



**Locating and Developing Women's  
Empowerment in the Agricultural Context of  
Rutana Province-Burundi  
Case study of Floresta Burundi**

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# Contents

<i>Acknowledgment</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of Maps</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of Appendices</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Relevance to Development Studies</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Keywords</i>	<i>ix</i>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Women's empowerment within a context of ongoing conflict	1
1.2. Research question	2
1.3. Theoretical framework	2
1.4. Methodology	3
1.5. Indication of findings and primary argument	4
1.6. Organization of the paper	4
<b>Chapter 2 Historical Context and Present Development and Conflict Situation in Burundi</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Important aspects of Burundi's history	5
2.2 The consequences of war on women	8
2.2.1 Women's legal rights issues	8
2.2.2. Gender and Land Tenure in Burundi	9
<b>Chapter 3 Theoretical Debates on Gender, Development and 'Empowerment'</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Gender and Development	13
3.1.1 Notions of sustainability and gender	13
3.1.2 Gender, agriculture, and the environment (food security)	13
3.1.3 Gender and Development in Ongoing Conflict Contexts	14
3.2 Gender and the concept of 'Empowerment'	14
3.2.1 Microfinance and gender	15
<b>Chapter 4 Methodology and the Floresta Case Study</b>	<b>17</b>
4.1 Methodology	17
4.2 Selection of Floresta as a case study	17
4.3. Background of Floresta	18

4.4 Methods of data gathering	19
4.4.1. Data collection techniques	19
4.5 Ethics	21
4.6 Limitations of the research	21
<b>Chapter 5 Understanding Different Concepts and Practices of Empowerment on the Ground in Rutana Province, Burundi</b>	<b>22</b>
5.1 Whose idea and practice of empowerment?	22
5.1.1 Floresta's documents	22
5.1.2 Floresta's staff	25
5.1.3 Floresta in practice	26
5.1.4 Other NGO's definitions of empowerment	28
5.1.5 Women beneficiaries	29
<b>Chapter 6 Analyzing the Challenges Facing Women's Empowerment</b>	<b>34</b>
6.1 Sexual exploitation and - entrenched patriarchy	34
6.2 Debt labour and repayment	36
6.3 Conclusion	37
<b>Chapter 7 Conclusion</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Reference</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>45</b>
Appendix 1 Interviews tools	45

## **List of Tables**

<b>Table 0.1 Accounting the Burundian Population</b>	11
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## **List of Maps**

Map 1.1 Map of Burundi locating provinces where Floresta is being implemented	19
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## **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 Interviews tools	45
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## **List of Acronyms**

ACAT	Action des Chretiens pour l'abolition de la Torture
ACORD	Agency of Cooperation and Research for development (Agence de Coopération et de Recherche pour le Développement)
ADDF	Association for the defence of women's rights (Association pour la défense des droits des femmes)
BAD	Banque Africaine de Developpement
BCB	Credit Bank of Bujumbura (Banque de Credit de Bujumbura)
BIF	Burundi Franc (currency of Burundi)
CAFOB	Collective of Women's Associations and NGOs of Burundi (Collectif des Associations et ONGs Féminines du Burundi)
CAR	Central African Republic
CDF	Community Development Foundation (Centre de développement Familial)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FAD	Fonds Africain de Developpement
FNL	National Liberation Forces
GAD	Gender and Development
GDP	Gross domestic product
HIPC	Heavily Intended Poor Countries
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus infection / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
IDA	International Development Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPR	Ministry of Finance for Professional Income tax
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
IDA	International Development Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund and
INSS	National Social Security
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	United the Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

PABFBA	Partnership Agreement Between Floresta Burundi and Association
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
ROSCA	Rotating Savings and Credit Associations
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SOSUMO	Sugar Company of Moso (Societe Sucriere du Moso)
SGBV	Special Session on Sexual and Gender Based Violence
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIFEM	United State entity Gender equality and empowerment of Women
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WAD	Women and Development
WDR	World Development Report
WID	Women in Development
WISE	Saving and Credit Cooperatives

## **Abstract**

The definition of women's empowerment is very complex in contexts community development. The objective of my research is to analyze the role of the NGO Floresta Burundi in its programs of empowering vulnerable populations (particularly women) in the rural agricultural context in Rutana Province, Burundi.

Using a women's empowerment approach, this research investigates how women's empowerment is understood and practiced on the ground in a post-conflict context. I interviewed twenty-seven key actors involved in women's empowerment programs (particularly in the area of micro-finance for agricultural support). My main interview findings show that the notion of women's empowerment must include the question of inheritance of daughters as same as the sons in Burundian culture in attempt to have power to own land and credit.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

My research design has illustrated gender analytical frameworks. Floresta Burundi situated in Burundi is a significant case study because of its mixture of beneficiaries of its services. Community members who benefit from its services include repatriated refugees, returnees and those who stay in the country (the host). The country is in the post-conflict (and at times an ongoing conflict) context, with multiple socio-economic challenges. Floresta Burundi implements its work in a holistic manner, interconnecting agriculture and environment, savings and loans and spiritual development/reconciliation. The Burundian economy is essentially based on rural agriculture with 90% of the population working in this sector. Women, in this instance, have a vital impact in community development because of their profound role in local community survival mechanisms. This study is an attempt to understand the relationship between women, environment, agriculture and economic opportunities for poverty reduction.

## **Keywords**

Women, associations, work, saving and loans, sustainability, development, Burundi

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1. Women's empowerment within a context of ongoing conflict

The concept of 'women's empowerment' has received significant attention and criticism in development literature to date (Kabeer 1999). Many practitioners and scholars argue that women in particular, face special challenges such as discrimination, gender-based violence and limited access to credit, property rights, education, resources, and other factors. Focusing on these issues of women's empowerment is also critical for addressing poverty and development more broadly (Basu 2008, Jaquette and Summerfield 2006, Seager 2009, Dam 2000, Kabeer 1994, Ostergaard 1992, Guijt and Shah 1998, Visvanathan et al. 1997, Altay 2007, Mawa 2008, Drolet 2010 and Mayoux 2006). Development projects devoted to promoting women's empowerment have included initiatives such as the political participation of women, gender equality in agriculture and rural development and women's empowerment through sustainable micro-finance (Hirschmann 2006 and Basu 2008).

However, scholars and activists have also argued that such programs are problematic. They contend that these programs have a tendency to frame women as voiceless victims, or focus too narrowly on one small aspect of women's empowerment, without focusing on broader inter-linked issues (Ofreneo 2005, Kabeer 2005, Goetz and Gupta 1996, Beteta 2006 and Kabeer 2001). Despite these criticisms, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other entities have continued to implement projects for 'women's empowerment', but with a more specific geographical or projects-based focus.

In countries with ongoing conflict, such as in Burundi, the challenges are manifold. It would be an exaggeration to say that NGOs or development projects could fulfil all of the needs of rural populations, especially after only 30 years of their presence in Burundi. Further, most of the NGOs, which were present in Burundi during the ongoing crisis, were there principally for emergency relief. The key years of conflict were 1959, 1969, 1972, 1988, 1991 and 1993 (Ndacayisaba n.d). NGOs were mostly providing shelter, food, and clothes to refugees and returnees. NGOs' lack of long-term presence failed to create any sort of sustainable development in the country.

Moreover, the province of Rutana in the eastern region of Burundi is particularly vulnerable due to high risks of food security due to climatic changes. The province of Rutana experiences prolonged dry seasons that sometimes turn into droughts. The other important element to mention as a handicap to the local community is the on-going development of a culture of dependency on humanitarian aid (which was established during the political crisis that engulfed the country for 15 years). Some local people do not take initiatives of cultivating their own land since they know that they will be helped by humanitarian agencies or they can cross to Tanzania.

The participation of local people on the issues that affect them is a significant concern. While women know what their concerns and priorities are, it

cannot be easy to address them. The needs are different from woman to woman and also from each woman to the wider community.

## 1.2. Research question

My research focuses on how the concept of women's empowerment is understood and practiced locally in the province of Rutana, and the implications of these dynamics for broader development theories concerning gender and the environment in settings of ongoing armed conflict. In particular, I focus on the activities of a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Floresta. While other NGOs in Burundi claim to support women's empowerment through programs such as building small projects, attempting to eradicate gender-based violence, promoting access to justice, or fighting for increased rights of women, Floresta's activities are unique because of its integrated approach. Floresta seeks to combine micro-credit financing with environmental and agricultural initiatives. Although this innovative approach has many benefits for the local community, I found that access to micro-credit does not automatically empower women. Furthermore, other challenges and limitations of this program do not directly address the issue of empowerment.

Despite significant input and support from outside actors like the United Nations and a peaceful election in 2010, challenges in Burundi remain. The country continues to recover from years of conflict. During the civil war, women were the most marginalized and disadvantaged in terms of control, political power, and human rights (Falsh 2010). Particularly, women have been raped and tortured (Simbananiye 2005:90) in times of conflict and have faced many challenges with the loss of friends, relatives, and children. These relationships are emotionally vital to women as the family code divides roles independently of the sexes. Given this context, my overarching research question is, "how is the concept of women's empowerment understood and practised locally in the province of Rutana, and what are the implications of these dynamics for broader development theories concerning gender and the environment in settings of on-going armed conflict. My more specific sub-questions are:

- What do Floresta's project beneficiaries (especially women) tell us about the concept of women's empowerment in Rutana?
- What are the most important factors associated with women's empowerment in the rural Burundi area?
- What is the significance of an integrated approach to women's activities and empowerment in this context?

## 1.3. Theoretical framework

The study's main theoretical framework draws on Kabeer's (1999) notion of 'women's empowerment', relating it to the process of change. The notion of empowerment is applied to somebody who has been disadvantaged. So the notion is not applied to somebody who has never had a lack of choices. The central idea of empowerment is the capacity in which a person is able to make choices. Choice implies having alternative means (1<sup>st</sup> order and 2<sup>nd</sup> order)

where the choices of first order are those which allow someone to live the way they want and include: choices of livelihood, choice of where to live, who to marry. The choices of second order are those choices that one makes regardless of the context (values, norms, rules, conflict, or peace (Kabeer 1999).

The concept of empowerment on its own lacks clarity in respect to change, because it is so dependent on the wide range of values of each individual, and the relevance of context. It is important to understand that change can occur at three levels: structural (position, sex), intermediate (by passing authoritative resources who have ability to put their own goals as priorities), or immediate, which are self-generated rather than given. Further, choice passes by three dimensions (outcomes of choices) that are interdependent (Ibid 2001b). The first one is resources (material resources in economic sense), the second is agency (ability to define one's goal and act upon them), and the last are the achievements (evidence, indicators) (Kabeer 1999).

I use this theory of women's empowerment (Kabeer 1999) because I think it can help me to answer my research question, which is how is the concept of women's empowerment understood and practiced on the ground in conflict context. Kabeer's conceptualization of women's empowerment is useful for several reasons. First, because the concept of empowerment is difficult to measure, a definition needs to account for various situations, contexts, period, time. Second, the theory argues that change is at the heart of empowerment. Third, Kabeer (2001) highlights that empowerment must be applied to a person who has been disempowered and lacks autonomy to make decisions. For a person to be autonomous, he must participate and be integrated in the process of change, covering all aspects related to the market, community, state, and family.

