

GENDER EQUALITY AND ITS ROLE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF RWANDA

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Abstract: Over the years, the female fraction of the population was perceived to be inferior to the male fraction, in all societies all across the world. The inferiority was mainly attached to the important roles in society such as decision making in sensitive matters. The perceived inferior nature of females was evidenced by their inability to take part in important economic, religious and social matters. The only place where a woman's voice was recognized was in her house, although it was still highly restricted. In African countries, this practice remained in place for a very long time and even today, some aspects of the patriarchal operations are still in place. History has shown that there is a significant difference in the rate of socio-economic development, between communities which embrace gender equality and those which discriminate women. The difference is attributed to the different types of capital such as human capital and financial capital. This paper is going to address the relationship between gender equality and economic development, specifically in Rwanda. The paper will show some of the programs and mechanisms put in place for the purpose of enhancing gender equality. The current economic development level will then be assessed in comparison to that of the period when the programs and mechanisms were being initiated.

Keywords: Empowerment of women, Gender equality, Economic development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality refers to the availability of equal opportunities for accessing social and economic resources such as education, employment, property and leadership positions, for both male and female members of a society. In the near past before the commencement of the struggle for equal rights with regard to gender was initiated, the roles of women were clearly defined in all societies in the world. The primary roles of a woman were reproduction and carrying out domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of the children. Women were, therefore, excluded from external roles such as working to generate income, voting and making important decisions which affected the society in general states Eynon, (2017).

Women were also not allowed to go to school, as most societies believed that since a woman would always get married, there was no need for her to specialize in any means of livelihood because her husband would provide everything for her. Considering that women were not allowed to own property independently, it was only logical for them not to struggle to amass any, because at the end of the day, the men would always be in charge of everything (Manneh, 2017).

According to Spitzer, *et al.*, (2014), For Rwanda, this culture was practiced for a longer time compared to countries in the west, where the campaigns for gender equality started earlier and were quickly assimilated into the society. Many scholars argue that the robust gender equality campaigns which seem to have bore fruits in Rwanda started in the wake of the 1994 genocide. It is believed that the tragic events gave rise to the need to end discrimination in all dimensions. The Rwanda people saw the need for the entire community to come together, and see each other as being equal, regardless of their ethnicity or gender.

This type of thinking motivated the formulation of healing strategies which were incorporated in all sectors of the country, including government institutions, leadership, education and family. The incorporation of these strategies in governance has seen Rwanda experience a steady and exponential economic growth, making her one of the countries with the highest

economic growth rate in Africa. Despite the historical steps made by Rwanda in matters of gender equality, the old practices are still being practices in many parts of the country, which means that there is still more to be done (Eynon, 2017).

Livelihood

Genocide

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF GENDER EQUALITY IN RWANDA

In the pre-colonial era, the roles of a Rwandan woman were well defined, which were mainly confined to the household. In crucial decision-making exercises, a woman could not sit with men in such discussions; let alone air her own views concerning a certain issue. If a woman felt like she had the solution to an issue facing the community, she would tell her husband about it, who would then present it to the relevant sitting. Women were not allowed to act freely or make decisions which affected their lives directly. According to the customs, a woman was supposed to always be under the protection of a man these included her father, brothers or husband. The inability of women to hold leadership positions was evidenced by the fact that only the sons were allowed to be heirs to the throne. As far as inheritance of property was concerned, it was a taboo for a woman to inherit any property from her father (Manneh, 2017).

The argument of Spitzer, *et al*, (2014), which I strongly support, is that as far as business was concerned, women were disadvantaged in different ways. Other than the tradition of financial enterprises being handled by men only, the low quality of education provided to women made it difficult for those who were bold enough to start companies. They were also denied loans by banks due to numerous technical and planning issues. For instance, a woman would have a good business plan which had the potential of generating satisfactory amounts of revenue. However, the plan would lack a feasibility study, rendering the business vulnerable to all possible loopholes. In such cases, it was impossible for the banks to give such a person a loan to start the business, due to lack of guarantee of their money being paid back in time. These and other constraints made it very difficult for women to be financially stable, rendering them helplessly dependent on the male fraction of the population (Spitzer, *et al*, 2014).

