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A Thousand Hills and Sixteen Women

Exploring Institutions and Female Leadership in Rwanda

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Abstract

This research paper investigates how institutional factors shape women's experiences in leadership. We investigate this issue in Kigali, Rwanda, a country widely recognized and applauded for its commitment and achievements in promoting gender equality. This research paper uses a qualitative methodology and is set out as an exploratory study based on a field research design. Using the experiences of 16 female leaders, we analyzed data from in-depth interviews, observations, and secondary resources to account for the role of intersectionality in institutional theory. We analyze this data using a Thematic Analysis style, allowing us to focus on shared experiences and their ascribed significance. We find that formal institutions, particularly the Inheritance Law (1999), gender-sensitive Constitution (2003), and anti-GBV Law (2009), have contributed to advancing gender equality in Rwanda. Social conventions, such as traditional gender roles, and cultural-cognitive factors, including women's self-confidence, remain significant barriers. The findings of our study demonstrate that intersectionality represents a pivotal aspect that shapes the degree of institutional power exerted over women and underscores the significance of employing equity strategies to mitigate intermediate barriers. The study also highlights the interplay between formal and informal institutions, revealing that top-down changes initiated through formal institutions have the potential to shape the normative and cultural-cognitive pillars by offering descriptive and symbolic representation. However, our findings suggest that achieving significant transformation within the normative pillar presents a formidable challenge constraining the effective development of the other two pillars. The study emphasizes the need for gender policies that account for intersectionality to prevent a widening gap between '*elite*' and '*disadvantaged*' women. The findings offer valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers and practitioners seeking to promote gender equity and women's leadership in Rwanda and other similar contexts.

Keywords: Rwanda, Gender, Leadership, Institutions, Intersectionality, Equity

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Moreover, we are grateful for our local contacts in Kigali, who helped us connect with participants and provided us with valuable contextual insights. Not only did they demonstrate how valuable women's networks really are, but they also enhanced our research and made our time in the field more pleasant and fulfilling.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Contextual Introduction

Famously known as the 'land of the thousand hills,' hearing of Rwanda perhaps evokes memories of its tumultuous past for most people. The country's tragic history is marked by the genocide against the Tutsi and moderate Hutus in 1994. In a meticulously orchestrated and heartlessly executed massacre carried out by Hutu extremists governing the country at the time, over half a million Rwandans lost their lives in just three months, targeted solely based on their ethnic heritage. Following the defeat of the ruling government's army by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a new government was established, marking the end of the genocide's principal part. What most people do not know is that a mere nine years following these tragic events, the country held its national parliamentary elections (September 2003), electing 39 women to the 80-member Chamber of Deputies (Burnet, 2008). With that, Rwanda surpassed Sweden's previous record for the highest percentage of females in a national legislature. Today, Rwanda's government is considered efficient and technocratic (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013), and the country has experienced considerable economic growth (annual GDP) since 1994 (The World Bank, 2021b). Additionally, Rwanda has implemented an ambitious economic modernization agenda aimed at transitioning from a low- to medium-income status and is among the top ten countries for gender parity, having closed beyond 80% of its gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2022). While this is arguably impressive, there have been mixed voices from the international community and observers on Rwanda's post-conflict development.

On the one side, Rwanda's government has been praised for its swift reconstruction efforts, successfully reinstating basic services, including healthcare, education, and infrastructure, in the aftermath of the genocide (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). The installment and representation of women in government have further been commented on by observers, including the United Nations (UN) and international journalists, as "*the dawn of a new, more 'peaceful,' and 'equitable' age in Rwandan politics*" (Burnet, 2008, p. 362). Enhancing women's involvement in public life is a widely acknowledged objective of post-conflict peace- and state-building, and Rwanda exemplifies some of the best practices for gender-equality reforms prescribed by international organizations (Buss & Ali, 2017). However, despite Rwanda's impressive progress in women's political representation, other developments seem to counteract meaningful democracy (Burnet, 2008). Thus, on the other hand,

Rwanda's government has been subject to critical voices concerned with the increasing authoritarian structures "*under the guise of 'democratization'*" (Burnet, 2008, p. 363) and the constraint of political liberties (Longman, 2011). In the 'Freedom in the World 2023' Report (Freedom House, 2023), Rwanda is rated as 'Not Free' until today and is one of the few countries that has consistently remained in this category over the past 50 years. Rwanda's current political system is considered an entrenched autocracy (Freedom House, 2023), casting doubts on "*the actual significance of women's high levels of representation*" (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013, p. 1112).

The importance of considering the transformative potential of gender-streamlined policy and female representation is especially vital when examining leadership opportunities. The term 'transformative potential' refers to a policy's capacity to challenge deeply rooted societal norms that perpetuate gender inequalities and emphasizes the importance of analyzing power dynamics and social relations between men and women (Debusscher, 2011; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). Looking at literature, it is evident that men have historically been favored in the sphere of leadership (Powell, 2020), and additionally, the gendered nature of leadership has been highlighted (Schein et al., 1996; Shabliy et al., 2020). Female leaders are still publicly subjected to gender stereotypes undermining their progress and creating unfavorable impressions about women's ability to lead (Shabliy et al., 2020). The gender disparity in leadership is a recognized and widely debated issue that begins early in women's careers and amplifies as they progress, and, in many economies, women are still barred from certain positions solely based on their gender. Whether conscious or unconscious, biases targeting specific attributes such as gender, religion, or socioeconomic class can influence how individuals interact with others (Powell, 2020; Shabliy et al., 2020). However, most studies addressing the linkages of gender and leadership have failed to speak to the intersectionality related to such gendered leadership challenges (Powell, 2020). Intersectionality is further crucially related to institutions and their influence on individuals (Sidani et al., 2015), which is why we believe the regard of intersectionality and institutions is critical to consider when examining leadership and gender.

Subsequently, existing leadership literature commonly lacks consideration of intersectionality when examining gender dynamics (Powell, 2020), while post-conflict literature mainly focuses on the significance of increased political participation rather than the transformative potential in broader societal terms (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). By identifying these gaps, we aim to

investigate how institutions shape the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda. Rwanda presents a particularly fascinating context to explore this as it is considered a world leader in expanding women's inclusion in politics and promoting and protecting women's rights, with women's political representation evolving from total exclusion under colonial rule to "*a female majority parliament as of 2017*" (Burnet, 2019, p. 564). The country's historical background, development, and institutional arrangements, including its enshrinement of gender quotas in the new constitution 2003 (Burnet, 2019), provide a rich context to examine the interplay between female leadership and gendered institutions.

To explore this, we have conducted a case study in Kigali. This research study's primary data is based on results from semi-structured interviews with 16 women leaders in Rwanda. Systematically placing our data collection period (two weeks) around Women's Day (early March 2023), we initially established contact with women at several events in celebration of Women's Day and prior to our arrival through LinkedIn. After gaining initial access to appropriate respondents for our case study, snowball sampling proved to be an effective strategy for identifying and recruiting more interview participants. All interviews were conducted in English, with an average duration of 63 minutes. Our 16 respondents all hold leadership positions in different companies or non-government organizations (NGOs) across various industries. Given the sensitivity of our research topic, we guaranteed all participants anonymity. To contextualize and complement the data and insights we gained through our respondents, we made use of existing empirical and theoretical literature. We hereby placed a particular focus on literature around female political representation (Coffé, 2012), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), as well as institutional theory (Scott, 1995/2013; Waylen, 2014).

The purpose of this research study is to explore the influence of institutional factors on female leadership. Our findings demonstrate that formal institutions have significantly advanced women and female leaders in Rwanda. However, social conventions and cultural-cognitive factors still present significant barriers to gender equality. Our analysis also shows the intricate interplay between formal and informal institutions in Rwanda, where changes initiated through formal institutions have the potential to influence normative and cultural-cognitive pillars in the gender equality sphere. Despite this potential, our findings reveal that the normative pillar continues to resist regulatory-induced changes, ultimately limiting progress in the cultural-cognitive pillar. It is essential to recognize the importance of intersectionality in how institutions shape the experiences

of female leaders in Rwanda, as it plays a vital role in determining the extent of power wielded by each pillar. To prevent the potential transfer of gender issues to matters of social class, we recommend that gender-focused policies consider the intersectionality of factors involved. Ignoring this could lead to the exacerbation of elite privilege, perpetuating inequality. Moving forward, promoting equity should be a primary objective of development initiatives, as a narrow focus on equality strategies alone may not adequately address intermediate barriers. With these considerations in mind, we have provided recommendations for both governmental and corporate entities.

1.2. Research Question

This research study is guided by the following research question:

How do formal and informal institutional factors shape the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda?

To inform and facilitate the exploration of this central research question, we investigate the following two sub-research questions through which we will answer our guiding question:

A. How are the key institutional factors constituted?
B. How do these institutional factors interact with one another?

Our research questions are designed to underscore the significance of considering the intricate interplay of various institutional factors that impact women's opportunities to attain and retain leadership positions. Given Rwanda's unique position globally, with the highest female representation in parliaments (UN Women, 2023), it is imperative to explore the institutional interplay to gain insight into the dynamics that go beyond legal parameters and significantly affect women's lives. This exploration is crucial for identifying the underlying factors beyond legal parameters that contribute to these barriers to provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers to gender equality. Our first sub-research question, therefore, aims at defining the institutional factors and their composition in the Rwandan context. Based on this, the second-sub research question explores the interaction of such institutional factors and their reciprocal influence. Eventually, our main research question addresses how the construction and interplay of institutions in Rwanda manifest in women's lives, particularly focusing on how they shape the experiences of

female leaders. The underlying assumption here is that these institutions can either be enabling or disabling. By the end of our inquiry, we hope to provide an informed assertion on the interplay of institutions and their influence on female leaders' realities to understand the possibilities and restrictions associated with changing institutional factors.

1.3. Terminology and Presuppositions

Before continuing with the rest of our thesis, we feel it is important to offer some essential clarifications and explanations that should be considered while reading. The following section will therefore include the definition and explanation of some recurring and vital terms and concepts of our study, as well as the acknowledgment of underlying presuppositions linked to the topic. This is particularly critical in our thesis, given the sensitive nature of the theme and in consideration of the impact language plays in our social constructivist essence.

Women

As this research study pertains to the domain of gender with a particular focus on women's experiences, it is crucial to clarify whom we include when speaking about '*Women'*. Defining the term *Women* is fundamental to our research inquiry and necessary given the performative potential of language (Fleming & Banerjee, 2015). When identifying this term, we must heed the concepts of '*sex'* and '*gender.*' While *sex* describes "*the invariant, anatomically distinct, and factic aspects*" (Butler, 1986, p. 35) of the male and female bodies, *gender* labels the "*relationship between biological sex and behavior*" (Udry, 1994, p. 561) and is a social construct that ascribes attributes and roles to the sexes (UNICEF South Asia, 2017). We further approach these concepts in the spirit of Judith Butler (1990/1999), who describes *gender* and *sex* as separate but highly interdependent concepts that reproduce each other, making the two complex to separate entirely. Followingly, we acknowledge that sex and gender are by no means the same, but drawing a separation between the two and evaluating their associated philosophical deliberations as part of our interpretation would go beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, for the sake of simplification, we do not base our analysis and interpretation on a separation between *sex* and *gender* and will use *Women* and *Female* interchangeably. Followingly, when talking about *Women*, we adhere to the *gender* binary concept of a separation between *Men* and *Women* and hence refer to all individuals who are both biologically assigned to the *female sex* and identify as *Women* in terms of their *gender*. By establishing *Women* as a societal group, we, therefore, imply certain commonalities among

individuals, these being their *female* biological *sex* and the cultural/ societal associations that are placed upon them based on that *sex* (Barker, 1997). However, we do not assume that these *Women* are otherwise uniform.

Gender Equality

Gender equality implies that the same treatment is given to both women and men (UNICEF South Asia, 2017). Followingly, opportunities shall not depend on whether an individual is born male or female but on their knowledge and capabilities. Achieving *gender equality* is not only considered a matter of human rights, but it is also essential for human-centric and sustainable development, serving as both a precondition and an indicator for such (UNICEF South Asia, 2017). Followingly it is a concept particularly relevant to explore in a developing country context. A sub-theme of gender equality to further clarify is the term *Gender Parity*, which is the related numerical concept addressing the relative equality of women and men in terms of numbers, proportions, or ratios. (UNICEF South Asia, 2017).

Gender Equity

We see *gender equity* as an advanced step of gender equality, focusing not only on equal treatment of women and men but rather aiming for "*equality of outcomes and results*" (UNICEF South Asia, 2017, p. 3). This involves differential treatment to "*compensate for historical or systemic bias or discrimination*" (UNICEF South Asia, 2017, p. 3). Hence, equity refers to treating both genders fairly and justly while also considering their unique needs, cultural obstacles, and past or current discrimination.

Feminism

The word Feminism historically had and still has various wide-ranging definitions. To build up our definition of feminism, we take our point of departure in Simone de Beauvoir's (1949/2011) philosophy, finding *feminism's* basic message in the assumption that women should have the same access to resources and opportunities as men. De Beauvoir (1949/2011) sees laws, education, and customs as essential drivers to equality and believes that such must be transformed to encourage equal treatment. However, we would like to go a step further and define feminism not as a "*'women only' arena*" (Schacht & Ewing, 1997, p. 1), or even worse, in competitive terms seeing women going against men, we would like to see it as "*a cooperative effort to improve the quality of life for everyone.*" (Schacht & Ewing, 1997, p. 1). Following, we define *feminism* as the aim and fight for the social, political, cultural, and economic equality of the sexes as well as the empowerment and

support of all marginalized or disadvantaged groups. We believe feminism to be a concept that should advance and liberate men and all other genders just as much as women.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a feminist sociological theory, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, that focuses on overlapping social identities and associated systems of oppression, domination, and discrimination that shape individuals' experiences. as multiple identities intersect to form a unique whole (UNICEF South Asia, 2017). The underlying idea is that the intersection of different identity components shapes experiences. In our context, this means that women do not all have universal experiences despite sharing a gender due to other variables such as age, race, or social strata.

Intermediate Barriers

Intermediate barriers, also called *gender bottlenecks*, define the available options and opportunities for individuals based on their gender (UNICEF South Asia). They include underlying factors such as heavier household burdens for girls and women or more significant safety risks.

Developing Country & Development Research

'*Development Research*' thematizes historical or contemporary issues, challenges, or topics for *Developing Countries* or countries in conflict and special situations (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). In development literature, the term '*Developing Country*' (DC) (often synonymously used with '*Global South*') commonly refers to countries that have little economic and social development as well as low levels of geopolitical power (Lange, 2015). Commonly, the denotation of a *DC* implied constraints in the state's ability to govern effectively due to intricate historical, political, or economic reasons (Azizi et al., 2021). However, one finds considerably varying levels of development among countries regarded as *DC*, making it essential to recognize their distinct historical backgrounds and contemporary situations (Lange, 2015). The United Nations (UN) further provide a classification of the sub-category of '*Least Developed Countries*' (LDC) as "*low-income countries suffering from structural impediments to sustainable developments*" (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021, p. 3) and has defined Rwanda as one of the currently 46 *LDC*s (United Nations Committee for Development Policy, 2021).

Productive Sphere

The '*productive sphere*' refers to the domain of economic activity that involves the production of material goods and services for exchange in the market (Li et al., 2022). It includes all forms of work

that generate income, such as manufacturing, agriculture, and service industries. In modern societies, the productive sphere is dominated by the capital market, which places a high value on efficiency, profitability, and growth. This emphasis on market exchange often results in the prioritization of economic interests over social or environmental concerns and can lead to inequality and exploitation within the labor force.

Reproductive Space

The '*reproductive sphere*' refers to the social and economic activity domain that involves the maintenance and reproduction of human life (Li et al., 2022). It encompasses a range of activities, such as childbearing, child-rearing, and domestic labor, that are essential for the survival and well-being of individuals and society. Traditionally, the reproductive sphere is often structured around the family unit, with women primarily responsible for domestic labor.

Recognitions

This research project only focuses on the binary distinction of the male and female sex as well as what is commonly understood as men and women in terms of gender and excludes intersex and non-binary gender forms from its analysis. However, we acknowledge the existence of all further genders and believe that their struggles are worth being examined, but for the sake of simplification and resource constraints, our research is based on a gender binary understanding. Beyond reasons of simplification, our research is rooted in the binary understanding of women and men for two main reasons:

1. Our research aims to contribute to the existing body of literature on gender and leadership and is informed by previous studies within that field. This research is usually rooted in the binary gender understanding; hence, we focus on the two genders to retain comparability.
2. As (to our knowledge) none of our respondents identify as non-binary, we do not have access to any empirical data including non-binary experiences. Our research is, therefore, limited to exploring binary gender differences.

All the above-inspected terms may be evaluated under different standpoints with varying resulting definitions. Nonetheless, for the remainder of this research paper, we imply the above-defined meanings for these terms.

1.4. Chapter Overview

We have organized this thesis into seven chapters best read chronologically: Introduction, Background Information Rwanda, Literature Review & Theoretical Framework, Methodology, Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusion.

Chapter 1 serves as the Introduction of our thesis, providing an overview of the purpose and problem that form the basis of our research. We begin with a thematic entry point, contextualizing our study within the broader discourse on Rwanda, institutional factors, and gender equality. We then present our research questions, which guide our analysis and inquiry throughout the thesis. We then provide definitions of central terminology and presuppositions. Finally, we outline the structure of the paper to guide the reader through the following chapters.

In Chapter 2, we provide a thematic overview of the history of Rwanda from pre-colonial times to the present day. We examine the key political, economic, and social events that have shaped the country's trajectory, highlighting their impact on gender relations and women's status in society. Additionally, we devote a subsection to the role of women throughout this historical period, examining their contributions and challenges in different spheres of life. Through this chapter, we aim to contextualize our study within Rwanda's broader historical and social context, shedding light on the complex factors that have influenced gender relations and women's leadership opportunities in the country.

Chapter 3 comprehensively reviews the relevant empirical and theoretical literature on institutional factors and their influence on women's leadership opportunities in Rwanda and beyond. Drawing from a wide range of sources, we synthesize the existing research, identifying key themes, debates, and knowledge gaps in the field. We then use this review to frame our theoretical framework for analysis, identifying the key concepts and variables that will guide our empirical investigation in later chapters. By situating our study within the broader scholarly discourse, we aim to build on and contribute to the existing knowledge base while advancing our unique research questions and insights.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology used to conduct our study, beginning with an overview of our chosen philosophy of science. We then detail our research design and approach, including our data collection methods and data analysis techniques. Additionally, we address the ethical considerations and limitations of our study, including issues related to informed consent and

confidentiality. By providing a transparent and rigorous account of our methodology, we aim to ensure the credibility and validity of our findings.

In Chapter 5, we present our analysis of the primary data collected in our study, drawing on a range of secondary data sources and our field observations to provide a rich and contextualized understanding of the institutional factors that influence women's leadership opportunities in Rwanda. Specifically, we aim to answer our two sub-research questions and our main research question by analyzing the data in a rigorous and systematic manner to identify key themes, patterns, and relationships. Throughout our analysis, we pay close attention to the nuances and complexities of the Rwandan context, exploring how historical, political, and social factors intersect to shape gender relations and women's leadership opportunities. By presenting our findings in a clear and comprehensive manner, we aim to contribute to the existing knowledge base on this important topic while also offering insights and recommendations for policymakers and practitioners working to promote gender equality and women's leadership in Rwanda and beyond.

In Chapter 6, we present a critical discussion of our findings in light of the existing empirical and theoretical literature on institutional factors and women's leadership opportunities in Rwanda and beyond. Drawing on our analysis from Chapter Five, we situate our research within the broader scholarly discourse, identifying key points of convergence and divergence with previous studies. We then critically evaluate the contribution of our findings, assessing their implications for theory, practice, and policy and highlighting their potential to advance our understanding of gendered institutions and their effects on women's leadership opportunities. By offering a nuanced and rigorous analysis of the institutional factors that influence women's leadership opportunities in Rwanda, we aim to contribute to ongoing efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the country and beyond.

Chapter 7 serves as the conclusion of our thesis, summarizing our research's key findings and contributions. We begin by restating our research questions and highlighting the main points of our analysis, drawing on the insights gained in Chapters Five and Six. We then reflect on the implications of our findings for theory, practice, and policy, emphasizing the need for a multi-level and intersectional approach to understanding gendered institutions and their effects on women's leadership opportunities. Finally, we offer suggestions for future research and conclude with a call for continued efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Rwanda and

beyond. Our conclusion highlights the significance of our research in advancing our understanding of the institutional factors that shape women's opportunities to attain and maintain leadership positions and underscores the importance of continued engagement with this critical issue.

2. Background Information Rwanda

This chapter provides the necessary background information about the country of exploration - Rwanda. Firstly, we will set the scene by providing a short overview of the country, supplemented with relevant economic and social indicators. Next, we will describe the relevant history for this thesis, starting with precolonial times and continuing through the aftermath of the genocide. Lastly, we will explore the role of women throughout the country's past.

2.1. Setting the Scene

Rwanda is a landlocked country located in East Africa and is one of the smallest nations on the African continent (The World Bank, 2023). The country is known for the genocide of 1994 that resulted in the deaths of around 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus (Buss & Ali, 2017). Since then, Rwanda has undergone significant political and social reforms and has worked to promote national reconciliation and economic development. As a result, Rwanda made remarkable progress in economic development, including a more than threefold increase in per capita income since 1994 (The World Bank & Government of Rwanda, 2020). Thus, Rwanda is among the fastest-growing economies in Africa and the world, despite being classified as a Least Developed Country (United Nations, 2022). A significant milestone for Rwanda's success was the 'Vision 2020' (Republic of Rwanda, 2012). Despite Rwanda not fully achieving its goal of becoming a middle-income nation by 2020, the program still provided the country with a strategic roadmap for economic development by emphasizing six essential pillars. These include good governance, an efficient state, skilled human capital, a vibrant private sector, world-class physical infrastructure, and modern agriculture and livestock. With the 'Vision 2050,' Rwanda keeps future aspirations in this regard high as it formulates the ambition to become an upper-middle-income country by 2035 and a high-income country by 2050 (Republic of Rwanda, 2015; The World Bank and Government of Rwanda, 2020).

In sub-Saharan Africa, where weak institutions and problems with corruption and governance are endemic, Rwanda stands out positively (Newiak et al., 2022). The country has significantly reduced corruption in the last years and is often recognized as one of the leading countries with the effort to implement good governance in the region. That is also evident in Rwanda's performance in the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) index, a measurement tool developed by the World Bank (The World Bank, 2021a). The index evaluates the quality of a country's policies and institutions, focusing on factors such as governance, public administration, legal framework, regulatory practices, and control of corruption. As shown in Figure 1, Rwanda consistently outperforms the sub-Saharan African average and its neighboring countries on the CPIA index:

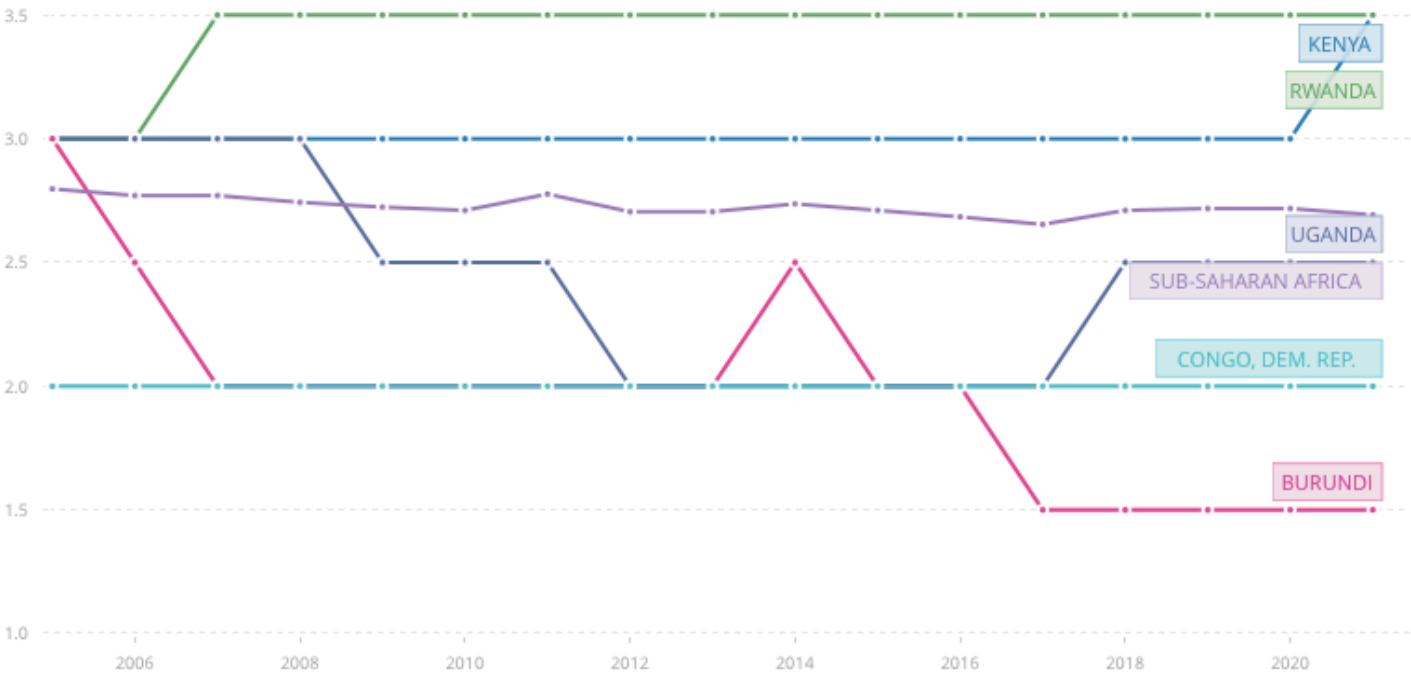

Figure 1: Country Policy and Institutional Assessment Index (The World Bank, 2021a)

That is also evident in the country's progress towards easing business development. While Rwanda was ranked lower than 150th in the World Bank's Doing Business report before 2010 (The World Bank, 2006), it has since significantly improved, reaching rank 38 in 2020 (The World Bank, 2020). Therewith, Rwanda has become one of only two sub-Saharan African countries to be ranked in the top 50 globally. Similar insights are demonstrated by the increase in Rwanda's foreign direct

investment inflows over the past decades (UNCTAD, 2021). That is also supported by the perceived attractiveness of Rwanda to investors compared to other East African countries due to the country's stability and regulatory environment (Raga, 2022).

Rwanda is also celebrated as an international success story in women's rights and gender equality (Buss & Ali, 2017). With 61 %, it has the highest rate of female representation in parliaments globally (UN Women, 2023) and is listed 6th in the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), right after the Nordic countries and New Zealand (World Economic Forum, 2022). In fact, in 2022, Rwanda closed more than 81% of its gender gap and has been consistently featured in the Top 10 of the GGGI over the last few years. The GGGI measures progress in four areas – health, education, economy, and politics. Especially in the economic sphere, Rwanda represents one of the highest rates of female labor force participation globally, with 86% (Thomson, 2017). Rwanda's President Kagame has received international praise for his efforts to promote women and gender equality (Buss & Ali, 2017) and has been awarded various international recognitions, including the 2016 Gender Champion Award (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2022).

2.2. Historical Background

By the start of the colonial period at the end of the 19th century, Rwanda was a centralized, hierarchical kingdom with important class distinctions (Newbury, 1998). There are differing opinions about the relations among the three ethnic groups in precolonial Rwanda. One perspective suggests that Hutus, Tutsis, and Twa lived together in a state of symbiosis and harmony with no significant differences between the three ethnic groups. While Hutus were commonly farmers, Tutsis mostly held positions of power and were primarily cattle herders. However, social mobility was possible. There were also instances of influential Hutus, as well as Hutus who owned cattle and Tutsis who practiced agriculture. The contrasting view argues that precolonial Rwanda was marked by significant social inequalities, where powerful actors, mostly Tutsi, exercised their power and authority. What remains undisputed is the profound impact of colonialization on Rwandan politics and society, particularly in relation to its impact on the relationship between all ethnic groups. The country was first under German colonial rule and, after 1916, under Belgian control. The European colonizers sought to uphold what they perceived as the 'traditional' power structures, where Tutsi

aristocrats held control over Hutu peasants. However, their interpretation of the monarchial structures was not accurate for Rwanda, especially not for people living in rural areas.

The colonialization was influenced by Hamitic theory, which attributed racial differences to the origins of Hutu and Tutsi (Kubai & Ahlberg, 2013). The Hamitic Hypothesis is an explicit formulation of white racial superiority and posits that sub-Saharan African civilization was only established by '*Hamites*' (i.e., racially white) while negating black Africans' history and cultural accomplishments (Law, 2009). Tutsis were considered descendants of '*Hamites'*; thus, they were regarded as naturally superior to Hutus and Twa (Chirayath et al., 2005). This racial ideology was observable in how the Belgian colonizers imposed order, standardized social relations, and provided power to the 'natural rulers' Tutsis (Newbury, 1998). During colonial rule, ethnic group membership determined one's opportunities in life, and identity cards were introduced to assign individuals to specific ethnic categories. As a result, Hutu were classified as second-class citizens with fewer educational and professional opportunities than Tutsi. Twa were even more marginalized with minimal access to education. These circumstances led to widespread dissatisfaction, especially in the rural areas. During the 1950s, a Hutu counter-elite started advocating for democratization, equal opportunity, and access to education, employment, and social services for all Rwandans, regardless of their ethnic background or social rank. However, these demands resulted in a backlash among those in power who feared losing their privileged positions. The conflict further escalated following an assault on a Hutu subchief by a group of Tutsi, resulting in rural uprisings against Tutsi aristocracy and Tutsi in influential positions.

The Rwandan Revolution of 1959 ultimately led to Rwanda's independence in 1962 (Newbury, 1998). In 1962, the overthrow of European rule was accompanied by overthrowing the power position held by the Tutsis (Powley, 2004). In the following years, a new ruling elite of Hutu majority emerged, which established itself in the name of democracy. Tutsis were only represented in small numbers in parliament and cabinet (Newbury, 1998). In 1964, Tutsi guerrillas launched an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Hutu-led government of Rwanda. The government responded by allowing and encouraging massacres of Tutsi in rural areas. Many innocent Tutsi were targeted and killed in these attacks, not because of any individual actions but because of their ethnic identity. The government used violence to punish and intimidate the Tutsi population, scapegoating them for the attempted rebellion. As a result of the ongoing conflicts, many Rwandans, mostly Tutsi,

took refuge in neighboring countries. Exiled Rwandans formed the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) in the late 1980s in Uganda. The RPF launched a military attack on Rwanda, aiming to enable Rwandans in exile to return and pushing for the democratization of the authoritarian Rwandan government. Juvénal Habyarimana, Rwanda's president at the time, was skeptical of the RPF's intentions, accusing the RPF of trying to overthrow the Hutu government to establish Tutsi dominance and monarchy, reversing the results of the Rwandan Revolution. Despite many Rwandans being dissatisfied with Habyarimana's rule, they were also reluctant to be governed by the RPF. The government's response to the RPF attack was similar to its response to the guerrilla intervention in 1964, and shortly after the attack, more than 9,000 Tutsi and Hutu critics of the government were arrested: "*One can see a recurrent pattern: the tendency for a regime threatened by external attack to target an internal scapegoat and to rationalize its behavior by propagating a corporate view of ethnicity."* (Newbury, 1998, p. 16). The ensuing civil war caused displacement and deaths of thousands of civilians and resulted in the Arusha Peace Accords, which included political negotiations for peace and power-sharing but was never fully implemented from 1992 to 1993.

On April 6th, 1994, the plane of Habyarimana was shot down over Kigali. What remains unclear until today is who was responsible for this assassination (Powley, 2004). This event represented the triggering event for the start of the genocide perpetrated by Hutu extremists against Tutsi and politically moderate Hutus (Burnet, 2008). In less than three months, the Rwandan army and the Hutu militia known as Interahamwe killed over half a million people, an estimated one-tenth of the population (Buss & Ali, 2017; Powley, 2005). The genocide ended when the RPF took military control of most of the territory in July 1994, driving Hutu extremists, militias, and complicit civilians into exile (Burnet, 2008). On July 19th, the RPF installed a transitional government that was committed to power-sharing as outlined in the Arusha Peace Accords. While the transitional government was initially set to serve for five years, it eventually remained in power until 2003 as part of the reconstruction efforts. These reconstruction efforts included an ideological program to build a 'new Rwanda' where people refuse the genocidal ideology of the past and strive for democratization efforts. However, the RPF was criticized for committing extrajudicial executions and several massacres, ultimately causing several Hutus to flee into exile.

