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Post-Genocide Nation-Building and Development – Rwanda’s Home-Grown Gender Policy and Its Complex Social Environment

1. Introduction

While some countries, such as Hungary, still does not recommend the travel to Rwanda¹, the East-Central African country has made a remarkable progress in many respect and is increasingly seen as a development model for many other African states. Delegations of other countries frequent President Kagame’s compound in Kigali to learn about ways and methods of participation across society to rebuild the country. One of the mantras of the new Rwanda is that solutions have to come from within to make sure to include citizens at all levels. They have to be “home-grown”, as people emphasized during the two-year-long series of discussions every Saturday with politicians in the State House (Urugwiro²).

1 See the website of the Hungarian government:

<http://konzuliszolgalat.kormany.hu/afrika?ruanda>, last update on April 11, 2017.

2 Urugwiro means ‘hospitality’ in the Kinyarwandan language and is home to the office of the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame. It was originally built to accommodate the 6th Franco-African Summit in May 1979.

According to the International Development Association (IDA) fund of the World Bank, by 2009, “the country [was] stable and at peace. [...] Substantial progress has been made in stabilizing and rehabilitating the economy. [...] Governance indicators have improved.”³ Based on personal interviews in March–April 2015 and March 2016, it is widely articulated across the country that people “claim to be happier now than before the genocide was committed [...] [and] the majority cannot imagine Rwanda without President Kagame.”⁴ Although many – mainly Western – nations have criticised Rwanda for amending the constitution in 2016 to allow President Kagame to stand for re-election for another seven-year term in August 2017 (the third mandate since he won the first multiparty elections in 2003)⁵, the vast majority of the Rwandan population is in support of his policies of reconstruction and development.

In rebuilding the country and to be able to improve living conditions, women are seen by a growing number of people as agents of change. How much can they really take part in decision-making and how much change can they truly induce is a fundamental question though. In an expanding scholarly literature about the issue of the role of women in national parliaments⁶ we read, for instance from Yoon that, “numerous studies have examined whether a growth in the number (or proportion) of women in parliament makes a difference.”⁷ The question is always at hand: How much difference does “increased female representation have on government policy”⁸ and on democratic governance as such?

3 See: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/IDA/Resources/ida-Rwanda-10-02-09.pdf>

4 BAMURANGIRWA, Patricia, « Rwanda Yesterday », Kibworth Beauchamp: Matador, 2013. p. 173.

5 “Kagame has been president since 2000, but he has effectively been in control since his forces marched into the Rwandan capital, Kigali, to end the 1994 genocide.” The Guardian, January 1, 2016. See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/01/rwanda-paul-kagame-third-term-office-constitutional-changes>

6 See for example, THOMAS, Sue, « The impact of women on state legislative policies », *Journal of Politics* 53, 1991, pp. 958-76.; DAHLERUP, Drude, « Women, Quotas and Politics », London, Routledge, 2006.; BAUER, Gretchen, and E. BRITTON, Hannah, « Women in African Parliaments », 2006. BOULDER, CO, Lynne Rienner Publishers.; or GOETZ, Anne M., and HASSIM, Shireen, « No Shortcuts to Power: African women in politics and policy making », London: Zed Books, eds. 2003

7 YOON, Mi Yung, « More women in the Tanzanian legislature: Do numbers matter? » *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 29. No. 1. 2011, pp. 83–98.

8 HANDELMAN, Howard, « The Challenge of Third World Development », 5th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2009, p. 156

The paper⁹ intends to contribute to our better understanding of the changing role of women in Sub-Saharan Africa in general, but with a focus on political representation in Rwanda, in particular. It offers a contribution to the debate on the process of 'modernisation' in Africa, as it will analyse the Rwandan case with the aim to comprehend how its high proportion of female political representation can be possible and even more, get maintained in the future, in a traditional patriarchal society with a lot of pressing post-genocide matters such as rebuilding a destroyed infrastructure and a shattered economy, reconciling a deeply divided and traumatized society with hundreds of thousands of orphans, widows, who have to manage households and land conflicts on their own, as well as overpopulation, female poverty, girls drop out of school, or early age pregnancy – these latter issues affecting mainly women, but also society at large. Although undoubtedly unique, Rwanda's case possesses a number of experiences and consequences that can be considered by other African states, in particular, as "discussions about female political participation [in the country] tend to assume that increased participation by women will lead to greater gender equality and a 'better', more peaceful society, yet these changes have not necessarily increased the political power of women or led to more egalitarian notions of citizenship."¹⁰

