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## Persistency of Poverty among Female Headed Households in Rwanda: Case of Huye District

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** Women in general have been persistently poor in relation to men and particularly female headed households (FHHs) whose number has suddenly increased in Rwanda in the aftermath of 1994 genocide against Tutsis. They took the responsibility to cater for the families irrespective of their lower level of competition and the history that considered them as weaker sex.

**Aim:** The purpose of the study was to assess the factors leading to the persistency of poverty among FHHs.

**Methods:** This descriptive study used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect and analyze relevant information from 87 individuals from Huye District composed by FHHs, sector, district and ministerial staffs who accepted to participate in the study.

**Results:** Respondents revealed that lower level of education; lack of self-esteem; small land for agricultural activities are among the main factors of poverty. The government through the community development policy established various strategies for women empowerment but still the poverty is persistent in rural areas

**Conclusion:** An emphasis should be put on increasing entrepreneurship and cooperative management skills; and the sensitization of both men and women about gender equality would be of paramount importance.

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**Key words:** Persistency; poverty; female headed households; women; empowerment

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### **Introduction**

The United Nations Development Programme and The World's Women asserted that long ago, women were considered to be the weaker sex, and would depend on men in almost all socio-economic matter. During the period after 1994 genocide against Tutsis, the country of Rwanda was confronted with a large number of households headed by women who struggle to fight poverty and raise their children. The Government of Rwanda has therefore created Vision 2020 and its first, the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS-1), was meant to focus on gender as a cross-cutting issue. During the EDPRS-1 period (2006-2012), several community development projects have been developed to empower the poorest families and some reports confirm the achievement of the expected results (UNDP, 2015 & The World's Women, 2015).

Oldenbarneveltlaan reported that EDPRS-1 has advocated a different way of doing things in Rwanda through decentralization and greater government accountability. In addition, it identified four cross-cutting issues: HIV / AIDS, gender, environment and social inclusion to be included in all sector reviews and budgets. This cross-cutting approach has shown the government's commitment to vulnerable sectors and also recognizes the

interconnection of programs and their results. He stressed that the Government of Rwanda, under the leadership of President Paul Kagame, has made empowerment and inclusion of women a feature of recovery and reconstruction (Oldenbarneveltlaan, 2010). In May 2003, Rwanda adopted one of the most progressive constitutions in the world in its commitment to equal rights for all, gender equality and the representation of women. The first title of the Rwandan Constitution establishes the equality of all Rwandans and must be ensured in part by giving women at least 30% of all decision-making bodies. Specific areas to accelerate development and increase the participation of women in all areas of Rwandan life have been identified. These areas include: the implementation of a family policy, with a greater emphasis on children's rights; support programs to eradicate the feminization of poverty, such as the women's guarantee fund, district-level credit funds; revoke laws that are not gender-sensitive; increase opportunities for women to take decision-making positions in the public and private sectors; encourage women to participate in educational programs at all levels; Women in Parliament Rwanda tops the world (Oldenbarneveltlaan, 2010).

In addition, Kamugisha renowned the substantial determination and eagerness of the Government and its citizens, and the country has made great strides in ensuring that not only the principles of good governance are deeply rooted, but also respected (Kamugisha, 2010). Nevertheless, there appears to be sustained poverty among female headed households in some districts despite the implementation of community development projects aimed at empowering women to alleviate poverty at large. Indeed, Mugabe reported that the Forum of Women Parliamentarians of Rwanda (RWPF) recognized that poverty among women remains a major challenge. They said that most women in the country live in extreme poverty in the villages despite the existing mechanisms (Mugabe, 2010).

The objective of this study was to assess the leading factors influencing persistence of poverty among female headed households irrespective of government programs implemented to empower women. The study was conducted in Huye District, Southern Province, Rwanda's poorest province (NISR, 2012) and the province with the highest percentage of women (52.1%, with 35,6% of female headed households) in 2012 (NISR, 2013).

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

According to De Vaus and Trochim, research design refers to the overall strategy that you choose to integrate the different components of the study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring you will effectively address the research problem; it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data (De Vaus, 2006 & Trochim, 2006). The research design for this study was a case study design and Huye district was taken as the case study for this research.

The study used a mixed research approach combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, with an emphasis on qualitative methods, in order to give a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation and thereby increase the credibility and validity of the results through various methods and techniques (Thomas, 2011; Ahuja, 2005 & Dudley, 2011).

