

**Transforming lives: An analysis of the impact of
the AVEGA's IGA training programme in
empowering widows of the genocide and
promoting gender equality in Rwanda's Eastern
Region**

MA in Gender, Education and International Development

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Abstract

Twenty years after the end of the Rwandan genocide, thousands of Rwandans continue to strive for survival, in a country still plagued by poverty and lack of food. Despite the country's recent achievements, in particular regarding its economic development, widows of the genocide remain amongst the most vulnerable and isolated groups in Rwandan society, struggling to make a living for themselves and their children.

Widows are at a disadvantage due to the patriarchal nature of Rwandan society, in which women are expected to be subordinate to their husbands. Widows' undervalued role in society, high levels of illiteracy, and increased responsibilities as mothers and breadwinners, in the wake of the genocide, also leave them in a position of weakness.

Providing widows of the genocide with the skills necessary to become economically self-reliant may represent the first step toward their reintegration into wider Rwandan society. Nonetheless, so far, the Rwandan government and the various NGOs operating in Rwanda have failed to recognize the specific needs of those women who lost their husbands and relatives in the genocide (and were often victims of sexual violence).

This paper reports on an income-generating activities training programme and investigates the effects of the training on widows' lives, in an attempt to identify effective strategies in addressing their needs. The literature review section will highlight the effects of the genocide on Rwandan women and analyse the main interventions implemented in recent years to promote gender equality in the country. Finally, the findings of a two-week field research project will be discussed.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

- AERG:** Genocide Survivors Students Association
- AVEGA Agahozo:** Association des Veuves du Génocide
- CBDs:** Cooperative Business Development assistants
- CTP:** Care and Treatment Project for HIV+ Women Survivors
- DDR:** Demilitarisation, Demobilisation and Reintegration
- EDPRS:** Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy
- ESSP:** Education Sector Strategic Plan
- FARG:** Assistance Fund for Genocide Survivors
- FFRP:** Forum for Rwandan Women Parliamentarians
- GBV:** Gender-based violence
- GER:** Gross enrolment ratio
- GMO:** Gender Monitoring Office
- IGAs:** Income Generating Activities
- MDGs:** Millennium Development Goals
- MIGEPROF:** Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion
- MIGEFASO:** Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs, then renamed Ministry of Gender and Women in Development
- MINALOC:** Ministry of Local Government
- MINECOFIN:** Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning
- MINEDUC:** Rwandan Ministry of Education
- NER:** Net Enrolment Ratio
- NISR:** National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda
- NISR:** National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda
- PRSP:** Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
- RPA:** Rwandan Patriotic Army
- RPF:** Rwandan Patriotic Front
- SIP:** Survivors Integration Project
- SURF:** Survivors Fund
- UOB:** Urwego Opportunity Bank
- WID:** Women in Development

Introduction

This dissertation considers the impact that the income-generating activities (IGA) training provided by AVEGA (*Association des Veuves du Génocide*), as part of the Survivors Integration Project (SIP), has had on the lives of widows of the Rwandan genocide.

Rwanda is a small nation located in Central Africa and it is probably best known for the genocide that shattered the country in 1994. Over one hundred days, hundreds of thousands of Tutsis (as well as about 10,000 moderate Hutus) were killed by their Hutu neighbours.

The legacy of the genocide still touches almost every aspect of life for those who survived the massacre. The 2007 Genocide Survivors Census¹ reported that at the time, there were approximately 300,000 survivors in Rwanda, of which 120,000 were considered to be very vulnerable. Out of them, 40,000 were shelterless, 28,904 were orphans living in households headed by children, 49,656 were widows, and 15,438 were children and youth who had no access to education. Furthermore, a significant amount of individuals (27,498) were disabled during the genocide, and many survivors still have to face complex health problems, such as HIV and AIDS, as a direct result of the violence perpetrated against them in 1994.

However, possibly the most devastating consequence of the genocide was the dissolution of local friendship networks, community solidarity and social trust, all of which had traditionally provided solace and support for many Rwandans, especially women (Newbury and Baldwin, 2000a, p.3). As a consequence of the events that took place between April and July 1994, survivors have suffered a legacy of insecurity, isolation and frustration – allowing no room for future plans (Rombouts, 2006).

For the past nineteen years, Rwanda has been uninterruptedly governed by the *Rwandan Patriotic Front*² (RPF). Over this period, the country has achieved remarkable results, especially with regard to its economic development. Rwanda has changed from the country in ruins that it was in 1994 to a modern nation, often praised as an example to be followed by other African countries (Burnet, 2008; Pottier, 2002).

By any account, under Kagame³'s government, Rwanda has accomplished a remarkable turnaround in almost every sector of society. Foreign capital is pouring into Kigali and has transformed it into a modern capital. Transports and infrastructure, especially roads, have been greatly improved, and entire quarters have been fully rebuilt.

What is more, much has been achieved in the fight against AIDS, with the number of children infected through their mothers down from 11.4% (2005) to 4.1% (2009). Remarkably, between the years 2000 and 2008, the maternal mortality rate has fallen from 1,071 per 100,000 to 750 (NISR, 2011). Also, the level of primary health care provided to the citizens by the Rwandan State is constantly improving (Nyange, 2010).

1 National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) (2008). *Recensement Des Rescapes du Génocide de 1994*. Available at: <http://statistics.gov.rw/images/PDF/recencement%20FARG.pdf> - Accessed: 03/09/2013

2 The RPF was established in Uganda by Tutsis in exile whose intent was to return to Rwanda through armed resistance. In October 1990, the RPF launched a war from Uganda that lasted for about three years. Peace agreements (the so called *Arusha Accords*) followed but did not avoid the outbreak of the genocide

3 Paul Kagame led the RPF troops in their fight against the incumbent government during the genocide. He was then Vice-President and Minister of Defence from 1994 to 2000, and was eventually elected as Rwandan president in 2000

Even more noteworthy are the data pertaining to the Rwandan education system since the aftermath of the genocide, with the most impressive aspect of the system's recovery being *'the rapid growth of enrolments'* (World Bank, 2003, p.23). For instance, the number of pupils in primary education has risen from 942,729 in 1994 to 2,019,991 in 2006 (MINEDUC, 2007). Overall, the primary school net enrolment ratio (NER) is 95% and the gross enrolment ratio (GER) is 145%⁴ (MINEDUC, 2007). These data clearly highlight how much has been done to increase accessibility to primary education in the country, in line with the second Millennium Development Goal⁵ (to achieve "Universal Primary Education" by 2015) (UN MDG, 2012).

However, as journalist Yoletta Nyange⁶ (2010) points out, some questions remain regarding the extent to which the Rwandan population have benefited from the recent national economic growth. More specifically, she asks;

*'What does the economy stand for when 50% of the children are malnourished? Who does the annual economic growth of 8.3% and \$500m of foreign investment benefit when 60% of the country lives below the poverty level on just \$0.43 daily?'*⁷

Widows feature prominently amongst those who were most affected by the genocide and who have not benefited from the country's recent economic growth.

During the genocide, (younger) males were the main target of the violence, especially at the earliest and most virulent stages. More specifically, as Adam Jones (2002) argues in his paper *Gender and Genocide in Rwanda*, there was a *'selective and gender-selective targeting of males, notably those with wealth and education'* (p.72). The main outcome of such an offensive was a massive gender imbalance among those Rwandans who survived the genocide and its attendant economic and social implications.

In the aftermath of the genocide, widows often found themselves displaced or living as refugees. Many of them became heads of household and breadwinners, with responsibility for their own children, as well as those of others⁸. What is more, even though rural women had for a long time cultivated food and cash crops alongside their husbands, in post-genocide Rwanda, these women also had to become responsible for paying rent, managing household finances, and seeking employment, activities that were previously the mainstay of Rwandan men (Newbury and Baldwin, 2000a).

Despite such circumstances affecting a significant portion of the female population in the country, in recent years, Rwanda has often been praised for becoming the nation with the largest female parliamentary representation in the world. At present time, women occupy

4 This is because in Rwanda, a large proportion of the adult population – that had not previously had access to any form of education – is currently in education

5 Eight International development goals were established following the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, and they originated from the Millennium Declaration that was adopted during the Summit

6 Yoletta Nyange is a Rwandan-born freelance journalist who has lived, amongst others, in Belgium and the UK

7 Yoletta Nyange (18/08/2010). 'What Kagame has cost us', in *The Guardian*. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/aug/18/rwanda-elections-kagame-deliver?INTCMP=SRCH> – Accessed: 10/09/2013

8 It is estimated that after the genocide, between 400,000 and 500,000 children were fostered or adopted by families and women headed households (Izabiliza, 2005, p.1)

63.75% of seats in the parliament⁹, and several female parliamentarians are in important and influential positions within the government.

However, there is evidence that increased female representation in Rwandan parliament has not led to a general improvement in the living conditions of Rwandan women (Reyntjens, 2010; Burnet, 2008, 2011; Devlin and Elgie, 2008). What is more, various authors (namely, Newbury and Baldwin, 2000b; Women for Women International, 2004; Burnet, 2011) note that over the last decade, a number of leaders of women's civil society organizations have given up their roles to become parliamentarians. As a consequence, many organizations that have operated in the country for decades – primarily advocating for women's rights – have been significantly weakened.

The present research aims to add to knowledge of measures and interventions that may promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Rwanda, and stems from two related considerations:

First, the following research is conscious that nearly twenty years on, the widows of the genocide remain one of the most vulnerable groups in Rwandan society. Thus far, the interventions promoted by Kagame's government have failed to recognize the specific needs of women who lost their husbands and relatives in the genocide.

The main measure promoted by the Rwandan government to support the survivors of the genocide was the establishment of an Assistance Fund for Genocide Survivors (FARG) [Fonds d'Assistance aux Rescapés du Génocide]. Created in 1998 and conceived as a form of full reparation for the genocide victims, '*FARG measures have taken the form of social service packages in several domains, including education, health, housing and income generation*' (Rombouts, 2006, p.200). Rombouts (2006) highlights how the education programme has undoubtedly been the most important programme of the FARG. Thanks to it, thousands of children in secondary schools and universities have had their school fees – often too expensive for their families – entirely covered (p.223).

However, FARG interventions fail to provide widows with the skills that could help them become economically self-reliant. More specifically, as Rombouts (2006) argues;

'it is regrettable that the FARG education program does not provide training or education of adult women, even though increasing the professional skills of women in certain areas (for example, in the field of off-farm activities) could clearly strengthen their economic position. Including this type of training in the FARG educational program would make it more sensitive to the needs of many adult women – who are too old to go to secondary school – and widows' (p.223-224).

The above remarks preface to the research's second consideration, that is, the need for programmes targeting the most vulnerable individuals in Rwandan society – such as the widows of the genocide – to adopt an approach that not only provides financial reparation to victims¹⁰, but also teaches them the skills required to become self-sufficient.

The goal of delivering a long-term sustainable source of income for vulnerable genocide survivors represents a significant challenge that has so far proved difficult to meet both for

9 Source: IPU PARLINE database on national parliaments. Results of Rwanda parliamentary elections 2013.

Available at: http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2265_E.htm - Accessed: 17/09/2013

10 Widows of the genocide currently receive from the government the equivalent of £13.5 per month

the Rwandan government, and for the various organisations working with survivors in Rwanda. In response to this gap in provision, AVEGA, along with its partner *Survivors Fund* (SURF)¹¹, has developed a curriculum to train widows in income-generating activities. The expected outcome of the training is for widows to improve their standard of living, as well as quality of life for themselves and their dependents.

