

## Review

### Women Participation in Politics, Leadership, and Gender Equality: A Lesson of Rwandan Success Story

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#### Abstract

*Since 2004, Rwanda has the highest women representation in parliament than any other country in the world; it has been ranked first country to promote women in politics, leadership and gender equality for more than twelve consecutive years. Rwandan traditional culture considers women to have good critical thinking, decision making and be a good adviser as the Queen mother played remarkable role in ruling the kingdom/managing palace before colonization. During colonization period, women perspective was changed by colonizers but later after genocide of 1994 against Tutsi which took more than one million lives of Tutsi within 100 days; many people were killed particular men, others fled the country and women made up 70 per cent of remaining population who were supposed to make effort and show their potential to rebuild the country. The paper stresses on how government of Rwanda managed to be the first country in the world for having highest number of women in parliament, which ways were used; and challenges women face in politics.*

**Key words:** *Women and Politics, Gender Equality, Leadership, Rwanda*

#### INTRODUCTION

In Rwandan culture and history, women have significant role and power in society; typical example is that mother of the king was regarded as best adviser of the king, genius, smart, and exceptional person while making decision on local, and the whole kingdom. For each decision the king wanted to make, he has to discuss with his mother and the loyal cabinet in charge of making decision before announcing the final decision; mother of the king was the most powerful person while making decision. But when colonizers came they started teaching how women are inferior to men, taking a woman as someone who is only in charge of doing simple tasks as domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, agriculture

and looking after babies (Hogg N, 2010) and (Randell and Buscaglia, 2011).

Rwanda, one of the smallest countries in Africa, located in Great Lakes Region also known as a country of thousand hills is now leading the whole world in promoting gender equality, with the highest number of women in parliament of 64 per cent seats representation (World Bank, 2008). Rising from the ash of genocide against Tutsi in 1994 which took around one million lives of people and all institutions, organizations; public sectors did not have much people to replace its workforce but very few people who were in the country, few men, children and women who suffered from the genocide that

stood to rebuild the country through democracy, leadership, unity, reconciliation, and created more space for women to show their potential. Back in the past before colonization period, women took responsibility as men did. And today, Rwanda is the first country to have a female dominated parliament and women are approaching 80 per cent in labor force participation.

Based on data from Ibrahim index (2015) on African governance, Rwanda is analyzed based on how far the country came from after genocide in 1994 against Tutsi; the country is remarkable in good governance, safety, human right, gender equality, leadership, human development, and sustainable economic opportunity with great achievement (Ibrahim Foundation, 2015). In many countries they have belief that men can perform better than women in politics and leadership but compared to the past some women were elected to be leaders in different government institutions at all levels, even being head of state and government (Carmichael et al, 2016). Till 2018 the number of women in politics is increasing globally even if the number is still low, 23.8 per cent women are in parliaments in both lower house and upper house or senate.

In 2016, Rwanda received award from United Nations for promoting women rights and gender equality. According to United Nations report (2016), women took 64 per cent of seats in Rwandan Parliamentary elections; the government of Rwanda has been working together with United Nations in order to promote gender equality, women participation in politics and labor force particularly since 1994. To provide gender-based support, government of Rwanda has many public institutions such as Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, National Women Council, Rwanda Women Parliamentarians Forum and Gender Monitoring Office. Since 1994 Rwanda has shown remarkable ranking on role of women in development of the country and participation in politics. Rwanda expanded women's rights and increased significantly the number of women in its political field. According to Longman (2006) and Burnet (2008), women participation in leadership is in each level and sector such as health, education, military, and politics.

Generally in Africa even other parts of the world, women were not given space in leadership and politics due to different reasons such as culture norms and what may be false judgment according to Cameron (2014); in many countries, culture is still playing big role as a barrier to women stopping them being included in leadership by Tripp, (1999). McLean, (2014) stated that

in history and culture of many tribes and generation to generation men are always regarded as responsible to their families, communities even in politics which made women to stay backward or left behind; even some families prefer their sons to continue education rather than daughters, this has been affecting women for centuries and centuries, their voices cannot be heard, (Kamlongera, 2008) and (World Bank, 2008). But the case of Rwanda is special and totally different to any other country in the world; the country will not reach far nor prosper if women were left behind.

Scholars like Abbot, (2008) and Friedman, (2011) confirmed that Rwanda is the first country with large number of women in politics since 2008 and it is regarded as a good example for developing countries of women's significant role in the development of their countries. The more women participate in politics the more gender equality is taking place and women have changed their rates in banking and owning their own properties, also domestic violence is slowing down (Hassim, 2010). Not only in Africa but also in many countries all over the world, religion and culture often see a women inferior to husband, and husbands are the ones who control everything in families and in decision making and this can affect many women, their children and community in general Kevane, (2004) and Adekunle, (2007). As result this left many women behind and they cannot get same opportunities as men do, in some cases they also face violence (Winter and Leighton, 2001).

