

Lund University  
Department of Political Science

STV 004  
Autumn 2005  
Supervisor: Ylva Stubbergaard

# A Window of Opportunity

A Minor Field Study on Empowerment in  
Women's Councils in Rwanda

Anna-Maria Ohlsson

# Abstract

The genocide in 1994 left Rwanda with economical, political and social structures in shambles. These circumstances equally forced and enabled women to take on new roles and tasks in the reconstruction of the country and opened a window of opportunity for women to the arena of Rwandan politics. A national structure of women's councils and quotas for women in parliament are initiatives with a high potential for women's political inclusion.

The purpose of the thesis is to analyse whether the new institutional arrangements, and especially the women's councils at local level, have contributed to political empowerment for women in Rwanda. Moreover, I have been interested in the interplay between empowerment at immediate (individual and group) level and intermediate (institutional) level with departure from theories on political participation and representation.

The field study indicates that women's resources were strengthened at immediate level. However, there are fewer indications that the resources will lead to political action and that women's councils serve as a bridge between women at grass root level and in Parliament. Empowerment for women at local level is complicated by the political context, economical barriers for participation and confusion of roles between the women at local level and women parliamentarians.

Key words: empowerment, women's councils, political representation, feminist political theory, Rwanda

# Sommaire

Le génocide au Rwanda en 1994 a détruit les structures économiques, politiques et sociales du pays. Ces circonstances, aussi bien qu'une forte volonté politique, ont forcé mais également laissé la possibilité aux femmes d'assumer de nouvelles responsabilités dans la reconstruction du pays. Les femmes à la base ont été engagées dans des structures organisationnelles des femmes et les quotas au parlement ont été introduit. En tout, une fenêtre a été ouvert pour les femmes dans la vie politique rwandaise.

L'objet de cette étude est d'explorer le rôle de nouvelles structures organisationnelles des femmes au Rwanda en ce qui concerne le renforcement du pouvoir politique des femmes de la base et leur rapport avec les femmes parlementaires.

Notre étude sur le terrain indique que les structures organisationnelles des femmes ont contribué au renforcement du pouvoir politique des femmes au niveau individuel aussi bien qu'au niveau collectif en ce qui concerne la confiance de soi-même, l'expérience de s'exprimer et d'être élue dans un contexte politique. Les liens entre les structures de la base et les femmes parlementaires sont moins apparents. Le contexte politique, le procès de décentralisation et le manque des cadres de rencontres pour les deux groupes des femmes sont discutés comme des obstacles.

Mots clés: Structures organisationnelles des femmes, représentation politique, renforcement du pouvoir des femmes, théories politiques féministes, Rwanda

# Acknowledgements

This master thesis would not have been as interesting to write nor able to address the issues at stake without the contributions from my interviewees in Rwanda. I am most grateful to the warm persons, women and men, in villages, in Parliament and institutions in different parts of Rwanda that took the time to share their views with me. I am especially obliged to the assistance of my field supervisor Alice Karekezi, the Parliament's Women's Caucus, the Sala Ida staff and my interpreter Alice. Murakoze chanje! The positive and strong experience of Rwanda and its people has had far greater implications to me than the limited scope of a field study for this paper.

A concrete prerequisite for the field study was the Minor Field Study scholarship from the Swedish Development Agency, SIDA, granted through the Department of Political Science at Lund University. The opportunity I and other university students are given, to stay for weeks in the South for field work, is important and much appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank my supervisor, Ylva Stubbergaard, for her enthusiasm over the Rwandan case and help to keep on track in writing this thesis.

# Table of Contents

Abstract in English	2
Abstract in French	3
Acknowledgements	4
1 Introduction	7
1.1 Purpose of the Study	7
1.2 Limitations	8
1.3 Disposition	9
2 Methodology	10
2.1 Methodological Considerations	10
2.2 Material	11
2.2.1 The field study	11
2.2.2 The selection of interviewees	11
2.2.3 Semi-structured interviews	12
2.2.4 Secondary sources and documents	12
2.3 Analysing the Material	13
3. A Conceptual Framework	14
3.1 Empowerment	14
3.1.1 The concept of empowerment	14
3.1.2 The empowerment process	15
3.2 Representation in Political Institutions	16
3.2.1 The concept of representation	16
3.2.2 Including women ‘from above’	17
3.2.3 Including women ‘from below’	18
3.2.4 Linking the models of political inclusion	18
3.2.5 A working definition of women’s political empowerment	19
4 Women’s Political Inclusion in Rwanda	21
4.1 The Political Context	21
4.2 Initiatives for Women’s Political Empowerment	22
4.2.1 The women’s councils	22
4.2.2 Parliamentary representation	23
4.2.3 Changes in gender structures	24
5 Analysis of Women’s Political Empowerment	26
5.1 Empowerment at ‘Immediate’ Level	26
5.1.1 The resource dimension	26

5.1.2 The agency dimension	28
5.1.3 The dimension of achievements	29
5.1.4 Inclusion and exclusion from women's councils	31
5.2 Linking Representation to Participation	32
5.2.1 Interplay between immediate and intermediate empowerment	32
5.2.2 Representing women in parliament	34
6 Concluding Remarks	36
7 List of References	38
8 Appendixes	
Appendix 1 Interview sheet for parliamentarians	
Appendix 2 Interview sheet for women in the women's councils	

# 1 Introduction

The genocide in 1994 left Rwanda with economical, political and social structures in shambles. These circumstances equally forced and enabled women to take on new roles and tasks in the rebuilding of the country. The changes in the societal structures, and a strong political commitment to include women in the reconstruction, opened a window of opportunity for women to the arena of Rwandan politics. *Women's councils*, political representational structures elected by women only, were established from grass root to national level with the purpose of serving as an awareness, discussion and advocacy forum for women. Parallel to this started a lobbying process by the women's movement to include women in parliament. Rwanda's new constitution, adopted nearly ten years after the genocide, states a thirty percent *quota* for women in parliament and in government (Legal and Constitutional Commission: 2003). Additionally, political parties promoted female candidates, which resulted in the world's highest ranking of women parliamentarians, 49 percent, in the parliamentary elections in 2003 (IPU: 2005).

The Rwandan case is exceptional in its swift change of gender relations in politics and in its political determination to include women 'from above' as political leaders at national level and 'from below' in political fora at local level. I find these two, parallel and possibly tensional, institutional initiatives very interesting from a theoretical and practical perspective on how women might be empowered and included in political institutions.

## 1.1 Purpose of the study

A national structure of women's councils where women discuss political affairs separately and women elect women representatives is unusual in a global perspective<sup>1</sup>. The Rwandan women's councils, though initiated by the government, are elected directly by the female population, whom they represent. It has been argued that the women's councils have meant a new political arena for women that will bridge the dividing-line between government and civil society (UNIFEM: 2002). The new institutional arrangements in Rwanda go far but few have yet documented and analysed the formal structures and whether they have strengthened women's participation and possibilities to influence politics.

The overall purpose of this master thesis is to *examine how the women's councils have contributed to women's political empowerment in Rwanda*. With departure in an interview based field study, I intend to answer the following research questions:

---

<sup>1</sup> Similar structures are at place in China (Howell, 2002) and in Uganda (Tamale, 1998; Pankhurst, 2002).

- Do the women's councils enable an empowerment process for women at local level<sup>2</sup> in Rwanda?
- Do the women's councils serve as a link between women at local level and women parliamentarians?

Women's political empowerment will in this way be analysed both as processes at local level and as the intersection between the two initiatives of women's representation.

## 1.2 Limitations

Due to time and form constraints, I have left out concepts that had deserved their place in a longer exposition.

The overall theoretical frame of analysis is the notion of *citizenship*, membership in a political community and the rights and duties that come with it. I have taken departure in the feminist critique of conventional theories of citizenship and drawn on the remark that an analysis of women's citizenship must take civic, political and social aspects into account (Wendt Höjer: 1996). I agree with Lister (1997) that citizenship should be analysed as a dynamic process in which the two dimensions of status, the formal rights and duties of citizens, and practice, the possibilities to use the rights and participate in political activities, interact with each other. When discussing political participation and gender we must see to how gender structures affect women's possibilities to reach a full and equal citizenship in democracies. My choice of research problem in this thesis is based on the value of active citizenship, where each citizen has the possibility to exercise his or hers powers of agency (Arendt: 1958; d'Entrèves: 1992, Mouffe: 1992).

The fundament for the problem analysis has been *gender theory* and feminist political theory. During the last three decades, there has been a major increase in the academic work devoted to improving the analysis of gendered power relations and more specifically comparative research about women's empowerment and the role of women's political agency in influencing political decisions (Hobson: 2002: 3-4). The body of gender theory research is vast but shares a common ground in seeing gender roles and relations as culturally constructed (Gemzöe: 2003). The theoretic position I have in this thesis takes departure from theories that see gender in terms of power relations. I acknowledge the post-colonial feminist critique of the western bias in gender literature, and its attention on seeing women in the South as agents and recognizing diversity and difference between women (Waylen: 1996). This is also to stress women's positions and identities as constructed by several factors such as class, race, gender and sexuality that interact (Ambjörnsson: 2004: 26).

As will be further discussed in chapter 4, consideration of the political context of Rwanda is important for a critical assessment of women's political empowerment. I would like to stress, though, that the aim is to analyse the means of inclusion of women into politics and not to go deep into Rwanda as a *democracy* or its process of *democratisation*. Neither will the background and implications of the *genocide* be in the focus of this thesis except in the cases when it has had a direct identified effect on women's political representation and

---

<sup>2</sup> The administrative levels are, from local to national level: Cell level, Sector level, District level, Provincial level, National level.



participation. Writing this, I do not by any means want to downplay the gravity of this violent conflict.

## 1.3 Disposition

Following this introductory chapter on purpose and limitations, I start out with a discussion on methodology. An extensive part of the thesis work lies in planning and carrying out the field study in Rwanda and the methodological concerns are therefore important.

In chapter three a theoretical framework for the study is developed. I have chosen a theoretical discussion on empowerment and group representation in order to clarify the multifaceted process of women's representation and participation in Rwanda.

The following chapter allows us to look further into the Rwandan context and the measures taken for women's political representation. They are analysed in relation to notions of empowerment processes at intermediate and structural level. I briefly address the political situation that plays a role for an adequate analysis of my research questions.

The material drawn from the Rwandan context is discussed and analysed from the mentioned theoretical positions in the fifth chapter. The answers and opinions of the interviewees in the field study will be woven into the discussion. The chapter will start out with an analysis of empowerment processes at immediate level in the women's councils and the limits for these processes. It will be followed by a discussion of empowerment process at intermediate level and the relations between women in parliament and women in Women's Councils. I will reflect on to what extent the women's councils facilitate mobilisation, listening and connectedness between the two groups. As such, they will relate to the structure of my research questions as presented in chapter 1.1.