With the adoption of the new Rwandan Constitution, the transitional period ended in 2003 (Buss & Ali, 2017). The new constitution formalized equal rights for all Rwandans, including a gender-

sensitive scope (Powley, 2005). The constitution not only officially acknowledges gender equality but also implemented electoral quotas reserving 30% of all elected positions in official bodies for women (Buss & Ali, 2017). In the first national elections held in 2003, the RPF won 33 of 53 seats (Devlin & Elgie, 2008), and Paul Kagame was officially elected as president with 95% of the votes (Waldorf, 2017). An overview of the evolvement of the proportion of seats (%) in parliament held by women from 1997-2021 is shown in Figure 2 (The World Bank, 2019):

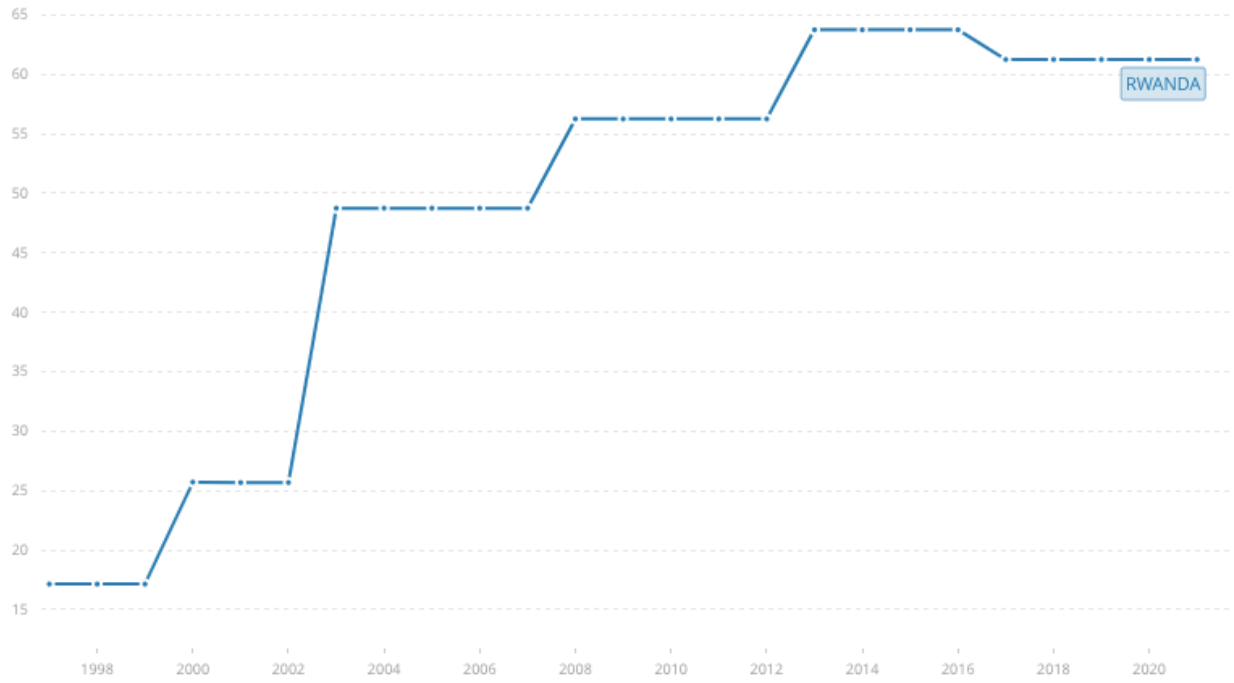

Figure 2: Seats held by Women in National Parliaments (The World Bank, 2019)

These elections were criticized for falling short of the expected standards for free and fair elections (Devlin & Elgie, 2008). Paradoxically, the democratization efforts resulted in a more authoritarian regime as the RPF consolidated its power (Burnet, 2008). Human rights groups noted limits on campaigning and access to the media, restrictions on freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, intimidation at the polls, and suspect candidate identification (Powley, 2004). In addition, the RPF regime destroyed any potential political opposition and reduced the tolerance for independent expression and political dissent (Burnet, 2008). Thus, elections had been orchestrated from the ground up, ensuring pre-selected candidates were winning. In fact, Rwanda is not regarded as an electoral democracy, being one of the few countries consistently rated 'Not Free' in the Freedom In The World Reports for the past 50 years (Freedom House, 2023).

It is crucial to underline that Rwanda is considered an authoritarian state (Devlin & Elgie, 2008) with the dominance of a single party and significant concerns about the lack of civil liberties and democratic freedoms (Powley, 2004). The regime's authoritarian nature is also evident in the relationship between the state and civil society, as NGOs and civil society actors must align their strategies with government policy (Burnet, 2008). Thus, it was argued that the RPF "*has dressed its increasingly authoritarian governance in democratic clothing by promoting its policies as the best methods to ensure 'security' and 'good governance*." (Burnet, 2008, p. 366). One part of these efforts for good governance is the increased attention to including women in the post-conflict peace- and state-building strategy (Buss & Ali, 2017). Therefore, critics argue that Kagame, the 2016 Gender Champion, "*is no champion of democracy*" as "*for more than 20 years, he has rigged elections, coerced opponents, and disregarded human rights to keep a tight hold on power*" (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2022, p. 1). Bjarnegård and Zetterberg (2022) identify that many autocrats strategically redirect attention toward gender, an area widely conceived as linked to democracy while diverting attention from their authoritarian abuses. This practice is described as 'autocratic gender washing.' This further links to critical voices asserting that gender equality policies and structures have been put in place formally to attract foreign aid (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; Hogg, 2009). Rwanda is regarded as a so-called 'aid darling' due to its "*climate of security and political stability [that] is seen as a vital condition for good governance*" and as a criterion necessary for the effectiveness of aid (Marysse et al., 2007, p. 13). As a result, it is argued that the international community has developed a one-sided view of the RPF and President Kagame (Burnet, 2008), praising Rwanda for promoting gender equality and applauding the efforts to modernize the country while overlooking human rights abuses and authoritarianism of the regime. Although our thesis does not aim to assess the authoritarian nature of the RPF and President Kagame, it is crucial to acknowledge the existing criticism because the motivation behind promoting gender equality can significantly influence its implementation (Buss & Ali, 2017). The timeline in Figure 3 presents a concise overview of the most significant historical events of Rwanda:

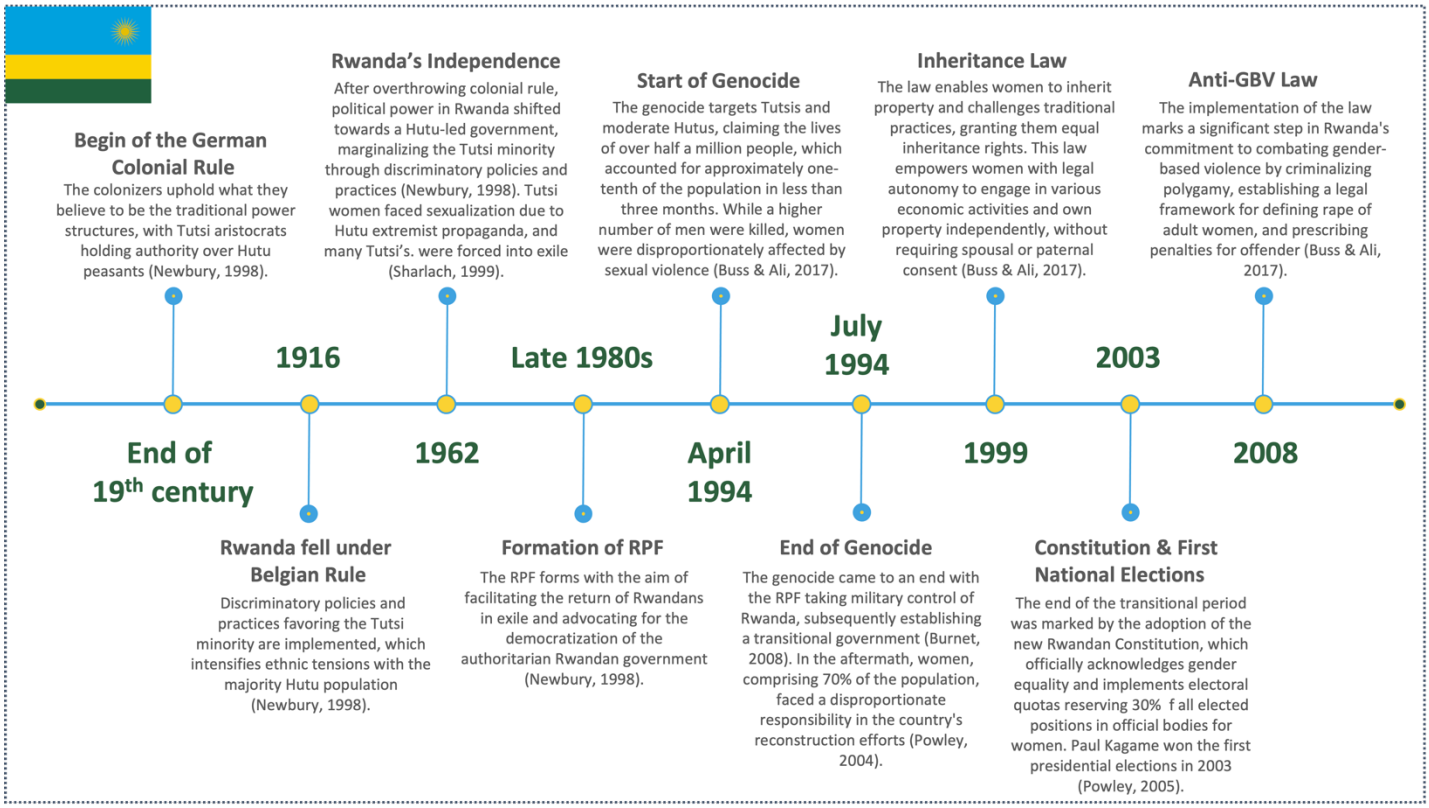

Figure 3: Historical Timeline Rwanda

2.3. Women in Rwanda

The history of Rwanda and especially the impacts of the genocide are highly gendered (Kubai & Ahlberg, 2013; Powley, 2004; Sharlach, 1999). Although violence was inflicted upon all Tutsis, gender played a significant role in determining the nature of the violence experienced. While men were killed in higher numbers, women were not only subjected to targeted killings but were also disproportionately affected by sexual violence (Buss & Ali, 2017). The sexualization of Tutsi women was also the result of Hutu extremist propaganda (Powley, 2004). The so-called 'Hutu Ten Commandments' were widely circulated in the years leading up to the genocide. The propaganda spread false and harmful beliefs about Tutsi women and urged Hutu women to protect Hutu men from Tutsi women while discouraging both professional and romantic interactions between them. Moreover, the 'Hutu Ten Commandments' encouraged the idea that Hutu girls were more dignified and better suited for traditional roles as women, wives, and mothers. Through such propaganda, the Rwandan government and media fueled prevailing stereotypes and ethnic resentments, denigrating and sexualizing Tutsi women (Sharlach, 1999). The prevailing attitudes and propaganda in Rwanda

during the genocide set the stage for mass rapes, which were considered an acceptable form of retribution for supposed Tutsi female arrogance and immorality. The systematic use of rape as a weapon during the Rwandan genocide aimed at humiliating and controlling the entire Tutsi population and parallels with patterns observed in other ethnic cleansing campaigns (Hogg, 2009). The difference in inflicted violence upon women during war times and ethnic violence highlights how such violence is often gendered in nature. However, women were both agents and objects of the genocide (Hogg, 2009). Even though they were participating in lower numbers than men, they took part in killings and torture and supported the communication with the Interahamwe (Powley, 2004). Moreover, women were among the core group that planned the genocide and participated in disseminating anti-Tutsi propaganda (Sharlach, 1999). Most of the women perpetrators during the genocide had a deeply ingrained Hutu nationalism ideology, overshadowing any sense of solidarity or empathy towards Tutsi women.

After the genocide, women comprised 70 % of the country's population, with Rwanda's "*social fabric*" (Powley, 2004, p. 6) being completely disrupted. Thus, women were disproportionately burdened with reconstructing the country (Hogg, 2009). "*[Women] They were the ones who picked up the pieces of a literally decimated society and began to rebuild: They buried the dead, found homes for nearly 500.000 orphans, and built shelters.*" (Powley, 2004, p. 5). Moreover, they were forced to assume multiple roles as financial providers, heads of households, and community leaders. Women took over tasks that were typically done by men, such as running farms, repairing damaged houses, and feeding the family (Buss & Ali, 2017). Simultaneously, these women endured not only physical and psychological trauma resulting from the genocide but also faced structural barriers (Sharlach, 1999). For instance, most of the Tutsi women survivors faced poverty as they had lost their husbands and other male family members and were unable to inherit property due to the laws of that time. As a result, various policy changes advanced women's legal status during the period of the transitional government (Buss & Ali, 2017). These changes included the Inheritance Law (1999), enabling Rwandan women to contract, own and inherit property, and the Anti-Gender Based Violence Law (Anti-GBV Law), formally sanctioning domestic violence. Moreover, the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Affairs was introduced with the mandate to "*integrate gender analytical frameworks into all policies and legislation"* (Burnet, 2008, p. 367).

Without a doubt, one of the most prominent advances for women was the launch of the new gender-sensitive constitution (Powley, 2005). The constitution included different mechanisms to increase female participation in parliament, such as a constitutional guarantee, a quota system, and innovative electoral structures. These mechanisms supported women in the first post-genocide parliamentary elections in 2003 to nearly achieve parity in Rwanda's lower house of parliament as they won 48.8% of the seats. At that time, this represented a massive success for Rwanda, where women never represented more than 18% of the parliament, but also internationally. With this percentage, Rwanda ranked first among all countries regarding female presentation in parliament, and it still does today, with 61% of seats in parliament being occupied by women (UN Women, 2023). In the lower house, men and women compete directly for 53 out of all 80 seats through a proportional representation system. In addition, the remaining 24 seats are contested in women-only elections, meaning that only women can vote and stand for election, which is orchestrated through the national system of women's councils. Women's councils are grass-root structures elected only by women at the cell level. They were created to represent women's concerns and engage in skill training and capability building as well as awareness-raising about women's rights. The head of each Women's Council also holds a reserved seat on the local general council to ensure official representation. Criticism about these Women's Councils includes that they lack resources as members of local women's councils are not paid, forcing females to volunteer on top of their paid work and family obligations. In line with previously introduced criticism, Women's Councils are accused of not being real grassroot structures but are rather top-down created to attract foreign aid (Burnet, 2008). Similar critiques are provided for the Gender Monitoring Office, which supports the government's ambition to become a target-driven society (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). It is responsible for gender auditing in NGOs, religious associations, and the public and private sectors. However, critics believe this is a strategic approach to be accountable to foreign donors. While the intentions behind gender streamlined policies of the Rwandan government are debatable, the renewed structures evidently advance women's rights (Burnet, 2008).

3. Literature Review

This chapter presents relevant theoretical and empirical literature and builds up the theoretical framework later used to analyze our findings. Firstly, the history and background of institutional

theory are outlined before laying out the foundations for our theoretical framework discussing Scott (1995/2013), Coffé (2012), Waylen (2014), and Crenshaw (1989). Next, we discuss empirical literature focusing on gender and leadership, female political representation, and studies previously conducted in the Rwandan context or other developing countries.

3.1. Theoretical Literature

3.1.1. Neo-Institutionalism – History and Background

Neo-Institutionalism emerged in the 1970s (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019), with DiMaggio and Powell (1983) being one of the earliest contributors arguing that institutional isomorphisms are the reason why organizations within the same field tend to behave similarly to reduce uncertainty and gain legitimacy. The researchers define three types of institutional isomorphisms: coercive, mimetic, and normative. Coercive isomorphisms represent external formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations. Mimetic isomorphisms refer to the tendency of organizations to imitate the behavior of others, and normative isomorphisms represent the influence of cultural and social norms on organizational behavior. Over the past decades, neo-institutionalism has become one of the most prominent schools of thought within organization studies and political science (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019; Schmidt, 2010). Today, at least four basic variants of neo-institutionalism exist, rational choice, historical, sociological, and discursive institutionalism. Rational choice institutionalists explore how rational actors pursue their interests within institutions, while historical institutionalists focus on how the past and so-called path dependencies shaped present institutions. Sociological institutionalists understand institutions as socially constructed and culturally framed, shaping the behavior of actors. Discursive institutionalists focus on the discourse in which actors engage to generate, deliberate, and legitimize ideas within institutional settings (Schmidt, 2010). While the approaches differ in their theoretical and methodological framings, they all share a core focus on the role of institutions in shaping behavior and outcomes and agree on the definition of an institution (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019).

3.1.2. Institution Definition

One of the most cited definitions of institutions is North's (1990) understanding that they "*are the rules of the game in a society*" (p. 3). He specifies that institutions can constrain or facilitate political, social, and economic exchanges as they provide the framework within which interactions take place. Institutions can represent formal rules, such as laws and informal codes of behavior

(North, 1990). Scott (1995/2013) further categorizes formal and informal institutions into three pillars: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive. Based on Peng et al. (2009), Figure 4 illustrates the interconnections between North's (1990) and Scott's (1995/2013) definitions of institutions. While it is argued that in developed countries, where markets work smoothly, "*institutions are almost invisible*" (McMillan, 2008, p. 2), developing countries are often characterized by formal institutional voids or weak formal institutions, resulting in strong informal institutions (Khanna & Palepu, 2010). Treating institutions as background conditions will thus not create conclusive insights when conducting research in these countries (Peng et al., 2009). Despite Rwanda being a special case among developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa that is often acknowledged for its stable regulatory environment (Raga, 2022), institutional theory is vital in this context to identify how different institutions shape women's experiences.

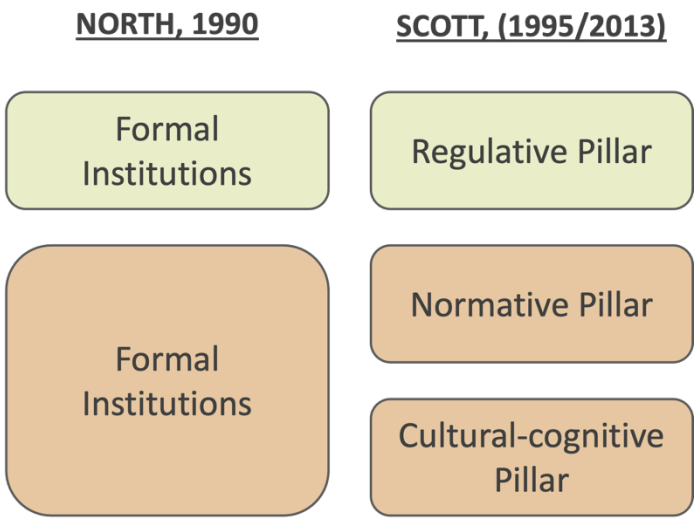

Figure 4: Segmentation of Institutions

3.2. Theoretical Framework

3.2.1. Scott (1995/2013)

Scott's (1995/2013) contribution to institutional theory is characterized by dividing institutions into three pillars. While he terms formal institutions as the regulative pillar, informal institutions are separated into the normative and the cultural-cognitive pillar. By proposing this broad definition of institutions and recognizing that they operate at various levels, "*from the world system to interpersonal interaction*" (Scott, 1995/2013, p. 58), the framework allows us to uncover various factors that influence the experience of women leaders. Therefore, we regard this

framework as particularly suited for our study. Dividing institutions into the three pillars can further be regarded as combining the previous work from scholars of different streams within neo-institutionalist literature since all pillars differ in their underlying logic, indicators, and assumptions about how behavior is constrained or empowered.

The Regulative Pillar

The regulative pillar contains explicit regulatory processes, such as rule-setting, monitoring, and sanctioning activities. The mechanism that controls behavior in the regulative pillar is coercion, meaning individuals and organizations comply with the law as nonconformity to rules is legally sanctioned. Authority exists when this coercive power is both supported and constrained by rules, thereby institutionalizing power. The central imperative of the regulative pillar concerning individuals is, "*What choice is in my own best interests?*" (Scott, 1995/2013, p. 65) and reminds of the argument of rationalist choice institutionalists.

The Normative Pillar

The normative pillar consists of values, beliefs about what is desirable, and norms that specify how things should be done. Moral principles govern behavior, and individuals feel ashamed when they violate norms or honored when they abide by them. This is similar to Foucault's (1975) concept of the panopticon, where individuals self-monitor and regulate their behavior to conform to societal norms and expectations. According to Scott (1995/2013), the pillar involves normative expectations of how specific actors should behave to fulfill their societal roles. The central imperative concerning individuals is, "*Given this situation, and my role within it, what is the appropriate behavior for me to carry out?*" (Scott, 1995/2013, p. 65).

The Cultural-Cognitive Pillar

The cultural-cognitive pillar is defined as *"the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and create the frames through which meaning is made*" (Scott, 1995/2013, p. 67). This pillar recognizes the cognitive dimensions of our human existence and acknowledges that our attribution of meaning to objects and activities affects our perception of the external world. Furthermore, this pillar emphasizes that external cultural factors shape these framing and meaning processes. Compared to the normative and regulative pillars, behavior in the cultural-cognitive pillar is shaped by taken-for-granted routines, and conformity to these routines is based on their perceived correctness. If individuals are not conforming to these taken-for-granted routines, they are perceived as "*at best clueless or at worst crazy*" (Scott, 1995/2013, p. 70).

In stable social systems, all three institutional pillars are aligned, meaning "*practices persist and are reinforced because they are taken for granted, normatively endorsed, and backed by authorized powers*" (Scott, 1995/2013, pp. 70-71). The institutional pillars, however, can also be misaligned and motivate divergent choices and behaviors. In such situations, institutional change likely results from the inherent state of conflict, confusion, and misalignment. While Scott (1995/2013) acknowledges that the interaction between the three institutional pillars can stir conflict or cause institutional change, he does not provide a framework for analyzing these interdependencies. As the central aim of this study is to analyze how formal and informal institutional factors shape the real-life experiences of female leaders in Rwanda, analyzing the interdependencies between the regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive is imperative. We recognize the outlined limitations in Scott's (1995/2013) theory and address them by incorporating a concept introduced by Waylen (2014), which will be further elaborated on in the upcoming section.

Moreover, institutions often have gendered effects; for instance, discriminatory stereotypes on gender roles influence the unequal distribution of caring responsibilities (Ferrant et al., 2014). Even though Scott's (1995/2013) pillars include a broad definition of institutions and acknowledge their influence on interpersonal interaction, they do not specifically address the issue of gender. That is evident in the fact that he elaborates on the existence of roles, how they are constructed, and how they prescribe expectations towards individuals while neglecting the fact that these expectations are often highly gendered. In general, institutional theory has been criticized for overlooking the relationship between institutions and gender, and an emerging body of literature argues that applying a gender lens is needed to provide new insights into this field (Mackay et al., 2010). Over the past ten years, there have been feminist contributions to institutional theory resulting in feminist historical institutionalism, feminist sociological institutionalism, feminist discursive institutionalism, and feminist rational choice institutionalism, leaving the field fragmented (Bogaards, 2022). For this reason, we will not apply a feminist institutionalist view as this fragmentation limits the analytical options of each framework, and one single coherent feminist institutionalist view has not yet emerged in literature (Bogaards, 2022). However, being sensitive to the nature of our study, we acknowledge the gendered character of the formal and informal rules that constitute institutions (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013). Furthermore, institutional theory has been criticized for underplaying the importance of power relations (Mackay et al., 2010) and ignoring how

intersecting categories such as class, race, and sexuality impact the lived experience of individuals (Waylen, 2014). To acknowledge these critiques, we supplement Scott's (1995/2013) three institutional pillars with contributions from Coffé (2012), Waylen (2014), and Crenshaw (1989).

3.2.2. Coffé (2012)

The gendered nature of institutions is closely connected to understanding power inequalities (Krook & Mackay, 2015), as male domination and intersecting unequal power relations are still omnipresent in many institutional areas (Waylen, 2014). To get a more nuanced view of the power that female leaders uphold, we make use of the female representation concept put forward by Coffé (2012). According to the researcher, one finds three types of female political representation in parliaments: descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation. Although Coffé's (2012) research primarily concentrates on female representation in the political arena, we are expanding her concept to evaluate female representation more comprehensively, encompassing both the political and economic domains. Therefore, we understand descriptive representation as representation through numbers, such as having gender parity in parliaments or having gender quotas in businesses. In Coffé's (2012) conception, substantive representation refers to being able to shape policy-making and outcomes. We extend this concept to the business realm of women having decision-making power and being able to influence change. Symbolic representation is the message that female representation conveys as "*a symbol that indicates to women that women matter*" (Coffé, 2012, p. 288). Moreover, the presence of women in leadership or political positions can serve as role models for other women, motivating and inspiring them to pursue similar aspirations.

3.2.3. Waylen (2014)

We follow Waylen (2014), who proposed different scenarios for how formal and informal institutions interact with each other. The concept allows us to explore how institutional interactions influence the experience of female leaders in Rwanda in terms of gender equality. Formal and informal institutions can be in or out of sync, either upholding or subverting each other. When informal and formal institutions are in sync, they reinforce, complete, coordinate, or substitute one another. For instance, informal institutions fill voids in environments with ambiguous formal institutions, which is especially prevalent in emerging markets and developing countries (Khanna & Palepu, 1997). However, Informal institutions can also be out of sync with formal institutions and thus subvert or compete with them (Waylen, 2014). She highlights that this is evident in the fact that even though formal rules about contraception have changed globally, informal rules subvert them

as priests in many countries informally sanction their use. Moreover, she highlights that informal rules can even trigger a formal rule change, as seen in the legalization of civil partnerships and gay marriage, where informal norms became increasingly incompatible with formal rules. Just as informal institutions influence formal institutions, formal institutions influence informal institutions. A typical example of changing formal rules is seen in the First and Second World Wars, which boosted women's employment. This example bears similarities to the case of Rwanda, as women were compelled to undertake non-traditional social and economic roles in the aftermath of the genocide (Powley, 2004).

3.2.4. Crenshaw (1989)

As outlined above, intersecting unequal power relations are still prevalent in many institutional areas. Yet, institutional theory fails to account for intersecting discrimination of different categories, such as sex, gender, sexuality, class, and race (Waylen, 2014). To overcome this shortcoming, we will use the concept of intersectionality coined by Crenshaw (1989). Intersectionality originates in black feminist literature, with '*The Combahee River Collective Statement*' as one of the earliest contributions. In the statement, the collective expresses that it is "*difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously*." (Combahee River Collective, 1977, para. 11). That is the underlying logic of what Crenshaw (1989) later defines as intersectionality. She provides an analogy to intersectional realities as an accident at an intersection where traffic flows in all four directions: "*It [the accident] can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination*" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149).

To illustrate the difficulties of intersectionality, Crenshaw examines the stories of five black women plaintiffs in the DeGraffenreid v. General Motors case. The plaintiffs filed a lawsuit against General Motors, claiming that the company's seniority system was perpetuating the effects of past discrimination against black women, leading to their exclusion from employment or loss of jobs during layoffs based on seniority. It was evident that while black jobs were available to black men and female jobs were available to white women, black women were not considered in the same manner. Crenshaw exposes "*that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination doctrine are defined respectively by white women's and Black men's experiences*" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 143). In such a setting, black women are only protected if their experiences align with those of black men and white

women. Similar evidence was brought when Crenshaw (1991) explored the intersectional realities of women experiencing male violence. She found that even though formal institutions, such as the domestic violence waiver, were in place to protect women from domestic violence, the terms of the waiver made it inaccessible to socially, economically, or culturally underprivileged women. Thus, ignoring intragroup differences and designing policies and intervention strategies focusing only on a singular aspect of identity, such as gender, will be ineffective for women experiencing intersecting forms of oppression. This is especially relevant considering Rwanda's historical background, as "*a woman's loyalty to her ethnic group almost always overrode any sense of sisterhood to women of the other major ethnic group*" (Sharlach, 1999, p. 388) during the genocide. Beyond, Rwanda has been recognized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) among the top 15 % of the most unequal societies in the world due to growing inequalities between social classes and geographic regions (Samset, 2011). Thus, integrating an intersectional lens into our theoretical framework is crucial. While this research project explores the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda, we must be aware that we cannot explain these experiences only through the specifics of gender. Thus, we acknowledge the existence of multiple grounds of identity influencing intersecting forms of oppression.

3.3. Review of Empirical Literature

3.3.1. Gender and Leadership

The gendered nature of leadership is a recognized and widely debated issue in research (Schein et al., 1996; Shabliy et al., 2020). Previous research commonly explores the barriers and challenges women face in accessing or succeeding in leadership roles resulting from men being historically favored in leadership (Powell, 2020). Role congruity theory argues that these challenges arise from a discrepancy between traditional female gender roles and the expectations associated with leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koburtay et al., 2019). One example that leads to prejudicial evaluations of women, thereby harming their career advancements, is the expectation that women are responsible for taking care of others in the home, which contradicts the typical leadership role of spending time outside the home (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Diekman & Schneider, 2010). Moreover, women are often stereotyped as caring, sensitive, and warm, which opposes leadership qualities typically associated with masculine traits such as assertiveness, forcefulness, and self-reliance (Koburtay et al., 2019). Therefore, men are advantaged over women in leadership evaluations,

highlighted by the *'Think male – Think leader*'- phenomenon (Schein et al., 1996). The presence of prevailing stereotypes can lead to bias, an inaccurate evaluation based on a generalization rather than an individual's true skills and abilities (Koburtay et al., 2019). Thus, the existence of gender stereotypes and biases undermines the progress of female leaders and creates unfavorable impressions about women's ability to lead (Shabliy et al., 2020). As previously outlined, biases arise not only from gender but from the intersections of different forms of social identity, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1989). However, most studies addressing the linkages of gender and leadership have failed to speak to the intersectionality related to such gendered leadership challenges (Powell, 2020), and knowledge is shaped mainly by studies in Western contexts (Abadi et al., 2020).

3.3.2. Female Political Representation

One research stream of female leadership particularly relevant to our research focuses on female political representation. One of the contributors to the research on substantive representation is Wängnerud (2000), who discovered that a higher representation of women in Nordic Parliaments resulted in increased parliamentary attention to issues related to social policy, family policy, and gender equality. This is in line with further research connecting an increase in female representation to the advancement of policies that specifically impact women, such as regulations on maternity leave, family assistance, and abortion laws (Berkman & O'Connor, 1993; Besley & Case, 2003; Kittilson, 2008). Moreover, researchers found that female representatives are more likely to prioritize issues relevant to female voters (Swers, 1998; Thomas, 1994). An increase in female representation has also been connected to higher investments in public goods, particularly in health and education, in developing and emerging economies (Hessami & da Fonseca, 2020). Such investments are considered to contribute to narrowing the gender gap in educational attainment, reducing child mortality rates, and boosting economic performance. Scholars agree that increased female representation in parliaments impacts gendered policy-making; however, researchers stress the possibility that women focus on these issues not out of choice but because that is the only space provided for them (Hessami & da Fonseca, 2020). Additionally, there is no consensus on the precise degree of women's impact on policy-making and outcomes in literature (Wängnerud, 2009). Some researchers argue that this variation is attributed to the need for a critical mass of women in parliament to have a significant impact (Childs & Krook, 2006). The need for critical actors of all genders striving to represent women substantively is underlined. While literature provides an

emerging body studying the impacts of female representation on policy-making, the coverage is not global, and most of the literature originates from the US, some European countries, and India (Hessami & da Fonseca, 2020).

Contributions examining substantive female representation in Rwanda include Burnet (2008; 2019) and Devlin and Elgie (2008). Devlin and Elgie (2008) argue that an increase in female representation leads to women's issues being raised more easily but having little effect on policy output. Burnet (2008) provides similar evidence through her interviews with members and leaders of civil society organizations in Rwanda. She uncovers the paradox of women's political participation in Rwanda increasing while female politicians' ability to influence policy-making decreases. Female representatives were accused of prioritizing their own interests, i.e., maintaining a good standing with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) by promoting laws to make Rwanda more 'investor friendly' instead of appearing for the interests of women and families (Burnet, 2019). That is exemplified by paid maternity benefits being reduced under the majority female parliament. While Burnet (2008; 2019) does not discover empirical evidence that the increased female representation in Rwanda has substantive effects, she uncovers that it has extensive symbolic effects. The increased representation transforms the public image and collective cultural vision of women. However, these findings must be interpreted cautiously as the underlying empirical evidence was retrieved through interviews with members of civil society organizations. Due to the authoritarian nature of the regime that oppresses civil society, these findings could portray a more positive picture than reality (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013).

Research about symbolic representation underlines the powerful symbol that female political leaders can confer (Coffé, 2012). Due to the historical absence of women in these positions, female representatives could ascribe a new social meaning to women in politics and the gendered social construction of women's capabilities (Verge & Pastor, 2018). Researchers underline the importance of these role model benefits, demonstrating to women "*that women matter*" (Coffé, 2012, p. 288). Mansbridge (1999) further states that this idea could be conveyed to cultivate greater trust in public officials and institutions. Moreover, it is elaborated that increased female political representation can motivate other women to become involved in political activities (Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2007). However, empirical evidence for these proposals does not provide a conclusive picture of the impact of symbolic representation. Although Ulbig (2007) reasons that women's political trust is positively

impacted by female representation, this effect could only be noticed among women who possess moderate levels of political awareness. While Lawless (2004) proposes a positive correlation between women's perception of government and female representation, this does not seem to translate into significant changes in political attitudes or behavior. Beyond, Verge and Pastor (2018) show that the media representation of the first women to serve top political offices in Spain failed to expand the social meaning of women. This is contingent upon the unremitting emphasis on the differences between female and male leaders and female leaders' narratives being reduced to performative dynamics of motherhood and the reconciliation of family and public life. This reductive focus reinforces traditional gender roles and expectations by emphasizing the importance of women's ability to balance their personal and public responsibilities, which can perpetuate gender inequalities in politics.

3.3.3. Female Political Representation & Peace and State-Building

Post-conflict contexts have been researched by an emerging body of literature focusing on the relationship between female political participation and post-conflict peace processes (Buss & Ali, 2017; Demeritt et al., 2014; Shair-Rosenfield & Wood, 2017). Post-conflict contexts often display a rise in female political participation, and Shair-Rosenfield and Wood's (2017) research focuses on the effects such an increase in participation can have. They argue that negotiated peace settlements are more durable than other forms of conflict termination, as it provides avenues for females to access political leadership positions, ultimately decreasing the risk of conflict reoccurrence. They found that greater female representation results in prioritizing social welfare spending over military spending and improving public perceptions of good governance and the credibility of political elites. Both factors are found to reduce the risk of conflict recurrence. Therefore, the researchers advocate for affirmative action policies to increase female participation in post-conflict states. These findings align with evidence from Demeritt et al. (2014), who indicate that including females in political and social institutions lowers the risk of civil war recurrence.

