

# Services Delivery in Local Government and Empowerment of Female Headed Households: The Case of Huye District, Rwanda

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## Abstract

This study “Services delivery in local government and empowerment of female headed households” was carried out in order to explore the community development services delivered in Huye district and how they impact on the empowerment process of female headed households (FHHs) in particular. It is an exploratory study that used mainly qualitative approach and survey design. Questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion were mostly used to collect data and thematic analysis to discuss the results. Findings revealed that FHHs participate actively in community development services (CDS) offered through various programs such Girinka program (one cow per poor family program), Umurenge SACCO, Vision 2020 Umurenge Program (VUP) and Intambwe Groups; where gender equality is highly observed. Respondents declared that CDS were an opportunity for FHHs and other poor people to participate in income generating activities. The credit and saving services are offered mainly via Umurenge SACCO and Intambwe groups and this prevents them not always rely on governmental support. Through national women council (CNF) and Umugoroba w’ababyeyi (women evening gatherings), local leaders report about the family and CDS related issues. Most of the time, community members select among them who should participate or benefit from a given service to testify the accountability and transparency in local government; even though it has been noted that in some areas, local authorities decide on their behalf. Nevertheless, family size, old age and level of education, have been raised among the issues that hinder the empowerment process of FHHs. The strategies already undertaken are family planning programs, financial support for old people and free basic education. Given the insufficiency of those strategies, the researcher recommends the local government to closely follow-up the implementation of CDS, sensitizing men about gender equality; and finally to increase the level of transparency in the CDS provision.

**Keywords:** Family headed households; Empowerment; Community development services.

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## **1. Introduction**

Rwanda, commonly known as “a country of thousand hills” because of its mountainous character, is bordered by Burundi in south, the Democratic Republic of Congo in west mainly characterized by the shores of Lake Kivu, Uganda in north composed of a long range of volcanoes where most tourists come charmingly to visit gorillas and Tanzania in east where the river of Akagera, the beginning of the long Nile river takes its source. The land of Rwanda is relatively made up of flat plains in the east along the Tanzania border to steep mountains in the west along the continental divide between the Congo and Nile rivers [1,2].

The Rwandan culture is extended to those neighboring countries especially Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo where you can find a big size of population whose first language is Kinyarwanda (the only national language in Rwanda). Historically, Rwandan population was divided into three ethnics: Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. These divisions were based on perceptions of historical group origins rather than on cultural differences. They were all involved in the same economic activities, mainly agriculture, cattle rearing and hunting. As a country of few resources, its economy is based on the largely rain fed agricultural production of small, semi-subsistence, and increasingly fragmented farms and according to the government reports [3], among 57% of Rwandans are living in abject poverty and surviving on less than \$1 per day; majority are women living in rural community.

In the last decades, there have been great achievements towards poverty reduction; hence people may assume that the end of extreme poverty may be possible in the future generation; but it requires cutting the multiple roots of impoverishment. As asserted by Sen [4] “Income deprivation prevents women from attaining resources and converting their monetary resources into socioeconomic status”; this statement may be applicable in Rwanda where women have been so long depending on their husband about monetary resources and engagement in income generating activities, inducing most of them in deep poverty. Deprivation passes down from one generation of women to the next, leading to a perpetual feminization of poverty [5]. There is a continuing increase of single mother households worldwide, hence higher percentages of women than men in poverty [6]. Female headed households (FHHs) in rural areas are at higher risk of poverty comparing to other categories of women due to lack of income and their children are more disadvantaged [5]. In various countries, especially developing countries, there are social and exclusions norms which do not allow women to benefit from employment opportunities and although both men and women suffer in poverty, Bianchi [7] asserted that occupational gender discrimination push most women to poverty. They do not have opportunities to access to the basic needs such as health and education [8].

In Rwanda, impoverished women have been vulnerable to discrimination and traditional gender-based mentalities [9]. A vicious cycle of limited education and lack of awareness for legal rights as well as inadequate health care push them into persisting poverty and life deplorable conditions. It is imperative then, to pull these women from the poverty and make them the focus of Rwanda’s economic advancement. The impoverished living environment for majority of women is a direct consequence of the genocide. Women encompass the majority of rural poverty and isolated suffering. During 1994 genocide against Tutsi, between 250,000 - 500,000 females have been sadly raped and deliberately infected with HIV/AIDS. As the conflict eased, women found themselves alone: unmarried, widowed, or wives of prisoners. This situation left Rwandan women as the heads

of most households and living in extreme poverty and despair [10-11].

