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WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING: A RWANDA SCENARIO

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ABSTRACT

Rwandan women have given new status as a world leader in gender equality, having achieved a 56% majority in Parliament chamber of deputies according to the 2011 report GMO. Rwanda women have reached this level of political empowerment for many reasons, including the current government's

policy will of promoting gender equality in the public sphere and also new Constitution (2003) that stipulated that women should constitute 30% in all leadership positions in the country. Highlighting women's roles in the political leadership in Rwanda, is part of encouraging Rwanda government to continue in that way because it is good politics of social inclusion where everyone is looked as part of country development without any form of discrimination. Women parliamentarians are not only encouraged by Rwanda leadership in the way of promoting laws that protect women against gender-based violence, but also in non-governmental organizations for the purpose of rebuilding and unifying the country destroyed by the 1994 genocide against Tutsi. Women's participation in national govern-



ment has created self confidence among Rwanda women as well as translated into empowerment in different field of social life.

KEYWORDS: Women, decision making, Rwanda..

INTRODUCTION:

A nationwide program to mainstream Gender in all national development programs and activities was initiated by the Government of Rwanda immediately after the emergency period that

followed the tragic genocide of the Tutsi of 1994. The change that Rwanda wanted concerning promoting and empowering women was firstly manifested in the new Constitution (2003) that stipulated that women should constitute 30% in all leadership positions in the country, and the establishment of the National Women Council (CNF). This was also followed by establishing Women Affairs, which was later changed to become the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), establishing the Gender Monitoring Office (GMO) in the country, passing several policies and enacting laws that reinforce the commitment to promote Gender Equality and women empowerment in all sectors of life in Rwanda.

Achieving development for all requires formulation of inclusive policy that recognizes the role that gender analysis plays in determining outcomes for women and men in the community. Having access to updated and reliable gender statistics is essential in the elimination of gender blindness in the formulation of policies. It is from the above background that the National Institute of Statistics (NISR) and the Gender Monitoring Office (GMO) in collaboration with UN Women / UN Delivering as One (DAO) embarked on establishing a comprehensive Gender Statistics Framework (GSF) for Rwanda which will result in Gender Statistics Publications highlighting the status of gender equality in key development sectors. The aim is to encourage policy debate in particular around gender gaps and discrimination but also to capture good practices by providing evidence.

The way President Paul Kagame sets works after the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi, it was to create an environment that encourages women to pursue their ambitions and gain skills and experience. But also, he used to promote gender equality and he sends a clear social signal to Rwandans of both genders and all ages about the country's evolving norms.

One major improvement has come in the leadership of Rwandan women, who have made history with their newly vital role in politics and civil society. No longer confined to positions of influence in the home, they have become a force from the smallest village council to the highest echelons of national government. Understanding how and why such a transformation occurred offers not just an opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments. It also provides lessons for other countries struggling to overcome histories of patriarchy and oppression.

Rwandan women have become a force from the smallest village council to the highest echelons of national government.

Rwanda's catastrophe was the nadir of decades of violence and prejudice. People in the area had traditionally drawn distinctions among themselves based on socioeconomic status and occupation, but Belgian colonists treated the differences as immutable ethnic characteristics and issued national identification cards accordingly. A perilous imbalance of opportunity and institutionalized exclusion followed, initially privileging the area's Tutsi minority and causing deep resentment among the Hutu majority. When the Hutus eventually came to power, they reversed the dynamic. Pogroms and fierce discrimination throughout the late 1950s and through to the mid-1970s caused an exodus of Tutsis to neighboring countries, with a large portion of the exiled population ending up in Uganda.

Fighting for a more secure place in their adopted home, many of these Rwandan exiles joined the 1980s rebellion that eventually installed Yoweri Museveni as Uganda's president, even holding principal positions in the officer corps of what became the Ugandan army. But members of the Rwandan Diaspora continued to seek a return to their homeland, founding the Rwandese Alliance for National Unity in 1979 and its successor organization, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, in 1987. Paul Kagame, a Rwandan refugee who had served as an intelligence officer in the Ugandan army, took command of the RPF's military wing in 1990. Kagame's tenure as Rwanda's leader has been highly

appreciated by many as a leader who in short time helped Rwandan to gain hope after long struggle of freedom and liberty. Today, in Rwanda Corruption is at low percentage, life expectancy has increased from 48 years to 58 over the last decade, and infant mortality is dropping rapidly. Paul Farmer of the global health organization Partners in Health contends that he gets more done in Rwanda than anywhere else in the world.

