

An Overview of Rwanda's Women Reservation and Participation in Decision-Making

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Abstract: Rwandan women have given new status as a world leader in gender equality, having achieved a 56% majority in parliament chamber of deputies according to the 2011 report GMO. Women have reached this level of political empowerment because of reasons like Government promoting gender equality in the public and the constitution (2003) that insisted women should constitute 30% in leadership positions in the country. Women's role in the political leadership in Rwanda is encouraging because it promotes social inclusion in any part of development without any discrimination.

Keywords: Women's Reservation, Participation, Rwanda

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality has been the hot topic of discussion all over the world. According to United Nations goals, it emphasize on gender equality and empowering women economically and politically. The economic empowerment goes hand in hand with access to decision-making, land, technology, credit and social protection. On the side of political empowerment is to make the women to take leadership roles and participation in political process [4].

The government of Rwanda initiated the nationwide program to mainstream gender in national development and activities immediately after the period of genocide in 1994. The change that Rwanda wanted concerning promoting and empowering women was stated in the new Constitution, 2003 that emphasized women should constitute 30% in all leadership positions in the country and establishment of the National Women Council[1]. This was followed by establishing women affairs which later changed to Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion establishing the Gender Monitoring Office in the country passing several policies and enacting laws that reinforce the commitment to promote Gender Equality and women empowerment in all sectors of life in Rwanda. In this response, 39 women were part of Rwanda's legislature in September 2003 [5, 6].

Achieving development for all requires formulation of inclusive policies that recognizes the role gender analysis has in determining outcomes for women

and men in the community. Having access to updated and reliable gender statistics is essential in the elimination of gender blindness in the formulation of policies. It is from the above background that the National Institute of Statistics and the Gender Monitoring Office in collaboration with UN Women / UN embarked on establishing a comprehensive Gender Statistics[1,2,3] Framework for Rwanda resulting to Gender Statistics highlighting the status of equality in different sectors. The aim is to encourage policy debate pertaining to gender gaps and discrimination while capturing good practices by providing evidence and model for the way forward [7].

In 2010, the NISR in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Service and Labor conducted a census on public sector employees (Civil Servants Census) of which final report was released early 2011[8]. The main aim of the civil servants' census was to collect viable information that will enhance an understanding and enable detailed scientific analysis of the civil servants in Rwanda.

The government of Rwanda under President Paul Kagame set work after 1994 to create an environment that encourages women to pursue their ambitions as they gain skills and experience. He promotes gender equality and sends a clear social signal to Rwandans of both genders about the country is evolving norms.

The improvement has come in the leadership of Rwandan women who have made history in politics and civil society. No longer confined to positions of influence in the home, they have become a force from the smallest village council to the highest elections of national government. Understanding how and why such a transformation occurred does not offer just an opportunity to celebrate their accomplishment but also provides lessons for other countries struggling to achieve that. Half of the country's 14 Supreme Court justices are women. Boys and girls now attend compulsory primary and secondary school in equal

numbers. New, far-reaching laws enable women to own and inherit property and to pass ownership to their children. Women now can use their husbands' assets as collateral for loans, and government-backed funds aimed at encouraging entrepreneurship. Women get involved in private-sector business and political sphere that has received attention of the world. Most Rwandan officials including that spear heading the programs are quick to direct the way forward by following the Rwandan public policy. The government has appointed women to key cabinet positions insisting on women in governance [8].