AVEGA Agahozo was founded by a group of widows in the immediate aftermath of the genocide and focuses on the specific issues that widows of the genocide face. At the organization's incipience, the daily survival of women was at the core of its actions, while over the years, AVEGA has become more involved with other issues such as HIV and trauma.

The following research is based on a series of interviews carried out in September 2013 with widows who have been trained within the SIP programme, their dependents, as well as some AVEGA staff. The findings address the impact that the IGA training has had on the lives of these widows and their children.

The *capability approach* will be used to examine the effectiveness of the programme with regard to improving the well-being of its various participants. Pioneered by economist Amartya Sen (Sen, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1993, 1999), the capability approach can be considered as '*a broad normative framework for the evaluation of individual well-being and social arrangements, the design of policies and proposals about social change in society*' (Robeyns, 2005, p.93).

The capability approach will be used to establish the extent to which the IGA training programme assists Rwandan widowed women survivors in expanding their capabilities and empowering them.

The following questions will guide the research:

- How does AVEGA's IGA training programme impact upon women's capabilities?
- What are the strengths and limitations of the programme?
- To what extent and in which ways does AVEGA's IGA training programme, in line with the MDG3, '*Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women*' in Rwanda?

To preface the research to follow, I will provide background information taken from the existing literature on the genocide and its consequences on Rwandan women. In addition, details of interventions promoted by the Rwandan government to address survivors' needs in post-genocide Rwanda will be outlined.

¹¹ SURF is an international charity with the specific remit to assist survivors of the Rwandan genocide, and has offices in London and Kigali

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 The genocide

April, 6th, 1994 - 8.30 pm Kigali time: Rwanda's presidential jet is shot down on its approach to Kigali airport, killing the Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana, the Burundian president Cyprien Ntaryamira, as well as several members of Habyarimana's government. The crash is immediately blamed on the RPF and within an hour, Hutu militia set up hundreds of roadblocks around Kigali to stop Tutsis and moderate Hutus from escaping. Hours later, assassinations of political figures that did not fully support Habyarimana's dictatorship begin. All Tutsis in Rwanda are accused of serving as an RPF fifth column and consequently, they become targets of the violence. Over one hundred days, more than half a million Tutsis and 10,000 moderate Hutus are killed throughout the country. '*It was the twentieth century's fastest genocide*' (Straus, 2008, p 41). While the killings went on, the international community did little to intervene (Barnett, 2002; Des Forges, 1999, Pottier, 2002). It was only at the end of July, with the military victory of the RPF, that the genocide was brought to an end.

After the genocide, 800,000 former Rwandan exiles¹² returned to Rwanda from neighbouring Burundi, Uganda, Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo), and Tanzania. Meanwhile, about 2,000,000 refugees, mostly Hutu, who had fled the country during or after the genocide, remained in refugee camps in Zaire, Tanzania and Burundi for almost two years. It was only when the RPA, the military wing of the RPF, moved to close the numerous refugee camps in Zaire by force (causing the deaths of thousands who were either killed, or died of hunger and disease), that hundreds of thousands of refugees returned to Rwanda.

Such a massive influx of people over a very short period of time placed a significant strain on Rwandan society. As Newbury and Baldwin (2000a) point out, '*by the end of the 1990s, post-genocide Rwanda contained a very heterogeneous mix of people, each with its own experiences of violence and sorrow, with all trying to rebuild their lives in a time of uncertainty and, for most, desperate poverty*' (p.2).

A substantial amount of literature has been written and published in relation to the Rwandan genocide¹³. Factors such as the causes behind it, the dynamics of its implementation, the responsibility that the Hutu leaders had in the spreading of the violence and the negligence on the part of Western countries, have been extensively investigated. Several authors (Fusaschi, 2009; Rurangwa, 2009; Barnett, 2002) have reported the experiences of the survivors, and of the local soldiers and of the international peacekeepers who witnessed the genocide. Some (Hatzfeld, 2008; Clark and Kaufman, 2008; Larson, 2009) have also analysed how the reconciliation of survivors and *génocidaires*¹⁴ has been approached and managed. In doing so, these authors had to take into account problems such as the high number of orphans (as a result of the violence), lack of shelter, the high percentage of the population who are HIV-positive and poor living conditions, all of which continue to affect the lives of the majority of survivors.

12 Those that had left Rwanda after the anti-Tutsi violence of 1959 and 1973

13 Jean-Pierre Chrétien in his *Dossier Bibliographique: le Génocide Rwandais* (1997) reports that at least fifty volumes regarding Rwanda have been written between 1994 and 1997

14 The term *génocidaires* refers to those who were guilty of the mass killings during the Rwandan genocide

The present research will analyse the impact of one of the several programmes that attempt to reintegrate the (widowed) survivors of the genocide into broader Rwandan society. Since the focus of the research will be on widows, the following section will provide the reader with information regarding the particular impact that the genocide had on women in Rwanda.

1.2 Sexual Violence during the Genocide

While the Rwandan genocide is often associated with the image of machetes which were widely used to kill the Tutsis through slaughtering, it must be acknowledged that sexual violence was another abhorrent theme of the genocide. *'Rwandan women were subjected to sexual violence on a massive scale [...] Administrative, military and political leaders at the national and local levels, as well as heads of militia, directed or encouraged both the killings and sexual violence to further their political goal: the destruction of the Tutsi as a group'* (Human Rights Watch, 1996, p.15-16). Many women were killed immediately after being raped, whilst others were allowed to live so that they would die of sadness, or having contracted HIV. Forced marriages were also common, whereby women became sexual slaves. For many, it was the only way to spare their own lives. In many cases, such a form of sexual slavery lasted for the entire duration of the genocide, and in some cases even longer (Human Rights Watch, 1996, p.56).

It is estimated that about 250,000 Rwandan women were victims of some form of sexual violence during the genocide¹⁵. Many of them also contracted with HIV/AIDS (Richter-Lyonette, 1997). However, in Rwanda, *'because the stigma of rape is enormous, women who have been violated often hesitate to talk about it'* (Newbury and Baldwin, 2000a, p.5). Consequently, many HIV-positive women genocide survivors continue resist accessing treatment in public health clinics, as they have concerns about the quality and confidentiality of the services, and fear that they would be further stigmatised, possibly by clinic staff with associations to genocide perpetrators. Over the years, AVEGA and its partners have been working to address the reluctance of HIV+ women survivors to access treatment in public health facilities.

1.3 Economic and Social Consequences of the Genocide on Rwandan Women

The genocide had devastating effects on a vast segment of the Rwandan female population, not only on those women who were victims of sexual violence. To begin with, as a consequence of the events that took place in 1994, social relations and networks in Rwanda were shattered, diminishing most people's *social capital*. In fact, in a country where *'your neighbour is highly important'*, and where *'you can fall out with your neighbours but you cannot live without them'* (Rurangwa, 2009, p.20), hundreds of thousands of Tutsis were killed by their own Hutu neighbours. A legacy of fear, anger and insecurity was left after the end of the conflict. Consequently, many women felt isolated and abandoned, struggling to trust anyone apart from members of their immediate families.

15 Source: United Nations, *Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Rwanda submitted by Mr René Degni-Segui, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights*, under paragraph 20 of the resolution S-3/1 of 25 May 1994, E/CN.4/1996/68, January 29, 1996. Available at <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/commission/country52/68-rwa.htm> - Accessed: 25/09/2013

The genocide also caused dramatic demographic changes in Rwanda. For instance, a socio-demographic survey conducted in 1996¹⁶ showed that 54% of the population was female (amongst Tutsi survivors, there were 169,304 women and only 113,500 men), and that about 34% of households in the country were headed by women (in the case of survivors, 41,731 were headed by women, whereas only 34,568 by men)¹⁷. Of these, it is estimated that about 60% were headed by widows (République du Rwanda, 1998, p.41). Due to the patriarchal nature of Rwandan society (in which women are traditionally regarded as dependents of their various male relatives), women who are widowed, separated or divorced tend to remain single, whereas widowed, separated and divorced men often remarry (Human Rights Watch, 1996, p.19).

Newbury and Baldwin (2000a) also point out that due to the loss of their husbands, many women in post-conflict Rwanda had to assume responsibility for activities that were usually carried out by men, such as repairing the house, caring for cattle, managing household finances (p.6). What is more, as tens of thousands of children lost one or both parents during the genocide, numerous women chose to care for children other than their own, e.g. children of relatives and friends or unknown children needing help.

After the genocide and war, the situation for survivors in general, and for widows in particular, was damaging both from a social and from an economic point of view. The next section will analyse the main interventions promoted by the Rwandan government to address the various issues that have affected women in Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide.

1.4 An analysis of gender-focused programmes in post-genocide Rwanda

It can be difficult to evaluate how post-conflict countries design and implement their reconstruction programmes. A considerable variety of social, political and economic factors have to be taken into account when attempting to establish the effectiveness of such programmes. Findings can therefore be ambiguous, and they often allow room for radically different interpretations.

The present research will focus specifically on the gender dimensions of post-conflict development in Rwanda, drawing on insights from Elaine Zuckerman and Maria Greenberg's 2010 article *The gender dimensions of post-conflict reconstruction: An analytical framework for policy-makers*. The article, which has a rights-based foundation, argues that three kinds of rights must be guaranteed to women in the post-conflict period: *'the right to participate meaningfully in policy making and resource allocation; the right to benefit equally from public and private resources and services; and the right to build a gender-equitable society for lasting peace and prosperity'* (p.70). As we shall see in the following paragraphs, the Rwandan government has so far only partially guaranteed such rights, therefore leaving women (especially widows) in a vulnerable position.

16 Source: République du Rwanda (1998). *Enquête Sociodémographique 1996. Rapport Final*. Kigali, Rwanda: Ministère des Finances et de la Planification Economique, Office National de la Population, et Fonds des Nations Unis pour la Population. Available at: <http://snap3.uas.mx/RECURSO1/unfpa/data/docs/unpf0015.pdf>. Accessed: 26/09/2013

17 The data referring to survivors were taken from: MINALOC (1998). *Recensement des rescapés les plus nécessaires*. Kigali, MINALOC. The document is available only in Kinyarwanda

Zuckerman and Greenberg (2010) also affirm that both WID (Women in Development) and gender-mainstreaming approaches are required to ensure that reconstruction is successful (not only from a gender perspective). More specifically, WID activities – which look at how to better integrate women into existing development initiatives – are necessary in those situations in which women lack resources, capacity, or knowledge of their rights. However, because *'questions of exploitation, subordination, and social division are generally not considered in this framework'* (Unterhalter, 2005, p.18), the two authors affirm that there exists also the need to pay attention to gender and to *'the gendered roles and responsibilities of women and men'* (p.71) in society, as well as to the ways in which they relate to one another. Finally, they argue, gender should be integrated into policy making through the so-called *gender-mainstreaming (ibid.)*.

The ensuing research will use these three dimensions of development (*women-focused activities; gender-aware programming; transforming gender roles*) to guide our analysis of post-genocide Rwandan reconstruction programmes from a gender perspective. These dimensions will also guide the analysis of the impact of AVEGA's IGA training programme.

1.4.1 Dimension 1: women-focused activities

Zuckerman and Greenberg (2010) suggest three sets of rights that can best be understood using a WID approach. In the authors' view, by implementing activities that focus on women as a specific group, post-conflict societies can redress *'gender disparities in women's access to essential services and resources'* (p.71).

1.4.1.1 Political rights and participation

First, post-conflict governments should focus on women's *'political rights and participation'* (*ibid.*). This is because post-conflict countries often have larger female than male populations (as in the case of Rwanda) and therefore, they present *'opportunities for women to fill positions that were previously held by men'* (*ibid.*).