The Government of Rwanda, through the Community Development Policy which has an overarching goal of “ensuring effective and sustainable participation of the community in its own development” [4], has put in place various programs in order to enable different groups at grassroots level to benefit from development programs such as Umurenge SACCO and 2020 Vision Umurenge Program and many others, which are implemented and closely monitored by local government. In all these programs, gender equality has been taken into account, hence both men and women are actively participating. They analyse their environment, define their individual and collective needs and problems, and design individual and collective plans to meet their needs and solve their problems in a prioritised manner [12].

Whatever the efforts engaged, the Community Development Policy cannot be effectively implemented without a good governance system. Rwanda Governance Advisory Council (RGAC) reported that good governance is an engine of sustainable development by focusing on aspects related to economic growth and people’s development through job creation and income generation. Economic empowerment of citizens is of tremendous importance for a country’s life and sustainability of its governance system. National security, for example, should not only be understood in terms of state security and absence of violence but also in terms of poverty reduction [13].

Quality of service delivery which is a fundamental obligation of government and private sector underlines accountability and transparency, responsiveness and fairness, participation and inclusion of all sectors. It engages both service providers and service users. Quality of Service delivery indicator measures the ability of central and local government to provide vital services to the population in a citizen-center manner. Sufficient quality, standards of services received, accountability and transparency in the domains of local government would impact positively in the development of rural community, taking into account gender equality [14].

Twenty years after the 1994 genocide, there is a lot to celebrate in the area of the promotion of gender equity and empowerment of women such as the attainment of 65% female representation in Parliament, compared to an average of 21% for the rest of the world, 40 % of Cabinet Seats being held by women Ministers, high representation of women among provincial governors and senior civil servants as well as their strong presence in the business sector, science and technology and culture. Nevertheless, in many rural communities, more women are suffering for deep poverty [15].

### ***1.1. Statement of the Problem***

The Government of Rwanda has adopted some important policies and programs which clearly show its commitment to the integration of gender equality into the community development: the Rwandan Constitution of 2003, which instituted affirmative action ; Vision 2020, which stated that gender has to be integrated as a cross-cutting issue in all development policies and strategies; including the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2008-2012 (EDPRS 1). During the period of EDPRS 1, key community developments projects were implemented in order to alleviate poverty within all poor families which analysed the still existing

gender inequalities as indicated in the National Gender Policy, revised in 2010.

However, according to Rwanda Governance Scorecard of 2014, service delivery scored relatively low more especially, service delivery in local government scored 67.7% in 2010, but increased slightly up to 71.1% in 2014 [14]. This study therefore aims at assessing the implementation and the impact of community development services and thereby explores the peoples' perceptions about the status of service delivery in the empowerment process of female headed households, who used to be historically living in deep poverty and thereby depending on their husbands.

## **1.2. Research Objectives**

### **1.2.1. Major Objective**

The major objective of this study is to explore the impact of services delivery in local government on the socio-economic empowerment of female headed households in Huye district.

### **1.2.2. Specific Objectives**

- (i) Identify the community development services delivered in Huye district to empower female headed households and women at large.
- (ii) Assess the socio-economic impact of community development services implemented in Huye district.
- (iii) Assess the accountability and transparency of services delivered to empower female headed households in Huye district.
- (iv) Find out the challenges and appropriate strategies to empower female headed households in Huye district.

## **1.3. Significance of the Study**

The study was carried out in order to extend the literature about women empowerment at large and particularly female headed households (FHHs) who have been economically ignored for so long but nowadays concerned by all developmental issues as they have to cater for their families. The study will help the local government review the community development strategies and approaches from the grassroots level.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Study Design**

This exploratory study has mainly used qualitative approach. In order to give a more detailed and balanced picture of the study and thereby increase the credibility and validity of the results, various techniques of data collection have been used. The research designs were case study and survey as it focuses on the female headed households from the rural area of Huye district across 14 sectors.

