The Burden of Rapid Development:  
A Case Study on Women’s Economic Empowerment in Post-Conflict Rwanda

by

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Abstract

This project seeks to examine the root cause of gender barriers preventing the majority of women in Rwanda from benefiting from economic opportunities despite access to such opportunities and strong political support for gender equality. Drawing on a comparative analysis of quantitative data and qualitative research produced during fieldwork, this paper argues that, in the short-term at least, many women encounter unintended hardships as a result of the government’s progressive gender reforms. Traditional practices still define relationships between men and women and this is not compatible with constitutional guarantees of gender equality in Rwanda. There are considerable gender inclusive gaps in legislative reforms, policies do not adequately consider normative constraints and discriminatory customary practices persist increasing women’s work burden and susceptibility to gender-based violence. Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms make it difficult to effectively implement gender reforms and have fostered resistance from some groups that feel their rights are being diminished.

Keywords: Rwanda; economic empowerment; gender; development; reforms
Dedication

To all the women and men in Rwanda that tirelessly work with, and sometimes against, the grain for change. And to the millions more that do not believe they are entitled to be empowered, I hope one day you’ll know you are.

Ku bagore n’abagabo bose bo mu Rwanda bakora ubutitsa baharanira impinduka n’iterambere. Na miliyoni z’abagore batumva ko bafite ubushobozi, ndizera ko umunsi umwe muzamenya ko mubufite.
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ACRONYMS, ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY OF KINYARWANDA TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>East African Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDPRS</td>
<td>Rwanda’s Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAWE</td>
<td>Forum for African Women Educationalists</td>
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<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-Based Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>GMO</td>
<td>Gender Monitoring Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>INKWANO</td>
<td>Bride Price</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFAD</td>
<td>International Fund for Agriculture Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>MFI</td>
<td>Microfinance Institution</td>
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<td>MGFP</td>
<td>Rwanda Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>RDSF</td>
<td>Rwanda Decentralization Strategic Framework</td>
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<td>RPF</td>
<td>Rwandan Patriotic Front</td>
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<td>RWAMREC</td>
<td>Rwanda Men`s Resource Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women</td>
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<td>VAW</td>
<td>Violence Against Women</td>
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<td>WEE</td>
<td>Women`s Economic Empowerment</td>
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<td>WGI</td>
<td>World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators</td>
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Definitions and Descriptions

Decent work: Refers to work that provides a sufficient income to support a family.

Dependant farmer: An individual that does not own property and is dependent on the landholder, typically a husband or father, to gain access to land. This work is not remunerated.

Dependant non-farm worker: An individual that is financially dependent and engages in non-agricultural, unpaid productive activities such as petty trade or managing a household enterprise.

Formal sector employment: Refers to someone that is a salaried civil servant, private sector employee or medium to large scale business owner.

Gender-Based Violence: Violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender or sex. It includes any act that inflicts sexual, physical, economic or psychological harm to an individual.

Haguruka: A nation-wide non-profit association with an overall objective to enforce the rights of women and children across Rwanda.

Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre: The only national organization that promotes male rights in Rwanda. RWAMREC works to sensitize men and address national challenges related to gender-based violence and gender inequalities.

Women’s Economic Empowerment: This project defines women’s economic empowerment as the ability for an individual to choose their own economic outcomes. This requires women to have equal access to economic opportunities, control over income and resources and agency to influence and participate in decision-making bodies on a micro and macro level.
"How can a society hope to transform if it shoots itself in the foot by squandering more than half of its capital investment?"

President Kagame speaking to delegates at an international conference celebrating the tenth anniversary of the women’s caucus in parliament, 2006
1 Introduction:

Are Rwanda’s progressive gender reforms improving or hindering women’s economic empowerment? This research project seeks to address this question and explore the impact Rwanda’s gender policies have had on the economic status of women. Post-genocide development strategies have transformed the land-locked country into one of the best performing economies in Africa. Gender is a cross-cutting issue in Rwanda’s economic platform and many development experts regard the country as a rare example of successful post-conflict reconstruction (Bigsten and Isaksson, 2008). Rwanda is the only country in the world to have a female majority in parliament and women have legal entitlements to inheritance and property. The 2003 constitution mandates that in all decision-making bodies, 30% of seats must be reserved for women and the government has ratified numerous international gender equality protocols and conventions (ADBG, 2008).

Despite tremendous governmental commitment to promoting gender equality, women continue to be the most vulnerable in society and economically disadvantaged. Female headed households predominately live below the poverty line. The majority of women work in informal sectors or are unpaid dependant workers. Women are underrepresented in formal sector employment and are more likely to work at less well remunerated and in lower status positions than their male counterparts.

1.1 Hypothesis:

This project hypothesizes that despite the Rwandan government’s commitment to gender mainstreaming, women continue to be economically marginalised because these policies do not take into account the patriarchal attitudes of society. Furthermore, in the short term, Rwanda’s gender equality platform has had unintended consequences that could potentially disempower the majority of women. For example, the government has advanced
equitable inheritance and land laws but many women fail to benefit from these reforms due to legislative gaps. Despite government efforts to enforce policies at a local level, customary laws continue to apply in many rural areas. Equitable income and employment reforms have also been ineffective as discriminatory hiring practices persist and many women lack control over their income, thus hindering their ability to be economically empowered.

Customary gender divisions of labour were fundamentally altered during the 1994 genocide. As men mobilized for combat, women took on traditional male occupations such as working in cash-crops, tilling land or engaging in male dominated employment sectors. Today, women continue to carry out many historically male designated tasks in parallel to performing customary domestic and care giving duties which increases women’s work burden. Gender policies have fostered an environment where women are expected to contribute to household income but fail to adequately take into account social inequalities that expect women to manage domestic responsibilities. The burden of “double work” has serious implications for women’s health, restricts their mobility, the type of work they can partake in and their potential to be empowered. Furthermore, evidence from a study carried out by the Rwandan Men’s Resource Centre indicates that as a woman’s income increases so does her susceptibility to gender-based violence. Customarily, a man’s identity in Rwanda is predominantly defined by his ability to protect and provide for his family. As women’s income increases some men feel that their masculinity is under threat which can manifest into violent behaviors against women in an effort to reassert their dominant household position (RWAMREC, 2010).

This project argues that traditional practices still define relationships between men and women and that this is not compatible with the 2003 constitutional guarantees of gender equality in Rwanda. The current government is rapidly implementing a top-down gender inclusive economic strategy which challenges cultural identities. As a result, gender reforms have unintentionally diminished the average woman’s ability to make strategic life choices.
Secondary quantitative studies and this project’s qualitative field research suggests that outside of the most central political spheres, change in gender relations are minimal which signifies a disconnect between government policies and the implementation process of such reforms.

**1.2 Country Context:**

This section will provide a comprehensive overview highlighting the strengths and weakness of Rwanda’s economy and the current economic status of women. Outlining the practical limitations and opportunities of Rwanda’s economy contextualizes the challenges the country, and more specifically women, face in development.

Rwanda is a tiny, land-locked country spanning just 26,338 square kilometres and is the most densely populated nation in Africa. The population is estimated to be 10,117,029 with an annual growth rate of 2.8 percent and a population density of 373 people per km² (RMRC, 2010). If current trends continue the population will double every 25 years and by 2020 the country will surpass 16 million (Vision 2020, 2000). Life expectancy for men and women are 56 and 59 respectively and 42.9% of the population is under the age of 14 (CIA Factbook, 2011). Rwanda is ranked 166 on the UNDP Human Development Index and the World Bank estimates 77% of the population lives under the international poverty line of $1.25 USD per day (UNDP, 2011; World Bank, 2008).

Rwanda’s geographical location, population density and lack of infrastructure presents serious challenges to its overall economic development. Landlocked countries are inherently economically disadvantaged because transportation costs in international trade are high which increases import prices and reduces export revenues. Rwanda’s transport costs are $165 USD per ton per km in comparison to the East African average of $95 USD per ton per km (World Bank, 2011). These additional costs make it difficult for Rwandan commodities to be competitive in regional and international markets and to attract foreign investments.
(Arvis et al, 2010). Beyond the main roads in the country’s capital and feeder roads to other cities Rwanda lacks adequate infrastructure which restricts citizens’ mobility and trade opportunities. In Rwanda, women are more likely to be involved in informal trade than men, thus the handicap of being land-locked and the lack of adequate infrastructure, prevents women from accessing national and regional markets hindering their ability to earn a decent wage.

Environmental degradation due to Rwanda’s population density and mountainous topography is a major concern for the country considering 90% of inhabitants reside in rural areas, the majority of which, are dependent on agricultural production. Soil erosion, sedimentation of water sources and deforestation has decreased agricultural productivity and this poses serious threats to food security and sustainable development (Population Institute, 2009). Women are particularly affected by environmental degradation because they are customarily responsible for gathering wood and water for household use, in addition to cultivating their family’s plot. Women are forced to travel longer distances as resources become scarcer which will inevitably further decrease agricultural production and negatively affect household consumption patterns.

Rwanda has one of the highest fertility and maternal mortality rates in the world and this creates major obstacles to economic growth. The total fertility rate in Rwanda is 5.5 and women have a 1 in 16 lifetime possibility of dying during childbirth (Population Institute, 2009). High population growth outpaces the country’s economic development and rate of poverty reduction which strains the government’s limited resources to provide adequate schooling, immunizations and other vital services. At the household level, maternal morbidity or mortality has obvious economic consequences and jeopardizes the future of women’s dependants.

In spite of the numerous challenges Rwanda faces on its path to economic development, the country has made remarkable progress post-conflict. The government has recognized the need to strengthen regional integration and has joined the East African
Community (EAC) to increase its competitiveness in regional markets. Rwanda has substantially reduced its aid dependency from 85% in 2000 to 45% in 2010 and has garnered a considerable amount of respect within the international community for spending donor money responsibly (Hitimana, 2011). According to the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators, Rwanda is the fourth least corrupt country in Africa (WGI Report, 2010). In an effort to overcome the limitations of its small, landlocked economy, the government has developed a long-term, gender inclusive strategy to reduce its dependency on agriculture production and has taken steps to becoming a regional leader in information and communication technology (VISION 2020, 2000). According to the Doing Business 2011 report, Rwanda came in second on the list of the ten most-improved economies. The UNDP predicts that Rwanda will achieve many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Notably improvements have been made in providing free universal primary education, reducing child mortality and promoting gender equality and women empowerment (UNDP, 2010).

Unfortunately, even though the government has proven it is committed to gender equality, there is little evidence to suggest that these policies have begun to benefit the majority of women. A UNDP country assessment concludes that women are more likely than men to live in poverty and work in informal sectors. Incidences of gender-based violence remains high and women are more likely to contract HIV and underperform in school than their male counterparts (UNPD, 2007). This suggests that despite government efforts towards gender inclusive reforms, and a female majority in parliament, women’s development opportunities largely depend on their socioeconomic status within society.

1.3 Case Selection and Methodology:

Rwanda was selected for this project because of the government’s concentrated efforts to enhance women’s socioeconomic status post-conflict. There is no question that the prominent role women play in parliament today is directly attributed to post-conflict leadership.
Rwanda is hailed as a leader in gender equality yet women continue to be economically marginalized. The country is land-locked, densely populated and predominantly reliant on subsistence farming. Exorbitant transportation costs, environmental degradation and high fertility rates pose serious threats to Rwanda’s sustainable development. The government recognizes that improving women’s economic position is crucial to national economic growth and attaining its development objective of transforming the country into a middle-income, knowledge-based society. Alleviating legal and normative constraints will be critical to achieving these goals. Thus, understanding the barriers to women’s economic empowerment is paramount.

The methodology for this project combines the strengths of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Desktop research provided the foundational framework of this case study which included an analysis of relevant academic literature, household surveys, records, and other publications pertinent to women’s economic empowerment (WEE). Information from the World Bank, United Nations (UN), US Aid, Rwanda Men’s Resources Centre (RWAMREC) and leading authors on gender and development were consulted as secondary sources. Additionally, an in-depth examination on the strengths, weaknesses and unintended outcomes of institutional reforms, policies and programs introduced by the Rwandan government pertaining to WEE was carried out. Rwanda’s long and mid-term economic development platforms Vision 2020 and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) were critically examined along with Rwanda’s constitution, civil, labour and family codes and gender reforms such as the Marital and Inheritance Law and the 2005 Land Law. The overall process consisted of examining all relevant materials and cross-analysing the data in order to determine if there are gaps or inconsistencies within the laws or literature.

