74
13	Karongi	West	78.62
14	Rusizi	West	78.60
15	Nyaruguru	South	78.40
16	Muhanga	South	78.40
17	Ngororero	West	78.33
18	Nyagatare	East	77.85
19	Kamonyi	South	77.51
20	Ngoma	West	77.50
21	Nyanza	South	77.15
22	Bugesera	East	76.95
23	Kayanza	East	76.86
24	Nyabihu	North	76.15
25	Kicukiro	City of Kigali	76.02
26	Gisagara	South	75.66
27	Nyamagabe	South	75.55
28	Ruhango	South	75.27
29	Rulindo	North	75.19
30	Rubavu	North	72.86

The table above displays the districts' performance in the 2016 and 2017 performance contracts known as IMIHIGO across all 30 districts of Rwanda. Districts have emerged as top to perform pledges in economic, social welfare, good governance, gender equality and justice for the year 2016/17. More importantly, these districts have been recognized for their effective implementation of gender equality-related programs in their agenda. However, Nyamagabe district<sup>7</sup> was not among the top districts on this list. Nyamagabe was chosen due to its historical status as the most rural district and its high poverty rate (KT Press, 2015). Thus, this study is best conducted in this ideal location to assess the current changes. The district of Nyamasheke in the Western province, along with Rutsiro, scored 78.74 percent. I chose Nyamasheke over Rutsiro.

Rwanda has four provinces (*Intara*) as of the province of East, West, South and North; the city of Kigali, and thirty districts (*Uturere*), each district is divided into sectors (*Umurenge*), cells (*Akagari*), and villages (*Umudugudu*). As the seat of devolved authority, the district authorises

<sup>7</sup> <https://ioe.ifad.org/en/w/gikongoro-agricultural-development-project-1993->

public spending and establishes priorities for local development. While the cell and village organisations disseminate government information, the sector councils support districts' efforts by providing daily services (MINALOC, 2012; 2017). In order to improve socio-economic development and institutional performance, the government launched the IMIHIGO initiative in 2006 to make sure that these institutions collaborate more efficiently and rapidly (MINALOC, 2017). The Imihigo ranking was determined by assessing its performance on three key pillars including economic transformation, transformational governance, and social transformation. It is in this context, that I did this research based on the districts that came before others in achieving pledges in the performance contract -Imihigo for the 2016-2016.<sup>8</sup>

Practically, IMIHIGO has been Rwanda's key performance indicator and praised for its cultural innovation for local governance (Kamatali, 2020). Conducting this research using district performance contracts is an excellent technique because it allows you to apply what you learn from theory to practice.

**Table 4: Number of survey respondents**

Location	Number of women	Role
<b>Southern Province</b>		
Nyamagabe	6	Healthcare officials at village level
Huye	5	Members of NWC at cell level
Muhanga	4	Executive secretaries at sector level
Nyaruguru	1	Members of NWC at district level
<b>Northern Province</b>		
Musanze	6	Education officers at village level

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rgb.rw>

<b>Gakenke</b>	2	Vice Mayors at district level
<b>Burera</b>	4	Gender officers at district level
<b>Gicumbi</b>	6	Members of NWC at sector level
<b>Western Province</b>		
<b>Karongi</b>	2	Gender officers at district level
<b>Ngororero</b>	4	Social affairs officers at sector level
<b>Nyamasheke</b>	3	Members of NWC at district level
<b>Rusizi</b>	1	Mayor of district
<b>Eastern Province</b>		
<b>Rwamagana</b>	3	Family promotion officers at district level
<b>Kirehe</b>	5	Members of NWC at cell level
<b>Gatsibo</b>	4	Executive committees at district level
<b>Total of surveys</b>	<b>56</b>	

**Table 5: Number of interviews**

<b>District</b>	<b>Number of interviewees</b>	<b>Role</b>
Nyamasheke	12	Ordinary men
Rwamagana	7	Ordinary men
Rwamagana	4	Ordinary women
Gatsibo	8	Ordinary men

Gatsibo	6	Ordinary women
Kirehe	7	Ordinary men
Kirehe	5	Ordinary women
Nyamagabe	5	Ordinary women
Nyamagabe	5	Ordinary men
Nyaruguru	8	Ordinary women
Nyaruguru	3	Ordinary women
Huye	5	Ordinary women
Huye	6	Women local representatives
Muhanga	4	Ordinary women
Muhanga	3	Ordinary women
Nyaruguru	7	Ordinary men
Musanze	5	Women local leaders
Musanze	4	Ordinary women
Gicumbi	12	Women local leaders
Burera	7	Ordinary women
Burera	6	Ordinary men
Karongi	7	Ordinary women
Ngororero	5	Ordinary women
Rusizi	19	Ordinary men
Nyamasheke	3	Women local representatives
Gakenke	4	Women local representatives
Gakenke	16	Ordinary men
Gicumbi	3	Ordinary men
<b>Total of interviewees</b>	<b>186</b>	

**Table 6: Number of Focus groups**

District	Number of focus groups	Participants	Role
Gakenke	2	25	Ordinary women and women
Ngororero	1	10	Ordinary women and men
Karongi	2	10	Ordinary men and women
Gicumbi	2	30	Ordinary women and women
Musanze	2	18	Ordinary women and women
Rwamagana	2	16	Ordinary women and women

<b>Burera</b>	1	13	Ordinary women
<b>Huye</b>	2	17	Ordinary women and women
<b>Nyamagabe</b>	2	24	Ordinary women and women
<b>Muhanga</b>	2	18	Ordinary women and women
<b>Nyamasheke</b>	2	15	Ordinary women and women
<b>Gatsibo</b>	2	17	Ordinary women and women
<b>Kirehe</b>	2	28	Ordinary women and women
<b>Nyaruguru</b>	2	13	Ordinary women and women
<b>Rusizi</b>	2	14	Ordinary women and men
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>268</b>	

To examine the impact of quota on rural women's socio-economic empowerment, it should have been foremost in listening to women from these 15 developed rural districts, to oversee if the changes from gender quota meet the image.

Some critics argue that Rwanda's gender quota may have been a public representation tactic to secure international aid, potentially resulting in less equality than other countries (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Longman, 2011). Therefore, it was believed that a case study of the districts recognized as the best performers should provide a real image of the experience of gender changes and prove that Rwanda is internationally recognized as a world leader in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, especially since the existing studies on Rwanda was done for women living in the city and its suburbs, while this one was done in remote villages and throughout the country of Rwanda. This study aims to ensure reliable and transparent information is provided by leaders and representatives in selected districts for its interest.

To get women's views on the impact of gender quota policy, I interviewed rural men separately. However, most of the men during the discussions showed dissatisfaction that women have been empowered economically and politically. In most discussion groups with rural men, men wanted to talk about their problems and to show their anger caused by women's economic and power autonomy. Getting men's perspectives on the questions I wanted to discuss was hard during this field research, given that men wanted to break into the questions asked and tell me their issues rather than answer the questions I asked. Many men in rural areas seem to want to express their complaints and concerns related to gender issues within their communities to me asking me to report them and advocate for men's issues. However, other men were positive about women's empowerment and tried to show their support for women.

Before the start of all interactions, what the research was about was explained by the local leader who asked the participants to provide all the information that was required. All the interviews and focus group discussions were recorded with the permission of the participant. The interview

transcripts were transcribed afterward, and all information was kept on Nvivo, the coding and analyzing data software daily. Most respondents were female, but I also interviewed some men to get balanced information on the subject as the main goal of this research was to get women's and men's perceptions on the impact of gender quotas on women's empowerment. Throughout this study, the gender of interviewees and their names and other identifying information have been reserved per confidentiality protocols.

The study relies on the qualitative approach. As explained by Bryman (2008) qualitative technique is considered to be best for unfolding and analyzing the culture/behavior of societies. It used a mixture of focus groups and individual interviews to gain a deep insight into women's empowerment at the grassroots level. The focus group method allowed participants (both women local leaders, and ordinary women (and men) to discuss questions about the impact of quotas on women's empowerment, and other Rwandan government policy reforms. Focus group member groups were chosen from a local community in each of the four Provinces of Rwanda. As described by Gillham (2000) and Ritchie and Lewis (2003), individual interviews are a suitable approach when the exploration is primarily focused on gaining insight into the lived or present experience of the respondents. In this study, individual interviews were used to gain insight into the perception of local political leaders. Semi-structured interviews were also chosen because of their purpose as summarised by Punch (2001): "... to understand other persons' constructions of reality; we would do well to ask them...and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms (rather than those imposed rigidly and a priori by ourselves) and in-depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of the meanings..."

After choosing research locations, districts, sectors, cells and villages I was going to work in, which was based on the IMIHIGO 2016–17 list of districts, I used my background and experience as a journalist to obtain the contacts of different local leaders in the regions I would be researching. Thankfully, I got a list of all phone numbers of all local government leaders in Rwanda. The local leaders when I called them and explained my research to them, and they helped me locate participants for my research.

The ordinary women and men participants were provided by village leaders who worked closely with the citizens. On the day of data collection, I and a local leader from the village (usually the chief of 10 households) reached the sites, and local leaders started by explaining the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of the participation. In Rwanda, the village local leaders are the ones who mostly interact with citizens. Of all legal matters, citizens first check on with their village local leaders, thus, village local leaders work hand-in-hand with citizens. Furthermore, the village local leaders must know about all activities that are taking place within their areas, this is

why, before conducting this research, there was a need to inform them to get their consent to get people to talk in the interviews or focus groups. More so, these village local leaders know better the women's local representatives and their availability. For surveys, I got in contact with women through the leaders of the National Women's Councils. I distributed the surveys among women, and they completed them on their own. They were in Kinyarwanda, the language of Rwanda and all women surveyed were able to write and read.

In some districts, the interviews were organized through the National Women's Council. The interviews were organized into three groups. One group of women local representatives was made up of between eight and ten women, most with married women aged between 22 and 55, and another group with ordinary women and then men. Most of these women's local representatives were among the nominating candidates for the elections of the local representatives that were happening at the time. These women who were active in their communities knew a lot and had some experience in terms of the government's gender quota– related policies and laws including the roles of women in rural society and current gender programs. Many of those women had experience as local leaders because many started working at the lower administrative levels, such as a village or cell, and they were promoted up to high levels due to the trust the citizens had in them. Also, most of these women were legally married, with some formal education background. A total of 56 surveys 187 interviews and 28 focus group discussions with women local representatives included village and cell leaders, social affairs, health officers, education officers, members of women's councils; and ordinary men and women in rural Rwanda.

Throughout this study, the gender of interviewees and their names and other identifying information have been reserved per confidentiality protocols. I conducted all interviews in Kinyarwanda, the national and local language of Rwanda. All questions about the impact of gender quotas were combined into semi-structured interviews in trying to cover as many other topics as possible. Also, a question about the roles of women local leaders and representatives was combined with other topics on the survey questionnaire. Based on the answers given by the participants, I tried to formulate more additional questions related to this subject to attain deeper or clearer answers for example "You have told us about positive changes, is their negative changes". Furthermore, to go into depth into women's roles and main tasks, this qualitative research presented a region-wide analysis of the profile of women's local representatives. As Burnet (2011) found in rural areas women in local leadership positions were being exploited and experiencing a double burden of work which is frequently unpaid and as a result, rural men try to prevent their wives from entering politics (Burnet 2011). I surveyed women's local representatives to investigate their profiles, their education level, their salaries, prior political experience, priorities, working hours, and their current occupation.

## Positionality

I was born in Ruhengeri (now officially renamed Musanze district) on Lake Ruhondo in the Northern Province of Rwanda.<sup>9</sup> Because of ethnic politics which were established during the colonial period in the 1990s, which divided Rwandans into clearly defined and hierarchically ranked racial and national groups as three distinct ethnic Hutu, the majority of 84 of the population described as short, hardworking, and solid. Tutsi<sup>10</sup>, a minority of 14 percent of the population with specific innate characteristics length, nose, teeth, foot, and hands, and a minority of the population 1 percent of the population, less intelligent and dwelled in forests.

At that time, it was problematic to be a Tutsi and to live in Rwanda (Newbury, 1998). Due to these issues, I had to seek safe hiding places in rural areas, and ended up residing in Butare village Huye district today and Ruhengeli village today Musanze District. In 2014, I left Rwanda for Ireland where I came to do an advanced journalism MA course. As a rural woman who has lived in these two worlds, the developed and developing worlds, it is a privilege to do this research utilizing my positionality to bring un-up-to-date knowledge about this current debatable topic. My critical analysis provided to this study does not originate from my perspective and is not related to my personal life, identity, or character.

## Data reliability

Generally, women were found to be comfortable and enthusiastic about sharing their opinions on the questions asked. The field research was characterized by interactive discussions, with each woman contributing their unique views and perspectives to the discussions. In many places, women were happy to tell their stories about their lived experiences and life, narrating their journey to leadership and their real life outside. The women's stories gave me an image of the situation of rural women empowerment and gave me a clear understanding of local authority function and structure. I also participated in community activities such as the *Umuganda*, locally known as a community work held on the last Saturday of every month. In the Umuganda service, with the community members in the village, we did a general cleaning of streets around in the villages. After the community service, we had a meeting where community leaders gave information and stories on what was happening in the area in terms of health, security, rural development, and some family development. I also participated in the Umuganura service

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<sup>9</sup> some place names in Rwanda were officially renamed after the genocide, in part to remove the associations with that time.

<sup>10</sup> It is sometimes said that Tutsis had their origins in Ethiopia

(National harvest ceremony)<sup>11</sup>, mostly organized at the grassroots levels; where we ate and drank harvested foods and drinks. The National Harvest Ceremony, led by women in local leadership, showcases the achievements of women in agriculture, including the production of various crops like bananas, maize, beans, milk, and pumpkins. Both events also addressed the main issue, this thesis sought to examine roles women played inside and outside the office. The stories of rural women provided insight into their daily lives and leadership experiences, while interactive discussions helped analyze the differences between urban and rural women.

## Limitations

Conducting field research in rural Rwanda presented a few challenges, primarily due to the high level of surveillance by governmental authorities. Some scholars and researchers about Rwanda had documented the difficulties faced in Rwanda, where the level of surveillance is high and can influence the behaviours and responses of participants that would lead to biased and inadequate data (Rayarikar, 2017; Friedman, 2012; Longman, 2011; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Burnet, 2008; Thompson, 2007; Pinto, 2021). Thus, when conducting this field research, I was aware of Rwanda's government's allegations of threats, international condemnation, and existing literature that suggests that access to information in Rwanda is challenging. One major constraint I encountered throughout my field research is the tight authorities' surveillance in some rural places where some participants were reluctant to express their opinions and experiences due to fear of outcomes thinking they might be considered traitors or slanderers of the country. On this, using my professional media techniques and experience, I explained to them that their opinions are not going to harm anyone. Therefore, the validity and reliability of the research findings were reliable. Beyond this, the requirement for me to seek first official permissions and traverse bureaucratic processes to get those permissions necessitated sufficient time and space for waiting. For this reason, in many places, I had to participate in community work [*Umuganda*] where most community members and local authorities gathered, making it easier for me to engage with them all at the same time. Addressing these limitations required careful planning, including thorough community engagement, ensuring culturally appropriate manners, and being flexible with the community leaders. I gave respondents and participants enough time to ask all questions concerning this research question beforehand and I was very specific and culturally aware when discussing the questions that were concerned about the government. With unpredictable constraints, in many places some local leaders often hesitate to talk to me, claiming they are not

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.rw/blog-detail/rwanda-celebrates-umuganura>

the ones who speak; that they would ask higher authorities for permission, which can be delayed or postponed. More so, many women who contributed to this field research were also involved in housework, often working in the fields and offices. During a certain point, I had to provide a substitute between 500rwf and 1000rwf, which is approximately € 1.

## **Documents**

This research also used documentary material to define and analyse the status of women in Rwanda as well as gender roles before the 1994 genocide and in post-genocide Rwanda. These documents were accessed from district/provincial archives, Catholic Church libraries, in the Universities' libraries in Rwanda. I also offered further insight into monitoring reports on gender equality policy in Rwanda by relying on recent discussions and news in Rwandan Websites and local media press such as the New Times (Rwanda's daily English newspaper), BBC Kinyarwanda-Kirundi news service, Kigali Today press and Imvaho Nshya (Rwanda's daily government-run Kinyarwanda-language newspaper).

## **CHAPTER 3: WOMEN AND THE RWANDAN STATE**

This chapter looks at the status of women in pre-genocide and post-genocide Rwanda. It analyses how the situation of women in Rwanda had changed over the years; from the situation of women in the first years after independence; until the 1994 genocide. It also discusses the introduction of the new Constitution in 2003 as part of the post-genocide reconstruction.

Finally, it describes the current position of women in the Rwandan state.

### **THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN PRE-GENOCIDE RWANDA**

In pre-colonial and colonial Rwanda, from the early nineteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century (1800-1960), from the early nineteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century (1800-1960), the rights of women and their roles were devalued in Rwandan society (Longman, 2006; Uwineza and Pearson, 2009, Hunt 2017; Burnet 2008, 2011; Kagaba 2015). The society guaranteed Rwandan men a hegemonic position of socio-economic dominance; as the decision-makers, owners of the family property, heads of the family, and sole income earners, and gave Rwandan women a social position of subordination (Hunt, 2017; Kagaba, 2015; Burnet and RISD 2003; Human Rights Watch 1996). In Rwandan communities, women were not allowed to speak in public or to give their opinions as men had the right to decide for the family and the community and this was the same situation in post-independence. Roles including the head of households or administrators were prohibited for women (Burnet, 2008a). More so, the Rwandan law prevented women from entering into commercial activities, contracts, or engaging in paid employment, in some urban communities, women could seek paid employment, but they had to ask for their husband's permission first (Burnet, 2011; 2008a; Human Rights Watch 1996). However, women's roles in the homes as mothers and food producers were given a position of honor in society, and on that basis, they could hold powerful religious positions (Longman, 2006; Uwineza and Pearson, 2009; Hunt, 2017). During colonial rule, even those few public positions were taken away and post-independence governments did not give a place to women in politics (Longman, 2006). In post-independence Rwanda, only a few women gained a position in politics, but it was based on their ethnicity. Until the 1994 genocide, the government included Hutu women only. However, this situation changed dramatically after the 1994 Rwandan genocide, when the government made significant changes in the rights of women and gender roles in society.

Many scholars on gender relations in Rwanda have shown how the disruption of gender relations caused by recurring conflict might have offered "significant opportunities" for social transformations in the post-conflict period (Bauer and Britton 2006:11). Today's rise of women in Rwandan politics is embedded in this specific moment of unstable political, social and economic crisis that emerged between 1990 and 1994 in Rwanda (Burnet, 2008; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Longman, 2006; Hunt, 2017). One current debate about changing gender roles in the

post-genocide identifies an interesting viewpoint on the immediate consequences of genocide where many families in the immediate aftermath of genocide were left headed by women as females as the majority population in the immediate aftermath. This created a situation where women had to partake in decision-making and also make decisions for themselves (Bop, 2001).

### **WOMEN AND POST-GENOCIDE RECONSTRUCTION (1994/5-2003)**

On April 6, 1994, Hutu President Habyarimana's plane was shot down over Kigali, and Tutsis were blamed, and genocide began immediately (Arnot 2010; Alozie 2008; McDoom 2011; Burnet 2008; Dallaire 2008; 2003; Chaon 2008). The genocide against Tutsi killed between 800,000 and one million Tutsi and moderate Hutus in 100 days from 6 April 1994 (more than 7 Tutsi killed per minute). About 75 percent of the Tutsi population was killed; and 1 in 4 Hutus committed acts of violence (McDoom, 2011). Two million fled the country, most crossing into Congo (Hunt, 2017), and more than 100,000 were held as prisoners (Wolters, 2005). In early

July 1994, RPF led by Paul Kagame, now President of Rwanda entered in Rwanda and stopped the genocide taking the power from the government army – Forces Armées Rwandaises (ex-FAR), which was also involved in the genocide (Arnot, 2010; McDoom 2011; Burnet 2008; Dallaire 2008; 2003; Alozie 2008). After seizing the power, the RPF installed the transitional government, which was known as the 'Government of National Unity'. Initially, the transitional government which immediately abolished ethnic identities and promoted one Rwandan Identity, or "Rwandanness/hood," by revisiting the pre-colonial Rwandan value systems at the core of the indigenous everyday social cohesion system; was to stay in power for five years as agreed by the Arusha Accords peace deal, signed in Tanzania in 1993 (Burnet, 2009). However, due to the programs they had to complete in the five years, as part of its reconstruction efforts, it was argued that it needed more time to complete them. Therefore, in 1998, the RPF reported that the transition period would be extended to five extra years to guarantee the post-genocide security and peaceful democratization process. Its second government round was officially launched in 2001 after the local government elections at the district level in all parts of the country (Burnet, 2008).

Though women's bodies were considered the objects of rape and sexual torment during the 1994 genocide, it ironically contributed to transforming the situation for at least some women. The genocide drastically altered the gender balance in Rwandan society (Abbott and Malunda, 2016). Although terrible, it also catalysed change, giving women the opportunity to take advantage of opportunities, alter gender stereotypes, and advance significantly in politics. Following the genocide, women found themselves leading houses, contributing to the economy, and playing significant roles in society. Women's organizations were instrumental in shaping the 2003 Constitution by advocating for women's inclusion in politics. Furthermore, women were given

equal rights to property (Law No.22/99 of 1999). Two other pieces of domestic legislation that promote gender equality and women's empowerment are the 2009 Labour Law (Law No. 10/2009) and the 2008 Law against Gender-Based Violence (Law No. 59/2008).

Women were the majority in the aftermath of the genocide, making up 70 percent of the population (Hunt 2017; Debusscher and Ansoms 2013). Immediately, dramatic gender relation changes were created with women filling the places of those men who had fled, died, or were in prisons. Within the rural communities, women took on new roles in society replacing those men who were absent. In rural families, women had to undertake more responsibilities that culturally used to be reserved for men, such as building houses, and driving cars (Burnet, 2011; 2008). In urban areas, women began to enter paid jobs, more women pursued their careers (Burnet, 2011). Some women stepped up as leaders in all domains whether at the national level or grassroots level. At the grassroots level, women are elected as judges and mediators running the local courts dealing with the perpetrators of the genocidal killings. However, even though those women had filled the places of men when some of the Rwandans in exiles returned and more prisoners were released, those women did not surrender their positions. The post genocide government had established gender-sensitive laws and policies for women giving women the right to participate in politics whether men were present or not (Rwandan Constitution 2003, Articles 9, 10,11,16,25,28,37 and 40). By 1999, women made 50 percent of the cabinet- high-level positions (Hunt, 2017) while the number of women parliamentarians doubled, with over one-quarter of women parliamentarians translated into 25.7 percent of parliamentary seats (Devlin and Elgie, 2008). It is believed that women at the grassroots level played significant roles in the country's recovery through consolidating peace and reconciliation in the aftermath of the genocide (Hunt, 2017).

