

Education for Women Empowerment: Perceptions and Experiences of Female University Graduates in Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

Despite the quantitative representativity of women in decision making in the political bodies and education, less is still known about their post-university experiences at the self- and social levels. The study at hand examines the perceptions and experiences of female university graduates in Rwanda. Personnel curricular planning or quality services frameworks are dependent on representations of a genderless society and rest on a mind-set of presumed objectivity and merit-informed decisions. This paper is centred on education for women empowerment with the focus on their perceptions and experiences as graduates from the universities in Rwanda. The paper's objective was to understand their empowerment and acceptance by society and assess the level of challenges that they are encountering after higher education. Due to its exploratory nature, a qualitative research approach was adopted to collect data from 7 participants purposely selected from diverse professions. The data were analysed using content analysis with iterative deductive-inductive identifications of themes and from the findings of the study it is expected that the participants would indicate their perception of the change in their status after leaving higher education, the treatment they are confronted with at the level of their families, and the society, the manner in which they perceive themselves with other women who are less educated, and how despite their attainment of tertiary education, they are still confronted with a myriad of challenges. In perspective, this paper would identify policy and research recommendations that can go a long way to stem the tides.

Keywords: Women empowerment, women education, gender, development, social justice

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study is to reflect the perceptions of the female gender in Rwanda after graduating from higher institutions of learning. The gender monitoring office in Rwanda

(2019), positions the dignity and ability of men and women as equitable, and hence, the availability of opportunities cannot be disaggregated. In view of this, any policy failure that jeopardises measures to promote gender equality cannot be overcome via isolated ventures in any structure (Reilly, 2021). Reflecting on empirical studies on the female gender regarding their life after tertiary education, western scholars are calling the shots. They do this with a very strong propensity to gauge the perception of women through lenses that are unilateral (Reilly, 2021) and akin to them. This paper sets out to critically examine the socio-economic and political status of Rwandese women after graduating from higher institutions of learning. We shall begin by framing the context of the study through which the problem shall be specified. We proceed to identify the theoretical orientation of the paper. This is followed by the identification of the thematic out view, methods, findings, and discussions.

Background and Problem

Gender discrimination and inequality always emanate from social and cultural norms (see CARE, 2019) and are blown up physically, psychologically, socially, sexually, and financially. At the global, regional, and national levels, each context seeks to handle gender equality by creating institutions in their societies wherein women contribute and benefit from the development and empowerment process (UNESCO 2015; Reilly, 2021). Anchoring this position is the commonwealth strategic plan (2017) that directly interconnects this with gender mainstreaming as a strategy needed to attain gender equality by rigorously injecting the gender perspective into all policies and actions. The exacerbation of the foregoing is the complication of the complex nature of the concept of gender intersectionality. Intersectionality, therefore, results from diverse power relations, experiences, and social locations (Reilly, 2021). The cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups (Woodroffe & Daigle, 2017). According to the United Nations sustainable development goals report, (2022), it would take another 40 years for women and men to be represented equally in national political leadership. Furthermore to this, women accounted for 39% of total employment in 2019 but it dropped by 45% of global employment losses to the female gender. In the African setting, the education of the girl child strengthens their social, economic, and health benefits and reinforces their competences for work as well as providing added value to their life including their families (Rubagiza et al., 2022; Woodroffe & Daigle, 2017). The girl child in Africa is still disadvantaged, suffering from discrimination, and hyper-masculinity, and fails to acquire the benefits of education and training (Reilly, 2021; Rubagiza et al., 2022).

The Rwandan government in its strategic gender framework of 2021, in priority area 2, indicates a holistic acceleration of women's economic empowerment and in priority area 3, pledges its determination to promote gender equality and equity in all facets of the society and in a sustainable manner. Realising these inclusive policies requires a robust approach to ensure success. A common denominator depends on monitoring and follow-up that is completely at variance with the mitigating factors of gender-based violence (GBV), still prevalent in Rwanda like sexual violence, physical violence, economic violence, psychological and structural violence (Sleghe & Kimonyo, 2010). In the area of gender equality and empowerment of women, it recognizes the centrality of gender, and the authorities in Rwanda are targeting mainstreaming across all sectors (UNESCO 2015; CARE, 2019), and continue to review policies and legal instruments to ensure that the empowerment of women and girls are pegged on strong policy

and legal frameworks (Rubagiza et al., 2022). Moreover, the Rwandan gender monitoring office (2019), shows that gender equality and the fundamental rights of women are by law assured a minimum 30% quota for women in all decision-making institutions by the constitution of Rwanda.

