

Promoting gender equality:

European rhetoric in view of the facts

Challenges and lessons learned for transformative European support for women's political and civic participation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda



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List of abbreviations

CICID	Interministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development (France)
CSO	Civil society organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DEU	Delegation of the European Union
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DGD	Directorate-General Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (Belgium)
EU	European Union
FDFA	Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (Switzerland)
GAP II	Gender Action Plan II, EU Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2016-2020
GBV	Gender-based violence
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RPF	Rwandan Patriotic Front
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations

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Glossary

Sex/gender

- “Sex” refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that differentiate men from women.
- “Gender” is used to refer to socially determined roles, behaviours, activities and attributes socially considered appropriate for men and women.
- More details at: www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/understanding/gender-definition/en/

Gender equality

The idea that women and men will have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities, which will not depend on whether they are born of one sex or the other.

Feminism

Social movement aiming at the emancipation of women, the extension of their rights in order to equalise their status with that of men, particularly in the legal, political and economic spheres; doctrine, corresponding ideology.^{1a}

1a. Definition of “feminism” by the [Centre national de ressources textuelles et lexicales](#), translated from French to English, consulted on 3 October 2019.

Gender mainstreaming

Transversal integration of a gender perspective.

1b. [Resources, Agency. Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment, Development and Change](#), 30: 435–464, Naila Kabeer, 2001.

Stereotyped gender norms

Societal norms defining the role and characteristics assigned to people according to their sex on the basis of gender stereotypes.

Empowerment

The process of change by which those who are denied the opportunity to make choices acquire it.^{1b}

Positive masculinity

Masculinity that is in keeping with gender equality, as opposed to “toxic masculinity”.

Introduction

Gender equality and women's full enjoyment of their human rights in the same way as men is essential to the full realisation of equitable and sustainable development. As such, the European Union (EU) and many European countries - including France, Belgium and Switzerland - promote gender equality as one of their priority objectives for cooperation.

Several recent strategic documents illustrate this strong will on the part of the EU. The new European Consensus on Development,² adopted in May 2017, aims to make the EU the world leader in promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. In accordance with this new Consensus, the European Union and its Member States undertake to intensify their efforts to promote the economic and social rights of women and girls, ensuring their voices are heard and addressing all types of violence against them. This commitment was already announced at the launch of the EU Action Plan for Gender Equality 2016-2020 (Gender Action Plan, GAP II).³ GAP II provides a strategic framework for results-oriented measures, highlighting the need for coordinated action to promote gender equality in the EU's and its Member States external relations. By approving GAP II on 26 October 2015, the Council states in its conclusions⁴ that gender equality is at the heart of European values and part of the EU's legal and policy frameworks.

In 2018, the European Development Days⁵ focused on the central role of women and

girls in sustainable development. Several EU representatives, including President Juncker and Commissioner Mimica (in charge of International cooperation), publicly reaffirmed their commitment to making gender equality a priority of the EU's external relations.

On 10 December 2018, the EU Council adopted new conclusions⁶ on women, peace and security announcing a new strategic approach from the EU with the aim of systematically integrating a gender perspective in all European activities related to peace and security, and more generally in the EU's external actions.

As far as the European States are concerned, France has, since the election of President Emmanuel Macron, a clear ambition to become a leader in the domain. France is again promoting equality between women and men in Article 1 of its law of orientation and programming of development policy and international solidarity.⁷ In 2018, the Interministerial Committee for International Cooperation and Development (CICID) reaffirmed the major objectives of French cooperation, including gender equality.⁸ CICID announced in its conclusions⁹ that this being "the great cause of the quinquennial" of the President, it would be a guiding and transversal principle of France's external action. In the same year, the government adopted its third international strategy in this field (2018-2022)¹⁰, following the steps of the GAP II European framework.

Belgium also makes the rights of women and girls a top priority. It is mentioned

2. [European Consensus on Development](#), Council of the European Union, 19 May 2017.

3. [Gender Action Plan II](#), Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020, 21 September 2015.

4. [Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 - Council conclusions](#), 26 October 2015.

5. [European Development Days 2018](#), Minutes, 2018.

6. [Women, Peace and Security Council conclusions](#), 10 December 2018.

7. [Loi N° 2014-773 du 7 juillet 2014 d'orientation et de programmation relative à la politique de développement et de solidarité internationale](#), French Republic, 25 September 2019.

8. [CICID : Une nouvelle ambition pour la politique de développement](#), 8 February 2018.

9. [Comité interministériel de la coopération internationale et du développement \(CICID\), Relevé de conclusions](#), 8 February 2018.

10. [Stratégie internationale de la France pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes](#) (2018-2022).

already in the first title of the country's overall international development policy.¹¹ The first objective of the government policy is therefore to empower citizens, specifically women and girls. In 2016, the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGD) also adopted a new strategic note on gender, which includes a thematic approach and priorities with explicit reference to GAP II.

In 2017, for the first time, Switzerland included a strategic objective for strengthening gender equality and the rights of women and girls (Objective 7) in its international cooperation strategy.^{12,13} In the same year, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) also adopted for the first time a strategy on gender equality and women's rights which states that "Gender equality, respect for women's and girls' rights, and the elimination of all forms of gender-based discrimination [are] fundamental values of Swiss society (...) This conviction is one that we as a country strive to promote internationally."

Building on these strong strategic commitments made by both the EU and some European states, the European Network for Central Africa (EurAc), wishes to look at how these European political commitments were actually implemented in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

This report focusses on the strategies and actions undertaken by the EU, Switzerland, France and Belgium in the sole domain of enhancing the political and civic participation of women and their

participation in decision-making bodies at all levels. Not only is this one of the key elements in reducing gender inequalities, but also one of EurAc's priorities in advocating for inclusive political participation in the Great Lakes region.¹⁴

This analysis is based on the situation of the political and civic participation of women in the DRC and Rwanda, the main challenges in the domain, and the strategies and programmes implemented by the European donors (in particular the EU, France, Switzerland and Belgium). It will propose concrete actions and recommendations for the implementation of a truly transformative approach.

This report, which does not claim to be exhaustive, aims, in part, to advocate for a better recognition of deeply rooted societal norms and practices in which gender inequalities in political and civic participation are entrenched.

In reminding European donors of their strategic commitments, attention will be paid to the necessary institutional cultural shift within European cooperation bodies. More than plain political and strategic commitments, an institutional cultural shift at the level of donors is an absolute condition for gender to actually be taken into account on the field. According to the observations made in Rwanda and the DRC, considerable efforts are still to be made beyond strategic rhetoric so that political commitments become a reality on the field.

11. *Note de politique générale. Développement international*, Belgian Chamber of Representatives, 19 October 2018.

12. *Nouvelle stratégie du DFAE : la Suisse renforce son engagement en faveur de l'égalité des sexes et des droits des femmes (communiqué)*, Swiss Confederation, 8 September 2017.

13. *Message sur la coopération internationale 2017-2020*, Swiss Confederation, 17 February 2016.

14. EurAc's advocacy work on the Great Lakes region is focused on Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This report is based on bibliographic research, an analysis of the different strategies and policies of the EU and some European states in terms of cooperation and promotion of gender equality, as well as about 40 interviews conducted in Kigali in July 2019 and Kinshasa in September 2019 with political staff and staff in charge of the cooperation of several European States (notably the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Sweden and Switzerland), the European Union, UN agencies, international NGOs and Congolese and Rwandan civil society.

Lastly, this study shows limits on some aspects. As a matter of fact, it does not address the issue of gender in all its dimensions (in particular that of LGBTQI+) and is limited to the participation of women in the formal political sphere (voters, elected representatives, nominees) and in civil society. This report does not address the participation of women in the media or unions or the private sector. Finally, the present report is, among others, based on interviews that were exclusively conducted with European staff deployed in the DRC and Rwanda and not at the level of the various European capitals (Paris, Brussels and Bern).

Part 1

Context and challenges to the promotion of women's political and civic participation in the DRC and Rwanda



Women's political and civic participation in Rwanda: a brief overview

Exemplary representation rate at national level

In Rwanda, the rate of representation of women at the national level in elected political positions is remarkable. **Rwanda ranks first in the world in terms of women's representation in parliamentary bodies.**¹⁵ The percentage of women serving in Parliament is constantly on the rise: increasing from 14% in 1994 to 48.8% in 2003, and women now represent 61% of parliamentarians.¹⁶ At the central government level, 47.3% of ministers were women in 2016, the number currently stands at 52.3%. Although the percentage is lower for most important ministries where women represent 27.7% and in the Senate 38.46%, Rwanda remains an exemplary country as regards the representation of women at the highest level of political decision-making, on the matter of reinforcement of women's political power.¹⁷ Rwanda is also ranked fourth in the latest ranking of the World Economic Forum on Gender Equality. This is due to strong political commitment and the development and implementation of a legal and political framework to promote women's political participation. The social consequences of genocide may also partly explain the greater participation of women in decision-making bodies in the country.

A strong political commitment following the genocide and a very favourable legal and institutional framework

After the 1994 genocide, many Rwandan women found themselves "household heads", their husbands having died, in exile or in prison. "Traditional" lifestyles were no longer possible. Women took on new roles in the domestic and public spheres that Rwandan society had not previously attributed to them. These roles included daily tasks that were usually taboo for women, such as building roofs for houses or milking cows. Many Rwandan women also assumed sole economic responsibility for their household because their husbands were absent or unable to do so.¹⁸ This post-genocide societal transformation has therefore in part positively influenced the participation of Rwandan women in decision-making bodies.

Nevertheless, this situation alone cannot explain the current representation of women in Parliament and the government. The development and implementation of a favourable legal and institutional framework as well as political commitment at the highest levels of power have also allowed more and more women to get involved in the political sphere.

The current Rwandan legal framework gives a series of provisions aimed at promoting gender equality and women's political participation at all levels, in particular by setting quotas. First of all, the Constitution¹⁹ (2003, reviewed in

15. [Percentage of women in national parliaments](#), Inter-Parliamentary Union, consulted on 3 October 2019.

16. [The State of Gender Equality in Rwanda from Transition to Transformation](#), Gender Monitoring Office, March 2019.

17. [The Global Gender Gap Report](#), World Economic Forum, 2018.

18. [Women Have Found Respect: Gender Quotas, Symbolic Representation and Female Empowerment in Rwanda](#), Jennie E. Burnet, Anthropology Faculty Publications. Paper 3, 2011.

19. [Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda](#).

2015) states in its fundamental principles (Article 9) that “equality (...) between women and men [is] reflected by ensuring that women are granted at least thirty per cent of posts in decision-making organs”. The Constitution also specifies that the composition of the Chamber of Deputies (Article 76) must have 24 women among its 80 members. These constitutionally established quotas ensure at least 30% of female representation in Parliament. The Constitution specifies that political parties “operate in such a manner as to ensure that women and men have equal access to elective offices.”²⁰ and “must constantly reflect (...) gender equality and complementarity, whether in the recruitment of members, putting in place organs of leadership and in their operations and activities.” This also concerns the lists presented by the political parties for the parliamentary elections. Finally, it is specified that “any serious breach of political training in these obligations shall be referred to the High Court of the Republic by the Senate.”²¹ This obligation for political parties to ensure equal access for men and women to electoral mandates and 30% of seats reserved for women in Parliament ensures a representation of women greater than 30%.

In addition to the quotas provided by the Constitution, Rwanda has several laws aimed at promoting gender equality and directly or indirectly the participation of women in the political and civic spheres. For instance, the Organic Law on State Finances and Property stipulates that the national budget contains gender-specific provisions and stresses the fundamental

principle of equality between women and men in the management of public finances. This law also provides for the establishment of accountability mechanisms to ensure gender responsive budgeting by all public entities through mandatory annual reporting in the domain.²² On a different page, the law on matrimonial regimes, liberalities and inheritance provides for the same right to inheritance for women and men.

Beyond the legal framework, several policies were developed and a series of institutions dedicated to the promotion of gender equality were established, commonly known as Gender Machinery. This illustrates the firm political will to make it a national priority. A National gender Policy was adopted in 2010.²³ It comprehensively identifies all the opportunities and constraints to gender equality in the country and provides for the approaches, strategies and programmes to be implemented, including with regard to gender-sensitive representation and effective participation of women, girls and boys in decision-making bodies at all levels. A strategic plan for implementing this policy has also been developed.²⁴

The Rwandan Gender Machinery encompasses the different structures and institutions set up in the country to promote gender equality. Alongside the Ministry dedicated to gender, we find:

- **The National Women Council**, as established by the Constitution.²⁵ Its role is to mobilise women for their effective participation in decision-

20. Article 52 of the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda.

21. Article 55 of the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda.

22. *Loi Organique relative aux finances et au patrimoine de l'Etat*, Republic of Rwanda, 5 November 2013.

23. *National Gender Policy*, Republic of Rwanda, July 2010.

24. *Strategic plan for the implementation of the national gender policy*, Republic of Rwanda, May 2010.

25. Article 187 of the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda.

making bodies from the grassroots to the top. The National Women Council plays a very important role as it also intervenes in the selection of women candidates for the 30% of parliamentary seats reserved for them (apart from lists submitted by political parties).

- **The Gender Monitoring Office** ensures the accountability of all actors (public, private, associative, etc.) in matters of gender. Through its monitoring and audits, it allows reporting on the state of gender equality in the country in all sectors of society and providing gender-specific statistics needed to assess and measure progress in the domain. Nevertheless, these recommendations and observations are not binding.
- **The Forum of Women Parliamentarians** brings together all women parliamentarians and aims in particular to promote the development and adoption of laws that promote women's rights and gender equality.

The representation of women at the Rwandan national level, in particular in Parliament and the government, is noteworthy and is accompanied by a robust legal and institutional framework in this area but is more limited at the local level. In addition, the effective participation of women in national decision-making organs has some limitations to be highlighted.