## **THE IMPACT OF THE 2003 NEW CONSTITUTION**

The new Constitution was officially approved by a national referendum in May 2003 after a consultation led by the commission of twelve, three of whom were women (Hunt, 2017). The 2003 Constitution included a quota policy granting a minimum of 30 percent representation in decision-making bodies for women to be applied across the board, from the president's cabinet to courts and elected and appointed positions at every level (Articles 25, 27 and 40 of the 2003 Rwandan Constitution; Government of Rwanda, 2003). It also shaped Rwanda's parliament into two houses: the chamber of deputies consists of 80 seats and the 26-seat Senate. The Senate included 14 each elected indirectly by 12 geographic jurisdictions and the faculty of two public universities. In the chamber of deputies, 53 seats are directly elected through proportional party lists, 27 seats are elected indirectly, 24 women seats are elected by the local district-level women's councils, two women MPs elected by the National Youth Council, and one-woman MP elected by the Federation of the disabled people (Articles 64,65 and 66 of the 2003

Rwandan Constitution; Parliament.gov.rw). At the local level, the constitution divided local leadership structures into village, cells, sectors, district, and province (Articles 5 of the 2003 Rwandan Constitution). After approval of the Constitution, many other legal reforms were put in place most of which aimed at promoting women's rights and their roles in society (Kagaba, 2015).

Under the new Constitution, two seats in each province and two seats in the city of Kigali are reserved for women which translates into a total of 24 seats. These women were elected by a joint panel of members from the relevant local authority and members from the executive committee of women's organizations at the relevant level (Rwandan Constitution, 2003; Articles 76) in 2003. As a result of the 2003 Constitution, the percentage of female candidates in parliament was up to 48.8 percent and rose to 52.6 percent in 2008, far surpassing the recently mandated 30 percent (Devlin and Robert, 2008; Bauer and Burnet, 2013; Burnet, 2008; 2011). In 2013 Rwanda held national elections; women won 64 percent in the Chamber of parliament and eleven women holding ministerial positions making up more than half of the president's cabinet in Rwanda (IPU, 2017). The representation of women in parliament decreased in 2018 after the national elections held in September 2018 where women won 61 percent of seats. But even at that, Rwanda leads the world for the percentage of women in parliament (IPU, 2019). The rise of women in parliament is directly linked to the introduction of the 2003 Constitution (Longman, 2006; Tripp et al., 2012; Tripp, 2003; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Burnet, 2008, 2008a, 2011; Powley, 2003, 2006; Hunt, 2017).

### **WOMEN’S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION POST-2003**

Women represent 30 percent of total representation in all decision-making institutions as set up by the 2003 Constitution (Ministry of Local Government, MINALOC). Women occupy 33 percent of the total district mayoral seats countrywide, an increase from 23.3 percent (Ministry of Local Government) in 2016. Women occupy 40 percent of provincial seats and 11 percent in the sectoral levels. The three administrative local levels, mayoral and provincial and sectoral levels are the highest local levels of local government, while cell and village levels are known as the lowest local levels (MINALOC, National Institute of Statistics Rwanda, Gender Monitoring Office). Even though the percentage of women’s participation in the lowest local levels is not shown anywhere, it is believed that women are also very visible in these lowest local levels.

**Table 7: The local government’s councils in Rwanda**

Provinces	Districts	Sectors	Cells	Villages
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<b>Southern province</b>	8	101	532	3501
<b>Northern province</b>	5	89	414	2744
<b>Eastern province</b>	7	95	503	3792
<b>Western province</b>	7	96	538	3624
<b>Kigali City</b>	3	35	161	1176
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>2148</b>	<b>14837</b>

Compiled from MINALOC and the local government system in Rwanda available here [http://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Country\\_profiles/Rwanda.pdf](http://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Country_profiles/Rwanda.pdf)

As shown in the table above, the local government councils are structured into five provinces including the capital city of Kigali. These provinces are organized into four levels namely, 30 districts, 416 sectors, 2148 cells, and 14837 villages. Following the local elections held in September 2018, women occupied 55.9 percent of all councillors. This number has increased compared to the previous elections. There are two circles of government in Rwanda, including national and local governments. According to the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) and The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), the national government includes the provincial administration authorities while the local government comprises four administration levels namely districts, sectors, cells, and villages. The district local level, which institutes the primary local authority, is policy making and administrative body at the local leadership level. The district local level is the position through which the people, by means of their representatives, can practice their decision-making and exercising powers to decide the advancement of the district. The sector local level is the second administration organ after the district for policy making decisions. It is composed of the executive committee, which is made out of 12 members drawn from the chamber and is capable of everyday organization and the execution of the decisions and plans of the council while the cell local level is elected for a five-year term. The third local leadership organ is the cell, which is the official board of trustees. The cell local level is made out of the official secretary and a secretary responsible for planning social advancements. Cell authorities are capable of organization and network advancement, including the day-to-day organization of the cell and the execution of choices taken by the cell board. While the last local leadership is a village. Village local leadership is the lowest administrative local authority of the local government and its boards elected for a five-year term. The village level authority comprises of a five member board of trustees which incorporates the village chief, the security officer, the social affairs officer, a member in charge of youth and gender but above all, they are all responsible for administration and community development including the everyday administrative

activities of the village and the usage of the implementation of decision making taken by the village local level for the benefit of all village community members.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 8: The current percentage of female and male representation in national and local leadership (2018)**

	% of women	% of men	paid/ Unpaid positions
Parliament	61.3	38.7	Paid
Senate	38	62	Paid
Ministers	50	50	Paid
Judiciary	43	57	Paid
Province governors	40	60	Paid
Offices of districts' councils and Bureau	55.9	44.1	Paid
District councils	45.2	54.8	Paid
District mayors	30	70	Paid
Vice/Mayors economic affairs	16.7	83.3	Paid
Vice/Mayor of social affairs	66.7	33.3	Paid
District counsellors	43.6	56.4	Paid
Sector executives	11	89	Paid
Cell leaders	35	65	Paid
Village leaders	43.9	56.1	Not paid

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Country\\_profiles/Rwanda.pdf](http://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Country_profiles/Rwanda.pdf)

Compiled from the Ministry of Local Government, MINALOC.

The local government system in Rwanda, country profile between 2017/18 available here

The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) and the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU).

Compiled from the Gender Monitoring Office website (GMO); Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) the

UN Women; and the National Institute of Statistics Rwanda. *Compiled from MINALOC website, available at*

[http://minaloc.gov.rw/fileadmin/documents/Minaloc\\_Documents/Assessment\\_of\\_Local\\_Democracy\\_and\\_Local\\_Governance\\_Benchmarking\\_Rwanda\\_Against\\_Aberdeen\\_Principles.pdf](http://minaloc.gov.rw/fileadmin/documents/Minaloc_Documents/Assessment_of_Local_Democracy_and_Local_Governance_Benchmarking_Rwanda_Against_Aberdeen_Principles.pdf)

[https://kigalicity.gov.rw/fileadmin/templates/Documents/policies/Decentralisation\\_Policy\\_2001.pdf](https://kigalicity.gov.rw/fileadmin/templates/Documents/policies/Decentralisation_Policy_2001.pdf)

[http://197.243.22.137/minaloc/fileadmin/documents/Minaloc\\_Documents/DIP\\_3rd\\_Phase\\_Draft\\_14.3.11\\_final\\_version.pdf](http://197.243.22.137/minaloc/fileadmin/documents/Minaloc_Documents/DIP_3rd_Phase_Draft_14.3.11_final_version.pdf)

[http://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/Publications/Rwanda\\_Governance\\_Review/Rwanda\\_Governance\\_Review\\_2018.pdf](http://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/Publications/Rwanda_Governance_Review/Rwanda_Governance_Review_2018.pdf)

The table above shows, there is a big difference between the numbers of women in local government. Women in the local government are still few compared to those women in the national government. Women occupy 33 percent of the 30 district mayors' seats in Rwanda. However, even though this number is still small compared to those women in the national government, the number of women mayors nationwide has quickly increased tenfold within one month in 2019, jumping from 23.3 percent in early September 2019 to 33.3 percent at the end of September 2019. This rapid increase can foretell a new path for the country's continuing efforts to promote women's representation in local leadership. Also, the statistics above show that numerous local government positions are occupied by men. For example, there are 60 percent of male governors, 70 percent of male mayors, and 83.3 percent of male vice mayors in economic affairs, while women represented 66.7 percent of vice mayors of social affairs. Since 2006 when the second Decentralisation rolled out across the country, the current administrative structure was instituted. The 2006 second Decentralisation recognized cell level authorities as government officials with a new status designed for their salaries and benefits including health insurance, communication, and transportation facilities and social security. However, it did not guarantee the salaries for village leaders.

It had been suggested that women in the national assembly in Rwanda had played a crucial role in the adoption of this constitution and have lobbied for some gender-sensitive laws that were included in the 2003 Constitution (Hunt, 2017). As indicated by the Food and Agriculture Organization on land and agriculture reforms in Rwanda between 2010 and 2011, Rwanda had

successfully enforced the inheritance and land laws (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2010 ; 2011), and these laws have also granted Rwandan women full rights to the family's property to women giving both husband and wife 50 percent of the family property at the time of succession and land distribution (Kagaba, 2015, Bayisenge, 2015; Bayisenge et al., 2015). This study also indicates that Rwanda is regarded as the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to have eliminated gender inequalities between women and men regarding family property and land ownership. As a result, the majority of women in rural Rwanda are co-owners of their joint property and have the same rights by law as their husbands to make the decision and participate equally in family decision-making (Kagaba, 2015; Niyonsaba, et al., 2013; Abbott and Mugisha, 2015). Given that land is the primary source of subsistence for a larger part of the population and the only wealth rural people have, it is assumed that these laws have had a positive impact on rural women. The new gender-sensitive laws have given women options, women have the right to enter paid work and work outside of the home doing the work that was previously ascribed to men such as building and driving (Burnet, 2008; 2011; Kagaba, 2015). More so, women have been given full rights to participate in politics and participate equally in family decision-making (Abbott et al., 2018; Kagaba, 2015; Hunt, 2017).

Some studies have indicated that Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania have made exceptional strides compared to other countries in the region, in terms of instituting gender-sensitive laws that have positively impacted the empowerment of women, and Rwanda is considered to have most effectively promoted women's empowerment at all spheres including education, health, and employment (McAuslan, 2010; United Nations Development Programme, 2015). According to a 2015 report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Rwanda has been an extraordinary example in all other countries across the world regarding the overall empowerment of women and gender equality.

Rwandan women's deputies helped women entrepreneurs, provided support and raise awareness about the need for education for girls and women, and promoted policies dealing with discrimination and rape (Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Longman, 2006). Thanks to these women's advocacy and lobbying, the law governing inheritance and marital property rights was passed in 1999 and the Gender-Based Violence law was established in 2009 (Powley, 2005). Equally important and most significant to the rise of women in politics in Rwanda, it is known that many women in the national government started politics at the grassroots level (Hunt, 2017). Some of the national women legislators started as volunteers engaging in grassroots activities including organizing women's movements that were in charge of resolving the problems of genocide survivors in society in helping them to rebuild their lives (Hunt, 2017). In time, these women's organizations grew up and carried out other missions to initiate peace and reconciliation within

their communities with women's organizations providing the most significant in helping women rebuild their lives (Hunt, 2017; Burnet, 2008). This work done by women at the grassroots level between 1994 and 2003 built the trust of the citizens and positioned women to the highest positions in government (Hunt, 2017; Burnet, 2008). As a result, many women were appointed to high-profile positions at the national level, as ministries, secretaries of state and supreme court justices, and parliamentarians (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Burnet, 2008). Some of these women in the national government recognized that their political journey started organically at the grassroots levels and appreciated the rural people's trust (Hunt, 2017).

### **ECONOMIC RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO LAND AFTER 2003**

In Rwanda, women owning land titles outnumber men in various economic areas, despite men still dominating women in this particular area. It is suggested that Rwanda has registered nearly twelve million plots and offered land titles to rightful owners, making land more valuable. The 5th National Population and Housing Census as of 2020 showed that women make up 51.5 percent of the population, slightly higher than men's 48.5 percent. At the national level, women have been granted extended economic independent rights both in law and practice and given legal inheritance rights (Mageza-Barthel, 2015:187). Among these are the 1999 law governing inheritance; wherein the formal marriage, women are entitled to 50 percent of the family's assets, and Marital Property Rights that included gender equality in land inheritance and ownership within formal marriage (Articles 42 and 43, law No 22/1999 of 2003 Rwandan Constitution). Although these laws were put in place before the New Constitution was passed, however, the new Constitution fast-tracked their progress (Kagaba, 2015). The 2003 Constitution introduced national gender policies including Land Policy established in 2004 and Organic Land in 2005, both with the provisions for gender equality in land rights (Articles 8,9,10, 15, 15, 27, 28, 40 of the 2003 Rwandan Constitution). These laws also gave women in the city and in rural areas, autonomous rights to enter into paid jobs and have a say on their income, while before these laws, men were to decide the women's income (Burnet, 2011). In both urban and rural areas, women got the opportunity to pursue their careers, both in public services and private services. Outside the home, women are doing the same jobs as men do, they work in construction, in agriculture, in factories, and public transportation as motorists, bus and taxi drivers, and in business (Hunt, 2017; Kagaba, 2015; Burnet, 2011). In urban areas, many women run businesses as employers and entrepreneurs, others are in public services as teachers, doctors, and nurses. In the family, women have gained the right to make the decision for themselves and their families (Hunt, 2017; Burnet, 2011).

In rural areas, because women have been given the right to property and the law of gender equality that gave women rights in lands, most women engaged in agriculture; some do agriculture as a business, selling the harvest grains into the local markets. A large number of women workers employed in farm jobs as independent farmers or wage farms, others worked in paid non-farming activities such as construction, transportation, in mines or factories. A study by the United Nations Development Programme on Rwanda indicated that slightly more Rwandan women than men are in the workforce, with 86.4 percent of women compared with 83.2 men in 2015/2016. The study by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) in 2016/2017 shows that the overall representation of females in the workforce was up to 87 percent while 86 percent were males. This survey, however, shows that the majority of women living in rural areas in Rwanda were mostly in the workforce with 89 percent, compared to 73 percent of women living in urban areas. This is because in general people in rural areas are exposed to many types of jobs in the workforce in rural areas such as agriculture, fishery, forestry, construction, trading, and craft amongst other things. Therefore, these jobs are available to rural people. As a result, many people in rural Rwanda, as well as women, have more than two jobs while in urban areas, women are restricted to these types of employment mostly because there are not many workforce development employment like in the rural areas of Rwanda. Far from workforce employment, given that the agricultural lands are typically allocated in areas, many Rwandans are unlikely to do farming in urban areas. The assessment of the distribution of workforce employment as per region in Rwanda by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) between 2016 and 2017 on economic activity shows a high assorted variety of workforce employment in rural areas compared to urban areas. This NISR assessment also shows those engaged in workforce employment are up to 87 percent of workforce workers living in rural areas compared to 32 percent of those living in urban areas. One thing is certain: Previously women were in agriculture, but they did not do it as a profession because they did not have a say in property or have their own property. But now they have property in the family and even those women who do not have their own lands, they can rent them (NISR, 2016; 2017; Kagaba, 2015).

**Table 9: Land ownership in Rwanda**

Northern Province	96.5%
Eastern Province	92.8%
Urban	60.2%
Rural	95.3%
Male	14%
Female	25%

Co-owner land	61%
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Table eight shows that 89.3 percent of all Rwandans owned land between 2016 and 2017. This proportion however slightly decreased from 94 percent between 2013 and 2014.

However, there is a considerable increase between urban areas (60 percent) and rural areas (95 percent). A big part of owned lands is being used for agricultural activities, especially in rural areas. The percentage of women's lands is 89.5 compared to 88.8 men. More so, women's access to land has contributed to access to loans as now, they use land as collateral to get loans from financial institutions. Beyond land ownership, women's access to livestock is also surprising and high. Countrywide, females represent 65 percent of livestock compared to 70 percent of males (NISR, 2012). Women's representation in livestock is comparatively high even though it is still low compared with that of men. One can say that the representation of women in agriculture and livestock is a big change in the history of women given the fact women never had access to their assets like livestock or land or any assets in the family. This was a result of the 2004 National Land Policy and 2005 Organic Land Law, both laws that were put in place to enforce a gender equality law in land rights (National Land Policy, 2004; Organic Land Law, 2005). More importantly, Rwanda's land ownership statistics reveal that 25 percent of the land is owned by women, 14 percent by men, and 61 percent by co-owners. Despite having more land, women struggle to make good use of it due to traditional family structures hindering access to finance.

**Table 10: Land registration**

Year 2016/17	% of households bought land	For the average amount received	% of households sold land	For those average amount sold	% of households rented out land	For those average amount rented	% of households sharecropped land	% of households have received lands from others as gifts, dowry, or inheritance, or other means	% of households received land from others as gifts, dowry, or inheritance, while the remaining households did not receive such land.
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Urban	3.3	911,57 2.7	2.0	1,095,5 86	5.0	32,1 37	3.4	1.5	2.0
Rural	8.7	241,93 3.5	7.5	219,08 2	9.1	16,9 19	7.1	3.2	4.5
Male	9.3	305,90 7.1	6.5	256,45 3	7.7	20,3 89	5.4	2.4	4.5
Female	3.0	219,36 9.9	6.1	325,25 7	10.3	14,8 99	9.1	4.1	2.6

**Source:** National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda online report 2016/17.

However, even though females' access to land is larger than males, and they are the majority in the agriculture sector, gender inequality remains. Men still have control over income from agricultural production. Moreover, more men compared to women benefited from agricultural activities. This is because the majority of women in agriculture practice subsistence farming and many of them lack modern agricultural skills. This is largely because many women farmers experience heavy workloads within their households including house chores and exercising power relations in their families as many heads alone their families. As a result, women are stuck at the point where they cannot afford to attend agricultural programs and training that are available within their communities on extension services and modern agriculture practices (Rwanda Agriculture Board 2014; Gender Monitoring Office 2014). The NISR report shows land registration statistics progress in both registered land area and the cumulative number of parcels from 2010 to 2021 (NISR, 2021). The same report shows that since 2010, Rwanda has put in places a systematic land registration process in both registered lands aimed at documenting and securing land ownership and rights. The registered land area has grown significantly from 500,000 hectares in 2010 to 2,350,000 hectares in 2021, with a notable acceleration in the registration process between 2010 and 2015 (NISR, 2021). The figure also shows that the number of registered parcels increased significantly from 100,000 in 2010 to 1,900,000 in 2021, with the most significant increase occurring between 2010 and 2016.<sup>13</sup>This is a result of the 2013 Land Registration Law which significantly accelerated the modernization in the land administration system, ensuring secure tenure and promoting sustainable development. These statistics demonstrate the efficiency of Rwanda's land registration initiatives in enhancing land tenure guarantee and management.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.statistics.gov.rw>

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[https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/anrc/AfDB\\_RwandaLandReform\\_FA.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/anrc/AfDB_RwandaLandReform_FA.pdf)

Since 2000, the Rwandan government has launched various methods that have been implemented to address land-related issues (Ali et al., 2015). Land Tenure Regularization (LTR) program, initiated in 2004, formalized land ownership and reduced conflicts over land. The process involves adjudication, public display, registration, and issuance of titles.<sup>13</sup> There is also the Rwanda Land Management and Use Authority (RLMUA) which oversees land registration and management and Both benefits of land registration include security of tenure, economic development, access to credit, and efficient land use. To ensure the efficiency and accessibility, a digital mapping and online services known as *Irembo.gov.rw*.<sup>14</sup>

In a study by the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) and NISR on Agriculture Gender Strategy in 2010, Rwanda's economy is largely dependent on agriculture as it employs over 80 percent of the population. Agriculture itself contributes almost 40 percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As 85 percent of heads of families, of which 27 percent are female, are involved in agribusiness. According to the 2014 NISR survey; in general, females represent 79, 1 percent in agriculture. Females are progressively engaging in agriculture compared to males, and a large portion of them are in subsistence farming. This shows dramatic changes in terms of gender roles where in the past women were not allowed to engage in labor forces and this sector was ascribed by women only. Moreover, this change has decreased the rate of unemployment in Rwanda between both genders, as the unemployment rate has gone down to 1.17 percent in 2017 from 1.37 percent in 2013. Furthermore, the participation rate of Rwandan women's labor force is viewed as extraordinary as it is the highest in the world (UNDP, 2018).

Beyond workforce employment, women are also greatly visible in civil services. Nationwide, the greater part of government employees in health centers are women, making up 58.6 percent, as per the most recent domestic reports on gender statistics in Rwanda. The study by the 2013 NISR on the public sector in Rwanda indicates that nationwide, Rwandan female medical nurses exceeded men with 58.6 percent women. Aside from the health sector, this report also shows the improvement in gender equality in most top and executive positions of all levels of high decision-making bodies with women making up 56 percent of the Chamber of Deputies, 50 percent of permanent secretaries, and 43 percent of supreme court judges and high courts and 28.6 percent of women ministers while the lowest percentage of women's representation was women ambassadors with 23.8 percent. The 2019 NISR report in Rwanda reveals a higher representation of males in public servants (54.5 percent) than females (45.5 percent), largely due to the lack of higher education qualifications for urban employers. It is believed that Rwandan women often

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<sup>14</sup> [https://irembo.gov.rw/home/citizen/all\\_services](https://irembo.gov.rw/home/citizen/all_services)

marry before pursuing higher degrees, leading to fewer completing Bachelor's degrees and fewer pursuing Masters and Ph.D. degrees for top-level positions (Bizimana, 2019).

However, although women are very visible in the workforce, the gender pay gap remains. According to the 2017 Labour force survey in Rwanda, female workers who worked full-time still earn 13 percent less than they earn their male worker counterparts monthly. Even though urban women were less visible in the workforce, compared with those rural women, in urban areas workers who were doing the same work as those workers in rural areas earned a double salary of those workers in rural areas. However, even with this, the wage gap between both genders is low in Rwanda compared to many countries in the first world (UNDP, 2018). Many women and men in rural areas were involved in various jobs, to earn enough money to feed their families. A study by the 2017 NISR on economic activity however further indicates workers among female and male workers in rural areas were involved in at least two or three jobs, while in urban areas were not likely in more than one job. Several formal and informal financial institutions including commercial banks, Microfinance institutions, and cooperative banks that provide credits and loans for women into small businesses and agriculture in Rwanda, especially for women living in rural areas (NISR, 2016/17), have assisted women in rural employment. These financial institutions have promoted rural women, helping them to develop small projects and provide loans to start-up small businesses such as selling food commodities in the local markets, others were doing commercial agriculture. In 2011, Burnet found that some of these women started with a small business with a small loan, but from this, they opened big businesses, where they employed other employees, and others were entrepreneurs Overall, it is believed that women's involvement in paid work has contributed to poverty reduction in Rwanda although some other factors have contributed to this.

**Table 11: Poverty rate over time (2006-2017)**

Year	Percentage	%Poverty rate by gender	
		Female	Male
2001	58.9	-	-
2006	56.7	-	-

2011	49.9	-	-
2014	39.1	35.9	32.3
2017	38.2	34.8	31.6

**Source:** *National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda online report 2016/17.*

*United Nations Development Programme UNDP*

*United Nations (UN) Online report*

According to the UN report, the number of Rwandan people of whom the majority poorest in Rwanda are said to be women from rural areas; has fallen from 56.7 percent in 2006 to 38.2 percent, an 18.5 percent reduction in poverty from 2006 to 2017. The UNDP report attributed the decrease in poverty in Rwanda to an increase in non-farm employment, which is most likely to pay a non-poverty wage; an increase in the number of livelihood activities in which an increasing number of Rwandans engage such as running a small business, where one finds majority women.