The last chapter is a concluding remark on the initiatives of Women's Councils in Rwanda.

## 2 Methodology

In this chapter, I will outline the field study work and the revise of the empirical material of the field study. Through this discussion, I hope to enable a critical examination of the field study and its results by the reader.

### 2.1 Methodological Considerations

This thesis aims at analysing women's representation and participation in Rwanda, with a focus on empowerment processes. My interest lies thus in the study of altered power structures, pinned down to three different dimensions.<sup>3</sup> In my opinion, the most suitable method to gain knowledge of these shifts in power relations is to interview the concerned women and listen to their interpretations. Devine argues that when the aim of research is to explore people's subjective experiences and the meanings they attach to these experiences and draw particular attention to contextual issues, qualitative measures are most appropriately employed (Devine: 1995: 138). It is important to underline though, that the choice of methods are secondary to the problem at stake (Svenning: 1996: 11).

There is a growing literature on women's empowerment and an ongoing discussion on how to evaluate empowerment. Kabeer (2002) has particularly stressed the importance of analytical clarity in the selection of indicators. This discussion formed a background for my analysis and research but my aim has not been to test an existing theory. I have studied the specific case of the Rwandans women's councils and have let the empirical material result in the formulation of a theory on the very processes there, which is an inductive way of working (Patel & Davidson: 1997: 21). Preknowledge is according to Svenning (1997: 150) a general and a more specific approach to people and the society that we all carry with us. In a hermeneutic tradition, this preknowledge – the thoughts, impressions and feelings of the researcher – is seen as an asset and not a barrier for understanding and interpreting of the research problem. Before the stay in Rwanda, I met with a Rwandan researcher in Sweden that gave her view of the political reforms in Rwanda which, as well as personal experiences on gender equality work, underlined the complexity of the issue and guided my focus in the field work.

---

<sup>3</sup> These dimensions and the levels of change are developed in the following chapter.

## 2.2 Material

### 2.2.1 The field study

The field study was conducted in Rwanda, mainly in the capital of Kigali and the town of Butare and its surroundings, in April and May of 2004. The analysis of this thesis is based on the primary and secondary material collected during that very period.

### 2.2.2 The selection of interviewees

The interviewees make up three groups: women from women's councils, women parliamentarians and expert interviewees.

The first group is key interviewees, women from the women's councils at grass roots level. A natural consequence of this study's qualitative approach is that it is not grounded in a large quantitative material that can be said to represent all women in women's councils. I have interviewed women from different villages of the Butare Province in the south of Rwanda. The interviewees were initially contacted through the local administration, the province office on Gender, Health and Social Affairs that has regular contacts with women from the women's councils. Together, we made a visit plan to both well-functioning and less well-functioning women's councils, but asking the local administration to recommend interviewees might affect the picture that the interviewees gave of the women's councils. In order to broaden my channels to women, I went through local women's organisations and used snow ball methods, where one person recommended another, who in turn recommended a third, and so on (Marsh & Stoker: 1995: 142-143) My aim in the selection of interviewees was to include women from cell and sector level in four different districts, with different posts within the council, and from councils with different levels of activity. Limited possibilities of transport to the villages put some restrictions to this, but the respondents' backgrounds were fairly diverse. Individual interviews as well as pair and group interviews were conducted, largely depending on the women's wishes and practical circumstances. 20 women were interviewed from this group.

In order to reach the second group, the parliamentarians, I contacted the president for the Women's Forum in Parliament and thereby got the contact information to the parliamentarians. The work was somewhat complicated by a two months' break in the plenary session, but 15 parliamentarians agreed to give individual interviews. The selection of interviewees covers all political parties, representatives or residents from 11 of the 12 Rwandan provinces as well as newly elected and more experienced parliamentarians from the lower and upper house.

The third group, the experts or resource persons, is more mixed. The purpose of the expert interviews was to get a rich and nuanced view of the research field and political context. The 30 interviewees are representatives from women's rights organisations, relevant ministries, international actors, researchers, students and others with special knowledge and experience of the research problems at stake. They were selected through a mapping out of relevant actors and a constant revision and analysis of the gaps of the research material during the stay in Rwanda.

### 2.2.3 Semi-structured interviews

An interview could be described as a 'guided conversation' (Marsh & Stoker: 1995: 138). With semi-structured interviews, the conversation takes departure in some prepared open ended questions or themes but allows for probes and minor deviations within the themes and allows for the conversation to follow a natural pattern. The question sheet that was the departure for the conversations was worked out after a few introductory expert interviews.<sup>4</sup> Through the open ended questions I wanted to avoid that my preknowledge limited the interviewees' answering alternatives, but on the same time a part of the problem of systematisation was moved to the analysis phase.

The interviews with the Parliamentarians and the experts were mainly conducted in French and English and lasted from one hour up to two hours. All the interviews in the women's councils were carried through by the help of an interpreter from Kinya-rwanda to English. Interpretation always brings about a risk of information loss, but was in this case a precondition for reaching the interviewees.

For practical reasons, the majority of interviews were recorded. This is not an uncomplicated decision given the political situation in Rwanda<sup>5</sup> which might affect the type of information the interviewees gave. With few exceptions, the interviewees gave their acceptance to recording. An advantage with recording, and the transcription of the interviews, is that it enables others to verify the results (Patel & Davidsson: 1997: 87). The first and second groups of interviewees are named in the list of references but have been given a random number and will be cited anonymously in the following text. The expert interviewees, being a more heterogeneous group, will be cited with their names.

In the interview situation, the trust and relationship between me as an interviewer and the interviewee is important for the outcome (Kvale: 2000: 130). In judging the reliability of the material, both the interviewer and the readers should be aware of the problem with interviewing effect when the interviewee understands, consciously or unconsciously, what answers might be expected from her (Patel & Davidsson: 1997: 88).

An ethical issue is the informed acceptance to the interview and a balance between what the interviewee gives and what she receives. This was sometimes an issue raised at the local level by the women's councils but the interviewees said that they appreciated the opportunity to share their views and pass them on to their representatives in parliament.

### 2.2.4 Secondary sources and documents

Secondary material has also been the departure for analysis. The body of literature on empowerment and representation as well as the comparative literature, books and articles, were drawn from the political theory field and from gender theory and were collected in Swedish university libraries and web databases. The context specific literature and documentation was collected in Rwanda, at the Parliament library, in relevant ministries and in women's organisations. Some problems were encountered with official statistics on the

---

<sup>4</sup> The question sheet can be found as appendix 1 and 2.

<sup>5</sup> On the political situation, please turn to chapter 4.

background of candidates for the most recent elections, statistics that had disappeared without explanation from the relevant ministry. This perspective has therefore not been taken in to the analysis of women representatives in women's councils and in Parliament.

## 2.3 Analysing the Material

Shortly after the interviews, the tape recorded material was transcribed and the notes were revised. The interviews with the women from the women's council and the parliamentarians were fully transcribed. The transcribed interviews were sent to the interviewees for comments in the cases where the respondent so wished and it was possible in technical terms, i.e. access to e-mail.

Contrary to a positivist researcher, that might study the research object bit by bit, the hermeneutic researcher tries to see the overall picture of the research problem and is pending between the detail, for example a part of a transcribed interview, and the overall picture, the interview in length, for interpretation (Patel & Davidsson: 1997: 27).

The interviews were analysed in their content, that is, what was said in the texts rather than in what way the interviewees addressed the issues. The texts were read through in length several times with parallel note taking on interesting and reappearing remarks together with my interpretation. This frame of interpretation was in turn influenced by an analysis process that had started parallel to the field research process. Svenning highlights that in qualitative methods the analysis and coding of material are integrated and made in a cyclic process, opposite to quantitative methods where the material has to be coded before an analysis might be done (Svenning: 1997: 151). The individual interviews were thereafter compared in terms of similarities and divergences and a pattern for analysis emerged. This method of extracting the categories from the empirical material is an example of an inductive approach (Patel & Davidsson: 1997: 101). These themes were then again related to the theoretical framework and the interviews were read another time to confirm the earlier categorisation.

The interviews with women in the women's councils and in Parliament were meant to let the individual tell her story, but in the analysis some general patterns emerged. The analysis has therefore been made at both individual and group level, even though I do not intend to generalise outside of the groups I have studied.

## 3 A Conceptual Framework

The theoretical fields of political representation and participation are broad and partly overlap. In the analysis of the women's councils in Rwanda, I have focused on the intersection between these two perspectives by using empowerment theory. Empowerment in its basic definition indicates how a marginalised individual or group increases power over her or their life/lives. The use of the concept empowerment varies greatly, as well as the scholarly and political agendas behind the definitions. A broad division between the multiple advocates for empowerment theory can be made between an individual and a structural approach to the concept of empowerment. Feminist theory is one of the fields where a critical discussion of the concept has been important and where the importance of taking gendered power structures into the analysis is emphasized (Christensen: 2001: 21).

### 3.1 Empowerment

Within the social sciences, power was first illustrated as *power over* in different dimensions, named by Lukes (1974) as the three faces of power (in Frølund Thomsen: 2000: 12). Other forms of power have been recognised where one person's gain is not necessarily another's loss. (Mosedale: 2005: 250). In defining power not only as power over and *power to*, but also *power with* (collective action) and *power from within* (self esteem and self confidence), Rowlands points at a complex relation between power and empowerment (in Afshar: 1998: 12-17). My approach to the concept of empowerment is structural and relies on an understanding of power as relational and dynamic. With this approach, power relations are therefore constantly open to challenge.

Also internal power relations in empowerment projects have been questioned, where Cruikshank (2003) argues that empowerment in itself is a relation of power that might be used constructively or not. This remark relates to the challenges that new perspectives such as postmodernism and post colonialism have put to feminist theory, the critique of feminist theory as constituting a blunt and restraining category of "women" as well as the "women in the South", perspectives that we will come back to (Butler: 2005, Mohanty: 1991).

#### 3.1.1 The concept of empowerment

In feminist debates, empowerment is often seen as a radical change of the processes and structures that reproduce women's subordination (Goodman: 1999). Theories on women's empowerment have had major implications in two fields. The first is the development field, in theory and practice, where discourses on women's participation and involvement in development projects have become increasingly important. The other field could be demarcated as feminist political theory, the area in which we are moving in this thesis.

Empowerment is then broadly referred to as a *process of achieving awareness through the help of others – a process of gaining conscience which in turn opens up for political actions in order to demand rights and thereby change power relations at different levels* (Mosedale: 2005: 244). This definition has been the point of departure for my field work and analysis.

Political theorists use the concept of empowerment to point at the citizens' abilities to change their environment through collective action in the civil society – the ability to act with others to do together what one could not have done alone (Christensen: 2001: 21). It is also applied for analyses of the way different institutions overlap – in what situations and under which circumstances the individual social actor becomes a political actor (Bang et al: 2000). But in order to evaluate empowerment, we have to go deeper into the meaning of the word.