Lower representation at local level

Despite positive results at the national level, the representation of women in local decision-making organs, especially at the highest levels, remains a challenge raised by all those interviewed in Rwanda. Data at the local level is indeed more mixed. There are only 8 women out of a total of 30 district mayors, which is below the 30% rate required by the Constitution. Similarly, women represent only 11% of Executive Secretaries at the field level.²⁶ Furthermore, women represent 66.7% of vice-mayors in charge of social affairs but are significantly less represented among vice-mayors in charge of economic affairs, where they represent only 16.5%.²⁷ This situation can be explained in large part by the gender stereotypes that continue to prevail and that keep a woman limited to social and human responsibilities rather than economic ones, for instance.

Women's participation is also lower in the administrative positions for which a competitive recruitment process is put in place. For example, they represent only 26.1% of the heads of departments in the central government.²⁸ This is mainly due to the prevalence of societal norms that hinder women from competing.²⁹

In conclusion, while quotas work effectively when they are binding, they face the patriarchal norms that are still strong in the country when positive discrimination measures are not strictly imposed. These quotas, the mere presence

26. Understanding factors leading to low representation of women in decision making at the local level government district, sector, and cells levels, in private local informal financial institutions- Sacco, Cooperatives and Saving groups, HAGARUKA, July 2019.

27. [The State of Gender Equality in Rwanda from Transition to Transformation](#), Gender Monitoring Office, March 2019.

28. *Ibidem*

29. Understanding factors leading to low representation of women in decision making at the local level government district, sector, and cells levels, in private local informal financial institutions- Sacco, Cooperatives and Saving groups, HAGARUKA, July 2019.

of women put aside, fail to meet the challenges of effective participation of women, especially in a closed political context such as that of Rwanda.

Beyond the numbers: challenges to female participation

Although women's representation in Parliament is undeniable, several of the interviewees stressed that this did not, however, lead to effective participation on their part. Men's prevalence in parliamentary committees was mentioned along with the lack of women's commitment, who tend to make less significant contributions in legislative debates, still largely marked by entrenched patriarchal norms.

30. [Women Have Found Respect: Gender Quotas, Symbolic Representation and Female Empowerment in Rwanda](#), Jennie E. Burnet, Anthropology Faculty Publications. Paper 3, 2011.

31. *Ibidem*

32. [Rwanda civil society development barometer](#), Transparency International Rwanda, December 2015.

In addition, the Rwandan political space is restricted, being dominated by the party of President Paul Kagame, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Any political involvement outside the dominant discourse is limited and presents specific risks for women. For instance, Diane Rwigara, the main figure of the political opposition, was attacked on a reputational basis rather than on her political ideas. This illustrates the specific risks faced by women who dare to express a dissenting opinion in the country.

As multiparty politics is not yet a palpable reality in the country, the effective participation of women in Parliament seems rather limited because they often follow the lines dictated by the party. The

fact that most of the legislative initiatives in Rwanda emanate from the executive power³⁰ adequately illustrates the limits of the participation of parliamentary elected representatives. Several analysts pointed out that the RPF's "feminist" policy would be a means of remaining in power, by having a majority of women, supposedly silent and docile, in Parliament, while receiving praise from the international community.³¹

Finally, the participation of women as voters is difficult to assess given the Rwandan political context. Indeed, voting is not legally required but is in practice mandatory. The turnout is therefore high in Rwanda for both women and men. However, it is difficult to deduce that women's vote illustrates their effective participation in the civic sphere and a result of their political commitment.

Female involvement in civil society

The Rwandan female civil society is praised for its dynamism and the important role it has played in peace and reconstruction initiatives in the country following the genocide, but also for having enabled the adoption of a legal framework favourable to women's rights, such as the inheritance law. Going beyond women's organisations alone, and although the gap remains limited, several studies have highlighted the predominance of men in the decision-making bodies of civil society organisations (CSOs) in general.³² In a study conducted in 2015 by CIVICUS, 50%

of respondents considered that women were “somewhat” underrepresented in the governing bodies of Rwandan CSOs.³³ The various interlocutors met in Rwanda did indeed highlight the existence of a particularly active women’s civil society, while recognising that the leaders of civil society were more generally men. The intolerance that exists in the country against any dissident voice makes the very existence of human rights defenders difficult, let alone to evaluate the number of women involved. By broadening the assessment to the media, we find that the rate of women accredited journalists is much lower than that of men (24.5% against 75.5%), as is the number of media companies owned by women (24 out of 170).³⁴

33. [The state of civil society in Rwanda in national development](#), CIVICUS, March 2011.

34. [The State of Gender Equality in Rwanda from Transition to Transformation](#), Gender Monitoring Office, March 2019.

Challenges to increased political and civic participation of women and girls in Rwanda

The challenges to increased political and civic participation of women and girls in Rwanda are well documented and taken into account in the strategies developed by the public authorities. The 2010 National Gender Policy lists a series of constraints and challenges for which specific programmes need to be implemented. A certain number of these challenges identified almost 10 years ago, seem to have found an appropriate response with notable progress, particularly as regards the establishment of institutional instruments for the gender mainstreaming or the availability of disaggregated data by sex in different sectors of society. Other challenges listed in the national strategy still remain relevant and deserve greater attention as well as financial and technical support. These include observed resistance to behavioural changes, perceptions that women are not made to make decisions or men's limited engagement in promoting gender equality.³⁵ The interviews conducted in Kigali suggest that the persistence of some societal norms and practices remains a major obstacle to the effective participation of women in the political and civic spheres and that these are not yet sufficiently taken into consideration or financed in the implemented programmes.

In the Rwandan context, this situation can also be explained by the top-down approach adopted by the political authorities. By focusing primarily on the achievement of quantified objectives, while not initially involving citizens, authorities struggle to have a transformative impact on gender relations in society as a whole.

Persisting stereotyped gender norms

Despite a certain evolution, particularly in urban centres, Rwandan society remains marked by beliefs, norms and societal practices perpetuated by both men and women that present obstacles to the effective participation of women in the civic and political spheres.

Some cultural values strongly favour men and encourage women to subordinate themselves to them. Although in Rwandan culture there are certain negative trends towards free interpersonal communication and open and frank debate, especially in the public sphere,³⁶ some cultural precepts in this domain apply more specifically to women than to men. As illustrated by the Rwandan proverb “chickens do not sing where there is a rooster,”³⁷ it is for example taught to young girls that it is virtuous to speak softly or not to speak at all and this particularly in the presence of men. In general, it is traditionally required for a woman to refrain from speaking in public, and she must remain at the service of men. There is therefore an imbalance of power and decision-making authority in favour of men which is often still culturally accepted in Rwanda. It should also be noted that the colonial period and the Catholic Church had an impact on Rwandan society and implanted certain patriarchal socio-cultural norms of the early 20th century.

Such power dynamics are particularly strong within the family and in couples who are still often marked by patriarchal norms.

35. All these challenges are taken from the list of challenges and constraints mentioned in Rwanda's 2010 National Gender Policy.

36. *Sustaining Women's Gains in Rwanda: The Influence of Indigenous Culture and Post-Genocide Politics*, Peace Uwineza and Elizabeth Pearson, The Institute for Inclusive Security, 2012.

37. In Kinyarwanda: *Nta nkokokazi ibika hari isake*.

The role of the family unit and men

A study, included in a 2015 USAID gender analysis, found that in Rwanda 53% of men and 65% of women agreed with the statement that men must have the final say on decisions made in the home.³⁸ The questioning of women's submission to men, and the efforts made in this direction, are also often poorly perceived, accused of destroying the stability of the couple and increasing domestic violence and divorces. A second Rwandan proverb dramatically illustrates this perception: "at home, when the woman speaks, the knife comes out,"³⁹ which means that a woman being vocal at home generates (violent) conflicts within the family.⁴⁰

The role of men, and in particular husbands, is particularly important and can be an additional obstacle to women's political and civic participation. Indeed, women in decision-making positions in the public sphere often face resistance from their husbands. This can lead to tensions and even violence within the family.

The prevalence of domestic violence in Rwandan society has been mentioned unanimously by all interviewees in Kigali. The statistics are indeed worrying: 31% of Rwandan women reported experiencing domestic violence in their lifetime, and 21% in the last 12 months.⁴¹

Beyond women's expected submission to man, traditional gender roles within the Rwandan family structure define a woman as a wife and mother who must

look after children and perform daily household tasks. These roles within the family and the household continue to prevail regardless of the level of education or financial autonomy of women.⁴² The words of a woman leader in the Rubavu district reported by HAGARUKA in May 2019 illustrate this situation: "When I come home, I leave my authority outside and I become a wife."⁴³

In addition to these tasks there are various social expectations such as participation in all family celebrations (marriage, bereavement, baptism). If it is accepted that a man, notably for professional reasons, does not attend a mourning ceremony, this is not socially acceptable for a woman.⁴⁴ These social demands impose an additional burden, especially on women involved in the political and/or civic sphere who must combine both their political responsibilities (and/or their civic engagement) with their family and social responsibilities.

The roles of wife and mother are intrinsically linked, as illustrated by the "intolerance of Rwandan society for out-of-wedlock pregnancies"⁴⁵ that causes dramatic social exclusion, especially for girls still in school who are particularly stigmatised. The respectability of a mother is therefore still determined by the presence of a legitimate man/husband at her side.

38. [Gender Analysis for USAID/Rwanda](#), Valuing Open and Inclusive Civic Engagement Project, January 2015.

39. In Kinyarwanda: *Uru-go ruvuze umugore ruvuga umuhoro*.

40. [Sustaining Women's Gains in Rwanda: The Influence of Indigenous Culture and Post-Genocide Politics](#), Peace Uwineza et Elizabeth Pearson, The Institute for Inclusive Security, 2012.

41. [Global Database on Violence against Women](#), UN Women, consulted on 3 October 2019.

42. [Sustaining Women's Gains in Rwanda: The Influence of Indigenous Culture and Post-Genocide Politics](#), Peace Uwineza et Elizabeth Pearson, The Institute for Inclusive Security, 2012.

43. Understanding factors leading to low representation of women in decision making at the local level government district, sector, and cells levels, in private local informal financial institutions- Sacco, Cooperatives and Saving groups, HAGARUKA, July 2019.

44. [Sustaining Women's Gains in Rwanda: The Influence of Indigenous Culture and Post-Genocide Politics](#), Peace Uwineza et Elizabeth Pearson, The Institute for Inclusive Security, 2012.

45. Words collected during interviews in Kigali in September 2019.

The influence of religion

In general, religious leaders and actors could potentially play a transformational role in addressing the root causes of gender inequalities.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the male monopoly of religion and all that is sacred has engendered a patriarchal reading of religious texts, often relegating women to submission and silence. In Rwanda, 96.2% of the population identifies as being a member of a religious group: 49.5% declare themselves Protestant, 43.7% Catholic and 2% Muslim.⁴⁷ The role of faith-based organisations is widely recognised in the 2010 National Gender Policy, which highlights that “given the key role of faith based organisations and their impact on the lives of Rwandans, it is critical that [they] take a leading role at the community level in contributing to the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment.”

Nevertheless, in Rwanda, religion and religious actors often seem to play a negative role in the perpetuation and normalisation of stereotyped gender norms that are unfavourable to women. The majority of the actors encountered in Kigali emphasised in particular the role of the Catholic Church, which tends to strengthen the patriarchal system existing in Rwanda by regularly conveying the principle of subordination of women to men, for example during the celebration of marriages. The Catholic Church, which runs a large number of health centres in the country, has also indicated that it will not provide modern contraceptives to women and girls in

its centres, causing tension with the Rwandan government. With almost half of the Rwandan population claiming to be Catholic, and the important role played by the Church in the health and education sectors, the teachings and messages it conveys are of paramount importance in the fight against violence, sexist norms and beliefs. As emphasised by several Rwandan women’s rights activists, it is counterproductive to have religious teachings, that have a significant number of followers,⁴⁸ in conflict with good national laws.

A legal framework little known at the local level

The majority of those interviewed pointed out the lack of knowledge and/or understanding of the Rwandan legal framework for women’s political and civic participation and more generally gender equality, particularly at the level of local authorities. This situation would lead to misunderstandings that sometimes lead to the rejection, conflict, and non-implementation of these laws at village, sector or district levels. This situation could partly explain the lower representation of women in local decision-making bodies.

Restriction of the civic and democratic space

Rwanda is characterised by an extremely restricted civic space, and the country is described as “not free” in 2019 by the Freedom House Association.⁴⁹ Indeed, civil society organisations and human

46. *Le rôle des leaders religieux dans la réalisation de la justice de genre*, Side by Side Brief, September 2018.

47. *The World Factbook*, CIA, consulté le 03/10/2019.

48. *Religion: Empowering or oppressive to women?*, The New Times, 30 August 2018.

49. *Freedom in the World 2019*, Freedom House.

rights defenders must act within very strict limits to avoid harassment or censorship. In addition, organisations that ensure respect for human rights or the promotion of a more open society are particularly targeted. Freedom of expression is largely compromised in the country, where political dissent is rarely tolerated and where journalists regularly face pressure and harassment.⁵⁰ It should be noted that Rwanda has no legal framework for the protection and promotion of human rights defenders, which amplifies the potential risks for those involved in the field. This situation affects women human rights defenders and civil society activists differently, particularly because of the stereotyped gender norms that prevail in the country. A recent study by Kvinna till Kvinna⁵¹ looks in detail at how the restriction of civic space results in women being reduced to their traditional role of mother and wife and their responsibility in the household rather than that of a political actor. As a matter of fact, because of stereotyped gender norms, the implications that the restriction of civic space has on all those in civil society, such as arrests or imprisonment have different social and familial consequences for women. Women are often attacked not only on the basis of their ideas but on a reputational basis, aiming to attain them in their intimacy and to dishonour them in public and private spheres. This was illustrated by the internet broadcast of Diane Rwigara's naked pictures a few days after the announcement of her candidacy for the 2017 presidential election. This restriction of the democratic space therefore has a direct impact on

the effective participation of women in political and civic spheres, but also in the media.