This table also shows that women are bound to be living in poverty at 34.8 percent more than men at 31.6 percent in 2017. However, while the two rates were lower than those in 2014, the decrease in poverty was marginally more rapid for men than for women with 32.3 percent (male) and 35.9 percent (female). Even though there are no regional statistics on the poverty rate in urban and rural areas, it is believed that the majority of women living in poverty are living in rural Rwanda. Given that the majority of poor households are larger in rural areas than in urban areas, and women head these households, it is claimed that Rwandan women might have had a monopoly on poverty despite the efforts they are using to be more developed. However, despite the rapid decrease rate in poverty since 2014, with the government's policies and programs to empower men, it is safe to say that more women will get out of the line of poverty shortly.

Although studies on women's economic empowerment in Rwanda show that Rwandan women have become economically independent (Mageza-Barthel, 2015; Burnet, 2011; Kagaba, 2015; Uwineza and Pearson, 2009; Hategekimana, 2011); other studies have indicated women's economic rights are only in name (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Kagaba, 2015; Burnet, 2011). Kagaba (2015) found that in most Rwandan rural communities, in some Rwandan families, men are still in charge of the household assets, and are making the major decisions in the family, decisions including managing the family's income, buying and selling property in the family and saving (Abbott, 2015; Kagaba, 2015). According to Burnet (2011), the perception that wives do not have a say about the family's property, and that husbands have to make all decisions for the family, remains in rural areas (Burnet, 2011). As a result, it is argued that women possess limited

control over their income which mostly comes from agricultural activities or informal business (Kabaga, 2015, Burnet, 2011). Kabaga (2015) argues that in rural communities if women try to speak out about their family problems, men would take an act of revenge by hurting them silently such as refusing to speak with them or to eat their food. In some cases, this has meant that rural women end up being secretive and subservient so that they can save their marriage (Burnet, 2011).

Burnet (2011) found that some rural women believe that granting freedom and rights to Rwandan women and empowering them has mainly benefitted urban women. They say this because some laws and policies have meant more work for rural women (Kabaga, 2015). Given that households in rural areas are frequently headed by women, rural women have always been responsible for all household chores. Furthermore, most work that women in rural areas are involved in, is not valuable and does not pay well (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013). A survey by ActionAid Rwanda in 2015 showed that 91 percent of women in rural Rwanda were doing invisible and unpaid housework; with 41 percent of the women's daily time spent in domestic work such as minding children, cooking, cleaning, washing, getting water and firewood. Some rural women said they spend the most time doing domestic work, yet they do not get paid for this despite the value to society. Plus, women in the local government struggle to balance family responsibilities and duties in local government (Kabaga, 2015). Therefore, according to these studies, rural women across Rwanda have compared their lives as unimproved compared to those of women in urban areas.

For rural women, carrying out those invisible and invaluable domestic work and yet they take some time, while they would do other profitable work; this has also led to poverty among rural Rwandan women (NISR 2016/17). Furthermore, given that some household chores including getting firewood and water, farming, and harvesting where women have to walk a long distance when they get them or to get to the fields, require energy, women have found them physically hard and this hardship might have a negative impact on their lives. As a result, some of these rural women have always felt tired from this work (Abbott and Malunda, 2015). A study by ActionAid in Rwanda in 2015 indicates that rural women look old before their time while men of the same age look young and are full of energy because they do not work as hard.

## **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SEXUALITY RIGHTS**

The 2003 Constitution included a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) provision that became law in 2009 and related policy was passed in 2011. The 2009 law included laws on the prevention and punishment of gender-based violence, granted women the right to report any act of abuse in the family or outside the family and imposed that any acts that result in bodily, psychological, sexual, and economic harm to any person, whether a female or male must be reported either to police or

local leaders (Rwandan Constitution, 2003). The sensitive- GBV laws and related policies have brought a big change to the women in Rwanda. Some women admitted that the 2009 law on the prevention and punishment of gender-based violence had given women the right to control their bodies over sexuality (Kagaba 2015). In the past, before this law came, women were not allowed to speak out about the abuse they suffered in the house. In sexual relations, women had to be submissive, as men were expected to have sex at any time whether or not a woman wanted, given that traditionally sexual relations were led by the needs of men, not love or the sexual desires of women (Kagaba 2015:582; Gender Monitoring Office, 2013;2010). This was also based on Rwandan culture, where a girl was taught from her childhood that every man needs more sex that he has the right to sex every time he wants, and that a woman should not say no to her husband, and this was in an aspect of respect and submission to men. This Rwandan traditional belief in the past explains how the Rwandan man controlled his wife in all aspects of life. But today, because of the law on gender-based violence, Rwandan woman has rights over their own body and their sexuality; sexual relations are now ideally agreements between partners (Kagaba, 2015). Despite these gender-sensitive laws and policies that were put in place following the 2003 Constitution, violence against women in the household remains prevalent in Rwandan society.

Violence against women and girls has remained a threat, endured, and left unreported in Rwandan society. The UNDP Index on Violence Against Women indicates that between 2005 and 2018, 34.4 percent of women and girls aged 15 and above faced physical and sexual violence from their partners. It is assessed that two out of five girls, which translates into 41.2 percent encounter physical violence by the age of 15, and a significant part of this violence is committed by male relatives or spouses. However, despite GBV laws on prevention and punishment, violence remains part of the experience of women and girls (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013). A study by the United Nations on Rwanda indicated that of five women, at least two of them translated into 41.2 percent experienced physical violence by the age of 15, while more than one in five women, 21 percent have experienced sexual violence. Moreover, the 2011 survey by Rwanda's Gender Desk demonstrated that 93 percent of victims of physical and psychological abuse were women. This is largely due to economic rights concerning the family property given to women, as some Rwandan men still follow the culture that Rwandan women should not have the right to family property. If wives try to control their family assets or income or raise their voices they get beaten by their husbands (Burnet 2011; Kagaba 2015). More so, in some communities, physical violence is acceptable; husbands are allowed to beat their wives in a way of correcting them. Kagaba (2015) found this in rural Rwanda, where beating women was perceived as one way of correcting their mistakes and asserting dominance in the house. She found that in rural Rwanda, there is a perception that a real masculine man may beat his wife and that a good wife should understand and accept that she may be beaten at any time, and that this is a respected and acceptable expression in

cultural gender rights for men. In 2013, women told Debusscher and Ansoms that given that GBV law is strict and has not been fully understood in society, it has put women in a tough situation rather than solving it. In some communities, when husbands abuse wives, they keep quiet, fearing that their husbands will go to jail or face charges and fines (Kagaba, 2015). Other women feared to report the abuse in their families, mostly because society and relatives (Kagaba, 2015) would reject them. A survey by Pro-Femme These Hamwe (a women's umbrella organization) on gender based violence in Rwanda shows that several women in rural Rwanda have health problems mainly from psychological and economic deprivation from their husbands. All these cases have made GBV remain in Rwandan society, and this is very common in rural society.

**Table 12: Experience of women and men on various types of GBV at the national level**

Year	Gender	Victims of physical violence	Victims of sexual violence	National
2013	Male	1,984	223	2,207
	Female	3,984	6,248	10,232
2014	Male	2,017	273	2,290
	Female	4,629	7,322	11,951
2015	Male	1,578	291	1,869
	Female	4,303	7,277	11,580
2016	Male	1,715	300	2,015
	Female	4,665	7,509	12,174

Compiled from Rwanda Biomedical Centre Report 2017

Compiled from National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda online report 2016/17

It is said that among many reasons why gender violence remains in place is that Rwandan society is still tied to patriarchal and cultural norms where gender laws and policies are seen as not enforceable laws, thus these laws can be viewed as insufficient protection of victims where in some communities especially rural communities, women are still devalued, undermined and left incapable to make choices for their lives and their bodies. More so, unbalanced gender roles

between women and men undermine and lessen the socio-economic aspects of the latter to the advancement of themselves and their families (UNDP, 2018).

## WOMEN’S ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Rwandan women have been granted all rights to education (Hunt 2011; Burnet, 2011). Although there are no statistics on women in the highest level of education such as master's and Ph.D., the representation of women in all categories in schools is now similar to or even higher than men (NISR 2016/17; UNDP 2018), and this very different to the past years where boys only had access to education. A 2016/17 study by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda on the level of education in Rwanda between 1978 and 2017 indicates that several women, who did not have even basic education in the past, now have at least a level of literacy, they can read, write and speak at least one foreign language. On the other hand, the same study also indicates that the level of women's literacy in rural areas is still lower than women in urban areas, with 87 percent of urban women literate compared to 70 percent of rural women literate. This study also shows the gap in education rates between males and females is higher in rural than in urban areas with 91 percent of urban males and 83 percent of urban females’ literate compared with 74 percent of rural males and 66 of rural females.

**Table 13: Current literacy rate for males and females aged 15 and above**

Urban			Rural		
% of male	% of female	Total %	% of female	% of male	Total %
95.3	90.7	93.0	74.4	84.9	79.6

*Compiled from the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) 2016/17.*

**Table 14: Female percentage of at least some secondary school, aged 25 and above (2010-2017)**

Year	Percentage
2010	8%
2011	8.7
2012	9.2
2013	9.8
2014	10.5
2015	11.1
2016	11.9
2017	12.6

**Source: UNDP index**

The tables above show the literacy rate among men and women is higher in urban areas with 95.3 percent and 90.7 percent for women, compared with 84.9 percent of men and 74.4 percent of women in rural areas. This demonstrates that the male population is still more literate than females. On the other hand, however, in both primary and secondary schools, females outnumbered males with 85 percent of girls compared to 84 percent of boys (UNDP, 2018), so this is something that is changing over time.

The literacy rate for males and females over the age of 15 and above has increased (NISR, 2016/17). The same study revealed the majority of women with low levels of education work in agriculture or business, while a higher proportion of women with a good level of education work outside agriculture, mostly in public services (NISR, 2016/17). The NISR (2016/17) study further shows that at least 92 percent of women who worked in agriculture had a primary or secondary school level education, compared with 87 percent of women with university-level working in public service while the percentage of 36 percent of women in businesses had not completed primary school level, while 3 percent had a university degree. In this study, it is clear that many women living in rural or urban areas in business have a low level of education such as primary or secondary. A study by UNDP further indicates that low rates in enrolling universities for women are influenced by their responsibility for most unpaid housework and childcare. This affects their universities' attendance given that many universities in Rwanda charge high fees, and yet many

women engage in unpaid employment, thus, this situation leads to the risk of women being forced to choose having a family over a career.

**Table 15: National literacy rate, aged 15 and above (2010-2017)**

Year	Percentage
2010	65.9
2011	NA
2012	68.3
2013	NA
2014	NA
2015	NA
2016	NA
2017	68.3

Source: Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) and National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) 2016/17.

Although there has been a slight increase in literacy rate nationwide, a 2018 study by UNDP on gender equality shows that women's literacy rates are lower than men's (65 percent when contrasted with 72 percent of men's). This further compels women and girls as of now constrained opportunities as far as getting to resources, business, and equal participation in decision-making. In addition to other things, high illiteracy rates between males and females limit the consciousness of gender-sensitive laws and policies as established by the 2003 Constitution. The inequality in education was at 29.3 percent in 2017, down from 30.7 percent in 2011 (UNDP, 2018). This shows that the literacy rate among females and males has not been improving over the years compared to other sectors of life.

According to the Gender Monitoring Office Rwanda, Rwandan women's improved economic and political position has made Rwandan men feel that their hegemonic positions of political and socio-economic dominance have been threatened. This research has found that men in Rwanda fight for their rights by undermining women's political influence and economic autonomy. What these men in Rwanda are doing is not new, as Schwindt-Bayer (2010) found a similar case in Latin

American countries. In these countries, she argues that one-way men do this is to burden women politicians by pressuring or encouraging them to focus on high-level issues such as political issues, foreign affairs, agriculture, finance, or economics that are in the men's interests but less important to women or are not concerned to women or indigenous people (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). This means that these women might have less impact on society. In Rwanda, men also diversely resist women's empowerment.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the Rwandan government program reforms in post genocide Rwanda have brought many advantages to Rwandan women, which have transformed the lives of women, particularly rural women. Even though the Rwandan society was destroyed by the 1994 genocide, adopting the Constitution in 2003 which included the gender quota policy and related policies and laws, such gender policies and laws have brought significant changes in terms of changing gender roles and improving the rights of women at every level of society. While in the past, both before and after the independence, in some urban communities, wives could hold very limited public positions and engage in paid employment under their husbands' permission, Rural women had no rights to engage in politics or seek employment given that the Rwandan law and society denied them these rights given that this country was patriarchal society built on traditional and cultural norms that granted Rwandan men the position of dominance and gave women the subordination's position in home and community. After the genocide, Rwanda undertook significant changes in terms of the rights and roles of women in society. As a result, rural women have the right to participate in decision-making both at the household and community level. As a result, Rwanda has been consistently ranked country in the world with a majority of women in legislative decision-making, both in parliament and cabinet; and have increasingly been visible in local leadership positions.

Rwanda has also been a world leader in advancing the empowerment of women and improving the rights of women at all levels of the domain. In education, Rwandan women have all rights to education and its representation in all categories in schools is now similar to men's, with more females in primary and secondary schools. However, even though women have more rights to attend schools, the male population is still more literate than females. Nationally, women have been granted extended economic independence rights both in law and practice and given legal inheritance rights, and have got rights and freedom to run businesses and engage in paid jobs. For this, Rwanda has been praised for having made exceptional strides in the region, in terms of instituting gender-sensitive laws that have positively impacted the empowerment of women in all spheres including education and employment. The 2003 Constitution also established GBV provisions which included laws on the prevention and punishment of gender based violence, granted women the right to report any act of abuse in the family or outside the family, and imposed

that any acts that result in bodily, psychological, sexual and economic harm to any person, whether a female or male must be reported either to police or local leaders and these GBV laws and related policies have brought a big change to the women in Rwanda.

Some of these changes have also been perceived as negative, especially by men, with many rural men believing that the government program of reforms has greatly advantaged women compared to men and that this has created new tensions between men and women. On the other hand, while women in the national government have reaped many benefits added to their salaries, women in local government have faced exploration as many of them work as volunteers and do not get paid, despite the overload of work these women have to do. More so, despite the GBV laws and policies on prevention and punishment, violence remains part of the experience of women and girls in Rwandan society, especially in rural society, where violence against women has been accepted and left unreported. In many parts of rural society, women are still facing physical and sexual violence from their partners. And women have chosen to live with it, fearing to report their male relatives or spouses, fearing to face rejection in society. This has also been viewed as part of the culture, as Rwandan society is still tied to patriarchal and cultural norms. Rwanda has been a patriarchal society for centuries before 1994. The patriarchal society was built on the traditional and cultural norms of men both in theory and practice. Thus, up today, Rwandan society still reconsiders these gender norms, giving men a position of hegemonic dominance at all levels of society. Thus, the policy of gender equality seems to be fitting in society widely, especially in rural society; resulting in violence against women. This, however, cannot diminish the transformative social changes that have emerged in Rwandan society, especially in rural areas. Given the fact that violence against women has never been seen as an anomaly, at this point, a husband who exercises dominance in the house must show violent behaviors towards his wife. Thus, beating a wife has always been viewed as a cultural acceptance and a normal way of life. Thus, in Rwandan society especially in rural areas violence against women has not been a debatable topic among women. However, as a result of the government's gender quota policy and related laws and policies that granted women rights and freedom to speak both at home and in public; thus women have got a platform to report and talk about their problems including the violence against them.

Research on gender quota in Rwanda suggests it has not been beneficial to all women, especially in rural areas due to traditional beliefs and oppression. Some policies favor women over men, viewing gender as masculinizing men (Kagaba, 2015, 2015b). The practice of dowry in marriages had hindered gender equality in many families in rural Rwanda, as men often treated married women as if they were bought. Rwandan tradition involves dowry before marriage, evolving from cow-giving as a symbol of unity to families negotiating for money.

A 2017 survey by the Rwanda Academy of Language and Culture (RLC) revealed that dowry in Rwanda, based on a girl's background, education, income, and family, can be cows or money, sparking debate over its relevance in the country. It has been argued that the debate over the relevance of dowry in Rwanda has led to some arguing that it hinders women's empowerment and gender equality. This attitude, often fuelled by high prices of dowry charged by men mostly in rural areas, leads to men hitting wives when they step out of line. More so, religion, which promotes submissiveness to men, has been a significant obstacle to gender equality in rural Rwanda (Kagaba, 2015; 2015a). On this, some rural women preferred to remain silent to avoid social disapproval and unintended consequences, avoiding social disapproval and extra burdens. As a result, they viewed new laws as a burden and struggled to find a balance between their rights and societal expectations (Kagaba 2015, 2015b). The dominance of patriarchal ideology extends beyond family relationships, defining women's roles in local politics and authority positions. This dominance also influences informal dispute resolution bodies, hindering women's rights in domestic violence and land disputes (Abbott and Malunda, 2016). However, only this research was conducted in one district in Rwanda, while this is going to be carried out in 15 districts out of all 30 districts of Rwanda, this clearly shows that it will bring deeper and different data than is currently existing.

More importantly, in that time between 1997 and 2009, Burnet (2011) found that the Rwandan government had made progress with many legal reforms that have had an impact on society. Ten years now since Burnet undertook this survey and this research builds on her work. While much research including Burnet's (2011) on women's rights in Rwanda primarily focused on the impact of quotas on women in national legislatures within urban areas, with few studies on rural women.

Therefore, studies on the impact of gender quotas on women in local leadership and the perceptions of ordinary women and men about post-quota changes are lacking. We all know that negative cultural attitudes continue to be a challenge, particularly in rural Rwanda where the majority of women live. Where the belief in rural Rwanda is that women should not be given equal value and should not have equal rights to property and education. However, we do not know how roles have changed for women in leadership positions at the grassroots level in Rwanda post-genocide and its impact on the family and community. And we do not know if the trend of female's socioeconomic and power autonomy in the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide had an impact on marriages as an institution. None has yet fully and finally researched what challenges and barriers women face in gaining political office and in the exercise of political influence.

What we know so far is that since 1994, the Rwandan government has launched a series of policy reforms including a gender quotas policy (Burnet 2011); and this has made it the first country in

the world to have more women in decision-making positions (IPU, 2017; Hunt, 2017). However, it is believed that its impact has only benefited a small part of women; only those women live in urban areas and participate in national legislatures, but we do not know how the government's gender quotas policies have had an impact on rural women, their experience of marriage or/and community in rural Rwanda. And when there is a difference between rural and urban women. or how socioeconomic and cultural factors have encouraged this representativeness.

To gain a deeper understanding of the current situation in Rwanda, this study will provide a voice for the concerned women and men in rural Rwanda, answering all questions we ask regarding the gender quota. It is anticipated that the perspectives of those participants will shed light on the questions people ask about the purpose and rationale behind Rwanda's government efforts to adopt and implement the gender quota.

One thing is certain: the results from the participants may not be identical to existing ones, but they can complement or differ and contribute to implementing gender reforms for the entire country's population. The purpose of this research is to gain a comprehensive understanding of gender quota outcomes in post-genocide Rwanda built on the answers, comments, views, opinions and observation from women's political participation from the district level to the grassroots levels, policy priorities, debate participation, the everyday life of ordinary women and men in rural Rwanda, and background information of women in local leadership. The study primarily focuses on rural women and addresses one main question: what the impact of gender quota on women's socio-economic empowerment in rural Rwanda is. An in-depth qualitative analysis" of surveys, interviews, and focus groups from women local leaders and representatives, ordinary women and men throughout rural Rwanda was then done and presented in the results below.

## **CHAPTER 4. PERSPECTIVES ON THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN RWANDA**

This chapter presents data that were collected in Rwanda for a period of five months from June to November 2018. It contains several views from surveys and group interviews expressed by women local leaders and women members of the National Women's Council (NWC), on 28 questions and multiple sub-questions asked about different topics related to life and experience of women in local leadership. The chapter begins with the description of women in local leadership i.e. their profiles, their roles, their salaries, their working hours, and their political aspirations and then their role and impact on the society. The section of the results from the surveys and group interviews of the women local leaders and representatives follows; it talks about the role of these female authorities to their communities; their contribution to the changes that have happened in the society after the genocide.

### **SURVEY OF WOMEN IN LOCAL LEADERSHIP**

**Description of all women local leaders and representatives surveyed.**

**Total number of women: 56 women**

**Women responded: 56**

**Level of women's engagement: 20 women= District level**

**14 women=Sector level**

**10 women=Cell level**

**12 women=village level**

**Gender**

56= women local leaders and representatives

**Age**

11 women = aged between 22 and 30;

23 women = aged between 31 and 35;

15 women = aged between 36 and 40,

7 women = aged between 41 and 55

**Legislative experience**

**When asked** whether representatives had previously been elected to the political position including the current term; 43 women said No, 13 women said YES.

**Prior political experience**

**When asked** whether previously held an elected or appointed to political office; 49 women responded with No; 7 women responded with Yes

**Occupation**

16 claimed they were educators; 2 women were in the business; 7 women were in politics before; 27 women were homemakers; 3 women were farmers.

**Education level**

18 women had completed primary school; 23 women have secondary school level; 12 women had completed University degree; 3 women had completed a master's degree.

**Political aspiration**

**When asked** whether women local leaders and representatives aspire to higher office or re-election: 40 women responded with Yes, to be parliamentarians; 7 responded with No, claiming that they are **too** old. 1 woman responded she aspired to be the Minister of Education; 6 women aspired to be in the Senate. 2 women wish to be managers.

**Representative's priorities**

Priorities that women local leaders and representatives place on relevant area; mentioned by all 56 women; women's empowerment and development (mentioned by all 56 women; family promotion mentioned by all 56 women; fight poverty mentioned by 37 women; health mentioned by 20 women; property rights were said by all 56 women and education were said by 39 women.

**Working hours**

Hours women local leaders and representatives spend working with the community: between 8 and 10 hours every day. All 56 women local representatives claimed they start at 7 am and finish at 5 pm. In these hours, they spend 4 or more hours working in the community every week.

<b>Women local representatives pay</b>	<p>Asking whether they get paid as local leader officials; 21 said NO, 4 said Yes.</p> <p>52 women local representatives including women local authorities' officials such as village leaders, health care officers, social affairs officers, education officers, whether at sector, cell or village claim they are working as volunteers.</p> <p>4 women working at the district level, they say they are paid between Rwf350,000 and Rwf 490,000(monthly, net salary).</p>
<b>Representatives political party</b>	<p>Whether women representatives belong to any political party before being elected or appointed or in their current term, 56 surveyed women responded they were/ are still members of the RPF before and during their term).</p>
<b>Marital status</b>	<p>45 women out of 56 surveyed say they are married; 8 women are widowed; 3 women are single.</p>
<b>Electoral system</b>	<p>35 surveyed women claim they were elected from the village level then to cell, the sector level, and district level; in these elections, citizens queued behind the candidate in the public setting, a candidate who got many people behind her, won the election for the relevant position; 21 surveyed women say they passed job examinations. They therefore gained their positions through competence by applying for job positions mainly in Districts, these included district officers and executive secretaries at the sector level.</p> <p>The current local government policy reserves 30 percent of positions for women. This position covers all local levels from the village level to the district level. In addition to these specific reserved positions, women can also compete for other positions through an open and competitive job test process.</p>
<b>Political passion</b>	<p>Whether women local representatives plan or wish to remain in the local leadership; 49 women responded with Yes; 7 women responded with No, because they are too old. If and when the current representatives get old, they should be replaced by younger ones.</p>

### Pre-requestion for political office

Asking women if there is a requirement to be selected/elected for a particular position. All 56 women surveyed responded that a candidate must be an RPF member.

