



GENDER POLICIES IN POST-GENOCIDE RWANDA: EMPOWERMENT OR POLITICAL STRATEGY?

Las políticas de género en la Ruanda postgenocidio. ¿Empoderamiento o estrategia política?

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In this article, we argue that the gender policies implemented by the Government of Rwanda have been introduced in order to strengthen the democratic credentials of the regime in the eyes of international donors. In order to do so, we have structured the paper in three parts. First, the article examines the political structure of Rwanda, highlighting the dominance of the RPF and the criticisms of its authoritarianism. It also explores the narrative constructed by the RPF, focusing on the portrayal of Tutsi as victims and Hutu as offenders, and the impact of this narrative on international aid. The second part of the essay explores the feminist movement in Rwanda before and after the Genocide, emphasizing the reconfiguration of gendered power relations and the emergence of grassroots women organizations. Finally, it analyzes the implementation of gender policies in Rwanda, considering the tension between transformative feminist goals and the increasing authoritarianism of the state. The main conclusion we have arrived at is that the gender policies applied by the RPF have lacked a transformative impact and that, rather, they have been used as a public relations strategy to disguise the increasing authoritarianism of the government.



Abstract

Feminism; Rwanda; development; international cooperation; autocracy.

Feminismo; Ruanda; desarrollo; cooperación internacional; autocracia.



Key words

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Fechas

En este artículo, defendemos que el propósito del Gobierno de Ruanda a la hora de introducir políticas de género ha sido el de fortalecer sus credenciales democráticas a ojos de los donantes internacionales. Para cumplir con dicho objetivo, hemos estructurado el artículo en tres partes. Primero, se examinan las estructuras políticas de Ruanda, destacando el dominio del RPF y las críticas a su creciente autoritarismo. También se analiza la narrativa construida por el RPF, centrándose en presentar a los Tutsi como víctimas y a los Hutus como criminales y el impacto que esta narrativa tiene en la ayuda internacional. La segunda parte de la investigación examina el movimiento feminista en Ruanda antes y después del Genocidio, enfatizando la reconfiguración de las relaciones de poder de género y el auge de las organizaciones sociales de mujeres. Finalmente, se analiza la implementación de las políticas de género en Ruanda, considerando la tensión entre los objetivos feministas transformativos y el creciente autoritarismo del Estado. La principal conclusión a la que arribamos es que las políticas de género aplicadas por el RPF carecen de un impacto transformativo y que, en su lugar, han sido utilizadas como una estrategia de relaciones públicas para enmascarar el creciente autoritarismo del Gobierno.



1. Introduction

In 1994, the state of Rwanda was devastated by the clash of the two major ethnic groups in the area, Tutsi and Hutu, resulting in one of the most violent genocides in modern history. This left a broken state, a divided society, and a whole new paradigm for state reconstruction. Now, almost 30 years later, Rwanda has become a success story for many in terms of women's rights and female empowerment.

The 1994 Genocide and its consequent aftermath have severely impacted Rwanda's population. Although determining the causes for the ethnic disparity in Rwanda goes beyond the aim of this study, it is important to mark that, despite the general understanding of Hutu and Tutsi as antagonistic ethnics, this problem aroused from an *ethnicization* by European imperialism of what it was a pre-colonial class distinction (Mamdani, 2001). Hence, to be a Hutu or a Tutsi was intrinsically related to the economic power of individuals, a division that is still present nowadays.

Rwanda is defined as an example of social reconstruction. Nevertheless, the many flaws of the system have put into question the legitimacy of these claims. Theoretically, the Rwandan political structure is considered to be a multi-party system; in reality, power is mainly controlled by the RPF (Burnet, 2011). Since the end of the 1994 Genocide, the Rwandan Patriotic Front "has monopolised power and eliminated countervailing voices" (Reyntjens, 2011, p. 32). Kagame's arrival to power in 1994 entangled a series of political reforms which have granted the President and the Prime Minister further and longer executive power (Turianskyi & Chisiza, 2017).

Although there is a common understanding that the 1994 Genocide was committed by Hutu extremists towards the rest of the population, the RPF has constructed a narrative that positions Tutsi as *offended* and Hutu as *offenders*, unrecognizing the Hutu perspective of a double genocide. This single story has translated into the international arena in what Reyntjens considers "an extraordinary sense of entitlement" which is enhanced by the "exploitation of international feelings of guilt and ineptitude" (Reyntjens, 2011, p. 32).