The limits of the top-down approach

Rwanda's gender equality policies are the result of strong political commitment at the highest level, which has led to the development of an important and necessary legal and institutional framework. Nevertheless, this top-down approach could make it difficult to challenge deeply entrenched societal standards and practices that primarily hinder women's participation, as described above. This approach, partly reinforced by that of the donors, is also a hindrance to the effective promotion of women's political and civic engagement in Rwanda.

The obsession with numbers

During interviews in Kigali, the limits of Rwandan success in gender equality were regularly highlighted, particularly with regard to the effective participation of women in the political and civic sphere. One interlocutor regretted that "in Rwanda, we do not aim to change behaviour. There is a lot of bragging going on over the amount of good figures at the national level and the international accolades." The government's obsession with statistics is reinforced by the requirements of international donors, on whom Rwanda's budget is still largely dependent. Indeed, the internationally defined indicators to illustrate the achievement of gender

50. [Monitor Tracking Civic Space](#), CIVICUS, consulted on 3 October 2019.

51. [Suffocating the movement – shrinking space for women's rights](#), Kvinna till Kvinna, 2018.

equality in the political sphere are mostly quantitative. For example, among the indicators to measure the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) related to gender equality: the proportion of women in management positions and the proportion of seats occupied by women in national Parliaments and local administrations,⁵² this is also true for the GAP II of the EU. Apart from the indicator for measuring the proportion of time spent on unpaid care and domestic work disaggregated by sex, there are few qualitative indicators to measure changes in behaviour and the decline of patriarchal norms in society. In addition, these indicators, when they exist, focus more on the consequences rather than the causes of gender inequalities, focusing largely on the prevalence of gender-based violence. This leads, particularly in Rwanda, to the implementation of policies focused exclusively on quantified objectives while neglecting the processes by which results must be achieved.⁵³

The lack of community involvement at the beginning

The top down approach adopted by the political power in Rwanda is also reflected in a basic lack of consultation and involvement in the communities. This is not unique to the policy of promoting gender equality, as it is also found in the development and implementation of many policies and reforms in Rwanda particularly in the agricultural domain.⁵⁴ This imposition from top to bottom neglects the active role that the

grassroots population must play in the fight against stereotyped gender norms and can have negative consequences for the comprehension and appropriation of the legal framework by all citizens. An interviewee in Kigali pointed out: “The top down approach is artificial and therefore not sustainable. We tend to think that if we have the laws, then everything is fine, the work is finished. Without substantial awareness-raising and dissemination of information, attitudes and beliefs that are detrimental to women’s participation in the public sphere will continue.” Beyond the non-application of certain laws, the lack of knowledge can also lead to conflicts at the community level. The initial lack of men’s involvement in this domain is particularly problematic as it causes tensions and rejections. Thus, poorly understood and little-known laws are perceived as benefiting only one group of people, in this case women, to the detriment of men, without the benefits for the whole society being diffused and adequate. This perception is particularly tenacious, even among men involved in the promotion of human rights encountered in Kigali. The establishment of mechanisms for community consultations and channels of communication from the grassroots to decision-makers is almost non-existent in the country, or dysfunctional given the Rwandan political context. Even the National Women Council, which is supposed to link the national and local levels through its presence at every level of society, is struggling to fulfil this role. This institution, created by the government in an authoritarian political context where critics are hardly tolerated, serves above

52. *Cadre mondial d'indicateurs relatifs aux objectifs et aux cibles du Programme de développement durable à l'horizon 2030.*

53. *Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda: Public Relations or Real Transformations?*, Petra Debusscher and An Ansoms, 12/09/2013.

54. *No intensification without participation: European donors must ensure the effective participation of Rwandan farmers in the elaboration of agricultural policy*, EurAc, 06/11/2018.

all to transmit information from the summit to the grassroots rather than to put community concerns back to the decision-making authorities.⁵⁵

In summary, the situation in Rwanda is characterised by a favourable legal and institutional framework and a remarkable representation rate in national political decision-making bodies. Nevertheless, the top-down approach adopted by the Rwandan political authorities neglects the role of communities and the work on changing norms and behaviours, which is necessary to ensure effective and sustainable participation of women in political and civic spheres at all levels.

While the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is very different from that in Rwanda, particularly in terms of representation and legal framework, the root causes that inhibit women's political and civic participation are relatively similar.

55. [Gender Equality Policies in Rwanda: Public Relations or Real Transformations?](#), Petra Debusscher and An Ansoms, 12 September 2013.

Political and civic participation of women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: a brief overview

Few women candidates and few women elected⁵⁶

The participation rate of women in the political sphere in the DRC is particularly worrying at all levels. First, there is a very small proportion of women involved in politics running as candidates in elections. In the national legislative elections of 2018, only 11.7% of candidates were women and this already very low percentage is all the more worrying as it continues to decline. In the 2006 and 2011 elections, the women standing were at 13.6% and 12.8% respectively. Moreover, the number of women actually elected is also very low, women are currently 9.8% in the Congolese National Assembly. Although we see a slight increase in these figures, 8.4% in 2006 and 9.7% in 2011, **the DRC is a very bad performer both on the African continent and in the world where it occupies the 164th place in terms of representativeness.**⁵⁷

The trend is broadly the same at the provincial level: women represented 11.8% of the candidates in the provincial general election and represent 10.6% of the elected candidates. Senate elections, held indirectly, give more encouraging results, although still very weak, with a noticeable increase of 19% of senators elected in 2019 being women, compared to only 4% in 2006. The election of a woman to Head of the National Assembly in April 2019 is also a positive signal that deserves to be highlighted.

In terms of presidential elections, the number of women candidates is particularly low. They were 4 out of 33

candidates in 2006, none in 2011 and only one in the 2018 elections. Finally, no woman was elected as provincial governor in 2019.

Marginal nominations

Successive governments since 2006 in the DRC have not given women a sufficient place either. They were 13.5% in 2006 and 10.1% before recent government nominations. Expectations regarding the representativeness of women in the formation of the new government were particularly important. The rejection of the first governmental formations proposed to President Félix Tshisekedi on the grounds that they did not sufficiently take into account the participation of women has raised many hopes, especially among the ranks of female activists. While undeniable progress has been noted, with the appointment in September 2019 of a 17% female government, this is still largely insufficient. On the other hand, women represent only 16% of the current President's cabinet, and none of them have been appointed as Deputy Chief of Staff.

Potential voters

While few women are elected and even more rarely candidates, they are better represented on the electoral lists. Of the 40 million voters registered in 2018, 50.6% were women, and some provinces had particularly positive results, such as North Kivu, where they accounted for 53% of the electorate. If the enrolment of women is satisfactory, it is difficult

56. Study on women's representation and influence in politics in DR Congo, Malena Liedholm Ndounou and Viktoria Saxby, March 2019.

57. Percentage of women in national parliaments, Inter-Parliamentary Union, consulted on 3 October 2019.

to draw conclusions about their level of participation, no data on this point was found during our research.

Female involvement in civil society

Statistical data on the involvement of women in Congolese civil society are few in number making quantitative analysis more difficult than in the political sphere. The exercise was nonetheless partially attempted by the Gender Equality Monitor in 2015, focusing on the participation of women in decision-making bodies in the various Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu.⁵⁸ According to the data collected, it appears that women are better represented in CSOs than in political life, with a proportion of organisations led by women averaging 30% in both provinces.

This being the case, these data need to be qualified because, while women are particularly involved in female CSOs, they are significantly less so in the decision-making bodies of other sectors of civil society (human rights, development, etc.). This trend was also confirmed in a recent study⁵⁹ by Protection International highlighting the low number of women in CSOs, including human rights organisations, where they are also rarely in decision-making positions. Although these data cannot be generalised to the whole of the DRC, this trend is still confirmed by the interviews conducted in Kinshasa. Interviewees pointed to the important activity of women's civil

society organisations but admitted less involvement in other sectors. The low involvement of young people in the structures of civil society, with the obvious exception of youth organisations was also pointed out, and in particular the lack of space granted to them at the level of decision-making bodies. This is even more the case for young girls.

58. *État des lieux de la parité dans la province du Nord-Kivu et du Sud-Kivu en République Démocratique du Congo*, Observatoire de la Parité, February 2016.

59. *Baseline study on the security and protection of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in North and South Kivu*, Protection International, December 2018.

Challenges to increased political and civic participation of women and girls in the DRC

The DRC is facing numerous challenges regarding the participation of women and girls, whether in politics or in civil society organisations. Some are common to both sectors and others are more specific. Numerous studies on the barriers and limits to the political and civic participation of women and girls have been carried out in the DRC, with the recent electoral context having particularly drawn attention to the issue. It is positive to note that many context-specific analyses of the DRC exist and that a diagnosis has been made by the different actors involved in the domain. This paves the way for the development of more appropriate and impactful interventions in the future. Nevertheless, despite the existence of this abundant literature, some elements are not being adequately considered. The list below, without pretending to be exhaustive, includes the obstacles for which promising but still under-exploited initiatives have been launched, as well as initiatives mentioned at the strategic level, but which are yet to be effectively put into practice.

60. *De la parité de droit à la parité de fait – Rapport d’analyses participatives et inclusives de la loi no 15/013 du 1^{er} août 2015 portant modalités d’application des droits de la femme et de la parité en République Démocratique du Congo*, Rien Sans les Femmes, March 2017.

The limits of the legal framework and its implementation

Unlike Rwanda, and despite a few positive elements, the DRC does not stand out for the development and effective implementation of a legal and institutional framework conducive to women’s political and civic participation.

The Constitution and Law N° 15/013 on the implementation of the rights of women and parity

Parity in the DRC is a constitutional principle, which in theory constitutes a unique opportunity for equal representation of men and women in decision-making bodies in the country. Article 14 of the Constitution states: “The public authorities shall ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (...). They take, in all fields, particularly in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural fields, all appropriate measures to ensure the full development and full participation of women in the development of the nation (...) The woman has the right to equitable representation in national, provincial and local institutions. The State guarantees the implementation of gender parity in these institutions. The law lays down the procedures for the application of these rights.” However, it took nine years for the law provided for in the Constitution to come into being, with the adoption in 2015 of Law N° 15/013 on the implementation of women’s rights and gender equality. Unfortunately, this law only deals with the application of parity in its title. It remains broad, providing no concrete modality, seldom clarifying the actors, resources and deadlines allocated to the implementation of parity, while covering an extremely broad range of themes that makes it particularly vague.⁶⁰ The only two structures explicitly charged with the implementation of this law, namely the Interministerial Committee and the

National Council for Gender and Parity, have not yet been established. Finally, the law does not provide for any sanctions for the non-fulfilment of established principles nor for positive incentives.

With regard to women's political participation, the law is particularly disappointing. Firstly, in terms of sanctions, since it only states that political parties whose electoral roll does not take gender dimension into account shall not be eligible for public funding. The term "gender dimension" is particularly vague, and is far from the concept of parity. In addition, public funding of political parties in the DRC is very rarely paid out, and the sanctions appear to be less restrictive. But the main weakness lies in the fact that the law refers only to the conditions established by the electoral law with regard to the implementation of parity in the lists established by the political parties.⁶¹ The Congolese electoral law is a definite obstacle to the effective participation of women in politics.

that "the non-representation of the woman does not constitute a reason for inadmissibility of a list." This non-binding aspect is a definite obstacle to women's effective participation in politics. It also illustrates a flagrant lack of political will, despite the possibilities offered by the 2017 changes. The law contains a series of other elements that further reinforce the inequalities between men and women, in particular with regard to the amount of the deposit required to submit an application which, in practice, is not reimbursed. Setting such a high amount negatively affects female candidates, given the limited financial resources available to women, especially those living in rural areas.

Next to political participation, women's involvement in civil society is also affected by a legal framework that is insufficiently sensitive to gender and by a general narrowing of the civic space that affects them more than men.

⁶¹. Article 5 of Law No. 15/013 on the implementation of women's rights and parity in the DRC: "Political parties shall take gender parity into account when drawing up electoral lists under the conditions provided for in the Electoral Law."

⁶². *Rapport sur l'état de la société civile*, CIVICUS, 2019.

Restriction on civic space

The electoral law

Until 2017, the Congolese electoral law stipulated that each list should be drawn up "taking into account men/women parity". The changes made to the act in 2017, however, saw the term "parity" removed to leave room for "representation of women" only, without further clarification, which weakens its scope. However, the greatest limitation of this law resides in the fact that it states

The DRC is characterised by a restricted or even "closed" civic space, according to the latest classification of CIVICUS on the state of civil society worldwide.⁶² Some positive signals have been issued since the beginning of 2019 with the election of the new President, but previous years have been marked by an atmosphere of fear and violence where the state and other actors have commonly imprisoned, seriously injured and killed people for trying to

exercise their right to associate, to meet and express themselves peacefully.⁶³

As in the case of Rwanda, the narrowing of the democratic space at work in the DRC affects women human rights defenders and civil society activists differently. Violence, threats and slander are obstacles that hinder women's commitment in different ways, including the simple participation in public meetings or demonstrations. Arrest, imprisonment or participation in a public gathering entails a risk of rape or significant sexual harassment, the psychological, reputational and family effects of which represent an extremely effective obstacle to women's participation. Defamation campaigns are often based on conservative norms and the expected role of women in society to provoke their exclusion within their community and sometimes even from their families. Threats against the families and children of women human rights defenders, with a view to silencing them, are also often reported by women activists.