Other requirements for local government office candidates include Rwandan nationality, 18+age, residence who must reside in the locality and moral integrity, who must reside in the locality and demonstrate good conduct. Women local representatives make up 30 percent of those who need to be in the Council of the Sector and District. Five local authorities from villages are elected nationwide, including the village head and two women. Voters also vote for lower-level leadership representatives, reaching the national level.

## THE ROLES OF WOMEN LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

I surveyed 56 women local leaders and women members of the National Women's Council (NWC). All 56 women surveyed responded to the questions and sub-questions on the survey questionnaire. These women were grouped into two groups; one group contained 23 women in NWC and 33 women local leaders in different positions at the local leadership level, including women local leaders at village, cell, sector and district level.

The questions on the survey mainly asks women local leaders and representatives about the frequency with which they participate in the rural community activities and what changes they have noticed in the community after the government's gender quota policy. Women local leaders and representatives tried to depict today's rural women in four ways: earned dignity, increased economic development, self-confidence, and advanced skills. Women argue that the changes that have occurred over 25 years have been a good lesson that teaches every woman in the country and outside. This, they say that other women have come to learn from them: "*many have come to learn from us. Our lives transformed in such a short time, despite where the country was and came from. It is something, we are always grateful for*".<sup>15</sup>

Evidence from surveys has shown that there have been changes in rural society after the government's gender quota policy. All changes mentioned by women's local leaders and

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<sup>15</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, September 2018

representatives were symbolic ones. Women local representatives surveyed could point to the positive changes that have occurred around by displaying them in numbers and names of concrete things like houses, cows, cars, lands amongst other things as evidence of transforming women's lives in rural Rwandan society. Given the fact these women are representing other women and their issues as those who from the beginning of these changes were eyewitnesses. And thus, they could narrate changes in their lives and in those of other women they are representing without any hesitation. Thus, this section contains the views and ideas of women local leaders and representatives about their journey of transformations.

Each and every change stated by these women was positive. Surprisingly, many women in rural Rwanda believe that positive changes in their lives, largely due to gender quotas, attributed to the country's president.

These women perceive gender roles changes as a goodwill of the president of the country through government programs and policies, which aimed to improve the rights and roles of women in society. As explained by one woman from a rural community, on this she says that president Paul has been a pioneer of every change that has happened in the lives and experiences of women in rural Rwanda.

*"Yes, there have been many changes in terms of women's rights and gender roles and all changes are positive. All these changes have been made because of our President. Vive our president, who remembers women"*<sup>18</sup>. Kagame has however faced criticism that the success of women's empowerment in Rwanda is twisted, that Rwandan women's high representation and gradual development are for publicity and do not reflect the actual results (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013, Burnet 2008, 2011; Briggs, 2020). On the positive side, Kagame has been always praised for his role in improving women's rights where the prioritization of women has led to significant improvements in various aspects of society; has boosted the country's economy, and improved healthcare and education (Hunt, 2017), things all these women and men we talked to believe.

Women respondents and participants tend to say that in most radio news and programs they often hear that Kagame prioritizes women's rights in his speeches, asserting that progress without addressing women's needs is insufficient. President Kagame has been frequently heard encouraging women to stand up and fight for their rights. *"You have to stand up, fight, and give yourself the rights you have been denied."*<sup>16</sup> *"We have said it time and again, guaranteeing that women and girls have equal rights as boys and men, is really no big favour, it is restoring what simply and rightly belongs to them."*<sup>17</sup> In separate surveys, the majority of female local leaders and representatives kept repeating the President Kagame's statements about promoting women's rights, and it appeared they had memorised all of them.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.paulkagame.com/international-womens-day-celebration-kigali-8-march-2024-2/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.peacewomen.org/content/rwanda-rwandan-women-honour-kagame>

On the other hand, rural men perceive that while women's rights are being taken care of by the country's president, their rights are forgotten, thus they feel left out. Many rural men think that gender quota policy has undermined their position in society as 'heads' and 'chiefs'. Men perceived gender quota policy as permission that was given to women to disrespect men asserting that the gender quotas have brought about negative changes. On this, women surveyed admit that there negative changes but they are fewer and smaller compared to the positive ones. One woman local leader explains, "*in general and most importantly, the gender quota has not had disadvantages, many things are positive. Even the negative changes have no harm, they are too small and are simple, one cannot consider them as significant issues to our society.*"<sup>18</sup>

### **Changing their lives, of their families and their communities**

Supported financially by the government, women in local government regularly attend training to learn skills on how women can transform their lives, that of their families and their communities. These training sessions are often held in Kigali (the capital of Rwanda), where women from all local authorities gather and interact with each other. Women local representatives discuss how through these training, they have gained knowledge and acquired many new things including skills about new techniques on farming, on how to use biogas in cooking, how to make projects and form cooperatives and skills about parenting. These women local leaders and representatives go on to explain that whenever they meet with other , they do not only talk about politics but also they exchange ideas about rural life, and urban women share with urban lifestyle. Thus, it has brought them another side of life. For women local representatives, chatting with urban women has enabled them to open their minds, use resources they have to achieve more. One woman explains, "*we all know that urban women know a lot, they are sharp and they know different angles of life, unlike us rural women. When we gather, we listen to them, we learn from them, and apply in our rural areas*"<sup>19</sup>. Another woman says, "*many urban women are more educated, they are professionals, they are smart that we all know. We go to these national conferences and meetings, we profit from chatting with them about politics of course but also we get to talk about life, challenges, barriers, family issues amongst others. We listen, we watch and we apply those at both our local authority*

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<sup>18</sup> The survey administered to rural a rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>19</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Ngorerero, West Rwanda, September 2018

*and our home.*"<sup>20</sup> This has benefited these women since most of them are farmers, they have learnt how to use the new techniques on how to use modern fertilisation and how to grow profitable and productive crops.

As a result, production has increased. Besides, given that, many women in rural areas have learnt how to make gas and use biogas instead of using firewood to save time and conserve the environment as many rural women are now using biogas in cooking. More so, these local leaders and representatives in rural areas are helping other women with business projects and bank loans, with at least three in five women in rural areas participating in profitable cooperatives.

### **Looking beyond salaries**

There are many benefits and advantages that women in local leadership have gained. As indicated by the women village leaders, local authorities, particularly at the village local level, are receiving numerous things such as health insurance (known as *mutuelle de Sante*), stereo radios, transport facilities including bicycles, mosquito nets, mattress, shoes, and mobile phones with toll-free calls which has a line called "*closer user group*" to communicate with one another and report any incident at any time. In addition, while local authorities at the cell level in the past 10 years were not paid, I was told that leaders at the cell level are now being paid and are considered as full-time government officials. Moreover, their salaries varied between 90,000Rwf and 150,000Rwf, and that this comes with all other benefits that the government officers are receiving besides the monthly salaries including health insurance, communication facilities, and social security. And this no mean feat, the fact that a rural woman now owns a mobile, a stereo radio, and a mattress. The ownership of a mattress has significantly transformed their lives compared to their previous sleeping habits on the grass floor.

A survey participant revealed that in the countryside, women often sleep on thatched grass floors. The same woman said that owning a radio used to be rare. The woman constantly beamed, showing me her new house and mattress for guests. She warned me about the pain she would have experienced from sleeping on the thatched grass. "*You have no idea how the village woman used to be miserable [ she just opened the door wide, trying to show me inside her house, she showed me the mattress that was spread out in the living room, for guests and mosquito net spread over it and a stereo radio was placed on the table] What are you not seeing, tell me?*"<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Burera North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>21</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, August 2018

As explained by women local leaders and representatives, local leaders from district to cell local level are getting paid, only local leaders that are at the village local level do not get paid, however, they receive some tangible things known as *Agahimbazamusyi* [*incentive things*] that aim to encourage those village leaders. The ‘incentive things’ include health insurance (*mutuelle de Sante*), mobile phones with toll-free calls, stereo radios, transport facilities, and mosquito nets.

The salaries plus other tangible things these women are now receiving have changed the experience of rural women and have impacted their lives. The main things these women pointed out aside from the salaries as local government officials include radio stereos, mattresses, mosquito nets, and shoes. As explained by these women local representatives when I was on the site during the fieldwork, in the past say before the genocide, the experience and lives of women in rural areas were challenging. Some women told me that they could not even afford to visit health centre or see a doctor or buy medicine when they were sick, or during their pregnancy time, and thus, many of these rural women used herbs as medications, while pregnant women could die before or during giving birth mostly die from malaria because they did not sleep in mosquito nets ...” *now every woman local representative is given a free mosquito net.*”<sup>22</sup> These women explained that thanks to these mosquito nets, the number of women, especially pregnant women who used to die from malaria, has decreased. These women also revealed that their radio stereos have provided them with access to government programs, including well-being programs.

Other women explained that the experience of rural women has changed given that most of the women in rural areas are now wearing shoes while in the past they did not wear shoes, mostly because they could afford them. One woman explained, *"Look, a rural wife used to rely on her husband ... a daughter has to rely on her father for everything, everything, if I tell you everything, I mean each and everything, the human being will need to survive. Then, what happened was, when your husband or father gave you money, he instructed you on using [his] money and of course, he had to verify what you had bought. How would you go tell your husband that... look I had bought shoes too? If you did this, you would be barred from receiving money for the rest of your life, so many women in this area have been walking barefoot for many years. Now you can see yourself, we are wearing shoes, we even wear them in the house, it is not a usual thing, do not laugh at me (she said pointing fingers at her shoes)."*<sup>23</sup> *"I would say these were the luckiest wives to be given the money by their husbands. I know some husbands in these areas would never give you even a single coin or let you go out to the market, they would go buy what we needed in the house for themselves and you would never see their money."*<sup>24</sup> *"In this area, many wives can*

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<sup>22</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Huye, South Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>23</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Huye, South Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>24</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, August 2018

*remember the exact time when they began to touch money; it is not so long ago. Myself I would say I began to count my own money after the genocide before that I did not know what the money looks like.”*<sup>25</sup>

Women in this group also narrated their experience of sleeping on the mattress for the first time in their lives explaining that many families in rural areas used to sleep on the grass. One woman explained, *"If you go around asking every woman randomly in this area, she will tell you that the happiest experience in her life is when she first slept on the mattress. Unbelievably, all women [I tell you all...a-l-l women] whether married women or widows in this rural area here used to sleep on the grass until very recently...ask others. I would say many began to sleep on the mattress quite recently, since 2010. I remember that the first mattress I had was the mattress I received one year after I was elected as a social welfare representative in my village.”*<sup>26</sup>

*“And now, it has become a policy, one mattress per family. Through our campaigns and advocacies all women, not only women representatives but also ordinary women from poor families are now receiving a mattress. But it started with women’s representatives, and now all women have received the mattress and of course, men are also benefiting from this. That is why the husbands these days are treating their wives like the queens, they know that we have saved them big time...Laugh. What man in this village could afford to buy a mattress... mattress is expensive, besides, it was difficult to find a store that sold mattresses. And now, a man is sleeping on a mattress brought by his wife.”*<sup>27</sup> On this, women representatives recalled how they began this campaign of removing the grass on both beds and houses in rural families. They explained that this campaign started in 2011 when they were required by the provincial administration to tackle *Nyakatsi* [thatched housing] in rural areas. These women local representatives and leaders started the campaigns and advocacies for those women from poor families. Some of these women local leaders acknowledged that within one year they have eradicated *Nyakatsi*, within their communities have removed grass-thatched houses and beds, and women, widows and poor had got support from the government including mattress and roofing mattress for their houses. As explained by women representatives and local leaders, the government and residents had praised women local authorities for the eradication of *Nyakatsi* in rural Rwanda. One woman explained, *“we have gained much praise for eradicating thatching housing in rural areas and speeding up this program. This program was implemented because of us, women local leaders, everyone knows, and we are happy it was implemented.”*<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Karongi, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>26</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Nyamasheke, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>27</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Nyamasheke, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>28</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Musanze, West Rwanda, August 2018

These women representatives have impeccable views as some of them could name the numbers of things they have received from the government as the government authorities, some of these women also pointed out they receive these things such as mattress, shoes, mosquito nets come regularly and thus they have used some of them and give away some of them to their neighbors or relatives. *“For us, the transformation started with us women local representatives, and now it is extending over. We also give to our neighbours some of the things we are getting from this work.”*<sup>29</sup>

Women local leaders and representatives pointed out that even though they do not get any salaries as local officials they have reaped what is beyond salaries, including skills that help them in everyday life; and also respect and trust. One woman explains, *“Look it is true we are not getting any money, but in reality, we are getting more than money. Trust matters a lot in business and life; imagine everywhere we go we are entrusted by people. In the business we are doing now, we get clients easily, we get markets of our goods more easily because we are known and people have trust in us(laugh). Even in these casual jobs, you see we are doing on sites, in our villages before the employers hire anyone else, they would hire me in the first place. Alternatively, those bosses looking for an employee, they ask us for a good and trustworthy person because they trust us. They know that when the government trusts us to lead people, who would deny us... It is not easy to lead people, my dear, we have earned a lot of dignity, and we have worked for it”*.<sup>30</sup> Many women in local leadership revealed that they own the houses, have lands and livestock, and can send their children to private schools, things that were seen in the past as the actions of men only. *“As you can also see we are in the new houses, we are all farmers in rural areas, we have our lands, we have cows, we can easily get fertilizer for our crops. Do you know what it means for a widow to own a house...to have a cow? These two things mean a lot here my dear. You can even count how many men who own house or a cow?”*<sup>31</sup>

*“In the past, it was even impossible to send your children to schools, if and when you did not have a husband, but these days, we are even sending them to private schools”*.<sup>32</sup> These women agree that they have owned their own properties since they entered into politics.

Some women local authorities also mentioned women having respect in society have been seen as an important thing that has an enormous value to women in rural areas. *“People do not understand what is to be called an official that serves under Kagame's regime... that is also an honor. Respect especially to women costs and means a lot, we Rwandan women know this very well. In the past, they did not count us in the society, they did not see as a part of the society or the family, but now they are*

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<sup>29</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>30</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>31</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>32</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, August 2018

*not only seeing us as a part of the society, but also they recognize us as representatives that can represent the entire society; this has a huge meaning to us as rural women*<sup>33</sup>.

When women local representatives and leaders talked out women's respect, they compared it to the life of a woman in the past, where women were not recognized and were not allowed to engage in politics. Yet these days, they are politicians and are respected within their communities. Women revealed that for them, being respected has a significant value over the salary. The majority of women local representatives surveyed said they are full-time employees mostly working in public services, some of them are teachers, nurses, secretaries and administration officers.

### **Women are represented in all decision making**

Women in local leadership explain that having a majority of women in parliament and cabinet is significantly important. Some women local leaders noted that women in the national government give them courage and inspire them. They also said some of the women parliamentarians and ministers were their former colleagues in local government. One woman explains: *"these women legislators and ministers you see we used to work together here, they started from local government. They are giving us the strength to aspire to the high political positions"*<sup>34</sup>. Thus, many women have shifted to higher positions, started at the lowest local level, village or cell and are now in committees in the National Women Councils, while others are in committee at district levels. When completing the surveys, some women indicated that they started as village leaders but now have become cell leaders, social welfare officers, education officers at sector levels. These women who have been promoted to top positions often began at the lowest local level, believing that their current position is a result of hard work.

One woman states, *"We started working behind the hidden scenes, we kept on working hard but now we are working in the visible scenes. We are seeing some of the former workmates in the parliament! They are getting further. Every time we hear and see in the news a woman elected to higher political positions, we see that she used to be one of us, it inspires us. It gives us hope that us too will get there soon."*<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Nyamasheke, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>34</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Rusizi, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>35</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Ngorerero, South Rwanda, August 2018

## Increased economic development

Rural women have developed financially. The majority of women local representatives surveyed revealed they are mixing politics with retail business and farming. Their main activities include poultry, piglets, banana plantation, crops and vegetables farming. The retail business includes selling dairy foods, clothes, amongst other things in the local markets. They particularly linked it to the financial improvement in households to women's work, as rural women nowadays are earning money from different activities. Burnet's (2011) findings suggest that in rural areas there is a perception that women in local leadership positions are being exploited and experiencing a double burden of work which is frequently unpaid and as a result, rural men try to prevent their wives from entering politics. Nearly all women local representatives and leaders surveyed pointed out that they were either in trading, working in plantations such as plantation of coffee, tea, banana, sugar cane, pyrethrum or working in the factories and were working on construction sites. Given that their main tasks as local officials are not happening in the offices but in the fields; meeting with and visiting people in the area or in their homes. This has allowed women in these positions the spare time to do other business. The majority of businesses, particularly those primarily involving agriculture, livestock, and commercial activities, believe they are generating sufficient profit from them besides their salaries. These women believe that their political participation is a platform that they use to communicate women's issues that are related to socio-economic issues, and that they learn from each other enabling their economic empowerment. Things many women say have improved their level of understanding and thinking given that many of them have a low level of literacy, mostly with primary and secondary school level. *“The good thing is we have got a channel where we can speak out about our problems, and those of the constituents we are representing.”*<sup>36</sup> *“It is not that we are being exploited but we are learning, we are contributing to country's reconstruction, we are speaking for the community and we are being heard, that is what counts really”.*<sup>37</sup>

The majority of women surveyed mentioned that they are committed to helping women in their villages to improve their livelihood. These women noted that they try to empower other women in the area to participate in politics, doing farming as a business and encourage them to ask for bank loans to improve and expand their businesses. *“We have transformed unprofitable farming into profitable ventures by encouraging women to apply for loans and start farming, while others have*

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<sup>36</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>37</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, August 2018

*expanded their businesses, transforming their lives.”<sup>38</sup> “Women in rural areas have become financially independent and respected. Their lives have changed completely.”<sup>39</sup> These women local representatives also explain that they will continue to push rural women until all women in rural areas leave behind the dependence mentality and understand they can make a life without their husband’s support and help. “Our main task is to empower rural women to live independently without depending on their husbands. The journey is still long, but we will never give up.”<sup>40</sup>*

## **Public participation**

The figure below shows that women local representatives are unlikely to speak with the press. On this, women local leaders explained that at each administration level, there is a leader called an “*informant*” [*umunyamakuru*] from village to district level the leader responsible speaks on their behalf. Only two women out of 56 surveyed, speak with the press “*very frequently*” while 27 women responded that they have *never* spoken with the press. It is evident that rural women have increasingly found a public platform where they can express and share their views, perspectives, and their voices and they are now able to engage more actively in public discussions. Also, as Figure 15 shows, there is a rise in women in church leadership, a shift from traditional male-dominated roles based on religious principles, where women were previously considered unacceptable to rise and speak in church. This means a lot, as it is widely known that most of the population in Rwanda are Christians, making up 95 percent of the population of Rwanda. So, women having a voice, these women believe is a great victory. One of the local women who is also a pastor emphasises the importance of women's public speaking rights today. “*As you can see in this rural area, everyone is religious, everyone belongs to a church, about 20 years ago, women were not allowed to speak in church because of the biblical statement which prohibits women from speaking. What is that scripture? I asked her...look, she showed me on her smartphone...in the bible where it is written 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35 “Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church... and now I am a pastor; I lead men as well, and men are respecting me what are you taking about, she laughs.”<sup>41</sup> Although no specific data are available, it is obvious that nowadays many Rwandan women hold religious leadership positions. This reflects the country’s huge progress in gender equality as a result of the implementation of gender quota.*

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<sup>38</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>39</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>40</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Gatsibo, East Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>41</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Burera, North Rwanda July 2018



**Table 16: Frequency of how women local representatives participate in activities working on women’s issues on a daily basis.**

**Total women representatives surveyed:56**

Frequency	Very frequently	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Religious meetings/events	9	34	11	2	0
Umushyikirano national council	3	11	14	5	23
Village councils	8	27	17	2	1
Cell councils	10	28	13	3	2
Umuganda <sup>42</sup>	9	40	7	0	0
Umugoroba w’ababyeyi <sup>43</sup>	10	27	17	3	1
Give public speeches	8	8	4	14	22
Make public presentations	4	10	4	16	22
Speak with press	2	4	8	15	27
Attend the public event at the local level	10	24	17	2	6

### **Working with communities**

According to the survey, women's local leaders and representatives focus mainly on four issues in their communities namely women's issues; education; poverty and family problems. It is striking that women hardly ever engage in issues related to men and boys. At least 18 women work with communities on women's issues "very frequently" whereas 23 women work on women’s issues “frequently” while 15 women focus on working on women’s issues “sometimes”. About 33 women work on education “very frequently” or “frequently” while 17

<sup>42</sup> According to the Rwanda Governance Board, Umuganda has its origin in the Kinyarwanda language meaning woods used to build a traditional house. It is being used as " coming together for a common purpose. In Rwanda, all Rwandans get together on every last Saturday for this cause.

<sup>43</sup> It is a platform where mothers gather to share related ideas particularly on socio-economic issues including family disputes, malnutrition, poverty found in the Rwandan families. Available at < [http://www.migeprof.gov.rw/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Umugoroba\\_w\\_ababyeyi.pdf](http://www.migeprof.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Umugoroba_w_ababyeyi.pdf)>

women work on education “*sometimes*”. This means that most women working on education within their communities stress the importance of education for both girl and boy children within their communities, and that they demand all parents to take their children at the age of six years to school. The findings from the survey questionnaire emerge the role of women in educational advancement in Rwanda. Thanks to these women's contributions, girls have outnumbered boys in schools while in the past years, girls were denied access to school. But equally important, the dropouts have decreased thanks to the contribution of women local representatives. It also shows that women's local representatives work on poverty. These women provide support for rural women in terms of advocating asking for a loan or financial support for those women who want to start up business.

They also help rural women with training on joining cooperatives including cooperatives of farmers, cooperatives of fishers, cooperatives of small business women among others. Beyond this, they help rural women with creating projects to get bank loans. As indicated by women, many of these entrepreneurs and businesswomen used to be street vendors, hawkers, beggars in the streets, and were sex workers. After receiving training organised by these women local representatives on self-employment and self-reliance, “*their minds have transformed, starting with small projects, now they have achieved a lot.*”<sup>44</sup> “*We started visiting women who have been sex workers, or beggars teaching and encouraging them and now helping them to do projects. We have lobbied the central government, stakeholders, and other institutions asking for financial support. Now they have become wealthy, they are very advanced. They can witness this.*”<sup>45</sup>

The survey findings also indicate that many women local representatives focus on family problems. On this, they represent the issues around rural families such as disputes in the family which usually lead to the children leaving their homes for the street. These issues reported to the central government on these children to help them receive support. They also teach the community members, especially women pregnant, to undertake regular pregnancy check-ups and to educate how to engage in the developing activities including creating new jobs, getting organized in associations and to teach them about reproductive health including abstinence from using drugs and to avoid adultery. Although based violence remains prevalent in many families in rural areas, the women local representatives revealed they work to end gender based violence within their rural community. “*We continue to engage in campaigns around the community, asking religious leaders to mobilize their members to avoid and fight gender-based violence in their families. As many Rwandans go to church and believe their church leaders, we are confident that in the near future gender-based violence will end.*”<sup>46</sup>

Women local leaders and representatives surveyed also indicated that when visiting their communities, they sit and work with women and men on the issues around their families, including family disputes, poverty, child spacing, and help them to get loans and to make profitable projects. After they visit them, they write a report and send it to

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<sup>44</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>45</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>46</sup> The survey administered to rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, September 2018

the relevant institutions so it can be followed. To determine whether women local representatives are more likely to spend time working on issues that saw women and girls more than men, the survey asked women local representatives to report the frequency of their community service that is for male citizens. Only four women local representatives reported they work for the issues for male citizens "sometimes" that is at least once in the year, while five women reported they work for male's issues rarely, explaining they cannot remember the last time they engaged with the men's issues. The remaining 47 women local representatives, however, reported they never do community service for male citizens.

