



Promoting Gender Equality in Rwanda: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract: Gender equality, which is a vital human right to both gender has become a global concern due to the unequal gender roles and responsibilities existing across world societies. The attainment of this gender equality is challenged by factors such as conflicts, climate change and disasters, migrations, displacement, discriminatory social norms, cultural norms, ineffective legal and institutional frameworks. Such factors cause gender inequalities which prevent women from rights and opportunities as well as making decision concerning their life. Men also are affected in some ways. This qualitative paper endeavored to assess the gender equality situation in Rwanda in the pre-genocide and post genocide era. The review uses content/ literature analysis to explore gender equality situation in various life domains. It is guided by the following study questions: - What is gender equality? How was gender equality in Rwanda during the pre-genocide era? How was/is gender equality in the post-genocide era? What are the current efforts to attain gender equality? What are the current gaps in attaining gender equality in Rwanda? What can be done to attain gender equality in Rwanda? The article finds that during the pre-genocide era, gender inequality existed highly because gender frameworks had not been well established. In post-genocide era, gender frameworks were established and have significantly addressed gender inequalities. In conclusion, gender inequalities exist despite tremendous efforts to reduce them. Recommendations are proposed for effective gender equality attainment in Rwanda.

Keywords: Gender, Gender equality, Gender policy, Sustainable development goals, Rwanda

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1. Introduction

The UN Women provides the meaning of the term gender as implying the socially constructed attributes, opportunities and relationships between being female and male, between men and women, and between boys and girls. On the other hand, Gender equality signifies the equal rights of women men, girls and boys in regard opportunities, responsibilities and resources (UN Women; 2020). Gender equality has become a global concern emanating from unequal gender roles and responsibilities. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), gender equality is a vital human right that is required to achieve a sustainable peaceful world. The attainment of this gender equality is challenged by factors

such as conflicts, climate change and disasters, migration and displacement, discriminatory social norms (UNDP, 2018). Such factors cause gender inequalities which prevent women from rights and opportunities. This is reflected in the domains of decision making and governance where men dominate, food insecurity affecting more women than men, women doing more than two times more unpaid work than men, as well as women participating in informal work that lacks social protection (UNDP, 2018; Gatsinzi & Byandaga, 2020).

It is from those gender inequalities and challenges that prompted the United Nation (UN) in 2015 to adopt gender equality as the Goal 5 of the 17 Sustainable developmental goals (UN, 2015). The goal of gender equality is unique

because it is the one goal that can be applied to the other 16 sustainable developmental goals. Below are the targets established in order to develop framework of addressing the issue of gender inequality:

End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation; eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through a provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion and shared responsibility within the household and the family as a nationally appropriate; ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, and economic and public life; ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the program of action of the international conference on population and development and the Beijing Platform for action and the outcome documents of their review conferences; undertake forms to give women equal rights to economic resources as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws; enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology to promote the empowerment of women; adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels. UN, 2015).

In the Rwandan context, women make up 50.9% of Rwanda's population (Country meters, 2020) yet, they face countless challenges solely based on their gender. The challenges are deeply rooted in archaic norms that have been masked as tradition from the pre-genocide to post genocide Rwanda.

2. Literature Review

This section analyses the gender equality during the pre-genocide era, post-genocide era, the efforts to achieve gender equality, as well as the current existing gender gaps as highlighted in the following sections.

2.1 Pre-Genocide Era Gender Equality

Before the coming of the European colonizers, that is to say the precolonial era, men were dominant in all sectors of the Rwandan life (political, economic and social) despite some special cases of limited means for women to be in power (Longman 2006; Uwineza & Pearson, 2009). During the colonial and post-independence era, Rwanda was still a patriarchal driven society, with men exclusively

controlling access to money, education, and health care resources (Ali, 2016). Despite the then existing Rwanda constitution in its article 16 guaranteeing equality, women had long been subjected to a wide array of limitations and restrictions which had discriminated against them in various ways. They were seen as solely wives and/or mothers, relying heavily on male relatives. They were also restricted from doing as they pleased without approval from their husband or male family figure, had no right to inheritance and property ownership while men were permitted to work in salaried positions (Human Rights Watch, 1996). The situation exacerbated during the colonial period and the post-independence Rwanda leadership showed no interest in bringing gender policies (Longman, 2006).

Regarding to equal rights to education, women faced challenges because they were not afforded the same opportunities in school as men, based on the idea that women were solely child-bearers. In the 1980s for example, 45% of students were girls in primary schools. In secondary schools, the boy-girl ratio was 7 to 1, and 15 to 1 at the tertiary/college level. Parents were much more likely to pull daughters out of school than they were their sons in times of economic difficulty. Due to lack of equal rights to education, the women's illiteracy rate was higher than that of men (Human Rights Watch, 1996).