Participation of women in politics, good governance, social and economic activities can contribute much to society and make significant impact in many countries and also in communities; then the next step should be ending gender based violence and domestic violence in order to live in harmony and have a peaceful life for both men and women. Women and men should work together to end violence which can help advance economic development and gender equality. For the case of Rwanda, it is becoming better even more expected for women to be leaders and show that they can do more once their voice is heard; as many people in Rwanda live in rural area, most of them rely on agriculture and small businesses, before it was difficult for them to inherit or own land and property such as house, car; but now it is right for women to own land and other properties (Wallace et al, 2009).

This research shows how the government of Rwanda used new policies, and redesigned women policy agenda to promote and empower women in politics which can be applicable to any other country in the world.

The objectives of this paper are to find out:

1. How Rwanda became the first country worldwide to promote gender equality, women in politics and leadership
2. The challenges women are facing while participating in politics and leadership

## METHODOLOGY

To understand the nature and discover deeply how Rwanda became the first country in the world to promote women in politics and gender equality, researcher used interpretivism in grounded theory Charmaz, (2008) the case study of Rwanda by using document and secondary data and interview of some Rwanda parliament members in order to investigate the relationship between Rwandan culture, history, pre-colonial, post-colonial period, gender equality and women in politics. Scholars like Strauss, (1987) and Glaser, (1967) said that grounded theory has been described not so much as a specific method or technique but more as a style of doing qualitative analysis and emphasizing on the discovery of theory from data collected from social research. A consequence of this, they argue that there will be the development of theory which is suited to its anticipated use.

Women occupy approximately the half of the entire world population but they are underrepresented in politics, leadership, and decision making in high institutions; but there are universal agreements to promote gender equality and provide enough space for women in different institutions so that their voice can be heard while making decision and contributing the development of the world. Rwanda applied Human Rights laws to protect women, children and eliminated sexual violence; men played a big role drafting, designing policies and doing campaign locally and on national level against domestic violence, sexual violence, and promoting women rights (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Another big change was launching law on prevention and punishment of gender based violence according to Republic of Rwanda (2009); and Rwanda Women Parliamentarians Forum (FFRP) which is very important to play a big role on behalf of all women and protecting women's rights. Women deserve same rights as men do, Human Rights Declaration of 1948 and other international conventions protect the rights of women in society worldwide; gender equality, participation of women in politics and leadership for women is the major discussed topics nowadays because in some countries the representation of women in leadership is still low considering to men's.

Gender inequality is violating human rights; people should live in harmony without any discrimination based on gender. Involving women in decision making and designing policy for gender equality is important because goals cannot be achieved without including women in leadership to join hands together in order to achieve goals more efficiently.

Rwanda is one of the most effective, stable and growing economy countries in Africa, however some people wonder whether or not the country will keep better perspective and be best example in Africa (Collier, 2010). But considering how far the country has come in last two decades, this can define how the country is becoming better and better in Great Lakes region in Africa and in the world; determined leaders, involving men and women in leadership will bring development to the entire population and better the future for next generation despite its limited natural resources and high density population.

Gender equality and participation of women in politics in Rwanda is a major concern as well as designing policies in order to achieve the Vision 2020, and Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) as already designed long term strategies/frameworks by Rwanda Ministry of Finance and Planning (2000). To accelerate faster and achieve more in terms of gender equality, the country has a National Gender Policy more concerned with girls 'education and supporting for girls, gender based violence, and many other plans to empower, support and guide women according to Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (2011), and Ministry of Education (2008).

Table 1 Women in Politics Worldwide as of June 2018, shows top 20 countries with highest number of women in politics all over the world. Rwanda is the first with 61.3% women in lower house and 38.5% in upper house or senate.

Note: During this classification 193 countries were considered and Table 1 shows top 20 with highest number of women in politics.

The government of Rwanda shows commitment to empower women and gender equality through eliminating all kinds of discrimination against women and start new form of inclusiveness of women in all sectors and positions, also providing more opportunity for education and professional development in all sectors (Gender Monitoring, 2011). Gender equality in Rwanda is meeting the standards of international law of gender

