

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON
DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

6th – 8th DECEMBER 2005 NAIROBI KENYA

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING
WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

CASE STUDY OF RWANDA

Prepared by: Mr. John MUTAMBA MBA (MsM)

CONSULTANT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Objectives

Methodology

Chapter I

BACKGROUND

1.1 General and Historical Overview

1.2 International Framework

1.3 National Development Framework

1.4 Underlying Causes of the Genocide

1.5 Status of Women in Rwandan Society

Chapter II

SITUATION ANALYSIS OF WOMENS' PARTICIPATION
AND DECISION-MAKING IN GOVERNANCE

2.1 The Role of Women in Reconstruction and Peacebuilding

2.2 Government Efforts to Enhance Participation

2.3 The Role of Female Leadership

2.4 Sensitizing the Population

2.5 Women's Participation in Gacaca Courts

2.6 Women and Decentralization

Chapter III

IMPACT OF WOMENS' POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ON THE
CONDITION OF WOMEN

Chapter IV

CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND STRATEGIES FOR
SUSTAINABILITY

4.1 Challenges

4.2 Lessons Learned

4.3 Strategies for the Way Forward

4.4 Conclusion

ANNEX

Resource persons interviewed

Bibliography

Acronyms

APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
CBO	Community Based Organizations
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
GNU	Government of National Unity
ICT	Information Communication Technology
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MNRD	National Revolutionary Movement for Development
NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
RALGA	Rwandan Agency for Local Government Associations
RPA	Rwandese Patriotic Army
RPF	Rwandese Patriotic Front

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The government of Rwanda has demonstrated political commitment at the highest level of leadership in pursuit of its goal of promoting gender equality in democratic governance and political decision-making. This commitment by the RPA government, which came to power in the elections following the 1994 genocide, is to transform Rwanda into a peaceful and prosperous country where the rule of law and human rights are respected.

The participation of Rwandan women in post-genocide peacebuilding and reconstruction at the national, local and community levels has had a significant impact leading to major outcomes such as the enacting of a gender-sensitive constitution, the highest representation of women in parliament of any government in the world, and public sector reforms.

The role of key players such as the Ministry of Gender and Women Promotion, National Women Councils, Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians and the Women's Civil Society Movement, combined with substantial resource flows from donors, has been instrumental in generating momentum for Rwanda's progressive gender equality platform.

Important lessons from the Rwandan experience are numerous:

- ⇒ The need to turn political commitment into action; concrete measures have to be undertaken to turn political will into tangible results
- ⇒ The importance of building and strengthening partnerships between government and civil society, and men and women
- ⇒ The need to fully involve grassroots women's groups in order to reinforce a sense of community ownership.
- ⇒ The importance of harnessing positive cultural values that promote gender equality
- ⇒ The importance of building the capacity of institutions and persons to spearhead gender mainstreaming to ensure sustainable gender equality
- ⇒ The importance of continuous support and political commitment in order to strengthen women's participation in political decision-making
- ⇒ The need for continuous multiple strategies using all available channels, such as educational institutions and media, to raise awareness and combat resistance to change.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Study Context

Rwanda is emerging from one of the most destructive conflicts in modern history. Despite that, the country has swiftly moved from a failed state to a re-established nation which now serves as a model of accomplishment in a politically unstable and economically challenged continent. Rwanda's achievements provide an important lesson: There is no crisis or challenge that is insurmountable if the leadership and the population share a commitment to creating a better society and working together towards common goals.

The country is among the vanguard of nations making progress in gender equality and women's empowerment. It is therefore pertinent to analyze the progress that has been made and the factors behind Rwanda's success.

Objectives

This study has the following objectives:

1. To analyze the progress and impediments to achieving gender equality in Rwanda.
2. To present Rwanda's experience as a lesson to other countries emerging from conflict on how best to advance the participation of women in government and post-conflict reconstruction.
3. To propose additional measures to be undertaken in order to make the participation of women in political decision-making sustainable.

Methodology

The study will involve reviewing documentation and conducting in-depth interviews with key players such as persons from government, civil society, UN country teams, bilateral and multilateral agencies.

Chapter I. BACKGROUND

1.1. General and Historical Overview:

Rwanda is a country located in the Great Lakes Region of Africa with a total area of 26,000 km² and a very high population density of 400 inhabitants per km. It has a total population of 8.2 million (2002 population census) of which 52.2% are females. Excluding children ages 15-19, the percentage of women rises to 57% in the 20-44 year age group, and to 58% in the 45-64 year age group. In different terms, in the 25-29 year age group, there are only 69 men per 100 women. Rwanda ranks among the least developed countries, with a per capita income of \$250 per year. Its gross domestic product fell by 50% in 1994, and it has still not attained pre-war levels of economic activity. Poverty increased

dramatically; in 1993, 53% of households were under the poverty line, but by 1997 the percentage had risen to 70%.