The government of Rwanda factors in diverse policies and legal frameworks to pursue gender equality. In its National Gender Policy (2021), it advocates gender equality and equity in national and sustainable transformation. Such a vision is realistic if the indicators like poverty, education and training, health, and violence against women in addition to women in power and decision-making (UN Indicators of Gender Equality, 2015), are judiciously harnessed and handled. Moreover, the 2013 law governing land and the constitution accords women equal rights to men in view of making decisions and owning and using property and land (Rwanda, 2003, Art. 29; Rwanda, 2013, Art. 4). The government completely bars discrimination on account of gender at the workplace and same pay for equal work at the place of work (OECD, 2019). In spite of the plethora of these legal instruments and the government's yearning to ensure equity, female gender discrimination in the family is 38%, restricted physical integrity, 21%, restricted access to productive and financial resources 26%, and restricted civil liberties 24% (OECD, 2019). The Rwandan government and its partners are committed to the education of the girl child through an inclusive policy thereby, supporting education for all and national development (Stavropoulou & Gupta-Archer, 2017).

Despite this vast array of empirical work (Rubagiza et al., 2022; UNESCO 2015; CARE, 2019; Slegh & Kimonyo, 2010; Reilly, 2021; Woodroffe & Daigle, 2017), and government policy documents that indicate efforts at gender empowerment and development, there is no research on the fate of the female gender upon completion of higher education in Rwanda. It is important and crucial to understanding how they are integrated into society and their local communities. It is imperative to find out about their social status, professional life, marital status, family life, and how they are perceived through the cultural norm lenses. Consequently, this paper commences this reflection and serves as an awareness-creation tool. It would provide visibility to the blurriness of this concept and add to the array of studies in this area by approaching the problem with the use of a different lens. Consequently, it seeks to understand how women are treated in the society after graduating from Rwandan institutions of higher learning and the challenges ensuing from the new status of women. This would be reflected in the framework of understanding how women are empowered after graduating from higher learning institutions of Rwanda and the challenges that are still inherent. Hence, the principal question to answer with this paper seeks to understand how women are perceived in Rwanda after attaining tertiary education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of gender indicates the social, cultural, and psychological differences between the masculine and female sex [1]. Corroborating this view, other empirical studies (Rubagiza et al., 2022; Woodroffe & Daigle, 2017) reinforces this by explicitly designating the attributes and norms as socially constructed between the different genders. Gender remains hierarchical and leads to inequalities (Reilly, 2021). In each context and society, all gender defects are dependent on hierarchical organigrams, cultural, and diverse power dynamics which are visible in both the female and male sex. Development denotes the lopsided growth of systems (Mario, 2019). Reyes (2001) and aptly demonstrates development as a social condition within a nation,

wherein the needs of its denizens are catered for through the sustainable use of subsoil resources. We will begin by identifying the theories that will harness the examination of these concepts.

Theoretical Orientation of Gender and Development: Realistic or Untenable?

The functionalist theory of gender lends credence to the division of labour emanating from biological differences between the male and female gender [1]. However, the sexual division of labour is prevalent in each society and is at variance from biological programming which is therefore a logical setup of the society (ibid). Implicitly, the foregoing theory denotes equality between the female and male but with cognisance of biological differences, the same roles for both genders are compromised and make the female to be subservient to the males. Second, certain attributes make some women to feel more secure in marriages than men. Development for any nation is seen as a social paradigm where the needs of the people are fulfilled through the natural and sustainable use of subsoil resources (Reyes, 2001). The theory of modernization indicates that societies are holistically more productive, with quality education for its citizens and the needy meeting their needs and welfare (Mario, 2019; Reyes, 2001). To this theory, societal modernization engenders tendencies of convergence and a homogenizing process ([1]; Mario, 2019). With this process, the societies evolved from one stage to the other until they attain saturation after meeting the criteria of development appearing the same in terms of infrastructure and the people in each context. The foregoing theories show that the functionalist implicitly dichotomised the female and male gender. The development theory talks of holistic growth in society without distinction of the sexes and the modernisation theory supports this view. The functionalist theory in view of the subject under review implicitly agrees with a patriarchal set up while the developmental and modernisation theories support a change and liberating paradigm of the gender without distinction. The relevance of these theories would be assessed in the analysis of the findings of this study.