I explain my data analysis using Kabeer's three interrelated dimensions (resources, agency and achievements). While my analysis does not attempt to measure the degree of women's empowerment in Rutana Province, I do attempt to make an in depth analysis regarding available resources, women's use of agency, and the outcomes they reach. This paper focuses on the ability of poor populations to improve their living conditions within a context of ongoing conflict. As stated previously, the basic fundamentals of survival and well-being in the province of Rutana include sufficient food, clothing, and education of children, good health, and adequate water supply.

## 1.4. Methodology

This paper uses a case study approach. I collected data from the 14<sup>th</sup> of July to the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 2012 in four communes (Giharo, Gitanga, Musongati and Bukemba) in Rutana Province, Burundi through interviews, focus groups and observation. The Rutana province borders Tanzania, and has been a major site of armed conflict, resulting in many refugees. The overall objective of this study is to analyze the role of Floresta Burundi in locating and developing women's empowerment in the agricultural context in Rutana Province.

## **1.5. Indication of findings and primary argument**

This study explored the concept of women's empowerment in the rural area of Rutana, focusing on women's priorities, abilities and the various barriers existing to accomplishing them. Moreover, the study shows that while many rural women can increase their resources by taking advantage of the micro-credit system, other factors constrain their opportunities for fully escaping poverty.

There are some indicators of empowerment at the local level such as access to resources (land, households' tools, credit, and control of it). However, access to credit alone is not enough to address all of the needs of human beings. In fact, many of the women interviewed stated low levels of direct independence due to a patriarchal system in which women have to abide by the traditional rules governing families. Thus, my main argument is that while Burundi still maintains a patriarchal system in which women do not have rights to land, women will remain the poorest demographic. Although the micro-credit system provides capital that can help a family to improve their living conditions, the access to the credit is not equal with control over one's life.

## **1.6. Organization of the paper**

In chapter two, I will present the context and history of development in terms of conflict in Burundi. Chapter three presents an overview of gender and development debates, while chapter four shows the case study used as a methodological approach to collect data. The chapter five describes the data. Following, chapter six provides an analysis of the data and finally chapter seven is the conclusion.

## Chapter 2 Historical Context and Present Development and Conflict Situation in Burundi

In this chapter I discuss the relevant historical events that inform my analysis. I also link this historical context with Burundi's present development situation and ongoing conflict. I focus on how the history and context of conflict in Burundi has affected Burundi's population, especially women and children, some of whom are refugees. These broader histories are critical for understanding what kinds of development interventions are implemented to support women and children, and how particular definitions of empowerment are applied in Burundi.

### 2.1. Important aspects of Burundi's history

Burundi is a landlocked country located in the Great Lakes region of eastern Africa and shares a northern border with Rwanda, eastern and southern borders with Tanzania, and its western border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Prior to colonization by the Germans, the territory that is now Burundi consisted of three ethnic groups – the Hutu (85%), Tutsi (14%) and Twa (1%) - linked to trade networks along tribal monarchies routes. Their primary forms of livelihood consisted of livestock, farming, gathering, and hunting (Daley 2006:662). They shared a common culture, language, and belief system, but the occupational divisions were sharp and defined one's position in society. Although the Hutu and Tutsi have always inhabited spatially contiguous areas and have intermarried (ibid: 663), the division of labour was as follows: responsibility for livestock (Tutsi), the cultivators (Hutu), and the hunters and gatherers (Twa). The Tutsi were considered the most intelligent group by colonizers, therefore were the most favoured in colonial period (Daley 2006:664). Accordingly, schools were segregated in this manner, giving priority to the Tutsi group (Linden 1977 cited in Daley 2006).

Burundi experienced two colonial systems. The first was by the Germans, ending in 1914, after losing a battle to the Belgians who stayed in power until 1962. Under Belgian colonization, the administration had five major effects on Burundian society, principally connected to later conflicts. For instance, by disenfranchising the Hutus in relation to the fledgling state, colonizers shaped the structure of the state so the ethnic differentiation of opportunity was clearly demonstrated – education was mainly provided to the Tutsi and *ganwa*. Ethnic identities were fixed and politicized; the economy began to be structured for primary product export – coffee, cotton, tea, and skin – and much as state than as Kingdom (Oketch and Polzer 2002:92).

It is meaningful to say that Burundi is majorly Christian as result of the Germans who implanted Catholicism and the Belgians who brought the Protestantism. Moreover, Oketch and Polzer (2002:93) argue that before colonialism, the Burundian economy was based on agriculture of subsistence and the transfer of products and cattle within a vertical social and political system of patronage. The beneficiaries of this system were involved in the self-sustaining cycle of economic and political exchange, which was replaced by colonizers in order to fulfil external needs exporting products such as coffee, tea, cotton,

and skins to Belgium. Further, export labour was sent to neighbouring Congo for mining support. Therefore, Hammouda (1995) cited in Oketch and Polzer (2002) argues that Burundi's economy was liberalized and dependent on Belgium. However, traditional values were still standing so that:

'[T]he traditional organization was maintained, weakened and especially distorted but it was maintained by a patriarchal system. 'The patriarchal system of Burundi is referred to the power of decision essentially of men in all areas of life'. Thus, the Burundian girl or woman has the right to control or manage land or other production sources in the absence of close relatives' (Dogji 2010:14).

The intervention of the UN in 1945 pressured the colonial power to install a climate of democratization in Burundi. Accordingly, the Uprona Party (Unity for National Progress) was founded by Prince Rwagasore – the eldest son of *mwami*, the King – from the Tutsis. Prince Rwagasore was assassinated in October 1961, and in the following year the Kingdom of Burundi accessed national sovereignty on 1<sup>st</sup> July. Since then, there has been constant instability due to successive short periods of governance by different peoples, starting with the "coup d'états" and the assassination of its first democratically-elected president – Melchoir Ndadaye, in 1993. Following this was the killing of more than 200,000 people, forcing over 350,000 into exile (Bentley & Southall 2005; Mpangala et al. 2004 cited in Daley: 2007).

Whilst there have been successive peace agreements, I argue that the Burundian situation is one of ongoing conflict. Yet, since 2005, Burundi has been engaged in a multiparty political system and in 2006; the agreement on Ceasefire was signed between the government – led by President Pierre Nkurunziza – and the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People-National Liberation Forces (FNL). Government coalitions were formed in November 2007.

Burundian's women have struggled to participate in the Arusha peace and reconciliation agreement conference. The negotiators argued that the women are not qualified to participate in those kinds of meetings. However, a minimum quota of 30% has been respected in the ministerial positions (Senate and Assembly) since the 2005 elections (Falsh 2010). The government recognizes the importance of taking into account women's participation, towards the fulfilment of the National constitution in 2005, the electoral act of 2010 and the Criminal code containing provisions conducive to gender equality (Falsh 2010).

Women have developed a strategy in order to participate in the 2010 elections, but have faced challenges such as patriarchal system and dependency from international community. Women were in that case obliged to follow the agenda of international organization and not their agenda (Falsh 2010).

The main gain that could be withdrawn from negotiations in Arusha could be to exchange experience among them about changing the environment and men behaviour and attitude therefore could strengthen their experiences in political process and acquire abilities for they can analyze and act in the sphere of peace and security through training (Ndikumana and Sebudiandi 2012:23)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Organisation de l'Action Gouvernementale (OAG), Evaluation de la mise en application des mesures prises par le Gouvernement pour l'intégration de la femme

Many countries involved in the international aid system in the 1980s had to produce project document. Project documents are the technical assistance and support documents for meetings of the committee monitoring a project (FAD, 1996:14)<sup>2</sup>. For a country to establish its project document, it must implement the SAP (Structural Adjustments Programs) policy, created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), for any country to get loans from those institutions. The agreement between the IMF and Burundi was signed in 1963 and with the World Bank in 1979. After Burundi gained its independence in 1962, it began to look for partnerships with international organizations such as the IMF, World Bank. SAPs are the policies imposed by the World Bank and the IMF in the 1970s and 1980s. SAP approach has been imposed on Burundi and had negative impacts, especially in regard to health and education. The SAPs also affected neighbouring countries such as Rwanda and Uganda and have caused adverse social impacts on regional integration (FAD 1996:16)<sup>3</sup>. Some of the literature Elson (1989:60) cited by Due and Gladwin (1991) criticize that SAPs do not benefit everyone, especially women (married or not). They agree that adjustment means change and change means costs, as well as benefits. So they must be winners and losers in the game. For instance, SAPs ignore gender differentiation at the village and household level (Due and Gladwin 1991:1435). Although the IMF and World Bank claim that they take into account the gender issue<sup>4</sup>, it must be noted that what is written in documents is not always what is practiced on the ground. SAPs, along with the IMF and WB, are not, in fact, gender neutral. (Due and Gladwin 1991:1438)

In order to achieve the Millennium Goals of Development (MDG), activities were undertaken by the Government of Burundi and aid agencies focusing on education, and the fight against HIV/AIDS. However, the challenges in terms of gender equality are still important. A country has to be on the list of the Heavily Intended Poor Countries (HIPC). The International Monetary Fund and International Development (IDA) agree that Burundi had met the requirements to reach the HIPC initiatives. (IDA and IMF 2009). In 2006, a first Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was approved through a participatory process involving stakeholders (civil society private sector), including IMF and IDA. Recently, a second PRSP was approved last month in Geneva (Suisse), which is significant due to the focus of these agreements on supporting poor countries, especially in Africa, however some critiques have been made.

Among the four strategic axes that Burundi presented in Geneva (October 2012) as the flagship of the PRSP, the one axis is the strengthening of rule of law, strengthening good governance and the promotion of gender equality. The government will intervene in the strengthening with the law of inheritance, the improvement of women's access to resources (Republic of Burundi, Poverty 2012:17). The poverty hit hardly female headed household than others.

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dans les sphères de prise de décision, Bujumbura 2001 and Barancira, D., Burundi, Analysis of elected women participation in local governance, Bujumbura 2011

<sup>2</sup> Translate by the author from French

<sup>3</sup> Translate by the author from French

<sup>4</sup> The WDR 2012 done by World Bank was essentially on Gender Equality.

Women's access to credit, land and formal employment is limited. Besides, there still growing violence women against women and women are underrepresented in politic. My anxiety is that if World Bank and IMF do not put in practice the agreement with the country, it will be even unthinkable that the initiatives of women's empowerment of small projects and NGOs with insignificant funds for rural women mostly refugees without any right to the land and any income such as Floresta Burundi and others.

## 2.2 The consequences of war on women

As stated previously, Burundi has experienced extreme political and social crisis, with disastrous consequences for vulnerable populations including women, children, and the disabled and ethnic minorities. Many women took on the role as heads of the family (their husbands killed during the war), but were not able to have access to livelihood sustenance, were tortured, had to leave their homes and lost their lands. The increase of gender-based violence, female-headed households, and poverty led to a massive displacement of people to refugee camps, increased health problems (HIV/AIDS) and an exacerbation of human rights<sup>5</sup> (Falsh 2010:9).

Gender is one of the dominant factors that have contributed to understanding the disparities between the number of men and women who have been killed or injured during the war. Daley (2007) states that race, class, and gender are some of the dominant concepts that helps to understand the war in Burundi. This can be attributed to the political rivalry between and within different ethnic groups. In the case of Burundi, a patriarchal culture and traditions contribute to sexist stereotypes and practices in the community, preventing women from prospering.