Rwanda's history has shaped the role women have played at different periods. Rwanda's pre-colonial history is marked by a centralised system of administration under the monarch (umwami) assisted by chiefs (abatware) and advisors (Abiru). The queen mother (umugabekazi) played a crucial role in state matters as the chief adviser to her son.

Rwanda's existence as a nation state dates from the 11th century. Rwandan society comprises of three social groups, the Bahutu, Batutsi, and Batwa, who despite having much in common have had bloody conflicts. According to the 1991 census, 91.7% of Rwandese were Hutus, 8.2% were Tutsis and .1% were Twas. They speak one language, Kinyarwanda, occupy the same geographical areas, and constitute 18 clans which have intermarried extensively. During the pre-colonial era, clan membership was the defining component of identities and rivalries

From 1957 onwards, Rwanda experienced massive social and political upheavals, resulting in large-scale massacres of Tutsi people in 1962, 1967 and 1973. The post-independent regimes were characterised by the institutionalisation of ethnic polarization of the population, regional and religious based discrimination, political repression, economic hardships and large numbers of refugees. This preceded the 1990 civil war that was started by the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), a Tutsi-dominated rebel group comprised mainly of Rwandan exiles based in Uganda and led by Paul Kagame, the current President of Rwanda.

From 1990 to April 1993 there were many reform initiatives aimed at restoring peace, democracy, human rights and national unity, including peace talks in Arusha Tanzania, and the signing of a peace pact between the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND) government and the RPF. Political parties were allowed to operate and Agathe Uwilingiyimana became the first women prime Minister appointed in Rwanda.

1.2. International Framework

The government of Rwanda is a signatory to many international mechanisms to enhance gender equality and women's rights. These include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) the African Charter on Peoples Rights and Women's Rights and the African's Union's New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) programme, which has as a long-term objective the full and effective integration of women in political, social and economic

development. Recently the country submitted its progress report in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action. Rwanda is the second country to be reviewed by its peers under the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) mechanism. One of the areas of governance where progress has been significant is gender equality in decision-making and governance.

1.3. National Development Framework

Through extensive consultations with different sectors of Rwandan society on the future of the country after the 1994 genocide, the government identified bad governance as a root cause of the terrible experiences of the last 40 years. The conclusion of this consultative exercise was to formulate a policy, legal; constitutional and institutional framework that would guarantee good governance as the foundation of political stability and economic prosperity. Among the key policy frameworks that were developed as guiding principles include the following:

- ⇒ Vision 2020: A long-term development initiative to build a prosperous society, devoid of any form of discrimination, and integrating gender-equality mechanisms.
- ⇒ The Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS): A medium-term development strategy which contains important elements on gender equality, such as the National Gender Policy which was adopted in 2003. One of its core principles is that all local government plans include a gender equality component.
- ⇒ The National Constitution: Promulgated on 4th June 2003, it strongly reinforces the principle of gender equality. It decrees a quota of 30% of women in decision-making positions.
- ⇒ Decentralization Policy: The objective is to promote good governance and democracy through the effective participation of the population in decision-making that affects their lives.

1.4. Underlying Causes of the Genocide

The Rwandan genocide in 1994 was preceded by a civil war and an ideology of exterminating batutsi that went on for several decades. The genocide was orchestrated and fomented by the government but perpetrated in large part by the civilian population. Analysts have divergent views as to the actual causes of the Rwandan genocide but all are in agreement on the issue of bad governance policies of discrimination and wanton abuse of human rights being the major root causes. The genocide shredded the country's social fabric and created huge challenges in terms of meeting the needs of hundreds of thousands of orphans and widows and internally displaced people. The civil war and genocide had a disproportionately strong impact on

women, as rape and genocide survivors, widows, heads of households, and caretakers of orphans.

1.5. Status of Women in Rwandan Society

Rwandan society has historically been essentially patriarchal. Women faced official legal discrimination in Rwanda. Many laws blatantly discriminated against women. For example, a royal (pre-colonial) law denying women the right to engage in any commerce without her husband's permission was only repealed in 1992. Today, women in Kigali regularly engage in commerce, but in rural areas women often do not know that the law was modified and are therefore unwilling to openly do so. In the Civil Code and the Family Code the husband was identified as the legal head of household, and in the case of disagreements over parental authority, the father's will automatically prevails.

Because the Rwandan civil code made no provision for regulating property in the context of marriage, women's property and inheritance rights were governed by customary law. Women had only usage rights over property, be it household goods or land, while the actual ownership remained in the hands of her husband or father. In addition, women could not inherit property or land, which frequently left them unable to provide for themselves and their families after the death of a father or husband. Women's access to land and property is also particularly important in the context of Rwanda's post-conflict reconstruction. Many women were widowed or orphaned and, because of customary law barriers, were unable to claim their father's or husband's land and property. Women returning from refugee camps, often without male family-members, were left without any legal channels through which to reclaim their family's property.