In the DRC, civil society is a space where women still manage to be involved more than in the political sphere. It is particularly important to be able to maintain this civic space as open as possible since it remains one of the few places where Congolese women may express themselves publicly and to exercise their civic activities.

The restriction of the civic space, in addition to repression and violence, is also reflected by a binding and restrictive legal framework *vis-à-vis* CSOs and

human rights defenders. Protection International, through the case study of the citizen movement LUCHA, illustrates in detail the strategies developed by the Congolese State to "criminalise" the activities of civil society and pro-democracy movements.⁶⁴ In the DRC, there is a real risk that the legal framework for CSOs and human rights defenders will further deteriorate. In 2017, the Minister of Justice Alexis Thambwe Mwamba tabled in Parliament a bill amending and supplementing Law N° 004/2001 on the general provisions applicable to non-profit organisations and public-interest establishments, which contains a series of particularly restrictive amendments. The law has not been put to the vote of the Assembly, but the fact that Mr Thambwe is currently the speaker of the Senate means it might return on the agenda. The draft law on the protection and responsibilities of human rights defenders in the DRC is equally concerning: instead of providing a protective framework, at the moment non-existent in the country, it contains a series of elements that limit the role and modalities of action for human rights defenders and completely omits provisions specific to women defenders. Given the specific consequences that the restriction of the civic space can have on women's engagement in the public sphere, it is absolutely essential that, alongside the legal framework favouring parity in politics, legislation does not become tougher with regard to fundamental and public freedoms.

However, the Rwandan example amply illustrates that a legal and

63. *DR Congo new presidency and Universal Periodic Review: urging the EU and its member states to issue strong recommendations on the human rights situation in the country*, EurAc, 25 March 2019.

64. *La criminalisation des mouvements sociaux: Le cas du mouvement la Lucha en République démocratique du Congo*, Protection International, 2018.

institutional framework favourable to the representation of women is absolutely necessary and a positive first step, but not enough in itself to achieve an effective participation of women in decision-making bodies at all levels. The weight of deeply entrenched practices, norms and socio-cultural beliefs also constitutes a powerful obstacle in the DRC.

Persisting stereotyped gender norms

The “symptoms” of gender inequality in the DRC, including sexual and gender-based violence, women’s lack of economic empowerment, as well as their low participation in public debates and decision-making bodies, all have a common denominator: the persistence of stereotyped gender norms in the country.

In the DRC, as in many other countries, the behaviour of women and girls is subject to certain expectations on the part of the family, the community and society at large who are strongly against their involvement in the public domain, whether it be in politics or in civil society. These norms in particular require women and girls to be passive and obedient whereas men are expected to be authoritarian, tough and dominant both in private and in public. Congolese society values the submission of women to men and expects them to “know how to behave”: by remaining discreet, soft and withdrawn. Their participation in decision-making is also considered traditionally wrong, as the Congolese proverb “eating with a woman is eating

with a witch” illustrates, meaning that you can not trust a woman.

Gender stereotypes in the public and political spheres

Cultural and social norms for men and women in the public space are deeply rooted. They generate a series of stereotypes about what to do or say in public based on the sex of the individuals and the negative and positive attributes related to their different roles. The political domain in particular is mainly perceived as a men’s affair, associated with negative values and behaviour that would not be natural for women and more the attribute of men. Politics is traditionally described as a “dirty” and hard universe where corruption and lies reign. The morality of women involved in politics is therefore often questioned and their social image is often tarnished. Moreover, the perception that the prevalence of sexual harassment is particularly important in political parties only accentuates this negative image of those engaged in politics, which greatly limits women’s participation.

This challenge is common to politics and civil society. Although CSOs are less negatively considered than political parties, actively engaging in civil society involves taking public positions and asserting oneself by having a “strong character”, which is a socially unacceptable behaviour for women in the DRC, especially in rural areas. As noted in the study conducted by Protection International,⁶⁶ many stereotypes persist about women human

65. In Lingala: *Kolia na mwasi, kolia na ndoki*.

66. *Etude de base sur les besoins de protection des femmes défenseuses des droits humains au Nord et au Sud Kivu*, Protection International, December 2018.

rights defenders, perceived as “difficult” women with light morals. Public speaking in front of authority and the community, even within a CSO, is still perceived negatively in some parts of the country, as was pointed out in the case of Rwanda.

Social expectations for women in the public sphere are much higher than for men, because stereotyped gender norms convey qualities or defects that are intrinsically linked to being a woman. For example, when women hold positions of responsibility, society expects them to be more resistant to corruption and to show solidarity with other women; morality and empathy being presupposed qualities more prevalent among women. Some interviews pointed out that elected women have often been disappointing or incompetent, which would not favour the election or future appointments of other women. This criticism is rarely made against incompetent male politicians. Thus, women politicians are expected to be more competent than their male counterparts. All of these expectations can discourage even more women from getting involved.

Finally, the woman involved in politics bears even greater responsibility than her male counterpart. She has no right to make mistakes and will be much more severely criticised in case of failure. These social perceptions of the expected roles of men and women in public and the *clichés* that exist in politics constitute a definite obstacle to women’s participation and engagement in the public realm. They are also reinforced in private, within the

family and the couple.

The role of the family unit and the men

The public sphere taken aside, Congolese society remains marked by practices, beliefs, distribution of tasks and power structures within the family placing the woman in a situation of inferiority and submission to the man. This is reinforced by the Family Code, which originally stated that “the husband is the head of the household. He must protect his wife; the wife must obey her husband”⁶⁷ and modified in 2016 to “the husband is the head of the household. The spouses must protect each other”⁶⁸ *de facto* assigns a second role to women.

In rural areas in particular, women rarely have a say in the decisions made within the household, especially with regard to family expenses, and it is inappropriate for them to express their opinion around men (uncles, brothers, husband ...). **A study conducted in 2016 in the cities of Goma, Bunia and Bukavu notes that 100% of men and women interviewed agree with the idea that a woman should obey her husband.**⁶⁹

According to a more recent study (2019)⁷⁰ among 1,220 women in Goma and Bukavu, 56% of women interviewed said they could not communicate with their husbands, who refused to talk to them. According to the same study, 50% of them say that they receive pressure from their husbands on how to dress, do their hair or behave in public.

67. Article 444 of the Third Book of the Congolese Family Code.

68. Law amending and supplementing Law No. 87-010 of 1 August 1987 on the Family Code.

69. Men, faith and masculinities: DRC A baseline assessment on the social attitudes, relations, and practices of men in relation to gender, and sexual and gender-based violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Tearfund, 2016.

70. *Rapport de l'enquête sur les violences domestiques et professionnelles faites aux femmes dans la région des Grands Lacs*, 2019.

In addition, according to the 2016 study, 41% of men said that “sometimes the woman deserves to be hit.”⁷¹ According to UN Women, 51% of Congolese women have been victims of violence by their partners in their lifetime.⁷² Violence between partners is therefore widespread in the DRC, rarely addressed adequately and often considered the norm. Donors and technical and financial partners have, furthermore, taken a much stronger interest in conflict-related sexual violence in the country, neglecting other forms of violence against women, especially partner violence.⁷³

Finally, a “good” Congolese woman, in the vast majority of circles, must above all be a wife and a mother who manages all domestic tasks. Most of the interviewees stressed that it is increasingly accepted - especially in urban centres - that women are involved in the public domain, but this evolution does not influence the entrenched distribution of roles within the private sphere. Both men and women recognise that women are the first to have to take care of the home (including children, cooking and all other household chores) regardless of their environment or outside activities. Paradoxically enough, this situation is rarely identified as an obstacle that should be tackled first and foremost in order to encourage women’s participation in the management of public affairs. Indeed, women, including those involved in political or civil society, derive some satisfaction and pride from the role they are given in the household and do not see any incompatibility with their commitment.⁷⁴ It is clear, however,

that the burden of domestic work has a negative impact, if only because the time and energy available to devote themselves to political or civic engagements is much lower than that of men. This aspect further affects poor women who cannot afford to pay for additional domestic help which would enable them to engage in public activities.

The lack of role models

The under-representation of women, combined with the fact that politics and public opinion are mainly perceived as “a men’s business,” leads to a vicious circle. There are few role models of national women leaders and these are rarely valued, which does not make it possible to inspire the younger generation. The roles of leader, director or in authority are still considered as intrinsically masculine, and the family, as the first place of socialisation, reinforces this state of affairs. Most women in politics say they have faced resistance and criticism from their families. Conversely, those who have been able to flourish underline the beneficial role of moral support received from their father or husband as the “head of the family.”

The role of religion

Christianity is the majority religion in the DRC, with almost all of the population declaring themselves Christian (93%): 29.9% of them are affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church, 26.7% to the Protestant Church, and 36.5% to other Christian

71. [Men, faith and masculinities: DRC A baseline assessment on the social attitudes, relations, and practices of men in relation to gender, and sexual and gender-based violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo \(DRC\)](#), Tearfund, 2016.

72. [Global Database on Violence against Women](#), UN Women, consulted on 3 October 2019

73. *Rapport de l'enquête sur les violences domestiques et professionnelles faites aux femmes dans la région des Grands Lacs*, 2019.

74. Study on women’s representation and influence in politics in DR Congo, Malena Liedholm Ndounou and Viktoria Saxby, March 2019.

movements.⁷⁵ There are also 1.3% of Muslims within the population.

In the DRC, the socialisation of girls and boys is strongly influenced by religion. Christian faith and leadership play a major role in both private and family spheres as well as within the community and the political sphere. The division of roles between men and women, and the beliefs and values described above are also often reinforced by religion.⁷⁶ It can represent a definite obstacle as well as a formidable opportunity to promote women's leadership.

The obstacles to equality between men and women represented by the conservative interpretations of the sacred texts of the different religions in the DRC are not sufficiently studied and often taboo or minimised by all the actors. The abundant literature on the causes of gender inequality in the DRC makes mention of it, but only anecdotally without seeking to enter into a more in-depth analysis. However, some of them point out that there are indeed religious practices that hinder women's political participation in the country.⁷⁷ In rural areas, the reference to sacred texts is often made by the men and women interviewed to justify existing gender inequalities within the family unit. Male superiority is thus seen as a natural order of things and the way God intended it, in accordance with the biblical account of Creation.⁷⁸

75. [The World Factbook](#), CIA, consulted on 3 October 2019.

76. [Men, faith and masculinities: DRC A baseline assessment on the social attitudes, relations, and practices of men in relation to gender, and sexual and gender-based violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo \(DRC\)](#), Tearfund, 2016.

77. [Freins à la participation politique des Congolaises, notamment en période électorale Rapport d'étude](#), Internews, July 2017.

78. [Men, faith and masculinities: DRC A baseline assessment on the social attitudes, relations, and practices of men in relation to gender, and sexual and gender-based violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo \(DRC\)](#), Tearfund, 2016.

Part 2

Lessons learned, good practices and recommendations



Challenges to women's political and civic participation are numerous and well documented in the DRC as in Rwanda. Women's economic empowerment, issues related to maternal and reproductive health, the role of the media or political parties, and gender-based violence, are other challenges identified by the various studies and strategies aimed at promoting the effective participation of women in public life. All of these elements are more a consequence of stereotyped gender norms prevailing in both countries, rather than the root cause of women's lack of political and civic participation.

However, there is a tendency for donors, especially European donors, to focus primarily on the treatment of these symptoms (health, economic empowerment, education) rather than on the underlying causes of gender inequalities, particularly regarding the political and civic participation of women. Treating all of the "symptoms", which are also highly interdependent, is obviously important. In a context of limited resources and reduced priorities, it seems important not to neglect the essential work necessary on socio-cultural norms and behaviour.

While so-called transformative approaches have been developed, they are still underfunded and represent opportunities for under-exploited action. Part 2 explores the innovative or promising initiatives implemented in the DRC and Rwanda. It incorporates the main recommendations identified by EurAc for a more effective intervention in promoting the political and civic participation of women in both countries.

A brief overview of the promotion of women's political and civic participation by European donors

Women's participation in the public sphere is one of the pillars of gender equality. It is positive that its promotion is one of the strategic priority objectives of the various European donors in this field. Nevertheless, this objective is prioritised differently between European actors who are active in both countries. In addition, the importance given to this subject varies significantly between the interventions implemented in Rwanda and those supported in the DRC.

The European Union

At the overall strategic level of the EU, "strengthening girls and women's voice and participation" is one of the four priority themes identified in GAP II. According to the exchanges with the EU delegations and the information available to EurAc, we note that in the DRC the EU has supported and continues to support several projects aimed at meeting this objective. In the DRC, among the different projects that meet the objectives of GAP II, more than half aim to strengthen the voice and participation of women and girls. On the other hand, in Rwanda, the DEU did not prioritise this objective. More broadly, there is no specific "gender" project being supported by the Delegation of the European Union (DEU) in Rwanda, which in 2018 funded only one project meeting the objectives of

GAP II. The DEU favours taking this issue into account transversally. However, this gender mainstreaming is limited to certain specific sectors of intervention and is not yet systematically applied.

Belgium

Belgium adopted in 2016 a new strategic note on gender defining the global priority areas for Belgian cooperation in the domain of gender parity. This is explicitly in line with the GAP II. “Education and decision-making,” which includes political participation, are among the four Belgian priorities.⁷⁹ In addition, Belgium considers at the strategic level that the implementation of gender mainstreaming is a key element for changing the unequal structures of society, which is strongly reflected in the operational approach adopted in Rwanda. Belgium has supported two studies carried out by the Gender Monitoring Office aimed at taking stock of gender mainstreaming in the energy and health sectors in Rwanda. However, the promotion of women’s political and civic participation has not been prioritised by Belgium in the country, which has focused more on support for maternal and reproductive health and responses to gender-based violence (GBV).