The decade of the 1990s placed the ideas of liberalisation, democratisation, and good governance high in the international development agenda. The events that happened between April and July 1994 brought a globally extended feeling of guilt and accountability which catalysed Rwanda as an “aid darling” (Marysse, Ansoms, & Cassimon, 2007). In other words, despite the denounces of democracy diminishment, the donation flux to the country has substantially increased since the arrival of Paul Kagame to power. “If they sometimes privately agree that some things are going seriously wrong, there is a consensus to give the [Rwandan] government a smooth ride” (International Crisis Group, 2001, p. 13).

Nevertheless, the latest decades have shown an increasing awareness of gender and feminist policies in the Rwandan governmental agenda, positioning its parliament as one of the most gender equal in the world. The implementation of feminist policies in Rwanda has been a divisive issue in the academic literature. On the one hand, a part of academia has underscored the extraordinary efforts Rwanda’s government has employed to overcome the disruption of the rule of law. Authors such as Nimusa, Karuhanga et al. (2018) have addressed what they called “a genuine commitment” towards gender equality and democratisation. On the other hand, there is an ongoing criticism among scholars (Tiemessen, 2004; Reyntjens, 2011; Debussche & Ansoms, 2013) which implies that said feminist policies have served as a public relations strategy to attract donors and deviate attention from the increasing authoritarian nature of the Kagame’s legislature.

This study aims to discern whether the current gender policies applied by the government of Rwanda follow a transformative feminist character and how it relates to the increasing authoritarianism of the state.

2. The feminist movement prior to and post-genocide

War impels rapid social change. Furthermore, war and the post-conflict scenario obligate a re-negotiation of domestic power relations which entangled all levels of society from gender to class (Tripp, 2015). According to Hughes regarding the feminisation of politics in the twentieth century “countries that have experienced war since the 1980s have higher rates of women in their legislatures than countries that have not” (Hughes, 2009, p. 4). After the violence occurred in 1994, Rwanda went through a reconfiguration of gendered power relations, accelerating an ongoing trend that was taking place since the early 1980s (Berry, 2018).

Following the international arena of liberalisation, during the 1980s a modest women’s movement emerged in Rwanda. This was motivated due to the increasing awareness of females’ propensity to poverty in developing nations (Burnet, 2012). Rwandan women obtained the right to vote after the independence, however, they were still constrained in most basic freedoms, “they required their husband’s consent to engage in any profit-making activity, register businesses, buy land, or undertake any legal action in court (Jefremovas, 1991, p. 385).

Women were major victims of the genocide. Rwandan women not only became the targets of mass killings and violence, in addition, perpetrators employed rape as a form of violence with not only ethnic but also class, and gender dimensions, rather than an individual extension of personal dominant relations. It is estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 rape crimes were committed during the three months that the genocide lasted (Braunéus, 2008). In Rwanda’s precolonial society, the ethnic lineage followed a patrilinear line, consequently, sexual

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violence became a political act designed to carry out an officially orchestrated policy (Buss, 2009). The emasculation of an identity. The utilisation of women and the patriarchal thought of motherhood served as a manner of eliminating the source of ethnicity.

Despite this differentiation, both Hutu and Tutsi women experience a situation of extreme poverty after the genocide. Female-headed households are more likely to fall below the poverty line (Moser, 1989), hence, “in the process of securing their families’ basic needs, women began expanding their social networks and interacting with foreign and local actors” (Berry, 2018, p. 73). They present themselves as less ethnic, less politically engaged, and consequently, more suitable to fulfil the holes left by the dead and detained in the new RPF system.

The genocide left an increasing number of female-headed households, but the impact was not only economic. The severe psychological trauma experienced by women in Rwanda promoted the emergence of informal self-help groups, again the community service-focused labour of women appeared as a solution that the newly formed government could not reach. By 1997, around 15,400 women’s organisations were formally created (Newbury & Baldwin, 2000). By 1999 there were “120 women’s organisations operating at the prefectural level, 1,540 at the commune level, 11,560 at the sector level, and 86,290 at the cell level” (USAID, 2000). Moreover, “women succeeded in seeking aid or small loans from humanitarian NGOs or government projects, they gained value in the post-war social context” (Berry, 2018, p. 77). These groups transitioned from forums to alleviate female psychological distress to income generators and advocated for women’s rights within the new Rwanda. A stronger female grassroots movement emerged. Although there is no specific data on the personal profile of the members of this group, studies by Berry show that “most were Tutsi with secondary or university education” (Ibid.).