**Table 1. Women in Politics Worldwide as of June 2018**

| WORLD CLASSIFICATION |              |                       |        |       |       |                       |        |       |       |
|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------|-------|-------|-----------------------|--------|-------|-------|
| Rank                 | Country      | Lower or single House |        |       |       | Upper House or Senate |        |       |       |
|                      |              | Elections             | Seats* | Women | % W   | Elections             | Seats* | Women | % W   |
| 1                    | Rwanda       | 16.09.2013            | 80     | 49    | 61.3% | 26.09.2011            | 26     | 10    | 38.5% |
| 2                    | Cuba         | 11.03.2018            | 605    | 322   | 53.2% | ---                   | ---    | ---   | ---   |
| 3                    | Bolivia      | 12.10.2014            | 130    | 69    | 53.1% | 12.10.2014            | 36     | 17    | 47.2% |
| 4                    | Grenada      | 13.03.2018            | 15     | 7     | 46.7% | 27.03.2013            | 13     | 2     | 15.4% |
| 5                    | Namibia      | 29.11.2014            | 104    | 48    | 46.2% | 08.12.2015            | 41     | 10    | 24.4% |
| 6                    | Nicaragua    | 06.11.2016            | 92     | 42    | 45.7% | ---                   | ---    | ---   | ---   |
| 7                    | Costa Rica   | 04.02.2018            | 57     | 26    | 45.6% | ---                   | ---    | ---   | ---   |
| 8                    | Sweden       | 14.09.2014            | 349    | 152   | 43.6% | ---                   | ---    | ---   | ---   |
| 9                    | Mexico       | 07.06.2015            | 500    | 213   | 42.6% | 01.07.2012            | 128    | 47    | 36.7% |
| 10                   | South Africa | 07.05.2014            | 394    | 167   | 42.4% | 21.05.2014            | 54     | 19    | 35.2% |
| 11                   | Finland      | 19.04.2015            | 200    | 84    | 42.0% | ---                   | ---    | ---   | ---   |
| 12                   | Senegal      | 30.07.2017            | 165    | 69    | 41.8% | ---                   | ---    | ---   | ---   |
| 13                   | Norway       | 11.09.2017            | 169    | 70    | 41.4% | ---                   | ---    | ---   | ---   |
| 14                   | Mozambique   | 15.10.2014            | 250    | 99    | 39.6% | ---                   | ---    | ---   | ---   |
| 15                   | Spain        | 26.06.2016            | 350    | 137   | 39.1% | 26.06.2016            | 266    | 101   | 38.0% |
| 16                   | France       | 11.06.2017            | 577    | 225   | 39.0% | 24.09.2017            | 348    | 102   | 29.3% |
| 17                   | Argentina    | 22.10.2017            | 257    | 100   | 38.9% | 22.10.2017            | 72     | 30    | 41.7% |
| 18                   | Ethiopia     | 24.05.2015            | 547    | 212   | 38.8% | 05.10.2015            | 153    | 49    | 32.0% |
| 19                   | New Zealand  | 23.09.2017            | 120    | 46    | 38.3% | ---                   | ---    | ---   | ---   |
| 20                   | Iceland      | 28.10.2017            | 63     | 24    | 38.1% | ---                   | ---    | ---   | ---   |

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018)

equality and women rights; giving women the right to own and inherit land and properties as men do, as described in (Law No 22/99 of 1999 and Law No 43/2013 of 16/06/2013) in legal marriage– the Matrimonial Regimes, Liberties and Successions Law, inclusiveness of women in public and private sectors for any position (Abbott and Rucogoza, 2011).

### **RWANDAN CULTURE LINKS TO GENDER EQUALITY**

Rwandan traditional culture and history show that Rwandans understand the role of gender equality and inclusiveness of women in leadership and decision making to have impact to the whole population none left behind. Women used to take responsibilities while making decision and handling some conflicts this prove that women contributed much in society while making

decision. During the time of kings and queens before colonization, the mother of the king was regarded as first adviser of the king, Queen mother's position was the most important in organizing, controlling, and managing the royal palace and Queen mother participated actively in court while handling tough cases (Gérard Prunier, 1995).

Understanding gender equality and participation of women in leadership have transformed the country significantly from local, national to international recognition in good governance, safety, human resources development, infrastructure, education, agriculture, science and technology; for Rwandans gender equality refer to providing opportunities for both gender and supporting in need; the term gender equality is a concept from western countries but Rwandan traditional culture and values see a man and women on the principle of complementarity rather than equality, responsible for



fulfilling responsibility with respect in the family, locally and the whole kingdom. Despite the conflict, different religions and belief they are one through unity and reconciliation. There are many proverbs and expressions in Kinyarwanda language showing how women are the most important in the family, kingdom or nation as a whole; some of them are *Ukurusha umugore akurusha urugo* “He who has good and kind wife, has the best home” and *umugore ni umutima w’urugo* “a wife is the heart of home” which explain how women are regarded as very important people in Rwandan culture and society (Reseau des Femmes, 1999).

