



Gender Equality in Rwanda

Factsheet

Overview

Rwanda, situated in East Africa, is a small landlocked nation with a population of more than 13 million people.¹ The majority are engaged in agriculture, where tea is the primary agricultural commodity and ranks as the country's fourth-largest export.² In the last two decades, Rwanda has experienced consistent economic growth, coupled with effective policy measures that have raised living standards and resulted in progress in various human development indicators.³ Despite these advancements, poverty remains a challenge, particularly in rural regions, where 63% of the population continues to live below the poverty line.⁴

Rwanda is widely recognised for its progress in gender equality, most notably in terms of political representation, with women holding 61% of parliamentary seats.⁵ In the 2023 Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum, Rwanda ranked 6th globally for reducing gender gaps in

various social and economic indicators.⁶ Yet several gender-related challenges persist, including higher poverty rates among women, limited access to services, and gender-based violence.

Tea

The tea industry is the third-largest employer in Rwanda, directly providing jobs for over 100,000 people and indirectly supporting the livelihoods of an estimated one million people.⁷ The majority of tea estate workers are women, who are mostly engaged in low-paid and labour-intensive jobs like tea picking, while men tend to hold higher paying supervisory positions.⁸ Across the estate sector, women are more likely to find themselves in less secure temporary employment.⁹ However, smallholder tea framers make up the majority of the sector in Rwanda, where women can be engaged in unpaid work on family-owned farms.¹⁰



Education

Education is a fundamental human right essential for empowering women and enabling them to reach their full potential. Through initiatives such as scrapping tuition fees for basic education and implementing the Girls' Education Policy, Rwanda has achieved near parity in enrolment rates for girls in primary and secondary education (49.7% and 53.2% respectively).¹¹ However, there is some evidence suggesting boys outperform girls in poorer and rural areas.¹²

More women are entering tertiary education in recent years¹³, although graduation rates remain higher for men (58.3% compared to 41.7%).¹⁴ Despite this, access to technical and skills training for women is limited, impacting their opportunities and leading to a higher concentration of women in lower-paid jobs.¹⁵ In 2020, less than 40% of women were employed in skilled professions.¹⁶

Women's economic status

The Rwandan Government has committed to poverty reduction by introducing several social protection policies which has resulted in reduced poverty among women and girls in recent years. However, as is the case globally, more women in Rwanda experience poverty than men. About 49% of working women live below the international poverty line, compared to 47% of men¹⁷ The



percentage of households living in poverty is also higher among those that are female-headed (39.5%) than those that are male-headed (37.6%).¹⁸

Around 49% of working-age women are economically active (known as labour force participation), while the rate is 61% for men.¹⁹ Women also face a higher likelihood of unemployment compared to men, with 17.1% of women being unemployed versus 13.9% of men.²⁰ Women who are employed have difficulties obtaining leadership and decision-making roles, which is caused, in part, by unpaid care responsibilities and societal norms that consider higher positions more appropriate for men.²¹ Women represent just 28.6% of those employed in managerial positions.²²

Access to land, resources, and services

Land ownership can improve women's empowerment as it serves as a basis for food production and income generation and can serve as collateral for accessing finance. Land ownership among Rwanda women has increased in recent years because of legal reforms targeted at achieving equal land and inheritance rights for men and women - 24.6% of women now own land alone compared to 14.3% of men.²³ However, due to discriminatory social norms, women who own land jointly often have limited control over how the land is used, or how the income it generates is spent.²⁴

Additionally, Rwandan women tend to have less access to agricultural inputs, including seeds, fertilisers, and extension services compared to their male counterparts.²⁵ Several factors contribute to this, including attitudes that exclude women, disproportionate poverty among women, and lower levels of literacy and computer literacy, which stand at just 73% and 7%, respectively

(compared to 79% and 11% for men).²⁶

Women are also less likely to be able to access credit and loans, which can be essential for making farm investments and maintaining their incomes. In the most recent data available, 74.5% of all agricultural loans went to men, while 25.5% went to women.²⁷ This is caused in part by gender biases among service providers, women having limited collateral to put forward due to poverty, and a lack of financial skills needed to apply for formal credit.²⁸

Gender-based violence

Although the government has demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) through various policy and legislative improvements²⁹, a significant number of women and girls in Rwanda still experience violence in their everyday lives. Roughly 42% of women aged 15–49 have been subjected to physical or sexual violence from a partner at some point in their lives,³⁰ and around 24% experienced violence in 12 months prior to being surveyed.³¹ These figures are likely underestimated due to underreporting.

GBV continues to be an issue due to a mixture of challenges within communities and in policy implementation. Attitudes that include the acceptance and justification of violence against women and girls continue to fuel GBV and mean that women are reluctant to report cases because of community stigmatisation.³² Limited women's economic empowerment and resource limitations at both central and local government levels also factor into the problem.

Child marriage

Following legal amendments in 2016, the minimum legal of marriage is 21 years.³³ Rwanda has seen one of the fastest decreases in child marriage rates in Eastern and Southern Africa, which are now 2.5 times lower than they were in 1995.³⁴ However, despite this success child marriage remains a challenge with 7% of girls in Rwanda married before the age of 18.³⁵ Child marriage is driven by cultural norms and is more common in rural areas than in urban areas.³⁶

ETP's approach

Through our on-the-ground projects, policy work, and engagement with the private sector, we work towards a tea industry that prioritises the safety and well-being of women and girls, where they are free from violence, respected, and have equal access to opportunities and resources. Many of our activities in Rwanda have a gender focus, ranging from advancing women's economic empowerment to supporting women to understand and access their rights. We adopt a participatory approach in our programmes and work closely with local communities and women's rights organisations to ensure we tackle the most pressing issues affecting the sector.

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