First, the paper will look at the Rwandan environment in the historic context of the 1994 genocide, mentioning the post-genocide demographic reality, the Vision 2020 development plan and policies affecting women. Second, a number of issues challenging in particular women will be raised – with a substantial focus on the education of girls. Finally, the opportunities and obstacles for women entrepreneurs will be discussed. The overarching intention is to raise some further questions to foster more debate on such gender issues in Rwanda and beyond, even in European countries.

9 It draws upon BAGI Judit – TARRÓSY, István, «Women's Political Representation and Participation in Rwanda Today», In: MACHALIK, Tomáš and MILDNEROVÁ, Kateřina (eds.), «Tradition vs. Modernity in Contemporary Africa: Viva Africa 2013: Proceedings of the VIIIth International Conference on African Studies», Pilsen, 2014. pp. 25-45, and TARRÓSY, István, «Home-Grown" Rwandan Approach for Female Political Representation and Participation», In TARRÓSY, István (ed.), «How Borderless is Europe? Multi-disciplinary approach to European Studies». Pécs: Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, University of Pécs, 2015, pp. 169-187., and it is its revised version.

10 E. BURNET, Jennie, «Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda», *African Affairs*, Vol. 107, No. 428, 2008, pp. 361-386.

2. The Rwandan case

Due to the series of events since 1990, Rwanda had to face a very difficult and complex situation right after the terrible (second) genocide and civil war: a demographic problem appeared, namely nearly 70 percent of the population were female.¹¹ The country's women also went through serious hardships, and as a consequence of this demographic imbalance, women found themselves in positions that used to be occupied by men. Women became heads of households, community leaders, and financial providers. Due to this problem, in the post-genocide period up until 2003 women's issues were put high on the political agenda. This political effort had two main reasons: one of them is a demographic imbalance, the notable majority of women in the Rwandan society. The other one is connected to the fact that the leadership wanted to establish an image that is democratic and preferred by Western donors; one of its basic elements was to enhance the equality between genders. Female representation in the parliament was around 25 percent at the time. In 2003, the country adopted a new constitution, which contained a specific clause on women's political representation. In the period leading up to the formulation of this new constitution women movements, NGOs, the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development (MIGEPROF)¹² and women parliamentarians played a very active role to achieve gender equality at the political level as well.

The country's new constitution was passed on 26 May 2003 after a referendum. It explicitly provides equal rights to all citizens of Rwanda

11 POWLEY, Elizabeth, «Strengthening Governance: The Role of Women in Rwanda's Transition A Summary», United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues And Advancement of Women (OSAGI) Expert Group Meeting on «Enhancing Women's Participation in Electoral Processes in Post-Conflict Countries», Glen Cove, New York, United States, January 19-22, 2004.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/meetings/2004/EGMelectoral/EP5-Powley.PDF>, p 2.

12 In the process of institutional reorganization in the aftermath of the genocide, the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Affairs (MIGEFASO) was created. Today, the ministry bears the name Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion and has the official website: <http://www.migeprof.gov.rw>.

and fosters the increased representation of “under-represented groups, particularly women and youth.”¹³

According to the constitution, women must hold at least 30 percent of the seats in the parliament. The regulation works in practise in the bicameral Rwandan parliament in the following way: “the Chamber of Deputies has 80 members, however only 53 of those (2/3) are elected directly through a closed list Proportional Representation system. Each list or each candidate has to have at least 5% of the votes. 24 seats are reserved for women, two per province, though indirect elections, 2 are elected by the National Youth Council and 1 is elected by the Federation of Association for Disabled.”¹⁴ The Senate altogether has 26 members for an 8-year term: 2 elected by the staff of the universities, 12 elected by provincial and sectoral councils, 4 appointed by the Forum of Political Formations, and 8 appointed by the president.¹⁵