The rising status of Rwandan women is a particular triumph. Half of the country's 14 Supreme Court justices are women. Boys and girls now attend compulsory primary and secondary school in equal numbers. New, far-reaching laws enable women to own and inherit property and to pass citizenship to their children. Women are now permitted to use their husbands' assets as collateral for loans, and government-backed funds aimed at encouraging entrepreneurship offer help to women without familial resources. Established businesswomen are leading members of Rwanda's private-sector elite. And the advance of women in the political sphere has received global attention. In 2000, the country ranked 37th in the world for women's representation in an elected lower house of parliament. Today, it ranks first.

Most Rwandan officials, including those spearheading the programs, are quick to direct credit to the top of the hierarchy: Kagame tightly controls Rwandan public policy. With dogmatic attention, Kagame has appointed gifted, articulate women to key cabinet positions, personally insisting on a critical mass of women in governance. When I questioned him about why he prioritizes female representation, he harked back to being a 17-year-old activist in exile, organizing for his people's rights. How, he asked, could he exclude women's rights?

Women in the RPF (now the country's ruling political party) also point out that many of today's leaders were raised by single mothers in the pre-genocide refugee camps. The hardships these young widows faced as a result of exclusion from their country stayed with their sons who were building the movement. As John Mutamba, an official at the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, told the researcher Elizabeth Powley in 2003, "Men who grew up in exile know the experience of discrimination. Gender is now part of our political thinking. We appreciate all components of our population across all the social divides, because our country has seen what it means to exclude a group."

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The way Kagame sets works after the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi; it was to create an environment that encourages women to pursue their ambitions and gain skills and experience. But also, he used to promote gender equality and he sends a clear social signal to Rwandans of both genders and all ages about the country's evolving norms.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, strong women in Rwandan politics were demonized and portrayed as undermining the country's traditions. Repression and rape became more common. As civil war loomed, extremist cartoons depicted Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, a Hutu, as promiscuous and a threat to the nation. According to the anthropologist Christopher Taylor, Uwilingiyimana's murder on the first day of the genocide owed as much to her being a woman as it did to her being an outspoken member of the political opposition.

A few months later, as génocidaires fled over the border to Congo, Rwanda lay in ruins: churches and schools had become massacre sites, roadsides had become open graves. The survivors faced the tormenting task of rebuilding a country in which every semblance of normalcy had vanished. The RPF government went to work amid piles of corpses, no running water, erratic electricity, and offices looted to the last piece of paper, focusing first on the cleanup and then on reestablishing political structures. The administration had little institutional knowledge to draw on, as most previous officials had fled or

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been killed and the replacements had minimal governance experience. Before the genocide, for example, Rwanda had some 785 judges. Only 20 survived. And when the Transitional National Assembly was created in November 1994, none of its 74 members and only five of its staff had participated in the prewar parliament.

The government, in short, had the obligation and the opportunity to reconstruct the country's institutions from top to bottom. Members of the RPF's executive committee, deployed far and wide, were expected to initiate programs as they saw fit.

Women played key roles at the grass-roots level of reconstruction as well, applying their existing proficiencies in new ways: mothering expanded to include caring for homeless children, managing households encompassed supporting widows, cleaning evolved to construction.

Facing ruin, many men seemed debilitated, while most women recognized that they had no alternative but action in order to preserve their families and rebuild.

The Rwandan society is characterized by a patriarchal social structure that underlies the unequal power relations between men and women, boys and girls. These unequal power relations are translated in male's dominance and women's subordination.

The gender-based discrimination and consequent inequalities were exacerbated by changes in the economic and social structures that were ushered in with the advent of colonial rule. The abrupt shift from subsistence to a monetary economy based on paid employment and a formal education system, weakened women's position relative to that of men. In particular, it weakened their bargaining position on matters concerning their access to, and control over resources and the degree of their level of participation in the development process.

The 1994 genocide left behind unprecedented distortions in social relations and exacerbated the already existing gender imbalances and inequalities. However, one of the most far-reaching effects of genocide and war is a change in gender roles. This is illustrated by the fact that today, women head 34% of households in Rwanda, a relatively new trend in the Rwandan society. The post-genocide period has been also characterized by women performing non-traditional roles such as decision-making, managing financial resources, building households and roads, with minimum capacities to take on those roles. For the first two years after the genocide, Rwanda's adult population was up to 70 percent female, due to the massacre of so many men and the flight of the killers. But women didn't relinquish their clout even when gender proportions became more balanced over time, as former combatants and exiled populations returned. The focus on men's aggression toward women began soon after the genocide, during which hundreds of thousands of women and girls were sadistically gang-raped or held as sex slaves, and often subsequently mutilated. Activists and academics, backed by international rights groups, demanded that rape be prosecuted as "an act of genocide" at the UN-backed International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. It was, and the legal scholar Kelly Dawn Askin called the subsequent 1998 conviction of the local official Jean-Paul Akayesu "the most important decision in the history of women's jurisprudence."