### 2.2.1 Women's legal rights issues

The Great Lakes region is considered as the most destabilized region of Africa due to endless wars, and crises (socio-economic and political, culture and religion). Women were most affected and are the main victims of sexual violence and gender-based violence (during and after the war). UNESCO organized in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), a consultation on empowering women in the Great Lakes Region in 2005. At the end of the conference, recommendations were given such as the creation of regional center for research and documentation to support the promotion of women's rights in post-conflict areas. Seven countries in the region as part of this structure are: Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Republic of Congo, the De-

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<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to obtain exact measures the human losers, it is estimated that over 300,000 people killed have been displaced another 1.3 million (Sullivan 2005:78). For instance, it is estimated that 19% of adolescent girls and women have been victims of sexual violence (UNFPA 2006:2). A centre for victims of sexual violence in Bujumbura relates that there has been a gradual increase in the number of reported cases of rape in the past few years. Domestic violence also remains widespread (Pézard and Tessières 2009, pp. 76-77). Also on PNUD, Rapport de la mise en oeuvre du Progarmme Global de promotion de l'egalite des sexes et l'autonomisation des femmes au Burundi, Bujumbura, 2011. Approximately 12 090 persons have been affected by the conflict, 3370 (27%) were women.

mocratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda , Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia (South Sudan should also accede to the Great Lakes region).<sup>6</sup>

It is true that many factors influence the formation of the family and the status of women in society. One of the most important is, of course, the legal framework surrounding the rights of men and women. The law and its sanctions exert much influence on direct behaviour, and they also act indirectly by strengthening or weakening the power of individual bargaining in the sensitive network of the family. But laws cannot do everything: they are of course violated or circumvented at times without consequence. Further, those whose rights are violated or who are victims of injustice often cannot or do not go to court to get protection and justice, in fear. This is the reason appropriate responses by the values are needed to get less violence against women appear at all as most dramatic aspect of accumulated violations of human rights by their number, their repetition and their distribution (Ntahe and Ntagwirumugara 2007).

Although some improvements have been made, women are still not adequately represented (30%) in the governing bodies of political parties. According to the law on political parties, no governing body of a political party may not comprise more than three quarters of the same sex (art. 33 of the law n° 1/006 of 26<sup>th</sup> June 2003 in Burundi).

‘It is expressly stipulated that no one may be discriminated against for any reason whatsoever including sex’ (Constitution of the Republic of Burundi promulgated by the Law n° 1/010, 18th March 2005).

It is clear that what is written in this law is not what is on the ground, where the girl is placed second after the boy. Prejudices and customary practices are still in action. As long as the Government does not take an obligation to drive the necessary changes in relation to the prejudices and sexist practices, the system remains an obstacle to the development of women.

### **2.2.2. Gender and Land Tenure in Burundi**

After 15 years of ethnic conflict and civil war, most communities need support to reinforce their livelihood and many seek for land to cultivate. Many local people, especially women, are willing to work but have limited access to improved seeds, fertilizers, income and resources to start small businesses. Women depend on day labour from landowners for subsistence. For instance, one of the returned women I interviewed was a member of Floresta Association and stated, ‘*before I become members of the association, I was always in need of economic support -some money- and wanted to participate in those associations because I heard that they get cassava for I can put in my portion of land*’. Accordingly, the Burundian law is clear that women cannot inherit land and other resources unless the husband, brother, or father, is absent. ‘The patriarchal Burundian system stated that man is the head of household. A woman is placed under the constant protection of a father, brother, uncle, a husband or a family council’ (ACAT Burundi, 2008). This means that women cannot inherit land. However, the government has appointed a National Land Commission that is helping landless

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<sup>6</sup> Translate by the author from French Accessed 23.10.2012  
<<http://www.genreenaction.net/spip.php?article8903>>

women and men to acquire land. The commission extends to the peaceful resolution of land disputes that relate exclusively to returnees or displaced persons. The commission proposes an arrangement between returnees and occupants for long period. It answers in substantial way to the extended needs of friendly settlements among the three groups in order to have peaceful reintegration. The Government is aware that women are often placed in a more difficult situation than men in this sensitive area and it should therefore give special attention to the protection of their rights. (Gouvernement du Burundi, 2010:39).

The concept of 'women's empowerment' has been complicated especially when considered in relation to resource tenure (Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997). Authors argue that in regard to this complex issue, there is no fixed response. What they do propose, is to focus on a framework of communication, dialogue and arbitration with the parties prioritizing gender and class dimensions.

An equitable use of resources depends on how property rights are defined and distributed. Property rights determine who can do what with a particular resource, such as a parcel of land, and sometimes also when and how they can do it (Wiebe and Meizen-Dick, 1998). Analyzing Wiebe and Meizen-Dick's definition of property rights, it can be very complicated for women to exercise their rights. The rights and laws of Burundi are not well defined in terms of which activity has to be done and who has the right between men and women to do so. The World Bank Report (2011) on the Burundian gender Profile found that 70% of Burundian women work in the informal sector because they do not have money to pay taxes. This is problematic because traditionally, land is seen as the ultimate form of power. Land gives a sense of identity and rootedness within the family (Agarwal: 1995:17). Agarwal (1995:17) defines rights to the land as 'claims that are legally and socially recognized and enforceable by an external legitimated authority, be at a village –level institution or some higher-level judicial or executive body of the State.' As a woman cannot inherit land, whether through her family or the family of her husband, this can be considered a form of violence. Further, Smith and Trujillo cited in Jacquette and Summerfield (2006:160) see 'women's access to control and management of property and in particular land, as crucial aspects of sustainable development because it conclude some dimensions such as ecology, productivity for human being and wealth in creation of the economy.'

The Burundi government pretends to show political will, but it is not accompanied by action. For example, within the four main axes of PRSP, gender promotion is not possible without allowing women to inherit land. Access to land is the subject of pressing claims on the part of Burundian women's organizations. The inability of women to access land is a serious sprain vis-à-vis the principle of equality between men and women, and plays a role in the power relations that exist within rural households (Ntahe and Ntagwirumugara 2007).

Although the Burundian Government, through the Ministry of solidarity and UNHCR(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), have put in place minimum structures to welcome the refugees into the country for their three first months, their resettlement into socio-economic lives is still not fully attended to. Because of the large number of spontaneous refugees in the country, those who have come by their own means are particularly paid less attention.

tion. When their resettlement kits get finished, concerns about survival become apparent. According to the interview carried out by OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) Burundi, some destitute women are engaged in commercial sex to provide food for their families.<sup>7</sup> The rampant, recurrent conflicts and economic conditions that foster the emergence of new landowners exacerbate the risk of tension.

**Table 0.1**  
**Accounting the Burundian Population**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>8.07 million</b>
	<b>Rural</b>	<b>7,03 million</b>
<b>Population</b>	<b>Under poverty</b>	<b>81,30%</b>
	<b>Adulity literacy</b>	<b>59%</b>
	<b>School enrolment</b>	<b>114</b>
	<b>In</b>	<b>97%</b>
<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>Employed</b>	<b>77%</b>
	<b>Land</b>	<b>2326 hect</b>
	<b>Arable land</b>	<b>995 hect</b>
	<b>Primary</b>	<b>93%</b>
<b>Ratio boy/girls at school</b>	<b>Secondary</b>	<b>72%</b>
	<b>Infant</b>	<b>113/1000</b>
<b>Mortality</b>	<b>Maternal</b>	<b>104/1100</b>
	<b>Life expectancy</b>	<b>49,3</b>

Source: Adapted by the researcher based on IFAD (2011:236-280)

Concerns about the promotion of women ultimately led to the creation of the Ministry of National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender in 1982. However, the budget assigned to that Ministry is insignificant in view of the mission and goals to achieve gender equality and to promote women's empowerment. For example, the budget assigned to the Direction of Women's Empowerment is 0.1% of the state budget which is insignificant.<sup>8</sup> Also the Government has put in place free primary education to allow all children to study without paying school fees. But the World Bank's Gender Profile of Burundi in 2011 found that the classrooms consisted of only 25% of girls (World Bank 2011:34). Consequently, agriculture in Burundi constitutes 50% of its GDP and women represent 90% of participants in this sector. Although it is women who primarily work the land, the Burundian Constitution discriminates against women regarding inheritance, matrimonial regimes, and donations that are still

<sup>7</sup> OCHA Burundi (2009). Kits from UNHCR includes \$50 along with food and seeds. According to returnees, these kits do not meet long term needs.

<sup>8</sup>Anonymous [a1], Staff of Ministry of National Solidarity, Human Rights and the Gender promotion , personal Interview, Bujumbura, 23.08.12

managed by a patriarchal system.<sup>9</sup> The economic empowerment of Burundian women is still limited by the lack of access to land, and therefore, to bank loans (because such loans depend upon land for collateral).

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<sup>9</sup> Republique du Burundi, Declaration Solennelle sur l'egalite entre les hommes et les femmes, Bujumbura 2006, page 11 (translation from French by the author)

# Chapter 3 Theoretical Debates on Gender, Development and ‘Empowerment’

In this chapter, debates regarding women and development, women and sustainability, gender and empowerment, and gender and micro-credit will be discussed.

## 3.1 Gender and Development

An important distinction has been made between two concepts: GAD (Gender and Development) and WAD (Women and Development). The two are different in the sense that WAD is mainly focused on women generally, while GAD prefers the term gender than the term Woman. The approach of GAD mainly integrates women in development, but prioritises gender. The approach links its goals to sustainable development. Jaquette and Staudt (2006) are against the idea saying that WAD and GAD have not succeeded in addressing issues in developing countries. The authors agree that women cannot wait only for the actions of donor's agencies; women's labour is the key to addressing the issue of development. Gender planning in the third world (1988) is a foundation of GAD approach while WAD viewed women as mothers (Moser 1989). GAD is able to respond to the gender differences among women (culture and norms) while WAD views woman as active agents as individuals are aware of their position due to the discrimination and subordination (Young 1997).

### *3.1.1 Notions of sustainability and gender*

Questions have been raised about the relationship between gender and sustainability beginning in the 1970s with the feminism theory and, shifting during the 1980s to the democracy agenda by the 1990s (Jaquette and Staudt 2006:18). Women's critics from Rio's Earth Summit (1992) have been made concerning the real roles played by women in sustainable development. In the 1987 conference, where the last definition of sustainable development has defines as “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising future generation's ability to meet theirs (Brundtland Report). So the term women, environment and development has been changed to “women, environment and sustainable development” (Braidotti et al. 1997:56) . The fight of women over the thirty years shows that women have made changes in relation to women's empowerment. Women need to remain involved in these discussions so that what have been gains so far will not be lost.

### *3.1.2 Gender, agriculture, and the environment (food security)*

Within the broader gender and development literature there is a strong emphasis on both the environment and agriculture; women have been called the “producers of life”; they are those who made things grow. Shiva (1997) explains the process of producers as follows: the interaction with nature (conception), appropriation of nature (to give birth), and the lastly, that women are the first producers in a productive economy. One the other handsone literature emphasizes on women overwhelming in substantive and some economic agri-

culture (Boserup) cited by Visvanathan et al. (1997) The term women as “invisible workers” has been used by some authors like Otobe(2011) and Dixon(1982) to emphasize the fact that that women are the main care providers in society and work even though they are sometimes unpaid or not recognized. Particular visible data in agriculture (national and international level) for example or United Nations (UN) does not count or measure women’s labour force participation. They are seen as wives and mothers and not farmers (Jaquette and Staudt 2006: 24).