The observed female political participation in post-conflict contexts is also highly influenced by the international community, which considers the increase in women's involvement in formal political processes and institutions crucial for peacebuilding initiatives (Seckinelgin & Klot, 2013). For instance, the UN Security Council has passed resolutions advocating to include women numerically in peacebuilding efforts (Buss & Ali, 2017). In addition, not only female representation but gender policies, in general, are instrumental in reaching policy goals related to economic growth and

modernization and attracting donors and funding (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). Seckinelgin and Klot (2013) present a literature review on substantive female political participation in fragile and conflict-affected states and highlight that the international community's agenda strongly affects post-conflict societies, directly or indirectly, through foreign aid, foreign investment, international reputation, and legitimacy. The researchers emphasize that this global policy approach conflates the principle of women's representation with the broader issue of gender equality outcomes. However, there is little evidence to support this assumption, and gender quotas may even unintentionally diminish the political agency of women, which is also supported by previously provided evidence from Burnet (2008). Seckinelgin and Klot (2013) highlight that no conclusive insight can be retrieved from existing research to assess if female political representation increases gender equality in post-conflict contexts like Rwanda, especially since factors necessary for increasing women's substantive representation are unlikely in developing countries and nonexistent in conflict-affected states. This epitomizes a dilemma that even though post-conflict context will likely see a rise in female participation to support peacebuilding processes, it is not clear if this will result in gender equality outcomes for the entire population (Seckinelgin & Klot, 2013). Similar arguments are put forward by Buss and Ali (2017), who argue that in post-conflict contexts like Rwanda changes resulting from increased female political participation are uneven, contradictory, and nonlinear since "*gains in one area can be accompanied by losses in another*" (Buss & Ali, 2017, p. 575). Therefore, the researchers posit the need for further research to explore gender equality in more detail and not in simple terms of formal indicators such as the numerical representation of females in parliament. Moreover, they discuss the importance of examining the underlying motivations and agendas that drive efforts toward promoting women's equality. This insight might be especially relevant in the context of "*'aid darling' […] Rwanda*" (Marysse et al., 2007, p. 437), which has been accused of engaging in autocratic gender washing (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2022).

Debusscher and Ansoms (2013) provide a new perspective by assessing the transformative potential of broader gender equality policies in Rwanda and going beyond assessing the significance of increased female political participation. They regard transformative potential as a "*policies' capacity to address the deeply ingrained societal norms and practices within which gender inequalities are embedded*" (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013, p. 1112). They argue that while the

political will of the Rwandan government to promote gender equality is strong, the transformative potential of Rwandan gender policies is limited.

3.3.4. Empirical Evidence from Rwanda and Beyond

Li et al. (2022) criticize that female political representation in Rwanda has been chiefly analyzed from a national governance and political democracy perspective while the real-life circumstances of Rwandan women political leaders, and their corresponding responses, remain under-examined. Thus, they propose a new perspective by exploring the real-life experiences of female political leaders through semi-structured interviews with 10 Rwandese women in different political leadership positions. They found that the scarcity of male labor after the genocide in Rwanda forced women into the productive sphere, while they did not receive enough support in the reproductive space, resulting in a double burden for female political leaders.

While there is limited research exploring the real-life experiences of female leaders (Sidani et al., 2015), a vast body of literature examines the experiences of female entrepreneurs. Over the last decade, literature examining these experiences through an institutional lens, particularly in developing country contexts, has increased (Amine & Staub, 2009; Field et al., 2010; Langevang et al., 2018; Naegels et al., 2017; Yousafzai et al., 2015). Researchers highlight the advantage of institutional theory for exploring the experiences of female entrepreneurs as "*all entrepreneurship is contextually embedded in the social, cultural and political institutions which influence the values, norms, motives, and behaviors of individuals*" (Yousafzai et al., 2015, p. 589). In other words, institutional theory is particularly suitable for addressing the external context that shapes the experience of female entrepreneurs. Thus, institutional theory may also be particularly suited to explore the experiences of female leaders in organizations and businesses, which has been insufficiently theorized thus far, especially in non-Western contexts. (Sidani et al., 2015). One contribution exploring the experiences of female leaders through an institutional lens is Sidani et al. (2015), who interviewed female students and managers in Lebanon. They conclude that both the cognitive and normative pillars have more significant influence than the regulative pillar in shaping organizational choices and behaviors, ultimately leading to a female leadership deficit in Lebanon. That is seen in women's rights organizations facing difficulties in implementing changes due to cultural norms resistant to change. Examples of such norms include patriarchal structures that privilege men over women and the expectation for women to fulfill caretaking roles in the private sphere. Briefly, Sidani et al.'s research underlines how competing institutional pillars can limit

meaningful change to decrease the female leadership deficit in Lebanon. Based on their insights, the researchers argue for more research in different contexts to assess whether changes in regulations, cognitions, or norms will affect the number of female leaders.

Similar arguments have been put forward by Abadi et al. (2020), who provide a systemic literature review informed by institutional theory to explore the career growth challenges women managers and leaders face in the Middle East. Applying an institutional lens allowed them to uncover the interdependencies of macro and micro levels that influenced the experience of women leaders, which are "*although individually experienced and constructed […] an extension of the deeply established social and cultural expectations and realities*." (Abadi et al., 2020, p. 30). One example is that despite significant reforms aimed at promoting gender equality, many companies still separate men and women into different workspaces. This type of gender segregation creates a structural obstacle for women to advance in their careers. Thus, the researchers argue that the labor market structures and employment regulations have failed to address gender discrimination in the workplace and even perpetuated existing inequalities favoring men by institutionalizing norms. In this case, regulative forces trickled down to the normative pillar, ultimately limiting women's advancement to leadership positions. Like Sidani et al. (2015), they underscore the importance of analyzing the interactions between all institutional pillars and, as current research in this field is limited, call for further research and empirical studies.

3.4. Research Justification & Contribution

Concludingly, we aim to fill the previously outlined gaps in literature by exploring the experience of female leaders in Rwanda through an institutional lens. In doing so, we follow Sidani et al.'s (2015) call for further research to explore the institutional forces shaping women's leadership. Answering this call in the empirical setting of Rwanda, a country highly praised for its gender equality advances in policy (Burnet, 2008), will provide novel insights. Exploring the experience of female leaders will allow us to assess how these policy advances trickle down to their real lives. While Li et al. (2022) have previously analyzed the real-life circumstances of Rwandan leaders in a similar fashion, they focus purely on political leaders without applying an institutional lens. Hence, we are confident that applying an institutional lens and including a broader perspective of female leaders will create further knowledge.

Moreover, we will provide new insights into the effects of broader gender equality initiatives in Rwanda by focusing on those directly affected by such gender policies. We will therefore move beyond assessing formal indicators, such as analyzing numerical representation of females in parliament, and respond to the research call of Buss and Ali (2017). We acknowledge that Debusscher and Ansoms (2013) have previously moved beyond formal indicators as they evaluated the 'transformative potential' of gender equality policies; regardless, we argue that their research overlooked essential perspectives. Their data originates from interviews with the government, civil society, and the donor community, excluding female leaders affected by gender policies. By focusing directly on female leaders, we will provide a more comprehensive and direct perspective. Our interviewees include female founders and leaders at the senior management level in organizations, corporations, and NGOs. Our study thus contributes to a deeper understanding of the gender equality realities in Rwanda's economic and organizational spheres. Ultimately, we contribute a novel perspective to the gender and leadership literature, where knowledge is mainly shaped by studies in Western contexts (Abadi et al., 2020) that have thus far failed to speak to the intersectionality of leadership (Powell, 2020).

4. Methodology

As researchers, it is crucial that we engage in critical reflection to establish the connection between our research design and objectives, considering our personal beliefs regarding the research subject and approach (Saunders et al., 2016). This chapter aims to disclose the methodological basis that supports our argument by offering a comprehensive and thoughtful account of the steps we have taken to guide and execute our research. We first introduce the research philosophy, outlining our chosen philosophy of science, ontology, and epistemology, as well as our approach to theory development. We then cover the research design, which provides an overview of the methods and techniques used in this study. The third section recapitulates our research process, including the interview approach, selection of participants, and triangulation of primary and secondary data. It also covers important considerations when conducting research abroad. We then delve into the data analysis phase of the study, including transcription, analysis style, and coding. We eventually explore

research ethics, focusing on universal ethics, specific considerations for development research, and our role as women researchers before we lastly acknowledge the study's limitations.

4.1. Research Philosophy

The chosen philosophy of science has profound implications for how researchers investigate and analyze the world, ultimately affecting how knowledge is attained and extracted from data (Egholm, 2014). It can be considered as the general framework of a study that directs the investigator's attention to the critical aspects needed to describe, comprehend, and explain relationships and phenomena in the world. Our research is guided by the philosophical position of social constructivism, which emphasizes the role of social and cultural contexts in shaping individuals' understanding of the world (Egholm, 2014). It holds that knowledge is generated and sustained through various levels of social interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) and is, therefore, a sound theoretical lens for exploring how individuals and groups create and interpret meaning in social contexts (Jackson & Klobas, 2006). This philosophical standpoint provides a framework for understanding the dynamic and ongoing nature of social construction and the ways in which social structures and systems are maintained and transformed over time. As our research explores how institutions shape female leaders' experience, social constructivism proves to be a fitting philosophical approach as it emphasizes the subjective nature of social phenomena and recognizes the importance of the context in shaping individual and collective behaviors, attitudes, and values (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Therefore, social constructivism allows for an in-depth investigation of the complex and dynamic interplay between social, cultural, and political factors in shaping women leaders' experiences in Rwanda (Egholm, 2014).

4.1.1. Ontology and Epistemology

Ontology questions the fundamental nature of reality and scrutinizes the very essence of existence (Egholm, 2014). It may therefore be understood as the study of 'being.' A primary distinction in ontology is the separation between two positions: realism, which posits that phenomena exist independently of the researcher's understanding of them, and constructivism, which holds that phenomena exist within the context of the observer's interpretation. Social constructivism takes its ontological starting point in constructivism. The key inquiry here is how phenomena are created in a particular context rather than the quintessence of the phenomena per se, making them contextual within the ontological understanding (Detel, 2001). Social

constructivism encompasses varying degrees of radicalism, with some denying all forms of the 'natural' existence of phenomena and others being more open to this idea (Egholm, 2014). Regardless, a common feature is the attention to how phenomena appear and influence their surroundings rather than their inherent nature (Kukla, 2000). Therefore, the concept of reality in constructivist ontology is subjective and shaped by individuals' experiences and perceptions, which may vary and evolve depending on the time and context (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This subjective ontological assumption guides our research as this allows us to recognize the complexity of participants' realities and the importance of interpreting them in specific contexts and to understand and engage with the diverse experiences and perceptions of our participants nuancedly. Our ontological standpoint acknowledges that interpretations of reality are not fixed but rather shaped by the time and place in which they occur. As researchers, we must account for these contextual factors to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena we study. (Egholm, 2014; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Saunders et al., 2016).

Aligned with that is the epistemological assumption of social constructivism that "*knowledge is always coloured by time and place*" (Egholm, 2014, p. 145) and is followingly mutable. Epistemology delineates how knowledge is produced and can be justified (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Saunders et al., 2016). The social constructivist doctrine understands knowledge as a product of its context while simultaneously serving as a tool to transform it (Egholm, 2014). Rather than trying to understand the significance of phenomena, the guiding idea is to understand how meaning is ascribed to them and define relationships affecting them. Hence, the belief that social contexts are imperative is fundamental to social constructivism (Detel, 2001). Our epistemological position contributes to the creation of rich and novel understandings (Saunders et al., 2016) and interpretations of the interplay between Rwanda's institutional context and female leaders.

As the epistemological perspective of each philosophy of science highlights the underlying assumptions employed to assess knowledge and consequently establish its credibility and validity (Saunders et al., 2016), it relates to the underlying idea of how truth is constructed. Social constructivism follows the coherence theory of truth, where a statement is considered true when it fits into a system of interpretive statements without contradictions (Egholm, 2014). Consequently, conclusions are drawn based on their consistency with the theoretical framework and empirical evidence. The credibility and validity of knowledge derived from social constructivism are ensured

by the relationship and alignment of its various components. As the unity of science is rejected under a social constructivist approach (Egholm, 2014), knowledge is not considered absolute but relative to its context and cultural impact (Jackson & Klobas, 2007). As the primary data in this research project was collected qualitatively through interviews, it is also vital to clarify that the aim of this case study is not finding widely generalizable data but to develop an understanding of the particular phenomenon within its context to derive rich, in-depth knowledge (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Mayoux, 2006). We use this qualitative approach to get comprehensive and nuanced insights into the context and the lived experiences of our respondents (Edmondson & Mcmanus, 2007). Beyond this, we use secondary data to explain and situate the variations in the given environment. Our field observations are another vital aspect of our research process, as they provide additional insights into the context and allow us to understand the setting of our phenomenon better.

4.1.2. Approach to Theory Development

Our research study follows an abductive approach, which philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce defined as "*the logic of exploratory data analysis*" (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 24). Abduction emphasizes the perpetual interchange between theory and empirical investigation (Dubois & Gadde, 2002) and therewith acknowledges inspiration from existing theory while allowing to further develop theory based on empirical findings (Kovács & Spens, 2005). We found that there have been studies like ours examining the influence of the institutional environment of female leaders within the context of the Middle East (Abadi et al., 2020; Sidani et al., 2015) and research examining gender equality and female political representation in Rwanda (Burnet, 2008, 2019; Devlin & Elgie, 2008). However, no research exploring the experience of female leaders through an institutional lens within the East African or, specifically, Rwanda context exists. Saunders et al. (2016) suggest that the abductive approach is suitable for cases where there is an abundance of information available in one context of a research topic but limited within the selected research context, allowing for the modification of existing theories. Despite iterating between theory and data, our analysis allowed us to generate insights from our data without being constrained by existing theory. Hence, our research and knowledge developed through the interfaces of theoretical assumptions and empirical impressions. Reviewing literature established our preunderstandings and academic frameworks, establishing the foundation for engaging with our research participants. The dialogue with them resulted in the discovery of meanings, interpretations, and realities, ultimately contributing to our

theoretical understanding. By embracing an abductive approach, we progressed from the descriptions and meanings provided by individuals to the formation of concepts and categories, leading to a comprehensive understanding and explanation of the phenomenon (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Given our research philosophy, this abductive approach further aligns with the need to ensure "*correspondence between the proposition and a set of propositions*" (Egholm, 2014, p. 65) to substantiate the data for a conclusive inference. Abduction further recognizes that phenomena do not exist objectively but are perceived by attentive individuals instead. The ability of individuals to recognize a stimulus is hereby based on their experiences and perceptions (Sætre & Van de Ven, 2021). By choosing an abductive approach, we, as researchers, acknowledge that we are influenced by our own experiences and mindset. Even if we try to see phenomena as neutral, our way of understanding, interpreting, and making sense of things will somewhat be influenced by our previous experiences and values. Concludingly, abduction is a fruitful approach if the researcher's goal is to explore new variables and relationships (Dubois & Gadde, 2002) and aligns with the subjective ontological assumption and the interpretative system of social constructivism. Since we explore the relationship between institutional factors and female leaders, we consider an abductive approach most appropriate for our research objectives.

4.2. Research Design

The research design refers to the comprehensive strategy utilized to integrate various components of a study reasonably and coherently, with the target of successfully addressing the research objective (De Vaus, 2001). In our study, we employ a research design with explanatory purpose that aims to gain insights into the topic and elucidate the connections between variables (Saunders et al., 2016). Nevertheless, our aim is not to discover an ultimate truth but rather to comprehend how diverse realities intersect and contribute to the comprehension of the interplay of institutional factors and their subsequent influence on women leaders in Rwanda.

As broached above, this research study follows a qualitative approach, as this is particularly suitable for studies that seek a comprehensive understanding of intricate realities and subjects that rely on appreciating differing perceptions (Edmondson & Mcmanus, 2007). Using a multiple case study based on semi-structured interviews enabled us to flexibly construct and develop our research to effectively "*fill in a 'jigsaw' of differing accounts of 'reality'*" (Mayoux, 2006, p. 118). The research

strategy of a case study involves exploring a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, utilizing various sources of evidence in an empirical inquiry (Saunders et al., 2016). As we aim to explore the dynamics of institutions and female leaders, a case study approach proves beneficial as it allows us to discover in-depth perspectives of individuals within these institutions to draw insights from their inimitable positions. Through interviews with female leaders in Rwanda, we could better understand their social contexts and gain valuable insights into our research inquiry from their unique perspectives. For example, through conversation with our respondent Ruby, we gained insights into her social environment: "*I also live with two brothers, my two brothers, and technically actually take care of everything at home.*" Additionally, adopting a research approach of a multiple case study enables us to delve into the intricacies of cultural interpretations in particular settings (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) and further enables us to challenge existing theories, conforming to our abductive research approach.

4.3. Research Process

4.3.1. Research Approach

After conducting field research in Uganda, we developed an academic interest in exploring the perspective of women in business in East Africa. Upon discovering the high female participation rate in Rwanda (Raga, 2022), we were motivated to investigate the experiences of female leaders in this unique context. Our research approach began with an initial research phase to familiarize ourselves with the context, stakeholders, and existing literature on our topic. During this phase, we collected existing empirical and theoretical literature to gain an understanding of preexisting studies around gender, leadership, and institutional theory. Based on this initial research, we identified our research problem. We then looked at methodological literature to identify a suitable strategy to approach our further steps. As we investigate a country-specific phenomenon, we decided to travel to Rwanda for our data collection as we saw benefits in gaining a deeper understanding of the context, enhanced access to data, and opportunities to build relationships with local people and organizations (Binns, 2006). We also found that traveling to the country we are researching honed our cultural sensitivity.

We decided to collect our primary data through individual in-depth interviews, as these are commonly suggested as a method of empirical data collection within case studies (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Willis, 2006). We also found this method to support our objective of gaining a

comprehensive understanding of the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda, as it allowed us to be responsive to each respondent and their story. Since Kigali serves as the primary hub of business activity marked by diverse sectors and industries, we conducted in-depth interviews with key informants in Rwanda's capital to gain a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. We chose to approach the research question in this way as we believed that gaining insights from people with direct experience and knowledge of the topic would provide a more holistic perspective and help us to understand the complexities of the situation better. Additionally, we wanted to ensure that the research was grounded in the local context and that the perspectives of those affected were prioritized.

To support our empirical findings, we were inspired to use secondary data sources such as reports, academic articles, and government publications. This helped to provide a broader understanding of the issue and allowed us to compare and contrast our findings with existing research. By incorporating secondary data into our analysis, we were able to triangulate our findings and enhance the rigor of our research. Throughout the research process, our field observations were valuable and helpful in providing context and depth to our analysis. Through these observations, we better understood the everyday experiences of individuals in the community and how they related to the issues we were studying. This provided us with valuable insights that were not necessarily captured through our interviews or secondary data sources.

Overall, our research approach was grounded in a social constructivist philosophy, emphasizing the importance of context and culture to understand what happens within a society (Kim, 2001). Through our use of in-depth interviews, secondary data sources, and field observations, we were able to gain a nuanced understanding of the issues at hand and provide insights that could be used to inform future policies and interventions.

4.3.2. Semi-Structured Interviews & Interview Guide

To successfully conduct our semi-structured interviews, we developed an interview guide prior to our fieldwork in Kigali. The interview guide (Appendix A) was crafted by selecting pertinent questions based on our background literature and theoretical framework, which aligned with the objectives of our study. We structured the guide into a few major sections and arranged our questions from broader and more open to more precise. However, the chronological order was not essential, allowing us flexibility to tie in the themes the respondents mentioned. Starting with a personal introduction and information about the interview, we endeavored to create a comfortable

atmosphere for our respondents by easing into the interview through a short conversation to get to know one another. We followed up with introductory questions about the respondents and information about their professional backgrounds to gain some contextual information about each participant's situation. We then asked them about some of their personal experiences, such as a typical day in their life, before moving on to more contextual questions connected to the institutions in Rwanda. Lastly, we included some questions through which we wanted to gain insights into their opinion on gender-specific themes, such as 'Equality', 'Equity,' or 'Feminism.' We further tried to incorporate close-ended questions with limited response variability for questions that required more factual answers (e.g., the gender ratio in one's company) as well as open-ended questions that encourage an authentic depiction of the respondent's subjective experience (Klenke, 2016). For example, we asked respondents to describe their daily routine and experiences from working with male and female colleagues. For variability, we also incorporated pictures (Appendix B), through which the respondents could describe their associations with specific images. We applied this interactive technique to make the otherwise straightforward question-answer arrangement less monotonous. The pictures further provided an additional point of departure for conversation through which we could obtain contextual clues that helped us understand the meaning and underlying structures behind the informant's statements and linguistic expressions (Folkestad, 2000).

Conducted across a period of 12 days, our interviews eventually resulted in an average length of 63 minutes. Having sufficient time for each interview provided an opportunity for participants to share their stories in their own words and at their own pace. Our interviews resulted in rich and detailed data and allowed us to form a more nuanced understanding of the participant's experiences through meaningful discussion. Development research often utilizes interviews as a method to gather such comprehensive information (Willis, 2006). Through semi-structured interviews, we as interviewers can ensure that vital areas of discussion are covered while being open to ideas and unforeseen themes the interviewees raise. A semi-structured approach is most appropriate for our social constructivist philosophy as it allows us to be responsive to the differing experiences of our respondents and give space to the specific context influencing them while simultaneously being able to get targeted answers for our research question to eventually paint a picture of the social constructions defining the general collective (Egholm, 2014; Willis, 2006). For example, following up

on the respondent's daily routine, we could elaborate more on specific questions regarding childcare for those with children.

4.3.3. Interview Setting

All our interviews were conducted in person across Kigali. Being mindful of our respondents' demanding daily schedules, we let them choose a time and place for the interview. We further hoped this would add to a relaxed atmosphere as the participants would be in a convenient and familiar setting. As the location of interviews can significantly affect participants' responses (Saunders et al., 2007), researchers should ensure that the chosen location is convenient and comfortable for the participants and should ideally not be susceptible to interruptions (Saunders et al., 2020). The respondents usually chose either their office space or a café as the place for our interview. Despite public places like cafés being prone to interruptions, we tried to minimize the impact of such by choosing a quiet and secluded area for seating, situated away from the main thoroughfare and noise, providing a peaceful and serene atmosphere conducive to conversation. Fifteen of our sixteen interviews were sound recorded, allowing us to dedicate full attention to the conversation and facilitate subsequent transcription. One respondent did not consent to being recorded, resulting in one interview being documented only through notes. One interviewer was appointed to lead the conversation for each interview, while the other observed, took notes, and asked follow-up questions. Our detailed field notes (Appendix C), derived from our general observations throughout our time in Kigali and from the interviews, were crucial in contextualizing expressions and determining underlying meanings. For example, we interviewed two sisters, one married with children and the other single, providing diverging views about the same situation. While the married sister spoke positively about gender equality in Rwanda and expressed ease in balancing her domestic and work responsibilities, her sister provided opposing accounts. By observing the respondents' overall attitudes and behaviors, we discerned that the married sister's answers might have been tailored to align with societal expectations, indicating a level of curated responses. After seeing off the respondent, we collectively evaluated each interview briefly, which enabled us to develop a shared perception and comprehension of the participants' answers. This step was particularly valuable considering our social constructivist philosophy, which places significant focus on the role of language and discourse, as the researcher's context and comprehension affect the knowledge creation process making the establishment of coherence

between our understandings vital to reach conclusions (Egholm, 2014). Our chosen research strategy, as outlined throughout the preceding sections, is visualized in Figure 5:

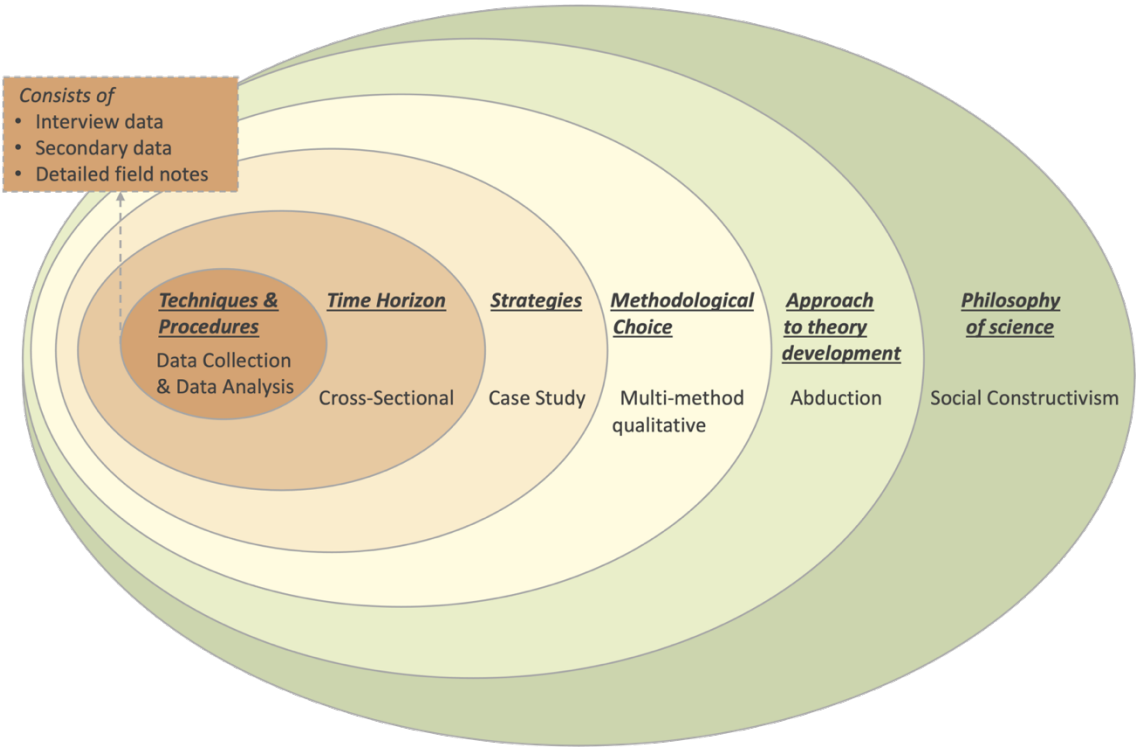

Figure 5: Research Strategy

4.3.4. Conducting Research Abroad

As indicated, we decided to conduct our research in the field. Consequently, we spent two weeks in Kigali, Rwanda. The decision to travel to the country central to our research was based on various considerations, of which we will explain the three most pivotal ones in the following. Firstly, we decided to travel to Rwanda to better understand the context we are researching. Rwanda is a country rich in history and culture and differs quite significantly from other East African countries in terms of social dynamics (Akena, 2014). Being able to observe and experience the environment and getting a feeling for the people and culture through direct interaction was exceedingly helpful for us in understanding, contextualizing, and classifying our data. For example, during our visit to the women's market, we noticed that men assumed supervisory positions for the stalls while women were delegated specific tasks. This observation suggests that traditional gender hierarchies continue to exist at lower organizational levels.

Especially considering our research philosophy, we believe this gave us an incredible benefit in accurately constituting our findings. We further align with Potter (1993; as cited in Binns, 2006) and Binns (2006) that assertions concerning developing countries should be informed by contemporary

field immersion, as "*a detailed understanding of people and environment […] is essential to the development of global understanding, empathy and action*" (p. 14). Secondly, a significant defining factor was the proximity to our participants, allowing for personal interaction. The personal interaction with respondents helped establish trust and familiarity with the respondents through non-verbal and auditory behaviors (Meijer et al., 2021). We believe this eventually positively impacted our findings as respondents were more comfortable with sharing personal anecdotes and discussing sensitive topics (Shuy, 2003), as rapport building is argued to be vital in fostering cooperation and hence facilitating information gain (Meijer et al., 2021). For example, one of our respondents, at a later point of our conversation, even opened up about her personal dating experiences: "*My [business] partner at that time we were actually dating, so there is fighting with your boyfriend and fighting with your partner it's a whole thing*" (Ruby). Not conducting the interviews online further reassured respondents that they would not be video recorded, adding to their confidence and contentment during the interview that their identity would remain confidential.

Going to the field was also motivated by personal motives of us as researchers. Both of us have a natural desire to learn about and engage with other cultures and people. After conducting field research in Uganda and India in 2022, we were aware of the benefits of immersing in the context of one's study to conduct more culturally nuanced and aware research. To illustrate, during our first weekend in Kigali, we visited the Genocide Memorial. This experience provided us with a deeper appreciation of the complexity and sensitivity of the topic, enabling us to be more attuned to the cultural nuances and cues that arose during our interviews. Despite being advised not to ask questions about the genocide prior to our journey, as this is understandably very sensitive for most Rwandans, drawing on this broader cultural awareness enabled us to react to respondents' insinuations and ask more insightful and nuanced questions. Followingly, through establishing trust with the respondents and having an understanding of the context, we got to discuss sensitive topics such as the belonging to ethnic groups: "*I don't know my group, like for younger generation, we don't know, our parents don't tell us that, and I hope that they don't because I don't want to know*" (Whitney). Going to the field thereby enriched the quality and depth of our primary data. Lastly, being present in Kigali was an essential aspect of our recruitment process, which will be reviewed in depth in the following section.

4.4. Selection of Participants

4.4.1. Selection & Recruitment of Interviewees

The objective of our research study was determining for the selection of our participants and required us to interview a range of female leaders in Rwanda. Due to the reliance on analytical rather than statistical inference in case studies, it is crucial to give significant attention to precise sampling methods that ensure "*an appropriate matching between reality and theoretical constructs*" (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, p. 559). Followingly when selecting interviewees, it is crucial to carefully consider the type of sample needed to adequately address one's research inquiries (Willis, 2006). As our research question did not necessitate statistical estimation of population characteristics (Saunders et al., 2020), we utilized non-probability sampling methods. This allowed us to purposely select our sample based on identified sample selection criteria to find research participants offering relevant input to address our research question, which we combined with volunteer sampling. In accordance, we culminated our sample through purposive sampling, a commonly used non-random sampling technique in qualitative research to "*identify and select the information-rich cases for the most proper utilization of available resources*" (Etikan, 2016, p. 2).

To begin our sampling process, we reached out to potentially relevant contacts in Rwanda who were recommended to us by our supervisor and by our network in East Africa that we established during the field course in Uganda and through our student jobs. Moreover, we conducted an extensive search on LinkedIn to identify individuals who meet the criteria of our target sample (see Section 4.4.2. for clarifications). We subsequently contacted around 50 individuals as potential interviewees and provided them with a brief introduction of us, the research time frame, and relevant information about the interest of our research, and asked whether they would be interested in participating in our study. By doing so, we utilized self-selective sampling techniques where each case (i.e., respondent) determined their willingness to participate in the study (Saunders et al., 2020). This led us to an initial sample of 7 individuals who voluntarily agreed to partake in our research before embarking to Rwanda. Upon arrival in Kigali, we gave ourselves a few days before the first interview was scheduled to further develop our local networks (Binns, 2006). The timing of our trip, which can have a crucial impact on the knowledge acquirement (Binns, 2006), was further aligned with our research objective as we traveled to Rwanda around Women's Day, which is annually celebrated on March 8th. With International Women's Day being a global day celebrating

women's social, economic, cultural, and political achievements, we considered it particularly valuable for our research to observe its celebration in Rwanda. By conducting our research during this time, we gained a deeper understanding of the cultural and social significance of Women's Day in Rwanda. We got to observe firsthand how the holiday was celebrated in Kigali and how different community members perceived it. This helped us to contextualize our research findings and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the complex social and cultural dynamics that shape gender relations in Rwanda. With many publicly and privately organized events in Kigali, it was an excellent opportunity for us to network and find further participants for our research.

After a short settling-in period, we started conducting our first interviews with our previously contacted participants. The personal interaction with our initial participants allowed us to utilize snowball sampling, as they gladly connected us with their peers (Saunders et al., 2020). Our first respondent, Margaret, for example, expressed her interest in our findings and offered to put us in contact with other women in business: "*I'm friends with so many […] I can just get you somebody who is in leadership position and then other women making waves here*" (Margaret). Through snowballing from our first interviews, we eventually got nine more participants to join our survey. Being in Kigali was crucial for our research process as we found that getting insider perspectives can be quite challenging in Rwanda. Many Rwandans we have contacted were quite reluctant and hesitated to agree to an interview without extensive information about the aim of our research. We quickly learned that Rwanda has a very close-knitted business network that relies heavily on recommendations. Individuals within this network were much more willing to engage with us once a personal referral was established. Traveling to the field was, therefore, helpful in establishing trust and gaining access to the local networks.

Nevertheless, we are aware of the common critique of our chosen sampling methods for their lack of randomness, resulting in rather homogenous samples impeding representativeness (Saunders et al., 2020). However, as our research aims to comprehend a specific group's perspective within the population and draw conclusions about collective patterns instead of generalizing the population via quantitative research, we anticipate that this weakness has little effect on the overall findings. A table of the demographic characteristics of our participants can be found in the section below, together with a description of our sampling criteria.

4.4.2. Sample Group

Based on our research aim of inspecting female leaders in Rwanda, we established sampling criteria that guided our interviewee selection. We decided on three main requirements individuals had to fulfill to be fitting for our research:

1. As we were interested in the experience of *female* leaders, we only considered women in our sample selection.
2. The definition of a '*leader*' was further vital for our selection. In our study, women are considered a leader if they have either a) established their own company, b) have at least three subordinates reporting to them, or c) have a position in senior management.
3. As our study was concerned with a country-specific context, these women had to currently live and work in Rwanda, to which we added the further requirement that they need to have some national affiliation to the country.