In the year 1956, the first campaigns for gender equality were initiated by the Belgian colonial administrators who created and implemented policies which worked to improve the status of women in the society argues Ní, *et al*, (2012). The proposed division of labor among both men and women saw women gain more access to education. Even though the campaigns brought about a sense of equality in one sector, they did not focus on the core issue, which was the autonomy of women in Rwanda. For this reason, it was not until the early 1990's that a true picture of gender equality in Rwanda started to reveal itself. These changes were prompted by the need to help women who lived in the rural areas, in their efforts to develop stable and sustainable livelihoods (Ní, *et al*, 2012).

The Rwandan government took the initiative to avail considerable amounts of funds in the form of credit, which helped the women start small businesses cites Eynon, (2017).

The highest levels of gender equality in the country started being observed after the end of the civil war. This drastic change is mainly attributed to the actions taken by both the government and the people to get rid of any form of discrimination. The need to come together as a people and move forward together as a country made it necessary for the government to initiate mechanisms and programs which ensured that every Rwandan citizen had an equal opportunity to access quality education, employment, leadership positions and success in general. The government's commitment to gender equality has been witnessed in the country since the first democratic general election which was held in the year 2003. The number of female representatives both in parliament and in the Chamber of Deputies has increased continuously from the year of the first general election to today. These changes have transpired to the social sector, where today women have acquired the ability to handle responsibilities which traditionally, they could not handle. For instance, 35% of the households in Rwanda are headed by women. Women are also allowed to manage financial resources and also make major decisions regarding issues facing the society (Kagaba, 2014).

3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

For there to be a sustainable socio-economic development in any country, disparities among the population must be minimized. An example of the differences which tend to deter sustainable development of the economy if they are on the extreme ends is poverty levels. If one fraction of a population is extremely wealthy while the other one is extremely poor,

it is impossible for such a community to develop sustainably. This is because other factors such as conflicts and insecurity could set it, due to the poor fraction feeling disenfranchised in terms of the distribution of national resources. In such a place, both local and international investors would not choose start or continue doing business there, due to the fear of incurring major losses in revenue. For such a community to have a chance of developing sustainably, the government would have to find a way of reducing the gap between the rich and the poor, by adopting numerous poverty alleviation interventions. This would create a sense of satisfaction among the people, and negative factors such as conflicts and insecurity would be eliminated because citizens and the public would be busy at the fields and industries working and building the nation instead of engaging in wars and insecurity paving way for sustainable socio-economic development (Eynon, 2017).

For gender, Prah, (2013), claims it is almost impossible for a society which discriminates its people on gender basis, to undergo sustainable economic development. This is because if a country does not provide equal opportunities to all citizens regardless of their gender, it would mean that the average economic productivity per person would be extremely low. This is because for example, if women are not allowed to participate in economic activities, it would mean that more than half of the population would be depending on the men who would be less than half of the population, for sustenance. In this scenario, even if other negative factors do not come into play, the development rate of such a community would be insignificant (Prah, 2013).

On the other hand, a community which provides equal opportunities for its entire people is likely to undergo sustainable economic development, even in the midst of manageable constraints. This is because when every individual is allowed to be economically productive, the human capital of the country is increased (Kagaba, 2014). This means that the average economic productivity of every citizen would be relatively higher. The gap between the wealthy and the poor would be moderate, which means that conflicts related to uneven distribution of resources would not be likely to arise. This means that the security levels would be satisfactory; therefore, this factor would not be a threat to local and foreign investors. To comprehensively explain the relationship between gender equality and economic development, it is important to look at the classical development theory, the human development theory and the institutional development theory. (Valodia, 2010).

Classical Development Theory:

According to this theory, the increased levels of women participation in economic productivity and other social activities is a result of the economic development achieved by the country. Looking at the economic growth rate of Rwanda from the year 1994, it has been relatively exponential. Despite the fact that 2003 saw the first democratic election in Rwanda, autonomy including that for women was already a part of the society, still in the developing stages. Between the year 2003 to the present day, women participation in educational and occupational programs has been increasing with the steadily growing economy. Therefore, with regard to the classical development theory, it is economic development which Rwanda had undergone, which saw the country set a world record of 56% women parliamentarians in 2008. Economic development was also the reason for the introduction of many educational programs, a change in the school curriculum and the vocational training, to help in enhancing the professionalism of women. These initiatives empowered women with the ability to hold respectable leadership positions in society.