### **Profile of Huye District**

Huye districts are one of eight districts (Nyanza, Gisagara, Kamonyi, Nyamagabe, Nyaruguru, Muhanga, Ruhango and Huye) that compose Southern Province. The latitude of Huye district is -2.586166, and the longitude is 29.689026; with the GPS coordinates of 2° 35' 10.1976" S and 29° 41' 20.4936" E. Huye elevation is 1831 meters height, that is equal to 6,007 feet. Huye District borders with Nyanza district in the North, Gisagara in the east and

south, Nyaruguru in the South West and Nyamagabe in the North West.

### Study Population and Sample Size

The study considered only the number of female headed households supported by the district of Huye through the social protection department (822) plus the staffs in charge of gender and women empowerment in Huye district (38); and the staffs in charge of women empowerment at ministerial level (5); which make the total study population of 865 individuals. To calculate the sample size the formula developed by Hamburg Morris (1985) was used as follows with  $\alpha = 0.05$ :

$$X = Z \left( \frac{c}{100} \right)^2 r(100 - r)$$

$$n = \frac{NX}{[(N - 1)E^2 + X]}$$

$$E = \sqrt{\frac{[(N - n)X]}{n(N - 1)}}$$

Where  $N$  is the population size,  $r$  is the fraction of responses that you are interested in, and  $Z(c/100)$  is the critical value for the confidence level  $c$  ( $c=1.96$ ).  $E$  is the margin error while  $n$  is the sample size.

$N=865$  (the study population)

$E=6\%$  (0.06) which is the margin of error is the amount of error that you can tolerate. The study sample is drawn from a population of 6 strata; I can tolerate only 1% in each stratum.

$$N = \frac{865 * 0.345744}{[(865 - 1)(0.06)^2 + 0.345744]}$$

$$N = \frac{299.06856}{3.456144} = 86.5324361$$

That is, the study sample is made up of 87 individuals identified via convenience, purposive and simple random sampling techniques.

**Table1. Composition of the sample by gender**

No	Study Participants	Female	Male	Number	Percent
1	Female Headed Households	70	0	70	80.5
2	Sector staff	5	9	14	16.1
3	District staff	1	1	2	2.3
4	Staff in the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion	1	0	1	1.1
<b>5</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** primary data, 2014

As indicated in Table1; it is shown that the respondents who participated in the study, there more women (77) than men (10); which means that female headed households (FHHs) were highly represented with 80.5 % of the total sample because the study was mainly based on female headed households. All the staffs in charge of social and economic affairs, both at sector (14/87 that is 16.1%) and district levels (2/87 that is 2.3%) were available in the period of the study and provided their inputs. 14 sector staffs represented each sector of the Huye district and 2 district staffs (the Social Protection Officer and the staff in-charge of gender). The staff in charge of women empowerment in the Ministry of Gender

and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF) also participated in the study. All the respondents were selected due to their involvement in the women empowerment at large

### **Data Collection**

Data is anything given or admitted as a fact and on which a research inference is based (Oso and Onen, 2008) both secondary and primary data have been considered.

### **Research Instruments**

#### **Questionnaire**

“A Questionnaire is a set of questions designed to generate the data necessary to accomplish the objectives of the research project; it is a formalized schedule for collecting information from respondents” (Mc Daniel and Gates, 2005). The researcher has designed a questionnaire relevant to the research objectives. The questionnaire comprised both open and closed-ended questions. Respondents were explained how to answer all the questions.

#### **Focus Group Discussion**

A focus group discussion (FGD) is a good way to gather together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest (Stewart, 1990). Morgan affirmed that the strength of FGD relies on allowing the participants to agree or disagree with each other (Morgan, 1988). The main items tackled were in relation to the empowerment of female headed households and their participation in community development projects. With skilled facilitation, focus groups can come up with ideas and solutions which none of the individual members had thought about beforehand (Alston and Bowles, 2003).

#### **Interview**

Rubin and Babbie stated that field research is a matter of going where the action is and simply watching and listening. You can learn a lot merely by being attentive to what's going on. Sometimes, it's appropriate to ask people questions and record their answers (Rubin and Babbie, 2005). A face-to-face interaction was done with the in charge of social affairs (AFSO) at sector and district level, and with the in charge family empowerment in the ministry of gender and family promotion (MIGEPROF).

#### **Observation**

Dudley noted that observation method is especially relevant to social work research, because social workers regularly depend on their observational skills in practice. Social workers are taught to pay attention to what they observe when meeting with their clients, particularly when visiting them in their homes. Observation focuses on what can be seen or heard such as the behaviours of people (Dudley, 2011).