SYNONYM	NATONALITY	BORN IN	RAISED IN	JOB LEVEL	INDUSTRY	DURATION INTERVIEW (MINUTES)	AGE BRACKET	APPROXIMATE GENDER RATIO COMPANY	MARITAL STATUS	CHILDREN
Margaret	Rwandan / Ugandan	Uganda	Uganda	Senior Management	International NGO	59	35-40	70/30	Single	2
Emelie	Rwandan	DRC	DRC	Senior Management	Finance	20	35-40	unknown	Married	1
Sarah	Rwandan	Uganda	Uganda & Kigali	Senior Management	Telecommunications	71	30-35	40/60	Single	0
Ophelia	Rwandan	Rwanda	South Africa	Team Lead	Aviation	49	35-40	60/40	Married	1
Barbara	Rwandan	DRC	Rwanda	Founder	FemTech	72	25-30	50/50	Single	0
Josy	Rwandan	Uganda	Uganda & Rwanda	Founder	Healthcare-Tech	65	30-35	60/40	Married	3
Lilli	Rwandan	Burundi	Rwanda	Team Lead	Digital Government Services	64	30-35	unknown	Married	2
Laura	Rwandan	Kigali	Kigali	Team Lead	IT Services	52	25-30	15/85	Single	0
Whitney	Rwandan	Kigali	Kigali	Founder	Healthcare-Tech	78	20-25	50/50	Single	0
Octavia	Rwandan	Rwanda	South Africa	Senior Management	International NGO	83	30-35	60/40	Single	0
Katherine	Rwandan	Kigali	Kigali	Founder	Fashion	62	30-35	60/40	Single	0
Dana	Rwandan	DRC	Kigali	Senior Management	Human Resources Consulting	70	unknown	60/40	Single	0
Ruby	Rwandan/ Congolese	DRC	DRC	Founder	Tech	82	20-25	0/100	Single	0
Fiona	Rwandan/ Belgian	Belgium	Belgium, Rwanda, DRC	Founder	Sustainable Energies	70	50-60	60/40	Single	0
Alice	Rwandan	Rwanda (Village)	Rwanda (Village)	Team Lead	Food Services	42	25-30	75/25	Single	0
Caroline	Rwandan	Kigali	Kigali	Senior Management	Leadership Development	no recording	30-35	unknown	Single	0

Figure 6: Respondent Overview

Figure 6 presents an overview of our respondents' characteristics. In our study, we have chosen to focus exclusively on women located in Kigali. This decision was made to simplify the data collection, and by limiting our sample group to women in Kigali, we can make direct comparisons between individuals in the same geographic area. This means that any differences or similarities we

observe are likely due to factors other than location. This way, we are better able to understand the unique challenges and opportunities that are present in that particular context. However, due to Rwanda's complex history, our respondents have various birthplaces and upbringing locations and come from diverse professional backgrounds, representing a range of industries. By examining the experiences and perspectives of individuals working in different industries, we were able to identify industry-agnostic patterns and trends, providing a more representative picture of women in leadership positions. The average age of our respondents was 31,5 years. It was salient that despite the average Rwandan woman marrying at 24,3 (The World Bank, 2015) and having her first child at 23 (NISR, 2023), only five out of our 16 participants had children, and only four were married. While we acknowledge that it could have been helpful to also interview women that are not in leadership positions to determine possible barriers for them, we had to refrain from doing so due to time limitations, expected language barriers, resource constraints in reaching these women, and scope margins of this project. Including men in the research could have also been interesting to create a more comprehensive picture and gain a feeling for their stance toward women. However, we also abstained from doing so as we wanted to focus this research on women and give them space to share their experiences.

4.4.3. Sample Size

As depicted above, our final sample size consisted of 16 individuals. While there is no consensus in research methodology literature about the ideal sample size for qualitative studies, we have followed a few common suggestions to determine our sample size. Unlike probability sampling, non-probability sampling relies on logical relationships between research aim and sampling rather than suggested guidelines for sample sizing. The sample should therefore be able to effectively address the given research question, with its size being secondary to its capability (Malterud et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2020). However, we found that a wide-ranging body of literature suggests "*anywhere from 5 to 50 participants as adequate*" (Dworkin, 2012, p. 1319). Beyond, research literature suggests the concept of data saturation, which suggests that a sample is large enough once additional interviews provide little, if any, new themes (Saunders et al., 2020). While consummate data saturation is likely unobtainable, we found that later interviews repeated themes of previous interviews, indicating that our sample size was sufficient. Further, with qualitative research being more concerned with in-depth understanding and meanings, the sample size does not need to be as extensive as in quantitative research (Dworkin, 2012). Therefore, we consider our sample size

adequate according to the presented factors. Conclusively, we can say that our chosen research method requires greater attention toward data collection and analysis skills than sample size to gain validity (Patton, 2015)

4.4.4. Triangulation of Primary and Secondary Data

Primary interview data, secondary data, and detailed field notes have contributed to developing our study's findings. Triangulation involves using multiple sources of data and methods to confirm or corroborate one's research findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000; as cited in Hussein, 2009). Data triangulation is particularly important for the social constructivist approach, as the coherence theory is a key element of this philosophy (Egholm, 2014). Our primary data is derived from firsthand accounts provided by our study participants through interviews. This data allowed us to gain insight into the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda, including their encounters with social and cultural norms, as well as legal structures. We expect our primary data to provide the foundation of our investigation to answer our research question, as it contributed rich and relevant knowledge to our inquiry. In addition, document secondary data forms the theoretical frame of our study, delivers background information, and contributes to the contextualization and substantiation of our findings (Saunders et al., 2020). While our primary data solely focuses on obtaining relevant information in the Rwandan context, our secondary data is more wide-ranging and not geographically constrained but generally discusses thematically relevant topics such as gender, institutions, and development literature. Incorporating secondary data sources offers supplementary information on our research topic, allowing us to scrutinize our results from various angles, thus improving the reliability and credibility of our primary data (Saunders et al., 2020).

We further supplement our primary and secondary data with detailed field notes, which enable us to draw connections between the themes and concepts discussed in the literature and the specific experiences and perspectives of our study participants. This integrative approach allows us to enrich our analysis and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. Hence, we make use of secondary data and field notes to assess, interpret and classify our primary data to ensure that our argumentation and derived knowledge gain validity and credibility in accordance with the coherence theory. In turn, we use our primary data to refine existing theories under our abductive approach, enriching our understanding of the subject matter. Through a rigorous analysis of the firsthand information collected during our interviews with female leaders in Rwanda, we can identify areas where the existing theory falls short and propose modifications to better align with

the empirical evidence we have gathered. This allows us to create a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda and to contribute to the broader academic discourse in the field. To sum up, our study relies on primary data gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews, as well as secondary data and field notes used to support the analysis of our data. This integration of three distinct data sources constitutes a form of triangulation, helping us to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena.

4.5. Data Analysis

4.5.1. Transcription

With the consent of our respondents, our interviews were audio recorded for the purpose of transcription (Appendix D). We used the transcription software Otter.ai, which provided an initial auto-generated transcript. Regardless, to ensure all transcripts were accurate, we manually reworked and corrected the initial transcripts. For time efficiency reasons, we each transcribed the interviews that we observed and ensured that transcriptions were finished within one week after the interview. This also enhanced the validity of our contextual interpretations. Our transcription procedure embraced a general dedication to verbatim, however, aiming at limiting confusing language to increase the comprehensibility of the transcripts. A dedication to verbatim is especially vital considering our social constructivist philosophy, as language is an integral part of the analysis (Egholm, 2014). We further synchronized our transcripts with the written notes we each took while observing. To guarantee the accuracy of our transcriptions, we reviewed and corrected one another's transcripts. We aimed to attain mutual agreement and internal validity and reliability of our observations by engaging in immediate discussions after the interviews and conducting collective reviews (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Transcribing is an integral part of qualitative data processing and terms the translation from oral to written language, making the data amenable for closer analysis (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). To ensure the veracity of our data and represent a picture that closely aligns with the interviewees' realities, it is essential to transparently disclose the transcription process (Wellard & McKenna, 2001). We are aware that transcription implies a change in medium, making it important for researchers to consider reliability and validity concerns. To reduce misrepresentation through transcription, we agreed upon and followed the presented consistent procedure (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

4.5.2. Coding

Our transcription process, as described above, served as an initial review of our data, allowing us to closely examine and develop an initial understanding of it, which, in turn, facilitated our interpretation of the data (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). It is worth noting that our coding and analysis processes were iterative, even though they are described in separate sections. This iterative approach involved continually revisiting our data, refining our coding framework, and re-evaluating our analysis to ensure we captured the full breadth and depth of our study participants' experiences (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). By adopting an iterative process, we systematically refined our approach and arrived at more nuanced and insightful findings.

A crucial aspect of the coding process is establishing clearly defined and rigorous coding procedures that are consistently applied to meet the "*validity and reliability standards associated with qualitative research*" (Williams & Moser, 2019, p. 47). We, therefore, coded our data in three distinct steps, through which we repeatedly reviewed and reexamined the data to eventually construct proper themes and their derived meaning. Being two researchers was further beneficial in discussing the codes and aligning our understanding of the data for categorization, which, combined with the meticulous coding steps, culminated in theory refinement and the creation of meaning (Williams & Moser, 2019). As suggested by Williams and Moser (2019), we followed three coding steps: 1) Open Coding, 2) Axial Coding, and 3) Selective Coding (Appendix E).

An overview of the coding steps can be found in Figure 7. We exemplify our coding process based on the selective code *Social Conventions*, showing how we went from the open codes to axial and selective themes:

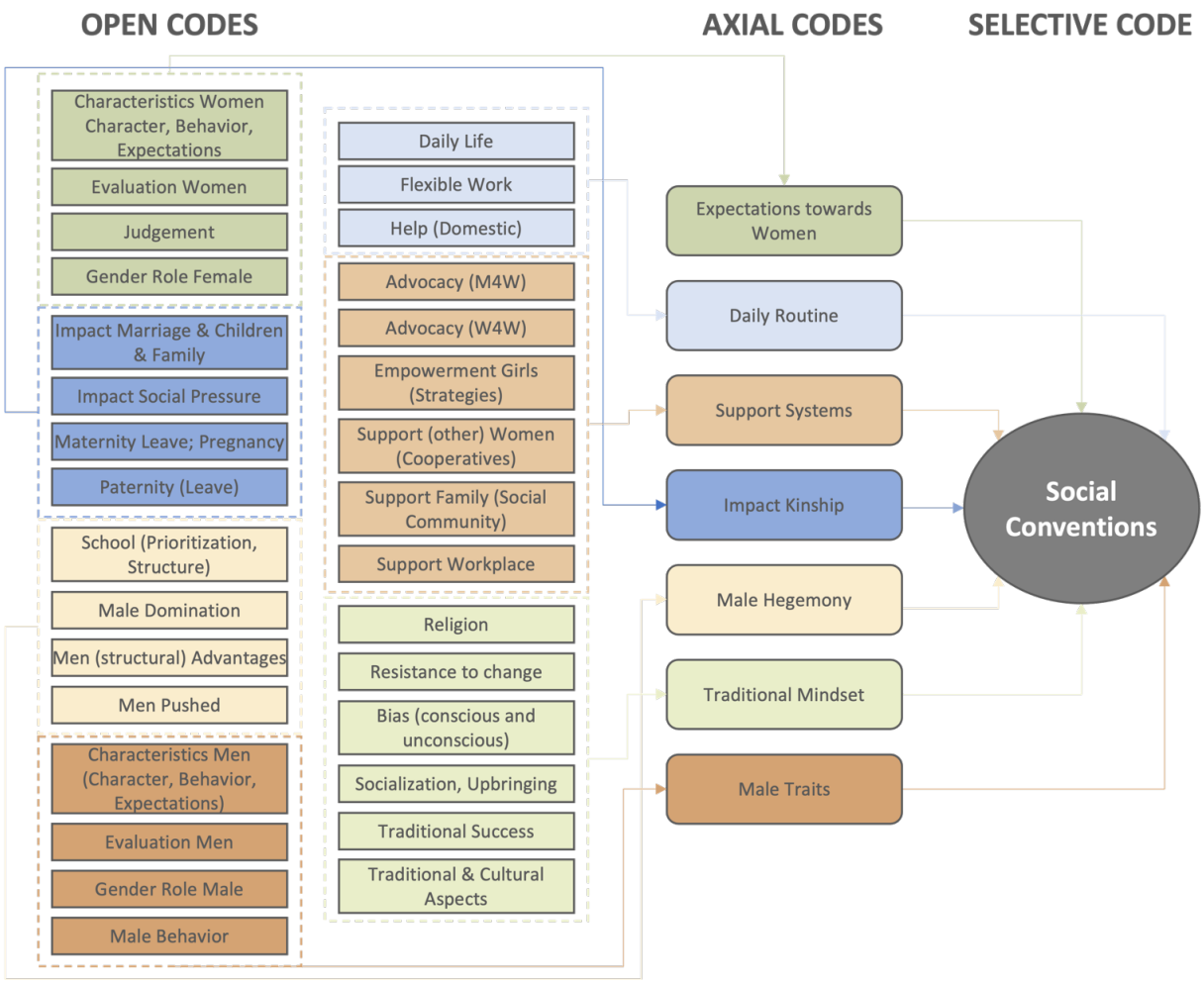

Figure 7: Coding Steps

During the initial step of open coding, we reread the transcripts and identified distinct themes and concepts for categorization. During this step, we approached the data dispassionately from theory and let empirical impressions and ideas emerge inductively. This led us to the creation of 109 initial codes that included a multitude of different subjects, even those that may not be relevant to our research question. We decided to include this step regardless, as it would allow us to get a more representative picture of the women's complex realities and pay attention to themes that may not initially seem relevant but could eventually impact how meaning is socially constructed. To undertake this initial step of the coding process, we used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, which simplified the accurate execution of the process. During the second step of axial coding, we refined, aligned, and categorized the initial themes into a more structured framework. With our previous experience in coding and examining similar topics in the Ugandan context, we

were aware of the importance of considering the interplay between different themes and codes. This step involved identifying relationships between categories and subcategories, leading us to 28 axial codes. Eventually, we got to the third level of coding, refining, and categorizing our codes even further. Through selective coding, we consolidated and incorporated the organized data categories derived from axial coding into coherent and meaningful expressions, serving as the foundation for our further analysis (Williams & Moser, 2019). After this process, we concluded nine codes (Figure 8) that represent the key categories derived from our dataset that are most relevant to our research question:

SELECTIVE CODES	CODE DESCRIPTION
Governance	Systems level encompassing polity, politics, and policies
Social Conventions	Unwritten rules and expectations that guide behavior, particularly within Rwandan society and culture
Exposure	Broadening of women's perspectives and understanding through opportunities for knowledge and self development, facilitating the development of new skills, competencies and confidence building
Representation	The influence of the different types of representation (descriptive, symbolic, substantive) on women in terms of reaching leadership opportunities
Advantageousness	The outcome of institutional influences as advantageous for women
Disadvantageousness	The outcome of institutional influences as disadvantageous for women
Contextual Information	Contextual information that inform the other codes
Intersectionality	Intersectionality a factor that further influence women and aggregate difference based on gender
Recommendations	Derived recommendations for necessary institutional developments to reach higher equality for women in the workplace

Figure 8: Selective Codes

4.5.3. Analysis Style

The analysis style we believe addresses our research aim best is a Thematic Analysis (TA), specifically Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2019) approach. Briefly defined, TA is "*a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data*" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79) and allows the researcher to focus on shared experiences and their ascribed significance across the data set. In light of our research philosophy, this is particularly fitting, allowing us to analyze the data of individuals "*representative of a general collective, defined by discourse and social constructions*" (Egholm, 2014, p. 146). TA highlights the researcher's active involvement in identifying and selecting significant themes and patterns that are presented to the reader (Braun & Clarke, 2006), aligning with our subjective ontological assumption (Egholm, 2014). Further, this analysis style offers flexibility in

processing data, enabling us to scrutinize our data to discover intricacies as the identification of a theme is not solely based on its frequency of occurrence in the dataset but instead on how abundantly it describes the meaning and significance of a particular pattern (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theme, therefore, "*is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures*" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82) but rather on shared meaning.

Despite having a theoretical background guiding our research direction, we did not presume the existence of potential themes in the data but rather anticipated that the data would influence and shape our research in an abductive fashion. Considering that our study investigates a topic related to impalpable, socially constructed, and invisible notions, we move beyond mere semantic analysis, including latent themes. These comprise underlying ideas and conceptualizations, which we identify and interpret when structuring the data. An example of that would be our respondent Josy who talks about the disproportionate burdens of being a woman: "*It doesn't come as an obligation to me. But there are situations I actually sometimes talk about it jokingly that I wish that in another life I become a man and he becomes a woman*". Although she claims that these responsibilities are not obligatory for her, her manner of conveying the message suggests otherwise. Conclusively, our analysis includes semantically explicit and implicit meanings and offers a comprehensive description of the overall dataset and specific details within individual accounts. Due to the nature of our research topic, we incorporated latent themes in our analysis as sensitive or cultural matters were commonly expressed through inexplicit expressions and underlying denotations.

4.6. Research Ethics

4.6.1. Universal Research Ethics

First and foremost, obtaining informed consent from research participants is widely considered an inevitable ethical obligation in research (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018; Josephson & Smale, 2020). Informed consent means that we only proceed with our research and inquiries after providing a clear explanation to the participants about our motives and intended outcomes for both us and them (Brydon, 2006). We have ensured to explain the objective of our research to all our respondents and gave them the opportunity to ask any questions before starting the interview. We further explained that they could withdraw from the interview at any point. As we investigate a sensitive issue, we further promised all our respondents' anonymity (Brydon, 2006). Therefore, we

obliterate all information that may indicate their identity, such as the names of their companies, and only refer to them by synonyms.

4.6.2. Specific Considerations for Development Research

Over the past few years, ethical concerns related to researchers from the Global North conducting fieldwork in the Global South have become more prevalent in literature (Binns, 2006). Although some scholars strongly oppose research conducted by individuals outside the community (Kobayashi, 1994; as cited in Binns, 2006), others contend that cross-boundary studies may be acceptable, as difference is a fundamental aspect of social interaction, and we can never truly be considered absolute insiders or outsiders in all regards (Nast, 1994; as cited In Binns, 2006). Regardless, considerations about power dynamics and positionality may be debatable and should be addressed. The researcher's position and identity in relation to the researched community are often defined by factors such as gender, ethnicity, class, race, marital status, religion, and other non-demographic characteristics, including their worldview. The quality and nature of development research can be influenced by these factors, especially as most of this research is conducted by individuals not part of the researched communities (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). This results in the possibility that researchers "*produce knowledge or interpret societies from a position or location of power and privilege […] without sufficient input from the local people* " (Apentiik & Parpart, 2006, p. 34). While this dichotomy arguably oversimplifies the intricate nature of development research (Apentiik & Parpart, 2006), we recognize these potential risks and have tried to portray our respondents' perspectives as accurately as possible through our commitment to proper research techniques. We are further aware of our foreignness's relation to demographic and non-demographic factors but attempted to minimize their effect through rapport building and open conversation with the respondents. Regardless, we are aware that some power imbalances might prevail despite all efforts. Though, this may not necessarily be related to our position as foreigners but rather to our position as researchers. We, as researchers, have engaged in reflexivity and continually reassessed our positionality and assumptions to overcome hierarchical relations between ourselves and the researched community to the best of our abilities (Momsen, 2006). With the feedback from some of our respondents being very excited that we chose their country and its development for research and our dedication to being respectful and eager to learn about the culture and country we are researching, it is our sincere hope that our research does not cause any undue offense or harm to any individuals or groups involved.

4.6.3. Our Position as Women Researchers

With our previous experiences conducting research in Uganda and India, we have gathered knowledge that has helped us develop a keen sense of observation, attention to detail, and critical thinking skills that have been essential in conducting this study. Having conducted research in developing countries and particularly the East African context, we already had some familiarity with certain cultural norms and practices and honed our ability to adapt to the given context quickly. This enabled us to navigate the complex dynamics of the research process with ease. For example, we learned in our previous research that establishing contact on WhatsApp is more commonly used than email; therefore, we established contact through WhatsApp, making the communication process much more efficient. We also understood certain power dynamics at play and how to navigate them to ensure that the women felt comfortable and respected during the interviews. This particularly adds to our positionality as women researchers, which has played a significant role in this project. Our own experiences as women provide us with a greater understanding of issues voiced as we have faced similar dynamics in our own lives; thereby, we could easily relate to the women and understand underlying themes and meanings. By meeting the women in person and showing them our interest in their lives, we built rapport and formed connections that have significantly enhanced our research.

As foreigners flying to Rwanda and talking to women, we were aware that we could be perceived as outsiders, which could impact the trust-building process with the women we interviewed. However, our positionality as women researchers and awareness enabled us to build a sense of solidarity with the women, making them feel comfortable and valued. One of the women we interviewed captured this sentiment, stating that it was great that we were interested in coming to her country to conduct research. This example reinforces our positionality as researchers who understand and value the perspectives of the women we interviewed. Our ongoing reflexivity and positionality are significant strengths of this study. Our attention to detail, critical thinking skills, and understanding of the power dynamics at play have ensured that the research conducted is rigorous, ethical, and respectful of the voices and experiences of the women we interviewed.

4.7. Limitations

By applying a constructivist approach in our research, we imply that we acknowledge the influence of our own values and beliefs on our research process. Thus, it was inevitable that our

preconceived notions influenced our research inquiry, precluding us from completely detaching ourselves from our subjective beliefs and values. As argued by Bryman et al. (2019), it is impossible for researchers to refrain from personal values as they are human. We duly recognize that our position as women researchers may potentially introduce a bias in a gender-themed research project. Firstly, we must be aware that researching a topic about gender equality might lead us to approach our respondents with empathy, may affect our ability to remain impartial, and hence influences our interpretation (Saunders et al., 2020). Conversely, our empathy could have encouraged women to engage in a more open conversation on gender-related topics based on reciprocity. Secondly, we need to concede that our inquiries and evaluations concerning the 'success of women' are profoundly shaped by our viewpoints and the Western standards and mindsets we grew up with and are exposed to. We acknowledge that the inherent concept of success is entirely constructed in itself and may be understood utterly differently, even among people from the same geographical or cultural background.

The validity of qualitative research can be increased by using various cases (Yin, 2009), which we aimed for by adopting a multiple case study approach, including participants in various leadership positions. We recognize that our case study could have benefitted from including more participants, such as female politicians or women in rural areas, to enhance its diversity. We want to point out that our research has been conducted only in the capital region of Kigali, making it essential to emphasize that the realities of women in rural areas significantly differ from those in urban areas (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). However, our limited time horizon and access to relevant networks and resources constrained us from doing so. We have obtained some illustrative statements by talking to respondents who have either lived in rural areas or are confronted with the challenges faced by women in those areas through the nature of their work. We further acknowledge the absence of representation of other marginalized groups or factors in our participant sample (e.g., individuals of the LGBTQIA+ community). To mitigate these limitations, we have strived to employ a rigorous and precise formulation of our research question, specifically focusing on female leaders to clarify the research concentration.

Due to the time constraints of our master's thesis, we conducted our research within a specific timeframe, despite our phenomenon being subject to ongoing developments. Followingly our study is cross-sectional in nature as it is "*carried out at one time point or over a short period*"

(Levin, 2006, p. 24). Therefore, our data is limited in representing this development and rather provides a snapshot of the current situation. Given the brief time frame of our research, we recognize that the perspectives, meanings, and experiences shared by our participants may shift with changing (social) contexts. Therefore, replicating our study at a different time may result in varying outcomes (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). As we inherently interpret language through our own experiences and socialization, we are further aware of our impact as researchers on our findings as language is "*never [a] neutral representation of the world*" (Egholm, 2014, p. 153). To valorize our knowledge production and reduce this and other limitations associated with qualitative research, such as biases, credibility, and validity concerns as broached in previous sections (Flyvbjerg, 2006), we continuously engage in reflexivity as a key part of our constructivist approach (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

To sum up, we are aware of various limitations to this research study, of which the most prevalent are discussed in this chapter. Regardless of the limitations inherent in any research, we have made a concerted effort to minimize them to the best of our ability by following standard practices described in literature. The methodology presented in the preceding chapter provides transparency to our process and allows for a thorough understanding of our data analysis approach. We will further be reflective on potential shortcomings throughout our analysis and discussion.

5. Analysis

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the primary data collected in our study, offering insights into the institutional factors that shape the experiences of women leaders in Rwanda. Throughout the chapter, we aim to answer our sub-research questions and main research question by examining primary and secondary data in a rigorous and systematic manner while paying close attention to the nuances and complexities of the Rwandan context supported by our field observations. To achieve this, the chapter is outlined in four main sections. First, we provide a brief overview of our primary data and derived codes. Second, we discuss our sub-research question A (*How are the key institutional factors constituted?)* and identify the institutional pillars and their particular features in the Rwandan context. This section delves into the regulative, normative, and cultural cognitive pillars (Scott, 1995/2013) that underpin the institutional framework for gendered

experiences in Rwanda. Third, we analyze the interaction of these pillars and answer our sub-research question B (*How do these institutional factors interact with one another?*). This section explores the interplay between the different institutional factors and how they consequently shape women's experiences. We draw on various secondary data sources and our own field observations to provide a contextualized understanding of these interactions. Lastly, we analyze our main research question, exploring how formal and informal institutional factors shape the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda. Through our analysis, we assess the key themes, patterns, and relationships found in our data to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of our research topic. Our selective codes are instrumental in the construction of our argument. To round off, we will use our findings to provide recommendations for policymakers and practitioners on how to address prevailing issues and promote gender equality and women's leadership in Rwanda and beyond.

5.1. Recapitulation of Primary Data

As previously explained in Chapter 4, our primary data was organized through a three-step coding process. This section will briefly present our encountered themes to provide a broad overview of the codes and meanings.

Our initial 109 codes were derived from the content of the interview data, to which we assigned code names based on the topic of the interview passages. These code names often followed a specific naming convention to facilitate the identification of related or corresponding codes later on, for example, *Respect (+)* and *Respect (-)* encompassing opposing accounts of women being respected or disrespected in the workplace, or *Evaluation Men* and *Evaluation Women* describing how each gender is appraised in the workplace. Once these open codes were established, we revised the themes, quotes, and transcripts to group the codes into more refined themes, leaving us with 28 axial codes. We then mapped these codes, as shown in Figure 9, to identify connections and interactions between the themes. This step is especially crucial considering our sub-research question B, to examine the interaction between institutions. We arranged the codes on five different

levels, which helped us understand which themes may be considered as root causes and which are depictions of outcomes resulting from the interaction of other themes.

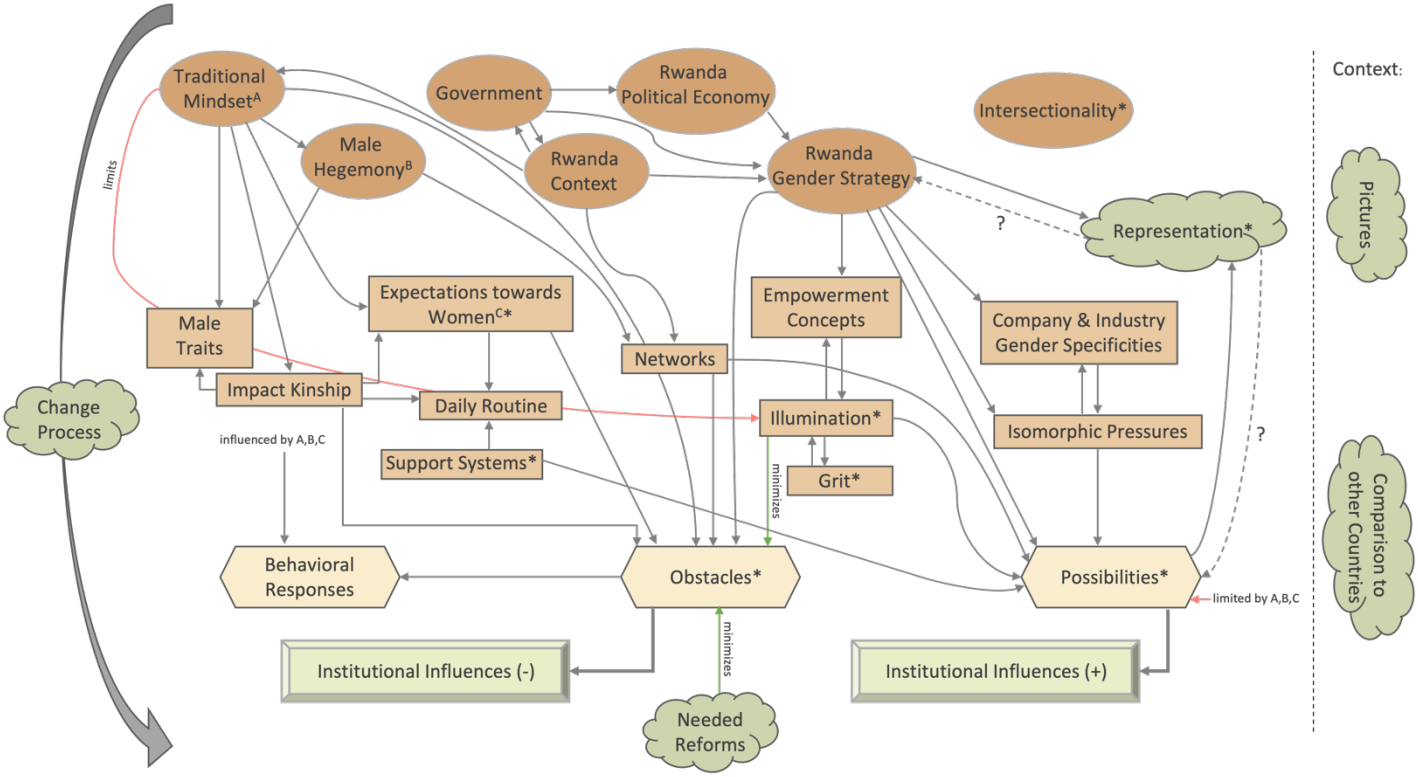

Figure 9: Axial Coding Map

Figure 9 represents how the axial codes relate to each other and describes their relationships. Circled codes represent first-level themes, identified as root causes influencing other themes. For example, the theme of *Traditional Mindset* influences the *Expectations towards Women* by perpetuating gender stereotypes, assigning women as primary agents in households. These second-level codes are presented in rectangular boxes and, in turn, shape third-level codes depicted in hexagons. To illustrate the example further, *Expectation towards Women* leads to *Obstacles* for female leaders. Three hexagon codes emerged from our data: *Obstacles*, *Possibilities*, and *Behavioral Responses*. These codes either hinder or support women and ultimately determine whether the institutional influence is harmful or supportive, resulting in two boxed codes: *Institutional Influence (-)* and *Institutional Influence (+)*. We also found that *Intersectionality*, represented by an initial circular code, impacts various interactions. Themes heavily influenced by *Intersectionality* are marked with an asterisk (*).

Moreover, contextual factors are represented with cloud symbols. Different colored arrows represent the relationship between all codes. Grey arrows indicate the direction of connection between codes without indicating the nature of the relationship (a grey arrow can be read as "shapes"). Red arrows indicate that the source code impairs the receiving code. For example, *Traditional Mindset* limits *Illumination*. In contrast, green arrows indicate positive influences, while dotted arrows indicate relationships where conclusive data is lacking. For example, we encounter ambiguous evidence on the relation between Representation and Opportunities for women (i.e., substantive representation). The thick arrow on the left, connected to *Change Process*, symbolizes the dynamic nature of our research and the flow of our exploration from top to bottom. As a last step, we grouped our axial codes into nine distinct selective themes, further guiding our analysis. Figure 10 visualizes this step and displays the composition of our selective codes.

