



PRIORITIES TO PUT FORWARD ON WOMEN AND GIRLS RIGHTS IN THE NST-2 DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Prepared and submitted by
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**PRIORITIES TO PUT FORWARD ON WOMEN AND GIRLS
IN THE NST-2 DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

Here our key proposed intervention to NST-2

- ≡ *Introducing Affirmative Action of 30% Participation of Women in the Procurement and Supply Chain Process;*
- ≡ *Introducing Regulation Policy on Unpaid-Care Work (Recognize, Reduce and Redistribute Income-3Rs)*
- ≡ *Establishment of Gender Based Violence Special Chamber at Intermediate Court of Justice*
- ≡ *Amending the electoral law to introduce two seats for disabilities, male and female positions at parliament, district council, and Levels (for fairness and equal representation of both men and women)*
- ≡ *Introducing does and don't in the Public Transport to ensure safety and security for women and girls, but also elders and people with disability.*
- ≡ *Introducing maternity leave for the vulnerable categories of women in agriculture and those in informal. The maternity leave for this category should be covered, through all salaries, government, private business, and civil society organizations with a 0,2% contribution to that scheme managed through Ejo Heza.*

I. INTRODUCTION

This position paper presents the results of wide consultations led by the Rwanda Women Alliance, formed of 30 women's rights organizations and gender activists, with a focus on major priorities of women and girls to address in the framework of Vision 2050 and its medium-term strategies starting with the second generation of NST-2 under development and the implementation of the National Gender Policy (2021) for inclusive development for all, to ensure no one left behind as fundamental principle of Sustainable Development goal.

II. POLICY FRAMEWORK

Rwanda is implementing the long-term Vision 2050 to transform the country through a series of medium-term national development strategies, aimed at ensuring the country achieves the two overarching goals of the Vision namely: (i) economic growth and prosperity; (ii) high quality of life for Rwandans. The National Strategy for Transformation (NST1, 2017-2024), which is the first in the series of national development strategies designed to implement the Vision is well into its final year, necessitating the elaboration of a successor strategy (NST2).

Throughout consecutive medium-term strategies, including NST-1, Gender Equality and Women Empowerment have been and remain highlighted as crosscutting and one of the top priorities of the Government of Rwanda. However, despite undeniable progress, gender gaps continue to surface in critical areas, if not resolved, could hinder the inclusive development gains and attainment of aspirations of Vision 2050.

III. RATIONALE

The Vision sets gender equality and women empowerment among the main aspirations to guide national transformation and define Rwanda by 2050. The National Gender Policy (2021) primary objective is to promote gender equality and equity in all sectors. Also, this policy aims to ensure that both women and men are free from any form of gender-based violence and discrimination.

Also, positive results are worthy to be mentioned for instance, women's representation in leadership positions and decisions with 61,3% of women in parliament and 62.5% in the senate (MIFOTRA, IPPS 2023), girls' education net enrolment rate at primary education level stands at 87.3% and in the year 2022, while, girls/females composed 47.7% of all learners/students in the STEM courses(MINEDUC, SYB, 2021/2022); women have risen to 92%, with improved access to financial opportunities and an increase in the number of loans granted to women (AFR, 2020), in agriculture, 42.2% of women being mobilized for land use consolidation, 41.8% accessing improved inputs like seeds and fertilizers, 37.6% receiving subsidized irrigation equipment, and 57% of women farmers involved in vegetable export receiving training in Integrated Pest Management(AHS, 2020), and the labor force participation rate (LFPR) for females increased to 48.8% in 2022 from 45.4% in 2017.

The commitment of the government of Rwanda is to ensure equal rights and inclusive development for all. Thus, the current data show that although, significant progress in addressing gender inequalities, more efforts are needed to eliminate the root causes of inequalities experienced for a long time by women and girls who constitute 51,4%), of the population from 2014 to 2021.