METHODOLOGY

The present study is designed to assess the role of women in decision making in the Republic of Rwanda, the world champion's of women representation in parliament. The aim of this study was to highlight gender gaps in other public institutions but also encourage government to increase number of women in other institutions as it has done in parliament chamber of deputies. The study is based on secondary data (Reports, Journals and Website information) and is based on Descriptive method.

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STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The comparative analysis of gender representation in different institutions was carried out with the help of tables with simple statistical calculation. They indicate the variation of representation of gender in different institutions.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To make a comparative analysis of gender representation in public institutions in Rwanda.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA:

Institutions /position	Percentage of men	Percentage of women
civil servants	54.5%	45.5%
Central Government	58.3%	41.7%
Ministers	71.4%	28.6%
State Ministers	33.3%	66.7%
Permanent Secretaries	50.0%	50.0%
Ambassadors	76.2%	23.8%
DG and ES of Public Institutions	84.3%	15.7%
Judges of Supreme Court	57.0%	43.0%
Judges of The High Court	75.0%	25.0%
Judges of High Commercial Courts	57.0%	43.0%
Senators	65.4%	34.6%
Deputies chair standing committees	63.6%	36.4%
Deputies	43.7%	56.3%
Agencies Commissions/Public Institutions	66.6%	33.4%
Government Projects ⁴	63.5%	36.5%
Coordinators Government Projects	74.4%	22.6%
Province Level ⁵	75.7%	24.3%
District Level ⁶	63.5%	36.5%
Mayors of Districts	90%	10.0%
Vice Mayors Economic Affairs	83.3%	16.7%
Vice Mayors Social Affairs	16.7%	83.3%
Executive Secretaries of Districts	93.3%	6.7%
Sector Level ⁷	64.4%	35.6%
Sector Executive Secretaries	90.9%	9.1%
Cell Executive Secretaries	62.3%	37.7%
Primary Education ⁸	50.1%	49.9%
Heads of Public Primary Schools	70.9%	29.1%
Nine Year Basic Education ⁹ (9YBE)	53.7%	46.3%
Secondary Education ¹⁰	69.3%	30.7%
Heads of Public Secondary Schools	83.3%	16.7%
Higher Education ¹¹	69.2%	30.8%
Rectors in Public Higher learning Institutions	94.1%	5.9%
Vice Rectors Academic Affairs p/p Higher learning Institutions	95.0%	5.0%
Vice Rectors Admin/Finance p/p Higher Learning Institutions	94.7%	5.3%
Health Centers ¹²	41.4%	58.6%
Hospitals ¹³	43.2%	56.8%
Hospital Directors	95%	5.0%
Specialist Doctors	87.6%	12.4%
Generalist Doctors	81.8%	18.2%

Sources: Civil Servants Census, NISR, 2010 and Gender Baseline in Four Sectors, GMO, 2011

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF FOUNDINGS

The data presented in this paper have been sourced from the main data set of the civil servants census and the gender baseline. It provides a viable benchmark situation on the gender status in the Public Sector. The statistic shows that 54.5 % of civil servants in Rwanda are men and 45.5 % are women – the sector is successfully complying with the Governments' commitment to promote women's participation in decision making. At the level of high decision making organs gender equality is improving– women make up above 40 % of Ministry Permanent Secretaries and Supreme Court Judges and above 30 % of Senators and Deputies Chairing Standing Committees. However positions traditionally occupied by men are still male dominated; for example 90 % of all District Mayors are men and 83.3 % of Vice Mayors of Economic Affairs as well, while 83.3 % of all Vice Mayors of Social Affairs are women. Key positions, such as heads of learning institutions, hospital directors and senior officers of the police force to mention a few, show big gender gaps with very few women. In education the gender gaps increase with the level; primary education employees are equal numbers men and women but in secondary and higher education men occupy 70 % of the posts.

CONCLUSION

Across the country, there are many evidences which show that women have been involved in the activities that promote social, economic and political domains and contribute to rebuild the country destroyed by the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi, but the journey is still long to overcome problems which women encountered from many years ago, where much efforts is needed also to increase the number of women in other public institutions as stipulated by Rwanda new constitution of 2003. If women are well represented, they will enjoy full rights and glory in Rwandan Society and this will be an example even for other countries in the world for their sustainable development. President Paul Kagame has said that: 'How can we develop our country if we leave half of the population behind?' And he is right." So, let other countries across the world follow the good example of Rwanda.

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