In general, women local representatives spend most of their time working on issues of women including general requests for the community such as poverty, education, health, land issues, legal problems. Clearly, women, local representatives do community service on behalf of women. Also, many of the tasks they undertake reflect women's traditional caring roles.

**Table 17: Frequency of working with communities on specific issues**

	Very frequently	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
<b>Issues</b>					
<b>Women and girls' issues</b>	3	20	27	4	2
<b>Men and boy's issues</b>	0	0	4	5	47
<b>Poverty</b>	12	28	12	3	1

<b>Education</b>	<b>13</b>	26	17	0	0
<b>Health</b>	<b>17</b>	39	0	0	0
<b>Legal problems</b>	<b>5</b>	19	23	7	3
<b>Unemployment</b>	<b>8</b>	15	22	7	4
<b>Land issues</b>	<b>8</b>	13	24	11	0
<b>Family problems</b>	<b>10</b>	19	29	0	0
<b>GBV</b>	<b>9</b>	29	17	0	1

### Participating in meetings or activities

I also asked women local leaders and representatives about the frequency with which they participate in meetings and activities related to the development of rural women and men. In general women, local representatives meet or work with their communities debating on issues “often” or “sometimes”. However, they are unlikely to give public speeches in their communities. Also, it seems that women local representatives “rarely” or “never” present the community's problems to the parliament. Figure 17 shows that only one woman out of 56 women local representatives surveyed, visit, or give a public speech in their community “some time”, while 29 women local representatives rarely visit or give a public speech in their areas, while 26 women local representatives never visit or give a public speech in their areas. This figure, however, shows that 20 women meet or work with committee members “very often” or “often” while 16 women meet or work with committee members “sometimes” for discussing men and women issues. This finding also shows 19 women attend meetings or other activities related to women and men’s issues in their communities “very often” or “often” while 27 women do “sometimes”.

**Table 18: Frequency of participating in meetings or activities related to rural women**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>
<b>Activities</b>					
<b>Visit or give a public speech in their community</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Work or meet with committee members</b>		<b>20</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Meet with community</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>

<b>Present community's problems to the parliament</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Attend meetings/other activities in the local community</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>

## Speaking in public

I also asked them about the frequency with which they speak on specific topics in their communities. In general women, local leaders and representatives speak publicly on the communities' issues at least every week during or in the local authority meetings. In these meetings, village leaders who meet with communities regularly express communities' issues or requests to the local authority committees. After, the local authority committees mainly sector, and district officials represent them to the parliament or affiliated ministries. I was informed that in the local authority, village leaders are important, mostly because the citizens meet in person with village leaders many times and very often to seek assistance/support with socioeconomic problems mainly land, health, education, women and girls and family issues. As explained by men and women during the interviews and focus groups, the village leaders are the ones who know the day- to -day situation of the community members and the community members trust them because they live in the same neighbourhood, thus they can know and understand their problems more easily. The table 18 shows that the women local representatives are likely to speak on the common issues that emerge in their communities particularly on women and girls' rights, education, family problems, gender-based violence, and rural development. However, these local women representatives are unlikely to speak on the behalf of the community, mostly because many women local leaders and representatives still lack confidence and they still fear to speak when men are around, because of the culture. Also, given that many women local representatives have a very low level of literacy, the lack of self-esteem has remained a challenge in rural society.

**Table 19: Frequency of speaking on the specific topics**

	<b>Very frequently</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Rarely</b>
<b>Women and girls' rights</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Rural development</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Health</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Family problems</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>GBV</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

### **Family conflicts**

It is believed that people in Western Rwanda extensively depend on subsistence farming. In West Rwanda, women local leaders and representatives say they work on issues relating to empowering women in helping rural women farmers create small projects based on agribusiness and encourage and help young people to start up agribusiness and help them get bank loans. As a result, many women in West rural area entrepreneurs venture into agribusinesses such as growing cassava, rice, vegetables, and fruits. They also help other women with small businesses such as hair salons, kiosks, mobile cash, and cafeteria, etcetera. In the Western province, especially young women have become businesswomen who could also employ others. These women also noted that they encourage women and youth to join cooperatives within their communities in which they can get money for capital. Joining cooperatives has enabled many rural women to start up retail business and commercial farming.

In West Rwanda, some women surveyed also mentioned that another casework request from the family that they receive, is the problem of street children, the children who leave their families and run in the city streets because of the conflicts going on in their families. These women explained that in general many children in the rural areas run away from their families for the street mostly because of recurring conflicts in their families, but others it is because of the poverty within their families. The representatives from a rural community in Ngororero District explained that given that many families in her rural area depend extensively on agricultural production for a living, and yet sometimes the harvest is not good. They also say most people in this area practice intensive farming on limited land that has resulted in soil erosion, a thing they think has contributed to a decrease in agricultural productivity. As a result, many families suffer from hunger which often forces children to become street beggars. *"It is not that these children come from more poorer families than others, it is just that many people here depend on the production from their crops, it may be good this year and bad next year, you know we cannot predict the weather or whether a season is going to be good."*<sup>47</sup>

Another reason why there are problems in the family is, given that west Rwanda located far from Kigali and bordering neighboring countries such as DR Congo and Burundi, is challenging to get potential and stable markets due to frequent border closures as a result of the recurring conflicts in those countries.

These women note that in family disputes, girls are most affected. These women officials explain that many men in rural areas drink, and when they are drunk, wives and daughters are the ones who are persecuted, leading girls to get married young or run away into prostitution. On this, they say these ongoing family conflicts have resulted in

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<sup>47</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Muhanga, South Rwanda, November 2018

poverty in many rural areas. One woman local leader explains, "*I believe for the family to prosper, there must be mutual understanding and respect between the couples. A family that is constantly in conflict will not make any progress.*"<sup>48</sup> However, these women local leaders and representatives explain they have been tough on this issue and all family problems that might affect girls in the family and are reporting them so that they can be acted on. The representatives in the same rural area also explained they work with the security officers to search for those children to return them to their families. But equally important, they run several advocacies in organizations in the area to get them enough food. Furthermore, they assist those drop-out students in finding sponsors so that they can return to school.

Generally, in most rural Rwanda, disputes over land ownership and inheritance have always arisen due to ownership and inheritance rights and limited economic opportunities, exacerbated by poverty and limited resource allocation within families. It is well known that in rural society still practice the tradition of inheritance, where land is passed from father to sons, and this has always led to conflicts, especially with the legal provisions that now grant women the right to inherit land.

Some women local councils known as *Abunzi* (mediators) told me that whenever there is a division of property within the family there is a conflict and that whenever the family members are going to divide their properties requires their intervention, because in a family that includes daughters/wife they do not agree that a daughter/sister /wife should also be given an inheritance.

### **Priorities of women local representatives**

Given that women local representatives spend most days interacting with their communities, hearing and helping them resolve problems and issues in their family or cooperatives. To gain a deeper understanding into the most casework requests that women local representatives receive I asked women, local leaders and representatives, the problems on requests they most receive.

### **Health**

Given that one of the most difficult problems for the population in Sub-Saharan Africa to access medical treatment is financial restrictions because this region is raged by infectious diseases (Olugbenga, 2017). Women local representatives throughout rural Rwanda receive requests from communities to help with resolving issues and concerns of health care. As indicated by women local authorities, most rural communities belong to the first and second categories of *Ubudehe*. In Rwanda, households are placed into classifications known as *Ubudehe* classifications. This classification depends on socio-economic status such as property including land, house, cars and other belongings. The first two categories are characterised by the poorest families who are perceived as indigents or very poor people who have no house or land, who cannot afford basic needs and who have no jobs.

Many families in rural areas still fall into these categories, despite the government's effort to get all out of these categories. In rural areas, poor families regularly go to see village leaders seek support regarding health insurance. In South Rwanda, the most common casework request received by women local representatives was assistance with health insurances known as *mutuelle de Sante*. As I was informed, until 2016, the cost of the health insurance was Rwf1000 per household, this price however changed in 2016 and shifted to 2,000, 3,000Rwf and 7,000Rwf varying depending on the household categories. Again, as explained by women local leaders, they receive expressions of concern from citizens who complain about the category the government had placed them in as some poor families were wrongly placed in the categories of rich people, yet they are not.

In Southern Rwanda, I found the large proportion of requests for health insurance assistance was surprising, mostly because ten surveyed women local leaders who took part in the survey, all of them responded that they have just received this request within the last two hours, meaning requests and concerns related to the health are the common casework in rural leadership. These women not only encounter health concerns and requests but also, they are actively mobilizing a campaign to stress the importance of paying health insurance fees and to advocate for poor people who cannot afford to pay this contribution. Thanks to these women's mobilization campaigns, Rwanda has been ranked the first country with the highest health insurance enrollment in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>48</sup> According to Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC), there are over 45,000 local-level community health workers, and the majority are women, working in 14,744 villages of Rwanda. Some women health workers revealed Rwanda to achieve universal health record, they have lately worked days and night. By 2017, over 9 million out of 11.5 million Rwandans (80 percent) had health insurance, especially those people living in rural Rwanda. Having health insurance has helped people in Rwanda, especially those in rural areas to get medical treatment easily. Many women local leaders and representatives noted that access to health insurance programs has decreased the spread of infectious diseases especially malaria which is primarily prevalent in rural areas.

### **Educational assistance casework**

Another common request that women local representatives receive is from youth regarding tuition fees particularly university fees. Women local leaders and representatives reported that community members mostly seek their help obtaining fee grants from the government scheme, education grants and sometimes direct requests for money. Given that genocide left many orphans and widowed people, there are high levels of poverty in rural areas and poverty has stimulated this type of request. Also, because many people in rural communities are low income earners, paying university fees is very difficult and almost impossible for many families in rural areas. Women local representatives, mainly education workers receive numerous casework requests asking for help with educational loans and grants and school materials as well as accommodation.

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<sup>48</sup> The New Times, Rwanda August 2017

In East Rwanda, many women local leaders and representatives explained many families in this area are heads of their families as a consequence of the 1994 genocide, and many families in this area cannot still afford three meals per day. Therefore, some families are still unable to send their children to school, mostly because they do not want to send their children to school hungry. Thus, some children stay at home. In North Rwanda, women local representatives responded they have been working on issues related to children who are above six years old who are not attending primary schools, others were dropping out of schools, given that many parents in this area do not send their children to school so that they help them with domestic work others send them to work in tea and mineral gardens to earn money for the family. In collaboration with schoolteachers and village leaders and education officers at every village local level, they encourage parents to send children to school and help them to address issues in the home that may affect children.

This study also found that in rural Rwanda, many children are dropping out of schools due to the problems of disputes in families and poverty. The 2014 study by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) indicated that the number of dropouts in primary school levels was up to 12,4 percent and up to 14.7 percent in secondary school and many of them were girls. This is because some parents in rural areas still have an old mentality that only boy children should go to school, while girls stay home to help with household chores. Also, some parents are frustrated by poverty where some parents especially husbands prevent their daughters from attending university claiming that they cannot afford the fees, yet they choose to pay for their sons because they believe that boy children would benefit the family more than girls children. One woman explains: *"If a spouse has money, he will only send his sons to school; they believe that girls will not help the family as much as boys. It is an attitude in rural areas, but we are working to change it, even if it will take time."*<sup>49</sup> These women also say they have encouraged women to leave behind the tradition of dependence to work hard to be able to pay fees for their children, and some women are now able to pay for their children even send them to the best schools in Rwanda and abroad.

## **GBV**

Another common request that women local representatives work on more frequently is Gender Based-Violence (GBV). Representatives from all rural communities cited three types of violence against females and males they have identified in their rural communities; namely sexual abuse, rape and domestic abuse saying that at least 90 percent of women in rural areas face both sexual and domestic abuse. When conducting this research, these women representatives point out that at least 40 percent of women had reported violence against them, while 5 percent of men had reported violence against them. Throughout the country, women local representatives surveyed said they were grouped into the network locally called agents of change including anti-GBV committees, GBV counsellors and Rwanda women network and some of them were members of Rwanda Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC). Some men force children or young women to sleep with them in exchange for money, jobs and other things

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<sup>49</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, November 2018

including smartphones, cars, and houses. Some men representatives from RWAMREC explain that given that women are now economically independent and powerful, they try to tempt and influence young men so that they remain in their job positions. Some men respondents explain that some women force young men, especially their drivers or helpers or house boys (known as *ababoyi*) to have sex with them promising them increased salaries or promotion. Men further explain that it is happening because many of those women are widowed, while others are married but their husbands work far away from their families. Thus, as mentioned in the focus group with men, many women nowadays prefer to hire young boys as drivers or house boys. A woman explains that those [*ababoyi*] often disrupt homes by replacing husbands in the household and engaging in sexual activities with their bosses. “*Nowadays, many women engage in sexual activities with their ababoyi, which frustrates men, causing them to become aggressive and beat women.*”<sup>50</sup>

Some women surveyed explain that GBV in rural society has remained prevalent, mostly because of the mindsets and culture in rural areas in Rwanda. They explained that given that many rural women rarely report GBV, because of their fear of a bad reputation and that they will face discrimination and rejection after reporting GBV, it is therefore difficult to end the gender based violence in rural Rwanda. As explained by one woman anti-GBV activist from the rural community, many women in her rural areas face several forms of violence including sexual abuse including rape, where wives are being forced by their partners not to use contraception which often resulted in having many children. This, she explains, is promoted by the beliefs and faith, where majority religions in Rwanda especially in rural Rwanda teach their members not to use contraception, claiming they might have negative effects on them. Many Christians particularly in rural areas are taught that using a condom during sex is a sin, that birth control is considered murder, and that God would not forgive them if they use birth control or any other form of contraception. Thus, many women in rural areas have severely opposed the government policy of family planning. One woman local leader points out that many wives have accepted this as a normal life, she went on to explain that this sexual behaviour between partners is sort of violence one would never hear women in rural areas talk about, based on the fact that rape or sexual violence that within marriages in rural society is not recognized as a crime, instead many married women choose to keep quiet in order to stay in the marriage. One man respondent explained; “*there is ongoing violence against men based on assault, where husbands are being assaulted by their wives in rural areas*”.<sup>51</sup> One woman from the rural community, however, claims that husbands who are abused by their wives are still very few compared to wives who are abused by their husbands. “*In most cases, wives are the ones who are abused by their husbands, only a few husbands can be abused by their wives, it is not the same case as women in many rural communities.*”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Muhanga, South Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>51</sup> Group interview, rural community, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>52</sup> Interview, rural community, rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, November 2018

A study conducted by the Rwanda National Police (RNP) in 2018 on domestic violence shows that every year over 400 wives are abused by their husbands while 94 husbands are abused by their wives (Rwanda National Police, 2018). This study indicates that men are likely to report domestic violence while women do not talk about domestic violence and are less likely to report it.

These women also reported that a large number of domestic abuses in rural areas are related to family assets, where some husbands abuse their wives when they ask for money or want to divide family property at the time of succession. It has been suggested that many men in rural areas do not like to divide family assets, based on the fact that according to Rwandan culture many women still think that materials in the families are meant to be the property of husbands only (Kagaba, 2015; Uwineza and Powley, 2009). One woman local leader said: *“men do not like us to inherit or divide family properties, mostly because they claim that when a husband marries a wife, she comes to a husband with nothing. She stays in husband's house, she uses things she finds in the house, many men think that a wife cannot get anything in the house, because she brought nothing.”*<sup>53</sup> Historically, a wife's parents receive a dowry for their daughters. Once married, some men would try to get back the price of dowry from their wives by making them work on the family property; and by making them give birth to many children and to do all housework. *“Another stumbling block is that dowry a husband gives a wife's parents. Men beat us up over this matter, as if they had bought us.”*<sup>54</sup> Women surveyed also pointed out that there are still also fights between siblings at the time of succession, mostly because boys still have the old mentality that their sisters should not be inherited. These women local leaders and representatives estimated that at least 60 percent of domestic abuse in their rural communities is related to inheritance and succession.

### **Women in local government and grassroots community government**

Relatively, the number of women in local government is still small compared to that of the national leadership. To date, women make up 40 percent of the local leaders. This number has increased over the last century. However, even though the number of women in local government is growing, women local leaders, especially at the lowest local level (cell and village levels), have complained about a pay gap in local positions 'salaries. These women argue that women who served in national positions are receiving increased salaries with for example a monthly salary of female parliamentarian vary between Rwf 1,000,000 million to Rwf1,200,000 (€1,000 and €1,200) plus other benefits such as social security, communication, transportation facilities, bank loans and per diem means. These women in local leadership claim that even though the citizens trust and believe their abilities as government officials, they feel less empowered to be volunteers. Some say they wish to be in the national politics and have high salaries like women legislators in national government but they still face a challenge due to limited education due to most grassroots local leaders and representatives having completed primary or secondary school.

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<sup>53</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>54</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, August 2018

Yet they wish the government could recognize them and design the salaries following their abilities and not education level. One woman local representative from the rural community explains, "*we want salaries like those in the national government, we know they are more educated, they are literate more than us. But we too have learnt by doing, we have gained skills, we have got experience, why are we not paid the same salary like them ... Some of us have been here for many years since the end of the genocide, but still work as volunteers, a volunteer for 20 years! There should be some salaries for us really*"<sup>55</sup> Although women at the cell level have started to receive salaries, village leaders wish to have salaries. This, they explain, cell and village local level authority are elected to do the same duties. Therefore, these women do not understand how other women local authorities are being given salaries but not village leaders.

These women at the lowest level of local leadership claimed that they spend most days exercising their tasks as well as participating in endless meetings and training in the area and Kigali, yet their hard work does not pay off "*You are not going to believe that women local officials, we work 24 hours and 7 days. We like what we do, but the problem is that our hard work is not being recognized.*"<sup>56</sup> These women surveyed at the village level indicated that the reason that they are still volunteers and do not get paid, is that they have low literacy level, though some of them have learnt how to read and write, they still lack the skills to be able to compete for the higher position.

They express dissatisfaction with their work, as they often work without compensation, leading to delayed or non-completed activities and household chores.

Some women struggle to afford maids or farming employees, leading to missed seasons or crop failures due to coupled authority duties and limited time for caregiving, "*for example, many of us are farmers, and we seed crops depending on the seasons, when we are working 24/7, we will never get our own time to catch the season time*".<sup>57</sup> "*Or you managed to seed the crops, but you will not have time for harvesting. Some crops ended up decaying in the fields because we cannot be here and there at the same time*".<sup>58</sup> Other women explain the socio-economic distinction between women local representatives and national representatives, saying that the majority of women in the national government have housemaids or helpers. Thus, they perform the authority duties well because they know other house chores are being taken care of while they are not there. Thus after work, these women can do their own thing, they can go to study in the evening or can pursue their business. These women also explain, knowing that you leave someone behind who can look after the house and field, make them secure and think properly, while these women local representatives spend most of their lives in the offices thinking about their other chores left-back within their household.

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<sup>55</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>56</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>57</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Musanze, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>58</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Musanze, North Rwanda, August 2018

One woman explains, *"my heart is not at ease while I am here knowing that my children are alone at home, my neighbours are sowing, others are harvesting. When I know that by the time I get home, I cannot do anything in the house because it is too late and I am too tired to do household chores"*.<sup>59</sup> *"Those women in the national government, they are well paid, they can afford to pay for the maid and employees for the fields, we cannot afford. Even if we are paid, but the money we get is not enough to hire a maid."*<sup>60</sup> Despite the challenges faced by women in their roles as officials, they remain positive and remain committed to their duties.

On the other side, rural women praised the government that had provided modern gas stoves and water storage tanks, saving them time and cost, as they used to spend hours searching for firewood. As a result, rural women are saving time by using gas stoves and water storage tanks, reducing cooking time and walking a long distance to get firewood.

One woman explains, *"these water tanks and gas stoves are helping women a lot. We are no longer taking a long journey to go find firewood in the forests and get water. Where would we get this time? Mostly we get home late at the night, and this time you cannot go outside that night to get water or find firewood to cook, but at least even if we get home late, when there are water and fire, you can cook."*<sup>61</sup>

Another challenge that women mentioned was that rural women still encounter heavy domestic work given that many husbands have not understood that they should help their wives in household work. Many women local representatives coupled their daily duties with the family chores. Some women attend the women's committee or councils after they finish with family duties such as cleaning and cooking. Given that agriculture is a major activity in rural Rwanda, many women in local-level leadership go to work after farming. In this group interview, some explain the culture that rural men's jobs where rural men still feel they are responsible for external duties such as building houses and shielding the crops while women deal with internal duties, remain in the rural areas. A study by Action Aid in some regions of the country found a rural woman spends seven hours doing household chores, in which they spend many hours getting water and the firewood.<sup>62</sup> So this delays them and prevents them from doing other profitable tasks.

Given that many men in rural Rwanda are not able to take care of the family properly as women do. This makes women refuse to take some responsibilities in leadership in rural areas. In the focus group, women in western Northern province Rwanda noted some women in their rural area choose the house responsibilities but refuse the office responsibilities fearing their husbands/ fathers/brothers will not be able to care about the family effectively. *"Many women in our area, refuse some responsibilities as well as entering the politics, paid jobs because men in rural areas do not want to see themselves doing houses chores, however, some of them do not know how to do some*

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<sup>59</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Musanze, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>60</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Burera, North Rwanda, July 2018

<sup>61</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Nyaruguru, South Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>62</sup> The study by ACTION AID in four districts of Rwanda: Nyanza, Nyaruguru, Gisagara, Karongi, and Musanze

housework such as cooking, cleaning, changing nappies for the kids or look after the family alone.”<sup>63</sup> As a result, women choose to stay home as if they think if they leave behind husbands/brothers/fathers, they will not do household chores. Rather, many women choose to do small businesses including hawking, sell commodities in the evening's local markets, others run to sell some foods in their homes so that they look after the home.