Traditionally, the Rwandan society has been characterized by a patriarchal social structure that promulgates unequal power relations between women and men, girls and boys. For decades, a Rwandan woman's role in society was centred exclusively on her status as a wife and mother. Women were *'expected to be managed and protected by their fathers, their husbands and their male children'* (Human Rights Watch, 1996, p.19). Consequently, they did not have access to land and credit and required their husbands' consent even to *'engage in commerce, register a business, buy land, act as a witness, or undertake court action...In principle, unmarried women had full legal status under Rwandan law; however, socially they were wards of their fathers and brothers'* (Jefremovas, 2002, p.98-99).

Furthermore, prior to the genocide, women's involvement in politics and decision-making in Rwanda was almost non-existent, despite the fact that in pre-colonial Rwanda, women had significant political influence (Longman, 2006, p.134). However, colonial laws and policies, together with the introduction of Christianity, undermined Rwandan women's economic and political opportunities. For women, their circumstances did not improve even after Rwanda gained independence in 1962, nor during the twenty years of Habyarimana's regime, as he did nothing to increase women's social, economic and political power. By 1985, women

constituted only 12% of parliamentarians and 2% in the diplomatic service (Women for Women International, 2004, p.8).

However, in recent years, Rwanda has often been praised for being the country with the largest female parliamentary representation in the world. At the 2003 Parliamentary Elections, 48.8% of seats were won by women¹⁸ while 5 years later, Rwanda became the first and only country in the world with a majority-female national legislative body¹⁹.

Additionally, several women were given positions within the RPF ranks and quota systems were established to promote women's representation at all levels of governance. More specifically, since 2001, one seat is reserved for a women's representative at each level of local administration, and women's councils exist at every level of government (Powley, 2003). Also, the new constitution, adopted in 2003, reserves 30% of seats in the lower house of parliament for women that occupy now important and influential positions within the government.

Burnet (2011) reports that several RPF leaders have voiced recognition of gender equality in the hopes of improving society (p.313). The Rwandan government appears to view an increase in women's representation in Rwandan politics as sufficient to promote changes in gender relations in the country. Gender equality, in line with a WID approach, is understood merely in terms of equal numbers of resources, e.g. the number of female parliamentarians in the country. However, gender equality is a complicated concept. WID programmes and activities alone (such as the establishment of quotas), as Unterhalter (2005) highlights, are unsuccessful in effectively '*challenging the multiple sources of women's subordination*' (p.17), as they do not take into consideration '*questions of exploitation [...] and social division*' (p.18).

In view of this, several authors (Longman, 2006; Reyntjens, 2010; Burnet, 2008, 2011; Devlin and Elgie, 2008) have investigated whether the increased women's representation in Rwandan parliament has led to any substantive changes in policy outputs as well as in public attitudes towards women in politics and women in general. This demands an analysis of the specific nature of the current Rwandan state.

Longman (2006) and Reyntjens (2010) both highlight how, despite regular elections in the country, the RPF regime has become increasingly authoritarian. The '*orchestrated nature of elections is an open secret in Rwanda today*' (Burnet 2008, p.366) and RPF officials regularly inform the population of the "correct" candidate for whom to vote (Reyntjens 2010). The RPF is also understood to maintain '*tight reins on the government and private media by silencing dissenting voices systematically, by suppressing independent civil society organizations, and by destroying potential opposition parties*' (Burnet, 2011, p.309).

Timothy Longman (2006) reveals that '*the hope that the increase in women's participation in parliament after the 2003 elections would create a more democratic parliament has been swiftly shattered, as the new post-transition parliament has continued to allow itself to be used as a tool of intimidation*' (p.148). Under such circumstances, women parliamentarians appear to have the opportunity to promote legislation that serves women's interests only

18 Source: IPU PARLINE database on national parliaments. Results of Rwanda parliamentary elections 2003. Available at: http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2265_03.htm Accessed: 15/10/2013

19 Source: UNIFEM (22/09/2008). 'Rwandan Women Secure 56% of Parliamentary Seats in Historic Election Result'. Available at: http://www.unifem.org/news_events/story_detail882c.html Accessed: 16/10/2013

when such legislation *'is consistent with the agenda of the RPF leadership'* (*ibid.*, p.149). Burnet (2008) goes further, asserting that (male) political leaders in Rwanda may be using female-friendly policies to achieve their own ends as well as to maintain a positive reception from the international community.

Devlin and Elgie (2008), who pose the specific question of whether women can really influence policy outcomes in Rwanda, notice that Rwandan female parliamentarians managed to add new issues to the policy agenda, such as property rights and HIV/AIDS. However, they also affirm that there is *'little evidence so far to suggest that increased women's representation has altered policy outcomes to any significant degree'* (p.241). The authors also point out that many of the female parliamentarians that they interviewed for their research affirmed that as parliamentarians, they have less time to pursue grassroots politics (that directly affect Rwandan women), since their priority has become *'the mission of parliament, the grand parliamentary mission'* (p.247).

The following sections will analyse more in detail some of the major pieces of legislation affecting women that have been approved in recent years by the Rwandan government. The analysis will seek to establish the extent to which these reforms, along with women's increased presence in the parliament, have had any positive impact on Rwandan (widowed) women.

1.4.1.2 Property rights

Zuckerman and Greenberg (2010) argue that post-conflict reconstruction *'often involves resolving disputes over property ownership'* (p.72) and that there exists the need for governments not only to guarantee women's rights to own property *de jure*, but also to ensure that they are able to enjoy such rights *de facto*.

As Newbury and Baldwin (2000a) highlighted, in the aftermath of the genocide, women were often refused access to the land that they had live and worked on prior to 1994 (p.17). This was because, according to customary legal practices in Rwanda, girls could not inherit land from their fathers. Instead, a girl's husband was expected to provide the land from which to grow the food to feed the whole family. Then, *'when a husband died, his widow was supposed to be allowed to remain on the husband's land, holding it in trust for her male children. [...] If there were no children, a widow's staying on her husband's land depended on the goodwill of her late husband's kin'* (Newbury and Baldwin, 2000a, p.17).

In the immediate aftermath of the genocide, at a time when hundreds of thousands of Tutsi exiles and as many refugees from camps in neighbouring countries returned *en masse* to Rwanda, land access became a problematic and potentially explosive issue for the entire Rwandan population. As a consequence of such a situation, thousands of widows and women without partners found themselves unable to have adequate access to land.

Women's legal status with regard to property rights improved following 1999, when the so-called 'Inheritance Law' (Government of Rwanda, 1999) was approved by the Rwandan parliament. The Inheritance Law was created as *'an amendment to the civil code which set up three matrimonial property regimes and made it legal for women to inherit property'* (Burnet, 2008, p.376). The Law not only gave girls equal rights with boys in matters of inheritance, but also gave women *'full legal rights to enter into contracts, seek paid employment, own*

property in their names and separately from their husbands, and open bank accounts without the authorization of their husbands or fathers' (ibid.).

Moreover, in 2005, the Rwandan government approved a new Organic Land Law, which explicitly prohibits '*any discrimination either based on sex or origin in matters relating to ownership or possession of rights over the land*' (Government of Rwanda, 2005, Art.4). The law is clearly designed to protect women and female orphans from eviction from their husbands or parents' land and, along with the Inheritance Law, represents a significant piece of legislation that aims at extending women's rights in Rwandan society.

Nonetheless, a number of issues related with women's access to land remain. To begin with, as Rombouts (2006) points out, both the Inheritance Law and the Land Law can only be applied to couples who are (or were, before the genocide) legally married, a circumstance that does not apply to a significant amount of couples, especially in rural areas. Hence, many widows of the genocide never actually repossessed the land that belonged to their partners before the genocide.

Moreover, given the scarcity of land, and considering that very small land plots are not allowed to be further subdivided, when (male and female) inheritors have to agree upon sale or common exploitation of the plot, '*male dominance in society and in the community may still play an important role, despite all formal initiatives for gender equality*' (Rombouts, 2006, p.205). Consequently, thousands of women still find themselves excluded from the use of land that they are legally entitled to access.

Burnet (2008) also highlights how, despite the fact that '*women, and female-headed households in particular, are among the people most vulnerable to losing access to land*' (p.379), the Rwandan Ministry of Gender and Women in Development, women parliamentarians and the most prominent women's NGOs in the country, all refuse to define land as a women's issue and argue instead that '*land is an issue for all Rwandans, not just women*' (ibid., p.380). By doing so, they fail to acknowledge the specific challenges that Rwandan women have to face when they attempt to repossess their land.

Finally, Burnet (2011) and Women for Women International (2004) both highlight that since the introduction of the Inheritance Law, there has been increased friction between women and their brothers. It has also been especially difficult to implement land legislation in the country's rural areas, where men remain firmly opposed to the legislation.

In short, despite the efforts of the Rwandan government to issue legislation aimed at guaranteeing women's right to own property, it remains difficult to ensure that (vulnerable) women are able to claim *de facto* access to land. Access to land is crucial for widows of the genocide, as well as for the majority of Rwandan women, because their livelihoods depend largely on the production of food crops. Hence, there is a need for the Rwandan government to buttress existing laws on access to land at the grassroots level, and therefore grant widows the opportunity to overcome social and economic disadvantage.

1.4.1.3 The right to freedom from violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains widespread across the country, and presents another challenge that Rwandan women still have to face in their attempts to achieve gender equality.

Zuckerman and Greenberg (2010) argue that post-conflict societies have to ensure '*the right to freedom from violence*' for women (p.72). In their view, protecting women from GBV can contribute to restoring trust in communities and wider society, thus promoting successful development. As it was reported above, during the Rwandan genocide, sexual violence against women was widespread, and used as a tool to destroy the entire Tutsi community (Rombouts, 2006). In post-genocide Rwanda, sexual violence remains prevalent and its victims continue to find it difficult to speak out '*because of the shame, guilt and social barriers they experience and encounter*' (*ibid.*, p.206). That there remains a high incidence of domestic violence and the fact that the most affected by community violence – whether verbal, psychological or physical – are educated, literate and employed women, suggests that violence is frequently used as a tool to oppose women's emancipation (International Red Cross, 2004).

In order to address the need for Rwandan women to be protected from GBV, in 2008, the Rwandan parliament passed the *Law on the Prevention, Protection and Punishment of Any Gender-Based Violence* (Republic of Rwanda, 2008). As Devlin and Elgie (2008) report, '*amongst other things, the law makes polygamy illegal and provides a legal definition of rape of an adult woman. It also sets out punishments of offenders*' (p.250). The Law was undoubtedly an important victory for Rwandan women. By contrast, just one year later, the same Rwandan parliament (including its female component) approved a new labour code²⁰ that '*reduced paid maternity leave from eight to two weeks and increased the work week from five to six days and from 40 to 45 hours*' (Burnet, 2011, p.314). Such a decision had a very negative impact on the majority of women, who strive to reconcile their working lives with their family lives.

Many of the women interviewed by Women for Women International (2004) for their research, pointed out other shortcomings of the GBV law, such as the fact that it remains difficult for women to accuse men (in many cases, their partners and husbands) of sexual violence as this would cause concern regarding their families' reputation. What is more, in a country where the 90% of the population is still rural, women continue to be considered as inferior and subordinate to their husbands, polygamy is often tolerated and women are disinherited and abused despite recent family laws (pp.23-27).

In sum, too often family violence is considered to be a private matter which should be settled within the family. So far, the GBV legislation passed in 2008 by the Rwandan parliament has been unsuccessful in generating a change in the attitudes of the majority of the male population in the country, thus failing to ensure adequate protection from GBV for Rwandan women.