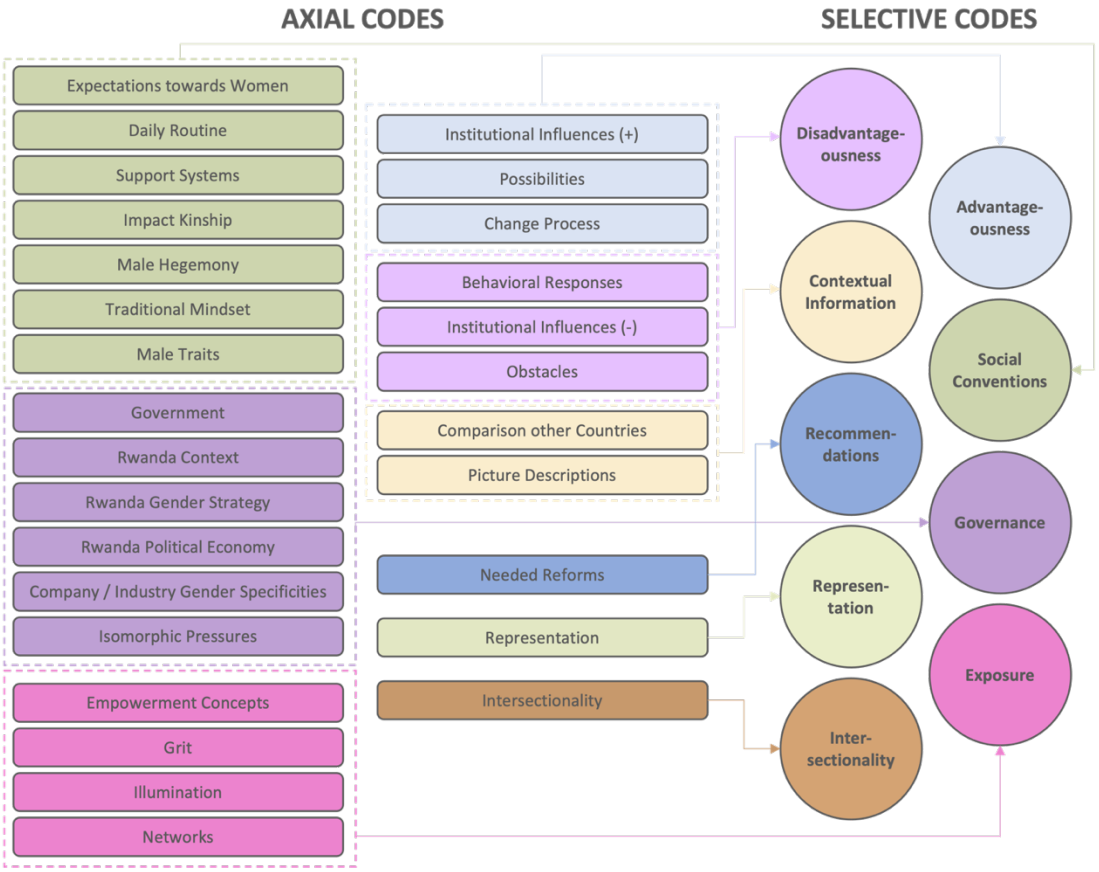

Figure 10: Composition of Selective Codes

1) The first code we identified here encompasses the theme of *Governance*, describing the systems level in Rwanda, including polity, policy, and politics. 2) The second selective code entails accounts of *Social Conventions*, in which we condense unwritten rules and expectations that guide

behavior within the Rwandan society and culture. 3) A third key theme pooled under *Exposure* relates to explanations about the expansion of women's perspectives and understanding through opportunities for knowledge and self-development that eventually facilitate the development of new skills, competencies, and confidence building. These first three categorical findings are particularly valuable in examining our sub-research questions A and B. 4) Our fourth identified theme, *Representation*, will further support this analysis, encompassing our respondent's account regarding the influence of the different types of representation (descriptive, symbolic, substantive according to Coffé, (2012)) on women in terms of reaching and maintaining (leadership) opportunities. Our next two codes represent the 5) advantages (A*dvantageousness*) and 6) disadvantages (D*isadvantageousness*) of female leaders in Rwanda. We see these codes as a second level of our selective themes that depict the sequels of the institutional factors in Rwanda for women leaders. To better understand these, code 7) includes contextual information of the country-specific context that informs the other codes. 8) The eighth theme we have identified is *Intersectionality*. This code is especially vital as it emphasizes the importance of considering intersecting factors that shape women's experiences and potentially further aggregate gender-based differences. 9) Our last code summarizes accounts of our respondents that call for further development or changes to better support women and female leaders in Rwanda, through which we derived *Recommendations* for necessary institutional developments to reach higher equality for women in the workplace. A graphic illustration of the array of our selective codes can be seen in Figure 11:

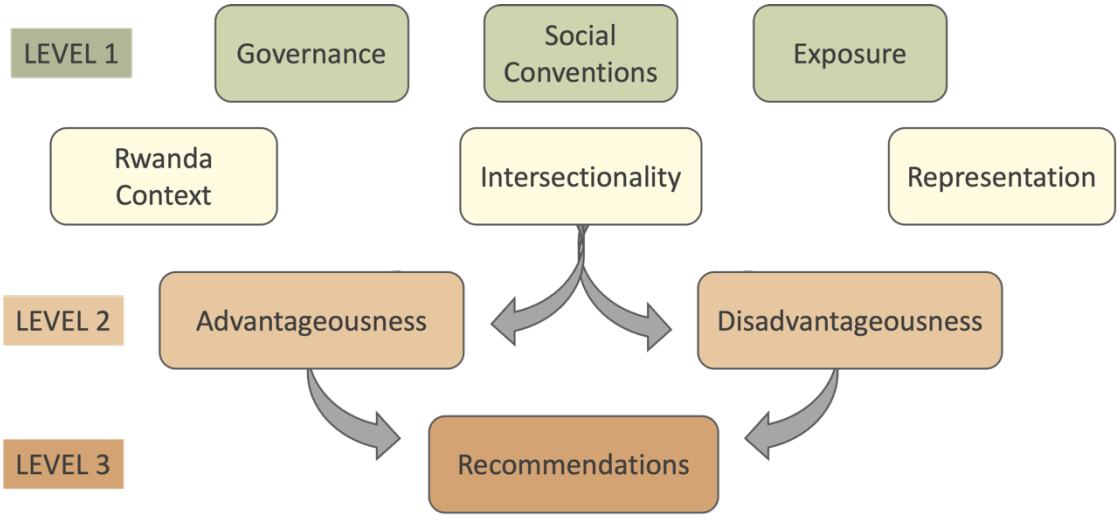

Figure 11: Selective Codes

5.2. Key Institutional Factors

In this section, we delve into the first of our sub-research questions (A): "*How are the key institutional factors constituted?*" This particular inquiry serves as the starting point for our analysis, as it provides a foundation for our comprehension of the institutions at play within the Rwandan context. We draw upon our empirical data and connect our findings to the theoretical framework, particularly to Scott's (1995/2013) institutional pillars. By closely examining these factors, we constitute the basis for later understanding how they interact and shape women's experiences. As a result, this sub-research question forms an essential component of our analysis, serving as a crucial stepping stone toward answering our main research question.

5.2.1. Governance

> *"The government has put in a lot of work to encourage gender balance […] And now is the time that the whole world is getting to realize that 'Oh, Rwanda, it's like this'." (Laura)*

The first finding we have come to through our coding process is the theme of *Governance*. This theme pertains to the formal governance structures of Rwanda and encompasses various aspects, including the role of the president, the cabinet, the parliament, and political agendas. To substantiate our understanding of this theme and the political structure of Rwanda, secondary data has been useful in gaining an overview of persisting laws and regulations. Considering our theoretical framework, this theme aligns with what Scott (1995/2013) coins as the regulative pillar and will guide our exploration of Rwanda's formal institutional set-up.

The above quote of one of our respondents gives a first indication of the efforts the Rwandan government has made in the past decades since the late 1990s in terms of regulatory changes toward gender equality. Most of our respondents ascribe a large portion of the changes that have occurred for women over the past years to the government, particularly President Paul Kagame, and the overall commitment to promoting gender: "*In Rwanda, we were lucky that the President himself talks about gender*" (Fiona). Another respondent tells us about her upbringing in Congo and how different today's setting for women in Rwanda is compared to other East African countries. When elaborating on where she thinks these differences stem from, she explains, "*I don't want to say Kagame because Kagame is always the answer that people give here, but yeah, technically. The government is trying to empower women in like everything, literally everything. Rwanda is actually*

known for that and they're really doing something for it." (Ruby). In sum, all our respondents agree that "*Rwanda is really pushing the women agenda*" (Margaret)

To explore what exactly Kagame and the Rwandan government have done to support women in the regulatory sphere, we identified three major legislations with a particularly gendered focus. Rwanda arguably has had an impressive upswing within a relatively short time span since the appointment of its government in 2003, which filled around two-thirds of its cabinet at the time with women (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). However, the first essential piece of legislation preceded this female majority cabinet by four years, dating back to November 1999 (Burnet, 2008). The Inheritance Law is an example of how women in government and civil society worked together in post-conflict Rwanda to make it legal for women to inherit property. By fundamentally altering traditional inheritance practices, the law ensured equal inheritance rights for both male and female children. Women gained full legal autonomy to enter into contracts, pursue paid employment, open bank accounts, and own property in their names without spousal or paternal approval or dependence on their husbands. Rwanda's historical context, as outlined in Chapter 2, may have played a role in making this implementation possible. Under post-genocide circumstances, women's civil rights organizations and the government worked together to introduce a series of bills aimed at promoting gender equality (Burnet, 2008). With coming into effect, the Inheritance Law laid the foundation for women's regulative upheaval.

The second legislation to address is Rwanda's gender-sensitive Constitution from 2003 (Rwabuhihi, 2015), which enshrines women's rights and includes a thirty percent quota for women in decision-making bodies (Burnet, 2008; UN Women, 2019). While the transitional government of 1994 had a female representation of around 14%, by 1999, already one-quarter of the parliament was comprised of women (Burnet, 2019). Before the parliamentary elections in 2003, women occupied 25.7% of the seats in parliament. Following the implementation of gender quotas through the new constitution, women's representation in the Rwandan government continued to increase significantly. Factually, in 2003, women won 48.8% of the seats in the lower house and around 40% of the seats in the entire parliament, meaning the Chamber of Deputies and Senate combined (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013). By the parliamentary elections of 2008, this number rose to 56.3% in the lower house, making Rwanda the first country in the world to have a female majority in a national legislative chamber. Adding the gender distribution within the Senate, the Rwandan

parliament amounted to 45% female representation. This further skyrocketed in the 2013 Rwandan Parliamentary elections, where women candidates won 64% of seats, making Rwanda one of the leading countries for women's political representation (UN Women, 2019). Consequently, the rise in female political representation indicates that the 2003 Constitution was certainly successful in ensuring descriptive representation, following Coffé's (2012) explication.

Despite Kagame being involved in the transitional government between 1994 and 2003 (Hogg, 2009) and him arguably making gender equality a topic of conversation (Longman, 2006; as cited in Burnet, 2019) (*"We're so lucky to have a president who speaks and the leaders understand or listen"* (Josy); "*Even the President himself, people just label him as 'Ah the president is a feminist'"* (Dana)), it is paradoxical that only one crucial piece of legislation has been passed after the 2003 elections (Devlin & Elgie, 2008), pointing to the question whether female representation in the Rwandan government is substantive (Coffé, 2012). Next to the two major legislations that we have already presented, other gendered regulations include the attainment of Category One status for rape or sexual torture in the post-genocide prosecution guidelines (1996), as well as the passing of extended rights of pregnant and breastfeeding mothers in the workplace (1997) and the law on protecting children from violence (2001), all passed while the number of women in government was significantly smaller than today (Devlin & Elgie, 2008).

Regardless, a noticeable policy achievement after 2003 is the 'Law on the Prevention, Protection and Punishment of Any Gender-Based Violence' (anti-GBV law), which became effective in 2009 (Burnet, 2019; Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013; Devlin & Elgie, 2008). The law criminalizes polygamy, establishes a legal framework for defining rape of an adult woman, and prescribes penalties for those who violate the law (Devlin & Elgie, 2008). The formulation and passing of the law were significantly influenced by women deputies and the Forum for Rwandan Women Parliamentarians (FWRP). Important to mention is also that they worked collaboratively with their male counterparts from the beginning of the legislative process. Devlin and Elgie (2008) argue that this signified a greater sense of solidarity between male and female deputies following 2003. This argument of greater solidarity and improved collaboration is also spawned in one of our participant's comments: "*I think the relationships today currently, it's much easier to collaborate, men and women in the workplace, especially in Rwanda […] the country's leadership has really built a very conducive environment where women have a voice*" (Lilli). Following the account of international observers,

the proposed inclusion of marital rape as a gender-based violence crime led to a heated parliamentary debate on the law (UNIFEM, 2006). FFRP Executive Secretary Judithe Kanakuze urged the chamber to protect Rwanda's image as a dedicated advocate of women's rights by approving the bill. While this might show that female parliamentarians have increased their ability to guide their male colleagues, it raises the question of the extent to which deputies truly support certain gender-based legislation. Beyond, it is worth mentioning that although women's involvement in the creation and passage of the anti-GBV legislation suggests substantive representation per Coffé's (2012) definition, our primary data includes divergent perspectives regarding the extent of female participation in Rwanda and its impact on legislative outcomes: "*when you're trying to pass a bill or something, and then it gets rejected and we're like, what? How did most women not vote, you know, free pads in school […] we came up with a term like, 'vaginas in seats' because they're just women who are there, but they don't support women*." (Barbara).

A last regulative initiative, which was brought forward in our interviews, is a newly introduced law aligning kids' school times with parents' office hours, further allowing for greater flexibility. Our respondent Ophelia explained to us: "*What the government did, which was very, very amazing; before last year, we used to come to work at 7:30 [a.m.]. […] the parliament said […] this is too early, first of all, for the kids to be waking up […] then the parents are also rushing to work to get to work at 7:30 [a.m.], it was not working. So effective January this year, they now put it for 8:30 [a.m.] for kids to get to school, and nine for office work.*" The law further includes a flex hour during which employees may work remotely (Republic of Rwanda, 2023). Ophelia further says that she feels like "*Rwanda is one country that supports their staff*," making it "*really easy to manage work and home*." This point towards the ongoing dynamic nature of Rwanda's efforts to advance and promote the development of regulatory frameworks.

We also want to draw attention to the Rwandan context and emphasize Rwandans' specific mindset toward their government. During our interviews, various participants have pointed out that they believe the positive implementation of regulations and political development of Rwanda is strongly tied to Rwandan's intrinsic character traits: "*What I found in Rwanda, everything starts from above. So, if a government puts in, we're very disciplined in Rwanda, so if the government says do this […] we will do it*" (Ophelia). Another participant further elaborates on that point, with an added layer drawing back on our above suggestion that not all legislations are internally supported: "*also*

why the top-down approach works here, because usually Rwandans are following the rules. You cannot do that everywhere, we are following the rules, we are organized […] Even if we think that it's not right but we will show as if we are, we agree, even sometimes deep in ourselves we don't agree" (Fiona).

In summary, Rwanda's regulative pillar is constituted through various gendered laws and regulations. The three most prominent ones have been presented in this chapter, namely the Inheritance Law (1999), the gender-sensitive Constitution (2003), and the anti-GBV Act (2009). Our participants' accounts and existing literature show that there appears to be a resolute political determination from the regime to advance gender equality. Rwanda's formal institutions appear to exert coercive power through specific legislative measures aimed at addressing gender-specific issues such as gender-based violence and property rules.

5.2.2. Social Conventions

The second apparent theme in our data accounts *for Social Conventions*. This code relates to the informal governance structures of Rwanda in terms of normative conventions. Underlying subjects such as the persistent *Traditional Mindset* and *Expectations towards Women*, as well as the *Impact [of] Kinship* or *Support Systems*, are encompassed in this selective theme. The code is especially expedient to inform how the regulative pillar after Scott (1995/2013) is constituted in Rwanda.

The axial code *Traditional Mindset* is one of the most significant codes that emerged from our data, characterizing the country's prevalent traditional and cultural beliefs. Beyond, the code entails our respondents' accounts of stereotypical characteristics of a 'good Rwandan woman,' such as being quiet, soft-spoken, respectful, and obedient: "*You're meant to be a bit timid, and it's very respectful to do that. So, when you are loud you stand out*" (Margaret). Moreover, a variety of respondents reports about females not speaking up despite being encouraged to do so: "*Someone just asked you for your opinion, that's literally the biggest permission you would ever have to not keep quiet […] I think a lot of times how they grew up because they're so silenced a lot as women.*" (Barbara). While we could observe such quiet and timid behavior for around one-third of our respondents, the remaining two-thirds appear rather loud and outspoken. These respondents were reflective of their non-conformity with the traditional expectations towards women: "*I am far from a good Rwandan woman […] being single, leaving my parents' home. I'm choosing to live by myself. I have lots of tattoos. So that whole representation of who I am, is not a good Rwandan woman*

culturally, or traditionally" (Octavia). Opposing these female stereotypes, men are traditionally considered as the head of the household and attributed characteristics such as strength, assertiveness, and leadership capabilities: "*The entire Africa, you find that men were meant to be the fighters, the warriors, the head of the family*" (Ophelia). We could observe these gendered behavioral expectations during our field interviews in open spaces such as cafés. For instance, during one interview, a group of men consistently disrupted our conversation by being extremely loud, taking up significant space in the café. Despite the disruption for us and other guests, no one intervened or asked them to lower their voices. In contrast, the female respondent continued to speak softly, and we had to encourage her multiple times to speak louder to understand her.

In this *Traditional Mindset*, we find a clear hierarchy between the genders, where men are regarded as leaders while "*women were always second priority"* (Margaret). This gender hierarchy strongly shapes all other aspects of what is perceived as 'appropriate behavior' for both genders (Scott, 1995/2013). While women are expected to be homemakers, boys are told to be ambitious from an early age, preparing them for their role as head of the household and provider. Thus, boys and girls are socialized and brought up with gendered expectations and roles that shape their behavior: "*the society was actually designed for men to work. If your role is to be the provider, it's been that of course, you have to be ambitious, of course, that is supposed to be your first priority […] [if girls] do exactly what boys do, [they]'ll actually be considered as a black sheep or rebel or something*" (Ruby). Simultaneously, success for women is traditionally defined by getting married and having children. Women that choose not to follow this "*lifecycle for a girl*" (Sarah) are "*out of the playbook*" (Octavia). An interesting finding of our data shows that the traditional idea of success as having children and getting married is applied to female leaders regardless of their achievements in their professional careers. According to some respondents, women may not be taken seriously in their professional careers unless they demonstrate success in their domestic lives: "*It's like, success is not you being a woman in leadership, success is with your family, where are your kids, okay, you're so big, and influencing everyone, but you have no man."* (Margaret). Our respondents indicate feeling disrespected in work settings for not being married or having children: "*Because respect is attached to having a child, having a husband, in this environment [workspace]. For me, that's what I've noticed. And there's times actually and in a meeting, I put on a ring, just to go to a meeting*" (Octavia).

The *Traditional Mindset* not only shapes how women are judged and evaluated but also shapes the *Expectations towards Women*. That is evident in traditional gender roles assigned to women within the family and in general. One example is that women are perceived as the primary homemakers, even though they engage in the professional spheres as well: "*In Rwanda, traditionally a man is the head of the family. This have not necessarily changed, we have evolved a little bit to include women [...] but when you bring it back to the family, household structure, that is not the case. A woman still has to fight to be respected by her husband, to be trusted financially, to go beyond just being the person who's raising the children"* (Octavia). The expectation toward women to fulfill most, if not all, of the responsibilities in the household persists, even when they have more demanding jobs than their male family members: "[*He] can be all day at home, and calls his wife to be like, I need some food"* (Octavia).

However, our respondents also point toward a societal shift with responsibilities being split between both husband and wife, at least to a certain degree: "*From conversations that I've had with my male friends, they'll tell you, my wife and I have split responsibilities within our home*" (Sarah). Moreover, most of the respondents acknowledge that there is a change happening in how men support in the reproductive space: "*Because before, men would leave work and go to a bar and have a beer and come home when the kids are sleeping […] today, you find them rushing, they're the ones going to pick the kids from school […] it is slowly coming. It has not reached there, but it is coming*" (Ophelia). However, these changes do not happen everywhere, and consensus among our respondents shows that such changes are currently mostly happening in the urban area of Kigali among the younger generation. Nonetheless, even in Kigali, traditional gender stereotypes and gender role expectations prevail, as respondents are in disagreement even with their peers at times: "*I never cease to get surprised when I hear comments, and they are our friends, comments like, 'Oh no, a woman cannot do that. I think that's what a man should do'*" (Lilli). Gendered expectations for women to fulfill in the reproductive space also shape their experience in the workplace. Respondents report situations where they needed to compromise their work as they are demanded at home. These expectations also lead to female leaders being perceived as having less time available at work, which leads to a biased *Evaluation of Women*, not only by males but also by women themselves: *"You have this unconscious bias […] one of the lady she's married, she has children, she was working very hard […] she told me […] if we hire a man he would be more flexible*

[…] she didn't realize that she was saying something that herself, she was doing very well […] it's not easy because we are surrounded […] by a male dominated environment and since 1000 years you cannot just change like this [snaps her fingers]" (Fiona). On the other side, due to the *Traditional Mindset*, which influences gender roles, men are not burdened with the same dual role responsibility as women, allowing them to be more flexible in their work and career choices. This and similar privileges were coded in *Male Hegemony*. Some of our respondents report that historically, boys were prioritized over girls to go to school, and to this day still benefit from structural advantages. The expectation for men to become providers and engage in the workplace results in a male-dominated work environment: "*Because there's like all these people, and then you're like, 1,2,3, 4 women in that happy hour. […] First of all, they're not even going to think that you're a founder, they're probably going to think you're somebody's girlfriend*" (Barbara). This male normativity leads to an unequal competition between men and women where women "*need to be very, very smart to beat someone [men] who is not smart.*" (Fiona). In general, our data indicates inequalities in the measure and evaluation of men and women. While men are widely perceived as competent and skilled, women often face converse assumptions: "*Guys if they come and say that I'm a social engineer, immediately […] what he is saying is gold. But when I come, most of the time, I have to prove that I'm smart*" (Ruby). These biased perceptions of men and women are also evident in the fact that positive attributes are associated with masculinity and negative ones with femininity. This is exemplified by the Rwandan saying, "*a good child is a man's child, but a bad child is a woman's child*" (Josy).

Our respondents indicate high social pressures to conform to norms imposed by the *Traditional Mindset*: "I *think it's a very common thing. Like, pressure to get married. Once you turn 24,25, then everyone's asking, when are you getting married, […] when are you going to give us kids and it's just an endless pressure, social pressure. […] Some people fall for the pressure*" (Laura). Evidently, most of our respondents at that moment in time defied these norms and gendered expectations as more than the majority of our respondents are unmarried: "*I know, they are going to pressure me to do it. I don't want to do it. […] I build a wall against it on an early stage, I want to focus on my career*" (Laura). The influence of family, marriage and children are summarized in the code *Impact Kinship,* which highlights how specific family settings shape the possibility of females to engage and perform in the productive sphere. For instance, our respondent Josy reports that her

husband constrained her from establishing her current startup as he wanted her to stay in a safe and predictable job where she could better manage her responsibilities at home.

Similarly, while family can constrain female leaders, it can also provide support and motivation for them. Some of our respondents speak about the influence of their family members as an inspiration for them: "*I was telling them, for me, my feminist come from my mother*" (Fiona). Moreover, we find instances where the husbands of our respondents support them in fulfilling the responsibilities of the home: "*So I know I can easily travel and focus on work, knowing that my husband takes care of everything*" (Lilli).

Data that explains how women get support in a plethora of ways is coded in *Support Systems*. Nearly all our respondents rely on house helpers who support them in fulfilling their home chores. Some respondents report that having a house help in Rwanda is widespread, while some acknowledge that mostly the inhabitants in the urban area of Kigali can afford it. These house helps are primarily young females in their early 20s, "*who have a story, and most of them will tell you, I'm here because my family cannot afford school fees for my younger siblings. In most cases, she's referring to her younger brothers*" (Sarah). This example underscores the pervasive influence of the *Traditional Mindset* and *Male Hegemony* on all interactions of individuals operating within the institutional framework of Rwanda. Other systems of support mentioned by the respondents were the ones of workplace support. Most of our respondents with children make use of flexible work arrangements to manage the dual role complexities. Moreover, maternity leave is a commonly discussed theme in our interviews, with women fearing to use their rights of taking leave to not disappoint in the work environment. Some of our respondents report wanting to advocate for better gender infrastructure and empowerment within their companies: "*I'm advocating and standing up for young women"* (Sarah).

In summary, the insights obtained from our interviews suggest that the normative pillar in Rwanda is shaped by *Social Conventions*, which manifest in diverse ways. Our findings reveal several underlying subjects encompassed within the theme of *Social Conventions*, such as the persistence of traditional mindsets and expectations towards women and men, as well as the impact of kinship and support systems. The perspectives gathered from our respondents and observations indicate that normative ideas play a significant role in shaping the society of Rwanda, highlighting the

importance of considering social conventions as an integral aspect of how institutions shape the experiences of female leaders.

5.2.3. Exposure

The third finding of our coding process is the theme of *Exposure*. This theme encloses how women broaden their perspectives through opportunities to develop new skills and competencies and build confidence. This finding relates to the cultural-cognitive pillar, defined as *"the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and create the frames through which meaning is made*" (Scott, 1995/2013, p. 67). The respondents highlight various aspects allowing them to gain exposure and become aware of culturally taken-for-granted routines. Some highlight the influence of education and knowledge, like our respondent Ruby: "*She [sister] actually gave me my first book, 'We Should All Be Feminists', Chimamanda Ngozi. So I read that book and I was like, this is crazy […] Jesus, that's what is happening here".* Laura similarly underlines that "*education opens the mind and exposes people to all the options that are available.*" Other respondents underline the importance of experiencing other cultures and countries, either through traveling, living abroad, or by growing up with international exposure in the city of Kigali: "*Honestly, it's simple but I travelled, I saw that things were done differently elsewhere. And then for me, some of those women that I saw just became like my role models"* (Margaret). Especially our respondents that are part of the Rwandan diaspora emphasize that their upbringing in other countries added to their confidence and knowledge development: "*I think one thing that is common, for sure, is that Rwandan diasporas are different […] in a sense that you grew [up] abroad. If you're exposed to external culture, if you lived in West Africa, or you got to live in US, Americans tend to be the loudest people you will ever meet, your perspective changes"* (Barbara).

A pervasive subject within our interviews refers to the importance of role models. The respondents share that seeing other females, either in their immediate environment, on television or media, or in leadership and government positions, contributed to their personal inspiration and aspirations. Katherine's testimony illustrates the meaningfulness of role models: "*My auntie was a teacher in my school, and I always used to think I want to be like her when I grow up*" further elucidating why having women leaders in all areas is important for younger girls: "*If that young girl is thinking I want to be a teacher […] she starts working hard to get there and then she realizes oh I can be more than that. So, the more you grow, you have one realization, the more you make new role models, and then boom, you have wonderful women in the future*" (Katherine). Additionally, the

respondents describe that the current representation of women in the economy and parliament supports them in negotiations, job interviews, and conversations with men by providing a reference point for women's capabilities, strengthening women's self-confidence: "*I've given myself a bit more worth. […] I am confident enough to present because I can make examples. […] she's in that position, do you think she's ineffective because she's a woman while she's leading a whole bank? […] So having that examples to give kind of makes you feel more confident, and you understand your worth a little bit more*" (Octavia). Having women in leadership also created a new social category and role for women: "*They are not only a housewife and not only mothers, they are more than that. They are career women, they are entrepreneurs, they are businesspeople […] I feel like that also brought some sense of respect, and exposure of capabilities women have other than being wives and daughters"* (Whitney). This quote captures how representation and role models in Rwanda transform ingrained taken-for-granted routines leading to increased self-confidence of women: "*As women we can. It's [not] only men who can do something, even women we can"* (Emelie). Our respondents accentuate that this so-called '*role model effect*' (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006) is particularly important for the adolescent and rising generations: "*When you're growing up, especially as a young girl, you need representation before you can even dream*" (Barbara). Considering our theoretical frame, our data here pertains to what Coffé (2012) defines as symbolic representation.

While our theme of *Exposure* provides a good indication of the factors constituting the cultural-cognitive pillar within the Rwandan context, we must acknowledge the positive orientation of our code. While our data shows that *Exposure* positively influences women in developing self-confidence and ambitions, we infer that women lacking such *Exposure* may have trouble developing such cognitive proficiencies. This tendency is recognized by our respondents reflecting on their privileges: "*If you're in this silo of our traditional community, you may not know anything else outside that. So […] you make statements like, 'but he's the man' because that's what you know*" (Margaret). Moreover, respondents acknowledge that not having access to *Exposure,* consequently being restricted in knowledge-generation possibilities and restrained from developing self-confidence, leaves women with fewer possibilities to contest taken-for-granted norms: "*But not everyone has a strong character, and sometimes it's easier to go with the flow, and to do what the society wants us to do than to go against the society*" (Fiona). An observation we want to allude to in this matter is that respondents appearing most confident were exceptionally aware of the Exposure they have

experienced throughout their lives. We further observed that specifically these women deviate the most from the normative behaviors and contest the traditional expectations held towards Rwandan women.

Concludingly, our interview data indicates that the cultural cognitive pillar in Rwanda is vastly constituted through the presence or absence of what we coin *Exposure*. Such Exposure includes access to education, knowledge-development opportunities, or contact with differing societies, for example, through travel. Our findings indicate that especially Rwandan diaspora seems to experience enriched *Exposure* due to their upbringing in other countries. Our respondents further attribute great significance to the 'role model effect' and indicate that the visible existence of role models significantly shapes the development of confidence and ambitions, especially for younger generations.

5.2.4. Interim Conclusion: Constitution of Rwanda's Institutional Pillars

To sum up, this section provided an in-depth analysis of the sub-research question A, examining how Rwanda's key institutional factors are constituted and offering comprehensive insights into the factors that shape the country's formal and informal structures. Our findings on *Governance* highlight the role of gendered laws and regulations as formal institutions, including the Inheritance Law (1999), the gender-sensitive Constitution (2003), and the anti-GBV Act (2009) for Rwanda's regulative pillar. Our participants' accounts and existing literature suggest a political commitment to advancing gender equality in Rwanda through formal institutions that exert coercive power to address gender-specific issues. Additionally, our exploration reveals the significance of *Social Conventions* for the normative pillar, including matters around traditional mindsets, expectations towards women and men, and the impact of kinship and support systems. Our analysis indicates the importance of considering such *Social Conventions* as an integral aspect of how institutions shape the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda. Lastly, our data signifies that the cultural cognitive pillar is largely constituted through the presence or absence of *Exposure*, encompassing access to education, knowledge-development opportunities, and revelation to differing societies. Following our interviews, the existence of role models is particularly influential in shaping women's confidence and ambition, especially among younger generations. These insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that form Rwanda's formal and informal institutions, which we build upon in the forthcoming sections.

5.3. Interplay of Institutional Factors

Based on the identified institutional factors in the previous section, we now investigate the second of our sub-research questions (B): "*How do these institutional factors interact with each other?*" When interacting, these institutional factors can either reinforce or undermine each other (Waylen, 2014). Therefore, by understanding how institutional factors interact, we can gain insights into the complex dynamics of social, economic, and political systems. This inquiry is an essential step in evaluating our main research question, as the interaction of institutional factors plays a significant role in shaping individual and societal behavior (Sidani et al., 2015). The interplay of our axial codes, as described in Section 5.1. (Figure 9), is the base for our analysis of the in-sync and out-of-sync relationships of the institutional pillars.

5.3.1. In Sync

> *"I think it has really empowered women, you know, they know, their rights, they know that they are an equal in the family set-up, they realize that they also can say something, they can do, they can start a business, they have a role to play."*
>
> *(Sarah)*

After establishing the puzzle pieces of Rwanda's institutional pillars, we classify a second level of our selective codes, which exemplify the interplay of these pillars. Through our theme of *Advantageousness*, we identify where formal and informal institutions appear to be in sync (Waylen, 2014), complementing and enhancing each other. The code further indicates how Rwanda's institutional frame has positively shaped women's realities, which we connect to the theme of *Representation* once again. It is crucial to mention that we merely analyze the interaction of the pillars within our topic of research; hence we place a focus on the interplay of the pillars with the focal point on gender equality.

The above-presented quote offers a first indication of a positive interplay between the regulative and cultural cognitive pillars. To investigate the interplay of the regulative and cultural-cognitive pillar, we will first dive into our code of *Advantageousness*; this theme is composed of the axial categories *Institutional Influences (+)*, *Possibilities*, and *Change Process*. Hence, the theme evolves around the positive or uplifting aspects that Rwandan women experience in accessing or maintaining leadership opportunities. *Advantageousness* highlights our respondents' perception that the regulative pillar fosters opportunities for women in business: "*They [government] have this*

new thing of enhancing women in every business […] I feel like opportunities are there because really the government of Rwanda tries to involve women at all levels." (Whitney); "*Like right now there are more opportunities for women […] there are so many trainings, there are so many companies that would like to hire more girls*" (Ruby). However, our respondent Caroline points out that "*access to schools and opportunities is not enough, they [girls/women] need to shift their mindset to make sure they have the confidence to take on leadership*."

This points us to the code *Representation*, which is vital to consider to better evaluate the interaction of the two pillars. As established in the previous sections and reinforced through the above statements, Rwanda has seen an increase in women's descriptive representation. Beyond, our data indicates that the increase of women in parliament and public life has also contributed to what Coffé (2012) defines as symbolic representation. In the Rwandan context, we see that having more women in these positions subsequently offers more display of women in "*any position*," says our respondent Emilie and further elaborates, "*we have women CEOs, we have women politician, we have ministers.*" Similarly, our respondent Barbara tells us, „Literally *all the biggest banks in Rwanda are led by women and they have 60% of women in parliament*." Fiona further sees Rwanda ahead of most other countries in terms of female representation, "*the young girls can see role models […] in the very high level […]. You have a lot, a lot, a lot of them. I think even much more than in Europe I have the feeling*". All our respondents agree that having more women visible in government and leadership positions adds to the confidence of girls in the rising generation: "*you know, knowing that it is possible for you to become someone you want to be because there's another woman who is in that seat. It gives courage*" (Josy); "*it's very inspiring for the young girls, they are very inspired by all these women in leadership*" (Ophelia). This indicates that a numeric increase of women fostered through regulative changes has the potential to enhance cultural-cognitive abilities.

Regardless, our findings also imply a generational gap when looking at the cultural cognitive pillar. One respondent points out, "*there's a huge intergenerational gap because our fight and ideas are completely different*" (Barbara), and another saying, "*they [older generation] were raised a certain way*" (Ruby). Our respondent Octavia further elaborates: *"I think it can still be an inspiration, but it is still considered as an unattainable dream, depending on where they are in their lives*." Our data shows that the cultural-cognitive pillar is strongly influenced by the setting someone is raised in, and the internalized mindset of one's abilities and aspirations is difficult to shift once established.

Our respondents often separate their testimonies into the 'old' and 'new generation,' through which we can see that the alignment of the regulative and cultural-cognitive institutions seem to sync over time. Successful symbolic representation further appears to be a key element in the interplay of the two pillars. However, our respondents' accounts show that merely seeing women in these positions is not sufficient, but the crunch point is that women and girls "*can actually see [themselves] in them*" (Ruby). Another respondent here particularly points to the differences between Kigali and rural areas, highlighting the importance of relatability within representation: "*I don't think it's the same influence […] a lot of people actually joke about it, which is quite interesting. When you go into villages, it's like, oh Claire Akamanzi, so that's the head of RDB the tourism industry […] when you start talking like that in the village like, 'yeah, my children that's not gonna ever be you.' So, it's like a joke around, but it's actually a little bit true. And most of those kids know it*." (Octavia). Our data here implies that the interaction of the cultural-cognitive and regulative pillars is crucially shaped by symbolic representation. If this is not given and girls or women do not feel convincingly represented, they will not take on opportunities provided through the regulative frame due to a lack of self-confidence. Hence, considering the context of our findings, we must point out that the in-sync relationship between the regulative and cultural-cognitive pillar that our data implies seems reliant on the age group of our participants and the environment of Kigali.

Relating to our social constructivist philosophy, this finding exemplifies the contextual nature of knowledge and the regulatory power it holds: "*There is a difference between what people in different contexts and times consider true, depending on the constructions and discourses that dominate their social space*" (Egholm, 2014, p. 165). What is socially constructed as true is thus dependent on the context one is in. This helps us reflect on older individuals constructing their reality based on the discourse and context to which they have been exposed over a long period. Such discourse and context may have included prevalent dogmas and social norms that have been deeply ingrained in their minds. As a result, older generations may hold beliefs, such as the idea that women are inferior, that are not in line with current regulations and may take time or a generational shift to entirely align: "*it's not just time - time as generations grow, and others die and we have new*" (Margaret), "*The mindset shift, takes a generation or more to completely change*" (Sarah). However, this philosophical consideration also allows us to conclude that within the context of our research, the two pillars approximate an in-sync relationship. Drawing back on Scott's (1995/2013) definition

of the cultural- cognitive pillar, we want to draw attention to the pillar's underlying premise of taken-for-granted routines. Accounts of our respondents point toward precisely such taken-for-granted understandings that women are without question in the workplace, politics, and high-level positions. Our respondent Dana says, "*in Rwanda, you don't even think of it*," explaining how deeply entrenched the regulatory rights of women have become in the country and women's cognitive mindset. Another respondent goes even further, saying discussions about gender equality and feminism are long outdated in Rwanda as "*we don't even need to make noise about feminism anymore, because we are already there*" (Ophelia).