Women were regarded as managers in their homes and have full responsibility to make decisions for kids and managing home’s resources; men have trust in their wives to be able to manage everything at home and make better choices; men who used to about everything, for instance how his wife spends and manages any resource each and every day were regarded as uncultured and greedy because Rwandan traditional culture gives responsibility to women to manage and decide what should be done based on situations while their men are busy away from home earning a living (Peace and Elizabeth, 2009). According to Brown et al. (2006), Rwanda traditional culture did not allow women to own or inherit land or house for the case of death of her husband; widow did not have the right, she has to marry the brother of her husband in order to keep the land or decide to leave and go back to her parents but the government of Rwanda made changes to this by promoting gender balance and women’s rights. On other hand, men are normally physically strong than women and mostly men took tasks which require much energy and there is division of labor for women and for men as a sign of respect and mutual understanding and this show how Rwandan men were responsible, caring and love their families.

To avoid domestic violence, traditional culture of Rwandans does not permit a man who beats, quarrel, cause any kind of trouble, or harasses his wife; women should be protected and be the source of good education to the whole family, if a man beats his wife, elders of the family or village gives him advice and warn him, then try to handle the root problem of fighting. Even before, few days to wedding day both groom and bride spend some days receiving advice from aunts, uncles, and elders of family to live in peace the rest of their lives and take care of each other, supporting each other no matter how or

which situation of life they are advised to be patient and kind. Rwanda traditional way of solving conflict called *Gacaca* is used to deal, manage, and solve conflict among people with deep understanding of the root of conflict, tolerance, unity and reconciliation while rejecting hatred, taking revenge and tough decisions (Peace and Elizabeth, 2009). Rwandan culture understands how important women are, treat them with care, love, mutual understanding, and respect.

Mothers were considered as source of life, Rwanda traditional culture respect much more women who have children, having children is a sign of blessing, good life, better future because your children will support you and help you when you are very old. On other hand, a woman who gets married and spends years and years living with the husband but could not have children because of some malfunctioning or problems with her fertility is regarded as a misfortune in the family though time after time technology in medical field reveal the reason and she can be treated and after be able to be pregnant and have a baby. For the last two decades women from different backgrounds and experience were elected to be in parliament to join men to have significant impact on the development of the country; no doubt the country changed for the better, other women joined executive, legislative, juridical positions and their presence is remarkable, they showed that they can do more once they are given time opportunities.

Gahene in interview by Peace Uwineza (2008) said that large number of women in Rwanda parliament has resulted to change many women’s and girls’ life in the whole country. According to Rwanda Parliament (2006); the fact that they are many they can express challenges other women face in their everyday lives and this has impact in restructuring policies of girls’ education, more investigation of domestic violence, sexual violence, and the policy output has positive effect to all women in general. In interview with some women who are Members of Parliament they stated that they feel comfortable, stable, and flexible when sitting, having meeting in parliament and seeing many other women together sharing ideas. In many cases for other countries in the world they are few numbers of women in parliament which make women’s voice not heard when considered to large number of men in parliament. This shows how large number of women in parliament can have positive impact on the rest of women’s lives in rural areas who are facing some difficulties which men cannot fully understand in the real situation.

Table 2, Women’s Representation on Standing Committees of the Rwandan Parliament shows the exact number of women in each field in Rwandan parliament;

**Table 2. Women's Representation on Standing Committees of the Rwandan Parliament**

| Committee                                                      | Number of women MPs | Total number of MPs | Proportion of women MPs |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Foreign Affairs and Cooperation                                | 5                   | 7                   | 71.43                   |
| Petitions                                                      | 4                   | 7                   | 57.14                   |
| Science, Culture, and Youth                                    | 4                   | 7                   | 57.14                   |
| Political Affairs                                              | 4                   | 7                   | 57.14                   |
| Gender and the Promotion of the Family                         | 4                   | 6                   | 50.00                   |
| Agriculture, Livestock Development, Environment                | 3                   | 6                   | 50.00                   |
| State Budget and Property                                      | 3                   | 6                   | 50.00                   |
| National Unity, Human Rights and the Struggle against Genocide | 3                   | 7                   | 42.86                   |
| Economy and Trade                                              | 3                   | 7                   | 42.86                   |
| National Security and Integrity                                | 3                   | 8                   | 37.5                    |
| Social Affairs                                                 | 2                   | 6                   | 33.33                   |

Source: Rwanda Parliament (2018)

foreign affairs and cooperation has many Member of Parliament who are women around 71.4 per cent, inclusiveness of women in Rwanda parliament has changed the country significantly and women play their role to build the country economically.

To understand how Rwanda became the first in gender equality there are many factors but most importantly the culture and traditional way, how Rwandans treat and see a woman. Traditionally in Rwanda, women have respect in society this brought the real image how they can contribute to the development of the country and participate in leadership; Rwandan culture, history-during the time of Kings they really respect women and they have significant role in society, so Rwandan government understand women even before colonization and helps to define women, their ability and potentials.