Women played a predominantly domestic role while men monopolized the political arena. Political decision-making at the community and national levels was almost exclusively the province of men. With the consequent unequal power relations, gender-based discrimination continued unabated. However, interviews with a cross-section of Rwandese reveals that within the Rwandan culture there existed positive examples of women enjoying relative autonomy in managing domestic resources and playing a critical role in advising men, such as the institutions of queen mother,.

During the colonial period, the introduction of modern education and the abrupt shift from a traditional to a monetary economy further disadvantaged women. The post-independence regimes were characterised by considerable progress in the economic and social sectors but governance continued to adhere to discriminatory policies based on ethnicity, gender and other factors. A centralized system of government reinforced women's

marginalisation in politics and decision-making processes. In response to international women's conferences, a women's movement emerged comprising of NGOs and women's associations with the shared objective of promoting women's rights, despite there being negligible political will on the part of the state to forward this agenda. However, after 1994 the situation began to improve in terms of women's participation in decision-making organs. The proportion of women in relation to men in decision-making posts within the executive branch is summarised in the synoptic table below

Year	Gender	Minister and Secretary of state	Secretary General	Member of Parliament	Senator	Prefet	Burgomaster Or District Mayor
1995	M	19	17	59	-	10	142
	W	2	5	11	-	1	0
	%W	9.5	22.7	15.7	-	9.1	0.0
1997	M	23	23	59	-	11	142
	W	2	4	11	-	1	3
	%W	8.6	14.8	15.7	-	8.3	2.1
1999	M	19	14	59	-	12	153
	W	2	7	15	-	0	2
	%W	9.5	33.3	20.3	-	0.0	1.3
2000	M	18	16	54	-	12	151
	W	3	5	14	-	0	2
	%W	14.3	23.8	26.0	-	0.0	4.0
2001	M	21	16	58	-	12	151
	W	4	5	16	-	0	12
	%W	16.0	23.8	27.6	-	0.0	1.3
2002	M	21	16	57	-	11	151
	W	4	5	17	-	1	4
	%W	16.0	23.8	29.8	-	9.1	2.6
2003	M	19	16	41	14	11	106
	W	9	2	39	6	1	2
	%W	32.1	11.1	48.8	30.0	9.1	1.9

Chapter II. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AND GOVERNANCE

2.1. The Role of Women in Reconstruction and Peacebuilding

The 1994 genocide shook Rwandan society to its foundation. The post-genocide period was characterized by a total breakdown of basic services and widespread insecurity in rural areas. The consequences were so devastating and challenging that every surviving Rwandan adult had a responsibility to fill the vacuum. Women played a critical role. The women of Rwanda stepped

forward together to begin economic and social reconstruction and restoration of security. From there they formed linkages between economic empowerment and political empowerment. This section addresses the contributions of women in the post-genocide period. Some of their contributions are difficult to quantify, yet they were critical to the country's progress towards gender equality and good governance.

2.2. Government Efforts to Enhance Participation

Looking at this phenomenon closely, it is evident that the government and the international community played a facilitating role in enhancing the role of women. The new government of Rwanda viewed promoting gender equality as a human rights and development issue. The political commitment towards gender equality is linked to its vision of transforming the Rwandan society through legal, policy and administrative reforms. This is reflected in the public statements made by leaders of the country. The political will is further stimulated by an international and regional environment that is developing greater commitment to gender equality.

The overriding factor behind women's increased participation in decision-making capacities and democratic governance is the prevailing strong political will towards the promotion of women.. Rwanda's commitment to the inclusion of women is evident throughout all levels of the government. At the national political leadership level, the Rwandan government has made women more visible, with high level appointments including Ministries, Ministers of State and positions in the Office of the President, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Environment. Mechanisms have been constituted to address women's issues and gender concerns. The Ministry of Gender and Women in Development is the institution charged with the responsibility for coordinating the government's efforts regarding gender and women issues.

The establishment of this Ministry has had a strong impact on the agenda of enhancing gender equality in the country. The Ministry is a critical institution in Rwanda for ensuring that policy gains towards gender equality continue and are strengthened. The Ministry of Gender organized women into elected representative councils. The Ministry was an efficient instrument in shaping policies and programmes that have benefited women, for example, by implementing programmes to alleviate rural poverty among women, and starting revolving credit funds, which specifically target women. The advocacy and influencing role the ministry has so far played has contributed to the enactment of laws such the law on inheritance enacted in 1999, defilement law, employment law, land ownership law, and laws on the environment. The Ministry has compiled a list of all discriminatory

laws that need repealing and a list of laws to protect and equalize woman which need enacting. It has acted as a conduit for the views and voices of women to be heard and taken into account during planning and legislation.

In order for programmes targeting women to be successful and yield results, the Ministry has from time to time acted as a liaison with development partners. This served to activate and energise women's initiatives. The Ministry works closely with gender focal points in key institutions to monitor progress on women's issues within each ministry. The ministry has taken steps such as establishing communal funds to encourage women's economic self sufficiency. Similarly, women's political empowerment has been promoted through the establishment of womens' councils.

