Uncovering the Barriers to Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Rwanda

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- EICV and RDHS data sets have been used with the permission of the NISR.

- I alone am responsible for the content of the paper and nothing I say should necessarily be taken to represent the views of the funders of the research on which I draw, the Board of Directors of IPAR–Rwanda or colleagues that have been involved in the research.
Background

- International – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Beijing Agenda for Action
- 2003 Constitution – Gender Equality and Domestication of CEDWA
- Inheritance, Land, Labour and GBV Laws – revised inheritance laws before Parliament
- Mainstreaming gender in policy and gender informed budgeting
- 30% quota for women in national and local political office and other senior government positions, Forum of Women Parliamentarians
- Secretariat for reporting on progress re Beijing Agenda for Action
- Gender Machinery – Ministry of Gender, Gender Monitoring Office, Women’s National Council
Gender equality is about men and women being equal – to be able to have the same outcomes.

Historically women have been denied equal rights with men so they need to be empowered so that they know and can claim and exercise their rights – they need to be empowered collectively and individually.

A legal and policy framework is only the first stage in enabling women to claim and exercise their rights – we need to identify barriers to all women exercising their rights and develop strategies for overcoming the barriers.

Government as a duty bearer has a responsibility not just to put in place a legal and policy framework but to ensure that women (and men) can claim and exercise their right.
Why Gender Equality?

1. Women are human beings and are entitled to enjoy the same rights as men – gender justice. This right is enshrined in International Laws which Rwanda has domesticated.

2. Empowered women are good for the development of the country and improve the wellbeing of households and especially children – the economic rational
Key Issues

1. Targets for measuring gender equality have often focused on inputs not outcomes.
2. Policies and programmes have often focused on the economic empowerment of women – employment in paid work but systematic reviews show that economically empowered women are not necessarily empowered in other areas of their lives.
3. The empowerment of women requires a transformation in gender relationships – men have to support gender equality or at least be less resistant to it and governments and other duty bearers need to put in place policies that enable women to compete on equal terms with men.
A gender analysis looks at the different outcomes for women as a class compared with men as a class and asks why there are these different outcomes in all areas of their lives. It uses quantitative and qualitative data to try and make sense of what is going on so that actions can be taken to overcome barriers. It also aims to empower women so that they are able to claim their rights collectively and individually.
This paper draws on relevant literature and qualitative and quantitative data to identify what are the main inequalities between men and women in Rwanda and what are the main constraints to women claiming and exercising their rights.

The research on which it draws includes secondary analysis of EICV3, RDHS, Women Economic Empowerment and Census Data sets, interviews with key informants at national and decentralised levels, interviews and FGDs with local leaders and interviews and FGDs with men and women across Rwanda.

We thus draw on the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research and are able to draw out what the main barriers are and what impact they have on women and girls lives.
Findings
Domestication of the main international conventions and a legal and policy framework that generally promotes gender equality

High political representation of women at national level

Significant improvement in women’s health including access to modern contraception and qualified helpers during delivery

Women have the same rights to own land and other property as men and there is general awareness of women’s rights

Improvements in infrastructure – water, sanitation, roads, electrification

Increased access to financial services

Social Protection Policies

Reduction in poverty of female headed households

Education – virtually universal access to primary education, girls perform as well as boys in 9YBE and nearly half of university students are women
There is a policy implementation gap
Men have disproportionately moved into non-farm employment, the majority of women work as dependent family workers and Women’s enterprises less profitable, likely to provide main employment or to operate all year round.

Women do the bulk of unpaid domestic work and child care and cultivating crops for the table. They remain economically dependent on their husbands

There is a 17% unmet need for modern contraception and nearly 50% of pregnancies are unplanned.

Unmarried young women are reluctant to use contraception and have difficulty accessing it. Men are reluctant to use condoms even when they engage in risky sex.

Women are less well represented at decentralised and community levels and often only stand for posts that are reserved for women or stereotyped as female. Women are reluctant to speak in public.

Girls are underrepresented in science, technology and engineering subjects in TVET and higher education.

Rates of GBV remain high, there is a high tolerance of domestic violence and men are expected to control women and children.

Land is still said to really belong to men and heads of household are responsible for the sale of surplus crops.

Traditional norms and values structure everyday life and at community level often influence the outcomes of community mediation mechanisms including the Abunzi.

Women may be involved in making household decisions but men generally make the final decision.

Men have leisure time and money to spend on themselves; women rarely do.
What are the Main Barriers

- In our research we have identified three main barriers (but there are others):
  - Literacy and Skills;
  - Women’s responsibility for unpaid domestic work, childcare and cultivating;
  - Traditional norms and values
Women are significantly less likely to be literate than men or to have completed primary school.

In interviews KIs have identified poor literacy skills as one of the reasons women have not benefitted from programmes designed to empower women (economic and more generally).

Women are much more likely than men to identify poor literacy skills as a barrier to expanding an enterprise and getting credit.

Men and women say that women’s poor literacy skills is the main reason that they do not stand for election as local leaders.
Unpaid Care and Cultivating Work

- Dependency on men;
- Time poverty – work significantly longer hours than men – time surveys underestimate the time women spend on domestic work – in effect they work 24/7;
- Space – child care places restrictions on where women can look for work;
- Identified as women’s work – shamful for men to do it.
Traditional Norms and Values

- Place restrictions on women’s lives in every sphere – public and private;
- Men are seen as dominant, as head of the household and responsible for controlling their wives and daughters;
- Informal disputes mechanisms interpret the formal law through the lens of traditional norms;
- Economic dependency restricts women’s access to justice (although poverty is also a factor);
- Traditional attitudes to sex and sexuality put women at risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies.
What Can be Done

- Training of women for income generation, encouraging savings to invest and possibly access to subsidised credit;
- Pre-school provision and encouraging men to do more unpaid domestic work;
- Training local leaders and Abunzi so that they understand the laws on land and GBV and holding them accountable for implementation;
- Community sensitisation re gender equality and the empowerment of women and community dialogues to enable women and men to identify and agree on how barriers to gender equality can be overcome;
- Building the capacity of the NWC and other women’s NGOs so that women can better advocate for their rights and recruit men as allies.