To complement the quantitative data, and to provide an accurate portrayal of women’s economic empowerment, qualitative research was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and ethnographic observations. In September,
2011 I travelled to Rwanda for three months and interviewed 45 participants and facilitated 5 focus groups discussion with various development agencies, legal and financial institutions, cooperatives, parliamentarians, students, academics and entrepreneurs. (Please refer to the appendixes for a complete list of questions asked and research results) The goal was to get a range of different opinions on the opportunities and challenges of WEE using a fairly open framework to allow a focused but conversational interaction with participants. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups discussions provided the flexibility for participants to go into details when needed and allowed for two-way communication which I found essential to making participants feel comfortable expressing their viewpoints.

All interviews and focus groups were conducted in French or English and hand-written notes were taken. In instances where participants only spoke their native language, Kinyarwanda, a female translator was used. The majority of economic development organizations and government offices are based in Rwanda’s largest populated province Kigali and this is where the bulk of the interviews and focus groups took place. In an effort to obtain a representative sample of urban and rural participants, interviews and focus group discussions were carried out in Rwanda’s other four provinces: Kimony and Butare in the Southern province; Gisenyi in the Western province; Gatsibo in the Eastern province and Ruhengeri in the Northern province. Initial contact with women and men came from cold calls or emails I sent to different parliamentarians and targeted economic development NGOs such as Women for Women. As I made contacts and interviewed participants, new connections were made which snowballed into gaining access to a diverse range of women and men. Cooperatives are a favoured poverty reduction strategy of the government, therefore the focus group discussions were with female cooperative members.

In order to determine if there were significant discrepancies in economic barriers amongst women, the interviewees selected come from diverse educational, regional and socioeconomic backgrounds. For the purposes of this project, participants are divided into
skilled and semi-skilled categories with a relatively even proportion interviewed from each group (25 skilled versus 20 semi-skilled). Skilled participants refer to those that have had education beyond the primary level and/or professional skills training or formal sector employment. This includes parliamentarians, academics, students, NGO staff and other professionals. Semi-skilled refers to participants lacking any formal education or nothing beyond a primary level, limited skills training and/or engaged in informal sectors which predominantly include women in cooperatives and small scale entrepreneurs.

A mixed methods approach was used for this project because it provides a well-rounded representation of the current socioeconomic status of women in Rwanda. The Rwanda government has been accused for years of severely restricting freedom of expression and there are laws in place that essentially “criminalize criticism” (Amnesty, 2011). Numerous independent journalists, academics and activists have been jailed in recent years for criticising the government which can create biases in the literature produced on the effectiveness of government policies related to WEE. This is one of the many reasons why conducting field research is important in order to get an intuitive, in-depth understanding of how the government’s economic policies are affecting women. Incorporating secondary sources and field interviews is the most logical approach to assessing the outcomes of gender reforms because many government bodies and gender specialists have noted that there is a lack of gender disaggregated data in Rwanda (MGFP, 2010; GMO, 2011; Abbott, 2010). Critically examining reports, policies and empirical studies on gender reforms and cross-analyzing this information with qualitative data collected in the field will offer a more comprehensive account of the impact policies have on women. A mixed methods approach is a useful research design because one method overcomes the weaknesses or draws upon the strengths of the other method which subsequently provides evidence for a stronger conclusion (Yin, 2006).
1.4 Challenges and Constraints:

There are notable limitations to this research project. It can be argued that it is difficult to make generalisations by using a single-case research design. However, a case study’s advantage lies in its internal validity (Yin, 2006). It is useful for generating new hypotheses and provides a holistic understanding of lived, human experiences which intrinsically has value. Conducting field research also presented numerous challenges. Outside of Rwanda’s capital city, Kigali it was challenging to find French or English speaking participants, thus a female translator was needed. This has the potential to jeopardize the research results because translation is subject to misinterpretation. There were rare instances during the research process indicating the translator may not have precisely translated participants’ viewpoints. However, the research results were fairly consistent amongst participants that required a translator and those that did not which suggests the data collected for this project is sound.

Several of the participants had limited mobility outside of their districts mainly due to family responsibilities, were still traumatized by the consequences of war and some lacked basic education or literacy skills. I was conscious and sensitive to the fact that being a white, Western academic, who does not speak their native language, may make participants intimidated or suspicious of me which could distort the data. Likewise, given the State’s intolerance to criticisms, participants interviewed may have been selective in what they chose to reveal. Despite the challenges associated with field research, collecting primary data on the opportunities and constraints women experience in socioeconomic spheres allows for a more insightful research project on the consequences of gender reforms.

1.5 Relevance to Development Literature:

In recent years, researchers and policy makers have recognized the correlation between women’s economic empowerment and national economic growth. Research reveals that improving women’s access to economic opportunities has a multiplier effect for
development. Studies indicate that if women have control over their income and resources, they are more likely than men to reinvest their earnings improving the health, nutrition and education of their families which creates positive externalities for their communities and future generations (Kabeer, 2001; WDR, 2012; Kaur, 2007; OECD, 2011). However, there has been little discourse as to how gender policies can negatively impact women.

Analysing the potential consequences of gender reforms provides a deeper understanding regarding the complex dimensions of women’s economic empowerment. It raises important considerations for policy makers on the operational aspects of WEE and contributes to the growing body of scholarly literature on how gender dynamics influence economic growth and development. Moreover, understanding the reasons behind persisting gender disparities provides valuable insight regarding the implications of gender reforms. The findings in this research project are beneficial not only to Rwanda, but could be applicable in other political and national contexts.

1.6 Outline:

Chapter 2 will review the literature on the dominant theoretical and practical perspectives of women’s empowerment and then specifically analyse contributing factors to WEE. Social justice and instrumentalist arguments will be put forth to support the benefits of WEE along with a study that challenges popular consensus that income in the hands of women produce automatic benefits to national economic growth. An overview of socially ascribed gender constructs and specific examples of unintended consequences associated with policies or programs intended to empower women will be explored. Analysing the complex dimensions of WEE is the first step to understanding the challenges of formulating equitable policies and the potential harms this can create if reforms do not adequately consider normative constraints. Chapter 3 provides the historical background necessary to support this project’s hypothesis, that women are economically disadvantaged due to pre-
existing inequalities which continue to define societal gender roles. Examining Rwanda's patriarchal legacy allows for a greater understanding of how gender relations are presently shaped and continues to marginalize women. This section summarizes pre-colonial gender disparities, Rwanda's colonial past and post-conflict gender reforms. Chapter 4 explores some of the most pronounced inequalities women face on their journey towards economic empowerment post-genocide and will critically assess the effectiveness of policies and programs to determine if these reforms create additional hardships to women. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings, suggests areas for future research and provides concluding remarks.
Chapter 2: What Does the Literature Tell Us about Women’s Economic Empowerment?

This section will first outline the common definitions of women’s empowerment and then illustrate why economic empowerment is view as a catalyst to attaining other dimensions of empowerment. The practical difficulties associated with providing women with economic opportunities and the conflicting opinions on what factors yield the highest returns will be analysed and this project’s definition of economic empowerment will be defined. This project will then use social justice and instrumentalist perspectives to justify the importance of WEE and put forth an argument that counters mainstream consensus that WEE only produces positive national and household gains. How the socialization of gender roles can restrict an individual from making strategic life choices and the complexities of implementing gender reforms will be explored. Microfinance is used as a universal example to illustrate how a seemingly positive program intended to empower women can have negative outcomes if normative constraints are not considered. Finally, the additional challenges post-conflict states have in advancing WEE will be discussed.

According to UN estimates, women represent 70% of the world’s poor (UNIFEM, 2004). Furthermore, women produce over half of the global food supply and constitute 66% of the workforce, yet they earn just 10% of the world’s income and possess 1% of the property (OECD, 2011). Global empirical research from the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and other international development agencies has shown that women’s empowerment is a key element to poverty reduction, economic growth and sustainable development (OECD, 2011). However, there is no universally accepted definition of women’s empowerment; it is used in many different contexts, and is frequently employed as a blanket term put forth by development agencies to support their individual mandates.
Despite the range of different opinions and conflicting agendas within the literature regarding the specific factors that contribute to women’s empowerment, there are a few overlapping themes which suggest a consensus on its conceptualization. For example, Roy and Niranjan (2004) believe empowerment lies in a woman’s capacity to control resources and choose outcomes that will shape her life. Golla, Malhotra, Nanda and Mehra, (2001) suggest that women can only become empowered when they have power and agency to take advantage of opportunities and can control their own income and resources. The World Bank provides a broad definition of empowerment as the “expansion of freedom of choice and action” (World Bank Sourcebook, 2002). Arguably the most cited definition in empowerment literature comes from Naila Kabeer, (2001) who succinctly describes empowerment as “the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them”. Feminist scholars Reeves and Baden (2002) describe empowerment as a bottom-up process which enables women to be agents of change in transforming gender roles. Empowerment not only requires women to have the power to make independent life choices and participate in activities that can influence change, but women need the self-confidence to believe that they are entitled to such freedoms. From a feminist perspective, empowerment is not about taking power away from men but about allowing individuals, regardless of gender, to be able to realize their fullest potential (Reeves et al, 2000; Kabeer 2001; Malhotra et al, 2002; Rowlands, 1996).

The common themes in the literature suggest that women’s empowerment is a complex multi-faceted concept which requires the expansion of women’s freedoms so they have the capacity to take advantage of opportunities and make autonomous choices that will shape the outcomes of their lives. There are countless interrelated aspects to empowerment such as the ability to make strategic decisions concerning ones education, nutrition or family planning, however this project argues that central to all these areas is economic empowerment. Although gender equality can only be achieved when women are empowered
in all aspects of life, women’s economic empowerment is increasingly being viewed as a
catalyst to achieving other dimensions of female empowerment. When women are financially
dependent, their bargaining power is diminished as is their ability to influence decisions that
affect their lives. Having the agency to generate an income and control over resources are
considered “entry points for channels of communication and vehicles by which women can
meet their needs” (Rogers and Youssef, 1988 as cited in Kaur, 2007). Women who earn an
income and control their financial resources have the freedom to invest in their human capital
and family’s well-being. Conversely, education, nutrition and other critical areas of human
development cannot be realized or self-sustained without economic empowerment.

The recipe for attaining economic empowerment varies as states, academics and
international actors often have conflicting perspectives based on their development objectives.
Women cannot be viewed as a homogeneous category because divisions amongst women
such as age, ethnicity, aptitude, reproductive health and regional location are factors that can
create unique barriers to achieving WEE. The literature suggests that a multi-sectoral
approach is needed to improve women’s economic status. This includes access to resources
and opportunities, education or skills training and equitable institutions to legalize and protect
women’s rights. There are discrepancies within the literature on which initiatives yield the
highest returns. The OECD emphasises the need to increase women’s access to financial
services, skills and market development, jobs, entrepreneurship, credit and property and other
assets (OECD, 2011). The World Bank takes a long-term economic development approach
and argues that providing equal access to education and vocational training is the first step
towards achieving WEE because this will provide women with necessary skills to compete in
labour markets and the confidence to make independent choices (World Bank, 2009). The
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency believes that more equitable sharing
to unpaid care work, the eradication of structural gender disparities in labour markets and
control over productive assets is imperative to improving women’s economic status (Törnqvist,
Jejeebhoy (2000) contends that creating gender sensitive institutions is the most important element to women’s economic autonomy. Institutions can change women’s legal rights and status, improve access to vocational training and work to transform patriarchal norms and practices.