Theories of Women Empowerment

Womens empowerment relates to the process through which women acquire the possibility to make strategic life decisions in a context where they did not have this opportunity (Huis et al., 2017). Multiple theories of women empowerment presume that early gains in gender equality takes the form of women's greater equality with men in skill development and standard of living. These gains untie women from traditional household activities, setting them free to participate in greater rates in civic activities such as petitions and boycotts (Alexander & Welzel, 2007). This theory of change first articulates the necessary conditions and actions for the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment, as contained in global normative frameworks. Hence, UN-Women supports the implementation of these normative frameworks comprehensively by leveraging its collaborative advantage in an integrated manner (UN Women, 2021). Moreover, each outcome area contributes to overall change for women and girls and the necessary conditions for the achievement of each outcome. Women empowerment is the power to women in all spheres and depends upon the change of that power because if power cannot change position, then there cannot be any empowerment for women (Devi, 2019; Alexander & Welzel, 2007). Huis et al., advocates for a three-dimensional model for women empowerment which resonates on the micro, meso and macro levels. At the micro-level, ones' beliefs, actions and personal empowerment can be observed. The meso-level harps on the beliefs, actions in relation to relevant others, where relational empowerment can

be gauged. The macro-level refers to the outcomes at the societal dimension in which the societal empowerment can be assessed (2017, p. 1).

Gender Disparities and Participation in Education

Higher education remains the bridge leading to human resource development, and social transformation, via the knowledge and skills acquired. This provides people with the required competences to manage and change societies and improve the social life of citizens (UNESCO, 2018; Tusiime et al., 2017). Human capital development remains a primordial indicator of self-sufficiency and socio-economic turnaround. Glick and Sahn, attest to the fact that low levels of human capital development engender poor economic growth and the eradication of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa (see Tusiime et al., 2017). The world has achieved the target of gender parity at all levels except tertiary education, though this is not valid for all regions. Only 66% of countries have achieved gender parity in primary education, 45% in lower secondary, and 25% in upper secondary (UNESCO, 2018). This notwithstanding, the aspirations and ability of people to further their levels of education are more often than not, inhibited by socioeconomic and gender norms (Reyes, 2001; Baligar, 2018). The effects of such inhibition lead to defects in sustainable and equitable development by the different genders. Higher education in Rwanda has been fraught with regional and gender disparities in enrolment and graduation, mainly based on patriarchal and sexist hiccups (Mario, 2019; Tusiime et al., 2017).

Educational institutions are agencies of socialisation and by dint of this fact, are responsible for ensuring the construction of masculine and feminine identities and this translates to what it means to be masculine or feminine in their contexts (Reilly, 2021; Rubagiza et al., 2022). Gender disparities in most African countries, particularly in Rwanda are rooted in institutions of patriarchy that is a determining factor of power distribution in the society, granting in a reckless manner more influential domination to the males than the females (Leicht, et al., 2018; Rubagiza, et al., 2022). The implication of patriarchy is systemic and accords superior, and apparently unmerited status to the males in all spheres. Consequently, this validates male privileges, values, and behavioural patterns (Rubagiza, et al., 2022). Normatively, the ability of males and females in regard to different roles and activities are determining factors of their different opportunities.

Education and Women Empowerment in Rwanda

Education is a human right and is built on the foundation of sustainable development for humanity (Leicht, et al., 2018). Making sense and taking into account the understanding of learning and broadly, education in general, heterogeneity, and equality are crucial ingredients for the sustainable acquisition of life skills in every context. Despite this holistic approach, African girls are still disadvantaged in training and education. the Millennium Development Goals (Goal 3) and the new UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development include goals on inclusive, quality, and equitable education as well as the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment (Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5; Gamoran & Dibner, 2022; Rubiazaga, 2022). Despite this, university education in Rwanda apparently does not give the female gender the requisite opportunities as the male gender due to a patriarchal culture that remains more real than apparent (Reilly, 2021). The expectations are disproportionate regarding the assignment to females over those of males. The female responsibilities and duties in support of the family outflanked that of the male and are entrenched in the framework of the Rwandan culture. This is primordial in a woman's professional life and hence, this provides a

comprehension of the challenges faced by women with a university degree (OECD, 2019; Reilly, 2021). The constitutional and public policy guarantees of gender equity in Rwanda are eroded by societal expectations and traditional patriarchal dispensations. Education and the level do not negate societal responsibilities like fulfilling the chores of a housewife and mother and ensuring that dinner is ready on time (Gamoran & Dibner, 2022; Rubiazaga, 2022; Stavropoulou & Gupta-Archer, 2017). Such gender disparities and discrimination completely negate the initiatives by the government of Rwanda to uproot the cankerworm of the unequal treatment of the different genders.

METHODS

The essence of this paper was to understand the perceptions of the female gender in regards to their empowerment after higher education in Rwanda. In this section, we would justify the method we used in this study by describing the research design, streamlining the population and the sampling technique. This would be followed by the tools for data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations.