1.4.1.4 An appraisal of Women-focused activities in Rwanda

As detailed across the previous sections, it appears evident that despite a significant increase in female representation in Rwandan politics, and the creation of several laws increasing women's rights, there remains a significant amount of work to be done to achieve gender equality in Rwanda.

²⁰ Republic of Rwanda (2009b). "Law No 13/2009 of 27 May 2009 Regulating Labour in Rwanda." Official Gazette of the Republic of Rwanda. Special issue, May 27, 2009

First, as Zuckerman and Greenberg (2010) point out, *'beyond funding, women-focused activities must address other challenges, such as the need to ensure that women political representatives are genuine advocates of gender equality – not merely well-connected, compliant politicians'* (p.73). In a country like Rwanda where *'the restrictions on the freedom of expression and of the media are serious impediments to democratic rights and practices in general'* (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2009, p. 56), *'having more women in government does not necessarily lead to greater democracy or a more democratic government'* (Burnet, 2011, p.330). As it was highlighted in the previous paragraphs, women parliamentarians had a chance to promote women-friendly policies only because such policies did not interfere with the RPF's agenda for the country.

Furthermore, Zuckerman and Greenberg (2010) also argue that *'gender-equitable laws and policies require a critical mass of capable women who argue articulately and garner collegial support'*, and that the challenge for such women is *'to engage all stakeholders, including older male leaders and younger men, to accept gender equality'* (p.73). In Rwanda, a significant portion of the male population still refuses to accept women's demands for equality and increased rights. Examples of this are the fact that brothers often consider the extension of inheritance rights to their female siblings as unfair, and that several men withdraw from politics because they do not want to deal with a larger number of female representatives.

Nevertheless, and this is true especially for women living in non-rural areas, some positive changes have already taken place in Rwanda. Women are now allowed to speak and be heard in public forums; they can finally engage in commercial activities; and have greater access to education (more about this will be addressed in the following sections). It may take a significant amount of time for Rwandan men to fully accept the transformations in gender roles that are already taking place in the country, but there is certainly evidence that *'even when implemented as top-down policies put in place by an authoritarian regime, gender quotas and equality policies more broadly can lead to significant cultural changes in attitudes toward, and perceptions of, women and their competence'* (Burnet, 2011, p.330).

1.4.2 Dimension 2: gender-aware programming

Having completed the analysis of women-focused activities whose aim is to give (Rwandan) women the right to participate meaningfully in resource allocation and policy-making, the research will now turn to another gender dimension of post-conflict reconstruction in Rwanda: the promotion of *'gender-aware programming'* (Zuckerman and Greenberg, 2010, p.70). Zuckerman and Greenberg (2010) use the term gender-aware programming to describe what others call *gender-mainstreaming*, that is, *'identifying and addressing gender issues that may obstruct or improve development programmes and projects'* (p.73). The two authors argue that in order to be successful, post-conflict reconstruction programmes need to address unequal gender relations and power dynamics since *'gender-related impediments diminish the effectiveness of economic and governance programmes'* (p.70).

1.4.2.1 Gender-mainstreaming in Rwanda

The RPF has endorsed gender-aware programming since its rise to power. For instance, this is how Rwandan president Paul Kagame spoke during the opening of a gender-training workshop for Rwandan parliamentarians in 1999:

“The abrupt shift to monetary economy, formal education and modern technology played a key role in restructuring gender relations to the disadvantage of women. These imbalances are not only an obstacle to the country’s development but constitute a form of social injustice. [...] My understanding of gender is that it is an issue of good governance, good economic management and respect”²¹.

Kagame’s words show a strong commitment of the Rwandan government towards the promotion of gender-mainstreaming in Rwanda. Such commitment was made even more evident by the creation of the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Affairs (MIGEFASO) – renamed the Ministry of Gender and Women in Development in 1999 – whose central mandates have been *'to integrate gender analytical frameworks into all policies and legislations, to reinforce knowledge of gender analytical matrices within state structures [...] via training and education, and to promote gender equity'* (Burnet, 2008, p.367).

Further, in 1998, *women’s councils* were created in every commune in the country, with the specific mission to promote women’s interests in development and advise local governance structure on specific women’s issues. However, as Burnet (2008) highlights, *'these structures existed in name only, or simply served as a channel to disseminate government directives from the top to the bottom'* (p.368). Even after the creation, in 1999, of women’s development funds to be distributed as loans to finance income-generating projects, there was evidence that only few (elite) women were aware of the existence of such funds, whereas the majority of rural women in the country did not know what the mission of *women’s councils* was, nor how to access the development funds (*ibid.*).

Over the last decade, the Rwandan government has also created, amongst others, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), whose aim is that of developing a national gender policy as well as strategies for its implementation; the Gender Monitoring Office (GMO), which is responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of progress in the implementation of the national gender policy; and the Forum for Rwandan Women Parliamentarians (FFRP), which is expected to lobby and advocate for women’s active participation in decision-making and gender equality on ministries and institutions (GMO, 2010).

Gender features both in the government’s *Vision 2020* (a long-term development plan aimed at transforming the Rwandan economy from one that is dominated by subsistence agriculture to a knowledge-based economy), as well as in its *Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy* (EDPRS) (Republic of Rwanda, 2013; MINECOFIN, 2009). As the GMO (2010) affirms;

'Gender dimension should be mainstreamed in all development sectors as highlighted in EDPRS. The latter has been put in place to serve as Strategy of achieving equity of voice,

21 Source: Izabiliza, J. (2005). *The role of women in reconstruction: experience of Rwanda*. Available at: <http://portal.unesco.org/shs/fr/files/9184/11387162411Presentation - Jeanne Izabiliza.pdf/Presentation+Jeanne+Izabiliza.pdf> – Accessed: 20/10/2013

participation, and accessibility to services in every sector. The strategy is translated into actions through three key flagship programmes including “economic empowerment, good governance, justice and social welfare”. These key programmes have great potential to impact on women and men differently, and gender dimension has great potential for impacting the outcomes of the programmes since they address issues that affect gender relations in Rwandan society' (p.5).

1.4.2.2 Complexity of defining gender-mainstreaming

In reviewing the Rwandan government’s performance in promoting gender-aware programming, it must be acknowledged that the concept of gender-mainstreaming itself remains quite vague and that it is often difficult to translate it into concrete actions, especially at the lower levels. In fact, *'underlying the variety of definitions of gender-mainstreaming are different models of gender equality'* (Walby, 2005, p.325). Such models can be primarily distinguished between those that are based on *sameness* (meant as equal opportunities and treatment for men and women); and those which focus instead on *difference* (and argue that existing separate gender standards and norms have to be retained and valued equally) (*ibid.*). With regard to the former, Walby (2005) points out that *'traditional equal opportunity policies are inherently limited because they mean that women can only gain equality with men if they are able to perform to the standards set by men'* (p.326). To the contrary, models based on difference accept and value the differences existing between men and women – as well as the diverse roles they play in society – since such differences do not necessarily represent an obstacle to equality (*ibid.*).

In line with such a view, the Council of Europe (1998) affirms that *'gender equality is not synonymous with sameness'* (p.8) and that *'men, their lifestyle and conditions'* cannot be established as the norm (*ibid.*). It follows that the most important targets for gender quality are *'equal participation of women and men in political and public life'*, *'the individual's economic independence'* as well as *'education'* (p.9).

1.4.2.3 Targeting gender equality in Rwanda

Regrettably, as highlighted previously, in Rwanda, women continue to have only limited influence on politics. Similarly, a number of social and institutional barriers to girls’ attendance in schools and universities remain, all of which eventually impair their educational performance. Huggins and Randell (2007, pp.16-18) list such barriers as the following:

- *'Poverty'*, which makes it difficult for poor families to afford uniforms, books and school materials for their children. Consequently, when families can afford to educate only a few of their children, boys are often chosen over girls;
- *'The fact that girls and women have historically been marginalized from the education system'*, and that their education mainly focused on developing skills – such as home economics and general hygiene – that merely reinforced their (subordinated) roles in society;
- *'Traditional gender roles'*, which force girls to be responsible for household tasks – such as caring for other siblings or fetching water – preventing them from attending school;
- *'Gender-biased curriculum and teaching methods'* since the entire school environment

- including curriculum and assessment methods – is tailored to male students;
- *'Lack of facilities'*, as often there are not separate and adequate sanitary and dormitory facilities for boys and girls;
- *'Discrimination in public institutions'* that tend to grant boys entrance to public universities in higher numbers than girls;
- *'Gender-based violence in schools'*; as a consequence of which, many girls feel afraid to attend school, instead preferring to abandon their studies.

In order to deal with the above issues, Kagame's government pledged to mainstream gender concerns at each level of education policy. Therefore, specific activities aimed at promoting gender equality in education as well as at increasing girls' school completion rates were introduced in Rwanda's 2002 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), as well as in its 2006 Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP). Such activities include raising awareness on the importance of educating girls; granting scholarships to disadvantaged girl students; increasing the number of female teachers in schools as well as planning specific activities to increase the participation of girls in technology and science courses (MINEDUC, 2006; MINECOFIN, 2002). Nevertheless, Huggins and Randell (2007) maintain that the Rwandan government and its Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) have so far not delivered on the promise to identify and remove all the existing barriers to girls' access to education.

Looking at the effectiveness of gender-mainstreaming policies in education, Unterhalter and North (2010) point out that governments often *'tend to privilege a meaning of gender-mainstreaming concerned with a particular set of techniques to increase gender parity in enrolments or the numbers of women teachers'* (p.397). Advancing the education of girls is understood as a feature of 'what works' in terms of human capital development and social stability in developing countries. Therefore, it is assumed that increasing the number of girls in schools will automatically lead to the achievement of gender equality in education, and in turn, to a more prosperous society. However – the two authors argue – *'stress on 'what works' to achieve limited goals in gender equality stands in contrast to discussions about gender equality, and hence gender-mainstreaming, as something which 'matters' because it expresses particularly important social values'* (*ibid.*).

While Rwanda has undoubtedly made enormous strides forward in improving children's access to education at all levels, it remains to be seen whether its education system can also be a vehicle for promoting gender quality in the country.

Also, education is often portrayed as an antidote to poverty and a tool in the promotion of societal, economic, and personal sustainability. Unfortunately, too often in Rwanda, young women remain relegated to the household and informal sector. This sits in opposition to the fact that in post-conflict societies, *'while it is crucially important to focus on employing men, missing the opportunity to engage women in formal economic activities weakens the prospects of post-conflict recovery'* (Zuckerman and Greenberg, 2010, p.77). With regard to the latter point, it must be highlighted that the Rwandan government has so far failed to recognise, value and support the contributions made by Rwandan women, including the widows of the genocide, in the informal and reproductive areas of the economy.

On one hand the various reforms promoted by the Rwandan government over the last decade have allowed Rwandan women to have the freedom to pursue careers and commercial activities, as well as to speak and be heard in public forums. On the other hand, the opportunity for these women to challenge customary notions of womanhood has often meant

increased poverty and social isolation, especially in the case of widows. More specifically, as Burnet (2011) highlights, '*for peasant women in rural areas [...] farming without their husbands' labour resulted in a heavier workload and lower yields, as well as reduced status in the community*' (p.312). Furthermore, having sole financial responsibility for themselves and their children while trying to balance work and domestic responsibilities, undoubtedly represents a heavy burden for women who also have to deal with the social, emotional and psychological consequences of widowhood (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, '*psychological assistance [for widows of the genocide and women who were victims of sexual violence during the genocide] has been almost non-existent in post-genocide Rwanda*' (Rombouts, 2006, p.209).