The Human Development Theory:

This theory suggests that modernization provides a favorable environment for the development of autonomy and women empowerment. This means that when a country is economically developed, it becomes easy for people to be given the freedom to self determination. Such an environment makes it possible for people to see the importance of equality in all fronts. In Rwanda, even though the campaigns against any type of discrimination started on the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, the major milestones of gender equality were seen in the year 2008. The initiations of women empowerment programs started in 2003 with the passing of the new constitution which entailed the National Gender Policy, but the impacts of the programs was witnessed in the later years. This means that the efforts of promoting gender equality and autonomy among women grew stronger with the developing economy. The direct link between economic development and gender equality is that; a higher level of economic development means that there are more funds and other resources required, to facilitate the campaigns and initiatives for promoting gender equality (Prah, 2013).

The Institutional Design Theory:

How institutions in a society are structured determines the capability of women to participate in processes such as elections and appointment to leadership positions. In a society where women hold a considerable number of leadership positions, it can be said that the institutional designs in the society promote gender equality. At the same time, since elections require candidates to spend a lot of money during campaigns, the number of women participating in campaigns can be used to assess the autonomy of the women in the society, as far as economic productivity is concerned. The large percentage of female parliamentarians in Rwanda shows how actively Rwandan women are participating in economic activities. The institutions in the country work collectively to promote gender equality, through the integration of the policies into the specific operational programs. As compared to the other theories, the institutional development theory is difficult to link with economic development (Valodia, 2010).

4. MECHANISMS CREATED TO FACILITATE GENDER EQUALITY

These mechanisms include policies and conventions which work collectively to cultivate the gender equality practice in all sectors of life in Rwanda. The first gender equality policy was enshrined in the new constitution of 2003, which required that 30% of positions in all decision-making organs at the three levels of government, be given to women (Masanja *et al*, 2016). The year 2004 witnessed the introduction of multiple policies such as the National Gender Policy and land reform policies. 2005 saw the adoption of the organic law, which set out expectations of how land should be used and managed (Masanja *et al*, 2016). Considering that the levels of education between male and female fractions of the population were not equally, some policies aimed at leveling the education and training grounds were initiated. These included the provision of basic and special education, training on information technology and the promotion of innovative skills. Vocational training programs were also created, to enable learners to gain practical exposure to what they learnt in classrooms. Several other policies have been put in place, such as those availing funds to women and youth. Considering that the youth category includes both male and female, it is correct to say that the female fraction of the Rwandan population is highly favored by such policies. From 2003 to the present, there are approximately 53 policies whose function is to facilitate gender equality, by ensuring that women have equal opportunities to succeed as men agrees Valodia, (2010).

In 1981, the government of Rwanda adopted the strategies proposed in the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Kagaba, 2014). This action saw the government assimilate the Beijing Plan for Action, which enabled it to integrate gender equality policies in all its organs as well as the private sector. Being a member of COMESA, Rwanda usually sends a representative to the annual meetings of the Ministry of Gender, where the representative is normally expected to present a report about the progress of gender equality policies in the republic of Rwanda (Masanja, *et al*, 2016). As a member of the International Conference of Great Lakes Region, Rwanda is expected to take part in the forums specifically designed, for women's issues to be addressed. The country's membership in the African Union saw it adopt the Maputo protocol which also plays the role of advocating for women rights in all countries affiliated to it states Prah, (2013). These and other affiliations make it necessary for the country to intensify its war on gender inequality, to fulfill the collective expectations of the conventions.