### **2.2. Scope and Study Population**

In 2006, the Government of Rwanda has reformed the administrative implementation of the decentralization policy. The country is currently organized into four provinces in addition to the Kigali city, 30 Districts, 416 Sectors, 2148 Cells and 14 837 Villages.

The study focused on female headed households within 14 sectors of Huye district, local authorities at sector and district levels; which make the approximate total number of 1500 people. But the sample size is made of 85 respondents comprising 70 female headed households purposively selected (5 FHHs per Sector), plus 14 staff representing all sectors and one staff representing the district (Staffs in charge of social affairs).

Although this qualitative and purposive sample does not deliver full generalizability due to judgmental considerations, the interpretation of data provide a clear perspective of how services delivered in local government are contributing in the empowerment process of female headed households in Huye district.

**Table 1:** Sample Size

<b>Respondents</b>			<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>Headed</b>	<b>households</b>	70	82.3529412
<b>(FHHs)</b>				
<b>Sector staff</b>			14	16.4705882
<b>District staff</b>			1	1.17647059
<b>Total</b>			85	100

### **2.3. Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

Primary data have been collected by the researcher and research assistants from the field. The main research methods were: Questionnaire administration, Interview and Focus group discussion, as well as observation. Secondary data were collected via document review. The research consulted possible reports and publications in relation to women empowerment and governance system.

### **2.4. Data Analysis Techniques**

After the field research, findings have been presented, interpreted and discussed qualitatively via thematic analysis and percentages helped to present and analyze some few numerical data.

### **2.5. Validity and Reliability**

#### **2.5.1. Pretesting of Tools and Review**

A very important part of the questionnaire construction process is its piloting, known as pretesting. This helped

to identify questions which do not fit in the study and do not make sense to participants. Pilot study is not done in order to report results but rather to check for glitches in wording of questions and lack of clarity of instructions [16]. A small number of respondents (7 respondents, 10% of the FHHs sample size) were targeted. Pretesting data were collected and analyzed; this helped in the correction of any mistakes regarding the process and content. It was also an opportunity for research assistants to be familiar with the field data collection issues.

To ensure validity and reliability of data, Construct validity and Inter-rater reliability were applied in addition to pretesting exercise hereby described.

### **2.5.2. Construct Validity and Inter-rater reliability**

Construct Validity is used to ensure that the measure is actually measuring what it is intended to measure and no other variables [17]. The researcher selected 4 lecturers (2 from University of Rwanda/Huye Campus and 2 from Catholic University of Rwanda) familiar with the construct who examined qualitatively the items and decided about what each specific item is intended to measure.

Inter-rater reliability is a measure of reliability used to assess the degree to which different judges or raters agree in their assessment decisions. Inter-rater reliability is useful because human observers do not necessarily interpret answers the same way; raters agreed upon how responses generate knowledge about what is being assessed [18]. This task was also done by the lecturers previously mentioned.

### **2.5.3. Limitations of the Study**

During data collection, some respondents could not disclose critical information about the issue of accountability and transparency in services delivery, and other services and programs insufficiently implemented, as they feared to be reported. However, the anonymity of research instruments and confidentiality upon respondents' identity assured them.

## **3. Results**

All the information gathered during the study process, are thematically presented, analysed and discussed.

The discussed themes are:

1. Community development services (CDS)
2. Inclusion and Participation of FHHs in CDS
3. Socio-economic Impact of CDS
4. Accountability and transparency in services delivery
5. Challenges and strategies

### **3.1. Community Development Services (CDS)**

Respondents mentioned Umurenge SACCO (savings and credits cooperatives at sector level), Girinka Program

(one cow per poor family), Vision 2020 Umurenge Program ([VUP] a sub/set of vision 2020 implemented at sector level) and Intambwe groups (women’s associations) as the main developmental services offered in their localities. They stressed on the fact that those programs help them boost their socio-economic status in one way or another.