Agarwal (2010) argues that woman cannot be differentiated from the environment because she is part of the environment. Women are the ones who are responsible for cooking (firewood) and cattle for gathering. These domestic activities are done mostly by woman, who is why women cannot be separated from the environment since, they depend on it. According to the Ministry of Agriculture (Burundi), agriculture is the main source of income for over 90% of the population. It is clear that the agricultural sector is important in the social and economic life of the country.

### ***3.1.3 Gender and Development in Ongoing Conflict Contexts***

During the war and conflict, women and girls are mostly affected than men. Women lost their lives but also many lost their husbands and relatives. They have been raped by and forced to have sex with the rebels. They lost everything including the capacity to produce food, which was their main livelihood. They became refugees, and were grouped in the displacement camps inside the country (Simbananiye, 2005). As conflict lessened and recovery began, many women had difficulty resuming their farming and livestock ventures. Often, they had lost the resources related to livelihood sustenance (Koen 2006).

Women political leaders try to bring significant improvement in the lives of women when they are facing limited access to resources and income in the context of conflict. Even in the context of peace, it is difficult to talk about women’s agency because patriarchal cultural structures exacerbated inequalities, as in the most societies in the world, but perhaps particularly in this context also (Senanayake 2004). On the other hand, Manchanda (2005) points out how women have a voice in the peace process. Women in Burundi have been included in peace talks, as mentioned early. Many women were involved in community management and have taken advantage of that role.

## **3.2 Gender and the concept of ‘Empowerment’**

Many definitions of empowerment are central to power and access and control over resources. On the other hand, some definitions focus on the inequality between men and women. Kabeer (1999) claims that the term empowerment has not yet been well enough defined and Mosedale (2005) agrees that the concept of empowerment is not clear because there are many definitions used by different people.

Sen and Grown (1987:78) argue that ‘empowerment is a strategy that will get us from here to there’. In other words, empowerment is a notion of process, as in development theory (see Rostow 1960). Bebeta(2007) recognizes that since empowerment is not an outcome but a process, measuring women’s empowerment has limitations. Mosedale (2005) argues that empowerment cannot

be given by a third party like development agencies or made to happen by outsiders. Mosedale (2005) also notes that empowerment tends to be more collective than individual and that it does not have finality or a clear moment of achievement. No one can say she arrives at the stage of being fully empowered. This is a linear understanding of empowerment and while this makes sense because without any change there would not be empowerment. Other scholars do not see empowerment as a linear process (Cheston and Kuhn 2002). They stated that empowerment is a process of change by which groups gain power and ability to make choice. The authors give this definition of women's empowerment as an ability to have access to the material, human and social resources to make strategic choices in her life. Access to materials does not explain empowerment or equality fully however. Three impacts measure empowerment: the impact on decision making and on self-confidence (agency), the impact on women's status and gender relations in the home (domination of women) and the impact on family and domestic violence. Mechanisms that contribute to empowerment may be training on business skills, education and literacy, family and work responsibilities, and social and political issues (Ibid.2002). The Beijing women's conference (1995), agreed that empowerment was adopted as a requirement for a better world for women (Townsend 1999:20). Generally, women are more marginalized, vulnerable and often the poorest in the world. My findings illustrate that the definition of empowerment depends on the needs and interests of those defining it.

### ***3.2.1 Microfinance and gender***

Numerous factors have increased interest in regard to micro finance as a promoter of gender equality. There is recognition by the participants of this study that access to credit and resources increases the quality of daily life. But it has not been a 'magic bullet' to resolve all problems and many challenges remain (Kabeer 2005). Access to credit is not the only factor that can empower women. Besides credit, agriculture and environmental activities must be supported as well. But given the Burundian patriarchal system where it still difficult to inherit land as a woman, unless you can buy it yourself, the strategy of micro credit without addressing the question of access to land may fail.

Micro-credit is considered both a boon and a burden in development literature. Authors such as Sarumathi and Mohan (2011), Swain and Wallentin (2009), Hashemi et al. (1996) and House (2000) have studies various schemes in India, Bangladesh and in the Pacific Island countries. They found that microfinance through self-help groups of micro-finance has been recognized internationally as a tool to reduce poverty. Microfinance has emerged as a key strategy to empower rural women. However, authors such as Goetz and Gupta (1996), Leach and Sitaram (2002), Kabeer (2005), Altay (2007) and Ofreneo (2005) working in micro-finance contexts in Bangladesh, India, Turkey and Philippines, found that the success of women's empowerment through access to credit can be blocked for a variety of reasons. First, the husband uses the loan. Second, after having used the loan, the men are unable to repay it, so women borrowers are obliged to pay back the loan using other resources. In the other cases, women's male relatives use a proportion of their loans while women borrowers bear the responsibility for repayment. The obligation to repay the loans at any cost (in order to meet the agency's repayment) has forced women with failed livelihood projects to work hard and longer, sometimes in jobs they never had to do be-

fore. The authors agree that microfinance does not necessarily lead to economic independence.

These two sides (boon and burden) on both sides illustrate that the question of microcredit and its connection to women's empowerment is complicated and may be context dependent.

# Chapter 4 Methodology and the Floresta Case Study

## 4.1 Methodology

Understanding how the concept of women's empowerment is interpreted and implemented on the ground in Burundi presents many challenges, in part because the concept is so broad. There are a number of organizations in Burundi that claim to promote women's empowerment including: Action Aid, CAFOB (Collectif des Associations et ONGs Feminines du Burundi), ADDF (Association pour la Defense des Droits de la Femme), CDF (Centre de Developpement Familial) and Dushirehamwe. Given my review of the literature on gender and development, women's empowerment and micro-finance, I was interested in finding out how environmental, agricultural and micro-finance concerns were combined in specific projects, and the particular challenges that such projects present for women in Burundi, NGO staff, government officials and for current theories of gender and development.

In terms of methodology, I adopted a case study approach. Due to both limited time in the field and my positionality as an employee of one NGO – Floresta in Rutana, Burundi working on women's empowerment. This has contributed to my knowledge of these issues by dealing with those challenges. The case study is a relevant method as it allows researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real-life events (Yin 2009:4). However, relying on case studies for research still remains a challenge in the social sciences because the case studies use multiple sources of evidence. My focus on Floresta helped me understand how women's empowerment is understood and practiced in Rutana Province, answering the first of my research questions. The sub-questions mainly focus on how Floresta defines the concept of women's empowerment and what are the factors associated with women's empowerment in the rural Burundi area (Rutana). The sub-questions are linked to my main question because women (beneficiaries of Floresta Project) and the organization's own interpretations of women's empowerment were used to define the concept. I was able to speak with the head of gender programs in government to better understand how the Ministry of Gender Promotion defined the concept of women's empowerment. Interestingly, the government's definition of empowerment relates highly to political participation, however, many women have not even been able to attend school and are farmers (70%).

## 4.2 Selection of Floresta as a case study

As a citizen of Burundi, this topic is of particular importance to me, and presents an opportunity for me to share with the reader the rural day life of women in Rutana. When I finish my university studies, I will return to full-time work with Floresta; as I worked there previously. The advantages of working with this organization for my research are many, including easy access to documents and reports and my familiarity with the staff for soliciting interviews. The disadvantages of selecting Floresta as a case study include issues of being too influenced by the organization's view of development because of

having worked there and the problem of rural women respondents knowing that I work with Floresta and thus providing responses that they think will please the organization. Other challenges include the unavailability of some women because of their busy schedules.

My interviews with rural women were conducted in Kirundi and my interviews with NGO/associations, Floresta staff and others were in French. Translation from Kirundi to English and from French to English was challenging.

### **4.3. Background of Floresta**

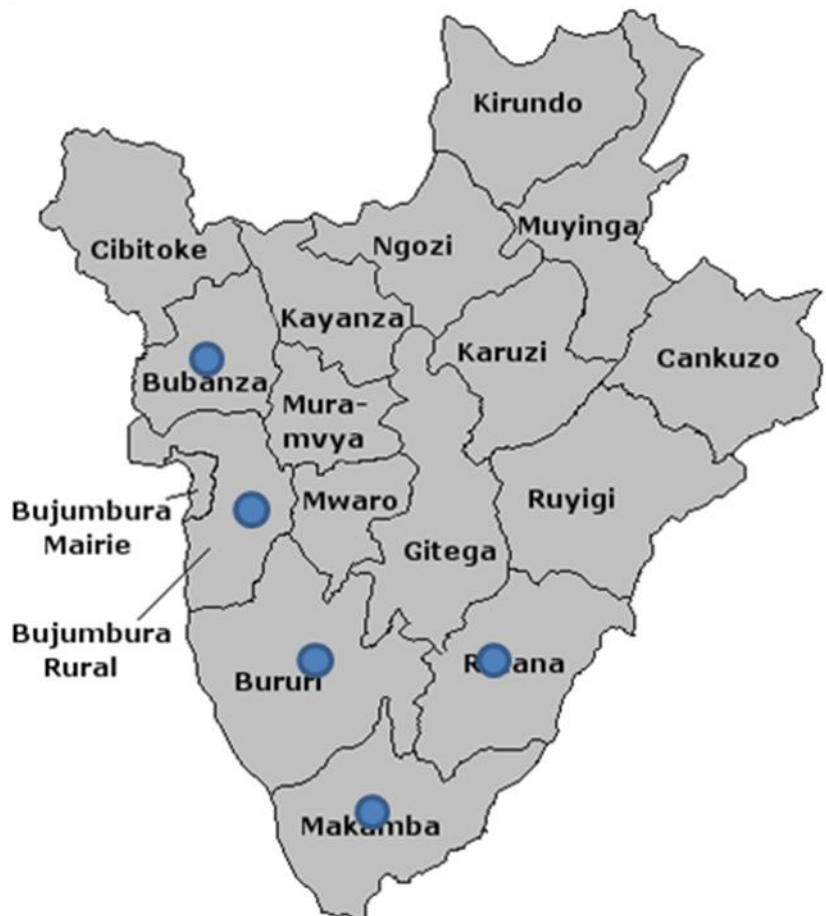
Floresta is the only NGO in Rutana that uses an integrated activities approach (combining agriculture with a microcredit program). Floresta has been at the service of communities since 1984 in the Dominican Republic and extended its services to other countries including Haiti, Mexico, Tanzania, Thailand, and Burundi.

‘The mission of Floresta, as a Christian non-profit organization, is to reverse deforestation and poverty in the world, by transforming the lives of the rural poor. Through teaching, Floresta develops communities by encouraging poor farmers to take ownership of their own problems, and gives them the confidence to apply solutions. Innovative agriculture and forestry systems enable rural farmers to make the best possible use of the resources that they already possess’ [...] Floresta teaches and promotes agro forestry, reforestation, soil conservation, and a host of other sustainable techniques. Moreover, through community loans, Floresta helps people to progress beyond bare subsistence, as well as to diversify village economies as the most effective way to fight poverty’(Floresta Burundi 2009).