### 3.1.2 The empowerment process

The concepts of power and empowerment are closely intertwined not only etymologically but also in denotation. One way to theoretically understand the concept of empowerment is to define power as the *ability to make choices*. This is an underlying argument with Naila Kabeer (2002) who stresses that empowerment entails a *process of change* where those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire that ability. But such an approach should also entail alternatives, in particular regarding 'strategic life choices' that defines the basic life conditions and an awareness of inequalities in the abilities to make such choices. In sum, empowerment with Kabeer refers to "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer: 2002: 19).

From a feminist perspective, advocating for an alteration in gendered power relations and women's social and political status, a process of empowerment is crucial. In order to understand how such a change is possible, Kabeer's model of the inter-related dimensions of resources, agency and achievements is a starting point as analytical tool. Its first dimension of empowerment concerns *resources* that form the very conditions of choice. The notion of resources here includes material, social and human resources. The terms on which people gain access to empowerment are considered as important as the resources themselves for the empowerment process. The second dimension of power relate to *agency*, the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Kabeer argues that agency is not just limited to observable action, but also includes the sense of agency and the meaning and purpose that individuals bring to their activity.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the third dimension in Kabeers model is connected to the *achievements* or lack of achievements. What is important is when a failure to achieve can be explained by asymmetries in the underlying distribution of capabilities, which must be understood as a sign of disempowerment (Kabeer: 2002: 20-22).

In addition to these different dimensions, power and empowerment must be understood as working on different stages simultaneously. Kabeer uses three levels of change, which can be used as analytic framework for empowerment: *the immediate level, the intermediate and the deeper level*. The immediate level refers to the level of individuals and groups in their perception of interests and their capacity to act, i.e. the individual's resources, agency and achievements. By the intermediate level, Kabeer means institutional rules and resources and

---

<sup>6</sup> These definitions of resources and agency together lie very near the concept of capabilities that the economist Amartya Sen has used in his theory of development as freedom. (Sen: 1999)

the deeper level could be understood as structural relations such as gender relations that are embedded in society (Kabeer: 2002: 27).

The dimensions of empowerment elaborated by Kabeer and the three levels where the changes take place are important to understand the process of empowerment. I agree with Kabeer that an analysis must include the interrelated levels and dimensions. I have focused on the interplay between political institutions and participation of women as a politically marginalised group. In the analysis of the women's councils in Rwanda, I have concentrated on the immediate and intermediate level whereas the deeper level of empowerment will be discussed in the following chapter on the Rwandan political context.

Kabeer addresses the concept and measurement of empowerment from a development theory perspective. With Kabeer, we find a model of the empowerment process, but few answers on the relations between empowerment and political participation and political institutions. The question is what resources in an empowerment process that might translate into political agency and what achievements that are interesting from a democratic theory perspective.<sup>7</sup> If we want to advocate that a certain set of representational structures contribute to women's empowerment, we should answer in what way they enable such processes. For these discussions, we turn to feminist political theorists' discussions on women's political representation.

## 3.2 Representation in Political Institutions

Representation and empowerment to participation can be seen as two different perspectives on how to include women in politics, where one focuses on including women by empowerment *from below* and the other on representation *from above* in political institutions (Marques Pereira & Siim, 2002: 170). The two models to include women in politics, and the linkages between them, will be discussed in the following.

### 3.2.1 The concept of representation

The problem at stake is women's political inclusion; a theme specifically elaborated in feminist political theory, in itself a response to the exclusion of women in political life and in normative political theory. Feminists have contested the idea that citizens participate in politics as equal and gender neutral, as that tends to ignore the relation between sex and power and the political implications of this. (Lister: 1997: 26). The theoretical and practical challenge for feminist political scholars is to overcome these limitations, which has led to a debate on new ways of structuring democracy and on women's political representation.<sup>8</sup>

The concept of representation is contested in both political theory and feminist scholarship. In political science the dominant approach has analysed representation as

---

<sup>7</sup> Kabeer acknowledges the reasons to move the measurements of achievements beyond basic functioning to more complex achievements such as political representation, but raises the problem that this might reflect the values of those doing the measuring rather than the criteria of women's choices (2002:23).

<sup>8</sup> For a wider discussion on feminist political theory and feminists criticising feminist political theorists, see Randall, 2002.



political representation connected to notions of agency and government. This contrasts with the approaches inspired by post-structuralism and post-modernism that relates representation to ideas about the production of meaning and knowledge (Stoltz: 2000: 18). When elaborating on the concept in this thesis, I will move mainly within the former field as my specific interest is political institutions as enabling structures for participation rather than notions of identity and how subjects are constructed by the institutions (Waylen: 1996: 7-9, Butler: 2005: 38-39).

### 3.2.2 Including women ‘from above’

Feminists have criticised the dominant approaches to political equality and contested the underlying argument that equality, and gender equality, can be achieved without changing the existing institutional framework (Marques Pereira & Siim: 2002: 177). While feminists share the criticism of the situation of women’s under representation in political fora, the suggestions on how to address the situation vary (Hobson: 2002: 175). In the last years, much debate and research has come to revolve around the issue of reserved seats, quotas, in political institutions, primarily in legislative assemblies (Wängnerud: 1999, Dahlerup: 1998). This has been a central political initiative in Rwanda, where a third of the parliamentary seats are reserved for women.<sup>9</sup>

Suggestions to include women by quotas in elected assemblies have been controversial (Elofsson: 1998: 95).<sup>10</sup> It has led to a normative debate concerning whether it matters *who* our representatives are. Does the election of more women ensure their representation? Can women represent women as a group when this group is internally diverse? In this way, it has been questioned whether descriptive representation (Mansbridge: 1999), where women representatives in their background mirror some of the experiences and manifestations of the group, makes any change for gender equality.

In conventional understandings of liberal democracy, representation is based on a voter’s shared opinions and preferences with those of the political representative. The personal characteristics of the representative are not considered important and political exclusion is explained in terms of electoral systems or people’s access to political participation (Phillips: 1995: 1). Hannah Pitkin formulated what has become the classical theory of political representation in the late 1960s. In *The Concept of Representation* (1967), she argues that it is the ideas and activities of our representatives and not their characteristics that really matter. The core idea is that an over-emphasis on who is present in the legislative assemblies draws attention from the more urgent question of what they actually do.

It is on the basis of the controversy between women’s representation and the politics of ideas that Anne Phillips (1995) establishes her critics, arguing that the former has to be understood in relation to the latter and that both aspects are crucial in order to find a fair representation. Phillips bases her critique, which is widespread within the feminist research field, upon a number of empirical observations: Male-dominated parliament does not give equal consideration to the interests of male and female citizens. She emphasizes the importance of social background, arguing that men and women have different experiences that will influence their political work (Phillips: 1995: 44). Her alternative is an enlargement

---

<sup>9</sup> For a fuller exposition of the political initiatives in Rwanda, please turn to chapter 4.

<sup>10</sup> The different arguments put forward and against quotas as such will not be elaborated further in this text.

of democracy ‘from above’ by a new institutional design that changes the very principles for democratic representation and the composition of political elites. New actors, such as women and marginalised groups should be ensured representation through quotas in elected bodies. Thus, women and marginalised groups will be able to change the political agenda and the principles of the political life through political presence (Phillips: 1995).

Phillips does not consider women’s political presence in elected assemblies as group representation which would imply that women automatically share the same values and opinions, which would be an essentialist standpoint. The politics of presence rather has a sociological point of departure; it is because women politicians share the same experiences as women citizens that they are expected to translate those experiences into politics (Wängnerud: 1999: 124).

### 3.2.3 Including women ‘from below’

The focus on women’s inclusion in formal representation structures, such as elected assemblies, have been criticised as being too narrowly defined. A traditional feminist approach has been to redefine the limits of what is ‘political’ (Höjer Wendt: 1995). Consequently, feminists have argued the need to go beyond more institutional or formal kinds of political participation and include involvement in the civil society.

Iris Marion Young has defined the ‘politics of presence’ with a stronger emphasis on group representation and excluded groups than Phillips and focuses on women’s inclusion in democracy from below. She argues for a model of democracy where marginalised groups are mobilised in civil society organisations and include new social perspectives into the public sphere. In theorising on this, Young has employed the concept of empowerment. In the book *Justice and the Politics of Difference* Young defines empowerment as the participation of an agent in decision making through an effective voice and vote (Young: 1990: 251). Empowerment is here understood as a means to include the participation of oppressed social groups in decision making on all levels of society.

Young’s approach focused on social inequalities and the inclusion of difference in politics and it was followed by a feminist debate about the meaning and implications of ‘the politics of difference’. Chantal Mouffe was among the scholars that discussed some of the problems with the politics of difference as group representation, tends to reinforce rather than to transform existing group identities (Mouffe: 1997). Young (2000) complies with this critique and develops her theories further in distinguishing between representation according to interest, opinion and perspective where the latter implies the point of view group members have on social processes because of their position in them (Young: 2000:133-141).

### 3.2.4 Linking the models of political inclusion

There is a difference in focus between the two models of including women ‘from above’ and ‘from below, and they are often referred to as different strategies, but I would argue that the underlying argumentations in Phillips’ and Young’s models are not contradictory. Both models offer a way of thinking of possibilities for women to represent women without being caught in an essentialist trap where women are seen as a unified subject.

Furthermore, they have a common point in stressing the normative point of linkages between women at political elite and constituency level for the initiatives to succeed. In this way, they take in the above question of whether women in parliament can represent women's concerns outside of the elected assemblies. In arguing for structures like parliamentary quotas, Phillips stresses that representation depends on the continuing relationship between representatives and the represented and that changing the gender composition of elected assemblies should rather be seen as an enabling condition but not in itself a guarantee for representation of women's concerns (Phillips: 1995: 188).

Young's main argument is that democracy can be strengthened by pluralizing the modes and sites of representation and also by improving the connection between representation and the participation of citizens in public spheres of civil society (Young: 2000). Citizens must be willing and able to mobilize one another actively to participate in processes of both authorizing and holding their representatives accountable. In turn, representatives should listen to these public discussions and claims; stay connected to constituents and be able to give reasons for their actions and judgements. Such *mobilization, listening and connectedness* can be either facilitated or impeded by the design of representative institutions (Young: 2000: 129-132).

Lister (1997) highlights the point that women's political representation without a feminist mobilization is problematic. A feminisation of the political elite empowers women politicians but there is no evidence that political representation becomes an arena for women's collective power. Continued links with the wider women's movement outside the formal political arena are important both in counteracting the pressures to conform with the institutions they set out to challenge and in promoting the influence of the wider women's movement on the formal political process. At the same time, better links between formal and informal institutions might encourage more women to move from one institution to the other (Lister: 1997: 163).