Table 1: Scenario of Rwanda's women reservation and participation in decision-making

Institutions /position	Percentage of men	Percentage of women
Civil servants	54.5%	45.5%
Central Government	58.3%	41.7%
Ministers	71.4%	28.6%
State Ministers	33.3%	66.7%
Permanent Secretaries	50.0%	50.0%
Ambassadors	76.2%	23.8%
DG and ES of Public Institutions	84.3%	15.7%
Judges of Supreme Court	57.0%	43.0%
Judges of The High Court	75.0%	25.0%
Judges of High Commercial Courts	57.0%	43.0%
Senators	65.4%	34.6%
Deputies chair standing committees	63.6%	36.4%
Deputies	43.7%	56.3%
Agencies / Commissions / Public Institutions	66.6%	33.4%
Government Projects 4	63.5%	36.5%
Coordinators Government Projects	74.4%	22.6%
Province Level 5	75.7%	24.3%
District Level 6	63.5%	36.5%
Mayors of Districts	90%	10.0%
Vice Mayors Economic Affairs	83.3%	16.7%
Vice Mayors Social Affairs	16.7%	83.3%
Executive Secretaries of Districts	93.3%	6.7%
Sector Level 7	64.4%	35.6%
Sector Executive Secretaries	90.9%	9.1%
Cell Executive Secretaries	62.3%	37.7%
Primary Education 8	50.1%	49.9%
Heads of Public Primary Schools	70.9%	29.1%
Nine Year Basic Education 9 (9YBE)	53.7%	46.3%
Secondary Education 10	69.3%	30.7%
Heads of Public Secondary Schools	83.3%	16.7%
Higher Education 11	69.2%	30.8%
Rectors in Public Higher learning Institutions	94.1%	5.9%
Vice Rectors Academic Affairs p/p Higher learning Institutions	95.0%	5.0%
Vice Rectors Admin/Finance p/p Higher Learning Institutions	94.7%	5.3%
Health Centers 12	41.4%	58.6%
Hospitals 13	43.2%	56.8%
Hospital Directors	95%	5.0%
Specialist Doctors	87.6%	12.4%
Generalist Doctors	81.8%	18.2%

Sources: Civil Servants Census, NISR, 2010[8] and Gender Baseline in Four Sectors, GMO, 2011[11]

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 1980s, women in Rwanda's politics were highly sidelined towards men. After 1994, there was need to create an environment that encourages women to pursue their ambitions, gain skills and experience as Rwanda's adult population had 70% female. The government insisted on gender equality giving signal to all citizens about the country's norms. Women played a role at the grass-roots level of reconstruction as well as applying their existing proficiencies like caring for homeless children and cleaning evolved to construction [9]. This has triggered need to revisit the status of women reservation and participation in decision-making.

The table provides a viable benchmark situation on the gender status in the public sector. In the civil servants sector, 54.5% are men, while 45.5% are women and it successfully complies with the governments' commitment to promote women's participation in decision-making. At the level of high decision-making organ, gender equality is improving as women make up above 40% of ministry permanent secretaries and Supreme Court judges and above 30% of senators and deputies chairing standing committees. However, positions which were traditionally occupied by men are still male dominated; for example 90% of all district mayors are men and 83.3% of vice mayors of economic affairs as well, while 83.3% of all vice mayors of social affairs are women. Key positions, such as heads of learning institutions, hospital directors and senior officers of the police force, shows a big gender gaps with very few women in charge. In education, the gender gaps increase with the level; primary education employees are in equal numbers in men and women but in secondary and higher education, men occupy 70% of the posts.

This trend has been changing in women reservation especially in parliament. According to the Rwanda's national gender statistics report of September 2013, there was 56.3% women representation in the period 2008-2013 [9] and there was an increase of 3.7%, which stood at 64% in 2014. This was 50% in state minister and permanent secretary posts, while 38% of women were senators and 39% were cabinet. The women in judiciary were 43% and governors as 40%. However, it was not same in other areas as it was lower than expected. In the lower level of governance in districts and community, women reservation is still low. Only 6.7% of district executive secretaries are female and 10% women in village councils.

CONCLUSION

Across the country, there are many evidences that show that women have been involved in the activities that promote social, economic, political domains and contribute to rebuild the country, but the journey is still long to overcome problems that women

have faced for so many years out of parliament in reservation and taking part in decision-making. Even if the number of women in parliamentary has increased, reservation in other governance levels like districts and community is much low. As per Rwanda country report of June 2014, there were only 6.7% of district executive secretaries who were female and 10% in village councils [10].

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