There is not a one size fits all approach to economic empowerment, it requires context-specific initiatives. For the purposes of this project, women’s economic empowerment is defined as the ability for an individual to choose their own economic outcomes. This requires women to have equal access to economic opportunities, control over income and resources and agency to influence and participate in decision-making bodies on a micro and macro level. This definition was developed because it incorporates many of the dominant themes within the literature on WEE. Women’s inability to choose their own economic outcomes, despite access to economic opportunities, is one of the biggest barriers to women being empowered in Rwanda.

2.1 Why Should We Care about Women’s Economic Empowerment?

The international donor community recognizes WEE as a critical component to poverty reduction and for the successful realization of all MDGs. Numerous studies from the World Bank, OECD and others have demonstrated that if women have control over their resources and access to income generating activities, they are more likely than men to spend a higher proportion of their earnings improving their family’s welfare. Economically empowered women tend to have fewer children, are more likely to send their children to school, adopt healthy consumption patterns and are less likely to remain in abusive relationships (World Bank 2011; UNDP, 2007; UNFPA 2007; OECD 2011).

The mounting recognition that WEE is imperative to achieving development goals is based on a dual argument. The social justice perspective deems that women’s economic rights are above all human rights. If women are discriminated against on the basis of gender
then this is a violation of human rights and therefore WEE is intrinsically worth pursuing as a human development objective. Recently, many international agencies have broached women’s empowerment from an instrumentalists standpoint and view WEE as “smart economics” that will foster sustainable development (World Bank, 2006; OECD, 2011). For example, women in Rwanda currently represent 54% of the population. To underutilize over half of the country’s potential human capital is squandering its most valuable resource and hindering economic growth potential. Gender disparities lower the productivity of labour and the efficiency of labour distribution in households, and on a national level, which perpetuates the uneven allocation of resources (World Bank, 2010). Therefore, a more equitable system that provides economic opportunities for women will not only serve to empower them, but has a direct impact on a country’s economy and can lead to accelerated growth. Inequitable gender divisions in labour inhibit women’s potential to earn an income which restricts their access to healthcare and food security. Consequently, women are more vulnerable to malnutrition and the risk of reproductive complications, which subsequently increases maternal and infant mortality rates. Thus the instrumentalist perspective recognizes the practical value of economically empowering women because it allows them the possibility to save, invest in education and nutrition or accumulate assets which indirectly advances the income and overall wealth of a nation.

There is some debate concerning whether or not WEE is actually beneficial to economic growth. Authors Matthias Doepke and Michele Tertilt (2011) analyse the causal links between women’s empowerment to development. They challenge popular consensus that suggests women’s control over income or resources produce automatic benefits to their children and national growth. Their theory is based on three non-cooperative family bargaining models they developed. While the authors conclude that more research is needed, they found that different forms of female empowerment may not generate positive returns to women’s dependants (Doepke, Tertilt, 2011). For instance, there are empirical studies that demonstrate
that women spend a higher percentage of their earnings on the welfare of their families (World Bank 2011; UNDP, 2007; UNFPA 2007; OECD 2011). However, these studies often do not account for gender discrimination in consumption markets. If women are culturally or legally excluded from consuming alcohol, tobacco, driving or participating in different forms of entertainment, then this restricts their behaviour and spending potential. Women may invest more in their family’s well-being because they are limited on what they can spend their resources on. If these gender barriers were eliminated, then perhaps women would adopt the same consumption patterns as men and invest less in their dependants (Doepke et al. 2011). Based on this theory, it could be argued that gender inequalities actually improve human capital which benefits economic growth. WEE is clearly important on many levels but it might not be a panacea for economic development as suggested by some research studies. There is a need for more analytical research to be conducted on the causal relationship of women’s economic empowerment to development.

2.2 Gender and the Unintended Consequences to Economic Empowerment:

While sex refers to biological differences, such as women being able to conceive, gender is frequently defined as a social construct that distinguishes the roles and patterns of behaviours between men and women (Pearson et al., 2009; Sen et al., 2007; Rowlands, J., 1996). Socialization begins at birth and positions men and women differently in society. For example, in Rwanda and other patriarchal societies, women are considered better at performing domestic duties than men and therefore bear the brunt of this responsibility. This stereotype is socially ascribed, as there is no logical reason why men are not capable of preparing food or caring for their children. Likewise, gender constructs distinguish men as protectors and providers thus in many patriarchal societies, men are positioned as the head of household. The socialization of gender roles gives rise to uneven power dynamics between men and women and is considered a root cause of gender inequalities (Sen et al., 2007).
Socially determined roles depict what is culturally acceptable behaviour for men and women and differentiates female and male rights, expectations and obligations in society. On an individual level, gender roles influence how we identify our self-worth, affects how we respond to our environment and how we are perceived by others. Fortunately, gender structures are malleable and no matter how entrenched gender inequalities are permeated into society they can change and evolve over time (Martínez, 2006).

The World Bank has recognized that normative constraints powerfully determine women’s social and economic opportunities even if there are legal instruments in place to promote and protect women’s rights (World Development Report, 2012). Social norms are particularly binding in household formations and legal institutions are often reluctant to enforce laws that go against societal attitudes. For example, despite laws prohibiting gender-based violence in India, a survey indicated that almost all police officers interviewed believed that a husband is entitled to rape his wife and half of all judges felt that a wife was partially to blame if her husband abused her. If a woman dressed provocatively, 68% of participants believed that this was an “invitation to rape” (WDR, 2012). In some instances, laws that seek to change normative practices can have unintended outcomes. In the United States, a law mandating police officers to arrest and prosecute domestic violence suspects, even when the complaint was rescinded, lead to a significant reduction in the rate of reporting (WDR, 2012).

Men and women are bound by their socially ascribed role which restricts their behaviours and ability to control their lives and make strategic choices. In many societies, a man’s identity is based on his ability to financially provide for his family. As women increase their involvement in income generating activities, this can foster resistance and resentment from men who feel that their masculine identity is being challenged. A qualitative assessment conducted by the World Development Report (WDR) across 19 countries revealed that women who earned a higher income then her husband was deemed a “threat to male status” rather than a positive economic gain for the household (WDR, 2012). In Rwanda, the RWAMREC
administered a nationwide household survey to uncover the root causes of GBV. The research results revealed that as women’s income increases so does her exposure to violence. During my interview with RWAMREC they believed that this finding reflects the impact of evolving gender roles in society and male resistance to changes in power balances.

Particularly in developing countries, such as Rwanda, who lack institutional capacity, societal resistance to change and an aversion to prosecute perpetrators diminishes the legitimacy of laws and policies which promote gender equality. Under these circumstances, it is nearly impossible for institutional bodies to monitor or assess the implementation of gender reforms or programmes, especially at the household level, where the majority of women socially and economically operate (WDR, 2012).

Policy recommendations and program strategies often assume that if they provide resources such as access to credit, employment or vocational training then women will be able to empower themselves. However, these approaches may conflict with pre-existing social norms and expectations and may result in unintended consequences that could have disempowering outcomes for women. Often in an effort to make an immediate impact on women’s lives, policy makers and program facilitators implement strategies with a narrow lens that does not take into account normative constraints (Martínez, 2006). Within the literature some of the reoccurring harms associated with WEE policies or programs are an increased workload for women, adverse health outcomes and a higher risk of exposure to domestic abuse. All of these determinants inhibit a woman’s ability to be economically empowered.

An excellent example of the unintended consequence of WEE, that is applicable across numerous national contexts, is the global proliferation of microfinance institutions (MFI). Microfinance is founded on the premise that if the poor are given access to credit and other financial services they will have the opportunity to invest in micro-enterprises and improve their family’s economic condition. Since the poor often do not have assets to use for collateral, they are unable to obtain a loan from a conventional bank. Microfinance is seen as
a way to empower the poor, develop local economies and many consider it an effective poverty reduction strategy. Due to the high repayment rates of women borrowers and the assumption that women will spend excess capital improving the standards of living of their families, MFIs deliberately target women (AusAid, 2008).

There is no question that if MFIs are run properly they can yield many positive gains for women. However, if MFIs do not sufficiently consider the complexities of gender power structures and persisting gender inequalities within society, then they can be counterproductive and even detrimental to women. For example, an examination of microfinance programmes in Cameroon revealed that some women spent their loans on school fees and improving the health of their families rather investing in their micro-enterprises (Mayoux, 2001). The study also found that since women were able to gain access to credit men felt less obligated to use their income on household expenditures. Loans essentially shifted household power dynamics; women were expected to work long hours to build their enterprises, were responsible for repaying the high interest rates of the loans in addition to performing all domestic and care giving tasks. Men believed that their wife’s extra income minimized their financial responsibilities and gave them disposable income to spend outside of the household. The study also noted that the double burden of managing their income generating activities along with domestic duties and insufficient sanitation facilities had serious implications for women’s health and illness was a frequent occurrence among participants (Mayoux, 2001).

MFIs must carefully consider the potential negative impact their services may create for women. If women are too poor to meet their subsistence needs then it is unrealistic to expect them to invest in economic opportunities. In an effort to repay the loan women may take out another loan from a different MFI and could become trapped in a vicious cycle of debt repayment. There have been numerous cases of domestic abuse reported as a result of women’s participation in microfinance programs. Since many MFIs predominantly target
women, this may foster resentment from men which could lead to violence. Some men may force their wives to take out a loan they cannot repay which creates volatile household dynamics. Furthermore, several MFIs have been criticized for employing abusive debt collection tactics and as a result women may suffer abuse from both her husband and the loan collector (Morduch, 1998).

In Rwanda, microfinance is a relatively new concept and there lacks sufficient disaggregated data to gauge the success of MFI programs. However, this sector is growing rapidly and the government has shown a keen interest in further developing this industry as a means to alleviate poverty and support a culture of entrepreneurship particularly in rural areas. Although this example is not directly related to Rwanda, its relevance lies in its ability to demonstrate the complexities of initiating economic empowerment programs and the importance of considering normative constraints that can obstruct the intended purposes of such initiatives. This project’s qualitative research results reveal that the vast majority of skilled interviewees cited normative constraints that reward female submissiveness, lack of control over resources and income and highly patriarchal intra-household relations as the major barriers to WEE in Rwanda. Therefore, considering the structural gender inequalities women face in Rwanda will be an important component to the successful realization of MFI and other WEE programs to ensure they do not pose undue hardships on women.

2.3 Challenges to WEE in Post-conflict States:

Post-conflict states have additional challenges to advancing women’s economic empowerment and this is particularly relevant to Rwanda. In the chaos of war, gender structures are disrupted providing women with new opportunities. While men are mobilizing for battle, women often assume occupations and responsibilities that were traditional reserved for men. Women are frequently recruited to partake in combat which elevates their power and authority in society. In Rwanda there is considerable documentation of women in key positions
actively perpetuating the genocide (African Rights, 1995). Studies have shown that many countries post-conflict adopt new constitutions that incorporate equitable political, economic and social rights (UNDP, 2001). However, the implementations of these reforms are often problematic as post-conflict states typically have limited resources and can be met with resistance from both men and women if they radically counter pre-existing ideology on gender roles. According to El-Bushra, J., A. El-Karib and A. Hadjipateras (2002) “conflict may create space to make a redefinition of social relations possible, but in so doing it rearranges, adapts or reinforces patriarchal ideologies, rather than fundamentally changing them.”

Women’s elevated political and socioeconomic status during conflict may dissipate post-conflict as there is a tendency to revert back to traditional practices. However, customary gender divisions of labour may be fundamentally altered which increases women’s work burden. For example, Rwanda was left with a 70% female population post-conflict which led to an extraordinarily high number of female headed households. Women were left with no choice but to taken on traditional male occupations in parallel to performing customary domestic work.

Rapid transformations in post-conflict societies can dramatically increase the levels of gender-based violence. Women’s enhanced role in household decision-making during conflict can foster resistance and violence from men post-conflict in their attempt to reassert their dominant household position (WHO, 2002; RWAMREC, 2010). A research study on the promotion of women’s rights in post-conflict Mozambique revealed that men were resistant to gender equality policies because it undermined customary norms and values and weakened male authority in society. As a result, an increase in family and community violence was found post-conflict as men tried to regain their traditional status as head of household (Slegh, 2009 as cited in RWAMREC, 2010). Furthermore, the sheer brutality of war can foster a “culture of violence” due to the traumatic events witnessed, orchestrated or experienced by individuals (Ward, 2002). Men may also feel alienated post-conflict and experience difficulties
reintegrating into society. Post-conflict social transformations can make it difficult for men to adjust to newly defined gender roles. As a result, men may resort to violence against women to obtain control over resources or decision-making (Ward, 2002).