Floresta intervened in five provinces (Rutana, Bururi, Makamba, Bujumbura rural and Bubanza) out of seventeen in Rutana, in five out of six communes (Rutana, Giharo, Bukemba , Gitanga and Musongati)’. (Floresta Burundi and Plant with Purpose 2010:3)

Secondly, I focus my research on rural women in the Floresta’s associations in Rutana Province (south of Burundi) because most of the members are returnees and refugees coming from Tanzania and the majority were women. Conflict related violence affected physical, psychological, economic, social, and cultural conditions of both men and women. The direct and indirect violence led to a wide array of negative consequences such as stigmatization of victims of rape, sexual transmitted diseases (HIV/AIDS) and undesirable pregnancies. These problems are aggravated by the patriarchal system of Burundian society and the absence of adequate state and actions to address them.

**Map 0.1**  
**Map of Burundi locating provinces where Floresta is being implemented**



Source: Adapted by the researcher

## 4.4 Methods of data gathering

The data for this study was collected during a seven-week field visit to Burundi that took place from the 14<sup>th</sup> of July to the 27<sup>th</sup> of August in 2012. My analysis focuses on four communes: Giharo and Gitanga (old partnerships with Floresta), Musongati and Bukemba (recent partnerships with Floresta). These communes share similar issues of economic vulnerability, food insecurity, and the stigmatization of women, violence, and gender inequality. I interviewed 27 key beneficiaries involved in women's empowerment. In addition to choosing a case study approach, I employed qualitative methods to obtain information from a range of sources.

### 4.4.1. Data collection techniques

This research employed a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and observation. I used a qualitative approach to examine the links between rural women's status and Floresta's activities.

## **Secondary materials**

Secondary data such as newspapers and internal memos in Floresta were helpful for this project because they allowed the researcher an insider's perspective in the organization.

## **Primary research with people:**

The category of respondents that were relevant to my research includes:

- Other NGOs that promote women's empowerment
- Staff from the Ministry of Gender Promotion
- Floresta staff
- Women beneficiaries
- Representatives from the provincial Department of Agriculture and Livestock
- Representatives of the micro-credit scheme

Primary data was collected in two phases; the first visit was used to contact and organize key informants for the interviews and focus group. In terms of research subjects, I divided them according to their roles and the kinds of questions that I hoped that they would answer. While each group of actors helps inform the concepts, strategies, and practices of women's empowerment, their actions, needs, and interests differ from each other. Specifically, I interviewed 12 women, including NGO members (5), government (1), agriculture and Microfinance sectors representatives (2), Floresta staff (6), the Governor of Rutana Province (1) and the staff in the Provincial department of agriculture and livestock in the province to understand and locate their views and practices around the concept of women's empowerment.

## **Interviews**

The research interview is based on a conversation about daily life (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Much of the qualitative work in this paper was collected through targeted interviews with open-ended questions. As stated above, a variety of key actors included government institutions, different intermediaries, and private sector organizations, both involved and not involved with Floresta Burundi. In total, 27 interviews were conducted. By interviewing key actors in women's empowerment, I compared the definitions and practices of women's empowerment in relation to development.

I interviewed a mix of six associations (twelve members) to investigate the concept of women's empowerment in Rutana Province. My questions focused on existing associations surrounding women's empowerment, its evolving definition over time, and what it might look like in the rural context.

## **Focus Groups**

A focus group is a type of interview with approximately 4 to 12 people (O'Leary, 2010). The primary goal of focus discussion is to go in depth of opinions that will arise in the direct questioning. For my case, my focus group was composed by women (4) and men (6). It was informative getting to know the men's opinions surrounding women's empowerment, and further enlightening examining how focus group responses differed from one on one interviews. What I found, was that the discrepancies in answers could be attributed to

beneficiaries not wanting to contradict the dominant patriarchal system in front of others.

### **Observation**

In order to ensure triangulation, I used a direct observation that ranged from formal to casual data collection activities (Yin, 2009: 199). As those kinds of surveys have never been done before by Floresta, I used this method in meetings and field visits. Observation is often useful in providing additional information about the topic being studied. I agree with O' Leary, that the observation allows you to get a sense of reality and work through the complexities of social interaction.

## **4.5 Ethics**

While there is no institutional review process here at ISS, I ensured that the findings are real and do exist in the field as well as the sources (secondary and primary data used). The ethical guidelines of ISS have been followed in my research.

- Anonymity was ensured, so that this document can be used by Floresta in the future for other purposes.
- In regards to conducting the survey, I ensured informed consent was received from the host staff of NGOs and community members.
- In the focus group, ethical issues were respected such as gender equilibrium and hierarchical power relations. I was ensuring that women were allowed to speak as much as men.

According to O'Leary (2010), confidentiality involves protecting the identity of those who provide to the researcher their data. For my case, the women I interviewed wanted to maintain privacy because there exists a possibility that the paper can be used in the future by Floresta.

## **4.6 Limitations of the research**

I did not get the opportunity to talk to some other International Organizations such as UN Women (United Nations Women) which claim to promote women's empowerment. However, I spoke to one International ONG in Burundi.

# Chapter 5 Understanding Different Concepts and Practices of Empowerment on the Ground in Rutana Province, Burundi

In this chapter I present the first set of analysis for my research question of how the definition of women's empowerment is understood and practiced on the ground, in the context of ongoing conflict in Rutana Province, Burundi. This chapter also highlights the implications of particular definitions of women's empowerment due to many challenges such as culture, gender and variations in women's status and roles. Here, I focus on analyzing and discussing the findings regarding the definition of women's empowerment according to Floresta's documents, their staff, what I observed in practice, other NGOs and by women beneficiaries. In chapter six, I will focus more deeply on key themes of empowerment challenges.

## 5.1 Whose idea and practice of empowerment?

Empowerment is a broad and unwieldy concept and is defined differently by different actors and institutions in different contexts. Below I present my research findings and then I will show the impact of empowerment for different women that I spoke to during my field research.

### 5.1.1 Floresta's documents

In terms of reaching the goal of empowerment, Floresta has focused on agriculture, the environment and microcredit. In the partnership agreement between Floresta-Burundi and its beneficiaries association (Partnership Agreement Between Floresta Burundi and Association (PABFBA), 2010:1-2)<sup>10</sup>, Floresta's document refers to women's empowerment in different ways:

'Floresta-Burundi agrees to work jointly with the association in finding a land to cultivate' (Ibid.)

'Floresta-Burundi agrees to supply Association with different kind of seeds/cuttings of high quality and agro forestry and fruit plants, to be planted in its fields and its member's fields'(Ibid.)

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<sup>10</sup> The Partnership agreement is signed entities (Director of Floresta Burundi and the President of Association. The associations partners of Floresta Burundi in Rutana are namely: Dushirehamwe, Twungurane, Turwanyinzara, Remesha, Abasangiraterambere, Rima tworore, Dushigikirane and Turwizumwimbu). The contracts are the same and are signed with each new association. Floresta started its program in 2008 but it was more focus in agricultural and environmental activities than micro credit program. But 2 years later, Floresta include the new system of micro credit (VSLA).

‘Floresta-Burundi agrees to grant an agricultural loan to the association to be reimbursed after harvest with no interest for the first year. The next year the interest rate will be of 10% per month’ (Ibid.)

‘The Association members agree to implement a savings and loans program within their community to allow them running small projects’ (Ibid.)

‘Floresta agrees to train farmers on the following topics: sustainable agriculture, environment protection, savings and loans program and female gender promotion’ (Ibid.)

Floresta Burundi does highlights livelihood through agricultural and micro credit, environment protection and spiritual development activities. It also negotiates land leased from the government free of charge for its association partners. It may happen that the government responds positively or negatively to the request based on the availability of land in the region. Again some households lack seeds. Floresta does also members who can put land s that can be shared for communal activities for a short period (1- 2 years). At the end of tenure, the owner can get it back or lease it again according to their agreement. (Floresta Burundi 2011). This approach can help owners because lands will be used for communal purposes. Ellis and Allison (2004:1) argue that ‘access by the poor to natural resources, including land, forests, water, fisheries and wildlife, is essential for sustainable reduction of poverty.’ Based on this justification, the definition is narrow, especially in consideration of certain areas in Africa, like Burundi, which are still governed by the discriminatory inheritance law. As long as the legislation of inheritance and matrimonial regimes remain the same, this definition cannot work in Burundi.

Ribot and Peluso (2003:153), on the other hand, define access as the ability to benefit something from institutions, governments, persons. However, this definition also falls short due to the clear-cut Burundian law: a woman can inherit neither in her blood family nor through her husband’s family. As long as the Government does not eliminate the discrimination that relating to its old customs, the Burundian women will continue to be tied to extreme poverty.

The government must clarify what kind of gains it wants to achieve. Without transparency, development could mean development through mechanization or intensive production, leading to land grabs. In fact, since the government decided to put agriculture investments within the concept of economic relationships (Cotula, 2009:25), many women are reluctant to make investments on land that can be removed while they are active in the cultivation and production process. The insecure access of land ownership can be an obstacle for increased productivity of women, and therefore the development of agriculture in general.

It is evident that Burundian rural women cannot be economically empowered unless they become members of associations. Women should be aware that NGOs and international organizations support associations and not individuals. The advantages of group work are many. First, associative groups enable women to acquire goods, services, and certain resources (e.g. field borrowing) that were not previously accessible. Second, associations help women become more independent, responsible, and aware of their capabilities (e.g. power through collective action); they become significant actors in the survival of their household. In addition, as Rocheleau and Edmunds (1997) point out, the participation of women in associations educates participants on women’s

rights. In that case women can be able to learn and protect their rights in conditions of unpredictable climate change. Agarwal (1995), as cited in Rocheleau and Edmunds (1997), the tenure dimension of agriculture, forestry, and conservation is used as an instrument of empowerment (for both women and men alike).

Agriculture is the main source of income for just over 90% of the population, making the agricultural sector of high importance in the social and economic life of the country. However, the division of labour is particularly disproportionate in the household habits and work practices. The traditional division of labour between the genders consists of the man taking on the productive activities for the maintenance of the family, while the woman is dedicated to reproductive work. Housework is almost universally assigned to women, and treated as natural activities related to the maintenance of the household and reproduction. In addition to this, the woman is the one provides the bulk of agricultural production. For a married couple, ownership is the husband who manages and controls the family's property and resources. The woman needs to ask permission from her husband regarding anything production from her labour. Based some cases which show that women do not have any control over agricultural production, a large number of literature showed that there is a significant percentage of the labour force made by women (Ogunlela and Mukhtar 2009; Udry et al.1995; Ghale 2008; Giarracca and Teubal 2008).

For these reasons, Floresta wanted to transform the lives of the most vulnerable women, through sustainable initiatives in agriculture and the environment. One of the objectives of this paper is to examine the challenges women faced doing in their daily activities. Literature has discussed the difference between access to and control of land, with access to land meaning that ability to cultivate the land as a wife or daughter in the household. Control of land, however, means going beyond simply access, and being able to control the production that comes from the land. It is imperative, according to Udry (1994) and Agarwal (1995), for women to obtain both access and control in order to achieve efficiency (evidence of growth, land production).