Switzerland

Along the same lines, among the six priority objectives of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) strategy on gender equality and women’s rights, published in 2017,⁸⁰ we find

“Strengthening women’s effective participation.” At the global strategic level, Switzerland states that “Women’s effective participation in public life and their representation in state institutions are prerequisites for creating a fair, peaceful and inclusive society.” It should be noted that this priority axis includes both issues related to women’s political participation as well as the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.

Supporting gender equality and women’s rights is also one of the seven strategic objectives of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), which states that in the context of its cooperation, Switzerland “seeks to increase the political participation of women in decision-making and in the management of public affairs at local and national levels.”

In the DRC, Switzerland has been, until 2015, heavily involved in promoting women’s political and civic participation, particularly through a specific programme on the status of Congolese women.⁸¹ This aspect is no longer part of current priorities and the issue of gender equality is tackled in a transversal and non-specific way. In Rwanda, Switzerland has in the past supported specific gender projects, particularly in the fight against GBV.

At present, gender is tackled in a transversal way. However, the promotion of women’s political and civic participation, although not a specific goal in its own right, is particularly covered in governance programmes related to citizen participation and conflict prevention.

79. *Note stratégique genre et coopération au développement*, DGD, 2016.

80. *FDFA Strategy on Gender equality and Women’s rights*, FDFA Swiss Confederation, 2017.

81. *Du statut de la femme en République démocratique du Congo : Rapport d’une réflexion prospective pour un changement pérenne*, Swiss Embassy to the DRC, June 2015.

France

Among the five sectoral priorities taken up by France in its International Strategy for Gender Equality, we find that of ensuring the effective participation of women in areas of economic, political and social decision-making. Although no concrete action is detailed at the strategic level, the strategy reflects French ambitions in the field of increasing the effective participation of women and girls in governance policies and electoral processes at all levels or equal participation of women, girls, boys and men in local, national, regional and global politics.⁸²

In the DRC, France mainly adopts a transversal approach aimed at promoting gender mainstreaming in all sectors. However, some specific projects related to women's political and civic participation are also supported. In particular, a recently launched project, in connection with the commitments made by President Emmanuel Macron in Biarritz, aims to strengthen the "legislative bouquet" in favour of parity and support for Congolese parliamentarians in developing a legal framework conducive to gender equality.⁸³ In Rwanda, French cooperation is for the moment extremely reduced, as a result of diplomatic tensions between both countries. It should however be substantially strengthened in the very near future, but focussed primarily on education.

In both Rwanda and the DRC, Sweden is a leader in the domain, promoting the political and civic participation of

women as one of its main priorities for cooperation.

In general, there is therefore a stronger involvement of European donors in promoting the political and civic participation of women in the DRC than in Rwanda. The reason given is often the already strong national commitment to the subject observed in Rwanda, which "makes the issue less of a priority." The greater commitment in the DRC can also be explained by the recent and upcoming elections in the country.⁸⁴

More specifically, the following section looks at how the challenges raised above are taken into consideration by the different European donors both at the strategic level and in the programmatic implementation in Rwanda and the DRC. Based on some good practices identified, this section aims to make concrete recommendations to the various European donors in order to promote a truly transformative approach to effectively promote women's participation in the public sphere.

82. [France's international strategy for gender equality \(2018-2022\)](#), Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018.

83. [L'Ambassade de France en RD Congo et Afia Mama s'engagent pour le Pacte de Biarritz](#), Facebook page of the French Embassy to the DRC, consulted on 03 October 2019.

84. The country will complete its electoral cycle following the presidential, legislative and provincial elections (December 2018) by holding local elections (scheduled for 2019).

Combat stereotyped gender norms in Rwanda and the DRC

When it comes to the fight against gender inequalities, working on stereotyped gender norms is now a priority in most of the strategic documents developed by European donors. The link between socio-cultural practices and beliefs and the prevalence of GBV or discrimination in education and health is almost always established, but the link between these social norms and the effective participation of women in decision-making bodies is rarely established.

85. [France's international strategy for gender equality \(2018-2022\)](#), Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018.

86. [Gender Action Plan II](#), Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020, 21 September 2015.

In the gender strategic note developed by Belgium, it is emphasised that “violence against women (...) is the harmful consequence of deep-seated cultural and social stereotypes (...) that require a total reconsideration of the value system within society.” However, this strategic note does not address the specific impact of stereotyped gender norms on women's political and civic participation.

Whereas France develops in detail the impact of “certain regressive social norms that persist to the detriment of laws” and the importance of “working also on religious customs and traditions”, the French strategy also stresses that “To achieve lasting gains in women's (...) social positions, gender mainstreaming that tackles the three levels of change – individual, socioeconomic or community (family, school, communities) and institutional – is essential.” and explicitly provides for “breaking down sexist

stereotypes related to decision making by women.”⁸⁵

In the same vein, the EU is adopting an undeniable transformative strategy. GAP II emphasises that “even in cases where quotas could facilitate the participation of women and girls, social norms will determine whether or not they can be efficient. In some cases, social norms prevent women and girls from accessing their rights and lock them into unequal power relations, leaving them little space to speak, even within their own family, regardless of the legal framework.”⁸⁶

Strengthen the work carried out within the family unit and generalise men's involvement

As previously stated, men in general and husbands in particular play a role in perpetuating stereotyped gender norms excluding women from public and private decision-making. On the one hand, the fact that gender equality is often confused with women's rights can provoke a certain rejection by men and create tensions between men and women that it is absolutely necessary to avoid. On the other hand, men can also be actors of very positive change.

The inclusion of men in the promotion of gender equality is taken seriously by Rwandan authorities, which makes it one of the four strategic approaches for the implementation of the National Gender Policy, stipulating that “measures to

stimulate men's involvement in gender issues in all sectors, including private, public and civil society" must be taken."⁸⁷

It is also positive that the role of men in promoting women's political and civic participation is recognised at the level of the EU's strategic framework. GAP II aims to help support the agents of change who are working to change negative social or cultural norms (...) and the active participation of men and boys. In addition, GAP II includes activities aimed at promoting behavioural change in decision-making. These include combating discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes at family and community levels through public and media awareness-raising campaigns involving both women and men who are encouraged to contribute to "women's participation in governance at all levels."

With regard to support for inclusive political participation in the DRC, according to information gathered in the country and given the 2019 electoral context, the EU has mainly supported civic education and election observation projects. Nevertheless, these projects do not seem to have adopted a particularly innovative and transformative approach to gender relations: women were indeed well targeted beneficiaries, but little or no activities addressing stereotyped gender norms have been carried out, notably including men.

Other European donors carried out initiatives that focused on supporting women candidates through coaching and

training. The work initially focused on women's leagues within political parties, involving very marginally - male - party executives. This lack of involvement of men in activities has recently been corrected, which is positive. Specific programmes addressing the issue of positive masculinity within political parties targeting politicians, while accompanying them in the development of an action plan for women's engagement within their structure, have recently been launched. These activities, supported by the Netherlands and Sweden, are for the moment only pilot initiatives, but the approach deserves greater interest and investment from the various actors in the domain.

Men's involvement is considered in the response to GBV and access to maternal and reproductive health care at the Belgian strategic level, but is not specifically emphasised with regard to women's political and civic participation. This is reflected in the interventions supported in Rwanda and the DRC. Similarly, Switzerland places special emphasis on promoting the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality, but it essentially focuses their involvement in the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence.⁸⁸ In the same vein, in the DRC, the EU has supported for four years a programme to combat GBV, entitled "Women and Men, Moving Forward Together", the first component of which aims to contribute to changing social norms and individual and collective behaviours to foster a new perception of masculinity and femininity. This

87. [National Gender Policy](#), Republic of Rwanda, July 2010.

88. [France's international strategy for gender equality \(2018-2022\)](#), Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018.

programme has therefore offered a large place to work with men and the family unit.

It is however regrettable that this aspect, which is largely taken into account in other areas of the promotion of gender equality, especially in the fight against GBV, is also largely neglected in practice as regards to political and civic participation of women.

In the DRC as in Rwanda, the role of husbands and more broadly of the family unit deserves reinforced commitment. Spousal clubs or role models as implemented in other sectors, especially GBV, could be a model to be further developed and adapted to the issue of civic and political participation of women, especially in rural areas.

The *Bandebereho* and *Indashyikirwa* projects in Rwanda

Bandebereho is a project implemented in Rwanda that targets men and couples. It aims to reduce partner violence by promoting the involvement and participation of men in sexual, reproductive and maternal health. The project is being implemented by the Rwanda Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC)⁸⁹ as part of the MenCare+ programme⁹⁰ based on the "Program P"⁹¹ methodology developed by Promundo.

Through this project, groups of men from the same community meet every week for four to five months for participatory sessions of critical reflection and dialogue in small groups. They followed a *curriculum* that addresses topics such as paternity, the childcare or the communication within couples and decision-making. Wives also participate in half of the sessions according to a well-defined methodology adapted to the Rwandan context, which puts power dynamics and gender roles at the centre of discussions to transform ideas and norms about who does what and who has power in the household, as well as in intimate relationships.

This methodology is bearing fruit in a sustainable way. Assessments⁹² in Rwanda show that two years after participating in the programme, men are almost half as likely to use partner violence and spend almost one hour extra per day on household chores. Involving the men and focusing on improving relationships can therefore be an effective strategy for reducing men's use of violence against women and improving relationships within the household.

Other similar projects implemented by RWAMREC in Rwanda, such as the *Indashyikirwa* project, have shown that focusing on behaviour change at the individual level, in particular by targeting men allows for a more general impact on social norms. By supporting couples in building healthy relationships, the project also develops the skills of individuals to act in their own community. In particular, participants are better able to respond to community-based conflict and GBV issues, and strengthen their commitment and activism within their community.

This approach, if adapted, could serve as a basis for specific interventions aimed at women's political and civic participation.

89. RWAMREC's website: <http://www.rwamrec.org/>

90. *MenCare+*, Promundo, consulted on 3 October 2019.

91. *Program P*, Promundo, consulted on 3 October 2019.

92. *Gender-transformative Bandebereho couples' intervention to promote male engagement in reproductive and maternal health and violence prevention in Rwanda: Findings from a randomized controlled trial*, Research Article, PLOS one, April 2018.

Break free from victimisation and promote role models

The work carried out in the fight against gender-based violence is crucial and the important amount of attention given to the problem must absolutely be maintained. Nevertheless, it should not keep women in a victim's position, which contributes to perpetuating the image conveyed by stereotyped gender norms, namely that women are weak and inferior to men. To deal with all the symptoms of gender inequalities, including gender-based violence, as well as women's low political and civic participation, care must be taken to move away from the victimisation narrative that still tends to prevail.

In this sense, activities aimed at promoting and communicating about the female role models who have successfully engaged in the public sphere should be continued and strengthened. The role of the media in this context is crucial. Belgium stresses in its strategic note on gender that highlighting women's political role models is one of the actions that can contribute to strengthening women's political participation. In the DRC, similar projects by European donors, such as Belgium, Sweden and now the Netherlands, are perfect examples. They encourage emulation through the radio broadcast of portraits of women engaged in politics and in an interactive manner with the listeners. In addition, taking into account the role of men and in particular husbands⁹³ in these programmes is also a good practice to highlight. This type of project must continue to be supported in the future, beyond the electoral

context alone. In the same vein, the recent establishment by UN Women of a directory of women leaders in the DRC is also a commendable approach.⁹⁴

In addition to these awareness-raising campaigns featuring women leaders, it is also necessary to develop individual approaches that value role models while allowing other women to benefit from the expertise of their peers. As such, mentoring activities are particularly interesting.

The EU's approach to supporting women human rights defenders in the DRC has the merit of having taken this dimension into account. While recognising the differing needs in terms of the safety and protection of women defenders, the projects emphasise the importance of promoting role models and/or mentors to counter stereotypical gender norms and encourage women's engagement in human rights defence movements. Furthermore, it is important to underline that all the projects currently supported by the EU in the field of the protection of women defenders have been developed based on a gender analysis and often in consultation with the actors concerned.

In Rwanda, the UN Women's 2019-2023 Strategic Plan also includes strengthening the capacity of women leaders for mentoring purposes. The idea is to use today's women leaders to mentor tomorrow's women leaders and ensure the sustainability of progress in women's political participation in the country.

Mentoring activities are particularly

93. *RDC : A la rencontre des hommes qui encouragent les ambitions politiques de leurs épouses*, Studio Hirondelle, 13 August 2019.

94. <http://femmesleadersrdc.org/>

effective with young people. Initiatives supporting the contact and long-term support between a woman leader and a young woman involved in the public sphere, or having ambitions to do so, deserve more attention. These activities require, by their very nature, long and tedious follow-up, and are therefore not given priority by the donors. Yet, they can bring a real added value to motivating women and girls. In addition, it was clear from the interviews with women and young women activists that there was still too often a generational breakdown, and that the passing of the torch between the old and new generation of women activists was still rarely done within CSOs. Mentoring within CSOs would also help to meet this challenge, as would the introduction of systematic internship programmes.

Strengthen gender education for young people

While the mentoring and valorisation of role models is an interesting approach to promoting women's public engagement, particularly to encourage the vocations of young women, there is also a need to increase the opportunities available to them.

France is relatively little engaged in the DRC on the issue of women's political participation, but developed a limited but promising approach: the establishment of preparatory classes reserved only for women at the National School of Administration. If the effects

of this approach are not yet measurable, encouraging girls to embark on the highest administrative functions of the State seems indispensable, given their current poor representation. This project has the merit of answering their needs. The establishment of scholarships by European states for young girls, as well as for specific research or studies on gender are also initiatives to be continued and generalised.