But in many African countries, religion, belief, and culture considers a man the one who should take all responsibilities and take a woman as weak and should rely on husband only, men took decision related to homes, kids, and resources, women should not oppose their

husband and no more discussion but in Rwandan tradition, man and woman sit together and discuss, help each other and listen how all issues should be resolved. Scholars like Kevane, (2004) and Adekunle, (2007) stated that the full control of women by men is not good because it is right and better to discuss the issues while taking decision.

In Rwanda, the majority of people live in rural areas and they are mostly some tasks women do at home, like cooking, cleaning, washing dishes, and taking care of children; but this does not have anything to do with inequality.

### **WOMEN IN POLITICS, HOW RWANDA LEADS THE WORLD**

Rwanda to become the first country in the world to empower women did not come in one day or a week, leaders took much time and services of experts to restructure and design policies to make sure women are not left behind, inclusiveness of women in politics,

leadership, public and private organizations, education. The structure reform of policies did not affect the government and organizations function and their progress (Immaculee, 2006).

### **Regal Reform**

In 2003, government of Rwanda made a constitution to sustain women to participate in leadership and politics in all levels of government institutions while protecting women's rights and promoting gender equality; right for women to own property, land and house; which was the first time in history of the country allowing women to have such rights. Inclusiveness of women in institutions locally, on national and parliament levels should be at least 30 per cent of women. The principle of the country is promoting gender equality and complementarity between men and women.

### **Structure of Election**

The system of election was changed and in any election, the government required to include a specified percentage of women on local, provincial and national level in order to keep increasing the number of women in politics. During the 2001 and 2006 elections women were distributed accordingly in sectors, and districts, even the list of candidates on ballot paper during elections there must be female candidates to promote equality and opportunity for all. Also on the position of executive committee and on provincial level women were given enough space and promotion.

### **Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion and other institutions**

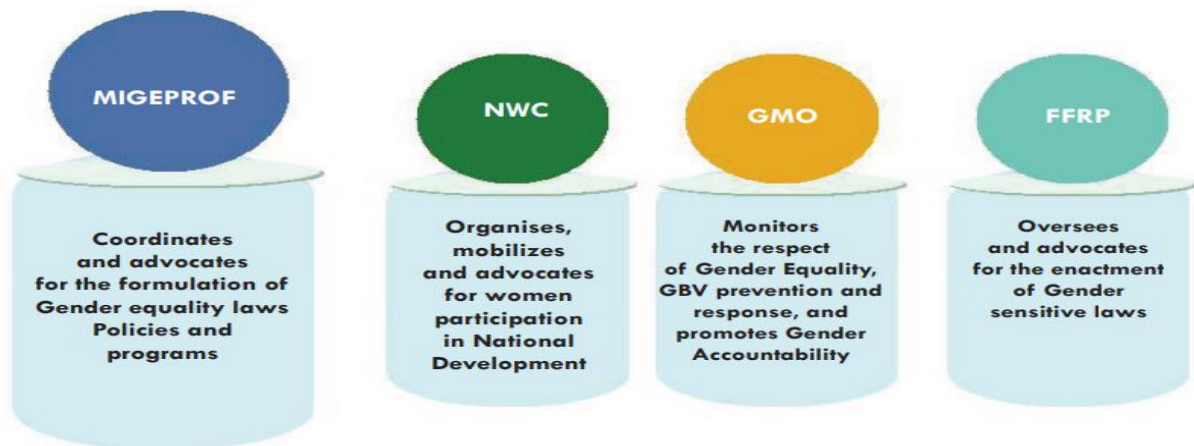
Rwanda established Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion and other institutions to maintain equality and

gender balance, institutions like Gender Monitoring Office, National Women's Council, Parliamentarian Women Forum, and so on were supported by government; the Ministry leads and coordinates all institutions to promote and empower women locally, and internationally (Anon, 2010). National Women Council is in charge of supervising how women are treated in different institutions and do follow ups (Yeshiareg, 2008).

### **Civil Society**

In Rwanda there are many Non-Governmental Organizations that promote women, in education, financing project for women, promote awareness and equality and complementarity of men and women. The Association of Widows of Genocide (AVEGA), started by only 5 people are now more than 30,000 widows and they share experiences and get financial aid for running small businesses; HAGURUKA is another association of female lawyers who provide legal services for women in case of violence or abuse; Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe is association in charge of maintaining the value of women in development of the country and all other associations and Non-Governmental Institutions work together with same vision to promote women and empower them in leadership and politics. Figure 1, Role of Institutions in Promoting Women shows the role of each institution to make sure that women are not left behind in all sectors and development of the country. Among those institutions are Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), National Women Council (NWC), Gender Monitoring Office (GMO), Rwanda Women Parliamentary Forum (FFRP).