Although the introduction of the new constitution had an enormous effect on women’s political representation, it seems to be problematic in certain areas. Many experts add that despite the progressive spirit of the Rwandan constitution (with equal rights, gender equality and women’s representation) plenty of issues such as land conflicts, overpopulation, female poverty, girls’ drop out of school, or early age pregnancy are still waiting for a change. Rwanda’s case demonstrates that the most effective tool to increase the proportion of women in parliament is to set a minimum quota in the constitution. According to the 2009 gender report issued by the East African Community (EAC), as a result of the high level of female representation, significant steps had been taken in women’s issues. For instance, since the new constitution took effect almost ten thousand jobs were created where the balance between male and female employees is compulsorily set.¹⁶

In reality, however, the prevalence of real representation of women is much more nuanced. Several experts believe that it is the country’s

13 BURNET, Jennie, *op. cit.*, 2008. p. 363.

14 LUTZ, Georg, «Reflections on Rwanda’s electoral regulations», November 2005, <http://www.ku.ac.ke/actil/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ELECTION-REGULATION-IN-RWANDA.pdf>, p. 6.

15 *Ibid.*

16 East African Community Secretariat, «Gender and Community Development Analysis in Rwanda», January 2009, http://cleancookstoves.org/resources_files/gender-and-community.pdf, p. 14.

political system – i.e. the authoritarian regime dressed up in democratic clothes – that is the real obstacle to the genuine representation of women. The real representation of women would mean effective policy making and tangible outcomes on the many gender issues this paper also makes mention of – in a cooperative, joint effort of female and male parliamentarians. Jennie Burnet draws our attention to increasing authoritarianism, as a result of which, “female political participation represents a paradox in the short term,” but she also stresses that “in the long term, however, the increased participation of women could prepare the path for their meaningful participation in a genuine democracy.”¹⁷

According to the strategic document “Vision 2020”¹⁸ finalized in July 2000, Rwanda emphasizes its focussed commitment to the creation of a knowledge-based economy, which considers strengthening all human capacities across the country. This involves an increased policy attention on behalf of the government, as the strategic concept says: “Rwanda is committed to reaching ‘Universal Education for All’, which is one of the most important Millennium Development Goals. However, there is clearly a need to educate and train people at all levels: primary, secondary and tertiary, with special attention paid to the quality of education.”¹⁹ To become a “capable state”, Rwanda intends to contribute to the development of not only the policy sectors in general, but also to target individuals in particular, with a special emphasis on youth and women. “Major emphasis [is] placed on vocational and technical training in the fields of technology, engineering and management. [...] To encourage skills development, micro-credit schemes will be promoted specifically to extend finance to self-employed young technicians. Special emphasis will be given to innovative, small-scale entrepreneurs. To promote efficiency and continuous upgrading of skills, appropriate programmes will be launched in the national institutions aimed at on-the-job training, in-service training and distant learning,”²⁰ as the document articulates.

17 BURNET Jennie, *op. cit* 2008. p. 363.

18 See: <http://www.sida.se/globalassets/global/countries-and-regions/africa/rwanda/d402331a.pdf>

19 Republic of Rwanda, «Rwanda Vision 2020», http://rnra.rw/uploads/media/Vision-2020_04.pdf, p. 15.

20 *Ibid.*

3. Issues challenging women in particular

Rwanda has been fostering an ambitious economic plan today along the Singaporean model. Behind the remarkable recovery and growth story, however, President Paul Kagame's argument that "control of the press, of politics, and of speech, was essential to the preservation of [...] a fragile peace"²¹ makes us more hesitant to believe how much female political participation in the parliament or the government can really have a say in deep social changes or as Bauer and Britton suggested, female legislative representation "may be used by political leaders [...] to legitimize their agendas."²² With all our doubts reserved, field interviews confirmed that society at large believes in "home-grown solutions" and the one and only way of uniting efforts to rebuild the country from ashes.