In summary, the literature suggests that there is not a lack of practical strategies to address WEE but often a lack of change on a wide enough scale to alter pre-existing gender structures defining men and women’s roles and status in society. Providing women with the means to be economically self-sufficient does not automatically translate to social empowerment (Abbott, 2011; Middleton and Hancock 2009). Just because a woman has the opportunity to earn an income does not necessarily mean that she feels entitled, or is able, to control her resources or has the power to influence household decisions which this project’s research results suggest is the case in Rwanda.

Furthermore, it might be presumptuous to assume that women living in patriarchal societies identify themselves as oppressed or that there is a need for government intervention. Even if women do feel liberated by programs or policies and are provide with access to income generating activities they may still be burdened by societal pressures to be submissive, take on all domestic chores and may live in fear of violence. As women’s rights advocate Mahila Samakhya observes, “if you organize women into production units, they are considered empowered, no matter how badly they are treated in their homes or communities!”(Martínez, 2006). Deeply entrenched gender structures are passed down generationally and are often slow to change. Post-conflict states have additional burdens to WEE due to women’s elevated status during conflict and men’s resistance to shifting power dynamics post-conflict. Rwanda’s legacy of conflict and patriarchy continues to shape modern day societal roles and responsibilities and will be the focus of the subsequent chapter.
Chapter 3: Historical Overview of Rwanda’s Gender Barriers and Post-conflict Reforms

The patriarchal structures of Rwandan society before the 1994 genocide perpetuated unequal power relations between men and women. Ramifications of Rwanda’s historical legacy of male domination persist in post-genocide culture which affects women’s capacity to be economically empowered. As the Rwanda Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MGFP) astutely points out; “gender inequalities have not been seen as unjust, but as respected social normality” (MGFP, 2010). This section provides the historical evidence to support this project’s hypothesis that women are currently economically disadvantaged due to pre-existing cultural inequalities that continue to define societal gender roles. This chapter serves to highlight not only the dramatic legal gains women have experienced post-conflict, but also to explain the origins of prevailing patriarchal attitudes. A summary regarding historic gender disparities in indigenous divisions of labour and resources, cultural attitudes towards marriage and children, women’s participation in the public sphere and gender-based violence will be explored. Additionally, Rwanda’s colonial legacy and post-conflict gender reforms will be reviewed.

It is important to note that indigenous cultural practices in Rwanda varied depending on a person’s socioeconomic status, geographical location and ethnicity, therefore women were both empowered and disempowered differently (Uwineze et al., 2009). However, there are some universal gender inequalities amongst groups and during the colonial period women’s rights and productive activities were restricted irrespective of their prior cultural identities.

3.1 Women’s Pre-genocide Socioeconomic Status:

Divisions of Labour and Resources:
Traditionally, gender roles in Rwanda were framed around household divisions of labour. Women were respected, and given a significant amount of autonomy, in their central position as mothers and as food producers for their families and communities. Men were considered the head of household and were responsible for protecting and providing for the family. Husbands exercised control over all economic, political, health and social household decisions. Even though the husband was considered the chief of his family, his father and other senior lineage heads possessed ultimate authority over decisions that could affect their patriclan (Adekunle, 2007).

Rwanda was a patriarchal monarchy led by a polygamous king before colonialism and the average women’s freedoms were restricted to most opportunities outside of the home. A woman’s duty was to perform the less physically intensive, yet more arduous, agricultural tasks such as planting and harvesting crops which are then consumed or traded for livestock or other assets. Women were also expected to manage and carry out domestic responsibilities such as caring for elders and children, food preparation and maintaining a clean household. Men were responsible for tending to livestock, clearing bush, the initial tilling of land and the delegation and supervision of women’s work. Gender divisions of labour were instilled at an early age and parents allocate domestic chores to their children based on their sex (Uwineze et al., 2009).

Even though women did the bulk of agricultural production, which greatly contributed to household wealth, they had little control over how resources were distributed or spent. Customary laws prohibited women to engage in any commercial activities without her husband’s consent (Hamilton, 2000). Inheritance and land rights were passed down on a patrilineal basis which further increased women’s dependency on men. If the husband of the family died, property was passed down to his sons or brother in the absence of male heir (Adekunle, 2007). Unmarried women only had usufruct rights over family land if a father or
other male relative died and once married, land entitlements were passed down to her sons or husband (Isaksson, 2011).

**Marriage and Children:**

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A woman's value in Rwandan society is related to her status as wife and mother, or in other words, to her household and procreative functions. Women are expected to adopt a reserved, submissive attitude``` (UNICEF, 1997). The socialization of gender roles has always been an important part of Rwandan culture and it begins in infancy. Traditionally, girls were raised to believe that their self-worth lies in their ability to produce children and be a subservient wife. As a result, most girls were excluded from formal education and were homeschooled by their mothers to prepare them for their future domestic and reproductive responsibilities. There was a greater incentive to educate sons because they would remain to support the family, even after being wed, whilst daughters lived with their in-laws after marriage. Thus any economic gains from her education would only serve to benefit her husband’s family. Marriage was held in high regard in Rwanda and was considered not only a union between husband and wife but used to enhance the economic, political or social position of the families or clans involved (Adekunle, 2007).

Customarily, once a woman married she was considered not only part of her husband’s belongings but that of her extended family. Before marriage a man paid inkwano (bride price) to the women’s family which is viewed as a sign of respect for the woman’s family and there is considerable pressure for the man to pay an exorbitant price. A bride is expected to perform manual labour to compensate her husband for the expenses he incurred to marry her. A bride was considered her husband’s family property and she was expected serve her brothers-in-law, domestically and sexually, and could be expelled from the family if she refused (Uwineze et al., 2009). Cultural linguistic practices were also used to reinforce a woman’s subservience to her in-laws. It was forbidden for a bride to call any member of her
husband’s family by their first name. When referring to members of her husband’s family, a wife was expected to only use plural forms to show respect, and acknowledge her position, within the hierarchal structure of the clan (Adekunle, 2007).

Children have always been considered a sign of prosperity in Rwanda and a childless family is considered incomplete. One of the most offensive insults a Rwandan can say is “Uragapfa utabyaye” which translates to “may you die childless” (Uwineze et al., 2009). Women did not have the right to divorce their husbands, however, it was culturally acceptable for a man to divorce his wife if she was infertile. Polygamous marriages were common place and men often took a second wife if his first wife could not produce a male heir (Pearson et al., 2009). Pre-marital pregnancy and adultery carried a death sentence or excommunication even if the woman was raped and as a result women were often forced to marry their rapist. Marriage by abduction was culturally discouraged but common practice if a man was too poor to pay inkwano. A man kidnap s a girl of marrying age and rapes her with his friends. This ostracizes the victim and shames her family, leaving her no choice but to marry her abductor (Ruremesha, 2003). Although this practice is now illegal, a legal record of indictment could not be located and forced marriages still persists today in some rural areas.

Public Sphere and Gender-Based Violence:

While there are some cases in Rwanda’s history of women in the royal family inheriting leadership roles, the majority of women were prohibited from participating in community decision-making processes. To speak publicly or challenge decisions about family or community matters was considered a sign of insolence and women were expected to obey male authority. To be soft spoken and submissive are considered virtuous qualities that would attract a husband (Pearson et al., 2009). A women’s economic stability was reliant on obtaining a husband so she could gain access to his land, thus women emulated this cultural
ideal in order to garner respect from her community and secure herself, and future children, economically.

Certain aspects of Rwandan culture discouraged violence against women and other aspects perpetuated it. For example, if it was known that a husband beat his wife more than once she was allowed to return to her family of origin. However, customary law gave men complete parental authority so the children would remain with the husband’s family making it unlikely that a woman would vocalize her abuse. Sexual violence is considered a private family matter and it is culturally understood that a man has a right to have sex with his wife and a woman does not have the right to refuse (Pearson et al., 2009).

3.2 Colonial and Post-Independence Legacies:

German, followed by Belgian, colonial rule led to ethnic stratification and dramatic shifts in male Hutu, Tutsi and Twa positions in society. Colonialism also served to reinforce male dominance over women, irrespective of their ethnic identity. European rulers abruptly transformed Rwanda’s traditional subsistence economy into a monetary economy. This system was structured around paid employment and formal education, both of which, women were largely excluded from. Colonial rulers owned and regulated resources which diminished women’s access to land and ability to cultivate crops (MGFP, 2010).

Colonialists essentially legalised Rwanda’s discriminatory customary laws and further entrenched cultural beliefs that women were inferior to men. The Civil Code prohibited women from owning or inheriting property or assets. Rwanda’s Family Code granted a husband legal recognition as head of household. This gave men sole parental rights and household authority over finances. The Penal Code mandated a one year prison sentence for women found guilty of adultery, in comparison to men that would be fined 1000 Rwandan Francs which is the equivalent to $2 USD (UNICEF, 1997).
Rwanda’s independence in 1962, replaced the colonial-supported Tutsi autocracy with a highly centralized Hutu regime. The government continued to adhere to inequitable policies based on gender or ethnicity and despite a constitutional law guaranteeing all citizens a right to participate in the political process, woman were largely absent from political office (MGFP, 2010). Mounting ethnic tensions, fluctuations in international coffee and tea prices, rapid demographic growth and failed negotiations amongst political leaders were all contributing factors that led to the 1994 genocide. In the space of 100 days over 800 000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were brutally murdered.

Post-conflict, the status of women transformed overnight. Women went from being considered part of their husbands’ belongings to becoming the heads of households. Even though women were victims, and perpetrators, of egregious crimes against humanity throughout the genocide, it was predominantly men that were killed or displaced which left the post-conflict country with a 70% female population majority (Powley, 2004). This tragedy left women with enormous responsibilities as they had to bury the dead, provide for their families and rebuild the social fabric of society. The genocide propelled women’s position in society, enabling them to make considerable legal gains.

### 3.3 Post-genocide Gender Reforms:

The devastation of the 1994 genocide dramatically altered gender balances in Rwandan society. Tutsi-led rebel group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), formed the government and made the promotion of gender equality a national priority. The expansion of women’s freedoms was paramount to reconstruction considering they comprised 70% of the total post-conflict population. Rwanda’s legal and policy framework demonstrated the government’s commitment to gender inclusive reforms. In 1999, the Rwandan parliament passed the Matrimonial and Succession Law which provides women equal rights to property, inheritance and equal ownership of assets in marriage. The National Gender Policy sets out
key objectives to ensure that all public and private sectors and government policies are gender-sensitive. The 2003 constitution mandates a 30% female quota system all decision-making bodies. Article 37 of the constitution gives equal rights to employment and the labour code prohibits gender discrimination in the work force (EAC, 2009). Gender is a cross-cutting issue in Rwanda’s long and mid-term economic development platforms Vision 2020 and Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS). A gender-based violence bill was passed in parliament in 2006, which criminalises rape, including marital rape, and physical violence of any kind. In September 2008, Rwanda gained worldwide acclaim when it became the first country in the world to have a female majority in parliament (EAC, 2009).

On an international level, Rwanda has also demonstrated its commitment to women’s empowerment by ratifying numerous international conventions and protocols such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Optional Protocol to the African Charter of Human and People’s Rights to Women’s Rights in Africa, the East African Community’s Gender and Community Development Framework and the Beijing Declaration (EAC, 2009). Furthermore, Rwanda’s International Criminal Tribunal shifted legal and political interpretations of rape in conflict. For the first time in global history, rape officially became an act of genocide and is now considered a punishable war crime (ADBG, 2008).