2.3 The Role of Female Leadership

Behind this commitment also lie other factors like the great contribution of women to national reconstruction and recovery. Women took over some of the responsibilities of looking after and providing services originally managed by men, in house construction, for example. Women were being recognized as breadwinners ably performing non-traditional functions. In the area of security, the role of women is crucial. One case in point: The cessation of the insurgency in the north of the country in 1998 was almost certainly due to the active role of women as mediators and civilian authorities. Women also play a critical role in mobilizing their displaced husbands and relatives to repatriate to Rwanda.

Unlike many other post conflict countries with a large number of female combatants, female fighters constituted a small percentage of the former guerillas of RPF who stopped the genocide. However, the demobilized female combatants contributed greatly to the peacebuilding process. Those who were educated joined the mainstream administration of the country. One important step taken by former combatants was to form their own association to promote the well-being of their members and to be agents of peace in their communities and the country as a whole. The Association they formed, Ndabaga, is serving as a point of reference in the sub-region partly because of its innovative approach to reconciliation. Former RPF rebels and former FAR government combatants came together in this association to promote reconciliation within the country. The message is if former fighters and enemies can come together as comrades and partners, everybody else can also do it. This group plans to share their experiences with their sisters in Burundi, DRC, Sudan and other countries emerging from conflict.

After the 1994 genocide, a transitional parliament was put in place in which women represented a small proportion: 17 out of

74, or 23%. These women formed a caucus, prompted largely by the need of women parliamentarians to work together across party lines. This caucus promoted unity and reconciliation by serving as a model of women working together irrespective of their diverse background - a very important gesture in the post-genocide reality of the country. The caucus ushered in a new spirit of cooperation, guided by higher principles of common good, and served as an example of unity in action. The forum also became a model of how Rwandans in leadership positions can transcend their differences and promote general good.

The uniting factor was the shared desire to promote peace within Rwanda and outside its borders. In its advocacy role, the women parliamentarians' caucus made important contributions which impacted strongly on women's role in post-genocide reconstruction. For instance, their advocacy ensured that a law was passed punishing sexual assaults and rapes committed during the genocide as crimes against humanity. The perpetrators of these crimes are categorized as planners of the genocide. Women parliamentarians were responsible for the adoption of a law on inheritance succession which for the first time in the country's history grants equal rights for men, women, boys and girls to inherit property.

Women parliamentarians played a critical role in ensuring the new constitution adopted on 4th June 2003 was highly gender responsive. The process of drafting the constitution was done in a participatory manner from the inception to the finalisation phase. The composition of the constitution and judicial commissions was gender balanced, comprised of women from government and civil society as well as men with an established record of being gender sensitive. The international agencies provided financial and technical supports. Grassroots meetings were organised and conducted to ensure men and women's views of general issues and those of special interest to women were amplified. As a result, many of the articles on gender included in the new constitution make it one of the most gender-inclusive constitutions ever. The process gave the population a sense of partnership and became an opportunity to enrol the public in recognizing the importance of gender equality.

The critical role played by women leadership in championing the cause of promoting gender equity and equality cannot be underestimated. The favorable conditions created by the government through the establishment of institutions such as the Ministry in Charge of Gender Equity, coupled with an emerging women leadership in the post genocide period became an impetus for promoting unity and reconciliation. Women leadership across the spectrum, from civil society, faith based organizations, and executive and legislative arms of government, contributed to the

momentum of empowering women and increase their role in national reconstruction.

Women leaders played a key role in mobilizing rural women to be involved in mainstream political activities. Women from different political backgrounds embarked on campaigns to actively encourage women to participate in elections and policy discussions. Womens' councils have helped prepare women for positions in government at the local and national level. They learn leadership skills and develop competences necessary for their effective performance. This had a strong impact judging from the high level of involvement of women across the country in shaping new policies and legislation. Much as there is still a gap between enacting a law and implementing it correctly, these laws mark a big achievement in the area of gender equality promotion. However, despite their great role in increasing women's visibility, they remain under funded, and so the technical capacity to maximize their positive impact remains to be developed. Such structures represent a good model of how women participate in, and contribute to, the country's development agenda with a sense of ownership - hence the sustained spirit of voluntarism in which they serve.

At the international level, Rwandese women vigorously participated in the fourth International Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The establishment of the Beijing Plan of Action and the Beijing Permanent Secretariat were strategic outcomes of this conference. This generated the momentum for women's empowerment and progress towards gender equality. This was a turning point for women in Rwanda at a critical moment which marked the beginning of partnership among women and between government and civil society. They were empowered by being connected to the global commitment to gender equality.

The role played by grassroots movement at the community level was crucial in fostering women's participation in local decision-making processes. Local NGOs functioned as training grounds, developing women's leadership skills. Among the current women MPs, about half have at one time or another been involved in NGO work. The same is true of members of womens' councils, whose volunteer members often used as a springboard to mainstream leadership positions.