During the nine years (1994-2003) that the transition period lasted, Rwandan women’s social role developed. Women’s political value thrived in a scenario that merged from the urgency to meet the imperious population’s basic needs and the demand for a new, less violent, political actor.

3. Mainstreaming approach in gender relations: from a global perspective to national reality in Rwanda

There is an increasing idea that higher representation of women in policy-making organs would be accompanied by a general improvement in women’s lives. During the latest decades, international organisations have attempted to mainstream gender analysis in their policies. The growing awareness of female-headed households constituting the “poorest of the poor” enhanced the general acknowledgement that previous female-oriented development plans did not function as expected, consequently, gender mainstreaming was an attempt to “rectify the slow pace of progress in women’s status in developing countries and at the global level” (True, 2010, p. 192).

Gender mainstreaming at the institutional level has followed a liberal integrationist approach. Although international organisations encourage and commit to the mainstreaming of women in their policymaking, there is a general bias of contemplating gender perspectives as a problem-solving device rather than a global goal, hence, focusing on a utilitarian approach rather than advocating for a genuine reconstruction of the system. Consequently, gendered analyses have been employed as a way of “increasing the legitimacy of international norms such as liberal democracy, humanitarian intervention, free trade, regional integration and so on” (Whitworth, 2004, p. 195). The implementation of gender mainstreaming internationally has seldomly led to the questioning

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of liberal feminism and liberal market structures which “privilege masculine agency and reinforce gendered inequalities in power and resources in the market, state and civil society” (True, 2010). After all, the underlying gendered structure of liberal capitalist market is reliant on household economies and the dependence on informal women’s work as child bearers.

3.1. The reality of gender relations in Rwanda

The Rwandan political elite class woman has experienced an extension of her fundamental political rights. This woman, however, normally corresponds to highly educated anglophone Tutsi, whose education has allowed her to be part of the governmental structure (Berry, 2015). Furthermore, while reserved women’s seats in parliament correspond to geographic regions, there is an extended normality that representatives of those areas do not reside there. Consequently, despite women in Rwanda enjoying the constitutional framework which legitimises their legal equality, there are profound impediments to their application in real life that have a strong tie to economic factors. As such, I propose three major examples: In the first place, the cultural and the official approach to rape and sexual violence. Secondly, the augmentation of gender violence. And lastly, the neglect of the “invisible labour” under the economic rationale.

3.1.1. The silence culture around sexual violence and rape

An outstanding example of the extent to which patriarchal norms are cemented in Rwanda’s society is the approach to rape and rape victims. Rape became a major genocidal crime and part of the jurisdiction of the Gacaca courts in 2008 and part of the Jurisdiction of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda since 1994, nevertheless, most perpetrators have not been convicted and no compensation has been paid to the victims. “The rapes during the genocide are acknowledged in the general discourse and indeed used as a key point of reference in stories about genocide” (Selimovic, 2020, p. 137), it appears that despite a general acceptance of rape as a tool of mass violence and ethnic cleansing during the genocide, the individual acknowledgement of violations is still problematic. In addition, studies by Braunéus (2008) found that those women who testified as rape and sexual violence victims have experienced a re-traumatisation of the events and have been left with no psychological treatment and stigmatised in the community, “Rwanda rape victims’ experiences have been socially labelled as unbearable and unspeakable” (Selimovic, 2020, p. 140).

Having said this, it is important to remark the current narrative positions Tutsi as *offended* and Hutu as *offenders*. Nevertheless, the reality is that many cases of abuse happened outside the mere dyad of Tutsi as victims and Hutu as perpetrators, extreme militias raped, enslaved, and abused women of any ethnicity. According to Thompson among the estimated numbers of reported sexual abuses, there are extremely high levels of Hutu women as victims of their co-ethnics (Thomson, 2013). This single-story-told has had a severe impact on women’s lives and reconciliation within Rwanda. The acknowledgement denial of a gendered specific issue as gender violence to a part of the population has broadened the gap between Tutsi and Hutu women and has anchored the latter to a position no longer of victim or sufferer but of “whore” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007). The specific economic breach between Hutu and Tutsi women implies that Hutu are more prone to live in communities where sexual stigma has more severe im-

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plications for community life. Furthermore, the experience of denial of sexual violence has as a consequence the denial of access to the respective legal and social security structures designed to cope with the situation of victims of sexual violence. As a striking example, Hutu women are denied their appearance as victims in the Gacaca courts (Braunéus, 2008).