I would argue that the discussed linkages between women political elites and grass roots is a vital ideal and qualification when we advocate for quotas and women's empowerment structures such as women's councils. Recognition of including women 'from below' level actualises questions on the processes of awareness and mobilisation among women that have been previously excluded. This is where the concept of empowerment becomes useful.

### 3.2.5 A working definition of women's political empowerment

In the analysis of women's councils, I have chosen a narrow definition of empowerment. I acknowledge the linkages between economical and social power and political participation, but changes in such resources have not been in focus. Empowerment is analysed within Kabeers framework firstly in terms of *awareness*. There are several reasons for this. Kabeer discusses the issue of developing a critical consciousness with oppressed groups where, for example, women have internalised the view of themselves as inferior. Kabeer underlines that a precondition for the emergence of a critical consciousness is the availabilities at the discursive level – that “competing ways of being and doing become possible (Kabeer: 2002: 25). Knowledge of rights and political alternatives therefore become critical as a precondition in the process of empowerment.

Furthermore, I have focused on the dimension of agency, where awareness might turn into action in the empowerment process. But if empowerment refers to women's ability to determine their own daily life as well as their collective ability to make a difference on the public arena, we must take a look on these arenas (Siim: 2000: 4).

My working definition of empowerment has been, as mentioned above, the *process of achieving awareness through the help of others – a process of gaining conscience which in turn opens up for political actions in order to demand rights and thereby change power relations at different levels*. This definition, which I find brings in the political dimension, has been measured within Kabeer's framework. Frameworks very close to Kabeer's interrelated dimensions of resources, agency and achievements have earlier been used also in measuring political empowerment (Bang: 2000).

My second research question regards the role of the women's councils in connecting women parliamentarians to women in women's councils at local level and thereby bridging the two models of inclusion from 'above' and 'below.' I have taken departure in the conceptualising of the two models and will look at the linkages in the perspective of Young's normative points of *mobilization, listening and connectedness*.

# 4 Women's Political Inclusion in Rwanda

This chapter aims to frame the measures of women's political empowerment in the Rwandan political climate. The representational measures will be described in greater detail as well as indications on women's empowerment in Rwanda at intermediate and deeper level.

## 4.1 The Political Context

The genocide in 1994, in which one million people were murdered and even more injured, traumatised or turned into refugees, is a tragedy for Rwanda, its people and the international community. After ceasing power through a military intervention in April 1994, the former guerrilla movement Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) installed a transitional government from a broad political party spectrum. The causes of genocide were partly identified by the new government as the systematic political exclusion of the Tutsi<sup>11</sup> population, women and young people as well as a hierarchic and undemocratic political system. The Rwandan government therefore expressed its determination to focus on *good governance* and the new political discourse strongly stressed *unity and inclusion* (MINALOC/VNG: 2003).

This approach initiated a process of *decentralisation* that in 2001 led to a national policy and implementation strategy for decentralisation. The Swedish development agency sees the process of decentralisation as the single most successful initiative in the reconstruction and elections at local level assured the inclusion of previously excluded groups (Athlin: 2004-04-27). Gender equality has been a feature of the decentralization process and this has included, amongst other things, gender analysis, gender budgeting, training of provincial officials in charge of implementing decentralized government (UNIFEM: 2002), although women's representation at local level is still low (National electoral commission: 2004).<sup>12</sup> Still there are capacity problems at local level and the process of decentralisation has been carried out in a top-down manner which has caused confusion in the division of powers (Norgren: 2004-06-01).

The *party system* as a channel for political participation is weak. Political parties were abandoned between 1994 and 2003 and had only one month of campaigning before the parliamentary elections in 2003. The political parties are only allowed to act at national level, which in practice makes them inaccessible for the majority of the Rwandan citizens. (Kampire: 2004-05-13, Sida Development Cooperation in Kigali: 2004).

Question marks to the government's will to put Rwanda on the path to democracy are especially strong regarding the *civil society*. The concept of *divisionism*, referring to discourses of ethnicity that is said to divide the people and revive ethnic conflicts, has been used to prohibit and discredit civil society organisations and dissidents (Kippenberg/Human

---

<sup>11</sup> The Tutsi and Hutu are (together with a small Twa population) the ethnic groups of Rwanda.

<sup>12</sup> There are for example few women mayors, only 2 out of 106 in 2003 and 1 of 11 prefects.

Rights Watch: 2004). The self-censorship of institutions, media and individuals is important in the country. There are constitutional provisions for a free media and a broad network of civil society organisations, but the civil society is weak in terms of watchdog to the government, (Athlin, 2004-04-27).

In Rwanda, there is a relatively strong tradition of women organizing themselves around various issues or tasks, both at a grassroots level and at a political level. These networks, organizations and politicians have, through a cooperative and coordinated approach, managed to generate a critical mass strong enough to lobby for change (Mukanyange, 2004-05-17). Still, we should bear in mind that the women's organisations have to work within the civil society limits mentioned above. The umbrella organisation for the women's organisations in Rwanda, the Pro Femmes, has very close links to the Rwandan government. There is a risk that the women's movement becomes a channel of governance for the state power. On the other hand, the close links can be used to advocate for gender reforms. What is important to stress is that many of the women's organizations exist at grass root level, but mainly around the bigger cities and that they do not reach all women, especially not in the rural areas (Twiubati: 2004-04-20, Mutamba: 2004-04-27).

## 4.2 Initiatives for Women's Political Empowerment

Intermediate levels of the empowerment are defined by Kabeer (2000: 27) as institutional rules and resources whereas the deeper levels of the empowerment process are described as structural relations of class, caste and gender. In women's empowerment, I have focused on structural gender relations, though affirming that there is a connection between different structuring principles. For both levels, the chapter rather highlights the changes than uses in-depth indicators. I still find this important in order to frame the more profound analysis in chapter 5.

### 4.2.1 The women's councils

According to the law that regulates the women's councils,

The National Women's Council is a social forum where girls and women put together their views in order to solve their own problems and to participate in and have a say in the development of the country. (Law no 27/2003:4)

The initiative to establish the women's councils was taken in 1996 by the then Minister of Gender, Family and Social Affairs, Aloise Inyumba. Directly after the genocide, everyone in Rwanda was needed in the reconstruction of the country and women constituted two thirds of the citizens. Women had had a prominent place in the guerrilla movement RPF and when they took the lead of the country, the RPF was convinced that women had to be involved in the reconstruction. But when the ministry called to women's village meetings to discuss women's opinions on the strategies of reconstruction – only men came. This made it very clear that an arena without discrimination for bringing women together was urgently needed (Inyumba: 2004-05-19).

The Minister of Gender participated in the Beijing Conference of Women and Development and was introduced to the All China Women federation, women's representational structures. The model, with some modifications, was brought back to be tested in Rwanda, with the purpose of creating a space for participation for the women in Rwanda.

Politics is about solving problems and Women's Councils was a measure of participation, identifying problems and present solutions. .../... The Women's councils should not be operational councils, but only advocacy forums. (Inyumba: 2004-05-19)

The purpose with the women's councils was also to contribute to the reconciliation process after the genocide in creating a new structure based on geographic grounds without ethnic divisions. Another important purpose was to work closely with the women's movement that was strongly emerging at the time (Inyumba: 2004-05-19, Mukamisha: 2004-04-11).

The national structure of women's councils was formally established in 2000 and given legal status by an institutionalising law.<sup>13</sup> The councils have ten members with different areas of responsibilities, among them a coordinator and vice-coordinator, a treasurer, members in charge of health, education and juridical questions. The council member in charge of culture and civic issues has a particular responsibility to make women aware of their possibilities to access political institutions (Law no 27/2003: 26). The coordinator has a reserved seat in the local or regional administration board, and is thereby linked to the political structures (Semarinota: 2005-05-26). At cell level, the lowest administrative level, all women above the age of 18 elect ten representatives for a five years' period, with these committees joining up at sector level to create the sector assembly, from which a ten-member committee is elected which will help form the district assembly. The system continues upwards through the provincial and national levels, with the national President and Vice-President automatically entering parliament (UNIFEM: 2002).<sup>14</sup> The women's councils get their budget from the government, but women in the structures work voluntary (Mukamosoni: 2004-04-20).

#### 4.2.2 Parliamentary representation

In the process of working out a new constitution, women's activists in Rwanda saw an opportunity to stabilise the gains made in women's participation in the post-conflict reconstruction. The civil society was highly involved in the process and managed together with the Parliament's Women's Caucus in the transitional parliament to lobby for a thirty percent quota in the parliament and the constitution was adopted in 2003. (Rusilibya, 2004-04-22, Kanakuze 2004-05-19). In the parliamentary elections in 2003, the political parties included women in their lists and together with the quotas; Rwanda passed Sweden as the country with the world's highest representation of women in parliament.<sup>15</sup>

At the time of my field study, the women elected on quotas had been present for not even a year. The impact of women in parliament on legislation and women's rights is not

---

<sup>13</sup> There is a similar youth structure with two reserved parliamentary seats (Law no 24/2003).

<sup>14</sup> The administrative levels are, from local to national level: Cell level, Sector level, District level, Provincial level and National level.

<sup>15</sup> In 1995 women's representation in Parliament was 17 percent (IPU: 2005).

subject to this study, but from the expert interviews the importance of women's presence in parliament, before and after the quotas, and contacts with the women's movement was clear (Niwemfura: 2004-04-22, Rwamasirabo: 2004-05-10, Tuyisenge: 2004-04-30). It was the lobbying by women's organizations that led to significant legal gains such as the decision to classify rape in the gravest genocide crime category, the adaptation of the gacaca system of justice<sup>16</sup> to accept women as judges, and the passage of the legislation on marital succession (Rwabuhiri: 2004-05-19, Mukamana: 2004-04-28, UNIFEM: 2002). Changing women's rights by law, contributes to the empowerment at a structural level, not least in changing attitudes.

There has been criticism against the swift inclusion of women in parliament in the elections of 2003. Some argue that women are politically inexperienced and will be too weak in relation to the government (Athlin, 2004-04-27). The women elected to the quotas in parliament might have limited formal experience of high level politics, but the women parliamentarians I met had a background in the women's councils and thereby a political experience per se. A more severe critique is the issue of withdrawn women candidatures in the elections of 2003 (Commission nationale electorale, 2003: 18). I interviewed two women who withdrew their candidatures and they had experienced a strong pressure from political parties to the women's councils in order to secure their candidates on the quota seats (Anonymous: 2004-05-24, Anonymous: 2005-05-28).