There is evidence of a relationship between women and the environment. For instance, all Burundian rural women depend on the forest for collecting firewood for cooking and cattle care. Tree plantation is experiencing community exploitation for survival as women look for firewood and charcoal; over 90% of Burundian households use charcoal for food preparation. Floresta provide veterinary and agricultural techniques to beneficiaries, with each household having its own small farm at home and at the same time having a collective/group farm. Along with vegetable and fruit production in their homes, women are able to improve their family's diet and thus reducing the degree of malnutrition. Agro-forestry trees and fodder will be the source of food for their animals, firewood, construction, green manures, and help with the protection of environment (Floresta Burundi 2011).

Moreover, Floresta provides small loans for agricultural activities. Agricultural loans are given periodically depending on the need of each community group. Upon the harvest, Floresta is refunded its loan, and the profit from the yield is divided among community group members equitably. While groups sign contracts at the beginning of the project, they become responsible in assisting individual group members to meet these goals. In addition to the injec-

tion of income provided through seed production, beneficiaries support each other in achieving long-term economic stability (Floresta Burundi 2010).

Each community group supervised by Floresta Burundi has its own saving methods and regular contributions that are used in communal activities. Support and training are provided in savings and loan activities and each group sets its own goals with respect to savings targets (Floresta Burundi 2011).

There is a Chinese proverb saying that “Give a man a fish, it will feed him for a day. Teach a man how to fish; it will feed him for a lifetime.” This approach is similar to the one used by Floresta by giving training related to best practices in sustainable agricultural and the protection of the environment. During the 1980s, local and international have been created to help vulnerable people including women. These include: Dushirehamwe, CAFOB, ADDF, Care International, and Actionnaid Burundi, among others. However, a women situation is hardly satisfactory. The shortcomings of these NGOs were once seeds were distributed, a lack of monitoring and supervision led women to sell seeds in order to meet more immediate needs (World Bank 2011).

According to Kabeer (1994), there is an absence of a bottom up approach in regards to development interventions. For her, empowerment should come from the grassroots. Kabeer’s claim seems to be that most poverty reduction programs seek to meet the basic needs of the poor, underserved, or marginalized groups in the community, but the more important question to ask is *who is identifying and determining what basic needs are?* It seems as though current programs do not give voice to those whom the program is designed for. Palmer (1977:105) furthers this argument by contesting that “basic needs involve the participation of the people in making the decisions which affect them.” The absence of beneficiaries’ voices surrounding poverty reduction is associated with the development of underdevelopment and modernization without development. Planning and other decision-making processes that engage women in any issue should enable women at all levels to speak for themselves.

Through a participatory program, Floresta is focused on reducing poverty and dependency and fighting against the degradation of the environment. Strategically, Floresta engages both beneficiary communities and local community leaders on the identification of needs and solutions envisaged to respond to their needs. These are not engaged as beneficiaries as such, but as partners. I believe that the majority of resources both material and human, should come from the community, and that the organization’s role is to provide technical and management support. This process empowers communities to be part of process and own the program. The most important part of this process is for the woman to be the main actress.

### **5.1.2 Floresta’s staff**

The definitions given by Floresta’s documents emphasize the supply of seeds/cuttings. This is a narrow framing of how women can achieve empowerment, given that the literature emphasizes other issues such as access to credit (Mayoux: 2000) and power (Kabeer 1999).

However, the staffs at Floresta maintain perspectives that are different from the organization’s paper definitions of women’s empowerment. For example, one staff member who has been working with Floresta since its incep-

tion, states that empowerment means “to be independent vis-a-vis the basic needs through Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA).” He explains that there are some women who have acquire goats, sheet metal, and bikes through the VSLA program. My belief is that microcredit alone cannot empower women; there must be other integrated activities that can support the microcredit program. Another staff member, who spends most of his time in the fields, defines empowerment as “to have access to income and resources.”

The women members of Floresta’s partners exercise small business activities that are not related to agricultural activities. Those activities can be useful in everyday life to add to the communal harvest. Generally, the commercial activity of women takes place within the rural village. Women often trade items that are mostly identical and in strong competition with each to other. Small business is practised by the majority of women and gives them the opportunity to have constant (if small) amounts of funds for the household. This activity does not necessarily generate visible savings.

A staff member, who works permanently in the office, defines empowerment as *‘to have access to primary needs without asking any additional help.’* She states that food insecurity affects primarily women and children, and depending on aid agencies does not empower women. Instead, as women participate massively in the activities of associations, it means that they earn an income for themselves. They are able to improve their agricultural production with increased fertility and soil conservation.

Floresta provides small credits, and encourages the formation of savings by contributions from members through the VSLA system. With enough production under their belts, women are able to cultivate their own fields and have time for other small projects, which may have a small refundable credit with a small interest. Another staff member who recently started with Floresta, referred to women’s empowerment as *‘to be totally independent in economic way through the credit programs and savings, capacity building and support agriculture inputs.’* Beneficiaries are able to realize micro-projects such as the renovation of their houses, starting small businesses and sending their children to school.

Women are usually integrated in associations and validly represent their respective households. Women beneficiaries of Floresta’s projects arrive to generate income through various programs and activities (agriculture and savings). Those revenues help them and their households to meet their basic needs.

### ***5.1.3 Floresta in practice***

After experiencing what the Floresta documents and staff members were able to inform me about women’s empowerment, I attempted to see whether the system of microcredit is structured and practiced on the ground accordingly.

I observed that Floresta provides quality seeds as well as microcredits for agricultural activities. But the extent to which this actually satisfies part of women’s basic needs depends upon the expressed needs of women themselves. In terms of microcredit, Floresta’s program achieves this through the Village and Loan Association (VSLA). The basic principle of the VSLA approach is that the members of a saving group save the money in terms of shares.

There are actually twenty-two members of the network in Burundi. Among them, three (WISE, Savings and Credit Cooperatives and Turame Community Finance) are the ones that give priority to women. Rutana Province had a branch of Banque de Credit de Bujumbura (BCB) in 1989 and one microfinance (Credit Communautaire) was opened in 2004. *'The fact that most loans are granted by banks that require guarantees in which most of the local population cannot afford, Rutana is no exception. There is evidence that there is a lack of financial systems in the Province, despite local interest in investments and deposits for micro financing. Unfortunately, the microcredit closed and went away with fortune of poor investors. From that period, local business people have avoided bureaucratic procedures of contracting loans in financial institutions existing in the area, and rather opting to do it among themselves'* (Interview with Anonymous 2). It is evident that institutions that give equal conditions and opportunities to rural farmers and business people were needed. Due to the lack of trust of banks in regards to the microcredit system in Rutana Province, the rationale for Floresta's group savings approach is clear.

Savings groups are funded by the VSLA (Village Savings and Loan Association), where the group saves money in the form of shares. The primary purpose of the VSLA is to provide simple savings and loan facilities in communities that do not have access to formal financial services. VSLA's main goal is financial independence, and all members of the association have the same rights to borrow from the loan fund. The VSLA group is composed by ten to twenty-five members. The management committee consists of: the chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and two money counters. The size of a loan available to a member may not be more than three times the total value of shares they have purchased. A rate of 10% per month is the most typical, with a cycle not exceeding one year. When the operating cycle comes to an end, the association spreads the total value of its financial assets equally amongst its members. As the end of the cycle approaches, no new loans are issued and all outstanding loans are repaid. After the share-out, members who do not wish to continue may leave and new members may be invited to join.<sup>11</sup>

The group savings system helps in beneficiaries in two ways: easy access to credit and share dividends after a given period. In order to prevent what happened before in Rutana Province, Floresta emphasizes women in leadership positions, requiring the chairperson of each savings group to be a woman.

A different approach exists in some context in India. Basu (2008:208) discusses the Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCA) approach based in India, which consists on helping groups. Moreover she argues that it is not only concerned about savings, it also focuses on equal service, support, security, and solidarity. For example, in case of livestock, a beneficiary of a goat is expected to give back a goat once it is produced. She claims that those kinds of group savings are helpful for the women especially because they become confident to talk with others and they can achieve many things (pay school fees, meet immediate needs). The ROSCA approach however, is not implemented by Floresta.

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<sup>11</sup> VSL Associates, Program Guide ( Field Operations Manual),2007

The two approaches (VSLA and ROSCA) are similar in the sense that they both work with small groups and the interest rate is shared between them, contrary to the bank or microcredit.

#### **5.1.4 Other NGO's definitions of empowerment**

UNIFEM defines empowerment as 'means to gain the ability to generate choices and bargaining power, developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes, and the right to control one's life' (Cheston and Kuhn 2002). Mayoux (2000), on the other hand, defines it as having access to credit and savings, increase well-being and political participation. Literature from other NGOs reveals that 'empowerment' is not as clearly defined as Kabeer (1999) has argued. Some relate empowerment to personal agency, others to access to microcredit, and others to political participation. But how exactly can one measure empowerment? As Beteta (2007) suggests, one factor is the selection of appropriate indicators that are discriminatory. For example, if we take divide beneficiaries by class (high, middle, and low) and the region (south, north, east, and west), it is possible for some groups to be left out. Another factor is considering women's interests from their position within their society.

I visited four associations and one international NGO that work in the field of women's empowerment. For Dushirehamwe, their activities 'are focused in capacity building of women through training of property management and small projects, the women's empowerment in the fight against poverty through the income-generating activities and peace building through the integration of gender in development programs Community.' The representative of the Association in Rutana Province referred to women's empowerment as '*to be independent in economic way, especially the financial one. Have everything you need (literacy, education, economy).*'<sup>12</sup> This means the ability of a human being to meet basic needs (to eat, to sleep, and have access to health services).

The second association I visited, CAFOB, describes their activities as mostly focused on the eradication of gender-based violence for the respect and support of those victims.

The representative of the Association in Rutana Province referred to women's empowerment as being able to '*live in good conditions, have a fund to finance agricultural activities especially women in rural areas, have access to resources, and better control of those resources.*' Since women are the main contributors to socio-economic development in the country, it is only fair that they should be able to reap some of its benefits. She should be able to participate and be integrated in all spheres of development activities (programs and projects) of her country, at an equal level as men are. For example, women should be guaranteed the same amount of work, same salary, same access to land, with shared resources<sup>13</sup>. Her

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12 Anonymous [a3], Dushirehamwe Association Representative in Rutana, personal interview, Rutana, 25.07.12

13 Anonymous [a4], CAFOB (Collectif des Association set ONGs Feminins du Burundi: Feminine Collective Association and NGOs of Burundi (Author translation from French) Association Representative in Rutana, personal interview, Rutana, 26.07.12

position all the strategic and practical ones because both public (basic needs) and private are there

The third association I visited is called ADDF and their activities are focused on assistance and support to women victims of physical and sexual violence. Women's empowerment to them is described as 'to have access to any income from the household or from the association. This means to have the ability to get money to buy or get what you want.'<sup>14</sup> The general assumption is that a woman cannot manage only what she gets from the family income, but also from outside sources like the association.

The fourth association I visited is called CDF and it focuses on promoting access to justice, education, and health care for victims of gender violence. For them, women's empowerment is an '*awareness of women for membership in income-generating activities. Be dependant in regard to the satisfaction of your needs. To be dependant of other persons minimized and mistreats the women.*'<sup>15</sup> The assumption is that women lose opportunities either for work, due to their class or gender.