Women's *economic independence* – which represents one of the aims of AVEGA's IGA training programme – is seen as crucial for achieving gender equality since it helps rebalance power between men and women (Council of Europe, 1998). With regard to this point, in recent years, the Rwandan government has implemented several initiatives, some of which have had success in alleviating poverty for women in the country. For instance, the *One Cow per Poor Household - Girinka* programme has provided thousands of Rwandan women with a cow. Cows bring nutrition and sustenance, provide a stable income for families, and are a source of soil nutrients via manure to assist small scale cropping activity. The *Girinka* programme also promotes social transformation in Rwanda since in traditional society, cows belonged exclusively to men. The Rwandan GMO highlights how the programme has empowered thousands of women because it '*has led to increased economic power of women which not only reduced poverty among poor women beneficiaries but also promoted gender equality both at household and community levels*' (GMO, 2010, p.18). Other initiatives that were implemented in recent years – such as the creation of bee keeping, fishing or potatoes farming cooperatives – all represent further steps towards women's empowerment in Rwanda.

Still, a number of challenges need to be addressed in order to achieve gender equality in the country. First – and this represents one of the specific issues that the AVEGA's SIP programme aims to address – in post-conflict societies, women are often denied access to credit. Needless to say, it is precisely in those societies that are undergoing a process of reconstruction after a conflict that the possibility for men and women to obtain credit and loans emerges as a key factor in economic recovery. However, in order to obtain a loan from a commercial bank, clients need to be literate as well as able to prove they own land or property. As stated previously, Rwandan women continue to struggle to access land. Besides, most widows of the genocide – who grew up in a society where they were expected to be reliant on their husbands to provide for them – never obtained any qualifications at school.

Several micro-credit programmes implemented by international organization help poor people to access credit, but they often fail to identify (and then, remove) gender disparities. Women are therefore at risk of finding themselves at a further disadvantage. AVEGA's IGA training programme aims to support widows of the genocide in obtaining the loans necessary to start income-generating activities that can make them self-reliant.

At present, 90% of the Rwandan population is rural and, despite the fact that economic growth rates averaged at 5.8% per annum during the decade 1997-2007, almost two-thirds of Rwandans still live under the poverty line (UNESCO, 2007). Agriculture remains the main source of income for the majority of people, especially women. Nevertheless, there has been a decline in the proportion of those working in agriculture from 90% in 2000 to 77% in 2006 (UNESCO, 2012). This can be ascribed mainly to the fact that the Rwandan government has

heavily invested in the ICT sector (seen as crucial for achieving the aforementioned *Vision 2020*). However, there is evidence that males dominate jobs in the ICT sector, while women continue to work mainly in the informal sector (*ibid.*).

With regard to the current state of the agricultural sector in the country, the Rwandan GMO (2010) also highlights that Rwanda still has only '*limited capacities, skills, agricultural assets and technologies to transform the agriculture of subsistence into a market oriented agriculture for food security and income generation*' (p.29). Thus, a need remains for further investments that target the most vulnerable groups in Rwandan society and help them to develop the skills and competencies necessary to become self-sufficient. Once again, AVEGA's SIP programme seeks to provide widows of the genocide with such skills, so as to reintegrate them into Rwandan society.

1.5 Final Remarks

The analysis carried out so far has highlighted that in the years since the genocide, the Rwandan government has made significant progress in improving living condition for Rwandans and at the same time, increasing women's rights in the country. Nevertheless, serious challenges to women's economic and social empowerment persist.

Overall, Rwanda's situation appears to be in line with that of several other post-conflict countries around the globe, where there is evidence of a '*slow but positive shift in international opinion and understanding about the consequences of conflict on women and the importance of their participation in peace-building processes and post-conflict social transformation*' (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003, p.1). Evidence of this can be found in the fact that in Rwanda, women now occupy the majority of seats in parliament while prior to the genocide, their involvement in politics was almost insignificant.

Nonetheless, Strickland and Duvvury (2003) point out that oftentimes, in post-conflict countries, '*gender discrimination continues through [...] economic marginalization and sexual violence [...] denying women their human rights and constraining the potential for development*' (p.1). Once again, Rwanda may represent a case in point, since GBV remains prevalent in the country; women are still denied access land; and a significant portion of the male population continue to resist women's empowerment.

As long as the above issues continue to exist, unaddressed, it will be impossible for Rwanda to embark on the third gender dimension of post-conflict reconstruction mentioned by Zuckerman and Greenberg (2010), that is, '*transforming gender roles*'. The authors contend that transforming gender roles can aid in '*healing the traumas*' associated with violent conflicts and '*re-build social capital*' (p.79).

Zuckerman and Greenberg (2010) call for gender-focused measures to address the trauma that men and women have – in different ways – experienced during a conflict. In the case of the widows of the genocide, such measures would have to take into account the impact that the genocide still has on widows. Factors such as the high incidence of sexual-transmitted diseases, the increased number of children that women have to look after, and the trauma related with having been victims of sexual violence, all continue to affect widows' lives.

Several authors (namely, Burnet, 2008; Longman, 2006; Newbury and Baldwin, 2000a) affirm that the war and genocide may have accelerated transformations in gender roles that

were already underway in Rwanda. While this transformational process has allowed women to finally have access to opportunities outside the home, it cannot be overlooked the fact that for widows, the genocide exacted the loss of family members as well as the disintegration of groups and networks on which they used to rely. Consequently, an urgent demand for a definition of new roles and responsibilities in post-genocide Rwanda emerged, along with the awareness that '*respect and collaboration must be built between household heads [often women] and members [of the wider community]*' (Zuckerman and Greenberg, 2010, p.80).

In sum, we can agree with Zuckerman and Greenberg (2010) when they affirm that '*constructing sustainable peace requires offering opportunities to all – and that means gender equality*' (*ibid.*).

In light of the topics that have been addressed in the literature review, the next chapter will present more information regarding AVEGA and the SIP project, followed by the findings of the interviews carried out for this study

Chapter 2:

Transforming lives: An analysis of the impact of the AVEGA's IGA training programme in empowering widows of the genocide and promoting gender equality in Rwanda's Eastern Region

2.1 AVEGA Agahozo, its work in Rwanda's Eastern Province and the SIP programme

The present research was designed with the aim of establishing the extent to which the IGA training programme implemented by AVEGA in Rwanda's Eastern Region, helps to expand the capabilities of Rwandan widows of the genocide, and to empower them.

The decision to focus on widows of the genocide was prompted by the awareness that in Rwanda poverty impacts heavily on widowed genocide survivors and consequently, there is an urgent need for programmes that address the specific concerns of that particular demographic. Regrettably, at present, despite the huge amount of aid Rwanda receives from the international community, there are few interventions that focus on vulnerable women (and their dependents). It is hoped that by providing an evaluation of AVEGA's IGA training programme, the present paper will provide meaningful information that will aid in the development of additional programmes to help vulnerable female survivors in Rwanda in the future.

AVEGA Agahozo was founded in 1995 by a group of 50 widows, and over the years, its mission has been to help widows of the genocide (and their dependents) to deal with issues such as poverty, grief and solitude, following the tragic events of 1994.

Almost twenty years on from its founding date, AVEGA incorporates 25,000 widows and more than 70,000 dependents and orphans from across the country. The organisation continues to be survivor-led and staffed and it is now structured in terms of regional offices, namely, AVEGA Eastern Region, AVEGA Western Region, AVEGA Central Region, AVEGA Northern Region, and AVEGA Southern Region.

Rwanda's Eastern Province represents the largest and most populated of Rwanda's five provinces and it is divided into seven districts. The capital city is Rwamagana, where AVEGA Eastern Region's offices are located, along with a health centre and a guesthouse with bar and restaurant that employs several AVEGA beneficiaries. AVEGA Eastern Region serves about 4,000 widows and over 17,000 orphans throughout the various districts of the Eastern Province.

The Survivors Integration Project (SIP) builds on previous projects that were implemented by AVEGA, along with its main partners: SURF and Solace Ministries (another Rwandan organisation that has been supporting survivors since the aftermath of the genocide). These projects were structured *'around the recognition that the women they worked with were multiply stigmatised as survivors of genocide, survivors of rape, and living with HIV/AIDS. This informed the model of comprehensive, multi-dimensional, or 'wrap-around' support to survivors; home-based care, counselling, nutritional supplements, legal aid, access to health clinics that offer a "safe, ideal space" to seek treatment, including psychosocial support, and Income Generating Activities (IGAs)'* (Dolan and Gatete, 2012, p.7).

In particular, the Care and Treatment Project for HIV+ Women Survivors (CTP) – which ran from 2006-2010 – allowed almost 1,000 HIV+ women survivors to join the public health system, where they have the opportunity to receive the care they need. Nonetheless, the project was unsuccessful in helping widows to overcome their social isolation from the broader community. Furthermore, independent evaluations of the CTP pointed out that there were significant challenges and weaknesses in its IGA component, and that therefore, there was *'the need for interventions to enable greater reintegration of survivors into the broader community to ensure the longer-term sustainability of beneficial impacts'* (ibid.).

In order to address these issues, AVEGA and SURF completely re-designed the IGA component of the project. To begin with, a network of cooperative business development assistants (CBDs) were recruited and trained so as to be prepared to deliver intensive training and support to the survivors involved in the programme. It should be noted that the CBDs were recruited mainly from AERG (Rwanda's Genocide Survivors Students Association), because *'as survivors themselves they are able to win the trust of the IGA groups, which otherwise may not have been possible, and can also more closely identify and understand the unique challenges and obstacles that survivors face'* (SURF, 2012a, p.2).

AVEGA staff also informed widows of the possibility to be trained in income-generating activities and therefore, widows autonomously formed groups to receive the training.

Finally, a 38-module training curriculum was developed and subsequently delivered by IGA officers (chosen from among AVEGA staff) and CBDs to the various IGA groups. The modules represent *'a comprehensive induction to starting and successfully running their own businesses – including building skills on group dynamics, market research, value chain analysis, profit and loss, bookkeeping'* (SURF, 2012b, p.2). The CBDs deliver training once a week to groups of widows over a four month period, helping group members with their financial literacy, identifying market opportunities, and ultimately, developing their business plans to establish new ventures. The group can either choose to pursue a group project or alternatively, group members develop and apply for individual projects. *'In either case, the loan is made to the group, and the group is collectively accountable for its repayment'* (SURF, 2012a, p.3).

Business plans include loan applications which are assessed by CBDs and IGA Officers, who then provide suggestions on how to improve and strengthen them, before they are eventually submitted for consideration by a microfinance institute (MFI). *'Following submission, the applications are assessed independently by the MFI against their standard criteria, and a loan will only be agreed if they meet the requirements. In cases where applications are rejected, the groups can refine and adjust the application and reapply'* (ibid.).

At the beginning of SIP, a partnership agreement with Urwego Opportunity Bank (UOB) was signed. UOB agreed to provide access to capital through a FRW 25 million Loan Guarantee Fund (LGF), and the IGA groups obtain loans at an interest rate of 1.5% a month (0.5% less than its standard business terms).

The loan officers working for the bank play a critical role in the project as they work together with the various groups to help them understand the bank's expectations in the event that they are accepted for a loan. *'If the loan is agreed, the loan officers work with the groups to ensure repayment rates, and flag up issues and concerns to the CBDs and IGA Officers, before they escalate into problems'* (SURF, 2012a, p.4).