The women in this focus group went on to explain they prefer to venture into unproductive business, so they are coupling it with the household responsibilities for the sake of saving the marriage. *"Look, in rural areas, women never want to go far from the house, everything we do, we do it around the house."* <sup>64</sup>*"When wives are out, some husbands would call them to change kids' nappies or feed them. They hate to do so. For us rural women, we cannot stay assured that men can take care of the family if we are not around. This is why we sometimes refuse to take critical office responsibilities."* <sup>65</sup>

### **Role of government and quotas**

For women in local leadership to overcome the challenges they face every day, the Rwandan government has set up women's platforms including women's groups and cooperatives where women meet and share knowledge. *"Now women have been given different platforms where they can sit and discuss their challenges. We have cooperatives where we help build each other's strengths, create ethics that help live a sustainable life in our community."* <sup>66</sup> *"Women congresses at the community level or in these cooperatives and together with government officials help formulate measures to respond to these challenges."* <sup>67</sup>

Among women's associations that help women cope with the challenges they face in local leadership, there is the Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA). The RALGA association has established a women's leadership forum for women in local government in order to help women local authorities learn and share information and skills that help them to balance family responsibilities and local authorities. Women local leaders explain with RALGA they share principles that can help build each other's capacity to positively respond to these issues. *"We have built confidence through RALGA."* <sup>68</sup> *"When we meet, we talk to each other in a sharing way. Join self-support groups to build on each other's strengths. Learning and teaching each other on strategies to fight against barriers."* <sup>69</sup>

In separate surveys, women pointed out that RALGA women's forum for women local leaders has benefited them to exchange ideas and interact with each other given that the women's problems in the leadership are almost often

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<sup>63</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Gatsibo, East Rwanda, August

<sup>64</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Gatsibo, East Rwanda, August

<sup>65</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Gatsibo, East Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>66</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Kirehe, East Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>67</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Gatsibo, East Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>68</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Gatsibo, East Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>69</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Kirehe, East Rwanda, August 2018

the same. *"This is the best place to advocate for the problems that we face in the primary sectors like women"*.

<sup>70</sup>Many women say that the government has set up regular programs and measures in the sensitization of gender quotas policy. In the focus groups, women pointed out that these governments and measures have provided open spaces for women to discuss their challenges and to take steps to solve the challenges they face. *"Government tries to hold those who abuse this policy. And that helps women in a way."*<sup>71</sup>

They also pointed out that most of these programs are held close to them and some of them in the late hours, thus many women participate in them. The Rwandan government has also kept promoting gender quota policies at all levels of the community especially explaining to men about this principle. As a result, men are beginning to understand this policy and change their mindsets to; *"some have well understood it and seen the importance of it"*.<sup>72</sup> They also say some men in rural Rwanda have changed their perceptions on gender roles, and they have already understood the principle of gender quotas in society. In conclusion, local leaders in rural Rwanda have significantly improved women's status through advocacy, advisory meetings, and mobilization, despite cultural challenges they still have to overcome.

Generally, women local leaders and representatives have benefited the female population in rural Rwanda. Women local leaders and representatives are seen as pillars of transformative social changes. As these women pointed out in the surveys and interview groups, the fact these women have started to express their ideas and raise the issues of other women has led to the promotion and development of the family in rural areas. These women accepted that visiting their communities and meeting and speaking with the members of the communities about their issues have changed the mindsets of many women in rural areas. Some of these women noted that the visits and meetings with their communities are changing the culture and traditional beliefs of rural people, increasing women's political representation. As narrated by some of the female local leaders and representatives, the major challenge and obstacles they encountered when they first entered in politics were the traditional beliefs of both men and women, suggesting that women cannot speak in the public, while majority rural men ignored the authority of women. These women narrated two major proverbs that still going on in rural society namely, *Ijambo ni irivuze umugabo* [a word is of a man only], and *Nta nkoko kazi ibika isake ihari* [no hen should crawl before the cock]. The fact that these two proverbs are still used and followed in some rural communities, hinder the authority of women, however, women stand on their rights and encourage other women to leave behind the traditional beliefs that could hold them back. In the meetings, speeches, and visits by these women local representatives and local leaders, women have changed their mindsets. Notably, these women revealed that the level of domestic violence has reduced compared to the past years. This, they explain, is due to the program of 'Utugoroba Tw'ababyeyi', the meetings in which women and men gathered to discuss the issues of women and their families. Given that these meetings saw wives and husbands, and that they aim to resolve the family disputes, men now fear to beat their wives fearing that they

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<sup>70</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Rwamagana, East Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>71</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>72</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, August 2018

would put them in shame in front of the public. Thus, these women noted that rural women are no longer beaten by their husbands at the same level as in the past.

They also explain, beating a wife was not seen as violence and could never be known to expect when the wife was wounded seriously and got killed. However, these days, a wife does not do physical violence but also other forms of violence. This has shown that women have understood their rights. As explained by these women, many rural wives could be beaten almost every day; yet these days, in the meetings with families, when they asked wives about when the last time they were beaten, many women could have accepted that they have never been beaten by their husbands while others said that they could not remember that. On GBV, most women respondents and participants explained that violence against women has been an issue that related to the culture, however, one could not ignore there has been a big change given that in the past when women talked about the violence, they could point at some cases of deaths or serious injuries caused by their spousal violence mostly by male partners. What these women narrated has something to do with the previous statistics on the incidence of GBV in Rwanda. A report by Rwanda Biomedical Centre on domestic violence between 2014 and 2015, indicates that even though various types of violence are being reported among spouses in Rwanda, the most recognized type of violence over one year was spousal violence, mainly reported by 28 percent wives for being slapped by their husbands while 23 percent women reported violence against them that their partners had offended them or had made them feel psychologically bad. While 15 percent of women reported that their partners had been pushed or shaken or had thrown something at them; while 11 percent reported that they had been forced by their partners to have sex against their will. In general, countrywide, at least eight percent of women reported that they have experienced physical violence, while eight percent of women reported sexual violence, and 19 percent of women reported emotional violence over 12 months. However, there had not been a case of death caused by spousal violence. This seems to hold the whole truth about what these women narrated about the level of GBV in Rwanda. In some group interviews in different parts of the country, some women local representatives and leaders revealed that they were not aware of the forms of violence until they got training on GBV. This, they explained, many women in rural areas did not know the abuse within their households can be treated as a form of violence, given the perception that a wife has to be beaten in a way of correcting her. Thus, some women could suffer violence to death because they were not allowed to talk about any kind of violence against them within households. Thus, many women in the past used to experience violence and suffer inside until they died. However, this is not the case anymore. Here, some women explained that the fact that women could now understand the form of GBV and can report it; it is a good sign that GBV will be eradicated in Rwandan society. *“At least women in our rural areas can understand gender-based violence, and once they experience it, they can tell. So, it is a good sign”.*<sup>73</sup>

Another visible benefit raised by these women was helping women forming and joining cooperatives including saving and credit cooperative [*ibimina*]; have given women opportunities to run business which enabled them to contribute to the family and the economy of the country. Furthermore, women local representatives and leaders are not benefitting women only but also men. On this, women surveyed explained that there are some programs and

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<sup>73</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, August 2018

projects that were started to promote women's interests only but now become men's too. Some of them were *Utugoroba tw'ababyeyi* which were started as women's social platforms where women express their issues and concerns related to their lives and their families, and now men too are joining them and can express their issues as women. Also, men were given opportunities to join the cooperatives of women and have the same rights as women to get a loan from financial institutions.

Evidence from surveys shows that urban and women elites are biased towards rural women local authority. As shown by views and ideas from ordinary women in rural areas, the authority of women local leadership is respected and accepted by the whole country's population. Also, many women in national leadership accepted that some of them started politics in local leadership. It is believed that some women in the grassroots leadership were promoted to urban careers. Some rural women were appointed as managers of banks, commissionaires and other positions in urban areas, amongst others left to become governors, ministers, deputies, and national government coordinators (Hunt, 2017; Mwambari, 2017).

Also, this bias is rooted to the culture and tradition, based on the level of education and location, where many urban women and women elite believe that not only women in rural areas have a high level of education, while others claim that the rural people know little knowledge, and thus they cannot make good leaders. However, these urban and elite perceptions and assumptions are based on the fact that many Rwandans living in the city are widows, young orphans, refugees and returnees. And those returnees who came from abroad behave like highly educated people because they speak English fluently as the official language in Rwanda (Burnet, 2008; Mwambari, 2017, NISR, 2018). While, following the 1994 genocide, widows and young orphans found numerous opportunities to continue their careers due to the support provided by numerous international organizations (Mwambari, 2017; Hunt, 2017; Pro-Femme Twese Hamwe, 2014). The change in Rwanda is believed to have been rooted in grassroots creativity and foundation (Hunt, 2017; Mwambari, 2017; Powley and Anderlini, 2003). In her book, "Rwandan Women Rising" Hunt (2017) highlights the significant contributions of grassroots women in the post-genocide reconstruction process. The perspectives of women and men in rural Rwanda negate existing studies and research deny the progress made in promoting women's rights, arguing that some laws have primarily benefited urban and elite women (Burnet, 2017; Mageza-Barthel (2015); Berry, 2015; Burnet, 2011).

The UN women global database shows that significant challenges such as domestic violence and sexual intimate partner violence persist. The same issues, even those respondents and participants raised, linked to the roots of the

cultural rural society. Majority women surveyed accepted that culture is the whole challenge every woman in local leadership faces in her daily life, however, they pleaded to make their effort to change it. Most women local leaders and representatives say that misunderstanding of gender quota had made it difficult to eradicate GBV and to maintain family harmony. One woman in the group interview explained, "*GBV has everything to do with culture. Culture in rural society is the whole thing. The belief that a real husband in his home has to be violent towards his wife remains and is tied to society. And one thing you must know about rural society, divorce is considered sacrilege. We are not allowed to divorce under any circumstance*"<sup>74</sup>

Women's stories of GBV reveal a reduction in cases despite past abuse. Some women have shown scars from past abuse, but no serious cases have occurred. Local representatives have received cases primarily due to family resource disputes, but they prevent them, and they hope gender quota policies and laws will improve women's situation. Rural Rwandan women's socio-economic transformations have significantly impacted their families and communities, allowing them to make decisions for themselves, their families, and society, and this change has been widely celebrated. (Hunt, 2017; Abbott and Malunda, 2016; Bayisenge, 2015; Burnet, 2008a; Devlin and Elgie, 2008; Kagaba, 2015; Powley, 2006; Powley, 2008; Republic of Rwanda; 2016). Rural women now recognize their value and potential in various fields, with women being empowered to achieve what urban women and men can do.

Rural women are increasingly recognized as local leaders and representatives, often praised for their voice and participation in women's groups. They perceive local representatives differently from national women legislators, who often criticize them (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013). Rural community women local representatives are dedicated to work for citizens, working 24/7 to address their issues and provide support, unlike urban offices with offices. They live with constituents and are present with them. One woman emphasizes the importance of having many women in the administration saying, "*You see that many women live in rural areas; so having women representing us in the national politics makes our problems known at the national level.*"<sup>75</sup> These women believe that Rwandan rural women have adopted a new mindset and belief system, viewing the gender quota as the foundation of their lives.

However, even though the government has made significant strides in promoting the rights of women and poverty reduction, gaps in the reduction of gender-based violence and family problems remain in effectively addressing the specific needs of rural areas like western Rwanda where the area is plagued by hunger and poverty mainly due to the low agricultural production and cultural challenges leading to conflicts within many households in rural Rwanda.

Despite positive changes, women face ongoing paradoxes and problems, including family conflicts and gender-based violence, which they perceive as a new hoe stick that they gradually get used to. Gender-based

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<sup>74</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Rusizi, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>75</sup> The survey administered to the rural community, Rusizi, West Rwanda, August 2018

violence rises due to anger and revenge of men towards gender quota policy, with women being targets for abuse. Openness to discussing violence in public is a positive sign for eradicating GBV. *“At least, we know, we have come a long way, now we know the cases of the victims of GBV, we are now aware of those families with disputes, and it is our job to teach them, as they are evolving gradually.”*<sup>76</sup> Numerous organizations and local churches are working to combat gender violence, raise awareness, and challenge patriarchal beliefs. Rwanda's 2003 constitution, which mandated 30 percent of parliamentary seats for women, has led to legal and institutional reforms, promoting women's rights and establishing dedicated institutions. However, Rwanda's post-genocide leadership by Kagame, favour women, has been criticized for limiting change and potentially maintaining power, as seen in the RPF party's politics (Longman and Rutagengwa, 2006; Hunt, 2017; Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Burnet, 2008; 2008a). Rwanda's political freedoms and human rights issues often overshadow gender equality achievements<sup>77</sup>, but President Kagame's significant contributions to women's empowerment since 2000 are undeniable.

Rwandan female legislators have implemented legislation transforming women's perception, resolving land ownership disputes, and granting equal marriage rights, promoting women's land ownership as a key economic empowerment factor (Uwayezu and Mugiraneza, 2011, Hunt, 2017). Rwanda is widely recognized as a global leader in enhancing women's rights (UN, 2019; International Monetary Fund, 2017). Significant changes in rural society, such as rural women cooperatives engaging in economic activities, are crucial for promoting sustainable development. Cooperative like Dukundikawa (we love coffee) coffee cooperative previously reserved for males now the cooperative employs numerous female farmers (Mwambari, 2017). It is well known that coffee is a main export and that women dominate this industry (which used to be a male-only job) as company owners, farmers, pickers, and sorters (Hunt, 2017). Cooperatives that weave baskets are found in nearly all rural areas of Rwanda and are also affecting rural women's employment (Mwambari, 2017, Hunt, 2017). Rural cooperatives, once men-owned, are now women-dominated, demonstrating their political party involvement and community contributions. The next chapter explores focus groups and interviews findings with ordinary rural women and men.

## **CHAPTER 5: ATTITUDES TO WOMEN’S ADVANCEMENTS**

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<sup>76</sup> Multiple interviews, rural community, Rusizi, Karongi, Nyamasheke, West Rwanda September and October 2018

<sup>77</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/rwanda/freedom-net/2022>

This chapter explores attitudes towards women's advancements, based on interviews and focus groups with ordinary women, men, local leaders, and rural women representatives. The findings in this chapters generated from 186 interviews, 28 focus groups, and 268 participants, including ordinary rural women and men.

Focus groups and interviews were conducted in fifteen districts across four Rwandan Provinces North, South, West and East, including Rwamagana, Gakenke, Karongi, Ngororero, Rusizi, Muhanga, Nyamagabe, Rusizi, Huye, Gicumbi, Kirehe, Nyamasheke, Musanze, Gatsibo and Nyaruguru. This chapter discusses questions about the impact of gender quota policy on women's socio-economic empowerment in rural Rwanda. It gives a different perspective on the advancements and benefits of gender equality in post-genocide Rwanda, particularly focusing on the progress made by rural women.

Despite cultural challenges, progress is evident in politics, business, and family life. Men's perspectives are uneven towards women's advancements, leading to gender quota changes and women taking leadership roles after the 1994 Tutsi genocide. Also, a significant participation of rural women in the economy has been supported through a gender quota system designed to improve their access to education, health, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

The main key changes noticed by rural women are women's entitlement to family property and women's economic empowerment. Most women interviewees and respondents confirmed that women having access to work and to have a say and control over their own money and to participate in the family decision making has been the overall changes, everyone would notice in rural society between the 1994 genocide and the present day. The overall changes women in rural areas mentioned include access to inherit property or to be an heir in the family's heritage, access to start up business and to contest for tender offers, and, rights to work with men in the jobs that used to be reserved for men in the past such as working on the construction sites, in factories, in companies as managers, experts, aviators, and drivers.

Some women explain: *“a female gained rights over property succession. Women have built confidence. Women gained rights over education in society, and because of that, the society has grown a respect for her.”*<sup>78</sup>*“In the past, a woman could only do household work, but now she even undertakes family development activities, like investing in the business. In the past, a woman didn't have a voice, but now she does have a voice, and she can even complement what her husband says. A woman didn't have access to education, but now girl children are going to school...which is so positive now.”*<sup>79</sup> These changes, therefore, have made rural women feel more empowered and independent economically. Also, women sense that women's economic empowerment and independence have contributed to the increased voice for women. As explained by one woman from the rural community, *“when you have money you will have a voice. When you are independent, you can speak whenever you want, wherever you*

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<sup>78</sup> Group interview, rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>79</sup> Group interview, rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, September 2018

*are. This is what happened to us, since we started to earn our own money, we started to speak, it started at home and then outside. And now we can speak out for ourselves, for our families and community.*<sup>80</sup>

Also, some women interviewees and respondents explain that even though willingness to speak in public started after the genocide, the rights to speak in public has been given to women based on their abilities. On this they explain, given the fact that women since the end of the genocide had been able to cope with its consequences by working together and helping each other without the support from men, heading their households and taking care of their families alone, and thus, the government recognize this and has since trusted their abilities. Therefore, since the end of the genocide, Rwandan women especially those in rural communities have been given a voice to speak out, contributing to the country's reconstruction. More so, Rwandan men are now respecting women.

### **Formal marriage/understanding and respect/ family problems.**

Nearly all rural women interviewees and respondents reported that marriage as an institution in rural Rwanda has greatly improved, due to mutual understanding and respect between the spouses. As mentioned previously, women in the past were not respected in society. The Rwandan tradition and custom suggested that wives were considered as helpers, who were supposed to do all the house chores in the families as per what the society required that all women including wives and daughters must be submissive and loyal to the husbands and fathers/brothers (Hunt, 2017). Thus, in many communities in Rwanda especially, wives/daughters/sisters were not counted and were not seen as the members of the families, and thus, their presence was unnumbered (Hunt, 2017). However, this mentality has changed dramatically. In Rwandan society, wives, daughters, and sisters are treated respectfully and their presence now has a value in the society and at home.

As described by many women in the focus group and interviews, there has been a perception in rural Rwanda that he who has a great woman, has a better home, meaning that the role of a woman at home has been improved. Nowadays, husbands have revisited this perception and have recognized the value of wives in the family. *“At present, a wife has become very well respected in the family given that men have recognized the value of a woman in the family.”*<sup>81</sup> Some men explained that they previously felt that their wives could not make decisions for the family because of the traditional Rwandan culture where women were seen as inadequate or weak people before men. But this perception has changed. *“Due to the fact in the past, a wife was not considered as a useful person in the family, because she was called a ‘helper’, thus the husband could leave her for another woman, especially that a man was allowed to have many women. But this is not here anymore. A wife is not a helper but is now regarded as a supporter in her family.”*<sup>82</sup> *“In marriages, the woman has recuperated her value and respect, and this resulted in equal rights for both girls' and boys' children. Nowadays, both have the same rights to go to school while in the*

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<sup>80</sup> Group interview, rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>81</sup> Focus group, rural community, Nyamasheke, West Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>82</sup> Group interview, rural community, Rusizi, West Rwanda, November 2018

past, only boy children had the right to go to school.”<sup>83</sup> “Hatred rising from the differences has reduced, and both girls and boys can be heirs to family heritage.”<sup>84</sup> Men have changed their mindset and they have seen women as capable people that can even give constructive ideas and make decisions for the family without men and this has led to the mutual understanding and respect between the husband and wife. “Marriages have been equal sharing of responsibilities. In the absence of a man, a woman can handle household issues, without a man worrying, and also, a man can take on what would usually be a woman’s roles such as taking care of the children and others.”<sup>85</sup> “There has been a mutual respect between couples, both husband and wife understand that there is no such thing as a king of the house for either man or woman, and there is equal respect in terms of handling household issues.”<sup>86</sup>

Some wives responded that mutual understanding and respect between a wife and a husband has strengthened marriage relationships in rural Rwanda. They have revealed that their husbands no longer cheat on their wives like in the past. Some wives explain; “no husband is cheating on his wife anymore because they are now understanding and respecting each other.”<sup>87</sup>

Women further explain that in the past, legal marriage was not a matter of good faith for men. Since the law on legal marriage has come, men have understood that marriage is necessary. As explained by this woman: “now life is easy. Married couples with their assets have to be registered lawfully. If there is any dispute, it will be resolved by law. The law governing marriage has made things easy.”<sup>88</sup> However, although they say this, some women say that in some rural communities, women are still afraid of taking decisions or giving ideas in the family, fearing to take risks when their decisions and ideas do not work properly. One woman says, *things are changing progressively, but slowly because some women are still not confident enough as they still fear risks when things go wrong, and they do not want to be responsible. Also, at home, things are still complicated. The woman cannot lend [gutiza]<sup>89</sup> a household item without her husband’s consent.*<sup>90</sup> On this, in the surveys, women local leaders and representatives show a strong passion in continuing teaching rural women the role of participating in the family decisions, as explained by one woman local leader, “transition takes a time, it is a long journey, but we will continue to encourage women to actively participate in family decision-making.”<sup>91</sup>

These changes mentioned by these rural women regarding the improvement in the formal marriage have happened after the passage of the 2016 Law on family and persons in Rwanda. Law Number 32/2016 of 28/08/2016 on

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<sup>83</sup> Group interview, rural community, Karongi, West Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>84</sup> Interview, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>85</sup> Interview, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, June 2018

<sup>86</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>87</sup> Group interview, rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>88</sup> Group Interview, rural community, Burera, North Rwanda, July 2018

<sup>89</sup> It is the culture of Rwandans to lend out neighbours some household items such as a hoe, axes, jelly can, cooker among other

<sup>90</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>91</sup> Interview, rural community, Musanze, North Rwanda, September 2018

family and persons in Rwanda determines different aspects of the life of people living in Rwanda from birth to death. Articles 209 of this law regulates that both wife and husband are the head of the household, and both have equal responsibilities and have equal rights. Rwanda's law permits only civil monogamous marriages, excluding illegal or polygamous marriages, from household assets. The law has prompted spouses to register their homes, ensuring equal rights in accordance with the law. As a result, until 2015, about 70 percent of marriages had been already registered (Bayisenge, 2015).

The new law on family and persons in Rwanda has been praised by several women respondents and interviewees as a solution to family property conflicts. One woman explains: *“now the fight over family property has ended.”*<sup>92</sup> Women also say that polygamy in Rwanda has also been ended, given that a man is now legally married to one woman. And this has added to the women's value and respect in the family. The law abolishing polygamy in Rwanda has brought joy to many women in rural Rwanda *“You have no idea how a wife suffered when she had to be another woman. There was no value given to the second or third wife. You feel uncomfortable, unsafe. But now knowing that you are the only wife to your husband, you feel secure and valuable in the eyes of your husband and even in your family”.*<sup>93</sup>

Rural women reported that marriage registration has had a positive impact on marriage in rural Rwanda. Furthermore, women confirmed that Rwandan women are particularly respected in the family because they are also contributing to the family as members of the family. *“There is a new situation here; women too can make money. So now women's earned income has made men see things in different perspectives, they tend to lend value to women now since they [women] bring contributions to home.”*<sup>94</sup>

On this, women have experienced a shift in men's perception of women's roles in the home, as they now see them as contributing to the family and earning income, and some husbands are showing respect and value to their wives. On this, some women interviewees explain that contributing to the family income, some wives are no longer abused by their husbands, saying that women's income has released the stress of the husbands given that many husbands in rural areas were the sole income earners in the past, thus, they were frustrated and stressful, and the stress could lead many husbands in rural areas to hit their wives.