3.1.2. The economic dimension of gender violence

Regarding the increase in gender violence, it is necessary to state that this issue is not a problem intrinsic in Rwanda or isolated in low-income countries. It is an ongoing dynamic in the vast majority of the world independently of economic, development or gender equality status.

Men are brought up, even in the most peaceful of times, to identify manhood with a readiness to exercise authority over women and to wield force, against women and other men. In war times they are further trained, and rewarded for the practice of wounding, raping and killing. Often this experience traumatises men as well as their victims. And it shapes their behaviour after the war, for the disposition to violence is not readily put aside with demobilisation. (Cockburn, 1998, p. 202)

Following Berry's studies on Bosnia and Rwanda feminist movements, "men firmly view themselves as the power holders and decision makers within the household, while they view women as primarily responsible for children and domestic sphere" (Berry, 2015, p. 201).

Although legislation such as Law No 59 of 2008 on the criminalization of marital rape has been passed, these efforts have been insufficient, 57.2% of Rwandan women had experienced gender-based violence from their partner and 32% of women reported that their partners had forced them to have sex (Rwanda Men's Resource Centre, 2010). The same study showed that those who were directly affected by the violence of the genocide, approximately 80% of respondents, had higher rates of perpetrating gender violence than those who weren't. The emancipation process lived in Rwanda is being matched with a *patriarchal backlash*, borrowing the concept from Berry (2018). The augmentation of independence and female emancipation in many historical and geographical locations has been counterparty with an augmentation of the violent and hostile attitudes by the patriarchy (Krook, 2015; Blalock, 1967).

Following this line of thought it is not surprising that the majority of reports for gender-based violence come from highly educated and normally employed women, suggesting that men use violence to repress their newly acquired freedoms. However, there is a dimension that seems to be hidden from statistics. A study conducted by Ho (2011) showed that women in low-income households were more reluctant to denounce their partners for gender-based violence. Paradoxically, whereas the punishment of perpetrators might be interpreted as a desired outcome "women don't like to talk about the violence they face because if the police are aware of that [abuse], they will imprison their husbands and [the wives] will remain alone" (Ibid.) The lack of financial means of women in low-income rural areas, impedes them from denouncing their aggressor fearing that the consequent punishment might worsen their financial situation. Furthermore, low-income women are less likely to seek a change in their life since the denouncement of their partner might imply a loss in their support network. This might entail not only that the number of poor women who suffer gender-based violence may be higher than those from an educated background, but that the overall number of women suffering this type of violence in Rwanda might be bigger than initially estimated.

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3.1.3. Gender and Poverty in the economic vision of Rwanda

Lastly, gender emancipation and feminist policies are hindered by Rwanda's attempt to impose an economic rationale in all sectors of the population, disregarding the "triple role" women are submitted to, particularly in the Global South. According to Caroline Moser (1989), in most low-income households "women's work" not only includes child-bearing work but also have a role as secondary income earners. Furthermore, the deficient state provision of basic services has linked women with community work, "where there is an open confrontation between community-level organizations and local authorities [...] women, as an extension of their domestic role, frequently take primary responsibility for the formation, organization and success of the local level groups" (Ibid.).

Kagame's administration has demonstrated that whereas feminist policies interfere with economic growth, preference is given to the latter. A notable example is the reduction of maternal paid leave from twelve to six weeks despite the women's majority in parliament. Moreover, the plan Vision 2020 has conflicted with the economic dimension of gender policies. One of the pillars of this political agenda has been "to move beyond past delusions of viable subsistence-based agriculture towards productive high value and market-oriented agriculture" (Debusscher & Ansons, 2013, p. 1121). To fulfil this purpose, Rwanda's government has implemented a policy of sanctions and promotions of certain forms of labour and hygiene. Although to a certain extent, this affects both men and women with low income, "they are particularly detrimental to women because low-skill industries dominated by women are disproportionately illegal compared to low-skill industries dominated by men" (Ibid.). These policies which attempt to force farmers into maximums of productivity without addressing the gender dimension are likely to enhance the socio-economic gap and trigger women into a spiral of poverty. Furthermore, Rwanda's government has obliterated the "invisible labour". Taking into consideration the aforementioned distribution of community work where women tend to take unpaid tasks, the attempt of the government of formalising this sector has broadened the socio-economic gap. This is a clear example of how governments worldwide depend on unpaid work, mostly personalised in women, and how the economic capitalist theory sends this type of labour to oblivion, even theoretically engaged feminist states such as Rwanda.