Women came together in associations to address issues that affect them, creating self-help groups and cooperatives to assist survivors, widows or returned refugees, or simply to meet the everyday needs of providing for their families. There are over one hundred of these groups in each community. They may be informal, or formally registered with the government. Hundreds of thousands of orphaned children were brought under their care

and protection. At the provincial level, gender programmes are managed and coordinated by a Director of Health, Gender and Social Affairs. In every district there is a Vice Mayor for Gender whose main mandate is gender mainstreaming, specifically with regard to development activities. Women joined microfinance credit programmes to address the needs of their families and implement socio-economic initiatives at the community level. The income-generating activities they initiated become important entry points for economic empowerment.

The role of women leaders, from the national level through to the rural level, in mobilizing Rwanda's population, and women in particular, was of great importance in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Across the country, women with the support of various institutions managed to participate in the construction of new settlements locally known as Imidugudu. This was facilitated by several factors, including the role of the ministry of Gender and both international and local NGOs. These initiatives also stem from the spirit of solidarity among women which had existed for a long time. The voluntary spirit is also important in the dynamics within women's organizations working to build unity and reconciliation.

Women's associations are also active at the national level, working on meeting the special needs of women survivors and returnees, empowering women politically and economically and reconstructing Rwandan society. Thirty-five women's organizations who work in women's rights, development or peace have organized themselves into a collective called Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe (Pro-Women All Together). The Pro-Femmes Triennial Action Plan (1998) states that the organization works for "the structural transformation of Rwandan society by putting in place the political, material, juridical, economic and moral conditions favorable to the rehabilitation of social justice and equal opportunity, to build a real, durable peace." In addition to their programmatic activities in peace and reconstruction, Pro-Femmes also provides its members capacity-building support and assists them with communication, information and education. The adoption of a Campaign of Peace Action Plan enabled Profemmes Twese Hamwe to earn a Terrance, the prestigious International Peace Award, from UNESCO in 2000. The National Women Council is an organization that the Ministry of Gender established with the aim of empowering women from the grass roots to undertake their own advocacy and mobilise fellow women to contribute to the national development process.

Womens' councils have played a crucial role in mobilising fellow women to participate in all policy making legislation process of the country. They have also been used as channels for mobilisation by different agencies involved in national

development. These councils are involved in skills transfer and making local women aware of their rights as in advising the generally elected bodies on issues that affect women. These councils ensure that women's views on education, health, security and other issues are articulated to local authorities. These structures have been instrumental in decentralisation, and grassroots participation of women in politics and development programmes. The affirmative action plan, which calls for 30% of parliament's seats to be reserved for women, led to a majority of those seats being secured by representatives of women's councils. These elected women work on a voluntary basis and are not funded, and yet they have contributed significantly to mobilise women for leadership. One issue that needs to be addressed in order to fully empower these structures is to address their budgetary needs.

Both within the sub region and globally, networking is another viable strategy used to empower women to participate in political processes. This has been done at civil society levels, particularly in the Great Lakes Region, where women in the umbrella organisation Pro-Femme –Twese Hamwe have come together with their sisters from Burundi and DRC to support a campaign for peace. Networking with regional organisations such as the African Union, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Great Lakes peace initiatives has started but needs to be consolidated to produce more tangible results. There is not yet an organised structure that links women in the sub-region in a systematic and sustainable manner.

2.4. Sensitizing the Population

The creation of awareness about gender issues is one of the tools of promoting greater participation of women in decision-making organs and other post-genocide programmes. Based on interviews with many Rwandans, it appears that the political will and public support for women's empowerment strategies that exist in Rwanda today emerged from two key factors arising immediately after the genocide. First, women successfully maintained households and communities and took on agricultural and household roles that had previously been undertaken by men. Secondly, women came forward in large numbers to adopt 400,000 orphans regardless of their ethnicity (Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion report, 1994).

The Gender Training Programme conducted across the country as a tool of mainstreaming gender has generated enthusiasm across the women and men. It is important to adopt an approach of gender sensitisation that establishes the link between developments, good governance and equity and link it up with culture. This approach has created a sense of ownership and demonstrated the importance of gender perspective to men in

rural areas. This strategy has been instrumental in developing a sense of local ownership instead of viewing gender as an imported and imposed approach. The issue that remains to be addressed is who should be targeted and what capacity is there in the country to effectively carry out the training and sensitisation programme in the country.

The media, particularly the radio, has a history of being used as a strong weapon of state mobilisation and control. The radio replaced the use of the chief's drums to mobilize the population for war or public works. During the genocide the radio was used to fuel ethnic hatred and direct the genocidaires to locations where Tutsi and alleged Tutsi sympathizers were hiding. As a result, radio messages are taken as gospel truth because radio is a symbol of authority.