We can agree with Greg Mills in stating, "Kagame's Rwanda offers much to admire."²³ Kagame has been a "donor favourite," as "one of a new breed of African leader [...] [who] had embraced capitalism and were said to have understood the need for rigorous administration and good governance."²⁴ Although Rwanda as a country has taken a huge leap forward, there are still some substantial issues that affect women in particular, such as land inheritance and conflicts, education of girls, or family planning, that are awaiting a solution. Some examples are highlighted here using the statistics of the United Nations and the World Bank.

21 APPLEBAUM, Anne, «Where economic ambition meets reality Rwanda», The Washington Post, September 25, 2011.

See: https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/where-economic-ambition-meets-reality-in-rwanda/2011/09/23/gIQA2fRgrK_story.html?utm_term=.9747c2598971

22 GRETCHEN, Bauer – E. BRITTON Hannah (eds.), «Women in African Parliaments», Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006. p. 22.

23 MILLS, Gregg, «Why Africa is Poor. And What Africans Can Do About It», Johannesburg, Penguin Books, 2010, p. 176.

24 ELLIS, Stephen, «*Season of Rains. Africa in the World*», London, Hurst & Company, 2011, pp. 36-37.

3.1. Land inheritance and conflicts

In a patrilineal society like Rwanda, in which “sons have equal rights to acquire land from their father [...] women’s land rights have often been a source of conflict.”²⁵ It has been the case even more so taking into account that a large chunk of the country’s population is heavily dependent on the land, “lives in the countryside and is engaged in agriculture.”²⁶ The law that was introduced by the government in 2005 (Land Law) had to respond to the traditional discriminatory practice that did not favour women and female orphans. Besides clarifying the entire inheritance process, the law addressed “the problem of customary inheritance and illegal practices that had deprived female orphans and widows from their rights over lands.”²⁷ Settling land tenure rights – as many other conflictual issues in the country – on the one hand strengthened and enhanced women’s positions, but at the same time left the ground open to continued discriminatory practices, “which are prejudicial to women and due to the negative attitudes towards women’s land rights,” as the Rwanda Women Network pointed out in a Policy Brief²⁸ published in May 2011.

3.2. Poverty, life expectancy and family planning

In 2008, more than 60 percent of the country’s population lived below the poverty line, less than 1.25 dollar per day, and 90 percent of the poor lived in the rural areas of Rwanda. One-third of the rural households

25 TAKEUCHI, Shinichi – MARARA, Jean, «Features of Land Conflicts in Post Civil War Rwanda», African Study Monographs Suppl, Vol. 42, 2011, pp. 119–138.

26 Ibid, p. 119.

27 UWAYEZU, Ernest – MUGIRANEZA, Theodimir, «Land Policy Reform in Rwanda and Land Tenure Security for all Citizens: Provision and Recognition of Women’s Rights over Land», TS04G – Gender Issues in Land Administration, Paper No. 4914. FIG Working Week 2011, Marrakech, Morocco.
http://www.fig.net/pub/fig2011/papers/ts04g/ts04g_uwayezu_mugiraneza_4914.pdf, p. 2.

28 This is entitled «Women’s land rights gains in Rwanda are eroded by cultural practices and negative attitude», <http://www.landcoalition.org/publications/policy-brief-women-s-land-rights-gains-rwanda-are-eroded-cultural-practices-and-negativ>

were led by women, according to globalgiving.org. While in 2000 the GDP per capita was only 242 dollars, in 2010 this amount nearly doubled, and reached 540 dollars.²⁹ The reduction of poverty as crucial issue and one of the Millennium Development Goals was taken seriously by President Kagame's government, as indicated in the Country Report 2010.³⁰ According to the World Bank, GDP per capita reached 697 USD in 2015.³¹ The Executive Summary of the Rwanda Poverty Profile Report 2013/14 showed improvement in all walks of life, for instance, saying: "Food crop production growth was more than twice that of population growth between 2007 and 2014. [...] Housing conditions are also improving. Households with grass roofing (nyakatsi) dropped to 0.4% in 2014 from 2.2% in 2011 while roofing with metal sheet increased from 54.4% to 61.1%. Access to electricity almost doubled during the same period to about 20%. [...] poverty has reduced from 44.9% in 2011 to 39.1% in 2014 and extreme poverty from 24.1% to 16.3%. This follows similar reduction between 2006 and 2011 where poverty dropped from 56.7% to 44.9% and Extreme poverty from 35.8% to 24.1%."³²