The first loan cycle usually lasts for six months after which, if successful, groups can apply for a larger loan. Once three cycles have been completed, groups are expected to become self-sufficient and will ideally have the necessary resources and knowledge needed to independently apply for bank loans. AVEGA staff continue to meet monthly with the widows that have completed the training so as to monitor their circumstances and provide further support where needed.

AVEGA began implementing the SIP programme in Rwanda's Eastern province in May 2010, and to date, a total of 24 groups have completed their IGA training²². In July 2013, SURF highlighted how *'the repayment rate for loans from UOB remains to be incredibly high at 96%'* (SURF, 2013, p.1). Additional data that seems to confirm the success of the programme from a financial point of view, are, for instance, a reported average 57% increase in spending per week; a 263% increase in bank savings; and an average individual net profit per month of FRW 23,600 (approximately £22) (SURF, 2012c, p.1).

SIP endeavours *'to empower [...] women survivors to build livelihoods to better support themselves and their own dependents, [...] over the medium to long term'* (Dolan and Gatete, 2012, p.9). Training in Income Generating Activities (IGAs) is crucial for such a vision since;

- it can help *'survivors to become self-sufficient and [economically] independent'*; and
- *'The nature of economic activities should itself contribute to alleviating social isolation and trauma and thereby contribute to integration'* (ibid.).

The present research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the SIP programme in improving the well-being of its participants and their dependents, and also seeks to achieve a better understanding of its strengths and limits. Next, I will outline the methodological approach and research design adopted for this study.

2.2 Methodological approach and research design

The following key questions guided the fieldwork that was undertaken at AVEGA Eastern Region's offices in Rwamagana, Rwanda, over a two-week period in September 2013:

1. How does the AVEGA's IGA training programme impact upon women's capabilities?
2. What are the strengths and limitations of the programme?
3. To what extent and in which ways does the AVEGA's IGA training programme, in line with the MDG3, *Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women* in Rwanda?

On September 13th, an introductory consultation meeting was arranged to meet with the AVEGA staff members who would be involved in the research, to discuss the focus of the research, who was undertaking it, why it was being undertaken, and how the findings would be used. The meeting was also used to identify the respondents, and to establish a schedule for the various interviews and field visits that would be carried out.

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted at the Avega Eastern Region's offices between Tuesday 19th and Friday 22nd September with a total of 20 beneficiaries and 6 dependents (aged between 18 and 21). The beneficiaries were aged between 34 and 62 (2

²² 729 members registered for the programme and 708 finished the training

were in their thirties; 6 in their forties; 9 in their fifties; and 3 in their sixties), with the average age being 49.5 years old. In addition, on Monday 23rd September, 5 AVEGA staff members were interviewed and 4 field visits were carried out at some of the beneficiaries' homes.

During the design of the research, extensive background documentation was provided by the Director of SURF and further documentation was made available by AVEGA staff during my stay in Rwamagana.

Since all the interviewees have little or no knowledge of English, a translator was used during all the interviews as well as in the process of transcribing. The translator was a 21-year old female student survivor, recruited from Rwanda's Genocide Survivors Students Association, as having a female survivor co-running the interviews was considered advisable in order to make the beneficiaries feel more at ease in telling their stories. All the interviews were subsequently transcribed *verbatim* and translated into English by the translator for analysis.

The present study adopts the Capability Approach as a theoretical framework. Unlike other approaches that concentrate on people's happiness, income, expenditures and consumption, *'the core characteristic of the capability approach is its focus on what people are effectively able to do and to be; that is, on their capabilities'* (Robeyns, 2005, p.94).

A distinctive feature of the capability approach is its focus not only on outcomes, or ends – but also on the means by which such ends are achieved. An achieved end is known as a *functioning* – for instance being healthy, being safe, or working – and constitutes what *'a person may value doing or being'* (Sen, 1999, p.75). Functionings can be achieved only if the necessary means or resources exist to facilitate their realisation (Sen, 1993; Nussbaum, 2003).

A *capability* refers to the freedom a person has to enjoy various functionings. The economist and philosopher Amartya Sen – who pioneered the capability approach – gave different definitions of the term capability. To begin with, capabilities are *'the substantive freedoms [a person] enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value'* (Sen, 1999, p.87). A capability can also be defined as *'the various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that the person can achieve. Capability is, thus, a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another, [...] to choose from possible livings'* (Sen, 1992, p.40).

The capability approach proves to be helpful in identifying social constraints (e.g. social norms, traditions, prejudices, habits) that influence and restrict people's well-being. For instance, as both Sen (1990b) and Nussbaum (2000) highlight, social norms and traditions often form women's preferences and influence their aspirations as well as their effective choices in society.

Sen (1993) affirms that policies should focus on removing obstacles in people's lives so that they can have more freedom to live the kind of life that they value. Indeed, people should have *'effective opportunities to undertake the actions and activities that they want to engage in, and be whom they want to be'* (Robeyns, 2005, p.95).

In her book *Valuing Freedoms: Sen's capability approach and poverty reduction*, Sabina Alkire (2002) provides a useful example empirical application of the capability approach in her evaluation of three Oxfam projects in Pakistan. The author highlights the importance of

largely *nonquantifiable* effects – such as the acquisition of useful knowledge and the cultivation of friendships amongst each other – that had a significantly positive effect on the women taking part in the projects she examines. Such intangible changes in women’s lives would not be taken into consideration by a traditional cost-benefit analysis. This serves to illustrate the importance of the capability approach in evaluating the (often largely non-economic) effects of a programme like AVEGA’s SIP.

Next, details of ethical issues for this study will be presented, before proceeding to an analysis of the study’s findings.

2.3 Ethical issues

The research was conducted in accordance with the BSA Statement of Ethical Practice²³ and as a researcher, I strictly adhered to the points underlined in the Data Protection Act 1998²⁴. Throughout the entire research, my relationship with the participants was built through trust and a mutual understanding.

Every participant was informed – in a language which is meaningful to them, namely, Kinyarwanda – regarding what the research is about, who was undertaking it, why it was being undertaken, and how it is going to be used. At each stage of the research, consent was negotiated and the participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time, for any given reason.

As the interviews were audio-recorded, permission from the participants was sought both prior to, and after commencing the actual interviews. The contents of the interviews will only be discussed with the participants themselves and any future use of the data collected will be discussed with participants. Their verbal consent will be obtained prior to any future use of the data.

The participants to the research were all survivors of the genocide and as such, they still have to live with the trauma of that experience. A concerted effort was made to avoid causing additional trauma by, for instance, prompting recollections of disturbing memories associated with the genocide.

As a male, white, European researcher leading a research project in a context where participants were mainly female survivors of the genocide, I am aware that my positionality as a privileged outsider might have affected the way in which the respondents reacted to my presence and chose to relate their stories to me. Therefore, the results of the research were analysed with the awareness that factors such as gender, class, race, and age may have partially influenced the process of conducting the research, as well as my own interpretation of its findings.

What is more, the fact that a translator was needed to carry out all the interviews (since none of the respondents spoke English), and that she was also responsible for the transcription and translation of all the interviews, may have further affected the validity of the research findings. It is conceivable that the translator’s own ideas and thoughts regarding the research may have influenced her translation of the interviews.

²³ Available at: <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm> - Accessed: 21/08/2013

²⁴ Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents> - Accessed: 21/08/2013

With respect for the anonymity and privacy of all of the participants, the data that were collected will be used solely in relation to the aims of the present study. Access to the anonymised data will be restricted to the researcher. If the interviewees request a copy of their interview transcripts, they will have ready access to them. At the end of the research, the final report (in English) will be made available to AVEGA and its partner, SURF. A brief research summary will also be sent to the AVEGA office with the hope that its main points will then be translated and communicated to the participants.

In the following section, I will analyse the information gathered during the fieldwork carried out in Rwanda.

2.4 Analysis of the interviews

2.4.1 Widows of the genocide before the SIP programme

In order to gain an understanding of the impact that the IGA training provided by AVEGA had on its beneficiaries' lives, it was first necessary to comprehend how the widows participating in the programme used to live prior to the beginning of the training. This is how some of the women interviewed for the present research described their living conditions before the start of SIP:

“Before we couldn’t plan for the future: if I had something to eat this evening, it didn’t matter what I would eat tomorrow. We only managed to survive, many of us were traumatized, [...] we were really hopeless...”

“Before [...] we used to live in isolation from others; we had no plans for the future. We used to cultivate enough so that we could survive but it was difficult to have decent clothes, a balanced meal, sugar, salt...”

“We were hopeless because we had lost our families and everything else we had, like our houses. We didn’t interact with others...we were kind of traumatized”.

“We were hopeless and we didn’t have plans for the future. Everyone was isolated in her own place and we didn’t have a social life at all...”

“[...] some were hopeless and isolated from everyone. When you visited them, they could cry, because they were thinking a lot to what happened during the genocide and they were traumatized. They live in very old houses which were built very badly after the genocide and did not have proper clothes to wear to go out. It was horrible”.

Social isolation, difficulties in finding appropriate shelter, lack of support, inability to make plans for the future, and feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness and destitution, are a sampling of issues that affected these women, and prevented them from living the kind of lives they wanted to live.

All of the participants in the present study also highlighted that for years, AVEGA represented the only source of social and emotional support for them. The aforementioned FARG fund provides them with economic support, in the form of monthly cash grants and educational scholarships for their children to attend schools. However, even if school fees are covered by FARG, families still have to pay for school materials (uniforms, books, etc.). Also, children that were born following the end of the genocide do not have their school fees

covered by FARG, and their mothers strive to find enough money to cover the costs of their education.

All the AVEGA staff interviewed for the present study highlighted the limited impact that the monthly provision of about rwf 15,000 (approximately £13.5) through FARG can have on widows' lives. In their view, economic independence represents as a key factor in returning dignity and respect to women who lost everything in the genocide.

“The most important thing they [widows] need is economic independence. For example, a member [of AVEGA] who is still asking for economic assistance today, when you talk to her she feels ashamed and other people often laugh at her. So these women need the opportunity to provide for themselves”.

Moreover, as another staff member explains, economic self-reliance can help women becoming more integrated and accepted by their local community;

“[...] it depends on the economic situation of the widow: if she is able to provide for herself and her family she is respected in the community; if she is not, she is completely ignored even if AVEGA and FARG support her economically. Other people still don't consider her as a person to be friend with”.

Even though poverty is often defined by one-dimensional measures, such as income, Sen (1990a, 1990b) has repeatedly argued that poverty has both material and social dimensions. For instance, in the majority of societies, wearing decent clothes is necessary in order to take part in the 'life of the community' and appear 'in public without shame' (Sen, 1990a, p.44). In Rwanda, as both widows and AVEGA staff highlighted, many widows cannot afford decent clothes hence, they are prevented from taking part in social activities in the wider community. Therefore, providing widows with a stable source of income (a capability that depends upon material resources), can have a positive impact also on the social dimensions of their lives.

As stated previously, most of the SIP beneficiaries had been AVEGA members for years prior to the beginning of the programme, and had taken part in some of AVEGA's previous projects:

“There was a project where AVEGA put us into groups and we did agriculture activities. They gave us some money so that we could have seeds and manure and then earn some money to solve some of our problems”.

“I was part of CTP which was AVEGA's program to support widows who are HIV-positive. When they started SIP, we were shifted from CTP to SIP. I was part of CTP as I am HIV-positive. [...] Even before SIP, we used to contribute with some money so that one day we could give it to a woman and the next time to another one...It was very helpful”.

Early AVEGA initiatives had attempted to improve widows' economic situation, however, achieving only limited results. One of the women interviewed was amongst the beneficiaries of the CTP programme. As she highlights, the programme failed to make a significant impact on widows' lives mainly due to the fact that the majority of its beneficiaries could not understand the loan process.