In this study, the researchers depended on qualitative survey because of the exploratory nature of the study. This was important because it was the desired method that could be used to understand the perception and experiences of female graduates from some Rwandan universities. With this mode, the approach intended to assess the female gender's ability to appropriate their ideas and experiences with different perceptions of reality (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Kothari, 2004). Non-probability sampling and or purposive sampling was used for our data collection and 7 female graduates were purposively identified from different universities in Rwanda and spanned across different professions. They were therefore heterogeneous in their different professional compositions. Qualitative research provides insights into a phenomenon, and never generalized.

The data was collected using semi-structured interviews which comprised a number of open-ended questions adapted from the subject under review. These permitted the researchers and the interviewees the opportunity to explore some themes through in-depth examination and reflection of the concept of gender. Provision was therefore made for prodding questions on the ideas raised by the respondents (Kothari, 2004). Hence, the researchers purposefully identified ladies with given characteristics who were certain to provide the needed information to unmasked the phenomenon under review (Kothari, 2004; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The collected interviews were transcribed by the researchers and then translated from Kinyarwanda to English by a professional translator and further checked for consistency by the three researchers before validating it. The collected data underwent coding and intercoding, categorising and grouped into content, discovery and meaning approaches (Kothari, 2004). Content analysis of the data was applied. In applying content analysis to the findings, we proceeded with iterative deductive-inductive techniques to fine tune and enhance the different themes and avoiding a missed out of any details. Coding accorded us the opportunity to have a picture of the data that could not be discernible after the transcription form and to reord the data into an analytical category. Ethically, the researchers consulted the interviewees and informed them of the reasons for the data collection. They were further informed that no information about their personality could be divulged for any reason. Anonymisation of their jobs and personality made them satisfied and decided to willingly take part in the interviews. From the data collected, the following findings emanated from the data under review.

RESULTS

In this section of the paper, the researchers provide the changes in the socio-economic status of women as described by the respondents, their treatment in the society and how they are faring with the women that are not educated. Over and above all, they would provide the challenges and the marriage decisions that they are confronted with in their daily lives. This is thematically structured with the following themes; education for self-percieved empowerment, education and social self-perception, education for social mobility and related changes, and education and percieved social contribution. We would begin by examining their demographic backgrounds as can be seen from table 1 below,

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

S/N	Code	Age	Marital status	Level of study	Study Area	Status of University attended
1	Interview 1	40-50	Married	Masters	Water resources	Government
2	Interview 2	30-40	Married	Bachelors	Education	Private
3	Interview 3	30-40	Married	Diploma	Social work	Private
4	Interview 4	30-40	Married	Bachelors	Accounting	Government
5	Interview 5	30-40	Married	Bachelors	Development studies	Private
6	Interview 6	30-40	Married	Ph. D	Finance	Private

Source: Primary Data, 2023

From the foregoing table above, the different study areas of the respondents are heterogeneous with every one of them successfully married. Their qualifications also indicate all the certificates from undergraduate to terminal certificates and obtained from government and private institutions of learning.

Education for Self-Perceived Empowerment:

The Rwandese women after the completion of their studies in higher institutions of learning witnessed some socio-economic and positive changes in their status. They acquire jobs in different institutions in Rwanda which include the education, health, political and the religious sector. This was confirmed by one of the interviewees when she postulated that, "I got a chance after my university studies, I got job(huu) in local government. That job helped me to change my lifestyle (huu). Before getting that job, I was not able to have my basic needs but that job helped me to change my life. Now I am somehow developed(huu), I can afford anything I want (huu) so my life has been changed due to my studies(huu) because I get job because I studied. So, after studying I got a job and that changed my life." (Interview Gender 4, Pos. 8-14).

Her employment contributed to the upgrading of her social and basic needs providing her the means to stand the gap for her family. Hence, her education led to the satisfaction of her basic needs.

In addition, their studies in higher institutions of learning led to their promotion in different services. It helped them to change their initial positions to better positions thereby leading to the augmentation of their salaries as testified by interviewee 2, "After having a bachelor's, the life also was good because the salary increased. After the salary increase, I tried to do many things because when the salary increases, and also the life change" (Interview gender 2, Pos. 68-71).

This is very significant because the rise in income brings with it the power of purchase and status in their different communities. With this position, attaining higher education is to them, contributing to the increase of her personal income and a change to her status in life.

The knowledge gotten from universities does not only helps women to get jobs but also help them to initiate their business. One of the women testified it. *"So, after my university studies, it was in 2015. I didn't directly get a job, but I worked on my own as a private. So, I initiated a business. Then after 2019, I got a job but I didn't stop my business. Together with a business, I do my work."* (Interview Gender 6, Pos. 8-11). This lady was successful in making business and combining it with another job he has gotten. With this level of her education and with the attendant skills and competences, she decided to be self-employed by setting up a business thereby becoming a budding entrepreneur.