Post-genocide, radio and print media were used for the elites and the radio for mainly rural women. Through their associations of women journalists, women were able to successfully reach out to rural women and mobilize them for unity and reconciliation. The Ministry of Gender and other government departments used radio to air programmes on various policies and activities. Messages are communicated to the public to enlighten the population on issues of national interest such as reconciliation, fighting poverty, HIV/AIDS etc. For example, the HIV/AIDS campaign used radio programmes to mobilize women for voluntary counseling and testing. Many women came forward to be tested. The majority of persons living with HIV/AIDS in Rwanda are women.

There are specialized papers like Kinyamateka, the Echo, and others, to which women associations contribute essays to educate the public on women's rights. Some important associations which promote and defend women's rights issue publications relating to women's performances and rights.

In concluding this section, one may ask this fundamental question: What factors have made this process possible and successful despite the challenging situation which the country was emerging from? It is a combination of factors that cannot be exhausted here. First, the existence of political will at the highest possible level and the seriousness and consistency with which the executive arm of government pursued a strategy for achieving gender equality, including enshrining it in the new constitution.

Interviews with a cross section of people highlighted the fact that although there are influences within the Rwandan culture that discriminate against women, there are also other cultural values and practices that assign women important roles as advisers, sources of power and wisdom, and managers of wealth. The existence of mother-queen institutions, women chiefs, and female

religious leaders and custodians of indigenous technical knowledge partly explain why men in Rwanda are not generally opposed to the women's empowerment agenda. The use of the media, particularly the radio airwaves, the most reliable medium of communication, to mobilise women to play a more active role in the country's development and sensitize the population to the advantages of gender equality was very effective.

2.5. Legal and Constitutional Reforms

Recovering from genocide and its consequences required more than the conventional methods. In the case of Rwanda, a country emerging from its dark past and forging a bright future of stability and prosperity, this called for marshalling all efforts to achieve the common good. The commitment of central government was demonstrated by new policies and laws. Important legislation institutionalised gender equality. The new law on inheritance and succession, which give women and children equal rights, is now used as a point of reference in sensitizing general public on issues of gender equality. The anti-violence bill will soon be enacted. The most fundamental change in the legal and constitutional framework is the adoption of the 4th June 2003 constitutions with its strong content as gender. The building of partnership between government, civil society and community based organizations for a common purpose of promoting women's participation in governance is another unique contributing factor. This is contrary to the common tendency for civil society and government to clash over their interests.

Regarding the specific role played by women in local governance, the policy of decentralization occurred before the new constitution decreed that 30% of decision-making posts be filled by women. Participation of women in local governance has remained rather weak. For example, out of the current 11 provinces and the city of Kigali there is no single female governor, and out of the 106 mayors of districts only 6 are women. This area remains to be strengthened within the new framework of administration reform.

On a positive note, the voices of women have continued to be strong in local governance through the affirmative action agenda which provide for a third of the seats on the executive and administration committees to be filled by women. These committees play an instrumental role in influencing local national development processes and enhancing women participation in political and social processes that shape their lives.

2.6. Women participation in Gacaca courts

Following the 1994 genocide, the country faced unprecedented challenges to their judicial system. Hundreds of thousands of genocide suspects were in jail awaiting trial. The system of justice was so overburdened that it could not cope. The

government of Rwanda undertook a restructuring of its justice system to include indigenous, traditional methods. In creating a national institution to revive and formalize Gacaca, the government of Rwanda indirectly contributed to the promotion of women's participation.

Women are represented in all Gacaca courts. Currently, the representation of women judges in these courts is 29%. This is an important achievement given that women did not traditionally serve as Gacaca judges or observers. The responsibility of settling community disputes was reserved for a community's wise and respected men (Inyangamugayo). This institution presents yet another opportunity which women have seized to advance their participation in the democratic process and governance. The skills they acquire and the experience will later be used to qualify them for leadership when the duration of these courts expire.

2.7. Women and Decentralization

The government of Rwanda has identified bad governance as one of the major issues behind the genocide, and the reason for the underdevelopment the country has experienced since independence. In the consultative talks that the GNU undertook in 1998, it was agreed that the centralized power structure is mainly responsible for authoritarian rule which has, among other things, promoted human rights abuse and discrimination. Rwanda has embraced the principle of decentralization through which power, authority, functions and responsibilities and the requisite resources will be transferred from the central government to local government.

The local government act stipulates that women fill a third of all local posts. As a result, the 2001 local government elections earmarked 27% of the local government structures for women. It is important to note that the implementation of this policy took the concerted effort of the Ministry of Gender and civil society organizations, women councils, members of women Parliamentarians caucus and many other actors. There was a deliberate campaign to mobilize women from all walks of life to come forward and present their candidature and also actively participate in the electoral process. National women councils played a crucial role in mobilizing the women at different levels.

Institutions such as the Electoral Commission played a facilitating role in integrating the quota for women in the electoral laws. This highlights the extent to which national policies like gender policy and decentralization policy can be translated into action at local levels. The participation of women in the post-genocide period was significant in terms of promoting reconciliation, providing survival needs for families, and taking care of orphans. Through challenging and important roles women were able to demonstrate

their capability to manage domestic and public affairs effectively, contrary to the commonly held beliefs of women's inadequacies in public affairs.