Rwanda’s institutional framework has transformed to reflect the government’s gender inclusive agenda. MGFP is responsible for implementing Rwanda’s National Gender Policy and the overall promotion of women’s empowerment on a national level. The Gender Monitoring Office evaluates the progress of gender reforms. There is Women’s National Council responsible for representing women’s issues and contributes to gender inclusive policy development and implementation. Finally, the Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians was created to promote gender equality and review existing laws to ensure they are gender sensitive and draft new gender inclusive laws (Abbott, 2011).
In summary, Rwanda’s indigenous and colonial past have placed women in a subservient gender role which continues to define how women identify their self-worth and how they are perceived by others; irrespective of post-conflict constitutional guarantees of gender equality. Women have made considerable legal gains post-conflict due to the government’s recognition of women as necessary participants in the country’s overall development. Political will is instrumental to improving women’s agency to make strategic life choices and can eventually trigger social changes. However, as the subsequent chapter will show, laws and institutional reforms can be ineffective and even harmful to women if political will exceeds society’s ability to culturally adapt.
Chapter 4: The Unintended Consequences of Gender Reforms

According to the Rwandan government, gender is a cross-cutting issue within all development policies, laws and institutions. As illustrated in chapter 3, women’s legal rights have improved immensely due to post-conflict government reforms, yet disparities still persist. This chapter will outline the most economically damaging inequalities women experience based on the evidence from this project’s qualitative and quantitative data. The goal of this chapter is to critically assess the effectiveness of government reforms to determine if they pose unintended consequences to women. Beginning with marital, inheritance and land rights, this section will illustrate that there are substantial gaps within the government’s newly adopted legislative reforms that impede women from equitable access to land and resources. Gender is deemed to be at the forefront of Rwanda’s economic platforms, yet this chapter will demonstrate these economic strategies are not gender inclusive. Reforms do not adequately consider normative constraints that restrict women’s mobility or increases women’s work burden and discriminatory hiring practices inhibit women from formal sector employment opportunities. Strict laws governing reproductive rights cause serious health and economic consequences for women. Cooperatives are a favoured governmental mechanism for economic development but this model does not account for inequitable distributions in labour or intra-household dynamics that prevent women from controlling their income. Despite government efforts to eradicate gender-based violence, incidences of violence against women remain extraordinarily high due to patriarchal perceptions, held by men and women, on gender roles. Finally, this chapter will conclude with an overview of participants’ interpretations on gender equality and their opinions regarding government policies that seek to promote women’s economic empowerment.

4.1 Marriage Laws and Property Rights:
Equitable access to land and property rights is a fundamental component to women’s economic empowerment, particularly in post-conflict states where typically the number of female headed households dramatically increases as a result of war (UNCHS, 1999). Even 17 years post-conflict, 32.1% of Rwandan households are headed by females. Considering the country’s high population density, land and resource scarcity and the fact that the majority of the population is largely dependent on agricultural production, equitable allocation of land and resources is the most important element to achieving WEE. The government has recognized the importance of gender inclusive marriage and land reforms and has advanced women’s legal rights and status considerably. Despite government efforts, within country inequalities persist and women are frequently denied their rights because preliminary conditions to land ownership disqualifies them (Spencer, 2009). Furthermore, women are often uninformed that their legal rights have changed, they cannot afford to pay for civil and traditional marriage ceremonies and formal legislation exists in parallel to customary laws which favour traditional patriarchy.

The adoption of gender sensitive legislation is an important first step to improving women legal rights. The Inheritance and Marital Property Law provides legal ground for all legitimate children to inherit equally regardless of gender and the 2005 Land Law prohibits gender discrimination in ownership of land between husband and wife (Isaksson, 2011). However, there are substantial gaps and ambiguities within the legislation that diminishes the effectiveness of these policy reforms.

To begin with, the laws only protect and apply to women that have had a civil marriage which excludes more than 40% of marriages in Rwanda that are not legally registered (Spencer, 2009). Women who do not have legal marriage contracts are not only denied legal protection, but their children are considered illegitimate under the law which disqualifies them from benefiting from inheritance legislation (Pottier, 2006). Many women, particularly in rural areas, are not aware of the need, cannot afford or are coerced not to
legally register their marriages. Traditional wedding ceremonies are still common practice for most Rwandans and it is considered an important part of preserving their cultural heritage. Inkwano is expected to be paid to the women’s family and there is a social obligation to throw a lavish party after the ceremony. In urban areas, many couples opt to have two or three separate weddings, traditional, civil and religious, all of which must be followed by a party at the expense of the couple or their families. In rural areas, the cost of inkwano is out of reach for many men, let alone the costs associated with obtaining the legal documentation and party for a civil ceremony, thus many couples are unable to afford to legalize their marriages. To the government’s credit, they have staged several “free marriage days” in an effort to legalize unions but no quantitative data pertaining to the effectiveness of this initiative could be found.

Another major barrier to equitable land access is that the Inheritance Law cannot be used retrospectively. This means that the Inheritance Law does not apply to thousands of women who became widowed or orphaned during the genocide even if they, or their parents, had legal civil unions. The Inheritance and Marital Property Law reinforces discriminatory customary practices in article 51 which states “the family council shall determine the part of the patrimony earmarked for the raising of minors and the part to be shared between all the children” (Pottier, 2006). Traditional customs dictate that a man controls the family council which would give him authority to distribute land and resources.

In an attempt to take advantage of trade liberalization and transform Rwanda’s agricultural sector from subsistence towards market-driven mono-cropping, the 2005 Land Law promotes the consolidation of fragmented plots and legally requires farmers to register their land. Article 20 states that in order to increase rural productivity, all farmers will need to consolidate their land, however, those that own less than 1 ha could lose their land titles in the expropriation process because it is deemed too small for “efficient exploitation” (Pottier, 2006). The law also prohibits households from further dividing their land if it is less than 1ha. Article 20 is in response to the EDPRS proposal that communities should consolidate land because
the average household plot size is 0.71 ha which is inadequate to meet the nutritional requirements of a family. Furthermore, articles 62 and 63 of the Land Law ambiguously grants local authorities the power to consolidate plots that do not meet the minimum size requirement and the ability to confiscate land if it is not being productively exploited (Ministry of Justice, 2005).

The policy implications of these reforms disproportionately affect female headed households. For example, in terms of landholdings, male headed households average 0.80 ha. Female headed households average 0.66 ha and this estimate is further reduced to 0.60 ha if there is no male member residing within the household (Daley et al., 2008). The average female head only successfully exploits three-quarters of her cultivable land. Research has shown that lower productive outputs for female agriculturalists can be attributed to gender disparities in their ability to access fertilizers, credit, labour and other agricultural inputs (Daley et al., 2008). My qualitative research suggests that women are also burdened by the uneven allocation of household responsibilities such as caring for dependants or gather water and wood which limits the time they have to spend on cultivating crops compared to men.

The vagueness in the law on what constitutes the productive exploitation of land provides local authorities the power to interpret the law without a gendered lens. If female headed households statistically have the smallest landholdings and are the least productive then they are the most vulnerable to either lose their land in the consolidation process or have it confiscated for not maximizing the land's potential. Under the law, compensation is promised but the amount is not specified if a landholder loses the title to their property during the amalgamation process. The Land Law states that land has no market value, regardless of its location, and that the compensation assessment will be based on the value of the buildings that have been constructed on the property (Pottier, 2006). What does this mean for the majority of female headed households who stand to lose their land? It means they would get a
very bad deal as most male and female small landholders have little more than a two room house made of mud and scraps of sheet metal.

A further inequality exists, despite a 30% quota systems that legally entitles women to participate in all decision-making bodies, women are poorly represented at local levels where decisions over land rights and other policy reforms are made. There are five provinces in Rwanda which are broken up into 30 districts, only 6.7% of women are District Mayors in comparison to 93.3% men. Every district is further divided into sectors and out of the 416 sectors, women only represent 17% of District Executive Secretaries (MGFP, 2010). Having equitable female representation in local government does not necessarily mean that women’s rights will be promoted, however, the lack of female participation does suggest that uneven gender power structures exist at local levels.

Even though Rwanda is rapidly changing, the government still has limited authority to implement land reforms and it is largely believed that customary patriarchal laws apply to virtually all rural land (Isaksson, 2011; IDRC, 2007; Spencer, 2009). Furthermore, the Land Law and the Marital and Inheritance Law contradict each other. As mentioned earlier, the average household plot is 0.71 ha (Pottier, 2006). If legitimate children are legally entitled to inherit equally but the Land Law deems it illegal to further divide property under 1ha then it is impossible to equitably allocate land. Traditionally, land is passed down on a patrilineal basis as the son represents the continuity of the family lineage therefore it is likely that daughters stand to lose the most from these conflicting laws.

In summary, many women lack protection under the government’s marital, inheritance and land reforms and are inadequately represented at municipal levels. Women face additional burdens in accessing agricultural inputs and time spent on domestic work. These barriers, in addition to, societal pressures to accept discriminatory customary laws and practices diminish a woman’s ability to make strategic life choices. Insecure land rights inhibit women from leveraging their land as collateral to access credit or other inputs to improve
agricultural productivity which deters investment and trade opportunities. Women stand to lose their land title if authorities deem the landholding too small or underutilized and inheritance entitlement are not guaranteed to a woman, or her dependants, if she is not married under the guidelines of the law.

If the government is committed to gender equality, then legislative revisions need to account for gender discrimination in inheritance, marital and land rights. Furthermore, the government has outlined in Vision 2020 that it intends to transform Rwanda from a subsistence economy into a middle-income, knowledge based society. However, the laws and economic strategies put forth by the government do not account for normative and legal constraints that inhibit women from earning a decent wage and this will be the focus of the next section.

4.2 Economic Strategies, Normative and Legal Employment Constraints:

It is estimated that informal sectors contribute to 75% of the country’s GDP and all of its agriculture outputs (ADBG, 2008). There is considerable gender segregation in Rwanda’s labour markets. Gender disparities include occupational divisions in employment, gender-based wage gaps and the disproportionate amount of women engaged in informal or unpaid work. Although gender is deemed a cross-cutting issue in Rwanda’s mid and long term economic development frameworks, (EDPRS and Vision 2020) the evidence indicates that there are considerable gaps regarding the gender inclusiveness of these strategies. For example, EDPRS anticipates accelerated economic growth and has set numerous targets to develop 1,000,000 new jobs, of which, 50% will be non-farm employments (EDPRS, 2008 – 2012). Employment statistics reveal that between 2001 and 2006, 75% of paid non-farm jobs created were taken by men. Moreover, women only make up 11.6% of paid non-farm work in comparison to 27.8% for men (Abbott, 2010). Men are increasingly moving out of agricultural sectors while over 60% of women continue to be dependant farm workers (ADBG, 2008).
EDPRS and Vision 2020 assert that gender equality is a critical component to Rwanda's economic development, yet these frameworks only identify two gender sensitive objectives: decrease maternal mortality and fertility rates (ADBG, 2008). Rwanda’s economic development strategies need to take into account legal and normative constraints that prevent the majority of women from being economically empowered in order to sustain growth. Women comprise 55.2% of the economically active population (Abbott, 2010); to not include specific targets that address disparities in employment and labour markets is hindering the economic potential of over half the country’s workforce.

![Gender and Employment](image)

Table 1: IPAR Rwanda, 2011

As outlined in Table 1, the majority of women work in the informal sector predominantly as independent farmers, dependant farmers or engaged in dependant non-farm work such as petty trade, artisanry or managing an informal household enterprise. Family responsibilities decrease the mobility of women and this is seen as the main reason women are trapped in vulnerable and informal employment. Given women’s critical contribution to both on and off-farm income generating activities, alleviating legal and normative constraints is imperative in order to optimize women’s labour productivity and integrate women into formal
employment sectors. Currently, the Rwandan government’s national policies only address gender inequalities in remunerated activities. This excludes the majority of women that perform unpaid or informal productive activities that contribute greatly to the welfare of society and national economic growth.