The NGP document of 2010 clearly stipulates all the gender policies which require implementation. For this reason, the relevant institutions and other stakeholders involved in the implementation process have been given specific duties to oversee the execution of the process. Within the executive branch of government, there is the directorate of strategic planning, which plays three key roles in the implementation of the policies. These roles are ensuring that gender equality and development issues are given priority on the national level, gaining the support of development partners in fulfilling gender equality goals and overseeing the assimilation of gender policies into the programs of the cabinet, the private sector and public institutions.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE POLICIES

The office of the Prime Minister plays one role, which is ensuring that all ministries comply with the gender policy implementation requirements (Masanja, *et al*, 2016). The ministry of gender and family promotion is equipped with the resources required, and the mandate to inform people in the entire country, about the strong link between gender equality and economic development. The government ministries play three roles. These are elaboration of the particular policy and the appropriate strategic plan for its implementation, creating a gender responsive system to aid in monitoring and evaluating the implementation and creation of a training program for its personnel to develop their gender skills on a continuous basis. (Literature review)

To monitor the steps being made towards gender equality, the Gender Monitoring Office was established in the year 2008 (Kagaba, 2014). Being consistent with the country's Vision 2020 as well as the second EDPRS in terms of objectives, GMO fights violence and injustices directed towards gender, other than monitoring gender commitments on the international level states Masanja, (2016). "To aid in the monitoring process, the institution creates complete systems featured with gender equality performance indicators, feedback mechanisms and report generating capabilities on a periodic basis" (Grown (2015). This makes it possible for GMO to know which sectors are performing poorly and therefore need improvement. The systems also enable the institution to know the best performing programs, so that they can be replicated in other sectors. GMO also plays an oversight role by demanding Gender Budget Statements, which are then evaluated to establish whether the progress achieved in gender equality correspond to the amount of funds spent (Valodia, 2010). However, only public sectors are required by GMO to generate Gender Budget Statements.

To ascertain that the implementation of the gender equality policies is consistent with the EDPRS, the National Institute of Statistics Rwanda was established (Masanja, *et al* 2016). Considering that the gender equality policies are mainly created to serve women, it is necessary for women of Rwanda to take active part in the campaigns and exploit all the benefits of the available initiatives. For this reason, Women's Councils were introduced in 2003. The councils were meant to be the platforms where women could advocate for their rights as they assist each other to become more active participants in national development projects, through acquisition of problem solving skills and economic productivity ideas.

"The government of Rwanda, development partners, the private sector and the civil society together comprise the gender cluster" quotes Valodia, (2010). This group is responsible for coordinating all processes which facilitate the implementation of gender policies. The group comes up with gender equality ideas, examines their feasibility, identifies any possible loopholes and recommends their incorporation into the available network of programs. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning is also an important institution which plays a key role in the implementation of the gender equality policies (Grown, 2015). The ministry evaluates the government's budget to ensure that the resources allocated for the implementation of gender equality programs meets the set expectations and objectives. The ministry is also responsible for creating a budget which ensures that the gender equality mainstreaming programs meet the required standards. Other entities involved in the implementation of the gender equality policies include the "Gender Focal Points, Forum for Rwandan Women Parliamentarians, National Human Rights Commission, Unity and Reconciliation Commission, National Commission for the fight against HIV/AIDS and Institutions of Higher Learning" (Valodia, 2010).

Programs Put in Place to Promote Gender Equality:

Following the commitment of the Rwandan government towards gender equality, Kagaba, (2014), cites that the country has witnessed the creation of programs and mechanisms which aid in facilitating the gender mainstreaming process. The programs introduced for this purpose were initiated via the Community Development Policy, which encourages the people to actively participate in their development process. This policy was aimed at eliminating the belief that for communities to undergo sustainable development, it was the responsibility of the government to single handedly put in place the processes and seeing them through, without any participation by the general public. The policy sought to remind the people that they were the government, and the government was them. It clearly stated that for sustainable socio-economic development to be achieved, every stakeholder had to perform their task to the best of their ability. It was the role of the government to create a conducive environment for doing business, while the people had the mandate to come up with business ventures. To remain consistent with this policy, the government came up with programs which were to play the role of bring people on board, to the community development strategy (Hunt & Carter 2017).