The spirit of all women in Rwanda is not to sit home and wait for men to do everything, they believe that they can achieve more and be the best they can, women have already discovered how far they can reach regardless of how many African cultures see women as inferior to men. Some traditional norms in Rwanda, in Africa, even the whole world do not allow a woman to speak in public



**Figure 1. Role of Institutions in Promoting Women**

Source: Rwanda's Gender Dividend (2017)

when men are present, this has been affecting women for centuries, not sharing their ideas, contributing or thinking at all. Rwanda is a place where women feel comfortable to speak in public sharing their ideas with men.

### **Vision 2020 and Inclusion of Gender**

Women occupy around 54 per cent of the whole population in Rwanda, and nothing can be done without their participation; in order to achieve vision 2020 development goals in all levels and fields. In the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS); women were supported in education, labor force, and leadership. Eliminating all forms of discrimination, poverty was decreased from 57 per cent to 40 per cent in 2012, according to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Rwanda is one of the best countries in Sub-Saharan region to promote education for all with universal primary education rate of 97.7 per cent (boys: 97.3 per cent; girls: 98 per cent) UNICEF, 2016).

After implementing all the above policies, the country has changed significantly; women occupied more than 60 per cent of seats in parliament, (Gross domestic product) GDP increased 6 per cent to 10 per cent, primary school girls enrolled reach 98 per cent and secondary around 29 per cent in 2014; maternal mortality decreased to 130 cases and life expectancy shifted from 50 years in 2005 to 67 in 2018 (Khanf Foundation, 2016).

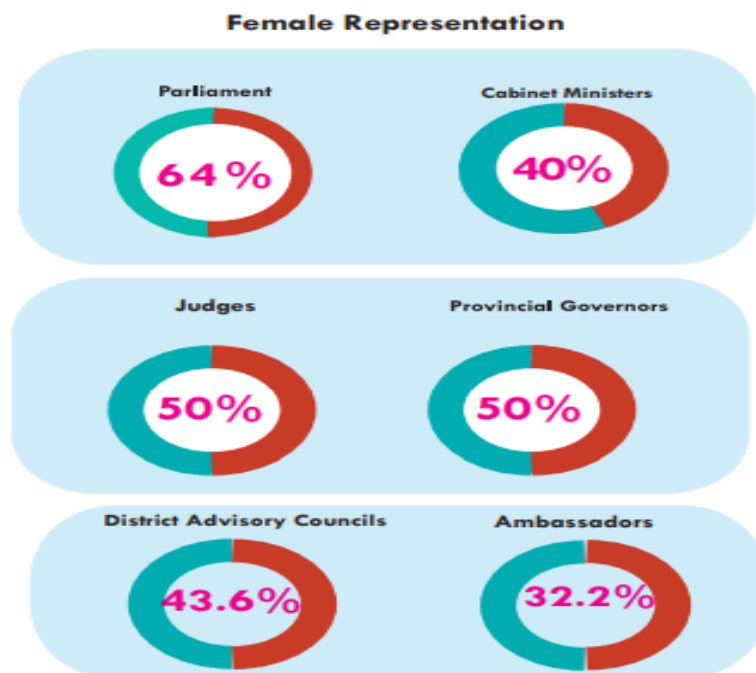
In his speech empowering women and youth in general, The President of Rwanda Paul Kagame said "If our

*country ranks first, and the whole world is watching us today, it's not because we have the Vatican, the Kabba, the White House, the Elysee or the Taj Mahal here at home. Not because you have a certain Paul Kagame as head of state, but rather because you have sons and daughters of Rwanda in this country. Men and especially young people and Rwandan women who have forgiven each other, and who have taken the destiny of their country in hand by the meaning of work, innovations and patriotism as the key to their progress and development. What we are doing here in Rwanda is not a miracle, nor is it impossible elsewhere, it is simply the commitment of an entire nation, especially Rwandan youth and women, but also political will.*

*Soon, we will have the best universities in the world at home (Harvard, London School of Economics, etc.) we will also have the best hospitals in Rwanda. The intelligence and competence of our children will be equal to or greater than that of the great powers, and our country Rwanda will be a new door of opportunity, knowledge, technology and innovation for all African children and the world who want to learn from us or still give us their knowledge. Rwanda will not only be at the rendezvous of civilizations, but also of science and technology and all the cultures that will dominate the world, according to M.T (2018).*

For the first time, the government of Rwanda promised seats of women in parliament in 1961 one year before independence from Belgium, later in 1965 first female appeared in Rwanda parliament; but because of conflict leading to genocide against Tutsi in 1994, women did not





**Figure 2. Rwanda Women Representation in 2013**

Source: Rwanda Gender Dividend (2017)