The involvement of the youth is indeed key to combating stereotypical gender norms. As already pointed out, the role of the family unit and the work within it are essential, but socialisation in schools can also be an important lever. In this sense, strengthening gender education is essential. For example, in the DRC, the establishment of gender discussion groups within universities, based on specific training curricula, was highlighted by some as an interesting experience that favoured a better understanding and taking into account of the impact of stereotyped gender norms by the beneficiary students.⁹⁵

In a more formal way, initiatives to integrate gender modules into university and school *curricula* could increase awareness of these norms by the younger generation and would significantly enhance behavioural change. This approach has the merit of reaching both girls and boys, regardless of their sector, but also teachers and professors. In Rwanda, gender has already been introduced in university programmes.⁹⁶ But in the DRC, this was done on an *ad*

95. *Curriculum Genre, Manuel pratique de formation sur le genre*, International Alert, 2017.

96. *Global Database on Violence against Women*, UN Women, consulted on 3 October 2019.

hoc basis, directly with the universities and targeted schools. Moreover, it seems to have focused more on the opening of a specific gender department, rather than on the systematic integration of the subject regardless of the department.

The generalisation of this approach, through its institutionalisation at national and provincial levels, from primary school onwards, could bear significant benefits in the future and would require increased donor attention to reach all schools and universities in the country. The Church should also be involved in this process as it plays an important role in the education system.

97. *Département genre et développement durable*, ISDR Bukavu, consulted on 3 October 2019.

Student dialogue groups leading to the introduction of a gender and development sector at the ISDR Bukavu.

The South Kivu Congolese Women's Caucus for Peace, among other Congolese civil society organisations, has set up student gender dialogue groups at some universities in South Kivu. These groups, made up of 60% young girls and 40% young men, meet once or twice a month in their university, with the support of the Women's Caucus, based on a specific methodology aiming at gradually addressing and understanding the question of gender inequalities. Sex discrimination and sexual harassment in universities (including the coercion of students during exams by some teachers in exchange for sexual favours) are at the heart of discussions. According to participants in these dialogue groups, this approach has revolutionised gender perceptions within their university and, for example, has seen more female students participating in different decision-making bodies within their school, for example by running for the posts of spokesperson and some even being elected associate spokespersons at their university. These groups also advocated for the introduction of a gender module within the formal academic curriculum. This advocacy work paid off with the introduction for the first time in 2017-2018 of a "Gender and Development" option at the Higher Institute for Rural Development (ISDR) in Bukavu.⁹⁷

Strengthen the implication of the churches and religious leaders

Churches are particularly influential institutions in the DRC and Rwanda. Their influence in both education and socialisation is an opportunity in the fight against stereotyped gender norms. It is thus necessary to make religious leaders targets of communication activities for behavioural change by addressing the issue of positive masculinity within religious institutions, but also to use their power of influence to fight negative norms and stereotypes within families and society. Religious leaders have the ability to change the attitudes and norms of their congregations and communities, as well as the ability to speak to the public and thereby influence public policy.

This aspect is hardly exploited by European donors from the strategic level. Neither the EU nor Belgium make religious actors a prime target for the promotion of gender equality in their overall strategy. Switzerland mentions it anecdotally in its overall strategy of cooperation with the countries of Eastern Europe.⁹⁸ Only France mentions this, once, in its international strategy for gender equality.

On the other hand, the role of faith-based organisations in promoting gender equality is clearly established by Rwanda in its National Gender Policy. Very clear objectives are assigned to them, including the responsibility to “initiate and facilitate the promotion of (...) community-based dialogue for a better understanding of

healthy gender relations at family and community level.”

In the DRC, the Catholic Church, through the Diocesan Commission for Justice and Peace (CDJP), has set up “women of peace dynamics”⁹⁹ which leads, among other things, local, provincial and national advocacy activities for the implementation of the law on parity and the development of a legal framework conducive to the civic and political participation of women in general. However, this initiative is struggling to find the necessary support from donors to strengthen its activities. Moreover, this approach, implemented by a denominational organisation, is not primarily intended to address in-depth stereotyped gender norms, often reinforced by religious interpretations. Other recently launched initiatives are also promising, notably by the CDJPs in the DRC and Rwanda to improve family cohabitation relationships by working on the dynamics within the couple in order to reduce domestic violence.

In Rwanda as in the DRC, initiatives involving religious actors are still few and particularly focused on GBV. They should be extended to the participation of women and girls in decision-making bodies at all levels, especially in the public sphere, and to receive more support and interest from the international community.

98. [Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2017-2020](#), Swiss Confederation, 17 February 2016.

99. [Programme Dynamique femme de la paix](#), Justice et Paix Congo Asbl, consulted on 3 October 2019.

100. *Déclaration commune des membres du Side by Side RDC à Goma*, 12 July 2018.

101. *Contextual Bible Study, Manual on Gender-Based Violence*, Tamar Campaign, 2007.

102. *Men, faith and masculinities: DRC A baseline assessment on the social attitudes, relations, and practices of men in relation to gender, and sexual and gender-based violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*, Tearfund, 2016.

The Side by Side movement in the DRC

The Side by Side movement, a global movement active in several countries, was launched in 2018 in the eastern DRC.¹⁰⁰ It is composed of religious leaders, faith-based organisations and religious individuals whose goal is transformational change for gender justice. This movement recognises that religious teachings have often endorsed the social and cultural norms that perpetuate gender-based injustice, and that adherents and spiritual leaders have a responsibility to revisit sacred texts and promote a just and equal society for men and women.

In order to fulfil this objective, Side by Side develops, for example, specific theological analyses which serve as a basis for exchange and confrontation of ideas within discussion groups of the faithful and/or religious leaders set up within the confessional institutions. These analysis sessions and discussions are based on different methodologies, including, for Christians, contextual Biblical study.¹⁰¹ The practice of contextual Bible study is done in a discussion group, sometimes called “Tamar circle.” These groups choose an issue related to gender inequality observed in the community and discuss it by confronting it with a biblical text and debating its interpretation. The process of discussion, analysis and interpretation of the sacred text has led to the development and implementation of an action plan to address the identified problem.

This approach also makes it possible to see religious leaders preaching for equality between men and women within their congregations, which gradually leads to positive behavioural changes.

Tamar circles have been particularly used to respond to GBV, which seems to have had a very positive impact in breaking the silence in the communities, increasing the legal recourse and the social and medical care of the victims.¹⁰²

This approach should be adapted to the effective participation of women and girls in decision-making processes.

Strengthen advocacy initiatives for the development and effective implementation of a favourable legal framework in the DRC

The adoption of binding laws and/or the introduction of positive incentives has direct consequences for the representation of women in political assemblies. They can bring about positive social change if accompanied by extension work, awareness raising, and changes in behavioural and socio-cultural norms.

To achieve a legal framework conducive to the participation of women in the political and civic sphere in the DRC, the various provisions listed above must be reviewed. First, the non-binding aspect of the representation of women on the lists of political parties in the electoral law. Strong political will is needed from the Congolese legislature and the diplomatic influence of European actors at the highest level is indispensable. The political support of the international community for advocacy by women's activists and civil society movements is also needed, as will be highlighted further in this report.

From a programmatic and operational point of view, the various interviews in the DRC also revealed the need to strengthen support for CSO advocacy initiatives. Advocacy is often the poor parent of donor-funded activities. Like work on behavioural change, the effects of advocacy activities are difficult to measure and take time to obtain, which does not

favour technical and financial support from international partners, who must increasingly be able to communicate easily on concrete and rapid results. However, it is necessary to strengthen the support provided to Congolese CSOs in these efforts if we are to be able to observe positive changes in the political and civic participation of women in the country.

In particular, this support must ensure that an important role is played in strengthening the organisational and institutional capacity of CSOs while supporting and promoting advocacy coalitions.

The empowerment of Congolese CSOs, particularly with regard to advocacy, must be a priority. The integration of this aspect must be done systematically during the design of the project. This is illustrated by the systematic introduction of training, rigorous monitoring and evaluation as well as close and high-quality support with regard to human resources management or financial and administrative governance. This also means taking on greater structural costs and financing longer projects that allow CSOs to work over time and meet the requirements of professionalism and accountability (accounting software financing, audit cost accounting, etc.). The financial precariousness of many CSOs and those engaged in advocacy activities impacts the quality and monitoring of implemented activities and tends to enable management weaknesses, leading to a vicious circle on their ability to attract future financing, further worsening their financial precariousness.

The need to promote synergistic work through the support not only of formalised consortia, but also informal coalitions of Congolese CSOs was emphasised. The establishment of broad coalitions and networking is a key factor for the success of advocacy activities. Congolese civil society is often blamed for its fragmentation and divisions, especially in connection with a significant politicisation.

Advocacy coalitions for the establishment of a legal framework conducive to the political and civic participation of women exist, but all too often suffer from a lack of means and support that can sometimes lead to problems of governance and/or internal divisions for the collection of funds. Donors can play a vital role in this area.

It is possible to strengthen existing coalitions through the format of calls for projects, the design of proposals and the mechanisms of prior consultation that should systematically underlie the development of projects. Here again, it is crucial to support for strengthening the institutional and organisational capacities of these advocacy coalitions and to connect them at the national, regional and international political level. While this support is no doubt less attractive than the financing of activities with immediate visibility, it is nonetheless indispensable.

Finally, support for regional initiatives is needed. Linking and exchanging experiences, particularly between Rwandan and Congolese CSOs through support to regional advocacy platforms, should be

encouraged. In addition to the transfer of expertise and the increased political weight of advocacy that this support would provide, the regional platforms also have positive consequences for the consolidation of peace in the region.

Commitment in a sustainable and continuous manner

The change in norms and behaviours, essential in the DRC as in Rwanda for greater participation of women and girls in the political and civic sphere is a long-term task, the results of which will be achieved over time.

As such, the commitment of donors, and in particular European donors, must be on a continuous basis and not be limited to electoral deadlines or be content with expressions of political will at the central level, as is the case in Rwanda.

In the DRC, during the interviews, many Congolese and international civil society actors deplored the late interest of technical and financial partners on the subject, which did not achieve the results hoped for in the last elections.

While attention must of course be strengthened during electoral periods, particularly with regard to the support of women candidates and civic education, activities aimed at combating social stereotypes, including gender activities targeting the family unit must be part of donor priorities regardless of the political context. Moreover, it is necessary that

a substantial investment in individual approaches, often still neglected, be provided alongside systemic approaches. The complementarity of both approaches ensures greater sustainability of interventions.

Similarly, donor support for advocacy should not happen at the last minute. Changing legal frameworks takes time and requires building lasting relationships, be it between those involved in forming a strong coalition or policy makers. It takes time to develop a constructive dialogue with often numerous back and forth on the texts and the amendments to be made. Advocacy work should start before the bill is put on the Parliamentary agenda. Support to these activities should take these considerations into account.

Finally, in Rwanda, despite a positive legal framework and strong political will, all CSO actors interviewed stressed the need to continue efforts to ensure the sustainability of current achievements. There is a need to vulgarise and disseminate legal frameworks at local and community level. Unfortunately, most European donors do not consider the issue to be a priority given the already positive developments in this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen the work carried out within the family unit and generalise men's involvement

- Develop programmes that combine activities for behaviour change at the individual level, especially in household and couple decision-making, by systematically involving men, while linking them to activities developed at community level.
- Develop programmes not limited to GBV in projects on positive masculinity, and ensure that women's effective participation in decision-making at all levels is integrated into the objectives of these programmes.
- Ensure that husbands and men are always included in coaching programmes for women leaders (e.g. in rural schools).
- Strengthen programmes on positive masculinity within political parties.
- Develop more awareness and communication campaigns on the benefits of gender equality for society as a whole, including men, by breaking with the notion that it is only for the benefit of women.

Break free from victimisation and promote role models

- Stop the stereotypical discourse presenting the woman as a victim and/or attributing specific "positive" qualities (consensual, gentle, peace-making).
- Pursue and strengthen communication campaigns, especially at the local level, aimed at celebrating women engaged in the public sphere.
- Strengthen mentoring programmes at all levels (formal policy, activism, development, economic ...)
- Support the development of internship programmes within national CSOs, NGOs, but also embassies and cooperation agencies, ensuring equal number of places for girls and boys.

Strengthen gender education for young people

- Support gender mainstreaming in primary, secondary schools and universities.
- Pursue and strengthen scholarship systems by introducing positive discrimination measures for girls.
- Pursue and strengthen scholarship mechanisms for students following gender studies.

Strengthen implication of the churches and religious leaders

- Integrate faith-based organisations and religious leaders at the strategic level as one of the priority targets for activities promoting women's political and civic participation.
- Develop positive masculinity programmes for religious leaders.
- Support activities aimed at a positive interpretation of the sacred texts on the role and rights of women, especially in decision-making and participation.
- Support awareness-raising campaigns led by religious leaders with key messages for effective participation of women in decision-making bodies at all levels.

Strengthen advocacy initiatives for the development and effective implementation of a favourable legal framework in the DRC

- Support long-term advocacy campaigns politically and financially aimed at modifying or implementing a legal framework favourable to the participation of women in the DRC.
- Increase the awareness and vulgarisation of legal frameworks at the community level by promoting exchanges with local authorities (e.g. a forum of popular expression).
- Integrate systematically into all calls for proposals a clear objective of empowering national implementing partners with the necessary budget.
- Prioritise support for CSO synergies and coalitions in advocacy projects and promote their implementation by making it a clear objective in calls for proposals.
- Support regional advocacy initiatives and platforms for the exchange of experience and networking of Rwandan and Congolese CSOs at regional, continental and international levels.

Commit in a sustainable and continuous manner

- Changes in behavioural and value systems, as well as legal changes, are long but essential processes to enable women to participate effectively. In this sense, support in the domain must be continuous and funded programmes must be planned for a sufficiently long duration.