Table 2: Time Spent on Domestic Activities per Week by Age Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Non-poor female</th>
<th>Non-poor male</th>
<th>Poor female</th>
<th>Poor male</th>
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<tr>
<td>7 to 10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>11 to 15</td>
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<td>16 to 20</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over 21 years</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
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Table 2 illustrates that in Rwanda women on average spend 20 plus hours a week on domestic responsibilities not including income generating activities. Over 95% of rural households are reliant on firewood for food preparation. Deforestation due to Rwanda’s high population density and ecologically damaging agricultural practices has made collecting firewood an increasingly arduous task as the country has lost 50% of its forest cover from 1990-2005 (UNDP, 2007). Women are particularly affected by environmental degradation because they are responsible for gathering wood and water for the household, in addition to cultivating family land. Women are forced to travel longer distances as resources become scarcer which will inevitably decrease agricultural production and negatively affect household consumption patterns. The median walking distance from a clean water source is almost 9 minutes in urban areas and 29 minutes in rural areas. In rural regions 40% of the population do not use safe drinking water which increases their risk of contracting communicable diseases (Abbott, 2010).
Women are much more involved in the sanitation aspects of the household and caring for the ill thus unclean water sources impact women the most. Lack of infrastructure, particularly paved roads, also create time consuming challenges for women. Outside of the few main roads in Kigali and connector roads to other main cities, roads are unpaved and in poor condition. The back roads used by women for everyday productive use can be treacherous, especially in the rainy seasons, making it difficult and time consuming to collect wood and water, trade or access medical facilities. The burden of multiple births, lack of time saving technologies or day care facilities is strongly linked to women’s availability for paid economic activities. Domestic responsibilities consume large amounts of time and energy and places women at a disadvantage because they have less time to develop new skills or learn about their rights.

The high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in older generations increases the burden of care for women. The wide-scale incidences of rape during the genocide left many women infected with HIV. The prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS amongst women ages 35-49 is 6.6% which is extraordinarily high compared to the national average of 2.9% (RDHS-III, 2006; UNICEF, 2010). The day-to-day nursing demands for someone with AIDS are infinitely greater than normal care giving responsibilities. The additional time required to care for someone with HIV/AIDS, leaves women with less time to complete other household and income generating activities and is extremely taxing which can erode women’s health. In general, women are at a much higher risk of HIV/AIDS infection 3.6% versus 2.3% for men (Abbott, 2010). Cultural influences discourage the use of contraceptives and social constructs that except women to adopt a submissive attitude diminishes their ability to refuse unsafe sex are possible factors in HIV/AIDS gender disparities. Based on, ethnographic observations, country statistics and conversations with interviewees it appears that the majority of women are directly or indirectly affected by HIV/AIDS. Due to social expectations that expect women to be solely responsible for care giving, this dramatically increases women’s work burden.
This project’s fieldwork supports quantitative evidence that women experience hardships as a result of pre-existing patriarchal structures and the government’s progressive reforms. There were several commonalities between the skilled and semi-skilled participants. All participants interviewed believed that women perform the majority of domestic and childcare responsibilities. The majority of interviewees (42:45) felt that the government was doing a great job enhancing women’s socioeconomic status in society because it was now culturally acceptable for women to work outside of the home. Most participants felt obligated to engage in income generating activities and some of the semi-skilled participants believed they would not get a husband if they did not make money.

During my interview with Professor Pamela Abbott she points out “women that are employed in formal sectors haven’t swiped one form of (domestic) patriarchy for another, they have just taken on both.” There is considerable gender discrimination in Rwanda’s formal labour sectors. The ratio of female to male earnings is 0.67 and the private sector is male dominated. Men outnumber women in professional occupations 2:1 and are more likely to work in managerial and high status positions than their female counterparts (EICV, 2007; Abbott, 2010). Results of my research show that out of the 25 skilled participants asked if there were significant gender inequalities in formal sectors, 100% of respondents said yes. 14:25 participants believed that patriarchal social structures encourages inequitable hiring practices and 17:25 participants felt that employers discriminated against women because they do not want to pay for maternity leave. According to Rwanda’s labour laws, women have the right to 12 consecutive weeks of maternity leave. Employers are required to pay women 100% of their salary for the first 6 weeks and 20% of their salary for the remaining 6 weeks (Rwanda: Labor Law Modified, 2009). Considering women have on average 5.5 children and men are only legally entitled to 4 days of paid paternity leave, it makes economic sense for employers to discriminate against women.
Due to a lack of disaggregated data on gender disparities in employment sectors, it is difficult to determine how widespread sexual harassment is in the workforce. However, 6:25 skilled participants believed that sexual harassment was a serious issue for women working in private sectors. Sexual harassment became an indictable offence in 1982 and carries a maximum penalty of either a 200,000 Rwf fine ($335 USD) or a maximum jail sentence of five years. In the 30 years that sexual harassment has become a crime in Rwanda, only 5 sexual harassment complaints have been investigated that led to an indictment (Musoni, 2008).

To conclude, EDPRS and Vision 2020’s economic strategies do not address the root causes of labour disparities. The majority of women are not protected under the government’s labour laws because they work in informal or unpaid sectors. Historic inequalities that expect women to perform all domestic and care giving duties run parallel with modern expectations requiring women to contribute to household income. This increases women’s work burden, provides them less time to develop new skills and can have negative consequences on women’s health. Lack of time saving technologies and infrastructure, high fertility rates and elevated levels HIV/AIDS in older generations restrict women’s time and mobility which prevents them from taking advantage of economic opportunities. Despite government efforts to integrate women into formal sectors, men dominate the private sector. Employers prefer to hire men to avoid paying for maternity leave and the lack of indictments for sexual harassment may put women at risk. Restrictions to women’s marital and reproductive rights hinder women potential to be economically empowered and will be the focus of the next segment.

**Marital and Reproductive Constraints:**

Marital and reproductive laws in Rwanda create additional burdens to women by restricting their mobility and ability to make autonomous reproductive and marital choices. Traditional norms influence law-making processes and how judges or authorities interpret the law. Although changes to Rwanda’s Civil Code has afforded unmarried women the same
rights to be head of household, Article 206 states that in married unions, the husband is the legal head of household. The basis of this law is founded on patriarchal conceptions of men being the leader and provider for the family and parental authority is held by the head of the family. Under Article 83 a married woman is also legally obligated to live in her husband’s home (Ministère de la Justice, 1988). These laws are blatantly discriminatory and not only reinforce cultural beliefs that women are inferior and should obey men, but it also restricts women’s mobility and employment opportunities.

Other laws intended to promote women’s empowerment can also have perverse outcomes. In 1992, the legal age for a man or a woman to be married was changed from 18 to 21 and only under extreme circumstances, such as pregnancy, could a judge approve an early marriage (Tallon, 1992). The logic behind this revision was to alleviate family pressure on women to marry early which would give them the opportunity to further their education. Another assumption was that later marriages would reduce fertility rates which would also decrease women’s work burden and Rwanda’s population density. Unfortunately, legislators failed to foresee the negative impact this well intentioned law would have on women. The gender implication of this law encourages men and women to cohabitate without the legal protection of marriage. This places women at considerable risk because they would have no legal rights or recourses to any property or assets accumulated during cohabitation. Considering most women work in informal and unpaid productive activities it is difficult to prove a woman’s contribution to household wealth. The registration of assets and resources are customarily registered in the man’s name which makes women living in cohabitation extremely economically vulnerable if her partner dies or they decide to separate.

The inability for women to make autonomous decisions concerning their reproductive rights has negative consequences for WEE. The legal age to buy and use contraceptives in Rwanda is 21, yet 14% of 19 year old women have already begun childbearing (Abbott, 2010). This age restriction was presumably adopted to deter women from engaging in sexual
activities before marriage. Denying women access to contraceptives puts women at risk. According to my interview with the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the number one reason girls drop out of secondary school is due to unplanned pregnancy. FAWE also believes that the negative social stigma associated with unwed mothers prevents most girls from returning to school after giving birth, thus limiting future employment prospects. Abortion is a criminal offence in Rwanda unless it can be proved that a woman’s physical or mental health is in danger. Women do not have the right to have an abortion if they are raped or if the child will be born out of incest. If found guilty of an illegal abortion women face up to 15 years imprisonment (Ministry of Justice, 2001). According to Rwanda police records from January to September 2008, 307 adults reported being raped and 1,652 rape cases involving minors were reported (Hendricks; Oder, 2010). Due to the social stigma associated with rape victims, this figure is likely substantially higher. Rape inflicts numerous physical, mental and economic hardships onto victims. Subsequently, women may risk having a self-induced abortion which can create serious health complications and/or imprisonment. There is a lack of data concerning unsafe abortion estimates, however, it is believed by health experts to be a major contributor to Rwanda’s exceptionally high maternal morbidity and mortality rates (Basinga, et al, 2011).

In summary, articles in Rwanda’s marital law inhibit women from making strategic life choices about where they want to live and reinforces archaic beliefs that men are better suited to head a household. The lack of protection under the law for women that choose to cohabitate leaves women financially vulnerable. Rwanda’s contraceptive and abortion laws disproportionally punish women and essentially exonerate men from their sexual health responsibilities. The social stigma towards unwed mothers and rape victims ostracise women in their communities making it difficult to find employment or a husband. Unplanned births can financial strain a woman’s limited resources and prevent her from furthering her education. A 15 year prison sentence for having an illegal abortion, even if raped, is an unjust punishment
considering rapists, if convicted, serve a maximum 5-10 year prison sentence (Rwandan Penal Code,1977). Current laws also do not take into account societal pressures for women to be submissive towards men or that many women are sexually active before the legal age to purchase contraceptives. All of these factors prevent women from being able to choose their own economic outcomes. The subsequent section will highlight the unintended consequences of government supported cooperative models.

4.3 Cooperative Model:

In an effort to minimize the impact of land consolidation policies, diversify household incomes, ensure food security and foster efficient, formal and agricultural sectors; the Rwandan government has identified cooperatives as a crucial means to reduce exclusion and combat rural poverty. In 2005, the government created the Taskforce on Cooperative Promotion to encourage and legally register cooperatives. In 2006 the National Cooperatives Promotion Policy was adopted which provides a legal framework for cooperatives. The taskforce has identified that there are 12,934 cooperatives currently operating in Rwanda of which 68.7 of which are in the agricultural sector (ILO, 2010). Coffee and handicrafts represent the largest categories of registered cooperatives and members. For these reasons, this project focuses on gender disparities in these sectors although the findings will generally apply to women in other income generating activities. This section explores Rwanda’s cooperative model as an avenue for accelerated economic development. The major barriers to WEE in this model are that it does not adequately address inequitable distributions in labour or intra-household dynamics that prevent women from controlling their income despite social expectations for women to contribute to household wealth.

A study carried out by the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) found that gender relations have transformed post-conflict and that women have taken over many tasks that were traditionally reserved for men. The study interviewed hundreds of
members from 9 coffee cooperatives and found that although gender distribution of agricultural responsibilities have changed due to policies that support gender equality, there remains strong disparities in wages, time spent in the fields and control over income (IFAD, 2010). For example, land clearance has traditionally been a male dominated task but it is now culturally acceptable to be done by a woman. The biggest disparity in labour the study found was that women spend twice as long as men in the fields as weeding and harvesting remain predominantly female designated tasks. In the mornings women would go out into the fields to work and then go home to prepare meals only to return to the field later in the afternoon until sunset. On average women would spend 8 hours a day in the fields in comparison to men that would work a half day and spend the rest of the afternoon either marketing or in non-productive activities. Furthermore, the IFAD found that men had greater access to advice from technicians which increased their level of skills and marketing of products was almost exclusively a male dominated task despite the significantly greater contribution in labour women provide to crop husbandry (IFAD, 2010).

Another finding, that is in line with this project’s field research on handicraft cooperatives is that married women have little control over their income or decision-making on household expenditure and women continue to be responsible for all domestic tasks. For instance, IFAD researchers found that women generally always transport coffee to the washing stations. However, on the days that payments are made, the men bring in the coffee and based on their interviews it was found that men typically control income from coffee revenues. Female headed households are in a better position from an empowerment standpoint as they control their income and decisions related to household expenses. At the same time, they are disadvantaged as they rely on one income whilst completing household duties which gives them less time to acquire new skills or market products (IFAD, 2010).