IV. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this brief, is to contribute to the elaboration of NST-2, feeding the strategies with specific sectorial objectives, and put forward key achievable interventions with direct positive impact on women and girls.

V. MAJOR PRIORITIES OF WOMEN AND GIRLS FOR THE NST-2

Despite these positive trends, Rwanda continues to surface gender negative effects due to the persistence of gender norms and gender stereotypes with rooted patriarchal mindsets. In the process of the development of the second generation of NST-2, the country should take stock and reconsider some key areas that need more concrete actions to engender specific policies and introduce others, for inclusive social-economic transformation of the Rwanda We Want. For instance, here are a few areas that kept our attention as women-led organizations and gender activists.

The multiple sources including, government and international reports and research and studies reports, continue to highlight important gender gaps that have not yet been addressed in medium strategies and the NST-1. Among a long list of gender gaps, Rwanda Women Alliance, considers that the following constitute the current bottlenecks of gender equality and women and women's empowerment.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE PROCUREMENT AND SUPPLY CHAIN PROCESS

The current data in the NPPA reports demonstrated that only a few women participate in the procurement process, especially those procurement with big shares. A study on Gender-Responsive Public Procurement in Rwanda, which was commissioned to analyze the procurement policies applied, understand the capacities and constraints of women-owned enterprises, and propose concrete measures for Gender-Responsive public procurement in Rwanda, noted that despite a range of commendable initiatives towards the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment in the country, women-owned businesses find themselves largely excluded in public procurement processes. At the opening ceremony, the UNWOMEN Representative, Mrs. Fatou, declared:

“One way to encourage entrepreneurship is to stimulate demand for goods and services supplied by women-owned businesses. Procuring entities such as governments, corporations and international organizations stand to benefit from diverse supplier bases, which foster productivity and innovation and guard against shocks”

Based on various indicators, the study reveals that out of the 332 won tenders selected for this study between 2016 and 2019, women-owned businesses won only 43 tenders which represents 13 percent of the selected tenders. In monetary value, the total value of tenders won by women-owned businesses represents 5% of the total value of the selected tenders. Moreover, women-owned businesses mainly won soft tenders such as the supply of services, refreshments, event management, and supply of office furniture, while men-owned businesses dominated in big tenders such as construction and supply of agricultural inputs. In responding to

further steps towards achieving gender-equitable economic development. Dr. Monique Nsanzabaganwa, the then, Chairperson of New Faces New Voices said¹

“at New Faces New Voices, we are bridging the gap between financial institutions and women doing businesses in informal and formal sector, we understand the needs of women and what financial institutions are offering”

The Minister of Gender and Family Promotion, Hon. Solina Nyirahabimana, in her closing remarks, declared that:

“We need to draw a strong call for action now going forward. These evidence-based findings in gender responsive public procurement requires us to collectively take bold action towards improving women owned businesses to successfully compete in public tenders,”

Alliance of 30 Women-Led Organizations and gender activists found it more essential to bring the issue to the table in this critical period when the country underwent the development of the NST-2 and called for more action and inclusion of affirmative action of 30% of women's participation in procurement and supply chain process. ***This requires the change in the procurement law, to include “for any procurement with the amount of money %, local or foreigner companies must partner with the local women-owned company during competition.”***

- ≡ ***UNPAID-CARE WORK (Recognize, Reduce the burden and Redistribute income-3Rs)***- National Gender Policy (2021) recognizes the disproportionate involvement of women in unpaid care and domestic work, challenges negative social and gender norms fueling gender inequalities, and, calls for the adoption of measures and programs to ensure shared responsibility between men and women over /unpaid care and domestic work. Similarly, the Revised National Employment Policy (2019) calls for gender-friendly strategies and appropriate technology to reduce the unnecessary hard work of women's domestic and economic activity and thus enhance their productivity and incomes

In efforts to address the UCW, It is important to highlight that the Government and partners provide subsidies for households to access improved green cooking energy including gas and gas stoves. Data indicates that female-headed households (HHs) using gas was at 3.9% while men HHs were at 4.8% and female HHs using stoves were at 31.8% whereas men HHs counted at 32.4% (PHC, 2022).