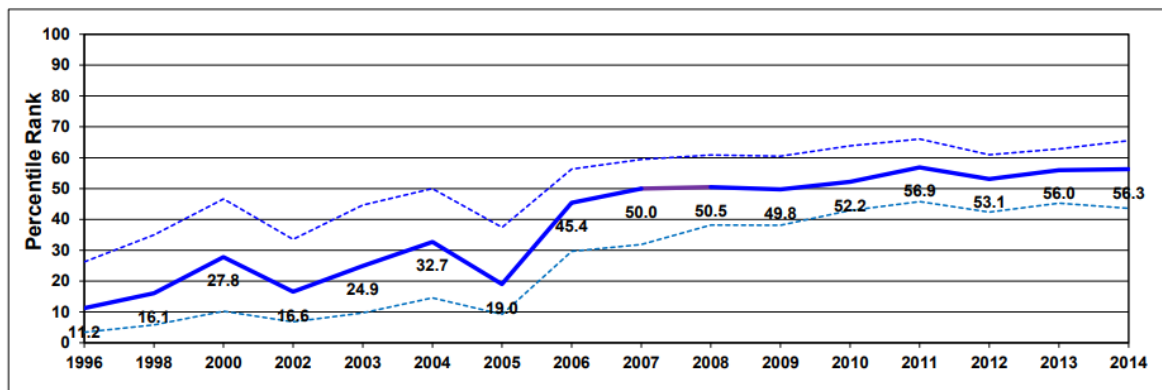
occupy more than 18 per cent seats in parliament, after genocide women were given enough space in parliament and took maximum seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1995). Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) the ruling party, best known for its role in ending genocide against Tutsi in 1994 with Paul Kagame as a leader and in keeping unstoppable rise in Rwandan economy and development none left behind emphasized the role of women in reconstruction and prosperity of the country. Back in 1960-1993 many Rwandans lived in exile in neighboring countries and while Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) was preparing to come back in Rwanda also women were among the soldiers and struggled a lot to fight for their right and stop genocide against Tutsi. Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) were refugees who left their country because of conflict and ethnic war, among them were few men, women and children without any other support but determined to save the country no matter what; women contributed as much as they can, even after genocide some of them were chosen to be among top politicians after genocide like Aloisea Inyumba, the first Minister of Women's Affairs, had been the Commissioner of Finance for the RPF, and Rose Kabuye who was the first woman to get the highest rank in Rwandan Army after genocide of 1994 (Drude, 1998).

Figure 2, Rwanda Women Representation in 2013 shows the percentage of women in parliament 64 per cent, cabinet ministers occupy 40 per cent, female judges in whole country represent 50 per cent, female provincial governor occupy 50 per cent, female district advisor council 43.6 per cent and female ambassadors 32.2 per cent.

Note: Figure 2 percentages keep changing every year.

### **Result of Reform**

There is evidence in the whole country after Rwanda took initiative of promoting women even if some of their contributions remain unknown or invisible. In education, the enrollment of girls for primary school raised to 98.0 per cent in 2016 and 98.1 per cent in 2017 (Rwanda Ministry of Education, 2017). Around 92.5 per cent of Rwanda population is registered in national health program where maternal mortality has decreased significantly since 2003 (Anupriya, 2014). In justice, the government is very sensitive to any violence, abuse against women and girls. Figure 3 shows the effectiveness of governance in Rwanda since 1996 to 2014; there is a significant improvement and change brought by inclusiveness of women in politics, percentile



**Figure 3. Government Effectiveness of Rwanda 1996-2014**

Source: World Bank (2015)

rank raised from 11.2 in 1996 to 56.3 in 2014 and this is a proof that women contribute more to good governance.

### **OBSTACLES TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS**

By 2018 only three countries in the world have more than 50 per cent representation of women in politics; Rwanda, Bolivia, and Cuba. As of October 2017, only 11 women were serving as heads of states and 12 as head of government across the globe (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017). Almost half of world population is female; and it is obvious that they are underrepresented in politics and decision making. In many countries women have been facing obstacles while trying to participate in leadership and politics; culture, religion, and social norms are the basic obstacles which stop women moving forward to higher levels in trying to improve their lives and make impact in society. Religion and culture play a big role in society and can influence anything in the society because they dominate society (Inglehart and Norris, 2003) and (Stump, 2008). The vision is to ensure stability and good quality of life without anyone left behind; while promoting gender equality, the status of women in society is most important for future the generation (Klingorová, 2015) and (Verveer, 2011).

In the world, religion, norms and prejudices are mostly minimizing the value of women and many countries, cultures and race support that which make women stay behind; people should realize how women are important and know that their potential can change the world according to Young, (1987), Hamplová, (2011), in some religions like Christianity and Islam some positions cannot be taken by women. Holm, (1994) stated that like

in Islam women are rarely heard in public or decision making and also all women in menstruation period cannot enter the mosque or touch the Quran; but on other hand Islam and other religion respect in general women and their role in family in daily life. Culture, religion, societal norms influenced the role of women in society and research revealed that neglecting women in society will have effect on generation to generation (King, 1995) and (Hopkins, 2009).