During my time in Rwanda I met with seven handicraft/tailoring cooperatives and my findings were similar to those of the IFAD. The Rwandan government and NGOs sponsor
numerous handicraft projects in an effort to create employment for landless or unemployed women and men and encourages them to form cooperatives to provide a social safety net for participants and greater access to resources and skills training. Landless citizens often have no choice but to sell produce and other goods in streets and since street vending is illegal in Rwanda, promoting cooperatives are seen as a viable alternative to creating productive employment.

During the focus groups discussion I facilitated with 5 cooperatives (2 exclusively composed of widows and 3 that has a mix of married and non-married women) it was apparent that the women not only lacked the necessary skills to be successful but also the confidence to find markets for their products. There were several similarities to the focus group discussions that indicate women are still bound by societal norms and this hinders their ability to be economically empowered. In all cases, women were hesitant to participate in the focus group and it was only when the president of the cooperative coerced women to answer questions would women feel comfortable speaking. When women did speak they would not make eye contact which is reflective of cultural barriers that prevent women from looking directly into someone’s eyes, particularly someone they view as superior, because it is seen as impolite. The maximum amount of skills training women received was six months and none of the cooperatives were trained in bookkeeping, marketing or had ever taken advantage of microfinance programs. When asked if their cooperative was profitable, every president stated no but they could not be sure because they did not have a bookkeeping system in place. Across the board, the quality of products were sub-standard and there was not a clear vision or business plan to improve women’s skill level or market strategies. The cooperatives were not only struggling to produce products that would meet national, let alone international, buyer requirements but they were producing poorly made traditional clothes and crafts in an already saturated market. Without any formal marketing or accounting skills and the general submissive characteristics of participants it is unrealistic to expect these women to be able to
connect to supply chains and there is not a big enough local market. My interview with a union leader in charge of several handicraft cooperatives revealed that many women join cooperatives in the hopes of a better life. After completing training some women decide to leave because they are unable to earn an income. They have no choice but to return to the streets to sell fruit and are constantly at risk of getting arrested and their products confiscated.

Cooperatives that are not profitable risk taking precious time away from women to earn an income in other areas. Landless women only have few seasonal opportunities to earn extra money during harvest seasons. If a woman is in training or is working in an unproductive cooperative this may prevent her from working during peak seasons and leave her economically vulnerable. When asked about gender divisions of domestic responsibilities, every focus group but one laughed at me when I suggested men should contribute to household chores. Based on their response it is reasonable to assume that women bear the brunt of domestic tasks which further dilutes the amount of time they have to earn an income.

The two widows cooperatives interviewed believed that they were more empowered than other (married) women. This is incredibly interesting considering the majority of skilled participants believed that widows are the most vulnerable in society and statistical data corroborates this belief. Several semi-skilled participants felt that the government supported widows more than other women which make them more empowered. Other women believed that they were free to make decisions about their families and this led to greater empowerment. Based on my observations, female headed households do not have substantial access to resources and are more likely to have less household income than married women. However, they do have control over their earnings and the ability to make independent life choices which contributes to their sense of empowerment. Furthermore, due to the lack of male authority within the household, female heads are at a reduced risk of exposure to gender-based violence which increases their level of empowerment. According to RWAMREC the majority of perpetrators that commit violence against women in Rwanda are the husband
or male figure head (RWAMREC, 2010). The economic ramifications of GBV will be explored in the next section.

4.4 Gender-Based Violence:

A growing body of empirical research has demonstrated that GBV not only poses serious consequences to the mental, physical and sexual health of victims but has debilitating social, economic and emotional outcomes for entire families (WHO 2002; Kumar 2001). In 2005, a demographic health survey administered by the Rwandan government revealed that 31% of women have experienced physical violence at least once from the age of 15 and in 47% of cases the husband was identified as the perpetrator (UNIFEM, 2008). Survey results from a United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNIFEM) on sexual and gender-based violence indicated that 10% of the 1056 women surveyed had been raped or experienced unwanted sexual touching. Out of the 108 victims 44% (48:108) of women surveyed had experienced forced sexual intercourse and 41% (44:108) had witnessed attempts at forced intercourse (UNIFEM, 2008). The survey results found that women were more vulnerable to abuse if married and spouses were the main perpetrators. The leading reasons why women chose not to report abuse was due to lack of knowledge about their rights, limited access to economic resources to seek justice and an unwillingness to publically expose family matters. It was also noted that local authorities and legal and health services do not provide a suitable environment for women to report domestic abuse (UNIFEM, 2008).

Gender constructs of feminine and masculine identities is understood to be the root cause of GBV in Rwanda which is further compounded by high rates of poverty and the lingering ramifications of war (RWAMREC, 2010). Despite government measures to address the high rate of GBV in the country, violence continues to be wide-spread which hinders the effectiveness of economic development strategies. The social stigma attached to victims along with the economic consequences associated with indicting a spouse leads to underreporting
and diminishes the government’s ability to effectively prosecute perpetrators. Normative perceptions on the acceptability of GBV as a way to resolve conflict make it difficult for many women to view themselves as victims. Both women and men can be victims or perpetrators of GBV but for the purposes of illustrating how GBV affects WEE only violence against women (VAW) will be explored.

The Rwandan government has identified 4 main forms of GBV: sexual violence, physical violence, economical violence and psychological violence. Influencing factors contributing to GBV include poverty, ignorance, alcohol abuse, wrong perceptions of gender, provocative clothing, jealousy, vengeance and witchcraft. Additionally, structural inequalities derived from culture and patriarchy, which both men and women perpetuate, are deemed fundamental reasons behind GBV (RWAMREC, 2010; MGFP, 2010).

RWAMREC administered a nationwide household survey in an effort to answer the following research question: “What is the relation between perceptions of masculinity and the problem of GBV committed by men towards women?” RWAMREC received 3612 completed questionnaires; 2301 by men and 1311 by women. The results revealed that 57.2% of female participants had experienced GBV from their partner, however only 38% of men admitted to committing violence against their partner. The discrepancies between male and female answers on partner violence may be attributed to men being ashamed to admit violent behaviours or perhaps they are unaware of the harm and injustice of their acts. The most common forms of violence reported by women were slapping (30.3%) and forced sexual intercourse (32.4%) (RWAMREC, 2010). The research results revealed that as women’s income increases so does her exposure to violence. RWAMREC believes that this finding reflects the impact of evolving gender roles in society and male resistance to changes in power balances. The prevailing social perception that domestic and care giving chores should be women’s main responsibility contradicts post-genocide transformations that encourage women to earn an income. Thus women that earn an income are viewed by men as neglecting
their household responsibilities. If a woman earns more than her husband this threatens his masculine identity as a provider and head of household which can lead to an increase in VAW (RWAMREC, 2010). Evidence from the survey results confirms uneven power relations and gendered expectations between men and women.

The following are some of the questionnaire results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GEM SCALE ITEMS</th>
<th>Men (n=2301)</th>
<th>Women (n=1311)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender Roles:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman's most important role is to take care of her home.</td>
<td>72.80%</td>
<td>81.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing diapers, giving kids a bath, feeding the kids are mother's responsibilities.</td>
<td>44.20%</td>
<td>78.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A man should have the final word about decision in his home.</td>
<td>52.80%</td>
<td>65.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A wife has to respect her husband and accept everything.</td>
<td>45.40%</td>
<td>53.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Violence:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.</td>
<td>43.70%</td>
<td>54.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A wife who earns more than her husband provokes violence.</td>
<td>32.00%</td>
<td>28.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Power Relations &amp; Sexual Relations:</strong></td>
<td>Partially or Fully Agree</td>
<td>Partially or Fully Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men always are ready to have sex and do not talk about it but just do it.</td>
<td>82.50%</td>
<td>95.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife has to be submissive (accept everything).</td>
<td>45.50%</td>
<td>53.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAW is needed to control a wife and women sometimes deserve to be beaten.</td>
<td>59.40%</td>
<td>70.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men have to earn more than women and women that earn more will provoke violence.</td>
<td>57.40%</td>
<td>50.80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on these questionnaire results the data suggests that traditional roles continue to define power relations between men and women in Rwanda. The majority of participants
believed that domestic and care giving tasks should be a woman’s main priority and that men are the ultimate authority in household decision-making. What is most disturbing is that over 70% of women and 59.4% of men believe that VAW is not only an acceptable way to control a wife but that women sometimes deserve to be beaten by their spouses. The fact that over half of male and female respondents believe that violence will be provoked if a woman earns more than her husband is a clear indication that intra-household structures are male dominated which goes against constitutional guarantees of gender equality and government WEE efforts. The concluding findings of this study found that patriarchal norms and values in Rwanda continue to dominate social assumptions about male and female roles which contradict government efforts to promote gender equality. The questionnaire also included questions about the knowledge and opinions of the 2008 GBV law. The majority of participants (85%) were aware of the law however their perception of the law was largely negative. Only 3.6% of men and 5.1% of women felt that the GBV law would help women. Women and men almost unanimously (95%) felt that the law was “too harsh for men” (RWAMREC, 2010). This suggests the progressive nature of gender policies in Rwanda may run counter to prevailing social perceptions on gender. As a result, laws intended to empower women may fuel household conflicts as legal shifts in gender power balances may exceed society’s ability to culturally adapt.

Although no direct questions related to GBV was asked in my interviews, 25% of skilled participants felt that VAW was a major barrier to women’s economic development. During my interviews with Haguruka and RWAMREC male control over all household income and resources was viewed as widespread and is considered a form of economic violence used to increase women’s dependency and submission to male authority. In both interviews, women’s fear of community scrutiny, the belief that spousal violence is a private family matter and potential loss of spousal income was deemed to be a main reason why women choose
not to report abuse. Another interview with a skilled participant revealed that men feel inferior if a woman is more successful and that this is a major contributor to GBV.

RWAMREC felt that men use violence as a way to protect their masculinity post-genocide. According to my interview with RWAMREC, a direct consequence of the genocide was that children were witness to mass violence. The trauma of war may manifest into violence behaviours in adulthood. RWAMREC believes that there is considerable male resistance to WEE and that there is a need to conduct research on masculinity and integrate male mainstreaming into women empowerment approaches. RWAMREC was the only interview conducted that had a strictly negative interpretation of inkwano. The respondent claimed that men are pressured to pay a high price for their bride to make the woman and her family feel valued but it also makes men feel like they `won`` their wife and have the right to control her. RWAMREC feels that this objectifies women and is a leading cause of marital rape. According to RWAMREC, in Kigali the average bride price is no lower than $500 000 RWF (837.52 USD) and $300 000 RWF in rural areas (502.50 USD). Considering 77% of the population lives under the international poverty line of $1.25 USD per day (World Bank, 2008) this sum is out of reach for most men which makes them feel emasculated. Some men may choose to take out a bank loan to pay inkwano which puts considerable economic pressure on the marriage and can lead to VAW.

This section provided evidence that suggests government efforts to promote women`s economic empowerment may increase women`s exposure to violence because it challenges patriarchal power structures defining male and female roles in society. In order for the government to successfully promote WEE it must transform social attitudes and minimize resistance. This requires society to have a clear understanding of the meaning of gender equality and the benefits WEE can create for households and communities. Unfortunately, the data indicates that many Rwandans misinterpret government efforts to support WEE which is the focus of the next section.
4.5 Perceptions on Gender Equality:

Based on my interviews and focus group discussions there appears to be considerable confusion over what gender equality means and the intention of government policies that support women’s empowerment. The general reaction from semi-skilled participants was that the government promotes gender equality which they enthusiastically believed was a good thing. However, none of the semi-skilled participants could identify specific laws or programs designed to protect them let alone where they could go for support or seek justice. One semi-skilled participant felt that the government’s support for gender equality was a way to “get back” at men. When skilled participants were asked if they know of the laws that protect women’s rights or if the government supported gender equality, most of the skilled participants were aware of Vision 2020, the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Bill, Land laws and generally felt the government was actively promoting gender equality.