Part 3

Shifting the institutional culture of European donors: a condition *sine qua non*



An understanding of the issues related to gender and the implementation of transformative strategies and programmes in the sector can only be achieved if the institutional culture of the different donors and technical and financial partners shifts extensively on the matter of gender.

Gender equality can only be promoted externally if it is taken seriously by all the institutions that advocate it and if it is implemented internally. This is a prerequisite for effective interventions in third countries. Moreover, this change should not be limited to unclear strategic statements or good political intentions and must be instilled at all levels of the institutions, with a very clear accountability framework (through performance indicators) and the availability of substantial resources. The European commitments are numerous but the operational implementation in the DRC and in Rwanda still presents some shortcomings.

Strategy...

The European Union and GAP II

The need to institutionalise the gender perspective in development cooperation in order to promote gender equality more effectively in partner countries has been well proven. Several evaluations¹⁰³ have blamed the lack of concrete actions on the part of the various donors, including the EU, to encourage this institutionalisation and the negative impact that this could have on the activities implemented. The evaluations carried out on the implementation of GAP I highlight this weakness. Only an institutional commitment at all levels and a strong political will can allow real change. This lesson learned has been taken into account and developed in GAP II. Thus, it is particularly notable that the evolution of the institutional culture is an integral part of the EU gender action plan and that it is included among the four priority themes.

This theme on shifting the institutional culture of the Commission and EEAS services to more effectively meet EU commitments is illustrated by a series of objectives to be achieved by the European services and the Member States, including:

- The establishment of a dedicated leadership for the promotion of gender equality within the European institutions.
- The allocation of sufficient human and financial resources to promote gender equality.
- A solid, evidence-based approach to programming development.
- Strengthened coherence and coordination between the European institutions and the Member States.
- The establishment of a specific monitoring evaluation mechanism through systematic and transversal reporting.

103. [More of the same, or radical change? Options for the successor to the EU's Gender Action Plan 2010-2015](#) Helen O'Connell, November 2014; and [EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 at year one, European Implementation Assessment](#), European Parliament, 15 January 2018.

104. [Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 - Council conclusions](#), 26 October 2015.

The four priority themes of GAP II are: ¹⁰⁴

- Physical and psychological integrity of girls and women.
- Social and economic rights / empowerment of women and girls.
- Voice and participation of girls and women.
- **Institutional cultural shift to deliver more effectively on EU commitments.**

These objectives involve actions such as: the integration of gender equality issues into high-level political dialogues (ambassadors, co-operation leaders, etc.) between the European actors and the partner country; the establishment of gender-specific training for key personnel, in particular gender focal points; the establishment of formal mechanisms for coordination between the various European actors; the systematic development of gender analysis for partner countries or the establishment of gender-sensitive indicators for all projects. In addition, GAP II provides for annual systematic reporting, both at the level of the delegation and of the Member States, of the achievement of these objectives based on specific indicators related to institutional cultural shift. This is already a breakthrough in itself and should help to encourage all European staff to take issues of gender equality seriously in their work and, in theory, to facilitate the fulfilment of the political commitments made by the EU in this area.

the institutional cultural shift, which is very positive. Among the five results to be achieved in this action plan, it is foreseen that Belgian cooperation actors develop and reinforce their knowledge and common ownership of the different concepts and tools relating to gender, in order to contribute to an institutional cultural shift. This plan therefore includes: developing advocacy for the rights of women and girls in meetings with high-level bodies in partner countries, regardless of the sectors of intervention; actively participating in the gender coordination mechanisms established in third countries; organising ongoing and joint gender training for all key actors of the co-operation or a number of initiatives to disseminate information on the subject through in-house awareness-raising activities. More specifically, Belgium is also expected to contribute to the drafting and implementation of the EU's GAP Plan 1325 and other plans related to this theme, and particularly to monitor their implementation in the DRC.

105. *Plan d'action relatif à l'intégration de la dimension de genre*, Belgian Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid.

The European States

Belgium

In order to operationalise the Gender Strategic Note, the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation of Belgium has developed an action plan for gender mainstreaming¹⁰⁵ that is both ambitious and concrete. This plan explicitly states several of the indicators and objectives of GAP II in particular with regard to

On the other hand, the action plan remains silent on how the indicators will be measured and with what frequency, stating that this must be determined with each directorate concerned.

The five expected results of the DGD Gender Action Plan:

- The Belgian cooperation has encouraged its partner countries to be active in gender mainstreaming and has supported their efforts in this regard, especially with other development partners.
- The Belgian cooperation has supported European and multilateral development organisations in their integration of gender and has strengthened its action in the defence and promotion of women's rights and gender equality on the international stage
- Belgium-funded humanitarian partners are encouraged to pay particular attention to the gender aspect, specifically to sexual violence, at both the strategic and operational levels.
- The Belgian cooperation has mainstreamed gender in its work of assessing non-governmental cooperation actors (ACNG) and has supported them in their efforts on this transversal theme.
- Belgian cooperation actors have developed and strengthened their knowledge and common ownership of the different concepts and tools related to gender, in order to contribute to an institutional cultural shift.

106. Website: SDC Gender Equality Network, <https://www.shareweb.ch/site/Gender/Pages/default.aspx>

107. *Report on Effectiveness Swiss international cooperation in the field of gender equality 2007-2016*, Swiss Confederation, 2018.

108. *FDFA Strategy on Gender equality and Women's rights*, FDFA Swiss Confederation, 2017.

Switzerland

The report on the effectiveness of Swiss international cooperation in the field of gender equality (2007-2016) highlights weaknesses in institutional cultural shift while noting the improvements already achieved in the sector. Switzerland has indeed developed a Gender Tool Kit for its staff and has set up an internal network for gender equality aimed mainly at making technical resources available while promoting experience sharing.¹⁰⁶ However, the report stresses that “the availability of gender related human resources is not up to the SDC's ambitions” and that “awareness and capacity building on this issue can still be improved among the personnel.”¹⁰⁷ One

of the main recommendations made to the SDC is “investing in capacity building for its own staff (...) to improve gender analysis and project design.” This seems to have been taken into account, not only with the development in 2017 by the FDFA of its first strategy on gender equality and women's rights,¹⁰⁸ but above all by the integration of a specific objective related to institutional culture alongside the thematic objectives. This objective involves, for example, intensifying efforts to achieve balanced representation of women and men at all hierarchical levels or to integrate modules and seminars on gender equality into the training programmes of the personnel. Objective 5 of the same strategy provides for increased integration of gender equality issues into

bilateral and multilateral dialogues and influence normative developments and intergovernmental political processes in this direction. Finally, the strategy plans for the FDFA to promote the appropriation of gender and women's rights by staff, including managers, and encourages the heads of missions to integrate the issues involved.

The monitoring and evaluation mechanism is explained quite briefly and superficially in the strategy and no specific indicators for objectives 5 and 6 could be found during our research. In addition, the SDC's report on the gender equality situation, published in 2017, notes that

reporting capacity building needs to be considered in order to improve monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the area of gender equality.¹⁰⁹

The six objectives of the FDFA Gender Equality and Women's Rights Strategy

- Strengthen women's economic empowerment.
- Strengthen the effective participation of women.
- Fight against all forms of gender-based violence.
- Promote sexual and reproductive health rights.
- Put gender equality and women's rights at the heart of bilateral and multilateral action.
- Ensure equal opportunities for women and men in the FDFA.

109. [Status Report on Gender Equality 2017 Closing the Gender Gap](#), Swiss Confederation, 2018.

France

As regards to France, the need to strengthen the institutional culture of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs and its operators is very much developed at the strategic level, with the aim that gender reflex becomes systematic in all areas.

France's latest international strategy for equality between women and men 2018-2022 is mainly devoted to this issue,¹¹⁰ and develops five specific objectives solely for improving the institutional culture of gender equality. Its objectives and actions include improving internal practices in the field, moving from simple awareness raising to effective staff training, strengthening gender focal points, increasing funding, intensify France's political advocacy on

the subject and communicating without gender stereotypes both internally and externally. Strengthening accountability is also an important point and a very detailed framework containing performance indicators to be achieved in the field is included in the strategy. Finally, it is important to stress that this strategy makes explicit reference to the European framework, emphasising that France "adheres to and contributes to the objectives of GAP II."

¹¹⁰. [France's international strategy for gender equality \(2018-2022\)](#), Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018.

The five objectives dedicated to improving the institutional culture of the French strategy for gender equality:

- Strengthening of the institutional culture for gender equality and gender mainstreaming within the Ministry and its operators.
- Intensify France's political advocacy on equality between women and men.
- Increase and improve the mainstreaming of gender equality in official development assistance (ODA).
- Improve and strengthen the visibility, transparency and accountability of the Ministry and its operators of the action in favour of equality between women and men.
- Strengthen links with actors in civil society, the private sector and research to tackle inequalities between women and men.

... put into practice in the DRC and Rwanda

Without reviewing the set of objectives and indicators related to the institutional cultural shift foreseen in the GAP II and the different national strategies of the European countries, it is interesting to evaluate how some of them have been implemented in the DRC and Rwanda both by the Delegation of the European Union (DEU) and by some European States. This analysis does not claim to be exhaustive. It is based on the interviews conducted in Kinshasa (July 2019) and Kigali (September 2019), as well as on the documentation made available to EurAc, and aims above all to make recommendations for improvement in the field.

Internal skills, gender focal points, training and budget

In order to achieve profound institutional change, training and awareness-raising among European staff on gender equality issues is essential. It is positive that GAP II includes this element among its indicators; and that the need to develop in-house expertise on the subject is clearly taken into consideration at the global strategic level by both the EU and the different European states. However, in the DRC and Rwanda, the different interviewed gender focal points and the political and programmatic staff more generally, be it at the level of the DEU and the Member States, suggest a much more nuanced reality.

First of all, with regard to the gender focal points, most pointed out the lack of

training provided to them. Some deplore having been designated focal point without having the required expertise. One said: “I’m a gender focal point, but I’m not an expert on gender.” Another said: “I’m an appointed gender focal point but have not been trained.” This situation makes it all the more necessary for specific initial training in this field.

In most cases, training is regularly organised in capital cities. But the initial training, before assuming the functions of gender focal point, is far from systematic. These training courses take place only occasionally, for some Member States only once every two years. They would remain superficial in terms of substance and the budget to participate (plane ticket for the head office) is not always available. This illustrates a lack of prioritisation at the hierarchical level.

Accompaniment, monitoring and coaching over time are almost non-existent. Most institutions limit themselves to making available online resources, which are often under-exploited by the personnel concerned, mainly due to lack of time. One of the interviewees emphasised that “GAP II is a good thing, but it did not come with an additional budget for its implementation.” The availability of resources (financial and human) seems still a major challenge and has a substantial impact on internal capacities on gender.

In most cases, such planned training is mainly, if not exclusively, organised for the gender focal points only. In many cases, the rest of the political and programme

personnel receive initial training prior to deployment, during which gender is addressed in a transversal and non-specific manner. Agents should therefore rely more on the training potentially provided by the gender focal point once deployed in the field to enhance their competence and sensitivity in this area. Unfortunately, the training provided by gender focal points to their colleagues has several limitations. First, the consequence of the lack of initial training and/or expertise of the focal points themselves. Second, the lack of time and/or availability to organise such sessions: many focal points have pointed out the work overload as most have been designated gender focal points in addition to their primary function. Third, giving training to colleagues is not always in their job profile or taken into account in their assessment, which, combined with the workload, makes it difficult to prioritise over other tasks. Last, the designated focal points are sometimes younger than their colleagues, which may limit their credibility as well as the importance that the rest of the team could give to training courses given by them.

Finally, gender is not the sole responsibility of the focal points. Colleagues will not prioritise gender mainstreaming in their programmes if it is not taken into account in evaluating their work. Moreover, gender may be considered by some officials as a separate domain, which does not involve them. More so if the gender focal point is a woman, thus feeding the common misconception that gender is more relevant to women than men. Male colleagues may then feel less concerned.

Gender mainstreaming, gender sensitive indicators and monitoring-assessment

Institutional cultural shift requires awareness raising at all levels, for which training is essential. But the high turn-over rate is also often highlighted as a recurring problem for implementing sustainable change internally. In this sense, shifting the institutional culture also requires the development of specific and/or gender sensitive indicators, but above all, a binding and transparent accountability framework through strict monitoring-assessment mechanisms.

There are two approaches to contribute to gender equality: (1) developing specific projects with as main objective the reduction of gender inequalities, and (2) gender mainstreaming in order to take into account the issue of gender in all projects and therefore to develop appropriate indicators whatever the sector of intervention (energy, infrastructure, WASH health etc.) It is worth noting that in its 2012 report¹¹¹ on gender equality and global development, the World Bank highlighted the risk of the fragmentation of results associated with the implementation of the transversal approach only. The complementarity of the two approaches is often put forward by the various donors as that which obtains the best results. It is therefore recommended at the strategic level.

Once the approach is adopted, the appropriate accountability framework should be put in place. In most cases,

111. [World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development](#), World Bank Group, 2011.

European donors use at least the OECD/DAC gender marker to evaluate their different programmes. This marker makes it possible to categorise, in a fairly basic way, development projects and programmes into 3 groups:

- 0: the project does not take gender into account.
- 1: the project has for a secondary or significant sub objective the improvement of equality between women and men or the fight against gender inequalities.
- 2: the main objective of the project is to improve equality between women and men or to combat gender inequalities.

This takes little account of gender mainstreaming. Indeed, a project may have very well integrated gender needs, and provided specific solutions to each of these needs and therefore have taken gender into account very well, without gender equality being a (sub) objective in its own right.

To measure the gender sensitivity of the project, different indicators are taken into account. For example, at the European level, GAP II foresees that all newly developed projects are systematically based on a gender analysis and that all data used throughout the project cycle is disaggregated by sex.