“We took part in this programme where we were given money and then we used it to do some business, but at the end of it we only pay back a half of the amount we were given and we did not receive further money”.

In order to understand whether the (re-designed) IGA training implemented by AVEGA as part of SIP has managed to actually improve widows' situation; the next section will analyse in detail the outcomes of the IGA training through the lens of the capability approach.

2.4.2 Expanding widows' capabilities through the IGA training

Zambrano (2011) affirms that to measure an individual's capabilities is to measure *'the size of the set of possible combinations of functionings that are potentially achievable by that individual'* (p.5). As the previous sections have highlighted, prior to the beginning of the SIP programme, most widows of the genocide were significantly limited in what they could achieve in their lives. For instance, they could not economically provide for themselves and their children, they were unable to find appropriate shelter, they could not afford a balanced diet, and were not integrated into their communities.

All the twenty widows interviewed were eager to share their experiences for the purposes of this study. Overall, their responses were overwhelmingly positive about the ability of SIP to provide them with the skills necessary to become economically self-reliant and promote their re-integration in the community.

As previous evaluations (SURF, 2012b, 2012c, 2013; Dolan and Gatete, 2012) already ascertained, after the completion of their training, SIP participants were able to start economic activities and regularly repay their loans on time. Most of the women interviewed trade agricultural products (bananas, cassava, beans, sorghum) and run small shops (that they often plan to further expand in the near future). They all reported that the income generated by such economic activities has helped them to improve their housing, to achieve a more balanced diet as well as to acquire better clothes and cover all the costs related with their children's schooling.

“For the moment, our situation has improved a lot: we are able to have a good meal, nice clothes, and materials for the children that go to school”.

“The situation has improved for all of us. Everyone, even the older ones, know how to run their businesses and we have improved our lives. Now we dress properly and so do our children, and we eat good meals, while before sometimes we couldn't eat anything. Today it's really different”.

“Things are good now because we have all the necessary in our homes while before it was difficult for some to have a proper meal. Today it has changed and we eat properly, we work on our houses, and we send children to school. For example, I brought water to my house and I plan to get electricity soon”.

'Bodily health' can be considered as one of the basic capabilities that all individuals should have the opportunity to enjoy (Nussbaum, 2003, p.41). Being adequately nourished and having decent shelter (two circumstances that depend upon the ability to generate income) both impact significantly on one's bodily health. However, the improvements that the SIP programme has brought into the lives of widows are not limited to the availability of resources and *bodily health*, but extend also to the social aspects of their lives.

Working in groups undoubtedly had a major role in reshaping widows' attitudes towards themselves, their capabilities, and other people. AVEGA informed widows of the possibility

to be involved in the SIP programme where they would have been trained in income-generating activities. Hence, women autonomously formed groups whose size varies from 12 to 104 members (with most groups having between 15 and 30 members each). Every group independently chose its leader, who attended an informational meeting and then reported to the other members.

Both staff and widows highlighted that at the beginning of SIP, many women were expecting to be simply given money and did not understand the actual aims of the programme. Several widows were also afraid of not being able to repay loans on time (one woman said she feared the bank would come to “*take her chairs and clothes away*” from her, had she not repaid on time); or thought they did not have enough skills (i.e. they were illiterate) to run an economic activity successfully. Finally, the geography of Rwanda (where villages are scattered throughout the country) made it difficult at times for women to both attend training and start an income-generating activity.

All the participants in the present study had either never attended school, or had received only (an often incomplete) primary education. Therefore, most of them did not even know the meaning of terms such as “profit” or “loss”, nor were they aware of the details of the loan process. However, once they have completed their training – during which widows had the opportunity to apply what they learned in their new ventures – SIP beneficiaries are able to be successful in their economic activities (evidence of which is the fact that they repaid their loans on time). They also gained the knowledge and confidence to develop new proposals to obtain further loans from banks, and overall, their self-esteem and self-confidence – not only as entrepreneurs – appeared to have significantly increased.

While meeting in groups, women have the opportunity to discuss their economic activities and advise each other on how to further improve their businesses;

“For example, if someone doesn’t have a market for its activities, we advise her on which business can be more successful than others”.

“If this program had been an individual one, it could have been very difficult to succeed because we would have not been able share ideas on how we can succeed”.

“[...] alone you can’t find helpful advice while we always meet twice a month to collect the money to repay [the loan] and also to evaluate how things are going for every member”.

The group supports those who struggle the most with their economic activities;

“[...] in case you have a loss, we contribute and can assist you...”

“A group is good because it is always good to have someone who can give you some advice and support. When we meet to repay the loan we can find out if a member doesn't have enough money to repay and we contribute for her”.

“When we discuss about our business, if a member had losses, we help her to find money to pay the bank”.

Widows also highlighted the importance of solidarity within groups as women have learnt the importance of mutual support in dealing with the hardships of life. Such support extends beyond their economic activities and encompasses the personal dimensions of their lives.

“When we meet, we share everything, not only things related with our businesses but also stuff about our everyday life. [...] For example, older women give advices to the young ones. If someone is traumatised, sick, or has lost someone, we visit her and we support her”.

“We knew each other in our group but not as much as today. We got much closer. We don’t only discuss about business but also on our personal life and we visit each other, we invite each other, we support each other as much as we can”.

“We knew each other [members of the group] even before the programme started but not as much as today because now when we meet we share everything about our life and experiences...We know every member who is sick and we visit her and we advise each other on our businesses”.

The group has helped many of them to overcome their social isolation. In some cases, the group appears to have assumed the status of a “second family”:

“It has been a very good experience working in groups because we live as a family and friends. For example, if a member is sick, we go and visit her and you know, in Rwandan culture you can’t go to visit someone who is sick without bringing something for him or her so we go there with fruits, beans...”

“For me, frankly speaking, the group has helped me because I used to be isolated from others and I was alone and hopeless, but now with this group I have friends and I can even ask for personal advice to them because we live like a family”.

“For the moment, through groups we have a social life which is the most important thing that has ever happened to us. We didn’t know each other this well but today we are friends...I can say even that we are a family. People in the community also learn things from us so we are a good example for others, especially because of our team-work”.

Working in groups has also increased widows’ self-esteem as well as their participation in the community. Whereas the majority of them were previously socially excluded and unable to provide for themselves, after their training, widows reported regularly taking part in social events. They are often approached by people who ask them how they have managed to “become rich”, and some of them have even become leaders in their sectors.

“[People in our communities] respect us and trust us. For example, a neighbour came to me and asked me to lend him some money (5000rwf) and I did it because now we are local leaders so people are good with us”.

“Before we used to ask for help in our sectors all the time and people used to hide when they saw us so that we couldn’t find them. But now things have changed as we provide for ourselves and we can also help very old women who can’t work”.

The widows also see their increased income as a responsibility, in the sense that they are obliged to give something back to their community. Consequently, they are willing to employ other people from their communities (e.g. as day labourers, or carriers) in order to run their economic activities. These individuals also benefit from the knowledge widows have gained during their training.

“For example, in a certain season we cultivate sorghum with the support of some other people that we employ and we pay them money. So these people instead of stealing can use the money we pay them to buy something for their families. We want everyone to benefit from what we have because it will contribute to the welfare of the society we are part of. People always say “those women really love each other!” It is true, but we love them too”.

“We employ other people in our activities. After selling what we have produced, we get money and we buy things from others who run their businesses as we do. If we have money our family can benefit from it; neighbours benefit from it and it helps everyone up to the national level”.

“If you employ someone you pay him and he can get something good for his children. [...] We also give advice to other businessmen and women and we work with them because we have been trained already”.

Widows demonstrate not only great self-confidence, but also that they seek recognition for their achievements, and demand respect as valued members of the community.

“We feel confident which is really different from how it was before. We are happy, and very proud of ourselves. We have even become younger somehow!”

“In groups [widows] have a social life and [...] even if they have lost their families they are able to interact with others and to have more hope. Now, they don’t only interact with other widows but also with the whole Rwandan community”.

“After the genocide it was difficult for us to speak to anyone because we feared them and we were unhappy. But today we interact with people because they are neighbours and our customers. If I have to leave my cow at home I ask my neighbour to look after it. We no longer fear people but we invite each other to our children’s weddings and we support each other”.

“[...] now we are leaders locally and we want to fight for our dignity and respect. Take me as an example: I don’t fear anyone and when there is a problem, I stand and fight for the truth”.

“I want to be smart and well-dressed so that I can be taken into consideration by others and also be respected”.

There appears to have been a dramatic shift in widows’ self-perception from “*hopeless*” to “*eager to work hard*”; and from “*fearing everyone*” to “*fearless*”. Such a radical change in their attitude is also evident in the fact that they no longer limit their social interactions exclusively to other widows and survivors. Women have grown professionally and personally, and now aim to expand their networks, as well as enhance their social and community awareness. Consequently, widows are now viewed by other community members with respect and often, admiration;

“[People’s perception towards me] has changed a lot: they have become more respectful and they ask themselves what we [members of the group] did to become “rich”: this is how they call us”.

“People respect us and they consider us as rich women. They trust us which wasn’t the case before. Now they see that we provide for ourselves and this impresses them”.

“Before people used to disrespect us but today it has changed and they can invite us to parties and weddings which was not the case before. Women and men all respect us as they realize that we are respectable women”.

“Some people have become more respectful. They see an old woman who used to ask for help for everything and today she has an account in a bank and she is independent. They are impressed by what we are achieving now”.

“People have changed the way they see us because now they consider us as rich women and they ask themselves how we achieved such things”.

Once again, all the interviewees highlighted that people in their community judge them according to their ability to carry themselves with dignity and provide for their families, and not solely because they are widows. For instance, this is how two of them replied to the question “How are widows perceived in Rwandan society”?

“It depends on how a woman behaves. If she respects herself others will respect her the same way. Widows are not segregated in society at all”.

“It depends on how the widow behaves in the society: if she respect herself others will help her as well”.

Remarkably, widows’ increased confidence and ability to provide for themselves and their children have also changed the way they interact with the families of the *génocidaires* that killed their relatives during the genocide. In a small, rural country like Rwanda, survivors often have to live next door with the killers of their families, a circumstance that can frustrate them and cause further trauma. However, after they have joined the SIP programme, widows are no longer frightened by the presence of *génocidaires* in their neighbourhoods;

“It was difficult for us to live with the people who killed our families and we used to see them as animals but today it is different: we pray for them so that God can forgive them and help them. We changed our attitude towards them they are now our customers”.

“They [those who killed our families] are ashamed because they realize that they didn’t achieve their objectives as we are still alive and healthy. They couldn’t imagine that one day we would be able to provide for ourselves again”.

“Before we used to live completely alone. We couldn’t interact especially with the families whose members killed our families in the genocide, but that has changed and today, as we have become entrepreneurs, we don’t sell our products only to survivors but to the entire community. If you don’t interact with everyone you can’t succeed so we interact with all the people and they do the same”.

“People’s perception towards us has changed a lot. For example, when they see us studying and being trained by AVEGA they realize that we have someone who cares about us and they respect us. This is true especially for people who killed our families: before we were ignored and sometimes disrespected”.