Education and Social Self-Perception:

The women contribute a lot to the community through their businesses and through their different jobs, or even through other services to their families and volunteer activities for society. One of them mentioned that, *"I think my contribution is very high. I tried my best to help other people. Sometimes I buy something for vulnerable people, sometimes I give some advice based on my studies, after my studies I helped many people. Even if it is not enough but I tried to help many people in the community."* (Interview Gender 1, Pos. 33-36). The contribution of this woman shows how she is generous to people in need. She cares for them by advising them on what to do and providing them with their needs.

They contribute to community development and giving back to the society through their businesses and their different jobs, in addition to other services to their families as well as volunteering services for the society. This was confirmed by one of them who postulated that, *"I think my contribution is very high. I tried my best to help other people. Sometimes I buy something for vulnerable people, sometimes I give some advice based on my studies, after my studies I helped many people. Even if it is not enough but I tried to help many people in the community."* (Interview Gender 1, Pos. 33-36). The contribution of this woman shows generosity to people in need, and supporting the community. She also engages in advising them on what to do and providing them with their needs. Education therefore opened their eyes to be able to identify the needs of others which contributed to helping them to reach out and support all others in the challenges they were facing.

Education for Social Mobility and Related Changes:

The women, after their studies, are well warmly received by their communities. It recognizes their ability, knowledge and gives them value. They are considered as people who are ready to enhanced the productivity of their society in different ways for the welfare of the community. One interviewee attest to this by stating that, *"So, after finishing my studies, also the society I joined before I get a job of short time(huu), they considered me as someone who is strong, who is able, who is capable of doing something and who is able of changing their life, who is capable giving contribution in society because being able to finish university studies is a very big thing, it's something that is not usual in Rwandan society. So, after finishing my studies, they considered me as someone who is able, and who has a big contribution to society (huu)".* (Interview Gender 4, Pos. 38-45). As such, the community appreciates her for her competence and has confidence in her as she managed to graduate from the university. As such, those of them that are educated

are very capable, strong, with a focus perception of themselves when compared with their peers who are not educated. Moreover, the community appreciates the women and elects them to participate in different leadership positions. This was supported by another interviewee with the following argument, *"So, to that, I can say that the community has elected me to be a member of that committee of the youth because maybe they have found in me that I can contribute to the community maybe by solving some issues in our village, or maybe for advocacy in higher organs about the challenges faced by my village. So, from now that election, I can ensure that the community has appreciated my studies very much if I think I can say."* (Interview Gender 7, Pos. 49-54). The community welcomed this lady and elected her as their representative in the youth council. From her ideas, she believed that it was a positive sign of trusting her by electing her to be a member of the youth council of her community.

Difference between Educated Women and Less Educated

From the perception of women, an educated woman is someone who is able to provide a good education to her children, to influence the community, to participate in leadership, and increase their families' income as well as contributing to the development of the society. In the situation where the mother of children is highly educated, they understand the need of educating their children in good schools by providing them the basic knowledge and skills they need in their life. As such, they send them to school, and coach them in their studies by supervising them in their private readings and assignments. They have in mind to support their education until the they attain the highest achievement. One of the interviewees argues that, *"So, their children also... those women search every time how their children can go to school. The family which has not educated women do not understand the necessity of sending their children to school. They do not emphasize on it. But when the women are educated, they search also how to send their children to school, not only primary, they have capacity or they have a positive understanding on it. They have the capacity of accompanying their children to finish primary and secondary school and even university."* (Interview gender 5, Pos. 119-126). Considering what was mentioned by this lady, the uneducated women do not have the advanced mindset for helping their children to study until they attain their potential. In short, being educated for a woman provides to her the capacity to provide a better education to her children.

Furtherance to this, educated women do not only educate their families but extend it to the community. They are able to communicate with confidence and those of them elected are able to play a significant role in the implementation of the government policies as they are able to understand them clearly. The position is supported by an interviewee when she stated that, *"If you educate a woman, you educate the community because if you have an educated woman, this woman is able to teach the children when her husband is occupied with other activities or nowadays educated woman is able to take any decision. She can be also a decision maker. An educated woman can do many things. I think it is in one sentence or in one proverb it is what we said, if you educate a woman, you educate a society."* (Interview Gender 1, Pos. 148-153). From this quotation, an educated woman epitomize progress not only for her family but for the entire society, Educated women, as they reported, are able to analyze different situations and think in a structured manner. They are good in setting goals to achieve and adopting different strategies to use to get those achievements. They contribute together with their husbands to ensure cohesion in the family and supporting their communities by raising money. Some them do even the extra job to raise enough money to support their families.