Two of the female parliamentarians and RWAMREC believed that there are societal misunderstandings that believe gender only refers to women. When asked if it was important to sensitize men about gender equality 23:25 skilled participants believed that integrating men into gender empowerment policies and programs was essential to changing cultural attitudes and fostering sustainable WEE. One participant stated that “you can’t empower the powerless” implying that one cannot expect women, who have been historically marginalized, to rise above patriarchal inequalities unless men are socialized to view the positive benefits of WEE. No direct question was asked regarding male resistance to women’s empowerment although 4:25 skilled participants mentioned that in rural areas men were resistant to changes in gender balances. Haguruka stated that some men viewed gender equality as women taking away historical male entitlements, such as land, and this is why some men choose not to legalize their marriages.
Many skilled participants felt that gender equality policies and programs had not yet translated into social transformations on a local level. The three parliamentarians interviewed felt that change is a slow process and it takes time to shift societal attitudes towards women. In my interview with GMO the participant explained that “before the genocide women had no opportunities, it is not realistic to think that women will be the heads of banks until 10 years from now. You can barely get a PhD from the time the genocide ended to today. Women still have traditional roles and conservative ambitions to be nurses and teachers- it takes time to change mindsets.” RWAMREC believed that government policies and programs are limited due to lack of accountability. “Gender equality is everyone’s responsibility but it is no one’s responsibility. Gender is a cross-cutting issue in all of Vision 2020’s objectives but no one is making it a priority.”

The intention of this chapter was to illustrate the unintended consequences women experience as a result of government efforts to support women’s economic empowerment. The results show that there are considerable gender inclusive gaps within government reforms and economic strategies. Legal and normative constraints increase women’s work burden, restricts their mobility and discriminates against them in private sector employment. Cooperatives do not account for inequitable distributions in labour and women are inadequately trained which diminishes their ability to earn a decent wage. Incidences of GBV remain high due to patriarchal perceptions on male and female roles and there is considerable confusion regarding government intentions towards gender equality. The finale chapter of this project will summarized the main findings, suggest areas for future research and provide concluding remarks.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Summary of the argument:
Rwanda has seen remarkable improvement in WEE post-conflict due to the government’s promotion of gender equality. However, there is much to be done about integrating policies at a grassroots level. Historic gender roles continue to define relationships between men and women which counter government efforts to implement gender inclusive reforms. Chapter 2 focused on the dominate literature pertain to WEE. It demonstrated the complexities of initiating economic empowerment programs and the importance of considering normative constraints which can hinder the intended purposes of such initiatives. Chapter 3 provided the historical evidence needed to illustrate how Rwanda’s patriarchal legacy continues to define gender roles and the dramatic shift in women’s legal rights post-genocide. Chapter 4 provided qualitative and quantitative evidence to support this project’s hypothesis that women are economically marginalized despite constitutional guarantees of gender equality. There are substantial gaps in Rwanda’s marital, inheritance and land legislation and customary laws continue to dominant in most rural areas. Women are poorly represented at local levels of governance despite constitutional guarantees of a 30% female quota. Vision 2020 and EDPRS do not adequately address legal and normative constraints that prevent women from taking advantage of economic opportunities. National policies encouraging women to engage in income generating activities do not account for the considerable amount of unpaid labour women perform at a household level. Lack of time saving technologies, environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS and high fertility rates are some of the practical challenges that increase women’s domestic and care giving burden. Normative constraints inhibit women from economically benefiting from their labour as men predominantly control household income and expenditure. Discriminatory legal constraints, restricts women’s mobility, reproductive rights and ability to accumulate property or assets. Subsequently, a disproportionate amount of women work in informal sectors whilst men are increasingly moving into formal sectors. There is considerable gender segregation in Rwanda’s formal labour sectors due to inequitable hiring practices and persisting culture of patriarchy. Several
female cooperatives lack the skills, marketing knowledge and confidence in order to be successful which can increase women`s economic vulnerability. GBV is a serious issue in Rwanda and may increase as women become more financial independent. Interpretations of the GBV law are largely negative and women have numerous incentives not to report abuse. Overall, there is a general misconception associated with gender equality and this can cause resistance from men that feel their authority and entitlements are under threat. Some participants question the effectiveness of policy implementation and accountability. All of these factors prevent women from choosing their own economic outcomes and are barriers to empowerment.

5.2 Areas for Future Research and Concluding Remarks:

Despite the numerous challenges women face in achieving WEE I believe that there is tremendous hope and opportunity for women because of the government`s strong gender equality political agenda. Empowerment is a process and cultural attitudes are slow to change. In reflection, if this project were to be recreated, I would suggest using a Rwandan woman to conduct interviews. As mentioned in the methodology section, being a foreigner that does not speak Kinyarwanda, has the potential to distort the research results. Women may feel more comfortable expressing their viewpoints if they had the opportunity to converse in their native language with a woman that truly understands the cultural nuances of Rwandan society.

Given the country`s traumatic recent history and women`s prior socioeconomic status, it is incredible that gender equality is at the forefront of the government`s development efforts. It leads one to wonder why the government has made gender equality such a priority which is an area to consider for future research. Perhaps the government`s rapid gender inclusive reforms are a result of its reliance on international donor aid? Another possibility is that the government`s promotion of women`s empowerment has been utilized to rebuild social cohesion and draw people`s attention away from the country`s legacy of ethnic tensions and stratification. There are arguments that suggest the government`s efforts are superficial and in
reality women play a very minimal role in policymaking and the celebration of gender equality is used to mask mounting socioeconomic and political inequalities. With a Gini coefficient of 48.6 Rwanda’s population is extremely unequal (CIA World Factbook, 2012) particularly between urban and rural dwellers. To date the only piece of legislation that was created and passed by members of parliament, as appose to the executive branch, is the 2006 GBV bill. This suggests that the executive branch has ultimate authority in governance.

In conclusion, this project found that government efforts to legislate and implement gender policies and programmes are limited, and sometimes destructive, to women’s economic empowerment because these approaches do not consider prevailing social norms and practices. The Rwandan government must carefully revise laws to consider normative barriers that constrain women’s potential to make autonomous economic decisions, or else the success of economic empowerment strategies could be short-lived and the gains easily lost.


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Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion. (2010). *National Gender policy, 1-34.* Kigali: Rwanda


Appendix 1

The following is an overview of the key qualitative findings: when asked what were the biggest challenges to WEE in Rwanda the overwhelming majority of skilled participants cited persisting patriarchal inequalities as the leading barrier. A culture of a female submissiveness, the need for “unofficial” approval from husbands to engage in income generating activities, lack of control over resources and income and highly patriarchal intra-household relations were the dominant themes that prevent WEE. Additional inhibitors to WEE frequently mentioned were high fertility rates, lack of local female representation, inadequate infrastructure and exorbitant costs of feminine hygiene products. The semi-skilled participants mainly highlighted practical limitations to achieving WEE. Lack of capacity due to limited resources or collateral, insufficient skills training, and inability to find markets for their products were noted as the main challenges. Another major obstacle to WEE expressed by the vast majority of skilled and semi-skilled participants were women lacked the confidence to be economically empowered. The skilled participants believed this was attributed to historic cultural inequalities and the semi-skilled felt they lacked the education to be successful.

When asked what kinds of support women need to be economically empowered and where do they go for assistance, the skilled participants believed access to time saving technologies, skills training and greater awareness campaigns to sensitize men and women on the benefits of WEE were the main support mechanisms required. They listed a variety of NGO and government services that assist in this regard. The semi-skilled participants noted access to resources, skills and markets are the main support drivers needed and none of interviewees knew where to access such services. When asked if women knew of the laws that protect women’s rights or if the government supported gender equality, most of the skilled participants were aware of Vision 2020, the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Bill, Land laws and generally felt the government was actively promoting gender equality. The semi-skilled
participants enthusiastically believed that the government supports women’s rights, some mentioned Vision 2020 but none knew of specific laws implemented to protect them. Interestingly, despite empirical evidence that suggests female headed households are the poorest and most disadvantaged in society (UNDP, 2007), many of the non-married female cooperatives interviewed felt that they were more empowered than married women. Control over income and household decisions were the main reasoning behind feeling empowered.

There were commonalities between the skilled and semi-skilled participants. All participants interviewed believed that women carried out the bulk of domestic and childcare responsibilities, the majority of interviewees felt that the government was doing a great job enhancing women’s socioeconomic status in society and that it was now culturally acceptable for women to work outside of the home. Most participants felt obligated to engage in income generating activities and some of the semi-skilled participants believed they would not get a husband if they did not make money. When asked if inkwano (bride price) was a good thing or a bad thing, all but one participant from either group believed that inkwano was either a good thing or indifferent. Many felt inkwano was a sign of respect for the bride and her family. Only RWAMREC felt strongly that inkwano was objectifying women and deemed this to be one of the biggest causes of marital rape.

Only the skilled participants were asked if there were significant gender inequalities in formal sectors. The answers varied on the specific challenges women experienced but common themes were sexual harassment from employers or co-workers, discriminatory hiring practices because employers do not want to pay for maternity leave, gender-based wage gaps and glass ceiling for female employees. Several participants stated that the formal sector was extremely patriarchal and that women are poorly represented in managerial positions and often work in lower status jobs than men with the same skill sets.

Based on participant interviews, the data suggests that although many believe the government promotes a gender inclusive platform, patriarchy is still extremely prevalent in
Rwanda. Many women do not control their income or resources and lack sufficient skills training and knowledge about their rights. Women continue to be responsible for domestic and care responsibilities in addition to contributing to household income and there is considerable gender segregation in formal labour markets. There also appears to be confusion about what the promotion of gender equality means particularly among the semi-skilled participants. One woman felt that it was a way to “get back” at men and others believed they were empowered because they earned an income even if they had no control over their earnings or influence in household decisions. The average perception of gender appears to be strongly linked to “women’s business” in Rwanda which excludes men and may foster resentment and resistance. All of these factors hinder a women’s potential to be economically empowered.
Appendix 2

Questions asked in the 5 focus group discussions with women cooperatives:

Economic empowerment of women- L’autonomisation économique des femmes

• How long have you been a part of this cooperative?
• Tell me about your experiences before joining the cooperative.
• What is the most expensive part of your operation? How do you pay for it?
• Does anybody help you?
• Have you ever had the opportunity to engage in microfinance?
• What would make cultivating maize easier for you?
• What kinds of technology do you use?
• Where do you sell your products?
• Do you feel that the government supports women entrepreneurs?
• What needs to be done to build capacity?
• What kinds of support do women need? Where do women go to seek help?
• What are your aspirations for the future?
• What are the biggest challenges to women’s economic empowerment?
Appendix 3

Questions asked of parliamentarian participants:

- How successful has Vision 2020 and the economic development and poverty reduction strategy been in integrating gender into cross cutting issues?

- Vision 2020 goal is to transform Rwanda from an agrarian subsistence economy into a sophisticated knowledge-based society. Since the majority of (semi)-subsistence farmers are women, what is the feasibility of achieving the goals of Vision 2020 unless women are more involved?

- How effective has gender mainstreaming been at the Umudugudu level? What needs to be done to address gender barriers and equality?

- Do you know how much of the national budget is allocated to gender responsive budgeting (mainstreaming) in Ministries?

- One of the GMO’s responsibilities is to hold different institutions accountable for implementing equitable gender practices. How do you do this?

- What are the biggest challenges to women’s economic empowerment in Rwanda?

- What is being done to sensitize men?

- What needs to be done to build economic capacity of women?

- Are women discriminated against in formal sector employment?
Appendix 4

Questions asked of skilled participants:

- What are the biggest challenges to women’s economic empowerment in Rwanda?
- How does education translate into employment?
- What needs to be done to build economic capacity of women?
- What kinds of support do women need? Where do women go to seek help?
- Are women discriminated against in formal sector employment?
- Do you feel that the government supports women?
- Do you feel empowered?
- Do you think it is important to sensitize men?
Appendix 5

Questions asked of semi-skilled participants:

- What are the biggest challenges to women’s economic empowerment in Rwanda?
- What needs to be done to build economic capacity of women?
- What kinds of support do women need? Where do women go to seek help?
- Do you feel that the government supports women?
- Do you feel empowered?