Widows’ involvement in the SIP programme appears to have also impacted upon the relationship they have with their children. Most of the children (both biological and adoptive ones) currently attend secondary school. The cost of school materials used to be prohibitive for widows, whereas there is evidence that they are now capable of covering all the costs of their children’s education. Widows’ ability to fulfil children’s requests has radically changed

the relationship they have with them, as well as the way in which children regard their mothers. For instance;

“When I see her [my mum], at her age [52], working very hard I am proud of her. Of course every child is proud of his mother but this is special because, you know, I am free to talk to her, while before when I asked her something and she was not able to give it to me I was mad at her, and we had lots of arguments. Now they no longer exist. And now I really love her not because I have to, but because she gives me a reason to love and respect her”.

“I am proud of my mother because she is working hard so I am pleased to see her like that. She inspires us to work hard as well. Now she is a leader in our village”.

“I am very happy for her, she used to say that she couldn’t get a loan or do anything but today she is a good example for me”.

“It is awesome to see my mother becoming an entrepreneur and it inspires me to become one too even though for now I don’t have the capital to start the business”.

“Today when I go to school, I have all the necessities so I can study well, and I know that those who I left at home are fine. When you are happy your studies go well”.

“Before I could ask something to my mother and she wouldn’t give it to me it and I couldn’t understand why. You know, I was a kid...But today we have almost everything we want and we are happy. With my mum there is no conflict because she doesn’t give me what I need”.

“I feel lucky to have a mum like her: beautiful, intelligent, and rich too. Before I used to cry when I didn’t get what I wanted but now I no longer cry because she gives me everything I need”.

Dependents’ words highlight how, prior to the SIP programme, most widows were not able to provide for their children, as they lacked the (economic) resources to do so. Such a situation caused frustration both for the mothers as well as for their children. However, the increased household income of the SIP participants benefited children not only by improving their relationship with their mothers, but also because it allowed them to feel more accepted at school;

“In the past some classmates used to pass next to me without even greeting me but today when I meet them they always greet me and tell me that I am dressed really smart. Then they ask me how my mother managed to achieve the things that she has achieved”.

“[...] some of my classmates used to isolate me but today they want to become my friends”.

“I am very proud of my mother because she is smart and very intelligent...I feel proud when I see her coming to school to visit me and she is well dressed and very beautiful. My mother is my role model. Children like to see their mothers smart because from that classmates judge them and have an opinion about their life”.

Next, I will outline some considerations regarding widows’ empowerment through training in income-generating activities.

2.5 Widows' Empowerment through IGA training

One of the questions that the present study sought to explore was the extent to which AVEGA's IGA training is successful in promoting gender equality and empowering women in Rwanda.

All the widows who took part in the research highlighted that the groups created for the IGA training provide a forum in which they can freely discuss a variety of issues – whether concerning their economic activities or their private lives. For them, having the opportunity to discuss lifestyle choices was seen as both satisfying and essential for building confidence.

What is more, the fact that widows do not receive free grants, but instead are expected to be constantly responsible for their businesses, puts the power of decision-making into their own hands. All the evidence gathered from the interviews and field visits helps to substantiate that the process of being trained was not only educational and useful from a practical point of view, but it has also served to build the widows' confidence in their individual and collective capacities.

Overall, the study found that there has been a significant change in widows' self-perception (for instance, one widow told me: *“we have become more beautiful, and even younger”*); level of confidence (another widow affirmed: *“I don't fear anyone...”*); and sense of connectedness with the outside world (*“we interact with all the people and they do the same”*).

Within the household, the fact that widows can now sustainably support themselves and their families, has helped them to reshape relationships with their dependents. Now they feel they are able to meet the needs of their children effectively, and to give them a brighter future, whereas in the past, they felt powerless to do so.

The increase in widows' self-confidence has also led to a significant change in the way they perceive themselves. A previous evaluation of the impact of SIP highlighted the *'deeply entrenched and internalised gender expectations (especially among rural women) that women should have nothing to do with money and should therefore not take loans'* (Dolan and Gatete, 2012, p.17). To the contrary, after the completion of their training, the widows are no longer afraid to engage with microfinance institutions, as well as with their wider communities. Moreover, they see themselves as equal to men, they feel capable of solving their own problems, and they experience great satisfaction in being able to successfully run their own businesses. Furthermore, they are seen as models in their communities and have become providers of employment to a significant number of others.

Women's achievements at the national level seem to have inspired widows to accomplish more in their lives:

“[Women's achievement in Rwandan society] make us proud because before it was different. Consider my example: I'm the RPF chairman in my cell and the AVEGA coordinator in my sector. But before I didn't use to do all these things”.

“When I see women's achievements in Rwanda, I am pleased and I feel I want to achieve important things as well, such as being a leader in my village. [...] I also want to become a businesswoman because nowadays you can't be restricted to do something just because you

are a woman, unless you have your own problems and you lack the confidence necessary to achieve whatever you want”.

These less tangible changes, that the research was able to highlight using the capability approach, are as significant as the tangible ones (i.e. the aforementioned increase in spending per week and bank savings) that previous evaluations had already pinpointed. In sum, AVEGA’s IGA training has been successful in empowering widows of the genocide and has contributed to the promotion of gender equality in Rwanda.

However, and this matter will be addressed in the next section, it is also important to scrutinize and present the limits of the present findings.

2.6 Limits of the findings

The analysis carried out so far has highlighted a significant number of positive effects that AVEGA’s IGA training programme has had on widows of the genocide. Nonetheless, it is also necessary to draw attention to the limitations of the programme as well as to the limits of the research findings.

In relation to the latter, it must first be noted that it was possible to interview only a small percentage of the widows that were trained (20 widows out of a total of 708 AVEGA members that completed the IGA training) for the present study. Therefore, it is difficult to know how representative these twenty views are of the other experience of the SIP programme.

To begin, it is possible that the women that made themselves available for the interviews are those who have achieved the best results since the end of the training, while others have perhaps encountered more difficulties in the development of their businesses. Also, since I was introduced to them by AVEGA staff, widows may have overemphasized the positive outcomes of the programme and overlooked its shortcomings, in order to make a positive impression on me, the researcher, and ingratiate themselves to AVEGA staff members. Similarly, the fact that I had to rely on a translator to conduct the interviews, and that that same translator transcribed and then translated them into English, may as well have (even if partially) compromised the accuracy of the information gathered.

While the present positive findings are in line with prior findings (SURF, 2012b, 2012c, 2013), it is hoped that in the future, AVEGA and its partners will continue to strengthen the evaluation of the impact of the IGA training and the SIP programme.

Both beneficiaries and staff interviewed for the present research also pointed out what appears to be the main limitation of AVEGA’s IGA training programme, that is, the long-term sustainability of the programme. The difficulties that AVEGA and its partners encounter in obtaining the funding necessary to continue to run SIP represent a common issue within development work. Hence, there remains uncertainty as to whether AVEGA will be able to continue to work with CBDs, as well as with regard to the number of widows that could receive training in IGA in the future.

As stated previously, only a very limited number of the potential beneficiaries was trained for the SIP programme while the majority of widows of the genocide continue to live in poverty and isolation. Most of the participants in the research reported that their positive experience with SIP has generated the interest of several other widows (and generally, of members of

their communities) that would be eager to receive the same training. Some of those expressing interest are widows who had initially joined the programme but subsequently withdrew from it due to their concerns over the loan process. It remains uncertain whether AVEGA will have the capacity to reach all potential beneficiaries in the future.

With regard to the loan process, some beneficiaries reported that at times, they experienced delays in obtaining loans from the banks. Several widows said that while waiting to receive money from the banks, they missed the opportunity to purchase goods from their suppliers at a more convenient price. This resulted in a reduced profit for their businesses. It is hoped that in the future, widows will not have to experience similar difficulties (AVEGA staff have been working closely with bank staff to solve this issue).

It is clear that supporting widows of the genocide in their economic enterprises is a delicate task, and that there are a number of external factors that may occasionally negatively impact upon their businesses and lives. Thus, the importance of widows receiving support – both from among their own ranks, and also from AVEGA – cannot be overemphasized.

Conclusion

The Rwandan genocide undeniably represents one of the most appalling events in recent human history, and its legacy will continue to affect the lives of those who survived it, in the years to come.

Twenty years after the genocide, Rwanda is a country that has made remarkable economic strides, and whose society is undergoing significant social and cultural changes. Women have undoubtedly been at the centre of this process of transformation and, as the literature review has extensively reported, they have attained prominence in politics and public affairs. As Burnet (2011) highlights, the increased presence of women in Rwandan politics has raised '*awareness of what women can achieve and legitimate women as political actors, unravelling at least to some degree previously accepted gender roles*' (p. 315).

However, due to the nature of the Rwandan state, it is unclear the extent to which women in Rwanda can actually influence political outcomes and achieve gender equality (Longman, 2006; Reyntjens, 2010; Burnet, 2008, 2011). The various reforms introduced by the Rwandan government have somewhat extended women's rights but there is evidence that a significant portion of the male population remains resistant to changes in gender relations.

Widow survivors of the genocide find themselves in a uniquely disadvantaged position due to a variety of factors. To start, they are women without husbands in a society that has traditionally been centred around the needs and desires of men. Following the loss of their spouses, they have to provide for themselves and their dependents without the support they could rely on prior to the genocide. Simultaneously, they face stigmatization, often owing to the fact that many of them were victims of sexual violence, and subsequently contracted HIV during the violence of 1994.

Furthermore, most widows of the genocide never obtained a qualification at school, nor experience of economic activities, thereby leaving most without the knowledge and skills necessary to secure a livelihood. In many cases, the trauma associated with the genocide has made widows distrustful of people, which then relegates them to an even more isolated place in society.

AVEGA Agahozo has been supporting widows of the genocide for almost twenty years, by attempting to reintegrate them into Rwandan society. The SIP programme represents its most ambitious project to date, with the aim of helping widows to become self-reliant. Cultivating the economic wherewithal of widows is seen as crucial for allowing them to reclaim their dignity and self-worth, while also increasing their children's chances for a better future.

The foregoing research, though limited, has highlighted a significant number of positive effects that AVEGA's IGA training has had on its beneficiaries.

Widows are now capable of generating the income necessary to afford food, clothes and decent accommodation, as well the various costs associated with their children's education. The fact of their involvement in economic activities also represents a major source of bolstered identity and self-worth, and this has radically changed the way in which they are perceived by the rest of their communities.

The findings of this study also illustrate that after completion of their training, widows are confident and skilled enough to not only succeed in their economic ventures, but also to expand them, thus extending the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole. Widows have gained the capacity to independently apply for further loans, as they have earned the trust of banks, and have sufficient knowledge of the loan process. They also employ other community members to cultivate their land and transport their goods, as well as to look after their children when they are away. Hence, widows promote positive change not only for themselves as individuals, but also for the wider community. Remarkably, the enhancement in their status within the community was also seen to lead to an improvement in their relationships with *génocidaires* and their families, providing hope for a more peaceful future.

The group structure of the AVEGA initiative appears to be the catalyst for promoting positive change in widows' lives, as well as in those of their families and communities. Within the group, widows learn how to commence and develop their economic activities; from its members, they receive the support they need when dealing with the hardships of being businesswomen, household breadwinners and carers, all at the same time. Furthermore, it is the group setting that facilitates confidence-building, by allowing widows to learn within a protected environment, and helping them to overcome the isolation that they have experienced since the genocide.

It is uncertain whether AVEGA and its partners will have the means to continue to implement SIP, and as such, doubts remain regarding the long-term sustainability of the programme. Considering the relative youth of the programme, there will be a critical need for AVEGA and its partners to continue monitoring the experiences of beneficiaries, and conducting regular evaluations of the programme's outcomes, in order to strengthen it.

For the present moment – and this is what the research herein aimed to establish when it was conceived – there is evidence that AVEGA's IGA training has been successful in expanding widows' capabilities and empowering them.

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