#### **Data Analysis Techniques**

After data collection, findings have been presented and analysed with methods and techniques appropriate to both quantitative and qualitative approaches: Univariate analysis, thematic analysis and Content analysis. Univariate Analysis was used to transform the information into numerical data. The numerical data obtained, have been exploited with the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) and Ms Excel. Thematic Analysis is the most common form of qualitative analysis (Guest, 2012). It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (or "themes") within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Themes are patterns across data sets that are important to the description of a phenomenon and are associated to a specific research question (Daly, Kellehear, and Gliksman, 1997). Thematic analysis is performed through the process of coding in six phases

to create established, meaningful patterns. These phases are: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report (Fereday, and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Content analysis is a research technique used to make replicable and valid inferences by interpreting and coding textual material. By systematically evaluating texts (e.g., documents, oral communication, and graphics), qualitative data can be converted into quantitative data. Although the method has been used frequently in the social sciences, only recently has it become more prevalent among organizational scholars (Robertson, 1976).

### Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability of data, the researcher applied construct validity and Inter-rater reliability apart from pretesting exercise described in the previous point. Construct Validity was used to ensure that the measure is actually measuring what it is intended to measure (Cronbach, 1971). Inter-rater reliability is a measure of reliability used to assess the degree to which different judges or ratters agree in their assessment decisions (Moskal and Leydens, 2000).

### Results and Discussion

#### Presentation and Analysis of the findings

Regarding the purpose of the study that concerns the assessment of leading factors that influence the persistence of poverty among female headed households in Rwanda; various factors have been identified to be hampering the good process of women empowerment in Rwanda, and thereby causing the persistence of poverty among rural women in general and FHHs in particular. Irrespective of the government efforts through community development projects, poverty is persistent among the majority of female headed households. Factors influencing the persistency of poverty have been presented in the following table.

**Table2. Factors leading to persistency of poverty**

No	Factors of poverty	Frequency (N=87)	Valid Percent
1	Lower level of education	82	94
2	Lack of self-esteem	82	94
3	Family size	66	76
4	Small lands	66	76
5	Fear of risk taking	62	71
6	Health disability	51	59

Source: primary data, 2014

As per Table2, majority of respondents (94%) mentioned major factors that are interfering with the economic empowerment of women in Rwanda thereby causing the persistency of poverty: lower level of education and lack of self-esteem. The following quotes illustrate how respondents emphasised on those factors:

*“The 1994 Genocide against Tutsis prevented me from continuing my studies. It happened when I was in Senior 2. It was not easy for me to go back to school as my entire family had ceased. I don’t have any professional skills to compete with others” (FHH44, a woman from Rusatira Sector)*

*“Nowadays it is not easy to find a good paying job. Almost every requires one to have completed a certain level of the study. For the unskilled jobs requiring physical strength, we try but men beat us” (FHH10, a woman from Ngoma Sector”.*

Apart from those two factors, 76% of the respondents stressed on family size and small lands. They said that having many family members would be a challenge for development in a country where agricultural land is getting smaller. The lower level of education and lack of self-esteem impact on the female headed households' risk taking as declared by 71% of the respondents; and 59% have raised the issue of health disability.

It is worth to note that various strategies to prevent the persistency of poverty and improve the women economic empowerment have been raised by respondents.

**Table3. Strategies for improving women empowerment**

No	Strategies for women empowerment	Frequency (N=87)	Valid percent
1	Entrepreneurship skills	85	98
2	Strict follow up by local government	80	92
3	Increase of family planning	79	91
4	Cooperative management skills	75	86
5	Saving culture	75	86
7	Improvement of education for all	75	86

*Source: primary data, 2014*

As shown in the Table3, majority of both female headed households and staffs (98%) said that more training on entrepreneurship skills would raise the self-esteem and motivate them to start up small business and participate in income generating activities. As stated by Negash (2006), female empowerment should take roots in improved education and technology training. Without that I would be very difficult to compete with men and thereby overcome dependency. Many of the female headed households belong to cooperatives but they claim little knowledge in cooperative management which lead to cooperative disruption; and 92% proposed training on cooperative management skills. One of them declared:

*“Intambwe Association helps us a lot but we have a huge problem of management and leadership; our leaders do not follow strictly the loans reimbursement and I think it continues like this, our group will collapse very soon” (FHH27, a woman from Ruhashya sector).*

Apart from reimbursement raised by that respondent, many others emphasized on the members' interpersonal problems due to conflict of interest. All those problems are not well tackled. As the main activities of cooperatives (Umurenge SACCO and Intambwe Groups) are saving and credit, they committed themselves to train and sensitize more women about saving and credit culture; and thereby remove the barrier of risk fearing. One sector staff supported it with the following statement:

*“No economic improvement can be done if the level of education does not also improve” (SS9 and FHH13, 21, 32).*

*“The government did a lot through the ministry of education but more short professional trainings to increase the abilities of the female headed households and women at large are outstandingly needed” (SS3, 5, 11 and 13, in charge of social affairs in Mukura sector; Rwaniro sector; Maraba sector and Kigoma sector; DS1 and 2, Vice Mayor in charge of social affairs and in charge of social development at district level; MS1, in charge of women empowerment at ministerial level).*

They proposed the revision and improvement of education policy by including short-term trainings; and finally insisted on the fact that the local government should improve their

follow-up and strictly monitor the participation of female headed households particularly in community development projects.

### **Discussion of the findings**

The study revealed that major factors leading to the persistency of poverty among female headed households include but not limited to the lower level of education and lack of self-esteem. These factors have been mentioned by majority of the respondents. Women in general and female headed households in particular don't feel enough confident to compete with men, even if some cases of women have witnessed their achievements through media and governmental reports. Some of them do not take advantage to the chance they have been given through the implementation of community development projects in local governments, their few skills make men remain stronger and it is not easy for many women to compete with them.

Given that the national population density is very high (493 inhabitant/sq km), 76% of the respondents asserted that female headed households and other categories of poor people are claiming to possess small and insufficient plots either for cultivating or for other purposes. This is general for all rural areas living from agricultural activities (2012 population and housing census). This is a problem the country which the economy is mostly based on agriculture. According to CIA-The World Factbook (2013), the Rwandan economy is based on agricultural production, which is largely fuelled by rains on small, semi-subsisting and increasingly fragmented farms. It has few natural resources to exploit and a small and still growing industrial sector. Although coffee and tea production is well suited to small farms in Rwanda, steep slopes and cool climates, and allowed access to currencies over the years, the size of the farm continues to decline. Large family size and small lands would continue to be a big challenge for poor people and especially female headed households whose history did not allow them to be prepared enough for skilful competition.

The consequences of 1994 genocide against Tutsis that affected the health status of the general population are also another factor that did not allow female headed households to economically develop. Health disability that is affecting their efforts to cater for the family members and lack of self-esteem prevent them to take risk. The study of Rieder and Elbert revealed that genocide survivors and their families continue to present with considerable rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and substantial depressive and anxiety symptoms (Rieder and Elbert, 2013). Their study indicated a strong association between health problems and psychosocial factors such as social integration. A high level of PTSD has shown that psychological suffering affects the general population, although the nature of traumatic stressors has varied. All the previously mentioned factors lead to the decreased motivation and fear of risk taking; which deteriorate female headed households' efforts in economic related development matters. To overcome those challenges, the government of Rwanda through community development policy, implemented various strategies to increase the entrepreneurship and cooperative management skills. This would help women actively participate in poverty eradication.

### **Conclusion**

The empowerment of female headed households through community development projects faced many challenges during the implementation process. Majority of respondents identified lower level of education and lack of self-esteem at the first rank. As previously presented, girls did not get the chance to study massively as their brother in the ancient Rwanda, which impacted negatively on the professional competences of women in the

aftermath of genocide when they were left on their own by the killings of their husbands. They lack self-esteem and competition with men was at very low level because of their educational background. Although, they are changing their mind and integrate the so-called boys and men's professions, the proportion is still down. Small plots and family size were also a problem for community development project managers due to disproportion between the number of family and the portion of land they had to exploit. As a country whose majority of rural population depend on agriculture, it was not easy for the family headed households with small plots to satisfy their family demands through agricultural activities.

However, the lower level of education and lack of self-esteem prevented women from taking risks, and it is not easy to develop without taking risks. In addition to their lower level of education, the women health disability is another poverty factor. Some of the women were marked by psychological and other health disability in the aftermath of genocide and that could not allow them participate actively in the community development projects. They depended only on direct support, a component of Vision 2020 Umurenge Program (VUP) where they get a certain sum of money for life demands, depending on their life conditions.

To bypass all those challenges to women empowerment, the government has established various strategies such as free education for all and increase of vocational trainings. But it is imperative to sensitise both men and women about gender equality so as the national gender policy be effective. Without such efforts women will continuously depend on men. Giving enough entrepreneurship and cooperative management skills will enable female headed households to run appropriately their own cooperatives such as Intambwe groups and thereby develop themselves. This would not achieve good results without more sensitization about family planning program to match family size and family resources.

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