**Table 2:** Community development services

Development services	Number of respondents	Percentage
<b>Umurenge SACCO</b>	85	100%
<b>Girinka program</b>	85	100%
<b>VUP</b>	85	100%
<b>Intambwe groups</b>	80	94%

All respondents (100%) affirmed that the services of Umurenge SACCO (saving and credit cooperatives operating at sector level) allow low and mid-income people in general , and FHHs in particular, to save the little money they get from various income generating activities. They declared that before this program it seemed difficult for rural and poor families to meet the loans’ requirements of commercial and popular banks; but they nowadays request loans at their ease.

Girinka program (one cow per poor family program) is of paramount importance in rural community as it helps poor families to get milk for consumption and manure for agricultural production, this was confirmed by staffs and beneficiaries of the program. When the first calf of the cow’s first beneficiary is born, community members gather together and select the second beneficiary to be given that heifer. Since then the first and second beneficiary get in touch until the heifer is big enough to be separated from the mother and the program expands to the other community members in the same process.

Vision 2020 Umurenge Program (VUP), a sub-set of economic development and poverty reduction strategy, has a significant role in rural socio-economic welfare. Through the main components of VUP: public works, financial support and financial services/credit packages. People are benefiting from various paid activities organised in the dimension of public works; they can get loans from the component of financial services whereas disabled and old people get financial support.

In local government, they have another program called “Intambwe” where women are organised into groups, contribute little money as saving, and later, they may request loans in conformity with one’s savings. The Intambwe services were recognised by respondents, mostly FHHs (94%), as helping services as they complement with Umurenge SACCO in terms of saving and credits opportunities.

### 3.2. *Inclusion and Participation of FHHs in CDS*

Given that Rwanda has put a big impetus on gender equality, females are included into different developmental

services in local government. Respondents declared that they benefit from the affirmation action implemented on the behalf of females and participate in all developmental and leadership opportunities. 65% of seats in parliament are occupied by females and 30% of the available leadership positions are reserved for them [15]. Respondents confirmed that women in general and FHHs in particular are nowadays participating in all income generating activities. They said that in public works and other activities organised by local authorities, women have rights to participate if they feel capable. One respondent declared that she lastly participated in the construction of roads and she was paid at the same level with male co-workers. However, during our group discussions, respondents disclosed that some women do not participate in different activities due to their health disability and benefit only from financial support.

### **3.3. *Socio-economic impact of CDS***

All these development services offered in rural communities generate money. The respondent, who witnessed having got financial support, declared that that monthly support helps her in everyday life demands. Not only financial support, but respondents also declared that they are paid public works where beneficiaries participate in various activities such as constructing public halls, schools and health centres, rehabilitating roads and bridges, and so on. These activities generate money which is used differently according to one's needs. Most of them said that the money is used to fulfil their everyday basic needs: food supplements, rehabilitation of their houses, paying children's schools fees and starting small business. Old and disabled people get some money in terms of support with no refund terms. Beneficiaries of VUP have been given an opportunity to request small loans after presentation of a project. Not only VUP provides opportunities for money generation, but its component of public works also provide an occasion for people to learn about community work which is a good social environment where people meet for work and may interact and discuss about other social issues. Strengthening social ties is a tremendous effect of these works for people who experienced genocide twenty years ago and nowadays still need to improve the level of social reconciliation level. During focus group discussion, FHHs said that through public works and Intambwe groups, they find the opportunity to interact friendly and share their everyday challenges of life.

All respondents affirmed that Girinka program allows cows' beneficiaries to get milk for home consumption but also get extra milk that generate money at the market. Some respondents who beneficiaries of the program said that they can get Frw 12,000 – Frw 20,000 every month from sold milk. It generates manure which increases the quality of lands and thereby impact significantly on agricultural production. Girinka program has also a social aspect by the fact that the first and the second beneficiaries of the cow get in touch and regularly collaborate while the latter is waiting for the first calf to be born, grew up and given to her/him.

### **3.4. *Accountability and transparency in services delivery***

According to the staffs in charge of social affairs at sector level, services are delivered to the beneficiaries with transparency. They said that the Central Government established various programs such as National Women Council (CNF), an organisation that operates from lower levels (Villages and Cells) up to upper levels. The voluntarily committee members of CNF at Village and Cell levels usually call upon women in their localities to

discuss about their problems, find solutions together and advocate for them at Sector and District levels where necessary. During those meetings, FHHs declared that it is opportunity for them to open up and talk about their future and sustainable development issues. CNF and Local leaders organise the “Umugoroba w’Ababyeyi” (women evening gathering) where both women and men meet and exchange about not only family conflicts but also community development projects. Staffs in charge of social affairs affirmed that local government may take this occasion to announce or report about community development opportunities and services that are being implemented in their community and invite them to take part. They often ask them to release the problems encountered in the course of those community development services and propose solutions together.