#### 4.2.3 Changes in gender structures

In Kabeer's model, empowerment at the "deeper" level concerns changes in the distribution of resources and power in a society (Kabeer: 2002: 27). Gender relations and gendered hierarchical structures are complex and work simultaneously at different levels. Hirdman (1998) argues that the system of gender relations has two logics: a separation of the 'female' and the 'male' spheres and a higher valuation of the latter. In discussing changes in gender structures, shifts in these logics may be reference points.

As with the mass entrance of women in production during the Second World War in the West, the endless practical tasks in the reconstruction phase in Rwanda needed the involvement of women in order to be solved (Rusilibya: 2004-04-22). This meant that women had to take on new roles that earlier had been regarded unacceptable for a woman and led to legal and cultural changes. A concrete example is the earlier the discriminating inheritance law that proved practically impossible in the wake of genocide (Reseau des Femmes: 1999) and the new possibilities for women to take banking loans, which expand their economical power. (Mukamosoni: 2004-04-20).

To a higher and higher extent, women are now visible in areas where they were previously totally excluded, such as tea and coffee production, cattle and in positions in churches and as teachers in higher education. (Mukamosoni: 2004-04-20). From the interviews with both men and women in Rwanda, I learned that men are more and more convinced by the arguments of gender equality and that women can manage, not least from the high number of women-led households. This indication is also elaborated in the Ministry

---

<sup>16</sup> A juridical system dealing with the juridical processes after genocide, built on a traditional forum of conflict solving (VNG: 2003).



of Gender's study of cultural beliefs in Rwanda (2002). Such changed attitudes on women's capacities will certainly lead to a broader freedom of action.

Others argued that political will and legal changes to include women means that in the political elite and in political institutions men can not oppose the public agenda. One of the interviewees described the rest of society as "a true war" as men are afraid of loosing power. There are notable gaps between policy and practice, as efforts to change deep-rooted attitudes and discriminatory traditions require a long period of time and a greater investment of resources than has been available (UNIFEM: 2002). Having progressive legislation at place is no guarantee for its implementation (Twiubahi: 2004-04-20).

In a survey of beliefs, attitudes and socio-cultural practices related to gender in Rwanda, the most important barriers to women's political participation are identified as women's unpaid household work, women's feelings of inferiority, and lack of experience in politico-administrative activities (Ministry of Gender and Women in Development: 2002: 88).

The structural discrimination of women is most pressing in the field of economical power and the feminised poverty. Women are generally more affected by poverty than men, especially women-headed households, a third of all households. Women headed households have on average access to 30 per cent less land than households led by men and women own on average 50 per cent less cattle (Sida Development Cooperation in Kigali: 2004). From this perspective we should also stress the central point of women's education and the fact that only half the women population are (Reseau des femmes: 2003: 20-23; MIGEPROFE: 2003).

A look at the political context points at a framework of institutions put up in the post-conflict reconstruction and a change in society's expectations on gender roles that has changed possibilities for women to participate in political life. Even though the analysis of empowerment at a structural level does not go deep, the changed expectations of seeing women as political leaders and taking responsibility for their own economical situation are certainly shifts in attitudes that enable political participation. Whether this has been the case at local level is subject to analysis in the next chapter.

# 5 Analysis of Women's Political Empowerment

In this chapter the opinions and thoughts on possibilities and obstacles for women's political participation that were expressed in the field interviews by women in the structures at grass root and at parliamentary level are presented. I will also give a brief remark on the barriers for women to take part in the political structures.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of the women's councils has been spelled out above as a forum where women put together their views in order to solve their own problems and to participate in and have a say in the development of the country. In that, the empowerment analysis will focus mainly on how the aims of the women's councils are achieved and not so much on what is done. It is important to point out that 'indicators of empowerment' need merely 'indicate' the direction of change rather than provide an accurate measurement of it (Kabeer: 2001: 52). I will also analyse the women's councils as a measure of bridging women parliamentarians and women outside of the representational structures.

## 5.1 Empowerment at Immediate Level

In the following, I will analyse whether participation in the women's councils have contributed to a process of empowerment in the dimensions mentioned by Kabeer: resources, agency and achievements. I will start out with the processes at immediate, i.e. individual or group, level.

### 5.1.1 The resource dimension

The resource dimension in empowerment is most of all a measure of potential choice and not of actualised choice (Kabeer: 2001: 28ff). If a woman has access to a certain resource we should not take it for granted that this access would lead to empowerment. We should instead discuss resources in terms of control and in the light of its potential for agency and achievements (Kabeer: *ibid*).

In order to measure empowerment in terms of *awareness*<sup>18</sup> women were asked questions on what they had learned from their work in the women's councils. In the different interviews similar themes were brought up in the way of defining the gained resources.

---

<sup>17</sup> The majority of the interviews with the women parliamentarians were made in French and the quotations are thus my translation into English. The interviews in the rural areas were translated from Kinyarwanda into English and the quotations are thus the interpreter's translated phrases.

<sup>18</sup> See chapter 3.2.5 for a justification of this choice.

The interviewees expressed that the meetings with other women had helped them to get out of ignorance and passivity in broad terms. The women's council served as a forum to meet other women and be part of a female community, a 'power with' (Rowlands, 1998). One of the interviewees expressed this in the following way.

When you are alone, you hardly know the day of the week, but when you are going to a meeting you have to be active and be aware of things. (Interviewee 17).

The awareness raising was also defined as awareness of how to find solutions of concrete problems. The women had learned income generating activities and how to *plan projects* for themselves and their family. This was due to the different trainings organised by the women's councils but also to the exchange of experiences between the women in the councils.

I learned to organise projects and plan for my family. Earlier I thought it was the husband's responsibility to plan for the family. Now I can do that as well. (Interviewee 9)

These organisational skills were brought as important to change the everyday life of the women. Being able to organise a meeting and drawing up a project plan are also important skills in the political life and a resource with direct effect on the possibility to participate as a citizen in a political forum.

As part of the project management, many interviewees said that they had also become more *aware of women's rights and channels of influence* and knew where to turn with a problem. This is certainly interesting in the perspective of political participation, where knowledge of what political channels exist is a precondition for taking part in them. The channels mentioned in the interviews were mainly the local administration and the women's councils, but neither political parties nor the women's organisations were mentioned by the women.

A gained resource mentioned by all the interviewees at grass root level, was *self-confidence*, awareness of the own capacity or 'power from within' (Rowlands, 1998). Being encouraged to speak in front of others, and being listened to, was a revealing experience for many of the interviewees and a strong contributor to the strengthened self-confidence.

Now I can stand up and tell what I find is important for the society. Before the war, before the genocide, I never thought that a woman could stand up and talk in front of the men. It is important to me. I am proud of what I know. When I come back from the meetings, I feel that I have to go on; that I can not go back to what was before (Interviewee 19)

Self confidence will lead to agency when women's abilities to formulate their problems and to act politically upon them increase. The experience of being voted to a position in the women's council also contributed to the strengthened belief in women's own capacities.

It really helped me when they voted for me, I felt really strengthened. If others can vote for me it means that they feel I am someone strong. I feel that it's really good for me. (Interviewee 13).

It was important to get the experience of being a leader and organise activities. (Interview, 12)

These experiences, awareness of what it means to *represent and lead other women* are per se political resources, I would argue. In the councils that function well, women that have not earlier taken place at a public arena get the experience to vote for other women that is close to them and easy to claim accountability from. They might also themselves be voted and take responsibility for the council decision and try the role as a representative with contacts to the women that voted for them.

The women's council at local level is a possibility for female separatist organisation within a political structure. The experience of working together with women from different backgrounds led to important insights of *solidarity* and awareness of different ways of life among the women.

It was important to me to be voted for by older people. I have learned a lot by working together with women that are older than me. (Interviewee 7)

It helped me to think of others than myself. When you talk to someone that is poorer than you, you stop complaining. You work together and realise that there is more than the individual. (Interviewee 18)

It was rewarding to meet with and learn from high-educated persons (Interviewee 14)

I would argue that these insights are equally important in the perspective of identifying resources that are crucial for translating into political action. If you are aware of differences and common problems between women in the women councils and ready to learn from this, you have a constructive starting point and an overall perspective in political discussions. (Diamond: 1999).

### 5.1.2 The agency dimension

In Kabeer's terminology, agency refers to the possibility to define goals and act upon these very goals.

In the process of agency, different resources seemingly interact and are not easily distinguished in the answers. The resource of *awareness of women's rights* that was brought up by the women as a gained resource turned into action by the broader feeling of belonging to a female community with competing alternatives of what should be accepted in a marriage or relationship, together with the increased *self-confidence*.

When you can speak out in front of other women, you can also do that to your husband. When he sees you talk in front of others in a meeting, he starts respecting you. (Interviewee 19)

.../... It changed our relationship. He started to respect me and finally encouraged me to go. (Interviewee 1)

Another example is the *awareness of women's rights and channels of influence* that translated into action in relation to the local authorities.

To be part of a women's council helps you not to be dismissed by the local authorities. Before the genocide, women were not considered real human beings. Now, I can go there and I am sure to get what I want. (Interviewee 19)

This is also related to the resource of *self-confidence*, believing in yourself and in your capacity to make a change. This was earlier addressed as an issue of resources but might also play a role in the way of claiming resources or a certain political solution together with the ability to formulate and *plan a project*.

The big change now is that I don't feel alone like I was before. Now I know that I can go to the district office and get what I want. I feel happy to know that I can get what I want. (Interviewee 14)

This experience was also true for the possibilities of *solidarity* and *representation* of others and advocating for a collective cause in women's councils at a higher level or other political structures.

It helped me to think that I can do something for someone else; when they tell me something I am sure that I will be able to say it even at a higher level. (Interviewee 16)

It helped me know how to help others. In my village, people used to be one for one, not for others, but now I can go to them, like solidarity and help them in their small problems of daily lives. (Interviewee 13)

The quotations above entail both the issue of understanding other women's problems, having the resources to find and formulate a solution and the ability and confidence to act upon it. In this sense the awareness gained through the participation in the women's council is a clear step in an empowerment process for the interviewee.

### 5.1.3 The dimension of achievements

The final dimension of the empowerment process concerns the achievements or lack of achievements. Have the changes in resources and agency led to concrete achievements for the interviewees in the women's councils?

From the interviews with women in women's councils at the local level, the earlier mentioned knowledge of *planning projects* gave concrete possibilities to a better income and thereby expanded their range of every-day alternatives.

From the Women's Councils, I got a loan and could pay my kids' school fees and I bought a cow with what I earned. .../... If I get alone, I know how to use it and get out of poverty. (Interviewee 14)

The above quotations on turning to the local administration also show that the resources of *planning projects*, *awareness of women's rights and channels of influence* have turned into action where the women have asked the local administration for services and acquired these.

When discussing concrete achievements the women all argued that the women's councils had altered the expectations from men of what a woman can do in political arenas. Some women mentioned that the *awareness of women's rights* and the new skills they got from the women's councils helped them to negotiate in a better way and therefore also expanded the roles in their relationship with their husband and in relation to what their children expected from them.