Regarding to health, women's access to health care and resources was limited, and in some rural areas unavailable. Insufficient maternal health care, a lack of family planning facilities, and lack of medical technology all combined to deny women rights during pre- and post-natal care. During the 1980s, maternal mortality was the major health problem facing women. 80% of pregnant women delivered their children at home. 63% of deaths among women in 1993 were related to their reproductive system (Human Rights Watch, 1996).

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi was state-sponsored horror that completely eroded away the right to live of the Tutsis and moderate Hutus. In this case both male and female Tutsis and female and male moderate Hutus' gender rights were completely denied. Specifically, Tutsi women saw horror as before their persecutors killed them, they could first rape them, those pregnant the fetus removed by piercing the belly, children could see their mothers live raped and after killed. Thus the Psychological trauma from the loss of family members, rape resulting in unwanted pregnancies, and the fear of sexually transmitted disease, coupled with physical trauma resulting from wounds, sexual assault, and malnutrition, being left widows without husbands, taking care of the orphans, etc., worsened the women's situation. Immediately after the genocide, women's health was in greater peril (Berry & Pott, 1999; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; Human Rights watch, 1996; Longman, 2006). Thus, the pre-genocide era leaderships never prioritized gender equality in their national development activities despite stipulating it in the constitution as well being signatories to the UN human

rights charter and the African Union human rights charter. Instead men profited in accessing resources, responsibilities and opportunities at the expense of women.

2.2 Post-Genocide Era Gender Equality

The post-genocide Rwanda saw a large disproportionate number of women who survived with lasting physical, social, and mental effects. The post-Genocide government realized that to rebuild the country, women had to be at the center in the country's developmental activities. Implying that various development strategies were to be designed which included gender inclusiveness, women and girls empowerment. Such strategies included the introduction of a model called Vision 2020 in 2000 which consists of six inter-linked pillars, with gender equality at the top (Ali, 2016; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; UNDP, 2018).

The Vision 2020 with the inclusion of gender equality helped achieve two goals; first it provided a framework to help combat all forms of gender inequality, and second it helped the government be accountable to its female citizens. Another strategy that was initiated and guided by the Vision 2020 was the EDPRS I&II (Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy). Some of the key emphasis of this strategy were skills development and job creation. The Ministry of Education rolled out a strategic plan to emphasize the advancement of girls' education in science and technology. Such plans include girls' entry point from primary to secondary level being lower than that of boys. Access to health for all was implemented, thus making a way for the reproductive health policies which the nursing profession plays a big role in when addressing gender equality, especially for the childbearing population (Ali, 2016; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; UNDP, 2018).

Women currently make up the vast majority of the nursing workforce. Obtaining an income and gaining respect within their communities. A competent and qualified and empowered nursing workforce is helping other women to improve their health and wellbeing (International Council of Nurses, 2017; WHO, 2017). In the economic sector, women are also thriving. Business incentives have been established through the BDF fund. Women can now access loans for doing business by providing mortgages of their husbands or other inherited properties. They can work without any hindrance in all the sectors of the country (public, private sectors) and return at home any time without hindrances from the husband rules or government set regulations. They are free to join any profession of their choice-education, nursing, security (police, military, private security companies), etc.

2.3 Efforts to achieve gender equality

The World Economic Forum in 2017 ranked Rwanda as the fourth best country in the world to promote gender equality and women empowerment thereby closing the gender gap. This is attributed to strong political commitment by the Rwandan leadership that have designed policies and legal instruments regarding gender equality and women empowerment (UNDP, 2018). Policies guide so that each time a question arises about how to implement a broad decision; there are some parameters to inform the response. Policy guidelines articulate how an organization's overall mission and aspirations are to be pursued (Ali, 2016). In this regard, the government of Rwanda has established conducive policies and legal frameworks that promote gender equality and women empowerment.

According to the Gender monitoring Office (GMO), the following legal, policy and institutional frameworks have been established and have significantly played a vital role in the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women across various sectors in the country. These are- The National Constitution of 2003 revised 2015; the Rwanda Vision 2020 and Vision 2050; the National Gender policy 2010; Sector Gender Mainstreaming Strategies; Girls Education Policy 2008, National Policy against Gender Based Violence, 2011; National Decentralisation Policy 2012; the Health Sector Policy 2015; Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation 2018-2024 (PSTA IV); Organic Law No 12/2013//OL of 12/09/2013 on State Finances and Property; Law No 43/2013/ of 16/06/2013 Governing Land; Law No 27/2016 of 08/07/2016 Governing Matrimonial Regimes, Donations and Successions; Gender Monitoring Office, The National Women's Council; Isange One Stop Center(for dealing with gender based violence cases- providing health care access and legal support); The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (GMO, 2019; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013).