Overall, interviews and focus groups revealed that women have noticed two significant changes ‘**value**’ and ‘**respect**’ in the family and society. Rural women make it clear that the value and respect they have found in family and society, had started in their home. *“Everything started at home. If a woman is not first valued at home and then in the family, how does society value her? The husbands gave us value first, and then our families followed, and now our society has seen our value.”*<sup>95</sup> *“That is true. My neighbour is correct. It is not a society that has given us*

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<sup>92</sup> Group interview, rural community, Burera, North Rwanda, July 2018

<sup>93</sup> Group interview, rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>94</sup> Group interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>95</sup> Group interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

*the value, but the society has seen our value after gaining it in our homes, and as a result, the society has believed and trusted us enough to grant us responsibilities in public life.*<sup>96</sup>

Many rural women confirmed that women's value has encouraged the representativeness of women in politics. Some women explained that since Rwandan women started changing roles from domestic to business, it brought about a change in cultural perceptions as to what women can do in society. Furthermore, the gained value has earned them confidence. Some women in the focus group explain, *"we are truly valued in Rwandan society. Rural women have got some value that they can add to their nation then they gained confidence in themselves. What marks that is the fact that women now are found on every level of administration in our country."*<sup>97</sup> *"Before, only men counted, society did consider a woman as a human."*<sup>98</sup> *The life of a woman has changed that she is not now a mere household woman because she is not limited to where she wants to reach as long as she wants it. Women have become self-confident. And a confident woman makes herself be respected even by others.*<sup>99</sup> Rural women are now competing for prominent positions with men, assuming roles traditionally assigned to men, and men are now able to perform previously assigned tasks. *"Women are now more confident; they can contest for the same job with men."*<sup>100</sup> *Women and men's behaviors have changed at home- when there are absences when wives have to go to work or the meetings or training, husbands can take on new roles at home such as taking care of children, or other things, and that have brought development to the many rural Rwandan families."*<sup>101</sup> Rwandan women's economic independence and power have been achieved in their homes and society, with improvements seen globally, indicating a long-standing trend in their situation; *"the capacity building and self-reliance begin from home. It reached the national level and now it has reached the global level."*<sup>102</sup>

Many rural women emphasise the importance of winning value and respect from men, as they have not always been accepted as capable individuals. They said that the fact rural women are able to make decisions in their families or to give a man a suggestion has been a great battle rural women have won. *"We have come far and it was not easy, men did not accept us in the first place. When gender equality came, most men in this rural community felt that this law regarded urban people only. So, we had to fight for our rights."*<sup>103</sup> *"Many men saw this law as it has come to violate their rights"*<sup>104</sup> *"It was not easy to tell your husband that all of you were equal, he might beat you immediately. It required a lot of effort to explain this law to men in this rural community. Now this law has been understood by men and has already been implemented."*<sup>105</sup> Even though the journey is still long, rural women

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<sup>96</sup> Group interview, rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>97</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, August and September 2018

<sup>98</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, August and September 2018

<sup>99</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, August and September 2018

<sup>100</sup> Focus group, rural community, Huye, South Rwanda, August and September 2018

<sup>101</sup> Focus group, rural community, Huye, South Rwanda, August and September 2018

<sup>102</sup> Focus group, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>103</sup> Focus group, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>104</sup> Focus group, rural community, Nyamagabe, West Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>105</sup> Focus group, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, November 2018

appreciate men's understanding of gender equality in families, a victory for women local leaders and representatives who have made both genders aware of the law.

Regarding building confidence among rural women, women local leaders and representatives cited it as a major change in women's local authorities. It is argued that Rwandan women played a key role in restoring peace in Rwanda immediately after the genocide (Burnet, 2008; Hunt, 2017). Some of the exceptional things these women did, were to deal with the effects of the genocide and help the country rebuild, as many of them experienced rape during the genocide; 250,000 and 400,000 women were raped, with 66 percent of women (of those women who were raped) with HIV/AIDS).<sup>106</sup> As their experience during the genocide, they took the lead in reconstruction engaging in addressing the post-genocide consequences. In their communities, they took resettlement initiatives in helping to address the problems of the genocide survivors who were mostly affected by genocide including the displaced people, widows and orphans. Many of the families receiving them were headed by women (Burnet, 2008; Izabiliza, 2003). It is believed that the role these women played in peacebuilding led to the increasing female representation in decision-making and the execution of several legislative policies at all levels of governance in Rwanda (Hunt, 2017, Burnet, 2008, Longman, 2006; Izabiliza, 2003). The fact women have been given respect in society today has made them become confident and that will fulfill their responsibilities and improve their daily work.

Most women (if not all) in the focus groups were strong supporters of the president and the RPF party. They explain, *“women got value in society thanks to Kagame[president] our chairman for the RPF. He remembered us, while we had forgotten because of the history of this country.”*<sup>107</sup> *“I do not know much about gender quotas policy, I have witnessed the positive changes that the RPF party had brought us.”*<sup>108</sup> *I am 53, I can witness the leadership and the place of women before and after the genocide. There is a big change (laughs), all because our president Kagame gave us life. He made the society recognize the importance of women in the family and society.”*<sup>109</sup>

Some women in the focus groups were strong supporters of the president and the RPF party. They explained *women got value in society thanks to Kagame[president]. He remembered us, while we had forgotten because of the history of this country.”*<sup>110</sup> *The history of the male centered tradition and put women down under the men.*<sup>111</sup> *“I do not know much about gender quotas policy, but I have seen a lot of changes in the situation of women here.”*<sup>112</sup> *“I am 53, I can witness the leadership and the place of women before and after the genocide. There is a big*

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<sup>106</sup> AVEGA AGAHOZO, 1999

<sup>107</sup> Focus group, rural community, Rwamagana, East Rwanda, August and September 2018

<sup>108</sup> Group interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>109</sup> Group interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>110</sup> Group interview, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>111</sup> Interview, rural community, Muhanga, South Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>112</sup> Interview, rural community, Muhanga, South Rwanda, August 2018

*difference (laughs), all because our president Kagame and RPF gave us life. He made the society recognize the importance of women in the family and society.”*<sup>113</sup>

As described by several women throughout Rwanda, joint decision-making about family resources brought about greater harmony in the family and strengthened the love between wife and a husband. Some women in the focus group explained, *"Love has increased in the family because now the husband and wife can sit and discuss together. if you sat together you are not only talking about family issues you can talk about your marriage relationship, about your children's lives and care, then you think together, while in the past, husband thought and decided for the family alone, the family education and care for the children saw wives only, but now the situation has completely changed.”*<sup>114</sup>

Another woman said that women are now taking the lead in providing family solutions, some problems required money, wives solve them without waiting for husbands while in the past before the genocide, men were the main characters; *" nowadays, women have the potential to propose solutions to any issue. Moreover, given that women can now make money, they can buy some things in the house things like sugar, salt, and soap, a wife can buy these without waiting for the husband. While in the past this was done by men only, men were the only providers for the family".*<sup>115</sup>

Throughout the country, women showed pride given that they were involved in decision making over the household resources. Some elite rural women in Rwanda began involving themselves in family decisions after the 2003 Rwandan Constitution, which granted equal rights to husband and wife. Other women respondents explained that she noticed the changes since 2000 after when the government made various reforms in the laws governing marriage in Rwanda, where the law requires formal marriage for a wife and a husband so that they both have access to the family's property; *"nowadays, there's no difference between a wife and husband, we are all equal, we have the same right to family property as well as at home".*<sup>116</sup> *"In the family, our ideas are considered equally and given the same value.”*<sup>117</sup>

Women also explained that therefore this law, in the family, a girl didn't have the right to assume the role of succession in terms of family property or matters but now even girls can assume that role in the community. Also, a mentality was that a family of girls only meant that the family was going to go extinct, but now it's not the case. *"Things have changed. The family lives on even with girls only. "A woman had so little say over family assets or even simple tools, but now she can pretty much exercise 50 percent rights over family issues. Tying into that, before*

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<sup>113</sup> Group interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>114</sup> Group interview, rural community, Ngororero West Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>115</sup> Multiple interviews, rural community, Ngororero, Rusizi, Nyamasheke, West Rwanda, between June and September 2018

<sup>116</sup> Group interview, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, between June and September 2018

<sup>117</sup> interview, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, between June and September 2018

*the law of succession was that a man could have exclusive rights of family heritage succession but now, when a woman and man have been legal, they both are entitled to 50 percent over property, all equally.<sup>118</sup>*

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<sup>118</sup> Interview, rural community, Rusizi, West Rwanda, between June and September 2018



## WOMEN'S PUBLIC ROLES

### Women's voice

In most interviews and focus groups, women in Rwanda have transitioned from being forbidden to speaking in public and making policies, to participating in all levels of leadership. Despite limited legal knowledge in rural areas, they are exposed to topics on gender equality law and women's rights through local media. Many of these topics are provided by government officials focused on gender equality law and the promotion of women's rights in Rwandan society. Besides, through these local radios and televisions, the president's speeches centre on promoting women's rights. *"Every time we listen to the radio and television, we hear how our president always tries to push women's rights in the society asking all government institutions as well as private sectors to consider women and their rights."*<sup>119</sup> However, even these women say this, all women interviewees, and respondents nearly all women are convinced that Kagame is the source of the value given to women in post-genocide Rwanda. *"Value is what has given us a speech."*<sup>120</sup> *"After a woman gained back her voice to be heard, now she can sit at making decision table at home and in the community."*<sup>121</sup> During this research, across the countryside, some women and men referred to the president statements as a part of his visits to their communities. Many have stressed on women's rights to the family property, domestic violence elimination, equality, and women's empowerment. In an informal conversation with men, men said how the president has promoted women's rights especially those in rural areas. Some men revealed a traditional saying about women: *Uhagarikiwe n'ingwe aravoma* [whoever is protected by the leopard draws tranquillity] showing how Rwandan in these days are supported and protected, as explained by this man: *women are protected and supported, except that most of the laws are in their interest, but also our president always puts it to the front.* Throughout this field research, the saying: [*abagore bimirijwe imbere*] the Kinyarwanda saying, that women have been put ahead these days. All of this comes back to show that the social changes in terms of women's rights and their roles in society are seen in rural areas as having a significant link to the President.

### Women's financial independence

Rural women point out that a rural woman has found greater independence in the family and society. The women interviewees express joy over rural women's financial independence, a significant shift from their traditional dependence on men. Some rural women say that the 1994 genocide forced women to care for their families independently, limiting their ability to rely on husbands. This had led to increased independence. *"After the genocide, it had become an apparent reality that many families were only left with more females than men, that meant that they step up and take actions to raise economies of the family, and community as a whole and that testified that in family and community, women can run life with or without men."*<sup>122</sup> *"After the genocide, which left*

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<sup>119</sup> Interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>120</sup> interview, rural community, Muhanga, South Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>121</sup> Interview, rural community, Muhanga, South Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>122</sup> Group interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

*more women than men, women became independent working hard to provide for their families.*<sup>123</sup> *“A woman can boldly take a decision without fear of what the partner will think because she can handle financially without having to depend on the man.”*<sup>124</sup> *Wives no longer depend on their husbands for living like in the past, because women in rural areas nowadays are into paid jobs; many women have joined and opened accounts in informal credits and saving cooperatives, locally known as Ibimina and similar local associations in which they contribute some amount of money that they deposit on those accounts and later use the money generating to get credits or loans.*<sup>125</sup>

Many local women have started up their own business and are into commercial farming. During the interviews and focus groups, all women agreed that this has resolved the emergency problems due to a lack of resources within their families. Furthermore, women do not have to wait for men to give them money or buy clothes as in the past where women were expected to get new clothes just for an event of celebrations, today they are able to buy everything they need.

Women also revealed that the trend of female's economic autonomy in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide had had an impact on marriage as an institution. *“The economic changes and power autonomy has given a woman a base to start feeling like she can do more than traditional roles, and made men respect them in marriage.”*<sup>126</sup> *“Women having money has made marriage institutions more sustainable as women's money makes household management easier as she supplements man's capability, and her ability to make decisions separate from a man, also bridges a gap that could arise from a man's weakness as a woman sees things differently”.*<sup>127</sup> Throughout the country, many women noted that rural wives have become economically independent, thus they perceived the female's economic autonomy as one of the most significant changes in the last 25 years, given that wives had to depend on their husbands. As described by women interviewees and respondents throughout the country, a significant impact of trend of female's economic and power autonomy in the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide on marriages is that women having or being able to make money has had empowered themselves in sense that they do not always have to say yes to what a man decides at home. Also, that has brought independence in decision making. A woman can boldly take a decision without fear of what the partner will think because she can handle it financially without having to depend on the man. Respondents and participants in the interviews and focus groups consistently reported that a woman can make money, it means that the household survival doesn't have rights as this law provides for full rights to family assets, inheritance, and ownership within the formal marriage.

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<sup>123</sup> Group interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>124</sup> interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>125</sup> Group interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November

<sup>126</sup> Interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>127</sup> Group Interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

Throughout the country, women were convinced that women's financial independence has led to the respect and value of women in today's society. *"The fact that women have become independent financially; it has brought about respect and value to women in the family and society."*<sup>128</sup>

Some rural women interviewees indicated that women's financial independence has pushed their representativeness in politics. However, even though this is the case, it has been suggested that increasing women's representation and participation in public spheres has put women's life especially those young women in a dangerous situation. Evidence from the informal conversation with young women revealed that they are facing sex-based corruption in exchange for jobs. Even in the government institutions both in reserved seats and no reserved seats for women, women are being asked to provide sexual favors to enter these positions.

In some rural communities, young women believe that the promotion of women's rights and interests as a result of the government's gender quotas has become sex-based wherein many workplaces, women are being asked for sex in exchange for getting jobs or promotion. Many young women in different parts of the country reported this: *"a gender-based corruption is a serious problem here."*<sup>129</sup> *"Sometimes we are competing for a particular job, but the job is given to the one who gives bribes based-sex and those who have skills and experiences lack the opportunity."*

<sup>130</sup>Many young women across the country noted that they have negatively been affected by gender-based corruption, and it has held them back from engaging in the job markets.

Elite rural women accused hiring agencies in their area for providing sexual favors to young women they called young women [*abana bato*]. The Rwandan government has mandated gender equality in employment, but many male recruiters in Rwanda exploit this by calling female candidates to sleep with them after promising jobs. *"It has happened to me many times almost everywhere I apply for a job, I am asked first to sleep with the recruiter to get hired. If you asked others, they would tell you the same story. Sex corruption is taking another level, and it is hard to tackle it because you would find evidence."*<sup>131</sup> *"Furthermore, some rural women pointed out that given the government's pressure insisting that the employment institutions must consider female candidates first; thus, many employment agencies try to walk in the line of the government request in showing them that they have achieved the goal of gender equality at the workplace and that they are gendered. Some women explained; "these days if you read most of the job offers out there, you will see this line saying female candidates are essential for this job position."*<sup>132</sup> *"The idea of gender equality was good, it gives women chances to get hired, but it comes with advantages too, simply because most employment recruiters or bosses are males, so we have no chances then unless we provide."*<sup>133</sup> As a result, more females continue to be exposed to gender-based corruption. *"Now it is*

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<sup>128</sup> Group interview, rural community, Muhanga, South Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>129</sup> Group interview, rural community, Muhanga, South Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>130</sup> Group interview, rural community, Huye, South Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>131</sup> Interview, rural community, Rwamagana, East Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>132</sup> Interview, rural community, Rwamagana, East Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>133</sup> Interview, rural community, Rwamagana, East Rwanda, September 2018

*getting worse, the problem of gender-based corruption takes another level every day. We do not know how this is going to end.”<sup>134</sup> “The situation is increasingly affecting women in their search for employment.”<sup>135</sup>*

Transparency International Rwanda (TIR) reports gender-based corruption poses a threat to employment in Rwanda, particularly in public spheres where female employees are required to have sex with employers for job opportunities, and in education. Gender-based corruption is prevalent in higher education and universities, accounting for up to 65 percent, and local government institutions, suggesting it is more prevalent than common corruption in Rwanda. TIR suggests that gender-based corruption is disproportionately affecting females, who are the primary job seekers in Rwanda.<sup>136</sup>

### **Entrepreneurship and employment**

Some studies have indicated that Rwanda has made numerous changes in terms of women's roles since the end of the genocide (Burnet 2008; 2011; Kagaba 2015; Hunt 2017). Many rural women explain that since the end of the genocide, women's roles have shifted from domestic to the business world given that cultural perceptions that women's positions are in the home doing housework have changed completely.

Women doing business has helped them to develop themselves and their families, and the country. These women are contributing to husbands' incomes and can buy some property for the family such as house and land, while in the past, men were perceived as the sole income earners and owner of the family assets. This perception has however changed dramatically. This also allows them to maintain self-esteem and to move on to other important responsibilities in the country. *“The possibility of having money, property, and business have permitted women to even contest for more positions in leadership. It has given women strengths to rise and want to exercise more, but on top of that it has potential contributions on family well-being, solid family, and family development.”<sup>137</sup>*

As described by many women interviewees and respondents, many rural women have been trained to make crafts including piercing and sewing, and some women interviewed noted they have potential markets inside the country and abroad, where they are exporting their products across Africa, Asia, Europe and America.

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<sup>134</sup> Interview, rural community, Kirehe, East Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>135</sup> Interview, rural community, Gatsibo, East Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>136</sup> A study conducted by Transparency International Rwanda in 120 local government institutions in 2017. The report is also available here < <https://ombudsman.gov.rw/?Ruswa-ishingiye-ku-gitsina-iracyagaragara-mubigo-bya-Leta>>.

<sup>137</sup> Multiple interviews, rural community, Rwamagana and Gatsibo, East Rwanda, August 2018

Most interviewees and respondents report that they are working in agriculture, combining it with other jobs like retail and casual work. Some rural women in the focus group explain: *“Though you find many rural women work in tea, coffee or banana plantation or construction projects, or in retail trades but our main work is agriculture.”*<sup>138</sup>

*“Agriculture is what we all do. We grow food and we earn some money in agriculture.”*<sup>139</sup> *“No one in these rural areas who does not work in agriculture.”*<sup>140</sup> *“All of us farming is our primary business.”*<sup>141</sup>

Many women farmers interviewed said they mostly grow potatoes, beans, and bananas, and some of them are being transported in the cities of Rwanda and exported to the neighbouring countries such as Uganda, DR Congo, Tanzania, and Kenya. All women interviewed point out that they have always had a strong desire to be self-employed because they wanted to be independent financially as they were tired of asking for money. Women went on to explain that they had previously waited for their husbands to provide money for the family needs, and this has been changed today; a wife or husband is contributing to the family. Thus, rural women have been developed economically, and they can support themselves and their families without asking for help. *“Some of us would get a new cloth at Christmas, or sometimes you asked your husband for a new cloth or something else, he would hit you. My daughter, there is nothing good with dependency! But now (she smiled) we do not need to ask our husband anything, we have got a life. I will tell you now, I can buy clothes for myself and my children and my husband (laughs)... I can get myself whatever I need. I can pay school fees for my children. Now, I have a life, I have got a life”.*<sup>142</sup> *“Now rural women longer dependent on men for access to life like in the past, they are economically, emotionally and physically independent (with a smile). In the past, our men treated us as their slaves, because we depended on them, we belonged to them, we asked them for everything, they were source of everything for a woman to live, that's why they did not recognize our value in society – we were just useless, but they were useful because they provided for the family.”*<sup>143</sup>

As a result, many rural women are paying school fees for their children in good schools, they have bought their properties such as houses, domestic animals such as cows, piglets, goats, cars, and lands.

Women entrepreneurs in Rwanda are part of a group called Rwanda Chamber of Women Entrepreneurs, which has helped them to advertise their activities and their investments. A study by Capacity Assessment Report on women entrepreneurs in Rwanda in 2018<sup>144</sup> pointed out some of the reasons for women's commitment to start up their own business, including 86 percent of those women wanted to be self-independent; 83 percent were in business as a

<sup>138</sup> Focus group, rural community, Musanze, North Rwanda, August and September 2018

<sup>139</sup> Focus group, rural community, Musanze, North Rwanda, August and September 2018

<sup>140</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, July 2018

<sup>141</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, July and September 2018

<sup>142</sup> Interview, rural community, Muhanga, South Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>143</sup> Focus group, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>144</sup> Capacity Assessment report, 2018

profession while 45 percent were encouraged and supported by their husbands. The recent report of the International Finance Centre has shown that women now contribute 30 percent to Rwanda's total economy. However, the number of women entrepreneurs is still low, and the majority of women entrepreneurs are involved in small businesses, at 33 percent, while the number of women who engage in big business is only 1 percent. As indicated by the report by the United Nations for Women, Agriculture sectors yield one-third of the country's GDP and a large number of farmers are women living in rural areas, with 70 percent of women.<sup>145</sup>

However, even though the number of women entrepreneurs is still small, one would say that much has changed in the history of women in terms of the transformative lives compared to the long way from where they came from. More rural women are increasingly entering small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), contributing to poverty alleviation and providing daily cash for family needs.

One can say that even though the number of women is still small in large-scale projects, some women have suggested that they wish to expand their small businesses to larger profitable ventures, but that they also face obstacles that include endless domestic chores. These women went on to explain that many women, especially those women in rural areas believe that they have gained more practical skills that will help them run large projects. They also said that they are willing to innovate and expand their projects, but due to the large amount of time they spend in doing household chores, it is still a challenge to achieve it. However, these women believe that there is hope that it can happen in the near future because men have started to change the mindset that some men are helping women with household chores.