Before the war, I never thought that my husband would allow me to travel and spend the night away. But now, in the women's councils, I go to trainings for several days and he does not mind. .../... I am really happy of what I can do. Last year I went to Uganda and met other women there, it was really great to meet them and discuss. (Interviewee 20)

Regarding the above mentioned change in respect from the men, the change in power relations in the private sphere had as result that conflicts and domestic violence had decreased, according to several interviewees.

The men respect women nowadays; they see that we can do the same work. There are no longer as many beatings, and that shows that the men regard us as rational beings with rights. (Interviewee 3 and 4)

It helps to keep peace at home, my husband respects me more. (Interviewee 10)

This change in relations in the private sphere might have strong implications for the possibilities to act in the public sphere. This is an example where empowerment at the deeper, intermediate and immediate level interact.

I would like to stress though, that on this matter the opinions between the women diverged. *No it hasn't changed much. According to him, it is still his word that counts*, told one of the women (Interviewee 5). Some of the women told about recent examples of women that were beaten by their husbands when coming home from the council meetings. Furthermore the women pointed at many problems regarding gender equality and situations where achievements were absent, even though the experiences from the women's councils were important in changing women's awareness and rights as well as men's expectations on women's roles. To many women, the issue of women's positions was linked to economical power.

When you are just a farming woman married to a man with a job in town, he is the one who will decide where you should live. Gender equality is for women from another class than ours. It is true that everyone has the same rights, but not the same level of income. Women here have the kind of problem that if you don't earn as much as your husband, you are not independent. That will never change. (Interviewee 19)

Gender equality exists only in the political structures. But at our level, at home, we have not achieved gender equality, we are still oppressed. We are on our way out of it, but we are not there yet. (Interviewee 20)

The above quotations are examples of how changes or lack of changes in power relations at a 'deeper' structural level affect the empowerment at the immediate level and where a structural discrimination might impede the achievement of women's agency.

Before moving on to the analysis of empowerment at intermediate or institutional level, I will dwell a moment on the issue of barriers for achievements in the empowerment process and women's participation.

#### 5.1.4 Inclusion and exclusion from women's councils

When the women who are active in the councils were asked of further barriers to their own participation, they all mentioned the traditional tasks in the family, i.e. the deeper gender relations. The widows and mothers of small children found it hard to leave their children unattended at home. This problem was even more important in a poverty perspective, as time spent in meetings meant time away from the farm work and other income generating activities. This picture has been confirmed by several studies (Secretariat executif permanent de suivi de Beijing: 2003, Ministry of Gender and Women in Development: 2002).

But structural barriers might also completely exclude women from participating in the Women's council. Why did some women *not* participate in the new structures? Certainly, individual women have different reasons for participating or not in the political life. What is interesting is whether any groups are systematically excluded from, in this case, the women's councils.

One group of women that, to a large extent, don't participate in the women's councils at local level, both in terms of the organised activities and as elected in councils, is the poorest and most vulnerable women. The women in the women's councils, who were very aware of the problem, explained this in terms of feelings of inferiority among the marginalised women but also as a very concrete problem of scarce resources.

Many don't come as they are very poor and they can't leave their children at home when they go to the meetings without knowing what their children are going to eat if they are not working. They just make up their minds not to go and have not seen the point with the women's councils. We try to include them with vaccination offers or small allowances. But they are afraid not to be accepted and don't have the means for transport to our meetings. It is important but we have to find something concrete or make it easier for them to come. (Interviewee 13)

Another group that was hard to reach for the women's councils was the young women that sometimes faced the problem of lack of confidence as representatives from adults (Kazaire: 2005-05-11). It should be noted though that the youth has its own representational structures where young women increasingly take part (Renzaho: 2004-05-27).

In order to find further answers to this question, I shortly interviewed four women clients in a micro-credit project in the town of Butare of which none were active in the women's councils (2004-04-10, 2004-04-14).<sup>19</sup> They were well aware of the structures but

---

<sup>19</sup> This part of the study is thus very limited and only meant to shed some light on the issue.

brought up the issues of feeling unconcerned and the lack of time for participation. *It is for some women but not for me* was a typical answer.

When analysing the Women's Councils, we should from this discussion have in mind that the women taking part have a certain level of education and economical status (Gakuba: 2004-05-26, Twiyubati, 2004-04-20). This actualises the issue of differences between women in their positions within different power structures that interrelate and may enforce or weaken possibilities of political participation.

## 5.2 Linking Representation to Participation

We have seen that, for the women participating in the women's councils, the women's councils have enabled new resources that could be important for political participation in a wider setting such as awareness of project planning, awareness of women's rights and channels for influence, awareness of own capacities (self confidence), the notion of representation and solidarity with others. We have also seen that the participation in women's councils has expanded the women's limits and possibilities of agency. Finally, there have been concrete achievements in the empowerment process in the project outcomes, use of political channels at local level and changed gender relations. According to Kabeer (2002), all these three dimensions must be at place for a real empowerment process to take place.

### 5.2.1. Interplay between empowerment at immediate and intermediate level

In the chapter on the Rwandan political context, we have seen that there have been several changes at institutional level, such as legislation on matrimony and quotas in parliament that has increased the possibilities for women's empowerment. The women's councils are such an initiative and in order to achieve the goals it has developed links to other institutions such as the parliament and the women representatives there.

In the interviews at cell and sector level, it became clear that some of the councils had easier to reach their goals than others. In some of the districts, many of the local women participated and organised activities that they transmitted to other levels in the structures.

We work in a simple way. Women give their views; the coordinator notes it and goes to the sector level. If it is a problem that can be solved at that level, it is solved there. But if we can't, it is referred to the district level where another woman argues for the issue and so on to the province and national level. (Interviewee 20)

Other women told about councils with a clear top-down approach and where the women had come into the councils on the government's initiative.

They are not our ideas. The district calls upon us regularly and gives ideas on how to promote development among people. (Interviewee 19)

We have many ideas of different projects, but no one to tell them. We discuss the government's ideas. (Interviewee 6)



A feeling of not being able to transmit their ideas and skills gained to a political level was expressed by a majority of the interviewees. This can be seen as a situation where the empowerment process has taken place at an immediate level but is not linked to an intermediate level. The change in the individual woman's possibilities to choose does not correspond to a similar change at institutional or structural level.

Apart from the role of awareness raising structure, the purpose of the women's council is to serve as a representational structure or an advocacy forum. The women's council has two reserved seats in parliament, and the women that came in to parliament quota have a background in women's councils. The women at cell and sector level expressed that in principle they were very positive and proud that women from the women's councils had entered the parliament.

It's good to have them there, because they can help other women in taking decisions. During the elections they said that the women were going to talk in the place of other women. (Interviewee 5)

The women parliamentarians have helped us, we had meetings together to discuss women's problems and bring it to the national level to make decisions that are good for us. (Interviewee 20)

But in practice, many women at grass root level were doubtful to the possibilities to influence the women in parliament and transmit their views to them.

It is important to have women in parliament, they will represent us, but they have not come back yet to hear what we think. I don't think it's because of lack of time. I voted many times and they never come back. (Interviewee 3)

I can hear on the radio that they are always in meetings, but I wonder what they discuss if they, at the same time, don't know what is going on in their villages. (Interviewee 11)

The gap between women parliamentarians and the women at cell and sector level in rural areas has been pointed out in a women's movement study and in the expert interviewees (UNIFEM/Pro Femmes: 2004). One of the most critical voices argued:

Quotas are for pro-government women and it did not change anything at the grass-root level. There is a too big gap between the women elite and rural women. We play a game and show the international community that women participate, but they can't. The seats in parliament are created for women and not won by themselves. Women don't have the same interests, it is a mistake to believe that they have the same interests. I see nothing positive in this (Kampire: 2004-05-13).

In order to follow up this line of argumentation, I chose to interview women in the parliament on the quota seats. The majority of the women have a background in the women's councils. It is therefore interesting to see how they look upon their role as representatives of other

women, on reserved seats. There is *mobilisation* taking place in the women's councils, but the *listening* and *connectedness*<sup>20</sup> from the women parliamentarians are yet to be explored.

### 5.2.2 Representing women in parliament

In addressing the issue of linkages between women in the women's councils and the women parliamentarians, many stressed their background in the structures and how positively this had contributed to their own capacity building.

Regarding the issued of contacts with women at the cell and local level, the answers turned out to be more diverging. The attitudes towards the ideal of linking the two models of inclusion from 'above' and from 'below' did not seem to follow a clear pattern from the representatives' background or position.

Some of the parliamentarians argued that they had regular contacts with their voters and women at grass root level. The parliamentarians of Rwanda have scheduled visits for field trips, which would be an enabling condition for both listening and connectedness, but it was vague whether these trips took place to the intended extent. Others argued that there was a misunderstanding of the role of a parliamentarian. In the view of the majority parliamentarians, the connection between them and women outside of the parliament should be done through associations and that there was a certain responsibility for the women to mobilise their demands.

It is important to explain the role of a parliamentarian to the people, they often confuse it. They might think that you as parliamentarian can give work to all unemployed, to give credits to the poor or live in their village and say good morning every day. That is not possible! My mandate, the institutional mandate as a parliamentarian is about explaining to the people how to use the parliamentarians. ...They have structures, associations of other women at the local level. I don't want to say that we have to be in contact with every woman. But we are in contact with the mechanisms that help them at the grass root level. (Interviewee 34).

I think that the women (at the grass root level) exaggerate. I have lived among them and discussed with them. I would say that the women don't want to see us. I will explain myself, when we organise a meeting, 15 or 20 persons show up, the others won't come. That is not being responsible. In the cells when women are aware, where they want to develop themselves, it works fine. (Interviewee 21)

Many parliamentarians pointed at the short time frame after the elections as an explanation of the problems of connectedness.

During the 'parliamentary vacations' we go out to the field. We have very precise themes to discuss with the population. We can't just go out in the field like that, just for the people to see me there. I think it is too early. We are very well aware; we know how the population has judged the former parliaments. We are determined. We know that we have to be close to the population, but the population should also know that we have obligations here. (Interviewee 28)

---

<sup>20</sup> See chapter 3.2.4 and 3.2.5.

Among the interviewees, some still admitted that there was a problem in connectedness between the elected women and the women voters and expressed a strong will to listen to the women outside of the parliament.

You have been to Rwanda; you can see that it is a very small proportion that can ring here. Some do, they can ring you, they can come to visit you here and they can come to the commission, that's true. But you don't get the overall impression.../... I really would like to have the feeling the people feel down there. I know it, it's not different, but... I feel I would do more if I had more time with them. .../...If we could pass that period of urgency and find things in a proper perspective, then we can have time to review the government bills against how the people would like it, because we have the mandate to change them. But you can't change what you haven't had, what you haven't seen. (Interviewee 33)

An interesting discussion was brought up on whether the parliamentarians saw it as their task to represent women in parliament. When asked of their support groups or constituencies, all the interviewees avoided to answer. This might be taken as a sign of avoiding tendencies of divisionism<sup>21</sup> but also that the constitution does not allow for such an explicit group representation.