An important aspect of everyday reality is, however, a consequence of the 1994 genocide: that is that Rwandan society has higher percentage of vulnerable groups in poverty. This phenomenon affects mainly the survivors, especially girls and women. Widows, imprisoned men's wives and raped girls all belong to this vulnerable social group. Undoubtedly, Rwanda's women society has more chance to become poor, which is confirmed by looking at the statistics: in 2006, 60 percent of the households led by women were below the poverty line.³³

The ratio of vulnerable working women is also higher than that of working men. In Rwanda, 44 percent of working men and 55 percent of

29 ABBOTT, Pamela – RWIRAHIRA, John, «Rwanda Country Report 2010: Millennium Development Goals progress report», Kigali: UNDP/IPAR-Rwanda. See: <http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/123456789/9980>

30 *Ibid.*

31 See: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=RW&year_high_desc=false

32 See: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR): Rwanda Poverty Profile Report, 2013/14, August 2015. <http://www.statistics.gov.rw/publication/rwanda-poverty-profile-report-results-eicv-4>

33 *Op. cit.*, Rwanda Country Report, 2010. p. 28.

working women live in poverty.³⁴ Statistics predict, however, that in the next decades the poverty gap between men and women will decrease.

Life expectancy is closely related health issue to poverty. Women's (57 years) and men's (54 years) life expectancy in Rwanda is still very low.³⁵ This means that the government needs to invest more into health-care. According to the latest WHO data published in 2015 life expectancy in Rwanda is: Male 60.9, female 71.1 and total life expectancy is 66.1 which gives Rwanda a World Life Expectancy ranking of 131.³⁶

Rwanda is one of the most overpopulated countries of the world, and family planning represents another key question today. The total fertility rate is 5.4 per person, according to UN Data 2010.³⁷ To raise awareness about childbearing the government had a goal of increasing the usage of and the access to Fertility Awareness-based Methods. The family planning programme has been quite successful; the number of unintended pregnancies has been decreasing, and more women want less children. Family planning is a good method to reduce poverty because with the use of different types of contraceptives families have the opportunity to decide about the ideal size of their families, the number of their children. According to the Poverty Profile Report published in 2015: "Both fertility and dependency are dropping; with nutrition indicators among children improving; overall stunting dropped from 44.2% to 37.9% between 2010 and 2014/15 while that for the poorest quintile improved also dropping from 54% to 48.6%."³⁸ All these resulted that by 2014 the total fertility rate was measured 3.9 by the World Bank.³⁹

34 *Ibid.*

35 Resource of data: UN Data, see: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/socind/>

36 See: <http://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/rwanda-life-expectancy>

37 Resource of data: UN Data, see <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=SOWC&f=inID%3A127>

38 Rwanda Poverty Profile Report, 2015. p. v.

39 See: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN?locations=RW>

3.3. Education of girls

In the case of the whole of Africa there is a serious necessity for the application and success of educational reforms. Countries of the developing world in general are in need of knowledge and educated people in order to catch up, otherwise their regular trends and vulnerability would not change in the future. In order to receive the required education, however, it is undoubtedly necessary to establish an education system that is democratic, efficient, economically sustainable, and gives marketable knowledge to the African peoples of the 21st century. It is, therefore, of huge concern that in the region of Sub-Saharan Africa an outstandingly high number of girls falls out from primary school. Sub-Saharan Africa showed 54 percent of its girls leaving primary school before completion, according to World's Women Report 2010.⁴⁰ According to the data from 2009, in Rwanda, 94.2 percent of the girls enrolled in school, but the proportion finishing primary school was the lowest (under 50%) in Sub-Saharan Africa. Reasons for falling out from school include teenage pregnancy, the necessity to help with household chores (carrying water, collecting firewood), the high expense of school accessories, and the lack of integrating new female roles. Enrolling in primary school is compulsory in Rwanda and education is for free. According to a survey in 2009, 22% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 received no education at all.⁴¹ Much fewer girls commenced secondary school than boys, and they also had worse results. Thus, it became obvious that girls were in a much more disadvantageous situation compared to boys in terms of participation and success in education. The percentage of citizens with secondary or higher education qualification seemed to be exceptionally low. According to a survey made in 2007-2008, commissioned by the Rwandan government, 13% of men and 11% of women graduated from secondary school. Furthermore, only 1% of women and 1.6% of men finished higher education.⁴² It is a fact that the Rwandan government did

40 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs: *The World's Women 2010. Trends and Statistics*. New York, 2010. p. 55. See: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW_full%20report_color.pdf

41 *Op. cit.*, Rwanda Country Report, 2010. p. 48.