Chapter III. IMPACT OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ON THE CONDITIONS OF WOMEN

The overall government policy of rebuilding new governance structures and promoting greater community participation, of women in particular, from grass roots to national level, has been significant, and an upward trend of women's involvement and representation has followed. Participation of women in grass roots structures such as women councils, women's associations, and civil society organizations has greatly increased women's visibility and also created more community recognition of women's political representation and participation as a right on its own. This partly explains the growing recognition among men of the importance of gender parity in governance, especially at national and local levels. It is gradually becoming a normal practice that in any important decision-making forum leaders question the absence of women's representation.

The presence of women in parliament, executive and judiciary organs of government structures and women councils supported by the ministry of Gender and the women civil society movement has made it possible to enact legislation on land ownership, property inheritance, employment, sexual crimes, environmental laws and for such laws to have a strong orientation towards sensitivity to women's rights national law such provide guarantees for women's rights to be respected. What remains is to have proper legal education to women particularly at community level majority of rural women remains largely ignorant of their rights, especially their legal rights. This is a major constraint to improving their quality of life.

In the overall national policy of promoting gender mainstreaming in all policies, programmes and projects, gender issues are gradually taking center stage in education, national and rural development programmes. What is important is to turn political will into actions. In the case of education, women's views resulted in the Ministry of Education's offensive to promote girl's education.

Chapter IV. CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

4.1 Challenges

The challenges and opportunities that presented themselves in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide were seized on by Rwandese women, the transitional government, Rwanda's development partners and the international community at large. Despite the progress and the firm foundation achieved thus far, there remain obstacles that continue to impede Rwanda's goal of attaining gender equality. Some of the key challenges are outlined below:

1. The persistence of the threat posed by gender based violence affecting women and young girls. Limited capacity arising from high illiteracy rates and low levels of education is still a major hindrance. In some areas of governance it is difficult to find women candidates with the appropriate academic qualifications.

2. Negative gender stereotypes persist, as well as stubborn resistance in some quarters to abandoning Rwanda's historically entrenched patriarchal structure. Some Rwandan men, particularly in rural areas, remain biased against the concept of women in positions of power. Women are adversely affected by these traditional stereotypes, which undermine their sense of self-esteem, confidence and potential to lead.

3. Women's organisations, both formal such as NGOs, and informal such as the FBO and Women Councils for example, despite being major protagonists for women's mobilisation and advocacy, lack funding, logistical support, technical capacity and personnel to run function more effectively.

4. Much of the progress made in the area of women's participation in democracy and governance is attributed to the role of institutions. Many ministries, commissions and local government entities do not have sufficient expertise in the arena of gender parity to execute proper planning, monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the objective is being properly pursued. The Ministry of Gender, itself recently restructured, lacks experienced personnel. Institutions responsible for advancing gender equality lack the political muscle and authority to demand accountability from other institutions.

5. There is a weak system of coordinating interventions on gender issues. This is characterised by duplication of efforts, lack of information exchange and lack of serious prioritizing. There are many structures or mechanisms involved in promoting gender equality at national, local and community levels. Their functions, roles, and working arrangement are not well developed. The

coordination system is still weak thus creating problems of duplication and weak networking.

6. Donors who intervene in gender issues are not effectively coordinated. This worsens the problem of overlap and misallocation of resources. Donors and institutional networking between institutions within the country and the sub-region is weak and there is no mechanism in place to improve it.

8. The policy on gender parity is well articulated but it has not been adequately translated into programmes and action. This results in policy evaporation.

9. Limited and poorly coordinated research on gender issues results in lack of reliable data. Lack of an adequate, well managed databank hampers efforts to accurately quantify the results of ongoing gender parity efforts and identify what aspects need to be shored up.

11. The rapid changes in the International Regional and National environments that need appropriate coping mechanisms and strategies to ensure gender equality priorities remain on focus.

4.2 Lessons learned

Important lessons other countries can learn from Rwanda and what the country itself needs to do better in future are summarised below:

1. It is critically important to have a strong political will towards gender equality if women's participation is to be developed. However, political will must be supported by strong gender advocacy and gender sensitisation to achieve results
2. Countries emerging from conflicts must take advantage of opportunities that arise during the formulation of the national constitution to enshrine gender parity as a tenet of the new constitution.
3. For gender equality to be attained and sustained, it is important to have a strong training programme to provide necessary expertise in gender.
4. For gender programmes to be effectively managed, it is imperative to establish a coordination systems so that wastage and supplication of effort and resources are minimised.

5. It is important to identify those traditional values that support the enhancement of women's status, and discourage those that reinforce gender based stereotyping.