As a parliamentarian, I represent all the people, that is stated in the constitution.../... You might say that you want to eradicate the barriers for a certain group, but you can not represent a certain group. (Interviewee 34).

This view stands in contrast with the views expressed by the women from the women's councils that tend to see the women in parliament as their representatives as promoting their concerns and serving as a role model for the Rwandan society. This raises new questions on the initiatives of women's inclusion from above and from below in Rwanda.

---

<sup>21</sup> For an explanation, see chapter 4.1.

## 6 Concluding Remarks

From the field study results, I would argue that the women's councils do serve as empowerment structure for women at grass-root level in terms of awareness-raising. The women have found new political resources that, in their own opinion, could not have been found elsewhere such as self-reliance, solidarity and awareness of rights and duties. The women brought up several examples of how these resources have been turned into agency and achievements although gender discrimination and poverty are important barriers. The women's councils have in this sense a participatory and mobilizing potential for women at grass root level.

But there is a certain frustration at cell and sector level that the increased power and ability to formulate political demands is left behind. In the Rwandan political context, there are few channels for rural women to pass on their political demands and connect with other political levels. The women's councils do not function satisfactory at all levels, some would say even top-down, women's organizations have difficulties reaching all women and the political parties do not operate at grass root level. Recognizing the importance of women parliamentarians and their background in women's councils, there are expectations on the women representatives at national level to come back and discuss politics with the women in local women's councils.

The women's councils have two reserved seats in parliament to ensure the connection between grass root and national level and as such an enabling structure for linking women's councils to the parliament. The women's councils have served as recruitment and capacity building base for the women at women's seats in parliament and in this sense broadened the representation of women in Parliament. From the dominant parliamentarians' perspective the linkages with women from outside of Parliament should run at institutional level and through contacts with representatives from the women's movement rather than in arenas of direct contact with women at local level. We have also seen that the view of a women's parliamentarian as a group representative differs between women in and outside of the parliament.

Instead of presenting a total picture of women's representation and participation in the Rwandan context and it is the linkages between them that have interested me. The case of Rwanda has shown the complexity of initiatives for women's political representation. One key aspect for achieving mobilization, listening and connectedness, with Young's words, is the process of decentralisation that might strengthen the intermediate channels between the local and national level. There are unique enabling structures at place and awareness among women that has great potential for women's political participation. From this perspective, the demands on the women parliamentarians from women at grass-root level should be seen with a positive note on women's mobilisation.

The case of women's representation in Rwanda gives many opportunities for further research. One topic would be to interview women that don't participate in the women's councils today and go deeper into the causes for this. That might help to shed light on what

inclusive citizenship means when it is viewed from the standpoint of the excluded (Kabeer, 2005). But first and foremost I would find it interesting to follow up the study as months have passed and the initiatives have had more time to settle and analyse further the outcomes of women's representational structures for women's participation.

The women's councils as a structure have opened a window of opportunity, although squeaking at times, for many women to political participation. It is my hope that it will be let widely opened for all women in Rwanda in the years ahead.

# 7 List of References

## Literature

Ambjörnsson, F. (2004) *I en klass för sig: genus, klass och sexualitet bland gymnasietjejer*. Stockholm: Ordfront.

Afshar, H. (ed.), 1998. *Women and Empowerment. Illustrations from the Third World*. London: Macmillan.

Andersen, J. & Siim, B. (eds) (2004) *The politics of inclusion and empowerment: gender, class, and citizenship*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Arendt, H. (1958/1998) *Människans villkor. Vita activa*. Göteborg, Daidalos.

Bang, H., Christensen, B., Hansen, A, Hoff, (2000) *Demokrati fra neden*. København: Jurist og Økonomforbundets Forlag.

Butler, J (2005) *Könet brinner! Texter i urval av Tiina Rosenberg*. Stockholm: Natur och Kultur.

Christensen, A. & Siim, B. (2001) *Køn, demokrati og modernitet*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Cruikshank, B. (1999) *The Will to Empower. Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects*. London: Cornell University Press.

Dahlerup, D. (1998) Using Quotas to Increase Women's Political Representation. *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. Ed. Azza Karam. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, pp. 91-106.

d'Entrèves, M. (1992) Hannah Arendt and the Idea of Citizenship. In Mouffe, Chantal (ed.) *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship and Community*. London: Verso. Pp. 145-168.

Diamond, L. (1999) *Developing democracy towards consolidation*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Eduards, M. (2002) *Förbjuden handling. Om kvinnors organisering och feministisk teori*. Malmö: Liber.

- Elofsson, Kristina (1998) Demokratins fördjupning – ett genderperspektiv. in Hydén, Göran (ed.) *Demokratisering i tredje världen*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Frølund Thomsen, Jens Peter (2000). *Magt og indflydelse*. Århus: Magtudredningen.
- Gemzöe, L (2003) *Feminism*. Stockholm: Bilda förlag.
- Goetz, A. & Hassim, S. (eds.) (2003) *No Shortcuts to Power. African Women in Politics and Policymaking*. London: Zed Books.
- Hobson, B (ed.) (2002) *Contested Concepts in Gender and Social Politics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Howell, J. (2002) Women's Political Participation in China: Struggling to Hold up Half of the Sky. In K. Ross (ed.). *Women, Politics and Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hirdman, Y (1988) Genussystemet – reflexioner kring kvinnors sociala underordning. In *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*: 3.
- Kabeer, N. (ed.) (2005) *Inclusive Citizenship. Meanings and expressions*. London: Zed Books.
- Kabeer, N. (2002) Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment in *Discussing Women's Empowerment – Theory and Practice*. Stockholm: Sida Studies: 3.
- Kvale, S. (2000) Inter View. *En introduktion til det kvalitative forskningsinterview*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag
- Lister, R. (1997) *Citizenship: Feminist perspectives*. London: MacMillan.
- Marsh, D. & Stoker, G. (2002) *Theory and Methods in Political Science*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mansbrige, J. (1999) Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A contingent Yes, In *Journal of politics*, August 1999.
- Marques Pereira, B. and Siim, B. (2002) Representation, agency and achievements. In *Contested Concepts in Gender and Social Politics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Mouffe, C. (ed.), 1992. *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*. London: Verso.
- Mouffe, C. (1997) Feminism, citizenship and radical democratic politics. In Tietjens Meyers, Diana. *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Mosedale, S. (2005) Assessing Women's Political Empowerment: Towards a Conceptual Framework in *Journal of International Development*, 17:243-257

- Pankhurst, D. (2002) *Women and Politics in Africa: The Case of Uganda*. In Ross, Karen (ed.). *Women, Politics and Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Patel, R. & Davidsson, B. (1994) *Forskningsmetodikens grunder. Att planera, genomföra och rapportera en undersökning*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Phillips, A. (1995) *The Politics of Presence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Pitkin, H. (1967) *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley, CA: University California Press
- Siim, B. (2000) *Gender and Citizenship: Politics and Agency in France, Britain and Denmark*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stoltz, P. (2000) *About being (t)here: And Making a Difference – Black women and the Paradox of Visibility*. Lund: Department of Political Science, Lund University.
- Svenning, C. (1996) *Metodboken. En bok om samhällsvetenskaplig metod och metodutveckling*. Lund: Lorentz förlag.
- Tamale, S. (1998) *When Hens Begin to Crow. Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- Waylen, G. (1996) *Gender and Politics in the Third World*. : Open University Press.
- Wendt Höjer, M. & Åse, C. (1995) *Politikens paradoxer. En introduktion till feministisk politisk teori*. Lund: Academia Adacta.
- Wängnerud, L. (1999) *Kvinnorepresentation: Makt och möjligheter i Sveriges riksdag*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Young, I. M. (1990) *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Young, I. M. (2000) *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Resources on Rwanda

- ACDI-MIGEPROFE (2002) *Rapport de la recherche sur les enjeux ES sans la décentralisation*. Kigali: ACDI-MIGEPROFE.
- Commission nationale electorale (2001) *Elections des autorités administratives des districts et des villes au Rwanda du 6 au 13 mars 2001. Résultats sommaires*. Kigali. Commission nationale electorale.



Commission nationale electorale (2003) *Rapport sur les elections legislatives du 29 septembre au 03 octobre 2003*. Kigali. Commission nationale electorale

Commission juridique et constitutionnelle (2002). *Les idées fondamentales d'une constitution*. Kigali: Republique rwandaise commission juridique et constitutionnelle.

Inter-Parliamentary Union (2002). *National seminar on "The Process of Engendering a New Constitution for Rwanda"*, 20-22/06/01. New York: Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Inter-Parliamentary Union (2005). *Women in Politics 1945-2005*. Geneva: IPU.

Haguruka (2001) *La femme rwandaise et l'accès à la justice*. Kigali: HAGURUKA A.s.b.l./Novib.

Kippenberg, J/Human Rights Watch (2004) *Rwanda Still in Our Human Rights Blind Spot*, *The Observer* 2004-07-25.

Ministère des Finances et de la planification économique (2002) *Vision 2020*. Kigali: Ministère des Finances et de la planification économique.

Ministère du Genre et de la Promotion de la Femme (MIGEPROFE) (2003) *La politique nationale du genre*. Kigali: MIGEPROFE.

Ministry of Gender and Women in Development (2002). *A Study on Beliefs, Attitudes and Socio-Cultural Practices Related to Gender in Rwanda*. Kigali: MIGEPROFE/UNDP

Ministry of Local Government, Information and Social Affairs (MINALOC)/VNG International (2003) *Appraisal of the Decentralisation Process in Rwanda*. Kigali: VNG International.

National Electoral Commission (2004) *Executive Summaries of the Existing Reports by the National Electoral Commission on the 2003 Constitutional Referendum, Presidential and Legislative Elections*. Kigali: National Electoral Commission.

Reseau des Femmes oeuvrant pour le developpement rural (1999) *Etude sur l'implication des femmes dans les instances de prise de decision*. Kigali: Reseau des Femmes.

Reseau des Femmes oeuvrant pour le developpement rural (2003) *Evaluation de l'implication de la femme dans les instances de prise de decisions*. Août 1999-Août 2003. Kigali: Reseau des Femmes.

Secretariat executif permanent de suivi de Beijing (2003) *Plan d'action national de suivi et de la mise en oeuvre de la plate forme d'action de Beijing 2004-2007*. Kigali: Secretariat executif permanent de suivi de Beijing.

Sida Development Cooperation in Kigali (2004) *Country Analysis 2004*. Stockholm: Sida.