Lastly, I visited an NGO called Action Aid. It main focused on the fight against poverty, hunger, women's rights (helping people who faced discrimination to stay in their households), the right to the education, and resources from communal activities. It referred to women's empowerment as to '*have goods and services to manage and have access and control of the household's resources. In few words, it is for a woman to be flushed.*'<sup>16</sup> This last definition given by Action Aid in Rutana Province is a bit similar to Floresta's overall ideology. Goods and services are linked to agriculture, with access and control of the household coming from the land.

Most of the associations focused on women as the main beneficiaries, and the men are secondary members. The difference between Floresta's documents and other NGO's definitions is that Floresta emphasizes agriculture, with microcredit coming at the second level.

### **5.1.5 Women beneficiaries**

In this section, I will discuss 'empowerment' broadly in regards to what the women I interviewed think about empowerment. Empowerment was presented to rural association members by Floresta as an integrated approach to sustainable development. The approach includes sustainable agriculture, environmental protection and the savings and loans program. The three groups I chose to work with had a difficult time understanding agriculture and the environment relates to microcredit systems; they said that they do many things at the same time, especially those who start the partnership with Floresta last year.

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14 Anonymous [a5], ADDF(Association pour la Defense des Droits de la Femme : Association for the defense of women's rights (Author translation from French) Association Representative in Rutana, personal interview, Rutana, 24.07.12

15 Anonymous [a6], CDF(Centre de Developpement Familial: Development family Center (Author translation from French) Association Representative in Rutana, personal interview, Rutana, 26.07/2012

16 Anonymous [a7], Action aid Burundi, NGO Representative in Rutana, personal interview, Rutana, 27.07/2012

Tenure systems of a state constitute the institutional rules that govern access to land. For my respondents, the average size of land is 0.75 ha<sup>17</sup> with the rate of land disputes being particularly high. The government responded to this by establishing the National Commission of Land and Other Property, whose mission extends to the resolution of land disputes concerning the returnees. The first part of my interviews sought to grasp key demographic/background information from respondents. A married woman with eight children living in the displaced camps told me: *'I leave Burundi in 1993 and went in Tanzania. The Burundian constitution states that if somebody has occupied a land, manage it and take care of this land after 3 years, the land become his own. When my family and I come back to my origin commune in 2005, the national commission of land tried to arrange a meeting between us and the family, but the family couldn't hear us and say that they have too many children as well, we cannot share the land. So they took us to the refugees camps and we have the right to receive just 0, 5 ha per household. The land is too small with many children and it difficult to mange to put even three different crops in such a small portion of land. I come to ask to member of Dushirehamwe association when I heard about the association and it is helping me in the sense that I came to work for the association and we get harvest, I have something to bring home for family and when we sell the seeds of cassava we share some amount. In general, this improves my quality of life and my husband respects me because of what I bring home.'*

Even though women have the willingness to work, the lack of sufficient land makes it difficult for her to manage survival with just a small piece of land.

With respect to knowledge and experience of Floresta's activities, one middle-aged participant (member of the association which gained partnership in 2011) said: *'We start to work with Floresta Burundi last year. Our association had a problem to find a land to cultivate especially in this area where we have many refugees coming from Tanzania. SOSUMO (Sugar Company) has promised us to lend us a land, but later on, it told us that they need the land to expand the sugar cultivation. We do have yet started to work with Floresta in the agriculture domain as we do not have land to cultivate, but meantime we get some training on credits and savings, management of association; we have the hope that Floresta will try to advocate for us a land to cultivate'.*

Some beneficiaries found it local NGOs, when they felt the organization did not have ability to solve their problems. One of the chairpersons passed on a respondent's statement, stating: *'Floresta support us in several areas of development. It provides the seed quality, fertilizer inputs and technical support. It also supported the program and savings credit training and coaching. For three months, at which time we began savings program, six people have contracted loans ranging between 15.000 FrBu and 30.000FrBu.'*

The benefits received from Floresta's activities are explained by an elder man (President of one of the association) I met in the focus group who said that: *'The Dushirehamwe association had a difficult beginning. We had limited resources and a small plot of land on which we worked. The large part of our harvest was destroyed due to illness and poor preservation. Now we can say that we have already come a long way for our development. The journey is still far away but we can reach it. Many people ask us to*

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<sup>17</sup> That average include those who have zero land

*join us because they saw our realizations, but we cannot accommodate all of them. We advised them to form other groups in order to work for their own development.'*

For one young married woman and mother of two, '*empowerment means be in good relationship with my husband and be able to run small projects*'. She explains me that her husband is the one who has ultimate authority, and as soon as a woman is not in good relations with her husband, she will not be allowed to be a member of an association. Another young mother states, '*empowerment means be literate and be able to have production for consumption and for commercialization*'. This woman was in her second year of secondary school when she became pregnant. Because she was not able to finish her schooling, she states she was not able to attain a job (despite her ability to read and write), except for being a farmer. If she could manage to get products to sell, she would be able to earn money for the primary needs of the house (salt, sugar, oil).

An elder woman with grandchildren said that '*empowerment means to have a sufficient land to cultivate*' She told me that if you have a chance to have a family land of 5ha, you are able to grow the most needed crops (cassava, beans, and vegetables). Even though land was subject to drought, late rains making it difficult to manage, little irrigation, poor yields due to climate change, the decrease in soil fertility, and lack of agricultural inputs from seed quality, all one can do is can try their best. Another woman widow told me that '*empowerment means the meeting basic needs: access to modern agricultural farming facilities (land, seeds, fertilizers), school fees, health services, and house (clothes)*' She told me that if she manages to have those, she will see herself as empowered.

The main concerns and priorities of the women I interviewed are mainly related to ownership of assets, access to economic opportunities, and opportunities to earn income as the key to improve their well-being and for their families (have access to health services, eat well, have livestock, own a small piece of land, and have a nice house). I also observed that women's roles and responsibilities in households are quite different from men. Women's tasks are largely associated with family care and home production, and men's with income generation and decision-making.

When discussing the VSLA system (how it is used, where they find money to repay their loans, and who is in charge of the loan), an elder married woman said: '*I got a loan from the VSLA system and my husband asked me to give him a small amount of it. He told me that from that day, I will cover the all expenses of the family because I have money. At the end of the day, I couldn't pay the loan on time. When you do not bring the money on time, you have to put on the loan another interest. So to pay back the money, I went to work on another person's field to have the money.*'

This is one of the challenges women faced in taking credit because most often they are not the ones who manage and control it. Those who are supposed to benefit from it are the ones who suffer from it. It is husbands who control how money is used and managed (Kabeer 2001). An important question bears asking, who is really using and benefiting from credits and loans? The power and control of the credit contracted by women is mainly done by those who did not ask for them. One woman says of her husband: '*I asked to my husband to pay the school fees of the children. He told me that I have a small business, so I have to do everything, which affects the money because I had a small business. Because of the interest was high, I have been obliged to sell my personal items such as traditional Burundian*

*clothes, shoes. I couldn't manage to buy other traditional cloths because I still wait to have another loan, so that I can have a chance to get some interests.'*

In another case, a middle-aged woman states, '*I am not able to manage a huge amount of money that could make me in jail because I will not be able to pay back with interest*'. She entrusts the money to her husband or she shares the money with him or the money is entirely entrusted by the husband.

However, there are other cases where the women said that their relationship with their spouses has improved or remained good since women joined the microcredit system. Some couples are able to sit together and think about how they can use the loan in order to improve their life. One young woman told me '*the program came to help us in micro-projects we had. I took a small loan to sell food at the market. Sometimes, it happens that I get a good price at the market; some other times, I don't get a good price.*' The credit does not resolve all her problems, and she states: '*it helps me to do not touch my initial capital, which is necessary in my commercial activity. If my husband fulfils his role as head of household, he responds to our basic needs (food, school fees, hospital fees), the credit improves collaborative relationships between men and women because he saw that I bring something at home.*'

Further, an elder widow woman with six children told me that: '*I bought a goat and a portion of land 0.5ha. I have paid school fees for two children who are in high school we had been chasing from school. To pay for the credit back, sometimes I borrow neighbours or family members not to pay with a lot of interest of late and I manage to pay neighbours. I can either sell the radio or other household items. It becomes difficult to buy again the radio and those items because later on, you realized that they are not the priorities.*'

There is a Burundian proverb that says "the hungry stomach is the source of jealousy." What is missing in current literature is a discussion on access to land in conflict situations. Access is becoming even scarcer with many refugees coming from neighbouring countries looking for lands to cultivate.

As a country which has been affected by the war for over 10 years, some populations do not trust a lot the NGOs. During the crisis, there has been a proliferation of many NGOs working in emergency relief and have left the population without a chance for long term benefits. Most beneficiaries suffer from the delay of seed delivery, climate change, and delay of rain, limited access to modern agricultural farming facilities, tools, and fertilizers.

In Floresta's agreement with its association's beneficiaries, Floresta-Burundi agrees to grant an agricultural loan to the association to be reimbursed after harvest with no interest for the first year. The next year the interest rate will be of 10% per month. The association agrees to reimburse the quantity of seeds given by Floresta.

In this chapter, the findings from the Floresta's agreement with its beneficiaries tell us that for many of Floresta's staff, empowerment means the meeting of basic needs. We have seen that what Floresta does on the ground actually is to find land for its beneficiaries and give them all the necessary tools for agriculture. Other NGO's working in women's empowerment believe women's empowerment means being independent in an economic way, while others talk about having access to income and resources. The last findings from the women beneficiaries referred to women's empowerment as being in good relationships with their husbands, while others say it is to have access to the land. The majority of the respondents talk about access to land, meeting basic needs,

and access to microcredit as a way to women's empowerment. However, microcredit is not helping land right issues, which is a big problem for the women interviewed because some of them are refugees and do have anything else to rely on besides farming. In chapter six, I will discuss of some of the limitations of women's empowerment.

## Chapter 6 Analyzing the Challenges Facing Women's Empowerment

To ensure equal access and control over the means of production, financing through microcredit and agricultural products would allow women and men more independence. The majority of rural women are involved in the whole agricultural production process (beginning to end), and the challenges they face are many. These include socio-cultural inequalities between men and women, unequal access to factors of production (land, agricultural inputs, equipment, and agricultural extension), domestic work (maintaining the house, looking for firewood, and child rearing), lack of access to credit, lack of training (low levels of education), lack of control of the agricultural activities they generate, sexual violence, and infidelity in households (polygamy, a practice prohibited by the law).

At the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) on the 4<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Summit and Special Session on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), the Head of State declared, “to unite to prevent, end impunity and provide support to the victims of SGBV.”<sup>18</sup> As SGBV remains a taboo subject in Burundi, It is difficult to deduce with precision the extent SGBV in Burundi is practiced. Victims (especially during the war) are often reluctant to talk about their experiences with gender-based violence because of the shame they feel and the real risk of being rejected or stigmatized in their communities.

Available data, mostly on sexual violence, indicates that from an investigation on sexual abuse carried out by the League Iteka, in some Provinces 81.1% of the people surveyed have witnessed sexual assaults on women, 52.2% on children and 6.9% on men.<sup>19</sup> These no doubt act as substantial barriers to women's feelings of empowerment. Some aspects of empowerment, such as this, are clearly not addressed by the narrow (even if integrated) microcredit program. Particularly, two key themes are missing from dialogue: sexual exploitation coming from an entrenched patriarchal system, and labour and debt repayment.