42 *Ibid.* p. 44

a lot to encourage education and to decrease illiteracy among citizens. While in 1990 only 62.5% of children enrolled in primary school, this proportion rose up to 94.2% by 2008.⁴³ As Robert Rotberg underlines, “the future of Africa depends on advances in educational opportunity, on greater and greater access to enhanced schooling chances, and on ensuring that more and more of Africa’s young – especially girls – are well educated.”⁴⁴ This is obviously true in the case of Rwanda, too. In particular, as Jackson Kaguri, president of the Nyaka AIDS Orphans Project in Uganda emphasises, “you educate a woman means you would have educated the whole community.”⁴⁵

It is evident that educating young citizens locally, who are capable of acquiring innovative knowledge, and keeping them within the country by establishing job opportunities requiring qualification is in the best and basic interest of Africa. The resources of the continent alone, however, are not yet sufficient since it is still without the necessary amount of capital and the required quality of infrastructure, hence the engagement of the international community including international financial institutions is still needed to make improvements. In order to advocate education among girls, the following goals were set to be achieved according to the strategic plan of the Rwandan Ministry of Education between 2008 and 2012: improving girls’ school results, decreasing the number of school dropouts, developing school infrastructure and equipment, increasing the number of students enrolling in higher education, reducing the proportion of teenage pregnancy and assault against girls, and spreading information regarding gender equality between parents. In particular, the strategic plan underlined that: “The quality of girls’ education is also a major area of focus in terms of improving the retention rate of girls in post primary and tertiary education, and especially for girls from poor households. Increased consideration of gender issues in education through training programmes for all teachers is required if

43 *Ibid.*

44 I. ROTBERG, Robert, «Africa Emerges. Consummate Challenges, Abundant Opportunities», Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013, p. 55.

45 TARRÓSY, István, «African Educators Inspire U.S. University Administrators», AFKInsider. October 16, 2013, See: <http://afkinsider.com/25571/quality-education-african-development/>

increased number of girls are to enter into maths, science and technology subject areas.”⁴⁶

Although there are even more similar fundamental issues that need special attention and care on behalf of the legislative and executive institutions of the state, the country has certainly departed from a hopeless past toward a bright future. Rwanda may expect the long-term benefits of greater female participation across the political spectrum, as well as all sectors of the economy. “The presence of women in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government marks a significant departure for Rwandan society and the collective cultural imagination.”⁴⁷ As also Minister of Defense, James Kabarere said in an interview in March 2015, the government “has gone beyond the numbers. Numbers is not the exciting story, but rather the quality” of involvement and output. Women (also in the armed forces) need to be empowered through education, but also challenged and supported so that they live up to the challenge.⁴⁸ This is the quality requirement of the country’s long-term development commitment.

4. Entrepreneurial women and obstacles to overcome

One of the focal issues of the investigation I have fostered in the last couple of years is the fundamental question of inequalities, which hinder women’s participation in business activities. Accepting the positive correlation that exists between the improvement of the economic status of women entrepreneurs and the increase in the welfare of their families, thus social development at large, a central issue is the circle

46 Ministry of Education, Republic of Rwanda: *Education Sector Strategic Plan 2008-2012*. June 2008, pp. 16-17.

See: http://www.hec.gov.rw/IMG/pdf/Education_SEctor_Strategic_Plan_2008-2012.pdf

47 BURNET, *Op. Cit.*, 2008. p. 38.

48 Interview recorded in the building of the Ministry of Defense (MoD), Kigali, on March 23, 2015.

of challenges women entrepreneurs need to face and meet, which then influence their performance (good and bad at the same time).