In addition, Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centers were initiated and scaled up to the village level to ensure that women have time to get involved in (or dedicate to) productive economic activities. The consultation outcomes led by Rwanda Women Alliance, formed of 30 women's rights organizations and gender activists, recognized and noted from the views of the majority of women, both rural and urban, that the triple roles of women contribute heavily to the performance of women and make more complicated the UCW. ***The recognition, therefore, by the government of Rwanda through regulation or policy stands, would significantly release that burden carried by 52% of the population (women and girls). The NST-2 should come out with a policy statement suggesting sectoral intervention on UCW. The Ministry of Public Service and Labour together with MIGEPROF must act and include UCW in their key strategic actions.***

¹ UNWOMEN and New Faces New Voices (Nov, 2019), *Women in Procurement Report*

- ≡ **ESTABLISHMENT OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE SPECIAL CHAMBER AT INTERMEDIATE COURT OF JUSTICE-** Under the legal framework, Law N°59/2008 of 10/09/2008 on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence defines GBV as any act that results in bodily, psychological, sexual, and economic harm. Further, Law no 059/2023 of 04/12/2023 amending Law N° 66/2018 of 30/08/2018 determining offenses and Penalties in General (hereinafter penal code), introduced heavy punishments for the different forms of violence, including marital rape (Article 137 of the penal code) while child defilement (article 15, paragraph 7) was made imprescriptible.

Also, Law N° 66/2018 of 30/08/2018 regulating Labour in Rwanda, as amended to date, in article 8, prohibits “Sexual harassment in any form against supervisee”. It, further, states that “If there is tangible evidence that an employee has resigned due to sexual harassment committed against him/her by his/her supervisor, his/her resignation is considered as unfair dismissal”, and hence in addition to the penal sanctions against the offender, relevant legal provisions relating to “unfair dismissal” also apply. Similarly, the Organic Law No61/2008 of 10/09/2008 on the Leadership Code of Conduct, as modified and complemented to date, in its article 25, calls for penal sanctions, in addition to any disciplinary sanctions, for a leader who commits sexual harassment against employees.

The current data provided by (NPPA, annual reports 2019 to 2023) indicates that 39.6% of the cases were dropped, one of the biggest challenges in GBV cases is evidence collection and preservation, which is sometimes exacerbated by the delay in reporting by some victims (where the case is received by relevant judicial investigation authorities when evidences have already disappeared/destroyed). The delays and preserving evidence resulted mainly in the scheduling process of cases due to a limited number of judges and prosecutors, with a bag log of other pending cases at the same time. ***The establishment of the special chamber in charge of GBV cases at the Intermediary Court of Justice is the adequate solution, to respond to these challenges that have immediate negative implications for the victims in the short, medium, and long terms, resolve the societal problem, ensure women’s rights in particular as majority victims, and prevent such atrocities.***

- ≡ **AMENDMENT OF THE ELECTION LAW TO INTRODUCE TWO SEATS FOR DISABILITIES MALE AND FEMALE AT THE PARLIAMENT, THE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND SECTOR (FOR FAIRNESS AND EQUAL REPRESENTATION)** - Rwanda is a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and optional protocol and other international protocols domesticated in law n0.01/2007 of 20/01/2007 relating to the protection of disabled persons in general, and ministerial order n0. 01/2009 of 19/6/2009 determining the modalities of facilitating persons with disabilities to practice and follow cultural, entertainment, and sports activities and subsequent other legal tools, including order n0. 20/18 of 27/7/2009, order n0.02/cab.m/09 of 27/7/2009, order n0.20/19 of 27/7/2009, order n0.03/19.19 of 27/7/2009, order 01/09/MININFOR of 10/08/2009 determining the modalities of facilitating persons with disabilities in matters relating to communication.
- ≡ The Rwanda Women Alliance noted that significant progress has been made to improve the living and rights of people with disabilities. However, the alliance found some impeding factors that continue to prevent the advancement of the rights of disabled people to exercise their rights and full potential, especially in terms of representation of disabled women at parliament and councils in local government, facilitation in public gatherings including several meetings organized by government institutions

without adequate interpreters, adequate technologies and devices during the meetings, and absence of facilitation during community meetings, and finally, the limited capacity of local leaders to handle disable cases in case of using sign language.