### 6.1 Sexual exploitation and - entrenched patriarchy

During one interview, one woman stated, ‘*when my husband goes to the cabaret and does not have money to pay the bill (beer), he returned home and took me with him. I will be paying the bill by sleeping with the barman a week*’. Consequences of this practice include the traumatisation, stigmatization, and humiliation of women, as well as a risk of contracting STIs, HIV/AIDS, and undesirable pregnancies. For some men, his wife becomes an ‘asset’ to use anyhow, anywhere, and at any time for his convenience. Of course, the paternal DNA of a child is often questioned in

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<sup>18</sup> Declaration of the Head of States and Government of the Member States of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), Kampala (Uganda), 15th December 2011

<sup>19</sup> Investigation on sexual abuses in Ruhororo, Bukeye, Kayogoro, Nyanza-Lac, Burambi, Buyengero and Rumonge communes, Iteka League, 2004, p.20

these types of situations. As Sen, cited by Visvanathan (1997) states, sexual control is a normal phenomenon because it has simply been entrenched in the culture for so long. Domestic violence is a great concern in Burundi, with one of the male focus group respondents confessing: *'I have developed the habit of assaulting my wife. My father often beat my mother and uttering insults to show her that she was worthless. I was convinced that to be respected for my wife, I should also fight. I finally understood the danger of abusing and beating my wife because of being member of this association. Now I do respect my wife and we share the work at home and the household is in good shape'*.

Once violent offenders claim that they have changed their attitudes radically because of associative groups, a report done by Care International finds that: In the past, violence against women was not considered as a violation to human rights. Women individually looked for strategies to fight or cope with all the suffering to which they were inflicted. Women were educated to say that «That is how life as a couple is; violence against women in marital life is acceptable »<sup>20</sup>.

These findings show that women's success does not depend entirely on socio-economic status, but also whether her emotional standard of living is taken care of. The consequences that come from sexual violence include: psychological problems (withdrawal, lack of self-esteem, anxiety), social strain (alcoholism and suicide), and economic insecurity (to the whole community as each citizen is critical for development).

A similar example brought by Kabeer (1999) pointed to their investigation of the impact of credit for women in rural Bangladesh. The authors give examples of a variety pretexts for the battering of women, such as: for giving birth to daughters rather than sons, dissatisfaction in the bedroom; for urging their husband to seek work or to stop gambling; for pointing to their husbands as failures in fulfilling his role as the provider; or for asking for money for any expense, even medical expenses. In terms of economic variables, the authors found that women with credit tended to have reduced incidences of violence compared with those who did not have credit.

Similar trends are found in Burundi, with some women having been murdered or having their hands cut off because they did not give birth to a boy. At the very minimum, husbands will lose respect for his wife, sometimes refusing to buy necessary items for her such as clothes. There is Burundian adage saying that: "those who have little to share quarrel because of dissatisfaction." When family needs are not met, conflict appears in the household management.

During the war, women and girls were particularly exposed to sexual abuse within the camps where social protection is low or absent. Sex becomes the only product that women use to for her own survival, as well as her families.<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that violence existed before the wars in Burundi; however it was amplified with the beginning of the war. Another Burundian proverb states, "the hen does not sing when the cock is around." As long as Burundian women live in a patriarchal system, she will always feel as though she

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<sup>20</sup> Care Burundi, Report midterm review, Bujumbura, 2009, page 6

<sup>21</sup> A Briefing Paper on the Status of women at its 50th session, Pawns of Politics, Children, conflict and peace in Northern Uganda, New York, 2006, 16

has a lower level of power compared with men. In fact, gender socialization is taught at birth, beginning with parental attitudes and behaviour<sup>22</sup>. Accordingly, as children grow to be adults, they accept that the man is the head of the household, and in a position of dominance. Women, in most cases, depend economically on their husbands and therefore must follow any and all orders given by him.

Due to poverty and lack of food (from subsistence crops), there are some cases where refugee women, especially single women, are forced to sell their bodies for money and basic necessities. As stated previously, women in such situations have a higher risk of becoming pregnant and giving birth to children with HIV, and further lack the financial support of a partner to raise this child. The perpetual cycle of gender-based violence may lead to the spread of such diseases, affecting the community as a whole, and thus the vicious cycle continues on.

## 6.2 Debt labour and repayment

While Burundian women play a major role in agricultural production, they often are not able to reap the benefits associated. Indeed, it is usually the husbands who sell crops and manage funds from them, especially when it comes to cash crops such as coffee and rice.<sup>23</sup> Women, who work as agricultural labourers on their husband's property, are little or not at all involved in the management of family assets. This data shows the immense gap between gender, and ownership and control. The issue of control has many dimensions (Agrawal 1994) such as the ability to make decision regarding the land (to sell, buy, or mortgage it), the ability to retain titles to the land, and the disposing of its products. As Boserup (1997) cited by Visvanathan et al. (1997) and Ostergaard (1992) argue, it is women's work that brings good production and income, although they, along with their labour, are neglected.

Some women face financial abuses. One of the women interviewed told me: *'Microcredit is very useful for us because it help us to expand our small projects. But it happens that crops didn't sell at the market or we didn't get a good price. So it becomes hard to pay the money back. It happens that I go to labour on another's person field to pay back the debt because my husband has spend the loan I get from the association in the bar'*.

Women have stated that positive changes have been observed with the increase of VSLA members' participation, as they participate more in the decision-making process at household and community levels. Some other factors contributing to changes include the provision of seeds, agricultural inputs, and livestock, which raise the level of production of women and consequently their economic power.

The inability of women to access land is a serious challenge due to the traditional views on equality between men and women in Burundi. The fact that a

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22 A study on the discriminatory practices and customs towards women in Burundi, Dushirehamwe, December 2007

23 Care International: 'Etude sur les impacts des revenus du café sur la sécurité des conditions de vie des ménages au Burundi', mars 2007. Cette étude a été menée dans les provinces de Kayanza, Gitega et Ngozi

married woman cultivates land that belongs to someone else, significantly affects her self-esteem. As Seager (2000) contests, women act as 'shock-absorbers,' because whatever happens in relation to household debt, it is them who find a way to keep the household going. As property titles are the main way to secure a loan or credit, women have difficulty acquiring loans in the communal or private banks. As long as men remain the sole group to inherit property, it is them who will continue to retain access and control over land and rights (Seager 2000:63).

The inability to access credit is another form of economic violence against women. This form of violence is embodied by the inequalities between men and women, especially in terms of the distribution of tasks within the family. Women face further discrimination when they do the same work as men, but are not paid equally. As a consequence, women are affected mentally and economically, and hence live in more poverty than men (Jain and Elson, 2011). Women work "double shifts" as they try to balance paid work in the fields, as well as more "invisible" work at home: fetching water and fuel, water supply, child rearing, and preparing food for the household.

Men think that they may lose their power if women are allowed to control how credits are used. The reasons often cited, state that increased control will mean women will disallow themselves to be dominated or that economic autonomy predisposes them to "vagrancy sex." Ways that men attempt to prohibit or restrict the freedom of women includes traumatizing them, humiliation, and rape, being polygamous, adulterous, and generally wearing out her happiness.

### 6.3 Conclusion

To sum up, in traditional Burundian society, women are recognized simply as a production tools. Although women are now seen by many NGOs as indispensable in the fight against poverty, the dominant patriarchal system obliges her obey and submit to father, brothers, and husbands.

Microfinance is seemed as one solution in order to alleviate poverty. Yet some of the issues facing borrowers are the consequences that occur when they are unable to pay back the loans. Some women are obliged to work on another person's field, while others sell their bodies to pay back the debt.

My data shows that it is difficult to define the concept of women's empowerment and more needs to be done to make policy match what is being experienced by women on the ground. As with VSLAs empowerment is difficult to achieve because women were not able to significantly improve their lives. Further, the microcredit system does not solve women's issues over land titles. Lastly, there exist multiple cases in which husbands use the loans for other purposes, leaving vulnerable women responsible for finding a way to pay it back. It is my belief that Floresta is aware of these issues, as they are working in the Rutana area and are familiar with the community. However, in order to reach a more consensual and workable definition of women's empowerment, a deeper analysis about the priorities and realities of NGOs, governments, and beneficiaries needs to be done

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

This research examined which understandings and practices of women's empowerment are taking place in Rutana Province. The extent, to which the concept of women's empowerment is identified in terms of practices and activities, depends on how its meaning is used and adapted to the conflict context. I argued that the primary definitions of women's empowerment in this context should be those definitions offered by women living in rural Rutana. From data collected in the field, I argued that women's empowerment is not a given gift; it must be forcefully negotiated, particularly in a patriarchal society and government. Access to land by women is still an issue in the government of Burundi.

The major objective was to answer how women's empowerment is understood and practiced on the ground. Accordingly, different actors prefer different concepts. For the rural women respondents, empowerment means to have access to land and credit, and meet basic needs. The NGOs understand that it is access to microcredit and political participation. While Floresta's internal documents focus on the idea of agricultural supply and access to credit, Floresta personnel think of women's empowerment as the ability to meet basic needs and, to access income and resources. Moreover, in practice empowerment is done by supplying women farmers with agricultural inputs and loans, and by helping them find land and meet basic needs. Based on my observations, I understand that helping women to find a land to cultivate could work on the ground where the issue of land ownership is the major challenge for those who depend on agriculture to survive. Nevertheless, the power dynamics involved in sexual exploitation and the problems of shifting labour relations potentially resulting from unpaid debts contracted from the micro credit services is still a challenge which needs to be addressed the ground. The traditional sexual practices that affect women in Burundi need more follow up.

However, it is with great optimism, that I can cite the African saying: "where there is Will there is a Way". Women are the first to determine their destiny and are willing to seize every opportunity and let their silenced voices be heard. Rural women of Rutana are actively involved in survival of their households and are more and more involved in economic activities. The bottom-up approach should be used to community development for women who are willing to improve their own economic status and this need to be reinforced in the province of Rutana and in Burundi at large.



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 Interviews tools

### Questions asked to women' beneficiaries during the interview and FGD

#### *Information on women empowerment and local priorities*

1. How can you define women empowerment?
2. Do you think that the inequality between men and women is a barrier for your development?
3. Why the inequality between men and women still remain?
4. Do you think that there is a link between women and development?
5. What are the main priorities which can help you to be developed?
6. If you can change some things in your life, what could be?
7. Which crops are locally grown? Which new varieties do you want to experiment?
8. Which type of fertilizer do you use?
9. Do you the right to make decisions in your household?
10. Have you asked for a credit?

Yes, for what?

No, why?

11. Where have you found the money to refund?
12. Have you get any interest after refund the credit and the rate?
13. What are your tasks at home/your husband?
14. Who is in charge of the loan? You or your husband?
15. How much money do you save per week?
16. How was your every day before to be a member of an association?
17. What benefits have you gained from this VS&LA system?
18. Does Floresta help you to get the loan?
19. What are the problems in doing association's work?
20. What are your future plans?

#### *Information on Floresta Experience*

1. What benefits do you gain to have a partner such as Floresta?
2. Do the Floresta's staffs ask you to do something by force?
3. Do you good relations between members?
4. Have any of member ever quit the group without inform the staff Floresta?

5. Are there sanctions for those who do not participate in work of the association?
6. Why are there many /few women in the associations?