Community members themselves sit down and select the potential beneficiaries of each program, especially in Girinka program, VUP (on the component of financial support) and Intambwe groups. The first beneficiaries of Girinka program are chosen by the people themselves and later they choose the beneficiaries of the second phase. Respondents said that it was in a meeting after community work commonly known as “Umuganda” where most of the beneficiaries are selected among other members to be part of the beneficiaries of Girinka program, and they also identify to whom they should give the first calf of their cows.

The staffs declared again that when problems occur, they intervene and solve them with the community members before reporting to the upper levels. In an interview with staffs, they said that bottom-up is the most used approach because it helps local leaders to put beneficiaries at the centre of every developmental service. People take this opportunity to exchange about the good progress of the activities.

That goes without reporting some FHHs who, during our group discussion disclosed that in some activities, they are not aware of how participants have been selected. They said that they are often informed of how things are going to proceed and invited to take part but in some other issues such as Ubudehe poverty categorization (Rwanda poverty categorization strategy), people are set and change the category against the consent of the concerned community members.

### **3.5. Challenges and strategies**

Female headed households (FHHs) raised some issues that are hampering the good progress of the developmental services and their full empowerment. Most of them mentioned the advanced age which is always accompanied with physical weakness (70% are more done 50 years old); which do not allow them profit from many income generating activities apart from financial support. The size of the family was also raised as an issue that hinder the sustainable development of FHHs (80% have more than 3 family members). Other respondents have mentioned lower level of education as another limitation during the empowerment process regardless the efforts engaged in local government. Refusal of some men to participate in women gathering has been also raised by the respondents.

Among the strategies already in place, the staffs mentioned monthly financial support for all those who are not able to participate in public works and other income generating activities organised in rural community. They put a big impetus on family planning services in order to regulate birth in line with the family incomes.

Education for all is national program and it concerns all categories of people through the education centres for adults established at cell level and the program of free education (a program established for students from poor families for whom primary and secondary schools fees are paid by the government). Females who had not been able to finish schooling on time benefit from twelve basic education program (TBEP), vocational training centres (VTC) to improve their knowledge and skills, and hence become to compete on labour market.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In local government, there are a lot of services offered to empowerment poor families, women and FHHs inclusive. Women, who have been considered as the weaker sex, are heads of families, and at the centre of all developmental services. The concept of gender equality has induced confidence and hope among women. Their rights in economic development matters are observed in local government.

They are included in all income generating activities; they have rights to participate according to their knowledge and physical competence. They benefit from public works of VUP, saving and credit services of Umurenge SACCO and Intambwe groups, as well as Girinka program. The money earned is used in different life demands and in their own income generating activities for a sustainable development. Some of them have started small businesses to cater for their families in supplement of those development services delivered in local government.

Nevertheless, the empowerment of FHHs and women at large is interfered by various issues such low level of education, old age and physical weakness which hinder their participation in some income generating activities. In some villages, men are not participating in the women's gatherings such as "Umugoroba w'ababyeyi" where their opinions and advices would be of paramount importance in the empowerment of FHHs in particular.

#### **Recommendations**

Given the findings from research participants, it is worth to recommend the following:

- ✓ Local leaders should be closer to old and disabled people, listen to them, observe the problems they have and make sure that financial support is used appropriately.
- ✓ As the level of education has been raised, local leaders should hereby organise and give more impetus to education centres for adults and then sensitize those who have not attended or dropped out to re-join the centres.
- ✓ As far as service delivery is concerned, local leaders should work with full transparency as well as possible. Without this, some people including FHHs may miss the chance to participate in different programs implemented for them. This goes hand in hand with the regular follow-up of people's participation in development services.
- ✓ Local government should increase the level of awareness for men, in particular, about gender equality and call upon them to participate in women gatherings to exchange development issues.

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