- ≡ The Rwanda Women Alliance noticed that although disabled groups have been represented in the parliament in the previous terms, the representatives (MP), have been always men. The same situation happened in almost all district councils and sector councils. Deliberate affirmative action and political decisions are needed to respond to this setback when it comes to the representation of disabled women in local and national leadership positions. Also, the Government should ensure that women with disabilities participate in the formulation of government policies and implementation thereof to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels and benefit the 30% as other groups of women. *Rwanda Women Alliance, calls upon, the Ministry of Local Government to act and reserve adequate political and strategic intervention through an electoral process which is ahead of us in the coming two months. All institutions in all sectors, including private and civil society, must consider facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes, and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official interactions. The NST-2, is the best platform to include these national strategic interventions which are crosscutting for all sectors.*

- ≡ **WOMEN AND GIRLS ISSUES IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT-** Women and girls face challenges of harassment while traveling in public transport around the city of Kigali in particular due to the absence of strict measures of protection in the bus and, the absence of instructions on traveler's behavior on don't and does. This also affects elders and disabled people who suffer because of standing longer and agitating situations on the bus. *The sector is requested to develop and disseminate dos and don'ts in public transport and make major changes in the public transport policy to maintain the safety and security of women, girls, elders, and disabled groups.*

- ≡ **MATERNITY LEAVE FOR VULNERABLE WOMEN, ESPECIALLY RURAL WOMEN:** The current maternity regulations (Labor Law 2023, General Statute of Public Servants 2020) state that for delivery purposes, a salaried woman has the right to suspend her work for fourteen consecutive weeks, of which two are obligatory before the presumed date of delivery. The employer should not give a salaried woman notice of termination, which is, included in her delivery leave.

A pregnant woman or a woman with a breastfeeding baby cannot be forced to continue to carry out tasks requiring excessive force or that are dangerous or inconvenient for their condition and health. During fifteen months starting from the birth of her child, every salaried woman is entitled to two rest periods of half an hour per day, to allow her to breastfeed. However, this is not the case for informal women working in the informal sector and those in agriculture either for subsistence or agri-business.

The absence of regulations and coverage of maternity for this big category of women impacts negatively on their lives and that of their children after delivery which in most cases leads to maternal mortality and infant mortality rate.

The introduction of maternity leave covering all vulnerable women in the former first category of Ubudehe, included in the graduation process, would contribute immensely to the reduction of maternal and infant mortality, increase productivity at household levels, reduce gender-based violence, impact positively on the

increasing of the well-being of children and therefore, ensure consistent breastfeeding which is a direct effect to reduce malnutrition. The maternity leave is suggested to be introduced through Ejo Heza with the contribution of 0,2% of private businesses, civil servants, civil society organizations, and the government.

VI. FORWARD LOOKING-ACTIONS (FLA)

In line with the above, we, as Rwanda Women Alliance, brought our call to the attention of the NST-2 oversight government leadership and coordinating team, to consider these gender-critical issues/gaps as essential to the attainment of inclusive development, shared prosperity, and equal rights of citizens to ensure No One Left Behind. These would include, as interventions, strategic actions, or through policy change in the elaboration of the NST-2.

- ≡ ***Introducing Affirmative Action of 30% Participation of Women in the Procurement and Supply Chain Process;***
- ≡ ***Introducing Regulation Policy on Unpaid-Care Work (Recognize, Reduce and Redistribute Income-3Rs)***
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