The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion is in charge of promoting gender equality, coordinating the implementation of the national gender policy, ensuring effective gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women. The Monitoring Office is then tasked to oversee the monitoring and evaluation of the gender policy's implementation and reporting on progress achieved. The National Women's Council (NWC) ensures representation of the interests of women at all levels from the village to central government, the dissemination of information on laws, policies and programs to promote gender equality and capacity-building in advocacy for women and women's organizations. The National Gender Cluster acts as a forum bringing together government and all stakeholders, including official development partners and the private sector representatives of Women's Councils and Civil Society Organization All these legal, policy and institutional frameworks are aimed at empowering

women, equality before justice, and equality to resources, education, health, and employment (GMO, 2019; UNDP, 2018; Ali, 2016). Such efforts have instilled women's hope for living equally with men in regarding the right to resources, opportunities and responsibilities.

3. Methodology

The study employs a descriptive-qualitative study design and uses content/ literature analysis to explore gender equality situation in various life domains. It is guided by the following study questions: - what is gender equality? How was gender equality in Rwanda during the pre-genocide era? How was/is gender equality in the post-genocide era? What are the current efforts to attain gender equality? What are the current gaps in attaining gender equality in Rwanda? What can be done to attain gender equality in Rwanda? The conclusion and recommendations are done basing on the analysed literature.

4. Results and Discussion

The above literature review has pointed out the status of gender equality in Rwanda in various domains in and in different eras. Despite the legal and policy instruments in place that promote gender equality and women empowerment and the achieved progress by the Rwandan government, women participation in all different sectors of the country's economy is still low compared to men. For example, there is a gap for equality in regard to employment across all sectors as the percentage of employed men is still higher than that of women (NISR, 2018; GMO, 2019). Again in terms of access to finance loans, women still lag behind men in terms of percentages of those who access financial loans (BNR, 2016). The only domain where women participate higher than men is in the education sector where primary schools female teachers' percentage is higher than the male teachers; and secondary school female students' enrollment is higher than that of the male ones. Again, women representation stands at 62% in the parliament which is the highest in the world (GMO, 2019; MINEDUC, 2019; UNDP, 2018).

Other gender equality gaps exist in cases where women are still physically abused by husbands and incur physical and psychological harm; adolescent girls forced to marry men who impregnated them by their families, girl students easily forced to drop school by their parents/guardians/care takers under the pretext of no resources for school tuition and learning materials provision compared to boys, as well as the pretext that the age of their marriage is at peak hence drop and get a husband. This issue is evidenced in the fact that many house maids/ house girls, mostly in urban areas of Rwanda are teenage girls whose majority of them were forced to

drop school by their parents/guardians to help them/ the family earn a living or because of no interest in sponsoring them.

Furthermore, the legal, policy and institutional frameworks lack coordination and harmonization for effective implementation that brings gender equality. The community at grassroot levels where mostly gender inequalities occur lack awareness and education about their rights and how to claim them. Even local leaders who would do the implementation lack awareness and education on how to deal with gender equality issues. Some of these local leaders connive with men who violate women's rights and help them to negotiate with the women's/girls' families in exchange of reward so that they are not punished.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

Gender equality attainment efforts in Rwanda has faced challenges since pre-genocide to post genocide era. Characterized by gender inequalities without established gender frameworks to raise its awareness and promotion, especially in the pre-genocide era, gender equality attainment efforts have been realised mostly in the post-genocide era through the political will of the leadership and the established legal, policy and institutional framework that prohibit and punish gender inequalities, provide guidelines, do monitoring and evaluation, as well as streamlining the gender equality, women empowerment, and girls' education.

Despite the achieved progress, however, gaps in gender equality remain as women and girls in some cases are still denied their rights to resources and opportunities like education by their family members. Furthermore, the established legal, policy and institutional frameworks have not been effectively implemented at the community levels and lack coordination and harmonization to address those still existing gender inequalities.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Pregnant or mothering students should get financial support and resources to continue their education.
2. Gender equality education and awareness campaigns should be extended to grassroot communities and the local communities be taught gender rights, and know how to claim them in case they are violated.
3. Legal, policy and institutional gender frameworks need to be fully coordinated and harmonized for effective implementation and follow up at all sectors of the country.

4. Gender equality courses should be designed and incorporated in the school curricular at all education levels to raise the awareness of gender rights in the young generation.
5. Laws should be fully implemented to punish gender equality violators and this should help to serve as an example to others.

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