In the DRC, and even more importantly in Rwanda, the European states, of which Switzerland, Belgium and France have mainly opted for mainstreaming, may see no project with as main objective to

improve gender equality (OECD/DAC marker 2). The way in which gender mainstreaming is implemented internally is very different from one donor to another. If “gender checklists” are supposed to be used by the personnel in charge of the programmes, this exercise is often limited to ticking boxes.

Beyond this initial work by programme teams in the field, it is planned that this gender mainstreaming be carried out and controlled by the head offices. Project proposals are reviewed at the capital level by the technical units responsible for gender to ensure that it is well taken into account in the action developed. For some European donors, this “control” is also carried out at the local level, by the gender focal point. Although this option adds to the tasks of the focal points, it seems to have the advantage of having a much greater impact on the appropriation by the teams and in particular the programme managers. For instance, a significant amount of mainstreaming work has been carried out by the gender focal point at DEU level in Kinshasa, which reviews all the project proposals, in particular through bilateral awareness sessions for each member of the programme team. This seems to have enabled the problem to be better taken into account. In 2018, more than half of the projects contributing to the objectives of GAP II of the DEU in the DRC, were developed based on a gender analysis. Almost 70% of them improved the quality and availability of sex-disaggregated statistics and only one project provided no gender-specific indicators.

At last, in terms of accountability, it is important to underline that GAP II requires the Commission services, the EEAS, but also the Member States, to report annually on the various indicators provided for in the European Action Plan. This reporting is interesting in that it also incorporates elements related to the institutional cultural shift. In 2017, this exercise was carried out by the DEU, which was to centralise the data for the Member States. In 2018, Member States were responsible for their own reporting.

This accountability, especially in terms of institutional shift, is not specific to the EU framework and is also provided for in the Member States' strategies and operational plans. For example, the GAP II plans to report the number of political dialogues during which the gender issue was addressed, as is the case for the French strategy which plans to inform on the number of bilateral political meetings integrating gender.

In theory, this coherence at the strategic level should strengthen the ownership of the monitoring and evaluation of GAP II by Member States. Yet, through the interviews with the different representatives of the Member States in Kigali and Kinshasa, it appears that the vast majority of them have not adopted the reporting and mainstreaming required by GAP II. This is mostly perceived as inadequate and binding. Interlocutors speak of "incomprehensible" indicators that do not reflect the reality of their work and that are "difficult or even impossible" to measure. This tends to introduce a

form of rejection of the exercise which is detrimental to the appropriation of gender concepts by personnel.

Monitoring-assessment, especially on the actions to be taken in terms of institutional cultural shift, should contribute to awareness of the importance of the subject and the utility of being accountable. If misunderstood or poorly formulated, this exercise becomes counterproductive.

Address the question of gender equality during political dialogues

Among the GAP II indicators, one of them deserves particular attention as it values one of the tools available to all European actors in the promotion of gender equality: political dialogue with the authorities.

As mentioned above, the amount of policy dialogues during which gender equality issues have been addressed is formally required in the annual GAP II report, both by the DEU and by Member States. In the discussions with the different representatives of the Member States in Kinshasa, the difficulty of being able to provide such an indicator in a precise and quantitative way was underlined.

In the case of Rwanda, political interest at the highest level for gender equality is seen as sufficient reason not to make it a priority in bilateral discussions with the authorities. In the DRC, beyond the numerical data, some examples illustrate the level of commitment of the different European actors on this point.

Sweden and Switzerland spontaneously highlighted political dialogue as one of the tools at their disposal to promote gender equality in the country. Both countries have indeed had an important recourse to political dialogue for promoting gender equality, with strong and committed public communications at the highest political levels.¹¹² Sweden goes further by facilitating regular meetings between Congolese activists involved in the promotion of gender equality and national political authorities, for example by providing spaces for discussions and debates within the embassy. Going further than political dialogues with the Congolese authorities, some European States are more strongly involved than others in organising and promoting public events on the subject. This is illustrated by the personal involvement of both the Swedish and Swiss ambassadors in the 12th edition of the UN Women's Gender Café in Kisangani on the issue of women's political participation.¹¹³

At the level of the DEU and the other Member States and according to the interviewees, there are significant differences in how this issue is addressed. For an important part of the interlocutors, the issue of gender is integrated into discussions with the government, but is dealt with occasionally or specifically, once the topics considered more of a priority such as the business climate, good governance, the fight against impunity and corruption were addressed. For others, it is integrated almost systematically and transversally. It therefore seems that commitment in political dialogues still

very often depends on the sensitivity of the people affected rather than on real organisational and political prioritisation.

Addressing gender issues in political dialogues with the Congolese authorities is essential and must be an integral part of the political agenda in the same way as the other subjects considered as priorities. The view that the promotion of gender equality is separate and needs to be addressed in a specific way tends to make it a secondary subject, even though the issue is inherent to all other priority themes such as economic development, peace and stability, governance and respect for human rights.

In addition, many actors in the Congolese civil society emphasised during the interviews the important role played in the past by European representatives in promoting gender equality through their political dialogue with the Congolese authorities, in particular by setting the agenda on the need to adopt a legal framework favourable to the promotion of women's rights. This potential impact sometimes seems neglected by European actors, even though they have the opportunity to exert significant pressure for gender equality to be taken seriously and considered as one of the building blocks of democracy.

It was also emphasised that female personnel were more inclined to address the issue of gender in their dealings with the Congolese authorities. The commitment of Sweden and Switzerland, as well as Canada, whose ambassadors

¹¹². [Tweet by Maria Håkansson](#), 18 May 2019.

¹¹³. [Facebook post by 'ONU Femmes en RDC'](#), 8 May 2019.

were all women, tends to confirm this statement. Nevertheless, this perception, whether founded or not, is an important limitation as it reinforces the idea that gender equality remains a women's issue, addressed by women for the benefit of women. Ongoing efforts to involve men more and popularise the positive impact of gender equality for both men and women and society as a whole therefore need to be strengthened and understood by the donors' personnel.

Finally, promoting gender equality externally is rarely part of the job profile of political or programmatic personnel (other than gender focal points) even though it is also an indicator of GAP II.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴. Indicator 3.3.2. N# of job descriptions that contain gender equality as an area of responsibility, by seniority.

Coordination and consultation mechanism on gender

Within the frame of institutional cultural shift, GAP II stresses the need for the Commission and EEAS services to continue coordination efforts with all international actors in the field of gender, including the UN. The setting up of an inter-donor co-ordination mechanism under the leadership of the DEU or a Member State is also one of the indicators to be included in the annual GAP II report.

In the DRC, interviewees report that gender coordination mechanisms already exist between donors and have been functional for several years: donors meet twice a month within the Gender Donor Coordination Group, as well as within the

“One+One” group, which also includes the UN agencies. A WhatsApp group has also been set up between the various donors involved in the domain. Some Member States are particularly active in these coordination mechanisms, notably Sweden, the Netherlands and Belgium.

Since 2018, the DEU has been strongly involved and took the presidency of these two coordination groups, maintaining a high level of collaboration with other donors but also with UN Women. This strengthened involvement of the DEU in gender coordination has been positively highlighted by many institutional actors in the field who describe the mechanism as dynamic and useful for coordinating activities in the domain, while increasing visibility and the importance attached to the issue of gender equality at the national level. The potential in terms of joint programming, offered in particular by these mechanisms, was also highlighted. For example, funding by Canada, Sweden, DFID and the EU for a joint evaluation of GBV programmes in the DRC in the 2005-2017 period could be a first step towards more coordinated programming in this area for the future. The DEU also plans to develop a joint gender strategy for the DRC by the end of 2019 and is actively seeking the involvement of other donors. The United Kingdom, Sweden and Belgium are particularly interested in supporting this initiative. The apparent consensus among the different European actors on the need to make the promotion of gender equality a priority, is an opportunity to be seized by the DEU in the development of a joint programme in the domain.

While donor coordination for the promotion of gender equality seems to work relatively well in the DRC, this remains a challenge for the other levels of coordination. In the DRC, the various sectoral ministries are formally responsible for the coordination of the actors intervening in each specific domain through the animation of thematic working groups. Still, with regard to the gender issue, with the exception of the sub-group on sexual and gender-based violence that still seems active, meetings are not held on a regular basis and the various actors involved in the domain (International and national NGOs, donors and state actors) stress the difficulty to coordinate.

The political context in the DRC, marked by President Joseph Kabila's remaining into power and then by the absence of a new government for many months following the election of President Felix Tshisekedi, partly explains this situation, making authorities reluctant to take the lead on such mechanisms.

The international community, and in particular European donors, could make additional efforts to facilitate this momentum by supporting the establishment of a gender dialogue and consultation mechanism that would allow international and Congolese CSOs, the various donors and Congolese authorities to discuss, plan and coordinate their actions on a regular basis.

Finally, the actors of Congolese civil society have repeatedly insisted during the interviews on the difficulties to be

heard and consulted, particularly by donors. If consultations do indeed take place, however, they are organised in an *ad hoc* manner, rarely formalised, and often with the same historical partners of the different European donors: this does not constitute a formal and inclusive consultation mechanism. Many interviewees from national CSOs have pointed out the difficulty of being heard and to bring their analysis to donors, especially some European donors. There was also some opacity about how to get in touch and discuss with them, regretting that calls for projects are then opened on the basis of pre-established frameworks in which CSOs can only limit themselves to being implementing agencies.

In Rwanda, coordination between donors on gender equality seems less dynamic than in the DRC. Sweden has for several years sought to boost discussions between donors on gender equality but recognises that this is now *ad hoc* and less regular. The DEU organises meetings in this regard, but this seems to be mainly limited to the moment when the GAP II reporting is to take place.

With regard to other levels, the Rwandan political context favours the leadership of national authorities in setting up coordination mechanisms including international NGOs, UN agencies and Rwandan civil society organisations. The establishment of a national gender cluster is thus provided for in the strategic plan for the implementation of Rwanda's national gender policy¹¹⁵ led by the Ministry in charge of gender. It seems

¹¹⁵. [Strategic plan for the implementation of the national gender policy](#), Republic of Rwanda, May 2010.

to have suffered from a lack of resources in recent years, but being revitalised, especially under the impetus of UN Women who integrated it into its strategic plan with a dedicated budget. Still, some of the gender focal points of the European embassies emphasised that they were not aware of these meetings and that sharing of information remained difficult.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A shift in the institutional culture is essential in order to claim to have an impact on the promotion of gender equality. It is extremely positive that this has been taken into account at the strategic level by both the EU and the Member States. Nevertheless, in practice, much work still remains to be done, although there are important disparities between European states and the DEU and within the European states themselves. Unfortunately, the positive results obtained are all too often the outcome of personal commitments rather than the result of a clear organisational response.

Internal skills, gender focal points, training and budget

- Initial training should be systematically organised for gender focal points, as provided for in most European action plans. It should not be limited to superficial awareness raising but should focus on the theories necessary for the appropriation of gender-related concepts as well as practical implementation in their daily work.
- Gender-specific training courses should also be organised for all political and programmatic personnel in embassies, cooperation services and DEUs. It is important that this training explains the benefits to both men and women of systematic gender mainstreaming, even internally on the one hand, and the need for gender mainstreaming on the other hand.
- Being a gender focal point should eventually be a full-time position with sole responsibility for ensuring gender mainstreaming in the programmes developed, training of personnel and partners, the development of gender analysis and tool kits adapted to the context of the country in which they are deployed; the participation and/or revitalisation of the gender coordination mechanism; and the management of programmes whose main objective is the reduction of gender inequalities.
- Integrate into the job description of all personnel of the DEU, embassies and cooperation agencies of the Member States, the responsibility to promote gender equality in their programmes and external relations. This should be the priority for Ambassadors, Heads of Cooperation and Programme / Project Managers.
- Following integration into the job description, provide for regular performance appraisal in this area to value or encourage the personnel concerned to do so in a systematic way.

Mainstreaming, gender sensitive indicators and monitoring-assessment

- Simplify the planned forms for reporting annually on the GAP and provide financial and human resources to raise awareness among Member States on the requirements of GAP II and support them in reporting on these indicators.
- In general, provide an envelope for the implementation of the objectives of GAP II with regard to shifting the institutional culture.

- Combining tangibly and systematically in third countries (and not only at the strategic level), particularly in the DRC and Rwanda, the dual approach aimed at both ensuring necessary budget for transversal gender integration in all projects, while providing envelopes for specific projects in the fight against gender inequalities, particularly as regards women's political and civic participation.

Addressing issues of gender equality during political dialogues

- Further promote political dialogue as an integral tool for promoting gender equality.
- Ensure that heads of delegation and political section leaders are aware of their responsibilities under GAP II, including that gender equality is a core priority and not a goal to achieve once all others have been reached.
- As a result, explicitly integrate in the evaluations and job descriptions that the promotion of gender equality must be regularly mentioned in the political dialogues.

Coordination and consultation mechanism in the area of gender

- Both the DEUs and the Member States must maintain and/or strengthen their level of commitment within the gender coordination mechanisms, regardless of whether they hold the chairmanship of the groups, irrespective of who is in charge of the dossier. This is an institutional obligation and not a personal commitment.
- Member States should make a strong commitment to developing a gender strategy launched by the DEU in the DRC and ensure its implementation in a coordinated manner.
- Member States and the DEU should support Rwanda in updating its National Gender Policy and Action Plan.
- The DEU and the Member States should take advantage of the current Consensus between the European States on the promotion of gender equality to launch joint programming processes in the domain, especially as regards the promotion of women's political and civic participation.
- European donors should promote the effective establishment of a mechanism for regular consultation of civil society before, during and after the development of strategies and calls for proposals and support the revitalisation of coordination frameworks between all actors (government, CSOs, UN agencies, NGOs ...) involved in the domain.



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