UNIFEM (2002) *Report of the learning oriented of gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment strategies in Rwanda*. Joint Assessment mission. Kigali: UNIFEM.

UNIFEM/Pro Femmes (2004) *La participation des femmes au processus electoral et constitutionnel au Rwanda. Esquisse de leurs rôles dans la prise de décisions (draft)*. Kigali: Pro Femmes.

## Legal documents

*Law N. 24/2003 of 14/08/2003 establishing the Functioning and Organization of the National Youth Council.*

*Law N. 27/2003 of 18/08/2003 determining the Organization, Attributions and Functions of the National Women's Council.*

Legal and Constitutional Commission, 2003. *Provisions Relating to Gender Equality in the Constitution*. Kigali: Legal and Constitutional Commission.

## List of Interviewees

### Women's Councils

Mukagatare Léonsie & Mukakimonyo Régina, Maraba district, 2004-05-07

Ahirokimana Christine & Sarimana Constance, Kiruhura district, 2004-05-10

Kabera Marthe, Butare Ville district, 2004-05-10

(x), Anastasia, Butare Ville district, 2004-05-12

Mukarusine Mathilde & Marie Nyirabaganwa, Butare Ville district, 2004-05-12

Mukambaranga Appolinaria; Mukashyaka Beata; Mukesharugo Vestina; Nyaramisago Annonciata, Save district, 2004-05-13

Bampire Maria Goretti; Kaborogaki Febrone; Mukabakomeza, Carita; Niyitegeka, Bernadette; Ntiyuguruzwa Anastasia; Nyarabaganwa Immaculée; Nyarahiwa Winifred; Nyirabaganwa Epiphanie, Save district, 2004-05-13

### Women MPs

Gahondogo, Athanasie, MP, WC Butare Province, Kigali 2004-05-03

Kanakoze, Judith, MP, WC Cyangugu Province, Kigali 2004-05-19

Katengwa, Juliana, MP, RPF, Kigali 2004-05-21

Muhongayire, Jaqueline, MP, SDP, Kigali 2004-06-01

Mukabaranga, Agnès, MP, PDC, Kigali 2004-05-25

Mukakalisa, Faith, MP, WC Umutara Province, Kigali 2004-05-25

Mukamusoni, Berthe, MP, RPF, Kigali 2004-05-03

Mukandora, Anastasie, MP, WC Gikongoro Province, Kigali 2004-05-25

Mukanoheri, Saidat, MP, WC Kigali Ville, Kigali 2004-05-26

Mukarugema, Alphonsine, MP, WC Gitarama Province, Kigali, 2004-05-28

Nyiramadirida, Fortunée, MP, WC Ruhengeri Province, Kigali 2004-05-31

Nyiramirimo, Odette, Senator, Liberal Party, Kigali 2004-05-26

Nyirabenda, Astérie, MP, SDP, Kigali 2004-05-26

Tyuisange, Solange MP, PL, Kigali 2004-05-31

Yankujire, Marie Goretti, MP, WC Byumba Province, Kigali 2004-05-27

## Resource Persons

Anonymous, candidate for Women's seats, Legislative election 2003, Kigali 2004-05-24

Anonymous, candidate for Women's seats, Legislative election 2003, Kigali 2004-05-28

Athlin, Joanna, 2<sup>nd</sup> Secretary, Development Cooperation, Sida, Embassy of Sweden, Kigali 2004-04-27

Four clients of Duterimbere Microcredit project, Butare 2004-04-10, 2004-04-12

Gakuba, Jeanne d'Arc, Vice Mayor in Charge of Gender and Women Promotion, Kigali-Ville, Kigali 2004-05-26

Inyumba, Aloisya, Prefect of Kigali-Ngali, Minister of Gender, Family and Social Affairs 1994-1997, Kigali 2004-05-19

Kabega, Emelienne, Directrice Générale, Duterimbere Cooperative, Kigali 2004-05-03

Kampire Marie Therèse, Professor, Department of Political Science, NUR, Butare, 2004-05-13

Kazaire, Judith, President of University Women Students' Association, UWSA, Butare 2004-05-11

Mukamana, Berthilde, Director of Women Promotion, Ministry of Gender and Women Promotion, Kigali 2004-04-28

Mukamisha, Léonsie, Executive Secretary, National Women's Councils, Kigali 2004-04-21

Mukamosoni, Berthe, Executive Director of the National Womens's Councils, Kigali 2004-04-20

Mukanyange, Ambassador Joy, National Coordinator, Rwandan Women's Leaders Network, Kigali 2004-05-17

Mukanyiligira, Concolée, National Coordinator, Association des Veuves du Génocide Agahozo, AVEGA-AGAHOZO, Kigali 2004-04-29

Mukazi Mutanguha, Odette, National Coordinator, Forum for African Women Educationalists, FAWE, Kigali 2004-04-27

Mutamba, John, Director of Gender, Ministry of Gender and Women Promotion, Kigali 2004-04-27

Muziranenge, Aimée, Gender Counsellor, National University of Rwanda, Butare 2004-05-11

Niwemfura, Aquiline, Executive Secretary, Permanent Executive Secretariat of Beijing Follow up, Kigali 2004-04-22

Nkusi, Juvenal, MP, PSD, Speaker of Parliament 1999- , Kigali 2004-05-25

Norgren, Finn, Project Manager, Sweden's Support to Rwanda's Decentralisation Programme, SALA-IDA, Kigali 2004-06-01

Renzaho, Giovanni, MP, National Youth Council, Kigali 2004-05-27

Rusilibya, Jaqueline, President, Pro-Femmes, Kigali 2004-04-22

Rwabuhihi, Rose, ass. Gender Advisor for Central Africa, UNIFEM, Kigali 2004-05-19

Rwamasirabo, Emile, Rector, National University of Rwanda, Butare 2004-05-10

Semarinota, Alexander, National Coordinator, Decentralisation Management Unit, Ministry of Local Governance, Information and Social Affairs (MINALOC), Kigali 2004-05-26

Tuyisenge, Christine, Chef de Service Affaires Juridiques, Association pour la Défense des Droits de la Femme et de l'Enfant, HAGURUKA, Kigali 2004-04-30

Twiyubati, Fortunée, former Executive Secretary of Women's Leaders Caucus, sociologist, Kigali 2004-04-20

# Appendix 1

## Interview sheet for parliamentarians

### **Background questions**

Name of respondent

Age

Education/Occupation

Number of years as politically active

Mode of election (party, women's structures, independent)

Missions in Parliament

---

1 Please describe your way into politics.

2 Why did you choose to run as a parliamentarian?

3 Were there any obstacles or challenges for your candidature? What factors supported your candidature? (Relatives of friends who are politically active?)

4 What expectations did you have of the work as a parliamentarian before your election? What challenges did you foresee?

5 Could you describe a "typical" day of work for you in Parliament?

6 How would you describe your time in Parliament until now, in relation to the expectations you just mentioned?

7 Is there something in the organization of work in Parliament that you would like to change?

8 Have your political skills been strengthened during your time as deputy? In what way?

9 Has the time as deputy strengthened you in other areas? What areas/In what way?

10 What are the most important experiences you have had during your time in Parliament?

11 Do men and women have the same opportunities in the political work in Parliament? Do they participate in the same way? In the same areas?

12 Have you experienced any specific advantages or obstacles as a woman? Do you feel you have had the support that you needed, within and outside of the parliament?

13 The high percentage of women in the parliament, does that affect your work in any way? How?

---

14 How would you describe your political platform (programme)?

15 What questions of this platform did you give the highest priority during your election campaign?

16 What groups in society are your strongest supporters? What groups do you feel that you represent in Parliament?

17 How do you keep contact with those groups and their views? When was the last time you were contacted by a citizen (interest group) in your role as a parliamentarian? For what purpose?

18 What initiatives in Parliament have you taken this far (individually or in group)?

19 What do you consider your most important achievements? How did you achieve that?

20 Have there been any obstacles in achieving results within your prioritised areas (see nr 15)? Of what kind?

21 As deputy, what political power do you have?

---

22 What does gender equality mean to you?

23 How would you describe women's and men's position in your society? Are they equal? Are there any differences in women's and men's possibilities to influence in society?

24 Are there areas who are more gender equal than others?

25 As deputy, is it important for you to work for gender equality? How can you do that?

26 What do you think the high number of women in Parliament means for women (gender equality) in Rwanda?

27 What do you think the women's councils mean for women (gender equality) in Rwanda?

28 Have women's enhanced political representation strengthened the democracy in Rwanda? In what way?

---

29 Is there anything you would like to add?

*Thanks for your participation!*



# Appendix 2

Interview sheet for representatives of Women's councils, cell level

*Presentation of me, purpose and background of the field study*

## **Work in women's council**

1 Could you please tell me about yourself and your life here in... (*village*) (Name, age, education/occupation, family)?

2 How did you come in contact with the women's councils from the very beginning? Why were you interested in participating?

3 Could you describe the work of the council? What initiatives has the council taken?

4 What is your task/post in the council? What does that mean? Can you give an example of what you have done this far?

5 What are the main problems for women in the daily life in your village? What causes these problems?

6 In what way can the women's council address these problems? Have they done so? Could you give an example?

7 Do you have a women's fund in your council? For what purposes?

8 Do all women participate in the activities of the women's council in your village? If not, how come?

9 What are the challenges in your work in the council? Are there any obstacles for your own participation? What would support your participation?

10 What do men in the village think about the women's councils? (What does your husband think?)

---

## **Empowerment**

11 What have you learned through your work in the women's council?

12 In what way has that been useful to you?

13 Has the participation in the women's council changed your everyday life in any way?

- 14 Has it changed your relation to your husband/children/family/friends/others?
- 15 Has it changed the way you look upon yourself? The way you look upon your future?  
Could you give an example?
- 16 Could that have happened in other ways than through your participation in the council?
- 17 What does gender equality mean to you?
- 18 Do men and women have the same opportunities in Rwanda today? If not, what are the obstacles women face?
- 19 Is women's participation in women's councils a way of improving gender equality? In what way? Can you give an example?
- 

### **Representation**

- 20 Today there are many women deputies in the national parliament. What does that mean to you?
- 21 Do you feel that the women in Parliament represent you (your views and interests)? In what way? How can you tell? Do you have any advice/opinion for me to take back to them when I meet them in Kigali?
- 22 Are the women's councils a way of strengthening democracy in Rwanda? In what way?
- 

### **Organizational matters (if time)**

- 23 Do you cooperate with the women's councils at other levels or in other districts? In what way? Example?
- 24 Do you cooperate with other actors? In what way? What about the vice-mayors of gender?
- 25 Can the work of the women's council as a national structure be improved in any way? How would you like it to be?
- 

- 26 Is there anything you would like to add before we end the interview?

*Thank you for your participation!*