Therefore, women's power cannot be determined by the legal framework, nor the availability of these rights rather is a matter of control over them. In an increasingly authoritarian traditional-based structure, "deeply entrenched social structures pose challenges for women's full control over resources" (Mason, 1986, p. 28).

3.2. Authoritarianism and gender in Rwanda's government

Unlike other paramilitary groups, the RPF has a story of female leadership embedded in that of the Ugandan National Resistance Movement (Longman, 2006). This together with the aforementioned factors of sex imbalance and ethno-nationalistic views on women, promote the upsurge of women into decision-making bodies and in general a legal framework that granted them the same rights as men. However, these advances have been put into question, firstly because of the lack of transformative potential in female movements; secondly, because of the increasing authoritarianism and repression in Kagame's administration.

We consider transformative potential when the implemented policies have "the capacity to address the deeply ingrained societal norms and practices within which gender inequalities are

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embedded” (Debusscher, 2011, p. 1112). In other terms, the assumption that a higher female representation would lead to fundamental change by itself it is erroneous since the hegemonic structures of the patriarchy ingrained in authoritarianist regimes would serve the dominant groups. The encouragement of women’s inclusion in decision-making organs is necessary but not sufficient to undermine the patriarchal structures of the state.

Furthermore, there is an increment in authoritarianism in Kagame’s administration. Certain scholars have remarked that the inclusion and the promotion of female leaders in Rwanda might be part of a strategy to increase foreign investment and assent control of an anglophone Tutsi elite and Kagame’s power (Pottier, 2002; Reyntjens, 2011). Despite the increase of women representatives in governmental agencies, grassroots movements have diminished, many times not because of lack of utility but lack of leadership. The RPF has curtailed civil society by giving political roles to the movement’s leaders, “which requires them to work to the government’s agenda rather than advocate for legal and policy changes to promote the rights of women” (Abbott & Malunda, 2016, p. 7). The lack of a vibrant civil society eradicates the possible opposition to the RPF hegemonic system and perpetuates the control of Kagame’s administration. Moreover, Human Rights Watch has denounced extra official killings, allegedly politically motivated, of women who have opposed Rwanda’s current government (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Rwanda’s government has benefited from a *single story* told. To construct a new nation under beneficial terms, the RPF has erected a coherent story of the nation which “relies upon stable, gendered, categories that are activated to mobilise support around the new and fragile post-conflict national narrative” (Selimovic, 2020, p. 134). There is little agency for women to act beyond the role of rape victims. This position of sufferer manufactures power through moral righteousness consequently, “glorifying victimhood” (Winter, 2006). Violence, especially sexual violence such as rape or sexual torture to which women were exposed during the genocide, is particularly linked with the feminisation of nationhood. Hence, the narrative revolves around the raping of Rwanda as a nation rather than acknowledging the individual victim. Therefore, we might interpret that the increasing attention to women might be part of an ongoing and more complex construction of a narrative which perpetuates a single story told to maintain the political elite which revolves around Kagame’s power.

3.3. The relation between authoritarianism and development in gender policy

Rwanda has experienced an increase in ODA (Official Development Assistance) flows and foreign investment in the last decades. As previously mentioned, this increase in international monetary “trust” relates to the reconstruction period after the genocide and subsequently, to the Kagame administration’s rise to power. Nevertheless, the linkage between female representation and the impact this investment flow might have on Rwandan women is an interesting matter of discussion.

The importance of the role that women represent in development policies is extensively recognised nowadays. Investing in women “speeds economic development by raising productivity and promoting the more efficient use of resources; it produces significant social returns, improving child survival and reducing fertility, and it has considerable intergenerational payoffs” (Ging & Boyd, 2016, p. 149). The argument relies on the idea that educated women are more likely to increase the human capital of a country by enhancing their productivity resulting in a consequent reduction in poverty.