For the case of Rwanda and other developing countries, there is no enough capacity building to prepare women who are willing to be leaders and participate in politics. In some regions, they still have prejudice or culture norms about women which is still holding women back but the government is trying the best to let people be aware of the potentials of women and their role in the development of the country. Insufficient income is also a problem in trying to stabilize women participation in daily activities which shape their future in leadership and politics. Most of the time women are busy with their kids or earning a living for their families. Almost all countries in the world agreed women rights and give them the right to be elected, New Zealand was the first country to give women right to vote in 1893 and Finland was the first to adopt women rights in 1906 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2004).

Obstacles like political life is organized according to male norms and values at the point it is sometimes difficult for women to join politics, partly due to lack of party support because men joined before and belong to some parties which is very important during election and campaigns. Women's organizations sometimes are not cooperating together to make an impact, electoral system

**Table 3. Detailed Summary of Barriers for Women in Politics**

| <b>Barrier</b>                                                                                                      | <b>Details</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The prevalence of the 'masculine model' of political life and of elected government bodies;                         | political life is organized by male norms, values and lifestyles and working patters                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Lack of party support for women                                                                                     | women are rarely decision makers in political parties, even though they play important roles in Campaigning.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Lack of sustained contact and cooperation with public organizations such as trade (labor) unions and women's groups | although women's organizations can help women parliamentarians overcome barriers, there is a less contact between politicians and these groups, Compared to other interest groups.                                                                                                                                                               |
| the nature of the electoral system,                                                                                 | different systems produce different numbers of Female parliamentarians. The PR system is most conducive to high numbers of women elected Politicians.                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Socio-economic obstacles                                                                                            | low socio economic status of women, compared to men means women have fewer power and material resources to support her move into politics                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Linked to socio-economic obstacles: women's lack of time resources                                                  | women carry a disproportionate share of domestic work, despite high numbers of women in paid Employment. Women's additional work burden prevents them from having time necessary to engage in politics                                                                                                                                           |
| Women's socialization                                                                                               | male values tend to dominate politics in many countries and women's roles are culturally viewed As being in the home rather than in politics. This impacts on women's confidence to engage in politics, attitudinal prejudice against women and Women's lack of trust and confidence in politics.                                                |
| The role of the mass media, linked to above                                                                         | women politicians are covered less by the mass media than their male counterparts and events and issues of importance to women are not covered as Much as other issues. This reduces women's Interest in politics. Mass media also reinforces gender cultural stereotypes about the role of women which prevent women from engaging in Politics. |

Source: Author's Own

does not support and empower women for participating in politics, social-economic obstacles which hold women in home activities and do not give them access to education and professionalism to be competent in political field and labor market; all these obstacles are still holding women back but there is hope that women in politics and gender equality is having good result considering the last four decades. Table 3 presents summary of barriers for women in politics.

In some countries women are not willing to join political arena because of lack of confidence, sometimes regard politics as a game where people commit organized crimes and corruption. The media also have less focus on women commitment; all these factors influence women's view of politics and sometimes they are not willing to join and make change in society, even if some countries do not have such obstacles, women remain inactive based

on women's participation in politics background and history in their countries.

## CONCLUSION

After genocide against Tutsi of 1994, Rwanda emphasized on values of women in Rwandan traditional culture linking with modern positions; pre-colonial Rwandan history shows that women were respected in society and regarded as managers of families, best advisers, having good critical thinking and leadership spirit. The identity of women's leadership is in Rwandan culture, politics, and in religion; while on the other hand some African countries do not recognize the potential of women in their culture, public decision making, limiting their ability, no right to own land and properties. The root of Rwandan women's achievement is based on how traditional culture view women and this reflect in the whole present achievements.

Despite many obstacles women in Rwanda face while in politics same as other women from any other country around the world; they managed to strive and show that any country can do it and promote participation of women in politics, leadership and women's rights. Leaders designed policy strategy to promote women's right and this was exceptional after genocide of 1994 where effort to empower women was actively done with support of Rwanda Patriotic Front. Supporting women should continue with effort in order to ensure that women can fit available positions in politics providing support in education, capacity building and human development training for elite women leaders; in order to maintain women's network in society. Cultural values that empower women should be linked to social life, religious values, and politics to keep the sustainability of women in decision making and their values.

Turning the spotlight on Rwanda experience, it is clear that three main aspects were the essentials to realize the potential of women after 1994; traditional culture that views women as most important people in society, leaders who are committed for development of country without leaving women behind, and genocide of 1994 against Tutsi where very few people survived and women represented 70 per cent of the remaining population to rebuild the country. Inclusiveness of women in politics has changed the country significantly, in education, health, justice and sustainable development. In addition, the most important is that parliament lead to designing, restructuring and ensured more effective implementation of policies. Only time will tell if the dramatic gains are sustainable.

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