In most parts of the African continent women contribute to household production to bring in income. The forms of their engagement vary depending on where they live and their class status. In rural areas of Rwanda women produce food and/or cash crops, participate in small associations, and engage in small-scale commerce; those with little or no land may work on the farms of others. In the more urbanized settlements poor women may work as day labourers or engage in petty commerce, while women with education and access to resources may hold a salaried job and/or run a small business or an NGO. Of course, one has to be cautious as “women” in Rwanda (or in any other country) cannot be taken as a homogeneous category: class does matter; the urban-rural dichotomy does make a difference. According to Catharine Newbury, Professor Emerita of Government at Smith College, “the demands on women are heavy. Engaging in an income-earning occupation is usually expected of women, and women want to engage in productive as well as reproductive labour.”⁴⁹

In Rwanda, a traditionally male-dominated business environment, if a woman wants to grow her business, as Grace Mbabazi Mulinda, managing director of Royallinks, a clearing and forward firm in Kigali explains, she has to understand the importance of having the right contacts and networking. “It is through networking that you will be able to learn of new big business ideas and get deals.” She shared her thoughts with Peterson Tumwebaze on the website of the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion in an article introducing Rwandan women’s success stories.⁵⁰

Her case is certainly exemplary, but also draws attention to the obvious difference in the daily life of the more wealthy people and the poor. Upper and middle class women in Rwanda usually have household help. For those women who want to engage in politics, especially in the case of rural women, “the burdens of participation in local government councils and associations are heavy, as they have to produce food as well as care for children – any may not have this kind of help. Women may also

⁴⁹ Interview recorded electronically on May 9, 2014.

⁵⁰ See the website of the ministry here: <http://www.migeprof.gov.rw/index.php?id=3>

have to deal with complaints from their husbands who may see some negatives (wife is often away from home) and few positives from the unpaid work on government councils at the local level,” according to Newbury.⁵¹

This view is also supported by Filip Reyntjens, Professor of African Law and Politics at the Institute of Development Policy and Management, University of Antwerp. “The better off women in Rwanda – and Africa more generally – have staff to run their households and many are not active in associational life. I imagine it’s easier for them to engage in business than for many European women,” he said to me in an interview to AFKInsider.⁵²

Although after a slowdown in real GDP growth to 4.6% in 2013 from 7.2% in 2012, Rwanda has been enjoying an impressive and stable economic growth in general terms, and according to the African Development Bank Group,⁵³ it was “projected to recover to 7% and 7.4% in 2014 and 2015 respectively due to the recovery in services, improvement in agriculture productivity and sustained implementation of the public investment programme.” Behind the scenes many praise President Paul Kagame’s policies, who, as Helen Hintjens, Senior Lecturer at the International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University Rotterdam in The Netherlands phrases it, pushes that “business has become veritably the new official religion.” According to Trading Economics, “considering full 2016, economy grew by 5.9 percent compared to 6.9 percent expansion in 2015. GDP Annual Growth Rate in Rwanda averaged 7.75 percent from 2000 until 2016, reaching an all time high of 13.40 percent in the first quarter of 2007 and a record low of 0.70 percent in the third quarter of 2013.”⁵⁴

Concerning the vision of a more equitable society, if we look at how female members of parliament can support women’s entrepreneurial courage, we can recognize that it is the official policy to push business above all else. Hintjens thinks, that of course “it will help if entrepreneurs

51 Interview recorded electronically on May 9, 2014.

52 See the entire article by Tarrósy here: <http://afkinsider.com/57699/women-entrepreneurs-business-inequality-rwanda/>

53 See: <http://www.afdb.org/en/countries/east-africa/rwanda/rwanda-economic-outlook/>

54 See: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/rwanda/gdp-growth-annual>

get into the right circles. Whether you are a man or a woman, if you have true belief, in the style approved then you are more likely to get the contacts that will make your business a success. But all successful business people are appreciated once successful.”⁵⁵