Tertiary Education and Marriage Decision

Marriage issues after attaining higher education is fraught with challenges and hiccups. Women have different experiences in taking their decisions related to marriage. The women may take decisions to choose their partners for marriage but the family contributes to exert pressure on her to take a decision, and more often than not, obliging her to arrive at a decision. The women before choosing their partners have characteristics and conditions that they pose especially regarding their backgrounds. They successfully do this by learning from the parents (mother and father) of the spouse. One interviewee testified that, *"I can say that there is something I have learned from their couple: my mum and my dad. So, because in the family, I have seen how they are loving each other, the way they loved us as the children, I found that having a family is a good thing in life. So, now that discipline I have seen in my family, I can say that it has somehow inspired me or induced me also to dream for being married."* (Interview Gender 7, Pos. 124-128). She was inspired by the good relationship between the parent for deciding to be married. The good behavior of her parents made her to build a family of her own.

On the contrary, another interviewee explained that, *"My choice was difficult for me. Because I had bad experience in the family. It was difficult for me to make a choice. But I did not want the husband who stresses me in my life because I and my mother didn't get care from my father. I wanted much care from the husband. First of all, I wanted someone who could give me the care I did not get from my father. Second I had a very bad image on the men."* (Interview gender 2, Pos. 86-91). This lady based on the experience she had with her father decided not to make an error in selecting a partner to spend the rest of her life with him. The poor treatment from her father tend to blind her and put all the men in the same basket of being bad people. For making a choice she wanted to have the one who would act differently from her father. The one who is able to provide and care for her. In order to get him, she made a longtime assessment as she said, *"I assessed his behaviour for longtime, then I decided myself, and told myself if it happens, I will live like other women but I wished that it could not happen to me."* (Interview gender 2, Pos. 104-106). The lady took a decision herself after checking the behaviour. Some of these women make their own choices for their husbands and the families agree with their choices. Their decisions are respected by the parents and other members of their families. In some other cases the parents and other influential members of the family tend to choose for them, and even reject the choices of their children. One woman explained this arguing that, *"the family didn't receive this decision well. They judged me as someone who is not a decision maker on this issue. They were against my decision until even my parents did not participate in my wedding. sometimes they thought about the economic issues of this new family and they have to contribute in order to build to make the development of this family. Then they stay complaining saying 'you see how she is now; she is going to give birth to many children, they can't miss some difficulties."* (Interview gender 3, Pos. 75-83). The parents of this lady refused to participate in her marriage as she did not comply with their wishes in the making of the choice. Failing to support this couple indicated ensuing challenges in the near future.

In other cases, the choice of taking decision to be married is speeded-up by the parents of the women especially their mothers. When the women are coming of age, the mothers are afraid that they will miss having a worthy husband to marry them, or getting pregnant before marriage and they pushed them to get married to forget any future embarrassment. These was confirmed by one of the interviewees *"There is a very big contribution, especially from my mum. Normally women or mother's(huu), let me say mothers, our mothers wished the children, getting*

their families, their own families, wishing to have children, getting better family so when you are about twenty-nine years old, your mum starts telling you, so what are you doing (smile)? is there anyone? why don't you bring someone here? So, my mum, she used to tell me, I did see anyone here. So, what are you thinking about? Its time. Sometimes they have fears for their children(huu), especial girls that may be impregnated before the time or before getting married and that is a very big thing that makes mother thinks that to see their children, their girls getting pregnant before having their own families(huu). So, mothers always have that fear for their girls" (Interview Gender 4, Pos. 97-107). The mothers worry about their girls and then push them to choose their husband and get married.

Challenges Faced by Female Graduates from Rwandan Universities

The empowerment of women graduates from Rwandan higher institutions of learning is inundated with some outstanding challenges which are linked to societal complexities and pegged on power relations with men, shared responsibilities and resources. In the sharing of responsibilities, women explained that they have so many responsibilities than men that includes combining their monthly jobs with their family responsibilities. Such responsibilities are enormous and exacting. At home the women are in charge mainly of caring for the children, working in the kitchen, ensuring house hygiene, and undertaking laundry for the kids and their husbands, ... One of the women attested to this fact by explaining that, *"Women are overloaded, but most of the men don't see their load. Men work on bigger things and you find it's like on one big thing only, but women have a lot of different detailed works. They have their paid work, and they have many things at home that are difficult to handle, but most of men do not understand that a woman has a heavy workload. At least if a man could recognize that load, it would be enough even if there is nothing else to help her. Because women are overloaded. When it comes to children, men abandon them in the hand of women.* (Interview gender 2, Pos. 141-148). The women at home perform so many duties and sometimes, it is not easy to do them and accomplish them in due time. In the house, the men pose like kings, they come as controllers and mainly blame their wives as irresponsible. When they encounter a poor execution of part of the duties by their wives, they accuse them of not assuming their responsibilities.