Considering Waylen (2014), an institutional set-up that effectively enables women suggests that institutions are in sync, at least under the examination point of gender equality. In the case of Rwanda, our interviews have shown that the regulative pillar and cultural-cognitive pillar appear to approximate an in-sync relationship, as regulative rules and cultural-cognitive behavior reinforce one another rather than undermining one another. This is shown through the acceptance of regulatively provided opportunities, which in turn provides role models for other women, resulting in stronger confidence of women to then take on given opportunities and promote these for other women. As an informal institution, the cultural cognitive pillar operates towards a similar objective as the regulative pillar, which represents the formal institution, with the shared aim of promoting women.

5.3.2. Out of Sync

> *"At the end of the day, these things need to be reinforced from who's actually connected to people. And these programs need to go down right into the family, into the household, and they don't." (Barbara)*

Opposing the above section, this section focuses on the pillars being out of sync. Through our theme of *Disadvantageousness*, we identify where regulative and cultural-cognitive institutions appear to be unaligned with the normative pillar (Waylen, 2014), hindering or operating against one another. Following its contrary code, *Disadvantageousness* reveals how Rwanda's institutional framework negatively shapes women's lives, showcasing a failure of *Representation* to some degree.

Firstly, we argue that the normative pillar undermines the regulatory pillar. It is evident that despite regulations supporting women's rights, such as the anti-GBV law, patriarchal norms persist

in business environments, resulting in their non-adherence. A commonly discussed theme among our respondents is that women are sexualized in the workplace and experience gender-based violence: "*70% of people you're meeting, they're all interested in you as a woman, not as an entrepreneur*" (Josy); "*My Co-Founder actually was a little bit assaulted once […] she's going to sign a contract somewhere and men are just like, oh, wow, you wearing a mini skirt and whatnot*" (Katherine); "*Once we had a meeting, we were just sitting here, we were like who has been harassed in a work environments before? Everybody put their hands up*" (Katherine). Such patriarchal norms create hostile work environments for women, which can not only cause them to resign from positions but also constrain their business or leadership success. For instance, Barbara explains that she experienced that female founders do not enjoy participating in networking events dominated by men as they "*don't want to join the men's club […] they're [men] not even going to think that you're a founder, they're probably going to think you're somebody's girlfriend*".

Secondly, we find that gendered expectations and norms prevail, hindering gender equality progress. This highlights the significant influence of the normative pillar, which can impede regulatory advancements through its lack of support. More precisely, we find a misalignment between the normative and regulatory pillars since women were legally pushed in the work sphere, while normative understandings of gender roles have not changed. Followingly, they remain the primary agents in the reproductive sphere. Existing legislation primarily supports women to access opportunities in the productive sphere, while there is limited support for them to manage their dual role complexities. As a result, the majority of our respondents with children reports: "*Most of the time, you find yourself sacrificing certain things to fulfil another thing. Whether it's at home, you have to sacrifice something at work; whether it's at work, there is something at home you must sacrifice. […] We have this thing that we call guilt, where you have a lot of work to do then you find yourself sort of committing more than at home, you start feeling guilty*" (Lilli). Managing various responsibilities further leaves female leaders with a mental burden, which has been coined by French feminist literature as "*La charge mentale*." Moreover, these dual role complexities not only result in mental stress for women but can also force them to leave their workplace entirely, especially if unanticipated caregiving responsibilities in the reproductive sphere arise, such as caring for a sick family member. For instance, Josy elaborates: "*You have to take your leave from [work] if you're going to take care of someone for a month [...] So in terms of performance, you cannot*

perform the same [...] It's a big challenge. I know I've experienced it firsthand. I have friends who have gone through the same thing. So it's really something that goes holds back women."

Both previously presented cases of misalignment highlight that regulatory advances are not reinforced on a normative level. Moreover, normative and cultural-cognitive pillars seem to be misaligned for female leaders. As Section 5.3.1. outlines, the regulative and cultural-cognitive pillars appear to approximate an in-sync relationship, as regulative rules and cultural-cognitive behavior reinforce one another with the shared aim of promoting women. However, female leaders face challenges where positive influences from the cultural-cognitive pillar are not aligned with the unsupportive practices prevailing in the normative pillar. This is evident in the fact that most of our respondents do not contest normative pressures, despite disagreeing with them. For instance, Ruby explains: "*I am a very convinced one [feminist], a hypocrite. Sometimes I feel like I am a hypocrite. I don't live by what I believe in, I don't. […] They [parents] raised us in a way that we're kind of craving for their approval, most of the time. […] I don't have the energy for that [confronting parents]. I can actually confront anyone else, but them [clicks her tongue] it's hard."* This quote greatly highlights the dominance of the normative pillar in governing the behavior of our respondents. It is evident that Ruby follows behavior patterns that are seen as appropriate for her to avoid shame and experience honor, as argued by Scott (1995/2013), even though this behavior is against her own beliefs and values. Josy expresses similar feelings: "*I actually sometimes talk about it jokingly that I wish that in another life I become a man and he [husband] becomes a woman. […] I am here, I'm working. You're there, you're working. So, I shouldn't take the blame for the broken thing that a maid has done […] So that pressure shouldn't be for one woman. For one person in the marriage. It should be shared by both parents."* However, we also found evidence from other respondents that contest normative pressures. Octavia explains, "*So I have started picking and choosing what it is of my culture that I appreciate, and that I want to push forward. But most of the time, I'm just trying to challenge it. So I end up wearing short skirts just for the sake of doing it. […] It has not worked in my favor in the sense that people just get really upset […] we don't actually know the reasons we're doing the things that we claim is the Rwandan way*." What is evident is that the interactions between the cultural-cognitive and normative pillars are very individual. Building on our argument from Section 5.2.3. regarding the role of exposure in developing women's confidence, we argue that exposure can serve as a necessary but not always sufficient condition for women to contest

normative pressures. The same argument holds true for the role of symbolic representation as it is needed but arguably not enough for gender equality changes to trickle down on the normative pillar.

Acknowledging the social constructivist nature of our research, we must recognize the interdependency of concepts. A threat that emerges from our data indicates that normative influences can harm cultural-cognitive perceptions of women. One example is the biased evaluation that female leaders experience, which is grounded in gender stereotypes and gender role expectations: "*In some organizations, it happens, where a woman is delayed in career growth, because often, some leaders would assume that if you have young children […] you […] taking on leadership roles as a woman will not be okay*" (Lilli). We find that nearly all respondents encounter biased evaluations, and as a result, they feel the constant need to prove their space: "*I actually feel like I have to prove myself when I'm working with guys. Is like I'm also working as myself, I'm representing all women*" (Ruby); "*I was pregnant when I was given the role of director. So my immediate instinct was to work twice as hard as anyone else within the company because I have more responsibilities coming in so everyone's eyes is on me*" (Josy). How this normative pressure that women feel to prove themselves can translate into challenges in the cultural-cognitive pillar is shown by the following quote: "*Also when you want to prove something to people, it gets worse, because every time you don't prove that thing to them, you feel like a failure. […] You be like, am I even enough to do this?"* (Whitney) Sarah similarly explains that she needs to "*constantly remind myself that even when I'm intimidated, even when I am having the imposter syndrome I […] keep going*". The results of our study underscore a dilemma faced by women leaders. We find that women need exposure and self-confidence to challenge the hostile normative environment they are in; however, that same environment limits the development of self-confidence, making it difficult for women to contest the norms they are up against.

In sum, it is evident that Rwanda's top-down imposed gender equality initiatives have not yet effectively trickled down to the normative level. We find that normative factors appear to be the most influential force among the three pillars, going out of sync with the remaining two. While the previous chapter demonstrates a positive trickle-down effect from the regulatory to the cultural-cognitive pillar, it is evident that the dominant normative pillar can even impede these

advancements. However, the extent of this relationship appears to be highly subjective and contingent on an individual's personal experiences, beliefs, and cognitive capacity.

5.3.3. Interim Conclusion: Interplay of Rwanda's Institutional Pillars

The section provided an in-depth analysis of the sub-research question B, examining how Rwanda's institutional factors interact with one another. Our data presents an interesting interplay between Rwanda's formal and informal institutions. The changes in the regulatory pillar following 1994 seem to have disrupted the sync of the regulatory pillar with the until then existing normative and cultural cognitive rules, which required women in the reproductive sphere on all three levels. While we find that the cultural-cognitive pillar has evolved to be increasingly in sync with the refined regulative pillar, the normative pillar still seems to lack behind. While the cultural-cognitive and regulative pillars seem to approximate an in-sync relation, we find that despite accounts of the normative pillar slowly changing, its influence still seems to work against the regulatory-induced changes, ultimately also limiting the realization of developments in the cultural-cognitive pillar. However, we see a potential for top-down changes initiated through formal institutions (i.e., the regulatory pillar) eventually being able to shape the normative and cultural cognitive pillar in the sphere of gender equality over time.

5.4. Institutional Factors and Female Leaders in Rwanda

In the preceding sections, our study meticulously scrutinized the institutional framework of Rwanda through a lens informed by Scott's (1995/2013) conceptualization of regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars. Beyond this, we utilized Waylen's (2014) conceptualization of the interplay between formal and informal institutions, as well as Coffé's (2012) perspective on different forms of representation, to evaluate how these three pillars interact with each other. By delving into the interview data and analyzing it thematically, we have gleaned valuable insights into how the experiences of female leaders are shaped by the construction and dynamic interplay between formal and informal institutions. Nevertheless, our data brought forward a vital theme, which we could not account for through the given analytical frame above. Our selective code of *Intersectionality* emerges as a salient and pervasive theme that is deeply intertwined with the other key findings of our study. The theme became apparent at an early point in our data processing when going from open to axial codes. The identified open codes indicate that aspects beyond gender shape the opportunities and lives of women in Rwanda. For example, our open codes *Socioeconomic*

Differences and *Grassroots* imply that especially the location one resides in (city vs. rural area), and the social strata one belongs to are decisive factors in shaping opportunities. As Scott's (1995/2013) framework overlooks intersectionality and its effects, we further augment our analysis by drawing upon Crenshaw's (1989) idea of intersectionality.

Our selective theme, *Intersectionality*, therefore, derives its meaning from Crenshaw (1989) and encompasses accounts of intragroup factors that create different experiences among women. As demonstrated in preceding sections, norms can hinder the effective utilization of regulations and can have a determining impact on the development of cognitive structures. Our findings here indicate that intersectional factors play a crucial role in shaping informal institutions and determining the extent of their influence. This becomes particularly evident in accounts of our respondents' drawing differences in the normative and cultural-cognitive pillar depending on age, area, education, or family background. To explain, we use the example of education. Despite being allowed and required to go to school on a regulative level, girls in rural or poorer communities may be restricted from doing so due to not being prioritized during financial distress or their normative role of being caretakers in case of sickness: "*I know that for sure most young girls are not prioritized within families, for example, in going to school, especially in rural and village areas. You will also find that even when they [girls] do [go to school], they're not a priority*" (Sarah); "*If someone gets sick at home, it's not a boy to take care of this person, it's a girl who is going to be the first to stay home*" (Josy). Consequently, these girls will eventually obtain a weaker education than boys within the same region as normative ideas restrict them from making use of the given possibilities, but also than girls in the city, who often have access to better schools and grow up in an environment where the mindset shift towards necessary education for girls is more advanced: "*the education structure is different. Because in Kigali […] the teachers here are trained better. And in the village, they don't have the same training. So, they're not offering the same quality education for the children*" (Octavia); "*the city's start things, the rural area, because they have their own thing doing it, how they perceive culture*" (Alice).

Our interviews point out that despite having the identical regulative frame, girls and women in cities and higher-level social classes seem to be better able to access the opportunities emergent from Rwanda's gender-streamlined policies: "*I think it's the economic gap in itself or the knowledge gap that contributes. It does not really exist because of the gender inequalities, I think it exists*

because of intersectional inequalities"(Barbara). The power of normative rules, additionally, seems to be aggregated in rural communities, where traditional structures are more tenacious. Our respondents indicate that this is also related to the accessibility of knowledge or a lack of exposure to alternatives for women in these communities. The access to knowledge of one's rights or opportunities is further reliant on long-standing structures: "*Because villages in Rwanda specifically like we have chiefs, we have elders, and elders have a big influence on the community. So, when we speak with elders within the community, we expect them to now speak with their people. But if they don't agree with a topic, or if they're not happy with it, then those people will never hear that information*." (Octavia). The distribution channel and language of campaigns or information are further factors that must be considered here. As elaborated, women in rural areas commonly obtain weaker education and are thus generally not proficient in English. As public information, such as women's development programs, is generally shared in English, women without the ability to understand the language are almost automatically excluded as a consequence. The increasing use of technology also plays a role in these dynamics, as distribution channels now shift toward online platforms. This widens the gap in knowledge obtainment between cities and rural areas, as women in rural communities rarely have access to online platforms and the internet, placing them disadvantaged against women in the city who can more easily access and are more frequently exposed to the opportunities and possibilities available. Rural areas in Rwanda often rely on radio as a broadcasting system, making it necessary for information to be shared on such accessible channels for women to obtain them. However, even if they are, we find that, once again, the normative frame operates as a barrier, as men are often the ones deciding channels or using the appliances. This further shows how women are disproportionately affected by the consequence of other intersectional factors, such as poverty, where they experience the consequences much stronger than their male counterparts (UN Women, 2021).

Followingly, our findings suggest that intersectionality constitutes a crucial aspect that needs to be considered while evaluating the interplay between institutional pillars. The power dynamics of these pillars and their impact on women's lives appear to be influenced by a range of intersectional factors, leading to variations in the extent of their influence within the same society. Followingly, the consideration of intersectionality is crucial in determining the transformative potential (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013) that the regulatory pillar in Rwanda can hold. Our findings indicate that the

capacity of gender-streamlined policy to address "*ingrained societal norms and practices within which gender inequalities are embedded*" (Debusscher & Ansoms, 2013, p. 1112) can vary even within the same country, leading to varying experiences of women based on intersectional factors that structure their lives. In the worst case, neglecting intersectionality in policymaking could result in a shift from gender issues to class issues, creating a divide between "*elite women*" and "*ordinary women.*" This once again connects to our above-presented argument that symbolic representation is only expedient for the development of cognitive abilities when women can identify themselves with role models, as intersectional factors will otherwise provide a barrier to identification: "*Even if they hear or have access to information, women in villages then tend to think that they are not educated like women in Kigali so they still can't identify themselves with these role models*" (Caroline). We would therefore like to draw attention to the importance of equity.

Some of our interviewees brought forward that in their experience, the Rwandan economy works merit-based, meaning women and men are merely evaluated on their skillset: "*As long as you're Rwandan you will, we have equal opportunities*" (Ophelia); "*In Rwanda […] if you are qualified for a job, there is no discrimination whether men or women*" (Emelie); "*The way we make it is to put things fully on merits*" (Dana). While we cannot say with certainty whether this is the case, as we have also observed that unconscious biases still seem to favor men in the job market ("*Men are very flexible, you tell him to come at 2 a.m., 2 p.m., they will take then a cab and come to work. But a female sometimes […] they're hard to manage*" (Ophelia)), we see an inherent issue with the merit-based account under the viewpoint of intersectionality. While a merit-based evaluation for men and women surely is a great step towards equality, it does not account for intermediate barriers that retain women from achieving this equal education in the first place or for catering towards their ability to start or maintain demanding jobs such as leadership positions next to their heavier household burdens: "*I remember the other day, we were looking for a CFO […] we have a network […] people who are really good, so I contacted each one of them and most of them declined […] And they just tell you 'Listen, I'm tired. No, I can't'*" (Dana). Hence, equality strategies based on merit cannot address the disadvantages women experience beyond the apparent nature of their gender through normative structures. Our data shows that the focus of gender-streamlined policymaking should shift towards equity rather than equality to better eradicate cumulative disadvantages that women experience. Positive discrimination, for example, can help to open up possibilities for

women; as one of our respondents exemplifies, "*it's not equal competencies, it's equal potential […] if we do equal experience, believe me, I will never have 50% of women in my company*" (Fiona). Our respondent Barbara emphasizes the importance of "*really breaking those cultural, societal barriers, and economic to make sure that we achieve the gender equality we want. I don't think we can ever achieve equality without equity*". Based on our data, we would therefore argue that if regulations manage to address equity under the consideration of intersectionality, they would have more potential to overcome still-existing barriers imposed by the normative pillar, making opportunities more accessible to women across socioeconomic spheres to counteract the formation of a two-tier society among women: "*in Rwanda, I think there's just like, the knowledge gap between I guess the elite group and just the mass populations*" (Barbara). To successfully boost change in the normative and cultural-cognitive pillar, we see a need for regulation to effectively "*get to the community because that's where the lack of information or education and that kind of thing is. So, we keep talking amongst ourselves those educated people. So, it's like change takes longer when we just have the same conversations in the same circles and not going out*" (Octavia).

Under consideration of intersectionality, we would also like to include a brief reflection on our sample group. Considering Rwanda's historical context, it is conspicuous that fourteen out of our sixteen respondents were diaspora. This poses the question of whether female leadership positions are held mainly by diaspora returners or if this is a random result of our sample. Acknowledging our snowball technique, we cannot conclusively say whether this is representative of the female leadership population or if this is merely a result of the network we tapped into. What we have found whatsoever is that diaspora returners commonly have had access to better schooling as well as exposure to other cultures, adding to their educational and cognitive development: "*So we have diaspora.* [...] A *lot of us have come back with better education*" (Octavia). While our data cannot substantively predicate that diaspora returners more frequently attain leadership positions, this does relate to the importance of intersectionality that affects women, as the affiliation to other socioeconomic factors forms each woman's individual set of experiences. Similarly, most of our respondents (11 out of 16) do not have children despite the average age of our respondents (31,5 years) laying way beyond the average age of Rwandese women having children (23 years) (NISR, 2023). While our data once again cannot conclusively determine whether this is a random occurrence, we did find that the arrangement of family and high-level jobs can be challenging:

"*There's a sacrifice you make to push for your career*"' (Margaret). Regardless, why most of our respondents do not have kids remains speculative. However, as we have described above, most respondents seemed very confident and detached from the normative expectations towards women, bearing witness to their solid cognitive propensities. The childlessness of so many of them could potentially result from their rejection of normative expectations or be an indicator of lacking complementary frames that allow women in demanding positions to combine childbearing and caring responsibilities with their work obligations, leading us to recommendations we have derived from our data.

5.5. Recommendations

The recommendations presented in this section result from an in-depth analysis of the interview data gathered during our research and are based on the voices and experiences of the women we interviewed. Our argument outlines the need to focus on intersectionality and equity, rather than simply pursuing a narrow concept of equality, to address the complex challenges faced by female leaders and women in Rwanda. By taking the intersecting identities and experiences of individuals into account, our recommendations aim to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in leadership positions and for those to attain them in the future, and we believe they have the potential to create real and lasting change in the Rwandan context. Given that the central focus of our paper revolves around women's experiences within leadership positions, it is essential that we outline recommendations for companies and governments to facilitate development opportunities for women in the workplace. This approach ensures that our findings remain relevant for organizational practitioners and other stakeholders. Notwithstanding, our research findings additionally yield significant insights that inform recommendations aimed at enhancing women's accessibility to the workplace and leadership positions, which we will present thereafter.

Encouraging Women's Achievement in Leadership Positions

I. To support women in managing both their reproductive and productive responsibilities, organizations should invest in infrastructure that would alleviate the burden of reproductive work, such as providing on-site childcare facilities. This would not only enable women to perform optimally at work but also promote work-life balance and gender equality in the

workplace. Employers could also consider implementing flexible working hours or job-sharing arrangements to allow women to balance their work and family responsibilities better.

II. Governments should take a leading role in promoting gender equality in the workplace by providing adequate support for women's maternity leave. This could be achieved by establishing and enforcing laws and policies that ensure job security and provide financial support to women on maternity leave. Governments could also consider offering subsidies or other forms of financial support to companies that provide maternity leave, especially for small businesses that may struggle with the economic burden of supporting their employees during leave. By taking proactive steps to support women's maternity leave, governments can promote gender equality and enhance women's economic participation in the workforce.

III. Organizations should invest in facilities such as breastfeeding (or pumping) rooms or enriched work-from-home possibilities to make workplaces more mother-friendly. These facilities would enable mothers to balance their work and family responsibilities better and promote their workplace well-being. Additionally, companies could consider providing support services for new mothers, such as parenting workshops or counseling services.

IV. To ensure the success of gender balance initiatives, organizations should include men in the change process through education and peer-to-peer proactivity. This approach would promote a culture of inclusivity and help men understand the importance of gender equality in the workplace. Organizations could offer training and education sessions for employees to raise awareness of gender biases and stereotypes and promote a culture of inclusivity. Moreover, organizations could consider involving men in diversity and inclusion committees to promote peer-to-peer learning and collaboration.

Facilitating Women's Access to Leadership Positions

V. To increase diversity and broaden opportunities, it is essential to encourage the participation of women in all job levels and industries. Providing opportunities for women to access entry-level positions and career development programs can increase their representation in various industries and provide a more diverse talent pool for organizations. It is also essential

to create a supportive workplace culture that fosters inclusivity and encourages the growth and development of female employees.

VI. Education for girls should not only focus on traditional school subjects but also their rights and opportunities. Providing girls with access to quality education that empowers them to make informed decisions about their lives and future career paths can help to break down gender stereotypes and promote more significant gender equity. Additionally, it is essential to address barriers to education, such as poverty, distance from schools, and cultural norms that limit girls' access to education.

VII. Shifting from merit-based recruitment processes to potential-based recruitment can promote equitable opportunity in the hiring process. By considering candidates based on their potential rather than solely on their past achievements or qualifications, organizations can identify and recruit a more diverse talent pool. However, it is essential to ensure that potential-based recruitment processes are designed to be fair and objective and do not perpetuate unconscious biases or discriminate against any particular group.

VIII. Positive discrimination (PD) can be a helpful tool for promoting gender equity by providing women with opportunities they may have otherwise been denied due to systemic biases and historical inequalities: "*They are being pushed but you are already way ahead of the line. They're just being pushed closer to you*" (Fiona). Followingly, PD, or quota systems, can be an effective way to address gender imbalances in certain industries or job sectors, especially those that are traditionally male-dominated. By actively pushing for more women to enter male-dominated fields, organizations and governments can help to break down gender stereotypes and promote greater gender equity. Positive discrimination can be an effective tool to achieve equity. However, it is important to ensure that these programs are designed and implemented carefully and do not lead to reverse discrimination or stigmatization of female employees.

IX. Distributing knowledge to women in rural communities is crucial for promoting gender equity and empowerment. Effective channels for disseminating information to rural women include community radio stations, mobile phone technology, and community-based organizations. By providing women with access to information about their rights, opportunities, and available resources, they can make informed decisions about their lives

and improve their socioeconomic status. Additionally, it is essential to ensure that programs designed to distribute knowledge to rural women are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and sustainable.

The recommendations outlined above incorporate three overarching themes: A) Supporting women in effectively managing their multiple responsibilities by implementing policies that promote gendered infrastructure; B) Facilitating intersectional capacity-building for women who encounter barriers in accessing leadership positions; C) Encouraging the inclusion of both men and women in the dialogue aimed at eliminating gendered biases on a normative level. To ensure institutional change toward gender equality, it is essential to recognize that simply raising awareness of the institutional forces at play is insufficient for contesting them. Our research findings indicate that awareness alone does not necessarily translate into meaningful action toward gender equality. To address this challenge, additional measures are needed to promote institutional change. As outlined throughout this chapter, these measures should focus on the normative dimension of institutions, encompassing the values, beliefs, and attitudes underpinning social norms. Educational initiatives encompassing individuals of both genders from an early stage are crucial in this regard. By promoting gender sensitivity and inclusivity, organizations can facilitate a shift towards more gender-equitable norms and practices in the workplace. Moreover, peer-to-peer proactivity and mentorship initiatives can facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills necessary for promoting institutional change toward gender equality. Overall, a multi-pronged approach is necessary to address the complex institutional factors that perpetuate gender inequalities in the workplace.

Before concluding this section, it is essential to note that the recommendations provided in this report are based on the specific context of Rwanda. Our findings suggest that the top-down approach to change is generally accepted by the population ("*why the top-down approach works here, because usually Rwandans are following the rules. You cannot do that everywhere*" (Fiona)); therefore, our recommendations are tailored to potentially enhance the change process on a normative level through effective regulations. However, it is also important to recognize that other contexts may require different approaches: *"All the solution cannot be applied everywhere. You go to Kenya […] I don't think that they would manage to do this top-down approach […] Here most of the time we wait, oh the government needs to help us […] Kenya or Nigeria they will not tell you the*

government, we will do it, whatever they think, we will do it" (Fiona). In some cases, change may need to come from the bottom up, driven by grassroots movements and community-led initiatives. As such, any efforts to promote gender equity and equality must be informed by the specific cultural and social contexts in which they are implemented.

5.6. Concluding Remarks

Overall, this chapter provides a detailed and nuanced understanding of the institutional factors that impact the experiences of women leaders in Rwanda. Through a rigorous analysis of primary and secondary data, we identified the key institutional pillars and their interactions that shape women's experiences. Our findings offer valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers and practitioners seeking to promote gender equality and women's leadership in Rwanda and other similar contexts.

Through our sub-research questions, we have addressed how formal and informal institutional factors shape the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda. While formal institutions, such as the Inheritance Law (1999), the gender-sensitive Constitution (2003), and anti-GBV Act (2009), have contributed to advancing gender equality in Rwanda, social conventions and cultural-cognitive factors remain significant barriers to gender equality. Our analysis also reveals an interesting interplay between the formal and informal institutions in Rwanda, where top-down changes initiated through formal institutions have the potential to shape the normative and cultural-cognitive pillars in the sphere of gender equality. However, the influence of the normative pillar currently still seems to work against regulatory-induced changes, ultimately limiting the realization of developments in the cultural-cognitive pillar. The interplay of the institutional pillars is followingly crucial in shaping women's experiences.

Furthermore, our research findings highlight the importance of considering intersectionality as an integral aspect of how institutions shape the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda, as it plays a defining role in how much power each pillar has on an individual. We suggest that gender-streamlined policies must effectively absorb factors of intersectionality to avoid shifting gender problems to issues of social class, which could result in the intensification of elites. Gender strategies should therefore shift their focus toward equity as equality approaches cannot account for

intermediate barriers. Based on this information, we outlined recommendations for government and companies.

In essence, this analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors that form Rwanda's formal and informal institutions and the interplay of these pillars in shaping women's experiences. Intersectionality is a key point in evaluating how formal and informal institutions shape the experiences of women leaders in Rwanda, and our analysis emphasizes the need for gender policies that account for intersectionality and shift toward equity to avoid further intensification of gender inequalities.

6. Discussion

In this chapter, we aim to comprehensively contextualize our findings within the broader landscape of existing empirical and theoretical literature. We will establish connections and distinctions between our results and previous studies, thereby proposing avenues for further exploration. Firstly, we delve into the relation and interaction of institutional theory with our findings. Secondly, we assess how the concepts of representation (Coffé, 2012) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) have enriched Scott's framework (1995/2013), incorporating reflections on previously introduced empirical evidence. Lastly, we present additional reflections that establish connections between our findings and empirical evidence in similar settings or related theoretical applications.

6.1. Institutional Theory

As this thesis explores the subjective experiences of female leaders in Rwanda through an institutional lens, we contribute to institutional literature on a broader level by providing empirical evidence from a developing country in a gendered context. The theoretical frame around our study is based on Scott's (1995/2013) contribution to institutional theory and provides feedback and enhancements to his framework. First and foremost, our research demonstrates the value of Scott's (1995/2013) framework in exploring the distinct institutional pillars that govern behavior and shape the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda. The acknowledgment that institutions operate at multiple levels "*from the world system to interpersonal interaction*" (Scott, 1995/2013, p. 58),

combined with our research approach and foreign perspective, allowed us to uncover the fine-grained institutional forces that are often overlooked when one is exposed to them daily. This becomes apparent through the reflections shared by several respondents when confronted with questions to elucidate taken-for-granted routines. An example of this is our respondent Ruby's account when asked about the consequences of not corresponding to her mother's demands of taking care of her brothers: "*I'd like to know seriously, I'd like to know. Sometimes I'm like, I will do this. […] But I just listen to her, and I just have a scenario in my head but I never ever, ever*". Further, Scott's (1995/2013) differentiation of informal institutions into normative and cultural-cognitive pillars was especially valuable for our analysis. Earlier contributions of institutional theory (North, 1990) would not have allowed us to assess the distinct features that comprise both informal pillars, which would have limited the level of detail and nuanced understanding that our study provides. A notable finding of our study reveals that at a cultural-cognitive level, most of our respondents demonstrate awareness and disapproval of the normative institutional forces at play. Nevertheless, due to the dominant influence of the normative pillar in governing behavior, they still conform to expected behavioral norms. In other words, respondents acknowledge the unfairness of societal expectations that assign women to the role of homemakers despite their achievements in the work sphere; yet, they still conform to these expectations and assume such roles within their households. By uncovering the perception of injustice among respondents regarding this gendered division of roles, we gain more nuanced insights that contribute to a comprehensive understanding of female leadership and the requirements for achieving gender equality.

We find that awareness about institutional forces at play does not necessarily translate into contesting them, allowing us to argue that additional measures are needed for institutional change. As outlined in Chapter 5, these measures must target the normative dimension of institutions and focus on equity and intersectionality. These findings support Debusscher and Ansoms' (2013) argument that for Rwandan policies to drive transformative change effectively, they must be inclusive and incorporate the voices of marginalized groups, challenging existing power dynamics.

6.2. Female (Political) Representation

Our study demonstrates that Coffé's (2012) threefold categorization of representation and Scott's (1995/2013) three institutional pillars provide great insights when used in conjunction. More

precisely, Coffé's (2012) categorization provides a more nuanced view of female representation, which we argue is crucial when exploring the institutional pillars in regard to gender equality. In the specific case of Rwanda, regulatory advancements, such as the 2003 Constitution, successfully increased descriptive representation in parliament. Moreover, Rwanda also saw a rise in women's representation in other leadership positions, as highlighted by our respondents. Our data suggest that this increased representation eventually results in symbolic representation, as female role models prescribe new meanings to women in the cultural-cognitive sphere. Summarized, we find that Rwanda's advances within the regulative pillar increased descriptive representation, which resulted in symbolic representation, ultimately impacting the cultural-cognitive pillar positively. Coffé's (2012) framework hence supports elucidating how positive gender equality changes from the regulative pillar trickled down to the cultural-cognitive pillar. Therefore, we argue that incorporating Coffé's (2012) categorization of representation into Scott's (1995/2013) institutional pillars provides significant benefits when studying gender-related issues from an institutional perspective.

Our findings relate to existing empirical research examining symbolic representation. Firstly, our research provides novel insights, as previous studies arguing for the extensive symbolic effects of female representation in Rwanda (Burnet, 2008, 2019) were limited to analyzing women in political leadership. Our findings suggest that role model associations with women in leadership can be extended from political to economic areas, emphasizing the significance of researching symbolic representation in various dimensions. Initially, we held a critical perspective towards Burnet's (2008, 2019) findings, given that the data was derived exclusively from interviews with members affiliated with civil society organizations. This raised our concerns over the potential for an optimistic bias in the results. However, our respondents provided similar evidence, supporting Burnet's (2008, 2019) argument. In addition, the presence of symbolic representation in Rwanda is instructive, given the lack of symbolic representation in contexts that rank low on the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) (Lawless, 2004; Ulbig, 2007; Verge & Pastor, 2018). Therefore, high rates of descriptive representation might facilitate symbolic representation, pointing towards Childs and Krook's (2006) theory of critical mass. While the researchers initially identified the term to argue that a certain number of women in parliament is needed to produce substantive representation, this argument could be extended to symbolic representation. To investigate this matter further, we call for further research on the effect of a critical mass on symbolic representation.

Substantive representation can serve as a driver for gender equality as it involves women's ability to influence policy outcomes. As outlined in Chapter 5, our findings provide limited insight into the current state of substantive representation in Rwanda. While we acknowledge that the absence of conclusive findings does not necessarily negate the existence of substantive representation, existing contributions within the same context argue for limited substantive representation (Burnet, 2008, 2019; Devlin & Elgie, 2008). Although existing literature suggests a link between female representation in post-conflict contexts and peace-building initiatives, our research findings do not provide substantial evidence to support this claim (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2022; Buss & Ali, 2017; Marysse et al., 2007; Seckinelgin & Klot, 2013; Shair-Rosenfield & Wood's, 2017). While we are aware of accusations against the Rwandan regime to engage in autocratic gender washing (Bjarnegård & Zetterberg, 2022), it is essential to note that our research did not specifically focus on these aspects. We acknowledge that our research design, which primarily focused on capturing the subjective experiences of individuals, may have limited our ability to gather such macro-level information. However, our deliberate choice of research design was the most suitable for exploring the specific research question of this study. We recognize the importance of reflexivity and acknowledge that alternative research methods, such as policy analysis, may be better suited for assessing the presence of substantive representation and evaluating the autocratic nature of a regime and the underlying motivations behind its focus on female representation.