Valodia, (2010), agrees that some of the programs initiated by the government of Rwanda for this purpose include HIMO, EBUDEHE, Imidugudu, and Gacaca. HIMO is a program which was initiated as a solution for the problem of high unemployment rates in the rural areas of the country. Between 2003 and 2009, reports have shown that approximately 10,000 employment opportunities were created through the program. To promote gender equality, the positions were shared equally among men and women. The EBUDEHE and the formalization of Gacaca programs were both focused on availing leadership positions to women, where they could directly voice their opinions regarding crucial matters affecting the community. The Imidugudu resettlement was a national program which saw Rwanda goes against the tradition of not involving women in house construction activities. Before the initiation of the program, there was a myth which stated that if a woman built a house, it would leak. The program saw women participate in the construction of houses alongside men and in some cases, alone (Valodia, 2010).

According to Masanja *et al.*, (2016), the women empowerment program which seeks to fulfill the financial needs of women who live in the rural areas was initiated as a sign that it was time for a change in the norms and practices in the country. Before the initiation of the program which empowered women with the capability to run small business to earn a living, women were not allowed to venture into business. The initiation of this program was therefore, a milestone in the struggle to eradicate gender inequality, on the economic front. The government started the Communal Funds Program which made it easy for women in rural areas to access small loans, which were initially inaccessible in banks agrees Hunt & Carter (2017).

The most recent program set up to sustain the gender equality gains made in Rwanda over the years is the Advancing and Sustaining Gender Equality Gains program. This program was jointly initiated in the year 2013 by the National Gender Machinery and the One UN in Rwanda (Eynon, 2017). The program works hand in hand with the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy and the United Nations Development Assistance Plan, to promote the mainstreaming of gender equality in all social and economic development strategies and policies. The program runs under the guidance of four primary priorities. These are, enhancing the institutional prowess of the National Gender Machinery, cementing gender equality in budgeting at all levels, policies and programs, Improving the effectiveness of mechanisms put in place to facilitate accountability in gender equality initiatives in all sectors and making productive resources more accessible to women considered vulnerable (Eynon, 2017). (Lit review)

The National Gender Machinery is a vital institutional organ which plays a major role in ensuring that gender equality initiatives and policies are adhered to the latter states Hunt & Carter (2017). The machinery works with other regional and global organizations to come up with ways of mitigating gender inequality in education, employment, leadership and also in family setups. The machinery is the instrument which influences social and economic policies in Rwanda, restoring balance where there seems to be disparities on the basis of gender. The National Gender Machinery is also charged with the mandate to form strategic partnerships with both private and public organizations, for purposes of funding its initiatives. Therefore, strengthening the institution enables it to carry out its duties with higher efficiency, which does not only aid in sustaining the gains made in establishing gender equality, but it also helps the country move towards a more stable gender equilibrium.

Being a capitalist country, it is likely that at a certain point, some people could feel like the resources being allocated to fighting gender inequality are in excess. When such ideas are entertained, the country could find itself falling back to the times when equity was compromised. Ensuring that gender parity is considered during budgeting at both the local and the national levels, enables equality programs and policies to keep running without interruptions (Abbott, 2015). The program ensures that any initiative meant to benefit the society be it socially or economically, is implemented in a bipartisan manner, as far as gender is concerned. Considering that the policies which are set up to combat gender disparities apply to both public and private institutions and organizations, accountability mechanisms have also been put in place to ensure that the institutions and organizations adhere to the recommended practices (Abbott, 2015). Boosting the effectiveness of such processes would make it difficult for the institutions and organizations to show non-compliance to the policies, thereby preventing the deterioration of the progress made.

Women are put under the vulnerable condition if they are widowed, divorced or single mothers due to the above two or other reasons. The vulnerability is attached to the hardships that the women have to go through in order to provide for their families. To ease their struggles, the program provides resources such as education, training and funds which enable the women to develop sustainable means of livelihood. Therefore, the program makes it easier for the women to provide for the needs of their families such as food, quality healthcare and quality education argues Eynon, (2017).