4.3 Strategies for the way forward

1. The government should integrate gender training in national human resource development institutions.
2. With the support of donors, regional research centres on gender should be established and information shared among member countries.
3. Affirmative actions in economic empowerment and education need to be initiated and strengthened by governments to close the capacity gap
4. Donor support should be better coordinated and focused on strategic areas for gender equality promotion. More resources should be made available to new areas like ICT and promotion of export trade
5. Government should strive to build a system of coordinating the various innovations on gender.
6. The departments of statistics should produce and disseminate data in a gender-disaggregated manner. A system of monitoring and evaluation indicators that are gender sensitive should be developed.
7. Civil society organisations should be provided with adequate resources to intensify gender awareness and advocacy programmes, particularly at the grass roots level.
8. More resources need to be invested in training women in skills-related to legislation, politics, communication management to enable them perform their new roles better.
9. Gender awareness and training campaigns should be intensified at all levels.

4.4 Conclusion

Rwanda's experience in the progress towards gender equality is strongly linked to the role of political leadership, the role of women's organisations, the support of donors, and its own cultural and historical context. However, critical challenges remain to be overcome in order to strengthen the role of women in governance and to ensure its sustainability.

ANNEX 1

PERSONS INTERVIEWED

- 1) Stephen Kooshak , Program officer , senior Project coordinator Good Governance for poverty reduction , UNDP , Rwanda office.
- 2) Ms Faby Ngeruka, Program Officer in charge of Gender in UNFPA Kigali office.
- 3) Ms Dona Kamashazi , Program officer UNIFEM Kigali office.
- 4) Cyriaque Ngoboka , Communication Officer , UNICEF Kigali .
- 5) Odette Kabaya , Program officer charge of Gender in Canadian Cooperation in Kigali.
- 6) Nety Butera , Administrator at DFID Office .
- 7) Josephine Uwimana , Program officer RALGA .
- 8) Leoncie Mukamisha , Executive Secretary of National Women's Councils .
- 9) Oda Gasinzigwa , President of National Women Councils .
10. Judith Kanakuze President Rwandan Women Parliamentarian caucus MP
11. Athanasie Gahondogo MP
12. Isaac Sengorore Employee of the Ministry of Gender and Family promotion in charge of women empowerment programs
13. Elizabeth Powley Director women waging peace Rwanda office
14. Edward Kasumba Programme officer NEPAD secretariate Kigali Rwanda

Bibliography

1. Ms Ecoma Alaga and Ms Thelma Arimiebi, Ekiyor : Women in Peace Building, Vol 1 , 2004
2. Pan – African Conference Peace Gender and Development , Kigali 1-3 March 1997.

3. Mutamba John: The role of Women in Reconciliation and peace Building in Rwanda: Ten years after genocide 1994 – 2004.
4. Mutamba John: Factors for sustainability of Women's participation in decision-making , A case of Rwandan Parliament 2004 , Thesis .
5. Africare , SNV Rwandan Women in local government : Challenges and opportunities Kigali Oct 2001.
6. Strengthening Governance the Role of Women in Rwanda's Transition, Elizabeth powley women waging peace policy commission September 2003
7. Women taking a lead progress towards Empowerment and Gender Equality in Rwanda women for women International, Briefing Paper September 2004
8. UNIFEM : Report of the learning Oriented Assessment of Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Empowerment Strategies in Rwanda, Sept 2002.
9. MIGEPROFE, *Etude quantitative sur les attitudes, les croyances et les pratiques de la culture en rapport avec le genre, analyse des résultats*, Kigali, 2001
10. MIGEPROFE-MINECOFIN : *Rapport sur le profil de la femme et de l'homme au Rwanda*, Kigali, 2002
11. MINIJUST (Ministère de la Justice), *Loi N° 22/99 complétant le livre premier du Code civil et instituant la cinquième partie relative aux régimes matrimoniaux, au libéralités et aux successions*, Kigali, 1999
12. ONAPO, *Enquête socio-démographique du Rwanda, 1996 : Principaux défis en matière de population*, Kigali, 2003
13. ONAPO, *Politique nationale de population pour le développement durable au Rwanda*, Kigali, 2003
14. ONAPO-ORC Macro, *Enquête démographique et de santé*, 2000
15. PRO-FEMMES/TWESE HAMWE, *Recherche sur « les raisons de la non scolarisation des filles au Rwanda »*, Kigali, 2000
16. Richard Dackam Ngatchou, *Les indicateurs relatifs aux programmes d'intervention relatifs aux questions de genre*, FNUAP, 2003
17. SERVICE NATIONAL DE RECENSEMENT, *Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat au 15 août 1991, Résultats définitifs*, Kigali, 1994
18. UNFPA, *Gender, population and development themes in United Nations Conferences 1985-1995*, 1997

19. UNIFEM, *Le progrès des femmes à travers le monde*, 2000,
20. MINALOC, Implementation strategy for National Decentralisation Policy , November , 2001.
21. MINALOC , National Decentralisation Policy , May 2000.
22. MIGEPROF, UNIFEM AND UNDP , National Plan of Action for the Follow up and implementation of Beijing Platform of action 2004 - 2007.
23. World Bank report no 29913, Rwanda institutional reform credit project 2004-2007.