5. Concluding remarks

In the post-genocide era a strong leadership has inevitable been imposed on Rwandan society. President Paul Kagame’s ruling RPF was re-elected again with an overwhelming majority in 2010, and most likely will start its third seven-year term after the elections in August 2017. The legal framework of the period, says Beswick, “has allowed the regime to equate criticism of the RPF government with support for the genocide, and thereby to delegitimize its critics and opponents.”⁵⁶ Even beyond the brutal cases, which have occurred to prevent opponents from political activism against the Kagame regime, many think that he “remains a visionary with a high order of analytical intelligence. His leadership has already brought real material and spiritual gains to Rwandans.”⁵⁷

Rwanda’s “Vision 2020” development plan lays emphasis on the private sector so that the country can become the region’s telecommunications hub. To be able to achieve this goal, the government focuses on human resources by developing capacities to transform Rwanda into a knowledge-based economy. This “capable state” obviously calculates with the active participation of women – both in the private sector and in the government. Today, Rwanda is “one of the few countries which is reaching the Millennium Development Goals,” among which its government has been making efforts to get “more children into school by

55 The interview was recorded on March 6, 2014 via e-mail. See: István Tarrósy: “Does Female Leadership Stimulate Rwanda’s Business Growth?” *AFKInsider*. March 14, 2014. <http://afkinsider.com/46423/female-political-leadership-stimulate-rwanda-business/>

56 BESWICK, Daniella, «Managing Dissent in a Post-genocide Environment: The Challenge of Political Space in Rwanda», *Development and Change*, Vol. 41, 2010, pp.225–251.

57 ROTBERG, *Op. cit.*, 2013. p. 214.

2015.”⁵⁸ As shown, from this angle Rwanda keeps girls’ education high on the political agenda.

It is beyond doubt that the government and civil organisations still have a lot to do to change the traditional way of thinking about gender roles in society – to encourage families, for instance, to send girls to school. In Rwanda, “the inclusion of women in governance has changed public perceptions of women in governance roles and opened the doors to greater individual freedom for women in other aspects of their lives.”⁵⁹ Despite the exceptionally high number of women representatives in the national parliament, serious issues are still waiting for debate and a change. This means that in the case of Rwandan female politicians, whose proportion is well over the ‘critical’ 30% in parliament, can speed up the positive change in women’s issues but they cannot solve them on their own. As long as women’s voices have become louder and heard more widely, irrespectively of the authoritarian nature of the state, female political representation can in the long run influence the policy-making process. Other examples from the region such as Tanzania’s also direct attention to the change the Rwandan case raised: “with more women in parliament, there has been a noticeable trend toward better articulation of women’s issues.”⁶⁰

As a summary of the major points, the high percentage of females in post-genocide Rwandan politics and politico-economic transition can be seen, as Helen Hintjens suggested in an interview, “at one at the same time as a) a manipulative tool to convince Western donors that the Rwandan government is genuinely progressive; b) as a genuine opportunity, something good that came out of the genocide, which was something bad; c) as a policy that reflects the reality that women do most of the work in most of the region, and d) as something that makes sense as a way to focus attention on something other than ethnicity.”⁶¹

Rwanda’s history of genocide and its heritage are hardly comparable with any other countries in the continent. From a policy-oriented perspective Rwanda can certainly be an example for other African countries

58 DOWDEN, Richard, «Africa. Altered States, Ordinary Miracles», London, Portobello Books, 2009, p. 528.

59 BURNET, *Op. cit.*, 2008. p. 382.

60 YOON, *Op. cit.*, 2011. p. 88.

61 The interview was recorded on March 6, 2014.

to open the arena for gender-sensitive policy-making. The long-lasting heritage of the conflict and the conflict itself “provided new opportunities to articulate debate about gender politics as well as for individual women to live in a different way.”⁶² From other perspectives, for instance, with regard to identities, difficult and long political and social transformations are still awaiting the country and its citizens. In connection with people’s self-identification, as Wangari Maathai soundly put it, “while it may appear that the micro-national ‘marker’ [i.e. the ethnic identification to be Hutu or Tutsi publicly] has been removed [by the government], it cannot truly be extinguished. It will have to express itself one way or another.”⁶³ For the “one Rwandan society” maintaining a balanced gender policy, together with a stable and predictable growth scenario with training and education opportunities for all will stay as central priorities for any future government to come.

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