## **MEN'S PERSPECTIVES**

Some men expressed positive views about the recent changes in Rwanda, while others expressed negative reactions. Many rural men believe that domestic conflicts between wives and husbands stem from women who make allegations against their husbands and report them to women's meetings. Men often avoid bringing family issues to their wives' meetings due to their lack of involvement, *"family problems should be discussed within the family, why are women taking families out in their meetings, and yet men are not invited to these meetings."*<sup>146</sup> Men who object to the recent changes believe that changing gender roles in the rural setting should be reviewed and reapplied carefully given that the rural structure is rooted in traditional culture. On this question, some women explain that the main problem is that many men have not fully understood what the aim of the gender quotas policy is. *"Most rural males have not comprehended this policy, and this is where women face a challenge."*<sup>147</sup> Although

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<sup>145</sup> UN Women report, 2018 available here

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2018/10/feature-empowering-women-farmers-in-rwanda> <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/eastern-and-southern-africa/rwanda>

<sup>146</sup> Interview, rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>147</sup> Group interview, rural community, Nyaruguru, South, September 2018

women have indicated that economic independence has brought positive changes to their families, some women interviewed said that women's economic independence has also led to conflict in the family. For several men, this is the root of the conflict, *“there are a lot of conflicts going on in rural families thanks to the women’s economic independence”*.<sup>148</sup> Some spouses said that their wives behaved like patrons in the household, *“women no longer listen to men, because they feel that are independent they have money.”*<sup>149</sup> Elaborating on this point, some men said that wives do not listen to their husbands, because they feel they are above their husbands *“they do not listen to us these days, and they do not want us to have a say in our home because they think they have become more richer than us”*<sup>150</sup> *“Women these days want to make decisions in everything; they even want to have control over the men’s income.”*<sup>151</sup> Other men complain that some wives no longer want to sit with their husbands to discuss family problems, yet they are taking family problems outside in the meetings with other women. *“They do not want to talk with us about family issues as couples, but they want to take family issues to women's social platforms known as Umugoroba w’ababyeyi. And once they report you among these meetings, it ruins the male's reputation; everybody knows that you are a bad husband.”*<sup>152</sup> Some men in the focus group were very negative about the quota policy, *“So, what would happen if you favoured one gender? What had happened here, the government made women disrespect us. It is not empowering women we see here; it is just favoring women over men.”*<sup>153</sup> As a part of these fears, almost all of the young men interviewed point out that in the search for work, females ‘candidates are being favored over males. Some young men also said that though many of them have completed university, they have gone to the small business saying they have found it hard to get a job these days given that most employment opportunities are taken by females. *“When we compete for a job position against a woman, you can be certain that the job will be granted to that woman, regardless of her qualifications or experience.”*<sup>154</sup>

The increased opportunities provided to women in rural Rwanda has led to a growing dislike towards men. *“Look, women have taken all the jobs, they are everywhere, in every part, women are in the office, they are in business, they are in construction, they are in transport, they are in a mine, they are in farming... They are filling both female and male positions. Look around you, if you go to any office or any sector, you will see females; how many men have you seen there. No one, we are nowhere. We are left with nothing. No wonder, our wives call us useless these days.”*<sup>155</sup> *“The fact that women are given all opportunities including jobs, free offices, loans etcetera, for us husbands, we have already lost our consideration as head of the household. That’s where the disrespect comes from.”*<sup>156</sup> On this, some men explained that even if some of the local authority positions are incommensurable but the fact that women have to go outside and leave the house every day, it has become men's concern that women are behaving like professionals and full-time employees. Thus, at home, before the husbands felt threatened given that

<sup>148</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>149</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>150</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>151</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gicumbi, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>152</sup> Focus group, rural community, Musanze, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>153</sup> Focus group, rural community, Rusizi, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>154</sup> Focus group, rural community, Karongi, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>155</sup> Focus group, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>156</sup> Focus group, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda September 2018

some husbands are not working. One man explained, *“they are behaving like professionals, like full-time workers, they wear professionally. They have changed their behavior, their mindsets... the way they speak to us, we [men] feel that we are useless or incapable. They are over us, we have to admit.”*<sup>157</sup>. Some rural men reveal that they have not gone to Kigali (the capital of Rwanda), Most local leaders and representatives have attended training or conferences in Kigali. Many men in rural areas believe that it has changed the experience of many rural women in terms of thinking and behaving. These rural men also note that even though some men in rural areas are angry over women’s advancement, in some places, they respect these women and appreciate them as local officials. *“Rural men have a tendency to be mean. We can disregard these women's authority and what they're doing. They are, in many ways, superior to us. And we cannot deny that they make more money than we do. Besides cultural thinking, we appreciate them (women), and we must admit that.”*<sup>158</sup>

Although these males express outrage over favouritism shown to women as a result of the gender quota policy, some rural elite women attribute this assertion to rural men's lack of awareness about the policy. Some rural men point out that since Rwanda implemented a gender quota policy, men have expressed dissatisfaction with it. *“Men were dissatisfied with gender quota policy since its implementation.”*<sup>159</sup> *“Only educated men have understood it, other men complicate things and are fighting against it.”*<sup>160</sup> *“Many rural men see this policy as a tactic to take away their authority in the community and make women disrespect them. Yet this is not the case.”*<sup>161</sup>

Some rural women note that many men in rural areas still have archaic mentalities. *“Many males still believe that women cannot be leaders due to the Rwandan custom that a man must always be the 'head' of the family or community.”*<sup>162</sup> Some rural women remark that gender equality practice remains an issue in rural areas, where many men still believe that a woman's place is in the home and kitchen.: *“Culturally, a husband, father, or brother sees themselves as the 'head of the family', whilst a wife, sister, or mother is viewed as a 'helper'. This cultural idea still exists in many rural communities and is an impediment to the implementation of the gender quota policy.”*<sup>163</sup> *For many years, the traditional assumption that a woman cannot assume a man's place as a leader in society has persisted. It is really tough to reverse it.”*<sup>164</sup>

According to the 2018 UN Women report on women in Africa, Rwandan women continue to spend much more time on household chores than males.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Group interview, rural community, Rwamagana, East Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>158</sup> Group interview, rural community, Rwamagana, East Rwanda, November 2018

<sup>159</sup> Focus group, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda September 2018

<sup>160</sup> Group interview, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>161</sup> Group interview, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>162</sup> Group interview, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda September 2018

<sup>163</sup> Group interview, Nyamasheke, West Rwanda, September 2018

<sup>164</sup> Group interview, Rusizi, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>165</sup> UN Women report, 2018 available here

<https://africa.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/eastern-and-southern-africa/rwanda>

Some men in a focus group claimed that rural women frequently misunderstand the word '*value*', believing they don't behave as '*valued persons*'. "*The truth is that these women of ours are abusing the value they have been given. Their behaviour nowadays is uncontrollable; the way they speak, what they dress, and everything else is beyond comprehension. When they are out late and something could happen, they refer the situation to us [men]. Sometimes we have to escort them to avoid these difficulties; they don't respect themselves these days.*"<sup>166</sup>

Many rural men believe that the concept of gender quota policy in rural Rwanda needed extensive training and will take a long time to execute. "*Gender quota policy implementation will take decades.*"<sup>167</sup> As described by these men, the popular expression saying '*Umugore ni mutima w'urugo*: the woman is the heart of the family (home)' meaning that a woman's place is always in the home; is wrongly used in rural areas. "*We husbands want a wife to stay at home to do housework. It is not good for a wife to go outside.*"<sup>168</sup> These men go on to say that because rural Rwanda is heavily reliant on culture, the gender quota policy may take a long time to be successfully implemented in rural society. They also believe that in rural areas, because culture consists of a series of components that complement one another, failing to respect one of them will result in a cultural infringement in society. "*For example, dressing code is controversial in rural regions, religious mentalities are still an issue, and of course, late working hours for women lead to misunderstood understandings in society.*"<sup>169</sup> The same rural men note that these are cultural norms and values of rural society that cannot be eliminated.

On a positive side, Rwanda's gender quota policy has resulted in numerous good developments in rural community. Rwandan rural women's lives have been radically improved by improving their status and roles, as well as allowing them numerous rights in the home and in society. In rural areas, some men believe that women have been given an advantage over them and that women are abusing these privileges to disrespect men, which has enraged men and caused confrontations in some households. Many men in rural areas believe that the gender quota legislation has removed their position of power. However, rural women disagree, believing that this idea stems from Rwandan culture, in which rural men still believe that women should rely on men for their livelihoods and should not speak in public. They say that this culture is inextricably linked to rural civilisation and will be difficult to remove.

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<sup>166</sup> Focus group, rural community, Burera, North Rwanda, July 2018

<sup>167</sup> Focus group, rural community, Ngororero, West Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>168</sup> Group interview, Nyamasheke, North Rwanda, August 2018

<sup>169</sup> Interview, rural community, Nyamagabe, South Rwanda, November 2018

Rural men's negative attitudes towards women's advancement in Rwanda are growing. The data from men's perspectives contradicts contemporary norms of gender equality, but in the end, many rural men support women's growing engagement in the workforce, political realm, and commercial sector, and they recognise the benefits of gender equality to society progress. However, pockets of resistance persist, frequently based on cultural norms and traditions. Some men are afraid to publicly support their wives' advancement in order to avoid being viewed as inferior or bewitched by their spouses. For example, in separate off-the-record conversations I had with some rural men on the issue of gender quotas following one focus group, they revealed that nowadays, if you need any service in local government, you must treat a woman well because there are so many women in any administration that their voices are heard in the legislative process and are the ones influencing policy that affects everyone. “ *Despite public disagreement, men in rural areas value women's roles in the home. If you openly acknowledge that you favour these gender [things], other men would label you crazy, but deep inside, we know women are the breadwinners; it is true, Kagame (the president) has turned the tables on us; today women make more money than men, so how can you be against them? In public, we show that we are not on the same page, but at home, we, men, show humility and respect towards them.*”<sup>170</sup>

In rural communities, women's importance and role in family and community are widely recognised, despite ongoing hostility from men. While Rwanda has made significant progress in women's rights, ongoing efforts are needed to address lingering difficulties and improve knowledge and value of women's roles in the family and public spheres in rural Rwanda.

Overall, gender quotas have improved women's socio-economic condition in rural Rwanda. Key developments include increased female political representation, increased money, shifts in gender roles, and improvements in education and health. Gender norms have shifted as a result of women's participation in local government decision-making bodies. Economically, more rural women own land as a result of land policy and law in Rwanda, hence rural female farmers are progressively switching from subsistence farming to cultivating cash crops and adopting modern techniques, primarily through the organisations these women are part in. Rural women are empowered by numerous activities and campaigns led by female local leaders and officials, resulting in greater job opportunities and loan applications. More microfinance organisations offer small loans to women, allowing them to establish or expand their companies. In addition, there are village savings and loan societies in operation that offer community-based financial groups for women to save money and obtain loans. As a result, more women become entrepreneurs and businesswomen. Socially, women's political participation has resulted in a stronger emphasis on livelihood improvement, education, health, and overall well-being, and this shift in attitudes of women's skills and roles in society has resulted in greater acceptance of women in many professional and communal positions.

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<sup>170</sup> Focus group, rural community, Gakenke, North Rwanda, July 2018

Changes in education, such as increased primary, secondary, adult, and literacy education programs, as well as scholarship access, have had a substantial impact on the overall educational system. The rural lifestyle has evolved, with rural women demonstrating proficiency in speaking, dressing, eating, and socialising, showing a transition from isolation to civilisation.

However, constraints such as societal, historical, and political issues have hampered gender quota results in rural Rwanda. While rural women are pleased of their achievements as a result of the gender quota policy, rural men are dissatisfied with women's achievements, claiming that the program has forced women to assume positions of power. Traditional gender roles in rural Rwanda, such as patriarchy and economic reliance, have stopped rural men from comprehending gender equality. More so, lower literacy rates among rural men have also affected their understanding. Mostly, low education levels among men in rural Rwanda contribute to their lack of understanding of gender policy, as their reactions to women's socioeconomic empowerment differ from those of men in urban areas. According to Burnet's (2011) findings, urban males feel disadvantaged in comparison to women, resulting in men withdrawing from civic life, whereas women in local leadership roles are frequently exploited and unpaid, driving rural men to dissuade their wives from participating in politics. Ten years after Burnet (2011) did her research, this study no longer demonstrates exploitation and nonpayment in local leadership, as many rural women are paid or rewarded. Women's economic empowerment has made rural men feel useless, resulting to resentment and mistreatment of women. Despite the fact that rural men do not comprehend gender quota policy, some men respect women's contributions to family development but find it difficult to embrace this in public for fear of being mocked by their colleagues. Overall, the evidence demonstrates that Rwanda's gender quota policy has proven to be an effective tool for advancing women's socio-economic status and fostering inclusive progress.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined the impact of gender quotas on women's socio-economic empowerment in rural Rwanda. It has also identified women's participation, role, and impact in Rwanda's local leadership. The study also aimed to investigate the continuous evolution of cultural and social changes by revisiting Burnet's (2011) findings on the social and cultural implications of Rwanda's high levels of political participation for women. Burnet (2011) also

investigated some rural women, but this was not her main emphasis. While numerous studies written regarding the impact of Rwanda's gender quota on women in urban areas have found that the experience of women in urban areas has changed as a result of gender quotas. (Burnet 2008; 2011; Mageza-Barthel 2015, Debusscher and Ansoms 2013; Hunt 2017; Abbott and Malunda 2016; Kagaba 2015).

Gender quotas have been adopted worldwide to promote gender equality and boost women's representation in political and corporate leadership positions. Gender quota has resulted in increasing female representation in political offices, legislative changes, and a shift in public opinion, all of which challenge traditional gender standards. In the communal sector, quotas have resulted in increasing female representation on company boards, promoting diversity and improving decision-making processes. Gender quotas also ensure that qualified women are given opportunities to lead, which leads to improved financial performance. They also serve as role models for future generations, accelerating progress towards gender equality. However, quotas continue to suffer implementation issues, with some claiming they would lead to tokenism. However, the effectiveness of quotas is dependent on their effective implementation and enforcement, as well as a larger strategy that includes mentorship programs, work-life balance rules, and measures to combat gender biases.

Gender quotas have impacted gender relations and influenced policy decisions around the world. The general approach to adopting and implementing the gender quota system has already assured that improvements in women's political representation translate into tangible changes in gender relations, contributing to a more equitable society. Reserved seat quotas have been popular in Sub-Saharan Africa, with the goal of ensuring at least some female representation in political and governmental institutions. These quotas often range between 5 percent and 30 percent with Rwanda being a prime example, with women having a sizable number of parliamentary seats. Countries such as South Africa, Uganda, and Tanzania have implemented these quotas, resulting in higher female representation in parliament and cabinet. This has resulted in more inclusive policies on maternity health, girls' education, and gender-based violence. However, women in politics frequently confront gender-based discrimination, juggling professional and household duties, and limited access to political networks and resources. Despite these limitations, the implementation of reserved seat quotas in Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates a broader commitment to achieving gender equality and strengthening women in politics.

The study found that Rwanda's history, as well as the 1994 genocide, wreaked havoc on women's lives, to the point that women constituted the majority of Rwanda's post-genocide population. As a result, females were required to take on home obligations as well as positions in the community that were traditionally reserved for men. According to this study and others (Hunt, 2017; Burnet, 2015; Herndon and Randell, 2013; Kagaba, 2015; Bayisenge, 2015; Sharlach, 1999), Rwanda was a patriarchal society prior to the genocide, with men dominating women and women subordinate in both the home and society. Evidence from several studies and this study seems to point to the fact

that gender quota, in general, has several effective positive changes in women's real life and a few negative effects on Rwandan society.

The study also found that women's representation in decision-making has increased both locally and nationally. The gender quota policy, as well as related gender-sensitive legislation and regulations, have transformed the lives of women in rural Rwanda. Rwandan rural women have gained access to land, and it has long been recognised as a major source of income in rural Rwanda. Furthermore, these legislation granted women in both urban and rural areas the autonomy to enter paid occupations and have a say in their income, whereas men were previously responsible for determining women's income. Women were able to pursue employment in both public and commercial sectors, both in cities and rural areas. As a result, rural women have achieved economic independence. According to this study, more women in rural areas own land than in urban areas, and as a result, many rural women use land to meet economic and social needs, such as earning money and providing food for their families. As more women in rural Rwanda engage in commercial farming, their lives and experiences have changed significantly on a social and economic level. This has helped them get out of poverty, despite the belief in Rwanda that the majority of poor women live in rural Rwanda; figures on Rwanda's poverty rate provide promise for change.

The study also found that rural women have better access to education. Even though urban women are more literate, and male literacy remains greater than women's in rural areas, women's literacy in rural areas has improved significantly during the last twenty-five years. According to evidence from interviews and focus groups, rural women in Rwanda have advanced significantly over the last two decades, with many becoming more economically developed and independent. Almost all women respondents, interviewees, and participants identified women's economic independence as the most significant shift that occurred in a rural woman during the 1994 genocide. In 2009, Burnet (2011) investigated the impact of female politicians in Rwandan culture, both urban and rural, and discovered little evidence that the trend of female economic and power autonomy as a result of altering roles during the 1994 Genocide had transformed marriage as an institution. This study, however, discovered that women's economic and power empowerment has strengthened marriages by increasing mutual understanding and respect between couples, as women are no longer a burden to their husbands because they augment their husbands' income. Rural women saw women's economic independence in Rwanda as a positive transformation that had a substantial impact on the lives of all rural women. Only a few males felt it weakened marriage by removing masculine control.

This empirical research has also revealed that rural women are no longer subordinate as they once were, with many rural women becoming independent. Women's financial independence has resulted in more respect in their households. Many of the results from the interviews and focus groups support the fact that rural women have

become financially independent and have caused a visible change in marriage, that many wives have found a voice and value in their families because they are contributing to their families, which was not the case previously when men were the sole income earners. Interviewees, participants, and respondents highlighted the visible benefits of the quota and other government reforms that have changed women's lives, pointing out that all gender laws and policies were enacted to promote women's rights and roles in Rwandan society, and they have all positively impacted women. This study showed that Rwandan women's willingness to speak in public and participate in politics derives from their homes. Women's continued participation in politics, whether at the local or national level, begins at the household level, where women have been exercising power within their families, such as participating in decision-making and caring for their families, either alone or by contributing to their husband's income, giving them the experience and confidence to participate in public spheres. As demonstrated by the findings of this study, equal power relations between husbands and wives in the family have significantly strengthened marriage as an institution in rural Rwanda. It has been identified that in the family wives have participated equally in decision-making while in the past husbands made the decisions for the family on their own (Debusscher and Ansoms, 2013; Adekunle, 2007; Burnet, 2008; 2011). Women's independence has led to development, resulting in improved well-being in the household and its economic development.

Despite some disadvantages, gender quotas and other government reforms such as the gender equality law, the 1999 inheritance law, and the 2016 family and persons' law have resulted in significant changes for women's economic advancements, mutual understanding, and respect in the family, as well as women's public voices. As these findings show, these two regulations have had a significant impact on women's experiences in rural Rwanda. Women can now inherit in their families, which was never possible before 1994, thanks to inheritance laws. The 2016 law governing the person and family also grants women the right to equal participation in family decisions. This has provided women more economic liberty and promoted greater female representation in rural decision-making.

According to Devlin and Elgie (2008) and Debusscher and Ansoms (2013), many women in the national government have benefited greatly. Many female lawmakers have multiple possibilities to advance their careers and attend university, allowing them to earn greater incomes and receive more benefits. On the other hand, it has been stated that Rwandan women in local leadership roles are exploited and bear a double burden of unpaid work (Burnet 2011). This study discovers that, while some women in local government were formerly unpaid, only women local village leaders are now unpaid; nonetheless, they get some material incentives, such as a monthly stipend, to assist them in carrying out their daily obligations within their communities.

According to the findings, many women in rural Rwanda engage in a variety of daily activities, including subsistence agriculture, small-scale projects such as crop cultivation and local market trading, and casual work in tea or coffee plantations, construction sites, and water irrigation. These activities have resulted in women's economic independence because the majority of women in rural regions participate in these profitable occupations. According to this study, many local women leaders and representatives are interested in working in local government. Some women have stated that, despite the fact that some women local leaders and representatives are unpaid, they are willing to continue their political roles because many people in their communities trust these women and value their contributions to the population's well-being. This is what drives them to maintain their tasks even though they do not receive a pay cheque or other advantages.

Some rural men perceived positive aspects of the government's gender quotas and other programs of reforms, while other men had a negative view feeling that women are advantaged over men. Some rural men complained that the traditional norms that used to give men a position of dominance and give women a position of subordination have been undermined and that men have lost power in the family and community. Many men in rural areas, therefore, believe that women's economic independence has created conflict in many families in rural Rwanda. However, even though some negative changes have been mentioned during the study, women's economic independence, respect, and mutual understanding within the family in rural Rwanda and increased women's political representation in the local leadership have overall perceived as major changes that have occurred in rural society, get unpinned using gender quotas and associated gender-sensitive equality laws and policies.

The image of many women in rural Rwanda demonstrates that women's socio-economic development has had a numerous impact on their families and communities, allowing them to make decisions for themselves, their families, and society, which is generally applauded. The socioeconomic shift recognises the significance of women in decision-making in local leadership, with many rural women thanking local women politicians for being a voice for their problems and answers. The female leaders' regular interactions stem mostly from their proximity to one another and their frequent participation in women's groups. Rural women have discovered that the gender quota is the beginning of life in rural Rwanda; with a changing perspective and belief, everything falls into place. Despite positive improvements, women encounter paradoxes and issues, including family conflicts and gender-based violence, which they perceive as a new "*wooden stick*", initially injured but progressively adjusting..

Overall, while great progress has been made in improving women's rights and roles within the state and society, there are still GBV cases and family difficulties in society, primarily due to rural cultural beliefs. While the government has made significant progress in addressing GBV and family issues through legislative measures and

community support services, there are still challenges to changing societal attitudes, ensuring effective law enforcement, and providing comprehensive support to affected individuals and families. The government has continued its efforts to ameliorate these difficulties effectively by establishing an ongoing campaign awareness of laws against gender-based violence and cultural attitudes, as well as heavy sentences for violent offenders to prevent others from engaging in such activities. Voices of women local leaders and representatives, as well as ordinary men and women, demonstrated that positive progress has been made, although some men continue to believe that women should not lead men, a belief that women local leaders and representatives stated should develop.

Evidence from several studies and this study seems to highlight the fact that the issues of family disputes and gender-based violence remained in Rwandan society despite the use of gender quotas and associated gender-sensitive laws and policies that were put in place to prevent violence against women and family disputes in the household. Nearly all respondents, interviewees, and participants in this study linked GBV and family disputes to the culture that the rural society is tied to. The barrier of culture was something mentioned by all women and men in this study, explaining that despite the existence of quota policy and related laws and policies, the power and dominance of men over women has remained the same as they have been in society long before the introduction of gender quota policy. Rural women stated that it is still difficult to break free from cultural and traditional norms of men in the household and community, which are perceived as pure masculinity.

This was also a major hindrance to the rapid results of gender quota policy as narrated by women in this study. Women's stories in this study showed that the outcomes of the gender quota policy could have been more than what it is today. Family disputes which often resulted in domestic violence were translated into men's nature of being violent in the household to show their position and manhood and this cannot be changed by the law or policy. Men's perspective on the impact of gender quotas has shown that the gender quota policy has been a threat to their rights and their roles in society. Men claimed that men's positions and roles in the family and society were devalued as a result of the gender quota policy. Thus, if men see the policy in this way, the explanation behind this perception would be to kill the gender laws and policies setting out their way of living which could be the old lifestyle which is always against the new law and new life. However, as explained by women interviewees, respondents, and participants, the men's contradictions over the gender quota policy and the old lifestyle have not prevented Rwandan women from moving forward. Thus, the empowerment of Rwandan women in the household, in the community, and in society, have overall improved greatly despite the cultural challenges and problems these women have to overcome.

Despite these challenges, the implementation of gender quotas in rural Rwanda has had the potential to transform communities, leading to more inclusive and rightful development.

The Rwanda case definitely is a good example of how quota systems can empower marginalized groups. It is clear from my findings that Rwanda demonstrates that effective leadership for change is a process that occurs at various societal levels. The interactions of women, local leaders and representatives, and ordinary women and men show the victories about the gender quota policy. At a strategic level, it has become a tool to launch women in leadership, a platform to display their value, which was culturally caught up. Particularly, gender quotas in rural Rwanda have had significant social, political, and economic implications. The system has not only allowed women to participate in decision-making processes but also challenged traditional gender norms, the norms that had been confined to them for a long period. Evidence suggests that rural women leaders and representatives prioritize issues directly affecting women and families and improve overall community welfare. In contrast to urban areas, where women in the national government are often perceived as prioritising their own interests over their constituents (Debuscher and Ansoms, 2013). Evidence from surveys, interviews, and focus groups confirms that Rwanda's post-genocide policies and laws were influenced by the realities of its citizens, primarily women, who facilitated the policy and law adoption and implementation and societal changes, rather than through individual transformation or political party. It also refutes the belief that Rwanda is a single-party state ruled by a single person, President Kagame, who is solely responsible for enacting the law in Rwanda (Longman, 2006).

More importantly, caseworks these women focus on most of the time are related to women and community in general, something that also contradicts that these women are party tools, but rather focus on broader issues. Also, many national laws have been approved based on the opinions and ideas of women in grassroots leadership (Mwambari, 2017; Hunt, 2017). It is those grassroots women ideas and opinions which transcended local communities, significantly influenced national policy and implemented by the RPF and President Paul Kagame (Mwambari, 2017).

Overall, Rwanda's progress in women's rights and societal standards is incomplete, which is why many rural Rwandan women continue to confront issues such as domestic abuse and poverty in their families and communities. Furthermore, traditional beliefs among men continue to undermine female leadership in public, whereas women's economic empowerment has brought happiness to the household because they now have something to contribute to the family, significantly increasing the value of women in Rwandan rural society.

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