6.3. Intersectionality

The centrality of intersectionality in our study is a significant advantage compared to the existing body of research on gender and leadership, which has largely failed to address this critical perspective (Powell, 2020). As outlined above, this research paper provides empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of Scott's (1995/2013) framework for analyzing gendered issues in developing country contexts. However, it also reveals certain limitations and weaknesses. As outlined in Chapter 3, we acknowledge that institutional theory does not account for intersecting discrimination resulting from various categories, such as age, gender, sexuality, class, and race (Waylen, 2014). This led us to include the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) in our theoretical framework. The aptness of this focus became apparent during our research process, as intersectionality emerged as a salient and pervasive theme deeply intertwined with other key

findings of our study. Our respondents shared various experiences of experiencing oppression or bias not only based on their gender but due to intersecting variables: "*So it goes from being a female to being African, to being different*" (Katherine); "*All the issues are the same, but intersection it means, like I can still feel issues as a woman, but because I have privileges there are things that usually will not come to me […] Because the fact that even with those things [privileges], that I still have issues, it means like, hey, imagine what the other person is going through*" (Barbara). In Chapter 5, we outlined in greater detail how intersectionality plays a pivotal role in determining how institutional factors shape the experiences of individuals. By incorporating the lens of intersectionality, this research paper provides a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the institutional issues female leaders face. Our conceptions hence go beyond the insights that would have been achieved by relying solely on institutional theory and understanding female leaders as one homogeneous category. Therefore, this study demonstrates that a focus on intersectionality is crucial when researching aspects of human identity and social constructs like gender and invites future studies to incorporate a focus on this concept.

Our finding suggests that accounting for intersectionality is also crucial when designing gender equality policies. This aligns with arguments put forward by Debusscher & Ansoms (2013), who emphasize the importance of considering multiple dimensions, including class, location, and ethnicity when examining gender dynamics in Rwanda to unlock the transformative potential of policies to ultimately achieve gender equality. However, it is essential to acknowledge that a significant part of our data concerning intersectionality and the experiences of less privileged women was derived from our respondents with privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. Intersectionality contends that discrimination and oppression are frequently overlooked or disregarded unless they are directly experienced by the affected individuals (Crenshaw, 1989). Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the potential variances in direct feedback obtained from female leaders with varying socioeconomic backgrounds in Rwanda and recognize that our study could have been improved by including more participants to enhance diversity. Hence, we argue for further research to explore the perspectives of female leaders from different socioeconomic backgrounds in greater detail, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of their unique experiences.

6.4. Additional Reflections

Building on Buss and Ali's (2017) call for further research, our paper takes a new perspective on exploring gender equality policies beyond formal indicators. Thus, we focus on the subjective experiences of female founders and leaders in corporate and non-governmental organizations in Rwanda. Li et al. (2022) took on another angle at exploring the perspectives of female leaders within parliament, central government, local government, and judiciary. Comparing our findings with those of Li et al. (2022) provides relevant insights, elucidating challenges to gender equality from different perspectives. Our findings conform with those of Li et al. (2022), who found that female leaders remain the primary agents for reproductive labor in households despite holding leadership positions. However, we also found contradictory perspectives. While Li et al. (2022) report that female political leaders experience support and cooperation in the workplace, providing them with confidence, our respondents report experiencing biased evaluations based on their gender resulting in lower confidence and the feeling of needing to prove themselves. These findings raise the question of whether women in parliament are more respected than women working in the economy or if the positive results originate from other factors, such as limited freedom of speech biasing Li et al.'s (2022) findings. We see the exploration of these this divergence as an exciting area for further research.

Moreover, our study addresses the research gap highlighted by Sidani et al. (2015) to examine female leadership from an institutional standpoint in a non-Western context. In contrast to Sidani et al.'s (2015) study on institutional forces creating a deficit of female leadership, our research sheds light on the challenges females in leadership face and how they respond to the institutional environment. Sidani et al. (2015) include interviews with male and female students in their study. In contrast, our investigation offers valuable firsthand perspectives from a context with a considerable number of female leaders. Although Sidani et al. (2015) focus on barriers for females to access leadership while our study examines the challenges women face in leadership positions, there are notable similarities in our findings. Both studies uncover that normative and cognitive-cultural pillars have a greater influence than the regulative pillar in shaping behavior. Hence, challenges experienced by females in leadership roles and those striving for leadership positions share commonalities on a global scale. Exploring the intricate interplay between institutional factors and female leadership in further contexts could present an intriguing avenue for future research.

7. Conclusion

Based on the research question, "*How do formal and informal institutional factors shape the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda?*" this study reveals the realities of female leaders in Kigali. Throughout this research paper, we address our research theme by firstly providing a thematic introduction before shedding light on essential information about the specific context of Rwanda, focusing on the role of women throughout its historical timeline from pre-colonial times to the present day. We then outline a thematic review of relevant empirical and theoretical literature, through which we establish our theoretical framework anchored in institutional theory, according to Scott (1995/2013). We supplement our framework with contributions from Coffé (2012), Crenshaw (1989), and Waylen (2014) to allow for the assessment of the intricate interplay between formal and informal institutions and account for intersectionality. Subsequently, the research approach of this study is explored, and we reflect upon the implications of our methodological choices on our results. The findings derived from our primary data are then presented, discussed, and contextualized under consideration of secondary data and field observations. Given the results of our study, we evaluate the practical implications and suggest actionable recommendations for policymakers and practitioners who strive to advance gender equality. Ultimately, we provide a comprehensive discussion contextualizing our findings within the broader landscape of existing empirical and theoretical literature.

To explore our research problem, we take our point of departure in social constructivism and obtain our primary data from a multiple case study. Using a qualitative research approach, we conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with female leaders in Kigali, which allowed us to uncover how their unique experiences are shaped through interactions with institutions. The findings derived from our primary data are grouped into nine selective codes that result from an extensive coding process and thematic analysis. We make use of two sub-research questions to investigate A) how the key institutional factors of Rwanda are constituted and B) how these institutional factors interact with one another.

The first sub-research question uncovers the elements that shape the country's formal and informal structures. Our finding on Governance highlights the role of gendered laws and regulations, such as the gender-sensitive Constitution (2003), in forming the country's regulative pillar. Based on our findings and existing literature, we conclude that Rwanda's formal institutions demonstrate a

political commitment to promoting gender equality. Social Conventions primarily construct the normative pillar, and we find that gendered norms and expectations strongly shape the experiences of women leaders in the productive and reproductive spheres. Our research indicates that traditional values and norms continue to privilege men over women in most aspects of social interaction. Based on our data, we emphasize the significance of Exposure in shaping the cultural cognitive pillar. Our findings underscore the significance of access to education, knowledge, opportunities, and revelation to diverse societies to develop stronger cognitive skills. Additionally, substantive representation (role models) emerges as an essential factor in fostering the development of confidence and ambition among women.

The second sub-research question assesses how Rwanda's institutional factors interact with one another. The changes in the regulatory pillar following the genocide disrupted the previous alignment with normative and cultural-cognitive rules that confined women to the reproductive sphere. Top-down gender equality initiatives seem to shape the cultural-cognitive pillar positively but appear to have a limited impression on normative practices. Hence, the cultural-cognitive pillar increasingly aligns with the refined regulatory pillar, while the normative pillar is still lagging. Our findings suggest that traditional normative structures continue to hold significant influence, not supporting the regulatory pillar and impeding progress in the cultural-cognitive pillar. The power dynamics between the cultural-cognitive and the normative pillar are subjective and dependent on individual experiences, beliefs, and cognitive capacity. In addition, our data brought forward the salient and pervasive theme of Intersectionality, revealing that factors beyond gender, such as socioeconomic differences or location, shape women's opportunities. Based on these insights, we present recommendations for policymakers and practitioners to promote equity, recognizing the importance of intersectionality for designing transformative policies. Merely granting women equal rights is insufficient to address the disparities in women's experiences, as additional measures are needed to bridge the gap caused by historical advantages favoring men.

Moreover, it is essential to recognize that simply raising awareness of the institutional forces at play is not sufficient for female leaders to be able to contest them. To address this challenge, additional measures focusing on the normative pillar are needed to promote institutional change. Our research findings significantly contribute to the existing institutional literature by offering valuable empirical evidence within a gender context, specifically from a developing country. Notably,

our examination of intersectionality provides a unique and novel perspective, addressing a significant gap in both institutional literature and gender and leadership literature. Furthermore, our study demonstrates the relevance and utility of Scott's (1995/2013) conceptual framework, which divides institutions into three pillars, in uncovering the distinct behavioral imperatives that govern the experiences of female leaders. Additionally, by exploring the subjective experiences of female leaders across diverse corporate and non-corporate contexts, our research provides a fresh perspective that enriches the existing literature on Rwanda.

Our research reveals the remarkable strides Rwanda has made in the past three decades in fostering female participation in politics and the economy. However, it also underscores the pressing need for further progress to accomplish gender equality in the future. We would like to conclude this thesis by spotlighting the voices of our respondents and their vision for what this future should entail.

"I would say would be a success story for us is when we don't have to push gender equality anymore, because at that point, it will be a given. We will all have the same rights, there will be nothing about what a boy child is, girl child is, it will just be a child. […] I think for me, that is what I would hope or look forward to, when we won't have to be clustered, again, that I feel at that point we would have achieved whatever it is that we're fighting for now."

- Sarah

"I wish for a more sort of a balance […] just feeling like it's okay to do something differently. And that is in every context. Like I should be okay feeling to go to a bar and drink by myself, without judgement. I should be able to walk into a meeting feeling confident […] walking into a meeting with all men, without feeling insecure about my position, knowing that I have a position, that I have a voice. Yeah, I should walk in feeling confident that I can share and you will actually listen and respect that."

- Octavia

"I also wish for them [women] to excel in every way possible that we never did. I want to see a lot of engineers, a lot of innovators and have even more numbers of ministers and all that or even a president."

- Josy

"I hope Rwandan society to really dare to positive changes and use it. But besides that, business wise, I hope to have a society where both women and men are given equal opportunities, to shine, to grow to run, and also to be taken care of."

- Whitney

"I think the future of Rwanda is bright with women leaders."

- Ophelia

"A female president! Yes, a female president!"

- Barbara

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction to the Interview

- Thank the participant for agreeing to conduct the interview
- Introduce purpose of interview: Understanding the experiences of female leaders in Rwanda
- Stress that there are no right or wrong answers, we, the researchers, just want to understand the world from their point of view.
- Stress that they do not need to answer questions they do not want to answer them
- Introduce us as personally and as **students**
- Inform the group about the ethical and moral implications:
    - Are you okay with the meeting being recorded?
    - Personal information will be anonymized (name changed, we might use your position but will not share the company name or the like)

Introductory Questions

Name and background

1. What is your name?
2. Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and your personal background?
   (family, children, siblings, husband, husbands' occupation, etc.)
3. Where are you from and where did you grow up? (city / countryside / Kigali?)
4. E.g., When did you have your first child; how old were you back then?)
   (DO not ask: Can you put yourself in one of the following age brackets
   (20-30;30-40;40-50;50-60;60-70)
5. Can you tell us a little more about your educational and career background?

Information about professional role

Professional Background

1. Can you tell us something about your current (and/ or previous) position?
    - What are your responsibilities?
    - How many people are reporting to you?
    - To whom are you reporting (man/woman)? How is your relationship with your boss?
2. What are the gender ratios in your: industry, company, leadership level of your company
3. Can you tell us about your experiences in collaborating with male and female colleagues?
4. Are you part of any organizations for women?
   (e.g.: women's council, The Rwanda Women Parliamentary Forum (FFRP), profemme...)
5. Have you participated in any workshops or programs directed towards empowerment or support of women?
    - If yes: can you tell us about your experience and what you have learned/gained from it? (Contacts, knowledge)

Questions

Experiences

1. What does it mean to be a good woman in the Rwandan society?
    - Clarification: What's the societal image?
    - How might this influence a female leader/ politician positively and negatively? (Rural, urban, educated, uneducated, different regions)
2. What are the prevalent gender stereotypes (men and women) in Rwandan society?
    - Do you think this has/ will change? What will influence the change? How long might this take? How does it vary (e.g.: regions)?
    - Do you feel like these have shifted over time? (IF yes: how was it 10, 20, 40 years ago?)
3. In your experience, have these stereotypes ever been an issue/ hinderance for you in your personal or work life?
    - Can you think of specific examples?
4. Can you describe a typical day in your life? (Childcare, Home chores (family supplies, cleanliness, care for husband, care for relatives), Social/community roles, Work)
    - Motherhood or other domestic responsibilities appear to be one of the major challenges facing working women. Do you align with this, and could you share some of your experiences where you have felt this?
    - As a woman, how do you balance your work and other responsibilities?
5. Are there times where you feel that you cannot fulfill any of your roles properly or where you are overwhelmed with balancing them?
    - Can you give an example?
    - What is the biggest problem for you?
    - How do you manage that? Do you get help from someone?
    - Do you discuss these kinds of issues with other female leaders or with anyone else?
6. Can you think of circumstances in family relations that impact women's personal and work life? (Marital circumstances, -Relationship with husband /children, Health of family members)
    - e.g., wives are responsible for taking care of parents in law

Meta-Level

7. Context: We have read a lot about Rwandan women participating in politics and the economy in high numbers; What do you think has made it possible for women to come into politics and business in such numbers in Rwanda?
    - If mentioned: try to follow up on ethnic background or their heritage in terms of Rwandan history
8. The Rwandan constitution has gotten international attention for being gender sensitive. In your personal experience, could you describe to us how life has changed for women after 2003? (For participants below 30 rephrase for general consensus)
    - How do you perceive the gender equality policies and achievements in Rwanda? (Personal opinion: is it enough, should there be more/ less. Inclusion of women)

- What do you think about the increase of women in parliament and what (if any) changes have you experienced?

9. In your view, how did the rising female participation rate in economy and politics influence the social image and lives of women in Rwanda?
   - Which opportunities have arisen for women?
   - Do you think this has also brought up some challenges?
10. What is gender equality in your view?
    - Do you think other women would define gender equality in the same way or do you know of diverging ideas around it?
11. When you hear the term Feminism, what does that mean to you?
    - Would you rather be seen as a homemaker, feminist, leader, advocate? What do you consider yourself as?
12. Do you believe that women's participation and visibility in politics/ economy changed gender roles in the families of female leaders in recent years?
    - How
    - Why?

13. How do you think having more women in politics and business affects how future generations of girls and women will live in Rwanda?
    - Do you feel like gender roles are currently changing? Why do you think that is?
14. How do you envision women's political, economic and social participation in the coming years in Rwanda?
15. If you think about the future, what do you hope, or wish will change in Rwanda in terms of gender equality and women's lives?
    - How and what would you like to see changing?
    - In the home, In the society, In the workplace?
16. Do you have anything else you want to say that I have not asked which would be relevant to add?

17. Pictures: When you see these four photos, what do you associate with them? What comes to mind when you see them? Which woman would you connect to and why?

Outro

Closing Up

- Thanks so much for the interview, do you know of any other women that you think would fit our research and that would be willing to talk to us?
- Do you have any further questions for us?
- Are we allowed to contact you again in case of any further follow-up/ clarification questions?

Appendix B: Pictures Used During Interviews

Picture 1

Picture 2

Picture 3

Picture 4

Appendix C: Exemplary Field Notes

In order to maintain confidentiality, we assured our interviewees that the field notes collected during their interviews would not be shared. However, we obtained consent from our respondent Dana to include the interview field notes taken during our conversation as an example. Additionally, we have attached field notes from a meeting with a local contact who was not part of our sample group but served as an entry point to build our local network.

Field Notes Dana

[redacted]

[redacted]

- 20 minutes late, she has a busy day
- [redacted] (executive Assistance) shows us in the room
- Greets us friendly, says she is excited to meet us
- Respondent seems relaxed and excited
- Casual seating in the couch area of her office; we sit in a triangle formation around a coffee table on armchairs
- Good atmosphere, we start with an informal chat
- Respondent seems confident and outgoing

- Single
- Managing Director [redacted], employing over 700 people
- Pan-African company with presence in 12 countries
- Was project manager before being promoted; also worked in NGOs and start-ups but always worked with business strategy
- Her parents emigrated to DRC, she was born there but came back to Rwanda as a small child
- Always been based in Rwanda but has travelled a lot
- Women majority in the field/ in the country
    - Management 5/7 women
    - 60% female company
    - Women-led company
- Very intentional about message they portray; more intentional understanding challenges for women in employment
- Challenges for women in work:
    - Some companies many women in entry level jobs but not in management
    - Because of traditional culture, girls get married very young and have children → have kids right after starting their career, then slow down their career
    - Given the cultural context many women tend to turn down higher career as this comes with more pressure
    - Some companies not comfortable hiring pregnant women
    - Some professions people think men are better; specific industries for men and women
    - Men tend to be able to focus more on their career when they get married because someone else will take care of them and make their life easier, for women it is the other way around
- Expectation for women vs wives
    - Everyone expects them to get married before they get too successful and scare off the men → "be ambitious but not too much"
    - You can be as powerful as you want but when you come home you need to know your place and take care of your duties (these duties are by default)
- It is culturally very engraved in people but it is not voiced out to the public
- Back in the days people would say women slept their way up to a position or only got positions for quotas, but with time
- Presidents consistency in his message over the years has been crucial

- Things are running, people saw that is has worked for 10 years so the mindset has been influenced
- There's a category of smart women and then there's other women
- At home it is changing very slowly, but it is
    - Campaigns that say men also need to take care of the children
    - The louder voices are still the traditional ones
- Social classes, people who have been exposed to global setting tend to be more open minded
- "most times things get better because people don't have a choice, it's in the law"
- Financial freedom is a key to gender equality
    - It changes the narrative
- Women used to be home all day so they did all the chores, but now they have business and go to work, so men need to contribute to the chores because women also contribute to the financials
- Rwanda skill-based economy
- Men have come to realize that woman working is actually good for everyone; change in narrative
- Distribution channels for information (laws) to villages
- "I become a very regular, normal person" → humble, shows hoe Rwandans are humble and see themselves on the same level as everyone else
- Rwanda predominantly Christian
    - Some muslims
- When you are too smart they tend to think you become the head of the family
- They try to humble you, its fie to do what you do but then you should almost 'act dumb' when you talk to the men
- I see a lot o people not being ambitious enough; I have to wait until I am married before I can take a higher position
- Men less 'loyal' to company
- Women always feel like they have t proof themselves
    - They always do double than the average man
    - Some women don't want to put themselves through that pressure
- Gender equality: putting a line based on logic; if you have the time you do it despite your gender; if you have the skills you get the jobs; tangible factors; comparing people without the gender level
- Future: the oppressed party shouldn't have to fight for their own promotion, I would like to see more men uplift women; people who have privilege and have thrived should help others who have less opportunity; men should be more proactive
- Even the president himself is an exception
- Feminist: advocacy of equality of gender, both, but because women are currently generally behind it tends to be seen more for them, but I believe it's for all marginalized groups
    - People should be ashamed to not be a feminist
- Religious people see it as a pageant movement, cultural people see it as western import who comes to destroy the moral fabric as the culture → people see it as a threat to the status quo; that is where the negative connotation comes from
    - The change in status quo threatens the people who benefit from the status quo

- "Women just want to be"
- Picture 2; 3; 4; 1

Question:
What is her take on equity? You said it is merit based (same KPIs for everyone) but women seem to have more going on, in how far is that accounted for, how are they enabled to still strive? → school example
What is your view on equity in Rwanda?

Smart women vs other women?

Laws such as inheritance, how is this actually ensured/ executed?

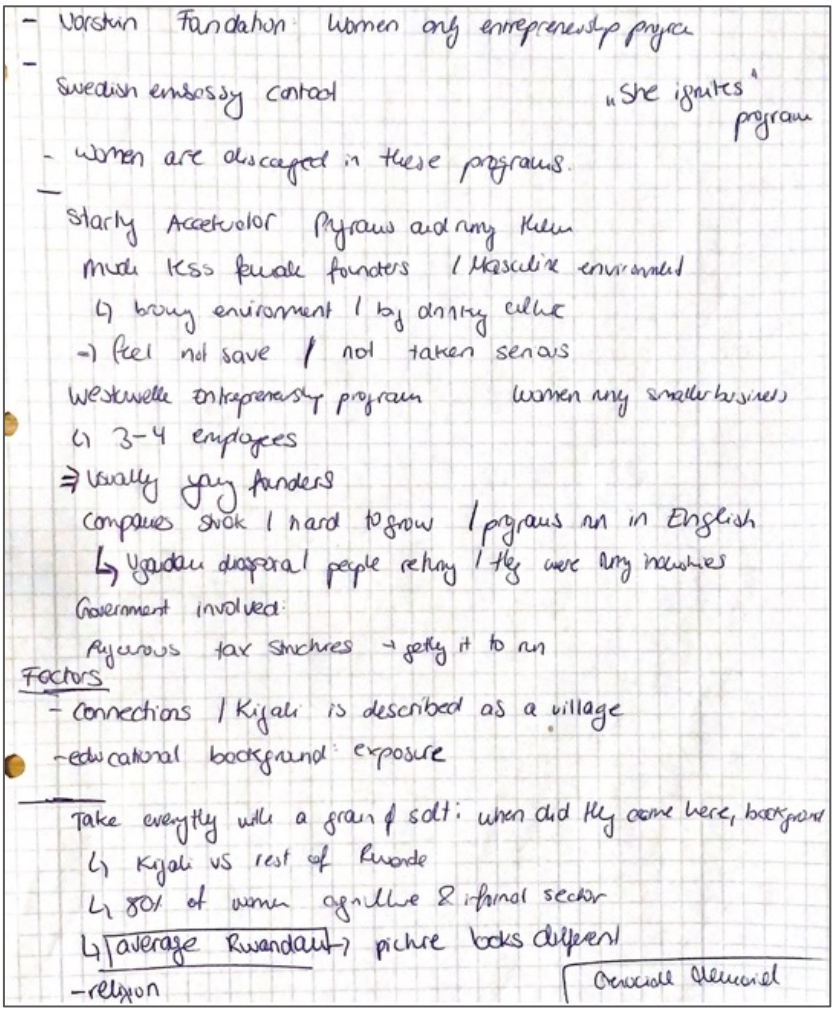
Field Notes Local Contact

Notes from an Informal Conversation held with a Local Contact in Kigali

- "Gender equality is not as accomplished as it seems here"
  - "there's definitely some gender washing" (said when she told us that some companies or organizations put women in leadership position to receive grants)
- Less women in entrepreneurship than men, not equal
  - More discouraged by family members
  - Women feel taken less seriously sometimes
  - Feel less safe (drinking culture)
- Businesses associated with women usually small scale
  - Not formalized
  - 3-4 employees
- People in entrepreneurship quite young (straight out of university)
- Government strategies trying to replicate NGO structures through start-ups
  - Businesses that address specific development issues
  - Problem: growth becomes difficult, start-ups at 5 years old spin in circles because they cannot develop
- Specific class (upper-middle) that has ability to participate in entrepreneurship (and often other higher level business activities)
  - Accessibility of programs --> most programs in English (language skill required) + exposure
- Divide of people that remained during genocide and people that have left and returned (diaspora)
  - People in high positions have usually come back from diaspora (have influence from Uganda/ Congo/ etc.) --> relates to one of the texts that Rwanda has been exposed to more international influence after Genocide, not only from aid organizations but also from 'own population')
- Government is highly present
  - Government intervention in most sectors/ areas of public life/ business
  - Intense reporting requirements to government (Westerwelle (but applies for all foundations/ NGOs etc))
    - Positive side: "The government really tries to enable a lot of programs"
    - Negative: Rwanda has very rigorous tax structure and people end up owing government (must pay back money that gov. put into programs)
  - Registration of business can be very easy ("You can set up a business in less than 5 hours") but keeping/growing the business is difficult
    - Can't afford tax
    - Regulations that make operation difficult
- Socio-economic background extremely important (gender may not be prevalent issue)
  - Connections (Social capital) ("Kigali is a village; you will rarely find anyone in high positions or successful business that hasn't been well connected even prior to starting their business")

  - Education/ international exposure (access to higher education based on performance --> private schools often higher quality --> system essentially allows everyone to obtain higher education but as it is based on performance the 'better degrees' will often be obtained from people who had access to higher quality education in their younger years)
- High civic involvement in Rwanda
  - People proud/ want to participate in Rwanda's development
  - people will not criticize the government
  - Consider peoples backgrounds/ positions in their answers to our questions
- 86% on women in Rwanda are in the Agricultural or informal sector
  - Women in leadership positions already quite specific sample group (consider respondents backgrounds)
  - Speaking to women only in Kigali will give a distorted view of 'women in Rwanda' (experience outside of Kigali will be entirely different)
- Divide of religion among young people, movement of youth that rejects religion, but overall religion still plays a prominent role in Rwanda among old and young --> therefore quite conservative society
  - "It is still quite a patriarchal society"
  - Especially outside of Kigali, genders are not equal
- Very hierarchical society
  - Socio-economic divide, class structure

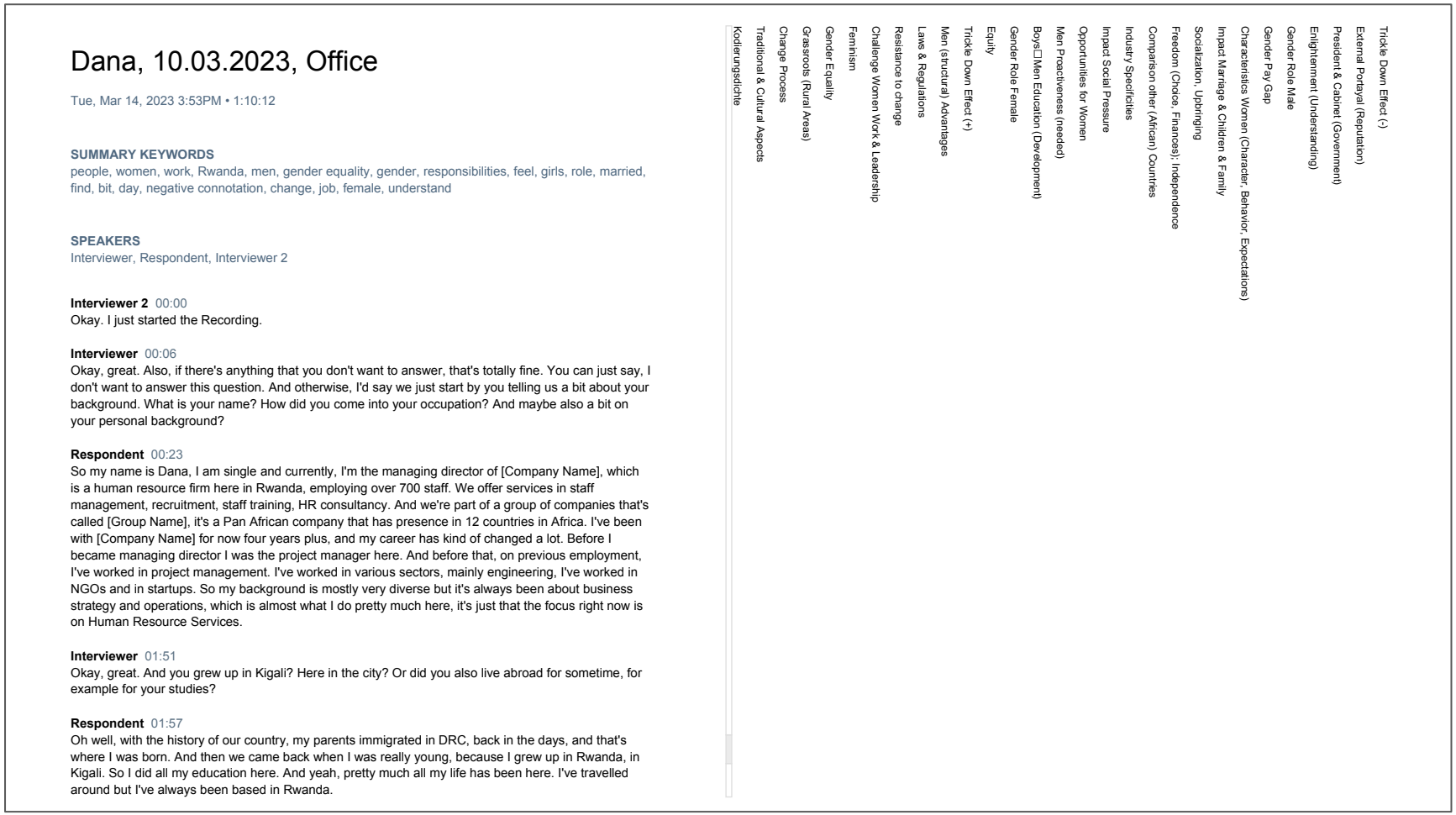
- Norrsken Foundation
- Women only entrepreneurship program
- Swedish embassy
- "She ignites" program
- In entrepreneurship program women often don't participate, they often need to have female specific programs to increase women's participation
- Few female founders, mostly masculine environment



Appendix D: Exemplary Transcript with Coding Stripes

Due to confidentiality concerns, we provided assurance to our interviewees that their interview recordings and transcripts would not be shared.

Nonetheless, we sought consent from one of our respondents, Dana, to use her transcript as an exemplar in the appendix of this master's thesis.



Dana, 10.03.2023, Office

Tue, Mar 14, 2023 3:53PM • 1:10:12

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, women, work, Rwanda, men, gender equality, gender, responsibilities, feel, girls, role, married, find, bit, day, negative connotation, change, job, female, understand

SPEAKERS

Interviewer, Respondent, Interviewer 2

Interviewer 2 00:00
Okay. I just started the Recording.

Interviewer 00:06
Okay, great. Also, if there's anything that you don't want to answer, that's totally fine. You can just say, I don't want to answer this question. And otherwise, I'd say we just start by you telling us a bit about your background. What is your name? How did you come into your occupation? And maybe also a bit on your personal background?

Respondent 00:23
So my name is Dana, I am single and currently, I'm the managing director of [Company Name], which is a human resource firm here in Rwanda, employing over 700 staff. We offer services in staff management, recruitment, staff training, HR consultancy. And we're part of a group of companies that's called [Group Name], it's a Pan African company that has presence in 12 countries in Africa. I've been with [Company Name] for now four years plus, and my career has kind of changed a lot. Before I became managing director I was the project manager here. And before that, on previous employment, I've worked in project management. I've worked in various sectors, mainly engineering, I've worked in NGOs and in startups. So my background is mostly very diverse but it's always been about business strategy and operations, which is almost what I do pretty much here, it's just that the focus right now is on Human Resource Services.

Interviewer 01:51
Okay, great. And you grew up in Kigali? Here in the city? Or did you also live abroad for sometime, for example for your studies?

Respondent 01:57
Oh well, with the history of our country, my parents immigrated in DRC, back in the days, and that's where I was born. And then we came back when I was really young, because I grew up in Rwanda, in Kigali. So I did all my education here. And yeah, pretty much all my life has been here. I've travelled around but I've always been based in Rwanda.

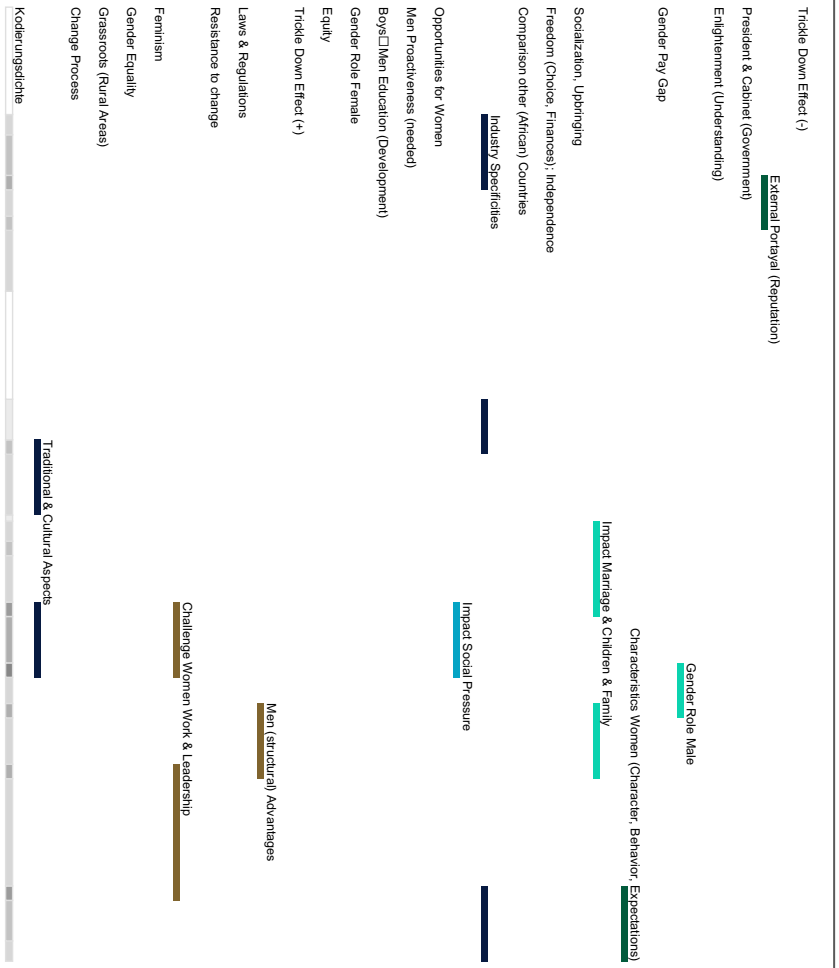
Kodierungsdichte
Traditional & Cultural Aspects
Change Process
Grassroots (Rural Areas)
Gender Equality
Feminism
Challenge Women Work & Leadership
Resistance to change
Laws & Regulations
Men (structural) Advantages
Trickle Down Effect (+)
Equity
Gender Role Female
Boys□Men Education (Development)
Men Proactiveness (needed)
Opportunities for Women
Impact Social Pressure
Industry Specificities
Comparison other (African) Countries
Freedom (Choice, Finances); Independence
Socialization, Upbringing
Impact Marriage & Children & Family
Characteristics Women (Character, Behavior, Expectations)
Gender Pay Gap
Gender Role Male
Enlightenment (Understanding)
President & Cabinet (Government)
External Portayal (Reputation)
Trickle Down Effect (-)

Interviewer 02:30
You said that you're the managing director of this company, maybe you can elaborate a bit on how the share of women and men in this company is?

