



**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session**

**National mechanisms for gender equality: advocates for action and accountability,
catalysts for change**

PANEL DISCUSSION

**THE ROLE OF NATIONAL MECHANISMS IN LEGISLATIVE CHANGE
AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

by

**Ms. Rose RWABUHIHI*
Chief Gender Monitor/Rwanda**

**Wednesday, 11 March 2015
15.00 - 18.00 pm**

*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

The initiative to organize this session as one of the events in the series of CSW59 by the leadership of the UN Women comes at an opportune moment. For the purposes of this presentation, the paper draws most of the examples and lessons from Rwanda to address the role of national mechanisms in legislative change and accountability which are vital ingredients towards a nation's sustainable development at all levels.

To build a nation founded on accountable democratic and human principles where discrimination would not be tolerated, the leadership of Rwanda has established a legal framework that underscores the importance of women participation and representation in all aspects of development and has paved the way to the attainment of various gender gains in Rwanda.

In 2003, a gender sensitive constitution was put in place entrenched in the broader liberation ideology of women empowerment, which broke the country's past discriminatory legal framework and created a new peaceful and gender sensitive phase. The constitution-making processes were all-inclusive, participatory and provided a forum for national dialogue and negotiation on some of the divisive issues including gender discrimination, which had affected the country's accountability mechanisms for several years. This involved a critical engagement of women's caucuses, a strong partnership and alliance of gender sensitive men, high number of women in the constitutional commission, the gender machinery and women's Civil Society Organizations.

As the foundation of the post-genocide legal system, the 2003 Rwandan constitution mandates a minimum of 30 percent representation of women at all decision-making levels¹. The preamble to the constitution formally states the country's commitment to the rights of both men and women in national development and for accountability purposes, the Gender Monitoring Office was established under Article 185 which is, by virtue of its constitutional establishment, an independent public institution mandated to monitor how the fundamental principles of gender are respected in all organs and at all levels².

Under the Forum for Rwandan Women Parliamentarians, women members of parliament have crossed party lines rallied to address issues facing women and the nation as a whole without embarking on individual party requirements and amplify women's voices as a shared agenda. This promotes unity and facilitates advocacy and legislation of gender responsive laws.

For the first time in Rwanda, ground breaking laws which have ushered in a new era for women and girls were put in place. They include, the Land law of 2005 and inheritance and succession law of 1999 play a substantial role in overcoming economic hurdles and guarantees equal rights of land ownership and property inheritance rights for men, women, boys and girls with 50% equal share. Women's access to land tremendously contributed to their control over productive resources and access to loans at a rate of 38% in 2011.

In 2008, the law preventing and punishing Gender Based Violence was adopted and punishes Gender Based Violence in all its forms but most importantly punishes marital rape. The adoption of a gender sensitive organic budget law in 2013 has made it mandatory for a gender sensitive planning and no budget is approved by the Parliament unless it has the required gender budget statement showing how

¹ Article 9, constitution of the Republic of Rwanda of June 2003 as amended to date

² Article 3 of the law N° 51/2007 of 20/09/2007 establishing the organization and functioning of GMO

gender equality will be implemented. These accountability measures are monitored by the Gender Monitoring Office to ensure compliance with the law but also identify specific obstacles that might prevent budget agencies to implement gender equality through resource allocation which has been the major hindrance to the implementation of gender equality commitments in several countries.

All these mechanisms and many more have contributed to the realization of gender sensitive legislative change and accountability and has had a remarkable impact demonstrated by a shift and increase in various development indicators. For example, women's representation in Parliament increased from with 48.8% in 2003 to 64% in 2013 making Rwanda a world leader in women's representation in parliament. In addition, women's representation in other areas include 43% of female ministers, 50% Supreme Court Judges and 40% of Provincial Governors.³ Women's access to formal and micro financial services has also increased from 29% in 2008 to 47% in 2012.⁴

Establishing systems for measurement, gender auditing and generating data for evidence based advocacy are some of the key strategies for effective monitoring and holding institutions accountable to gender equality and the empowerment of women that have been put in place. Specifically, the Gender Monitoring Office has invested a lot in the production of gender and GBV indicators, conducting institutional gender audits, development of National gender monitoring and evaluation framework, districts and sector gender profiling which all lead to the development of concrete issue papers that inform gender sensitive planning and decision making.

Twenty years after Beijing, National mechanisms for gender equality in Rwanda have worked in partnership with international mechanisms for better results for women and girls. For instance, the United Nations agencies played a very supportive role throughout the process of engendering the constitution. By and large, technical and financial support is visible at various levels within the national gender machinery through joint interventions and single-institutional support.

In partnership with International mechanisms, Rwanda Security organs have embraced the establishment of an outstanding Model, Isange One Stop Centers that provide holistic response to survivors of Gender Based Violence under one roof thereby preventing re-victimization, risk of spoiled evidence and delayed justice.

Responding to the Secretary General campaign "Africa Unite to End GBV", the Gender Machinery has worked with security organs to set up the Kigali International Conference Declaration, which brings together over 34 African countries in prevention and response to GBV. This campaign has brought new momentum in the fight against GBV among the signatory countries, coordinated by Rwanda.

The respect of reporting requirements at regional and international levels on gender equality, including Beijing Declaration, CEDAW, Solemn Declaration on gender equality among others have created awareness and assured measurement of progress, challenges and more importantly accelerated domestication of international commitments into home grown gender sensitive mechanisms for the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

³ Gender Profile in governance and Security 2014, GMO

⁴ Fin scope 2012

Call for increased support to strengthen accountability mechanisms not only through reporting mechanisms but also through national strategies that hold different stakeholders and ensure sustained gender equality and women's empowerment is key.

In conclusion, let me underscore H.E Paul Kagame's message towards sustaining gender equality gains in Rwanda. I quote "The struggle to achieve gender equality does not cease when we experience a few victories. On the contrary, the stakes are raised, even higher, and we as leaders are challenged to keep on running, to run even faster, and think ahead of our times."⁵

⁵ Opening address by President Paul Kagame, at the International Forum on the Role of Leadership in Promoting, Accelerating and Sustaining Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment-Kigali, 17 May 2010