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As can be noted, there is a general understanding that gender inequality is an economic matter and thus, it could be solved by market forces. “Gender equality is reduced to women’s opportunities and empowerment, wherein women’s opportunities are limited to market opportunities and empowerment is constricted to economic empowerment in the form of individual human capital investment and job attainment” (Ibid.). The aforementioned paradox in Rwanda’s feminist policies displayed that whenever economic goals enter into competition with the gender equality agenda there was a preference for the former.

Nonetheless, this tendency is not merely enclosed in Rwanda, however, it is part of the general mainstreaming of female empowerment in development agencies. “Since the 1990s, multinational agencies, NGOs, and policymakers have made the advancement of women a core objective of development initiatives” (Berry, 2015, p. 3). The structure created by these organizations relies on the premise of “entryism”, the assumption that the augmentation of women into paid labour, decision-making structures or merely basic education will unequivocally result in a reduction of gender inequality (Razavi & Miller, 1995). Therefore, women’s empowerment actions have been directed to equalise the number of men and women in these scopes. The post-genocide conception in Rwanda was that access to financial credit would lead to an improvement in productivity, hence, several NGOs and the newly established government granted low-interest rate loans to women during the post-genocide period. Nevertheless, “the best outcomes for economic growth are not necessarily the best outcomes for girls and women” (Woodroffe & Donaldson, 2012, p. 100). This utilitarian view of gender equality enters into direct opposition with the transformative nature of feminist views. There is little value in normative resources when they served as a way of promoting class discrimination and broadening the economic gap not only between men and women but in society. Furthermore, this dynamic is particularly problematic since it implies that “if women’s productivity can be shown to be consistently lower than men’s, then, following the logic of the market, they deserve fewer resources” (Goetz, 1994, p. 161).

The structures in Rwanda have been arranged to appear democratic in what seems a method to attract international funding (Longman, 2006). The lack of transformative nature of this regime jeopardises the opportunity for a true renewal of gender relations. Furthermore, the infatuation for quantitative targets from both local and international policymakers “leads to the blind implementation of result-oriented policies that fail to address deeply ingrained societal norms, practices and power structures within which gender inequalities are embedded” (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013, p. 1130).

The Rwandan gender paradox arises from the inadequacy of a vertical up-bottom structure promoted by the national government where civil society and grassroots movements have been limited. Furthermore, the international development system has continuously prompted economic growth rather than social equality. This symbiosis has led to the maintenance of an autocratic regime that uses non-transformative, mainstream and anti-social gender equality policies to stay in power and gain the favour of the international community.

4. Conclusion

The use of women in Rwanda has been instrumental in both the national government and the international system. For the former, the introduction of gender policies has served not only to legitimise an autocratic regime under the notion of modernisation and female empowerment but also to sustain an economy that perpetuates this technocratic elite. For the latter, it is part

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of an economic rationale which capitalises on women with the focus of returning and increasing the investments made, instead of addressing the necessary dismantling of the structures that perpetuate this inequality.

There is a need for long-term strategies which disintegrate “the structure of inequality between genders, classes and nations” (Moser, 1989, p. 1815). The target of particular groups of women and the attempt to introduce them to paid labour has not necessarily meant improving their conditions since the “triple role” they maintain in society has not been addressed. This has been a top-down composition in which international organizations have set a series of standards in which founding recipients’ manoeuvre. The fixation on quantitative results has led to a lack of qualitative understanding of the repercussions certain policies have on the female population. Rights by their mere existence are of little use if they are not followed by an empowering movement for their holders.

Thereupon, if we are to truly combat gender inequality the international community must embrace an *empowerment approach*:

The empowerment approach acknowledges inequalities between men and women and the origins of women’s subordination in the family. It also emphasises the fact that women experience oppression differently according to their race, class, colonial history, and current position in the international economic order. (Moser, 1989, p. 1816)

By addressing the triple role that women are submitted to it recognises that women have confronted oppressive structures synchronously at different levels and sensitises the need for a strong core of women’s organisations that can turn this vertical hierarchy into a more horizontal one. This is particularly important in developing countries where civil society is limited by the lack of a democratic government and the intrusion of poorly planned development and funding initiatives. Withal, the empowerment approach remains largely unsupported due to its challenging nature against the status quo perpetuated by the international system.

To interrupt this circle of physical, structural and cultural violence, and to promote the rights of women, there is an imperious need to advocate for vital freedoms with the support of political, environmental, and fundamentally, social policies which might promote vulnerable women to recognise their agency. Change would only happen when we create an environment in which women can take active charge of their lives.

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