Impact of economic empowerment of women on the development of Rwanda:

Looking at the history of Rwanda, it is easy to say that women empowerment programs started as early as 1956, in the colonial era. However, a closer look at the gains made shows that effective programs and mechanisms for promoting the participation of women in all societal activities including economic productivity, started in the year 2003. During this period, programs were put in place and different governmental and non-governmental institutions given specific responsibilities to oversee the implementation of the plan. These programs saw women receive basic and special education, vocational training and even funds in the form of credit. These programs made it possible for women to run their own businesses, contributing to the well being of their families and in developing the economy of the country. Looking at the country's socio-economic indicators such as GDP and poverty levels, it is correct to say that the women

empowerment initiatives have had a great impact on socio-economic development. For example, from the fiscal year 2003 to the fiscal year 2017, the country had had an average growth rate of 7-8 % in real GDP states (Grown, 2015). As far as the poverty levels are concerned, the period between 2006 and 2011 saw an approximately 8% decrease in the proportion of people who were living below the poverty line (Grown, 2015).

The program which has been guiding the development of Rwanda's economy is the Vision 2020. The objectives of this vision are to transform Rwanda from being a low-income agriculture-based economy to a knowledge-based service-oriented middle-income state. Considering its impact on economic development, the programs of empowering women economically have been aligned to the Vision 2020. The programs have witnessed the improvement of available educational facilities and the introduction of new ones. These efforts are meant to improve the quality of human capital (Abbott, 2015). A high quality human capital is a vital requirement in ensuring that the work output is of the highest efficiency possible. This leads to high productivity, which consequently promotes socio-economic development.

The economic empowerment of women has led to the participation of the republic of Rwanda in international conferences, as well as the formulation of gender equality commitments. This has improved the international relations of the country, opening doors for foreign investors to tap into the Rwandan market. This has in turn led to the creation of employment opportunities for many Rwandan citizens. The ultimate result of this is the improvement of the living standards of the people of Rwanda and a reduction in the poverty levels, enhancing socio-economic development.

Challenges Faced by Government in Promoting Gender Equality:

Despite the tireless efforts the government of Rwanda has put in the implementation of gender equality policies, the changes in the society are not yet at the expected level. This is mainly due to the constraints faced by the various institutions in the implementation and monitoring processes. First, some districts and ministries lack people with sufficient skills to facilitate the efficient implementation of the policies states Spitzer, (2014). This makes it difficult for the process to be effective, because the people in those areas do not know what to do, to optimize the gender equality exercises.

In some institutions, the resources required to facilitate the optimum implementation of the policies are not enough. Since the people in these institutions do not know what to do, they simply follow the outlined frameworks, without seeking for technical support from the National Gender Machinery argues Masanja, et al, (2016). This problem has led to inconsistencies in the progress made in gender equality, despite some of the Gender Budget Statements being accurate. There has also been a problem with the frequency of collecting and utilizing "sex disaggregated data at central and decentralized levels" (Masanja et al, 2016). This has made it difficult for the institutions involved to have a clear picture of the steps being made in gender equality. As a result, some places have lagged in this journey, which makes it difficult for the government to create a consistent budget for the implementation of gender policies.

The Gender Based Statements generated by some districts and institutions have been of limited quality (Hunt & Carter 2017). This has decreased the ease of development partners to strongly deliver gender equality initiatives of high efficiency. Looking at the numerous interventions put in place to promote gender equality; their sufficient coordination has proven to be problematic. This has created a situation where some interventions work well while others do not meet the expectations, even though the feasibility studies conducted before the implementation showed that the interventions would work well. For these reasons, the government of Rwanda has not been able to enjoy the maximum benefits of its efforts in promoting gender equality. However, the government is aware of these challenges and it is currently working towards alleviating them.

6. CONCLUSION

The government of Rwanda in conjunction with other stakeholders has been playing an active role in promoting gender equality in the country, since the passing of the new constitution in 2003. These efforts have seen the initiation of gender equality initiatives, which have aided in improving the position of a woman in the society. From a point where women could not speak in front of men or present their views in public, Rwanda has become the global pace setter for women participation in national politics. These developments in gender equality have translated into the socio-economic development of the country, through the increased overall economic productivity brought about by the participation of women in economic activities, leadership positions and decision making.

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