In some families, the interviewed women indicated that the decisions are made by men without consulting them. The men decide on the responsibilities of the family members, the use of resources, the time for having sex and so on. There are different decisions which are taken by husbands, and the wives find themselves in the position of implementing the decisions in which they did not take part in its formulation. Regarding the use of resources, men are the ones to decide how to use them and more often than not, squandering them. This was corroborated by one of the interviewees, *"Regarding property and resources, the ladies do not have freedom in their use. For example, if a man has a certain salary, he feels that he should use it as he wants and feel that he may participate in the use of the salary of his wife. Men and women often do not like to agree on this, but it mostly comes from men, especially because most men are the ones who like to be paid much money and have much income compared to women.* (Interview gender 2, Pos. 134-141). The men do not want to share their income with their wives and want their wives to share theirs with them. Men tend to decide on how to use the resources and income of their wives. When the women oppose, it creates conflict in the families.

Sometime times, there are some men who want to maintain their supreme power in their families and refuse their wives getting jobs thinking that if they have money, they will not have

full control over them. One of the participants explained that, *“I know someone who told to his wife, I do not want you to get a job, if you need shoes I bring them for you, if you need else, I bring it, even very easy thing (huyu) that someone can afford herself, he told her, you are not allowed to get out of this house, you have to stay at home. I do not want you to go to the market, I don’t want you to go to the job, please stay at home.”* (Interview Gender 4, Pos. 133-137). This lady even though she has a degree and knowledge for contributing to the community, she remains at home and not exercising the skills she acquired in school for the sake of peace in her family. There are also other different sources of conflict in families including taking too much alcohol by the men, sexual abuse in the family, and polygamy. Most of the men misused so much money to pay for beer and when they get home drunk, they start to beat their wives in order to cover the misuse of the family resources. In addition, there are some who practice polygamy without a consent from the wives. Polygamy brings conflict between the man and his wives, between wives and their children as well as between the families of the wives. Such actions are supported by this interviewee, *“There are some men who take much alcohol. This is the main source of those fighting and other behaviours which are not good... We are still seeing women and men who practice polygamy, polygamy is not good behaviour because it destroys trust and confidence and even the whole country because it creates family conflicts. When a man gets married to many women or many wives, they are still crossing the families, those families where they took girls, they are going to have conflicts. And society will be destroyed because of this and then taking care of and financing all those members he is giving birth to it will be difficult. Then his own family will not have a future. Their future will not be well built.”* (Interview gender 3, Pos. 150-158). The conflicts between families as reported by the participants caused by the men’s selfishness destroys family cohesion. Their wives are exempted from participating in decisions regarding their families including resource management, sexual issues, and sharing responsibilities. From the primary data, the following types and criteria emerged (see table 2 below).

Table 2: Types and Criteria Emerging from Primary Data

Types of women	Developmental	Independent	Community leader	Decision maker	Submissive to patriarchal system
Criteria					
Social economic change	Job appointment and promotion, salary increase, business initiation	Business initiation	Develop the community	Business initiation, Political leadership	No decision on his bank account,
Community support	Respect from society, develop welfare of society	Free woman, A rebel woman	Role model	Respect from society, trust	Domestic woman
Education perception	Support children education	Support children education	Support children education	Support children education	Support children education
Marriage decision	Own decision, Push from Community	Own decision to marriage, Identification to parents couple	Push from Community	Own decision to marriage	Push from Community, Sexual decision by husband

Source: Primary data, 2023

Table 2 above has successfully identified positive attributes related to types of women and criteria that are supportive of these different types upon their graduations from higher institutions of learning. 80% of the types of women interviewed after attaining higher education institutions revealed that they are development oriented, independent, community leaders, and decision makers. The context in which they find themselves makes them to be submissive to a patriarchal-sexist system. The criteria have been used to identify their different potentials ranging from socio-economic transformation, community support, education perception and their marriage decisions. This is disaggregated with the criteria in practice underneath the patriarchal type.

DISCUSSIONS: BENEFITS OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN RWANDA AND THE CHALLENGES

The concept of gender reflects humanity in its multiple dimensions; female, male, transgender, LGBTQ and other genders. This paper was limited to the male and female genders and sets out to assess how the female genders are treated after attaining higher education in Rwanda. The concept of equality in relations to gender is not an issue of equal amounts but a more substantive idea linked to solidarities and confronting injustices (Fennell & Arnot, 2015). Higher education in the context of Rwanda empowers and projects the females with new status and responsibilities that is supportive to the male gender (UNESCO 2015; Strategic Gender Framework, 2021). Gender intersectionality makes it complex but higher education sharpens the reflexivity of the female gender and importance to the society. This is debunked by the functionalist theory (Baligah, 2018) but supported by the modernisation theory with the convergence and homogenising process (Mario, 2019), thereby avoiding the dichotomisation of the male and female gender. Gender mainstreaming and equality in Rwanda is harped by the National Gender Policy (2021) which strengthened human capital development by ensuring a holistic sustainable transformation of the skills of all genders. This involves other legal instruments from the government bench. The education of the female gender in higher institutions of learning accords to them a socio-economic transformation through the development of their employability and appointments, salary augmentation, independence by sourcing for additional income through business initiations and supporting their different communities in different capacities. They are pro-active by contributing to constructive decisions and in such positions, valorised the education of their children. The government of Rwanda is keen on attaining the objectives of empowering the female gender via inclusive support of education and development with its multilateral partners due to such numerous flouts of the education of the females (Stavropoulou & Gupta-Archer, 2017). Besides being a fundamental human right, they deserve to be empowered and to benefit from ensuing advantages without discrimination (Gamoran & Dibner, 2022; Rubiazaga, 2022).

The education of the Rwandan women supports them in their social mobility as their education affords them to have different openings in their societies and communities. Such socialisation provides them the means to take up different responsibilities in any setting base on their skills and competences (Gamoran & Dibner, 2022; Rubiazaga, 2022) acquired, while in the university. Furtherance to this position, education provides for them, individual and personal development thereby enhancing their assertiveness and self-esteem that gives them social recognition and capability. As such education provide to them different opportunities to make decisions in a constructive manner thereby freeing them from some of the shackles of domination (Alexander & Welzel, 2007). Moreover, with their education, some of them are able to identify their life partners even if such a position is not mutually exclusive for all cases. It

therefore means the attainment of a big milestone unlike in cases where the decision is left at the beck and call of the parents or the family.

In spite of this, the ensuing challenges are still multifaceted. Gender dynamics in Rwanda after attaining higher education by the female gender does not lead to a fundamental overhaul of their status. They are still subjected to a patriarchal and sexist societal framework thereby hampering the equality and equity strides of the government (National Gender Policy, 2021). At home, the house chores are overwhelming and the women are bound to perform these tasks without blinking. These are routine chores and completely eroded by societal expectations of the role of the woman as a wife and mother (Gamoran & Dibner, 2022). The husband at home poses as a king and in most situations, remain abusive and haughty (OECD, 2019; Reilly, 2019). On the whole, having university education in Rwanda by the female gender does not accord to them any requisite responsibility like the male. They are submerged by cultural norms that are disproportionate regarding the assignment to females over those of males. Hence, the challenges faced by female gender in the global south, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, especially in Rwanda, remains profound, deeply rooted and requiring concerted efforts steeped in sustained reflections between both genders to chart a way out.

CONCLUSION

This paper has been used to understand the welfare of the female gender after attaining higher education in Rwanda. Education is the fundamental rights of all irrespective of their sex, colour, ethnic group and language. In view of the pro-active position of the Rwandan government doing everything to support and enhance the education of the female gender, and despite the societal challenges, their education is leading to some outstanding achievements. Rwandese women from higher institutions of learning are developmentally oriented, independent in their actions, assuming community leadership, taking decisions but submissive to the patriarchal ordering of the society. Education of the female gender in Rwanda is advance in regard to the push from the government and skewed at the level of the setting. This is apparently very strong in the case of the female gender found in Kigali when compared to other towns of Rwanda. The challenges are still disorienting but hope for complete emancipation of the Rwandan woman is strong and promising as the government is accelerating moves to ensure complete transformation of the lives of women irrespective of their status.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Practice

- The government of Rwanda should redouble its efforts at different levels to ensure the protection of the female gender through diverse policies and legal instruments. With such instruments, it would be able to reduce patriachialism and put everyone on a level playing ground.
- The female gender should be more assertive and to employ more efforts to sensitize and transfer knowledge their peers to support them out of a difficult situation.

To Research

- Researchers should undertake a quantitative study to be able to Gauge a cross section of the population to be able to scientifically test the degree of the women who are still suffering from marginalization in the society after their graduation.

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