Respondent 02:38
So actually I will say that [Company Name] is one of the most women majority companies in our field, or even the country in general. Because our management is made of, if I may say, we have a management of seven, and we have two men. In the team overall, I think our percentages, is 60/40, so 60% female, 40% male, so we are very predominantly female. So we also, even on Google, we actually describe ourselves as women-led. So we are a women-led company and we're very intentional about the message that we portray out there. It's not that we discriminate to not hire men but we just are more intentional by understanding the needs of women and the different challenges that come in when it comes to employment. And we understand that when you offer an environment that's actually conducive, you will get more women in those positions.

Interviewer 03:51
Can you maybe elaborate a bit on these challenges that woman meet in business?

Respondent 03:57
You will find that mostly it depends on industries as well. So some industries, for example, there will be a disparity between the percentage of women in leadership positions, and some industries you will find a lot of women at entry level jobs, but as you go higher, in ranks, there are less and less of them. And this is mostly cultural because here the understanding is, a lot of people are very traditional, so most girls will go to university, they will graduate and then they'll start working. And most of them tend to get married somewhere at the very beginning of their career. The moment they land the job right after university, the next step is getting married. And either they will get married and they will have children, it's very common to have children right after marriage, most of them don't really take long. And because of maternity and all the responsibilities and all the changes that just happened, suddenly they slow down in terms of career projects, projections and ambitions and everything. So most of them, because they were just starting their career, they're not going to go as much. Or the other category is, they will advance, but then they feel they get to a point where they feel they should hold a little bit. Because as you know, the higher you go in a career, the more demanding it becomes. And given the cultural context, most will choose to not subject themselves to much more pressure. So that is one of the factors that you'll find that men tend to actually get more pushed, because it's even in a cultural perception that a married man is more serious, more trustworthy, more reliable. So once they get married, and given the, I can say that the imbalances of duties at home, the man actually gets to be more relieved of whatever other responsibilities he used to have on his own. Someone else is taking care of them, now they can focus on their career and advance much faster. So it's a bit of that. And other challenges that we find in that we try to fight, especially as a human resource firm, is that, for example, some companies are not comfortable hiring pregnant woman. Even if you will be two months pregnant, a month pregnant, because in their head they're already thinking, in a couple of months, I'm gonna have to pay for maternity, this person won't be there to be productive; I'm losing and I will have to find someone else in the mean [time]. So those are the kind of mindsets that will create some sort of barriers sometimes. But it's not just that. It's sort of that some perceptions, and also in some professions, people just tend to think that men are better at that. They think, you know, men are more analytical, they're more logical, and then women are more emotional. So you find jobs like HR, people understand that yeah, a woman could be great in HR, they're very warm and understanding and



sensitive, so they will be good for that. But then, you know, very tough roles like finance and logistics, this is too harsh, and just by looking at a person before they even evaluate how well they perform, or how much they're qualified for it, they already got to think this is not the right person. So those are the kind of different barriers that you face. And as an HR firm, the way we make it is to put things fully on merits. And sometimes we cannot understand that there is a challenge, for example, a person would approach us and let us know that 'I'm pregnant but I'm applying for this role.' And we make it very clear to let them know, it has nothing to do with anything, you're gonna go through the process just like everybody if you get the job because you deserve it, then you will get the job. So it's a bit of that.

Interviewer 08:10
So you said it's merit based?

Respondent 08:12
Yes, very.

Interviewer 08:14
Okay. So if you perform, then you perform. It doesn't matter how you do it? So is it also flexible in terms of where you work? Or what other services do you offer in that regard? So for example, working from home.

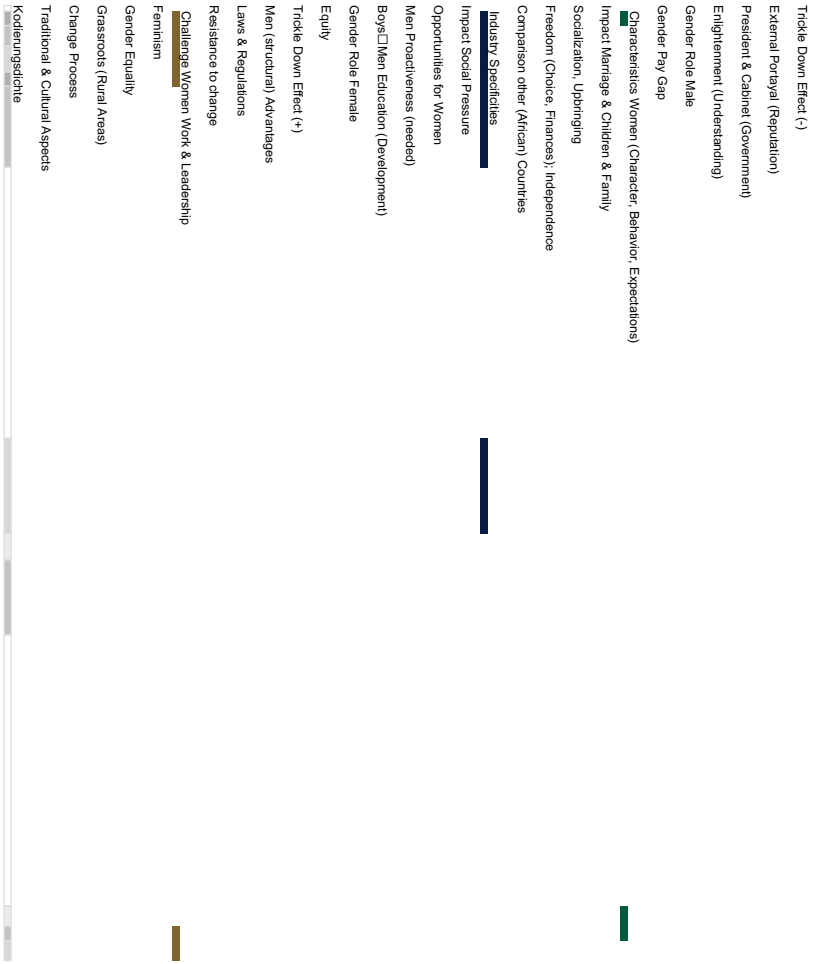
Respondent 08:29
Yes, so working from home, for us the nature of our business is human. So there's work that you can't do remotely because most of the staff that we manage our clients trust them with us, because they want us to be hands on with them. They want us to deal with an issue that just happened, if there was a disciplinary cases or fraud you have to be there physically. If there is staff going through some things on the personal level, we have to sit with them. So for us, as far as remote work is concerned for example, this is not part of the incentives. But we do have other areas of flexibility where either you can come in a bit late if, you're [taking care of someone] in a nursing home, for example. If you're on your period, you can take that day off as a sick leave without necessarily having a doctor's note. Because it's just things that women go through, you don't have to find the doctor to tell you that. So yeah, so for remote work, it doesn't work for us. But the rest of other aspects we definitely are more flexible.

Interviewer 09:40
Okay, you already touched upon that man are more relieved from some of the responsibilities that they had when they were single because the woman takes them over. So maybe you can explain a bit more about this typical image of a woman. Like what does it mean to be a good Rwandese woman?

Respondent 09:59
Like a wife, or just a woman?

Interviewer 10:03
Maybe both.

Respondent 10:05
Because it's a bit different when you're talking of a single Rwandan woman. Definitely, I feel like Rwandan women are smart, and confident. And one of the challenges that most of the career women that you'll find that are not married have, they will always tell you that everyone just assumes or expects



them to get married asap before they get too high and start scaring the men away. It's kind of, that's one of the perceptions people get, they're like: 'don't get too successful too early, you know, get a man first. And then you can do that, so that you don't scare the boys away, they won't approach you'. So a good career Rwandan woman who's single should be ambitious, but not not too much. But like, as a wife now, the perception is that you can be as powerful as you want but when you come home, you need to remember that there's the man in the home and you're still the woman and you need to take care of these duties by default. And I think this is not really Rwanda, it's quite global. They assume that the responsibility of children is with the woman. Everything that has to do with grocery shopping, kitchen, cooking, is with the woman. In Rwanda at least we do have what we call house helps. So the women won't do the cooking, the cleaning, most times their house helps with that. But the house help will come to ask for groceries, the grocery list, what are we going to cook, and the person in charge of that aspect, is by default the woman. And if anything needs to be dealt with that's the woman's role most times. But I will say that, in comparison, when we look at maybe the neighbouring countries, even sometimes globally, we are a bit ahead and I think it has to do with the national perception. You know, because of the president's speeches, the way he puts the women in front, most big positions are held by women. Even if culturally it's very engraved in people's minds, it's not spoken about very loudly, you won't hear someone say it. But in family settings and very intimate social settings, people will voice it. So it's somewhere in the subconscious and in the back of Rwandan's minds, that there are roles that are meant for women.

Interviewer 12:41
So you just mentioned how the president speaks about women and also all the policies. Do you think that this strategy has changed the societal view of women in Rwanda?

Respondent 12:56
Big time! Big time! I think, because for me I can even compare at the very beginning, even when we didn't have majority in parliament and early on in the early government that we used to have and the people that we had in big positions. At that time, I remember, whenever a woman will be promoted, there were always gonna be these rumours about, you know, them sleeping their way through. Or sometimes, because when the President started talking very loudly about this issues, people started thinking, 'Oh, they placed her there to fill the quota because they want to make sure there's a woman'. And because it became a requirement at some point to, you know, you have to have a kind of balance in management and teams and everywhere. And then people started thinking, first of all, women are not there by merit, they are there because they're required to be there. But with time, and for me, personally, I think the President consistency in his message has really played a role, because he kept saying the same thing over the years. And now the people who were starting to just say, 'they're doing it, because the President said it', now they're starting to realize you can't say that someone has been there because of a quota for 10 years. And the things are running, things are running well. So now the perception has really changed. People are like, 'actually, you know, there are really smart women out there'. So it has very much influenced the mindset of people. Although like I said, they're still going to take it like there's a category of smart women. And then there's another category. So when you come back home, they kind of keep the same mindset. But the general mindset is that women just can do it. But it [the mindset] wasn't the case, I think over the years it was built up and it has worked.

Interviewer 14:49

You kind of touched upon it already but I'm going to ask you about it again. So the societal image of women change, that's what you just said. But did the image or the gender distribution and gender roles in the families change because of the higher female participation rate in politics and economics?

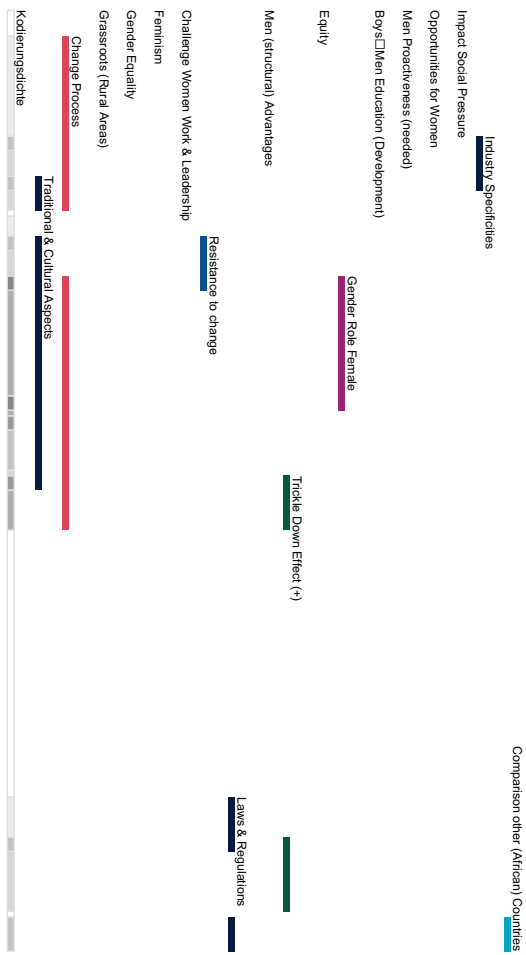
Respondent 15:10
It's changing. That's what I think. But this one has been much slower than in the workplace, definitely. In the workplace the challenges are not as much, it's really changed so much. If you can just even, let's say look at the banking sector, I think that we're seeing that now there are 40% of all banks in Rwanda are led by women, for example, this wasn't the case a few years ago. And this happened very fast. But at home, it's changing very slowly - but it is. Because for me, I tend to observe the people in different levels of life. And you'll find that there have been some initiatives and some outreaches and awareness campaigns to say that, as a man, you need to also take care of the children. And there are debates about it, sometimes, you know, people want to say: 'Why? This is, this is not our culture, this is not how we do things'. But on the other side, you also see a lot of men actually actively involved. I remember this one picture that went really viral. There was a woman and a man and the man carried the toddler on their back. Usually here, women the ones that carry them. And it went really viral and it sparked so many debates about: 'Is this right? Is this man emasculated?', you know. But the fact that up to that level of like a rural area, where a man can feel alright carrying the baby on his back, shows that there's some changes. But definitely the louder voices are still the traditional ones that don't want to change things the way they are. But I will say that it's not as if you take the corporate side, and even by the corporate side I'm talking also about the class, the social classes. So when we're talking about people that have lived abroad that'd been exposed to the global and international settings, they tend to be more open minded, and you find that the others that are still very traditional in the way of thinking. Even them [the traditional people], they are getting there, but they're not there yet. So when there are certain debates and people are actually open about what they think it will sound very backwards. But even then, now, there's things that you can't escape it. Yeah, so it's coming.

Interviewer 17:42
With the gender sensitive constitution from 2003, how did life change for women? Can you say something about that, how it was before and after?

Respondent 17:59
Um, I'm not very familiar of what the specific changes were implemented. Because I can't confirm if that's when they changed things like inheritance for girls. I'm not sure if that's when it was implemented.

Interviewer 2 18:15
That was in 1999 I think.

Respondent 18:17
Yeah. So because I do know that with time, there were introduced new laws. Every single time that a new update is introduced, there's always something that changes in favour of women. So I'm not sure about the 2003. But what I do know is that over the years, things just get better. And most times they get better because people don't have a choice. It's in the law, you have to do it. And then, so you do it reluctantly, you don't want to, and then eventually you get used to [it]. And then eventually, eventually, you understand why you even had to in the first place. So yeah, but it's true. I'm not versed enough to know exactly the different changes, but I know that there've been so many changes that when you ask people in other neighbouring countries, some rights they don't have yet. Here, it's kind of sorted.

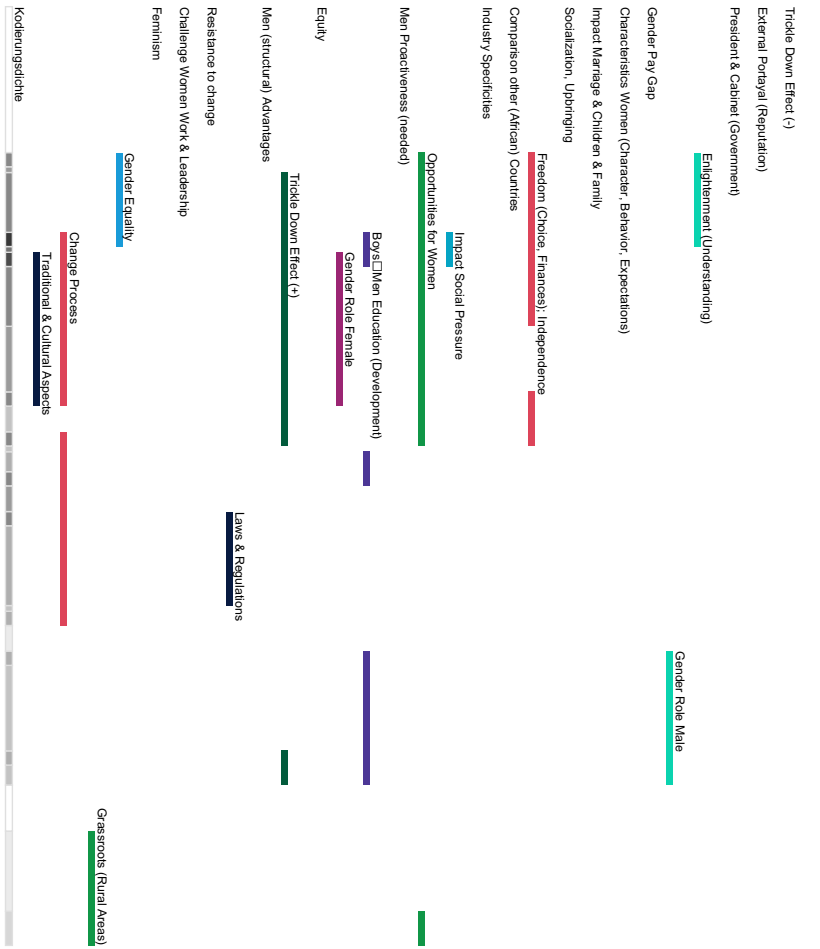


Interviewer 19:27
So you spoke about how things changed already until now, you said that there's progress that is observable. If we look into the future, how do you think gender roles and gender stereotypes and also the view on women will further change? And also the view on men?

Respondent 19:45
I think the future is quite promising. Because one thing that I've noticed that really contributes to achieving gender equality is for women is mostly financial freedom. I think the more you give opportunities to girls and women, the more they are, you know, they can now make their own choices, they can now decide what's good for them, they can now actually decide to get out of things that are not good enough for them. And the more now the other gender, the male gender, now realises 'Oh, we need to do better', otherwise, there are standards here. So in looking at the opportunities that have been availed, I'm looking, for example, at like the entrapreneurship scene and the new businesses that we see that are owned by women, and the incentives have been made for them to at least be able to self sustain. It changes the narrative, for example, in a family setting in a cultural setting and gender roles at home, of course, the woman was supposed to do all the chores and take care of the kids because she was staying home all day. But now she has a business and she's just equally, if not more, contributing financially to the home. Now the man is almost obliged to accept that she won't be there to do all those responsibilities, and now they have to be shared. So I think that the more women are given space and opportunities and financial freedom and more room to decide for themselves, it's just going to balance itself. It kind of works just automatically. So looking at the way, and I think the new generation is much more open minded than our fathers and grandfathers, brothers; so the men here they know that this world is very competitive, we're a very skill based economy. So you can't bring the fact that your gender is what's gonna get you ahead, because that's not how it works in the world in general. So it's changing, definitely. I feel like we're gonna get to a point where even if you still hold your traditional ideals, they won't be relevant anywhere, no one will actually... the law will be against them. The society will not consider them as normal or common; you can keep them to yourself or whatever small group you might, but you won't be relevant anymore, you won't be able to exert it anymore. So I think, definitely, I feel like the future is going to be much much better, even though there's still some work to do. But the more we become like this majority of women showing the example, speaking up and showing the possibilities, because at the end, I think for me I'm quite active on these things. So I've been following these other kind of like discussion where men were talking about the fact that they didn't realise that a woman working is actually good for everyone. Now, the man doesn't have to suffer that as much to grind for the whole household, because they get to share all their responsibilities together. And because of that, they're more open to say, 'You know what, yeah, actually, I could take care of the kids because I know we're gonna have more money now'. It's changing the narrative. So the more things are being done, and people are looking at the benefits, seeing them for their own eyes, they'll easily just going to go with it.

Interviewer 23:23
Do you think there's going to be a difference between maybe like the more urban settings like in Kigali and outside in the villages?

Respondent 23:29
Yeah, definitely, just like anything else. In the rural areas, things just take more time, and the realities are different. There's not as much opportunities or it's not the same. Mostly, people in rural areas have



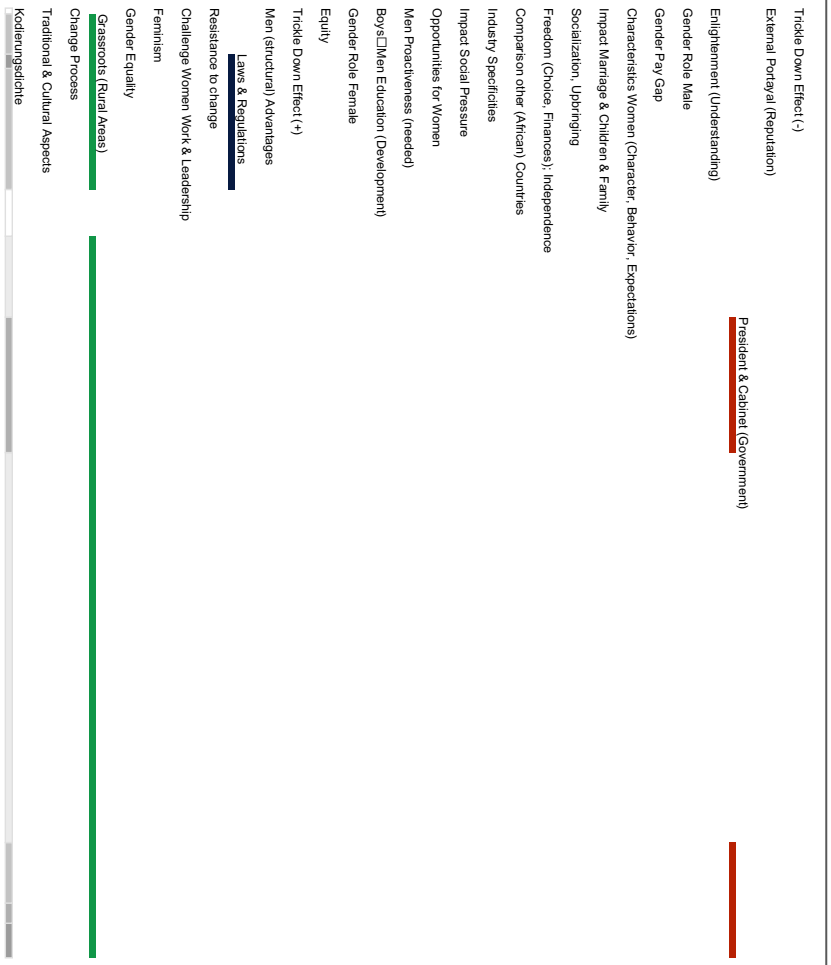
much simpler lives. So even the women there, and the level of ambitions that they have is not the same as a girl in the city; she [girl in city] wants the world, this one [girl in village] she just wants to live a very quiet, peaceful life. So even there definitely, I don't think it will be the same. But the only difference, that's why I like the fact that it's part of the law, is that things like domestic violence and inheritance and rights, these ones are actually ensured by the government. So you can't run away from it. Even if you're from the city or the village, it's still going to be the same laws. So even when they [girls and women] won't want to overachieve or won't have big ambitions, they will be protected from a certain level of harm or anything that could be against them. And so, definitely, there will always be a difference but in terms of how they're safeguarded, I think at least that one will be covered.

Interviewer 24:51
Now, you mentioned the new laws that can protect women. Do you think that all women in the villages actually know about their rights?

Respondent 24:57
I think there's been quite a good level of awareness, the ministry... Because we actually have a Ministry of Gender and family planning, it's specifically there for that. And I think there are so many programmes, especially, I think they use a lot of social workers. So the social workers are pretty much like the government spokespeople to the lowest level. And they usually do lots of awareness especially in terms of health, but also in terms of anything that has to do with rights and livelihoods of people. So they will definitely and they do have a lot of times when they talk to people, let them know these are your rights, and especially also the monthly... Oh, you know we have a monthly community work?! Where every month people meet in villages, so they do community work. But then every time after [that], we have meetings, like a neighbourhood meeting pretty much. And usually during those meetings, there's always some sort of awareness or information, 'You should know about this'. I remember I attended one in the southern province, and the mayor was there. And I was very surprised, that's when you know that the realities are very different, because the speech of the mayor, he was really talking about hygiene. And he was telling people 'Listen, you know, every time after you've gone to' oh what do you call it?

Interviewer 2 26:47
Like cultivating? Cultivating the crops?

Respondent 26:48
Yes, exactly. 'So, after you come from the field, please, you know, try to bath, don't just go straight to bed or go to cook'. So, those kinds of meetings that's what they do, they will tell you the most [basic things]. For us it's like the most basic things, like how? But you will see that the conversation in the villages are different. So a village they will talk about, 'Our road is not is not paved, so we're gonna contribute. How much is everyone giving on a monthly? Let's pledge'. They will talk about barbecue, they'll talk about Christmas celebration, but there [monthly meetings] they will talk about some things like hygiene. Things like, 'I've seen that your kids are going to school and they don't have shoes, this is wrong. You know, go buy shoes, it's much cheaper. Go to the market'. So, those kinds of initiatives allow... I think the idea of decentralisation has actually helped because whatever message comes from above just goes down and it's translated in the language of the person that's going to get it at the end of the day. So that works a lot in actually raising awareness. And it always has to come with the ministry. Because when the ministry is running a campaign because I think there's this where they're fighting against GBV, like gender based violence, and so they will run a campaign countrywide, and they use



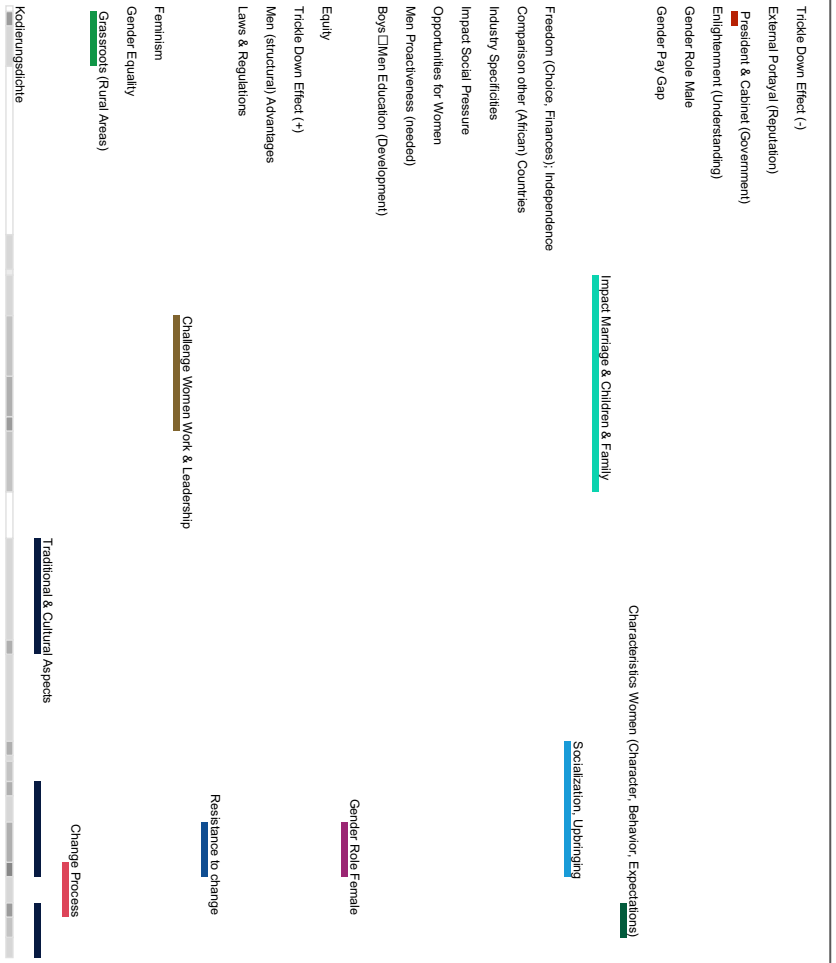
that on village level and cell level. So it's easier to talk to the people. Yeah, so there are definitely routes that even if people would want to maybe create some sort of awareness for a specific thing, you go through the proper channels, it will get to them.

Interviewer 28:29
Okay, I want to go back a bit to these household chores and everything. Now you're not married, you're single you said but maybe you can explain how how you manage your household and being in such a high position in management?

Respondent 28:49
I think I get this a lot. I personally feel like there is not much difference, in a sense of it comes back again, it's like work life balance. So after I come from the office and all the responsibilities that I have here, when I go home I just become a very regular normal person and I'll take care of my things, I will do my shopping, some things I'll get it and I get them done so there's no... As far as my role is concerned, and how it affects my personal life there's not much implication but I'm very well aware that it's different for example, if I was married, it wouldn't be the same. Because the previous MD [Managing Director] for example, I know we sometimes have really hectic weeks and have to work on a project and it's soon due, so we spend the night. But for example I know that when it happens in my situation right now I can afford to pull out all nighter or leave almost at midnight because I'm working on it. But I know for example, the previous MD, she used to sometimes have to first go and get the kids to bed, and then she would take her laptop, and she would still work remotely. So I'm very well aware of sometimes, if I may say the privileges, that I could get because there are certain responsibilities and duties and things that I can put on hold because they directly concern just me, so there's no other party [e.g. family] that will be affected by it. But it's also a matter of organising onseself I think.

Interviewer 30:39
And you also said that some people say that you should be married before you get on higher levels, is that because men don't accept a woman that is in a higher position than themselves as a wife?

Respondent 30:53
That's the cultural understanding, you know of our aunties and grandmothers. They don't want you to scare all the men away. And for me, I always have a reply for them. I'm like 'a man who is already intimidated by something as little as a job position that you can get today and to lose tomorrow, is already too insecure to not be a man good enough for you regardless of which position you hold in life at all'. It's like if you were a student and they would say 'don't do all A's because you're going to scare the dumb boys away'. If they're so dumb that they get scared of a smart girl, then they should just be scared. But it's mostly in the understanding, because back then the mom, and it also has to do with religious beliefs. Most of the religion like in Rwanda, we are predominantly Christian and then there's the Muslims. So most of the religion say the head is the man and then you are more of like the support. So when it's understood as you are too smart, it's almost like you are going to become the head, and that's kind of the misperception that most people tend to have. And because back in the days, there weren't women doing these roles [e.g. leadership] it's scary to the culture and say, 'We've never had this before so it's a threat'. But I've seen some old people that are more open minded, that will say, 'Actually, you know, you should really aim higher and just don't lower your standards for whatsoever reason'. Or sometimes they will try to like humble you, like 'You know, it's okay to be all that, as long as you come back and act like you don't want anything, like you act like you're dumb'. So but I think it stems from a place of fear and people use culture, or religion as an excuse now to put someone down.

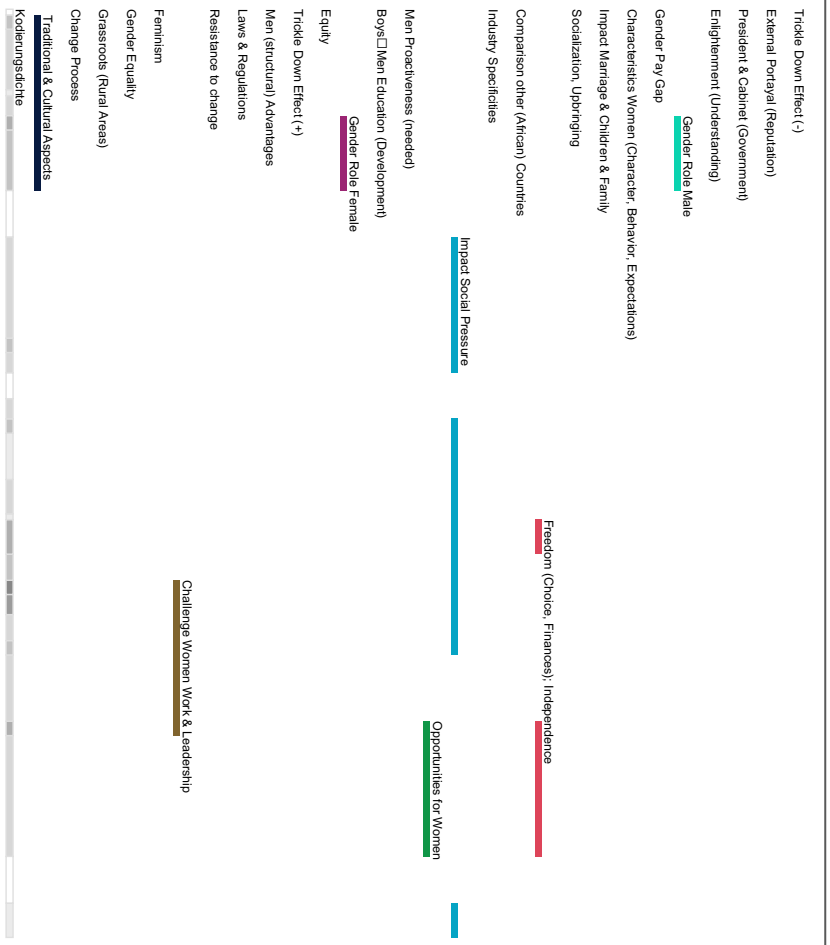


I think has nothing to do with the reality but the perception still comes in. You know, when people say, who pays for a date? First of all it's understood that a man will pay for a date. Those kind of mentalities that a man pays for a date, a man will buy some flowers, he's the one to send the gifts; like he does the work. So they feel like if you get to a position where those things won't impress you, then no man will come to you because you won't be impressed. But personally, I don't even believe in those things. I believe that, if you're in a partnership, you should equally pour into each other. So it really stems from all those stereotypes of what are the dynamics in the relationship. There's the strong one and then there's the weak one that has to be protected and provided for. So if you already have that, you're protected, you're provided for, suddenly you don't need a man, that's the understanding.

Interviewer 33:57
Do you think that these stereotypes or old beliefs of what a man is and what a woman is also impacts you sometimes in the workplace?

Respondent 34:08
Definitely, definitely they have an impact. Personally, I think maybe you got the wrong one because I have a very different view. But I see it around. I see a lot of people not being ambitious enough. Really taking a leap and they say 'No, I can't go to this level until I'm married, and after that I will'. And some actually do, they wait, they get married because that's their goal. They feel like, it's like a step and before this step I'm not gonna go to the next. And I see a lot of women. I remember the other day, we were looking for a CFO, and this organisation was very specific that they wanted a female CFO. And we have a network so we know a lot of CFOs out there and finance managers, people who are really good, so I contacted each one of them and most of them declined, even though the money was really good. And they just tell you 'Listen, I'm tired. No, I can't'. And you just talk to a guy, he just got the job a month ago, he doesn't care he's like, 'next'. So that one was actually quite something to observe because it's also the social toll of it. For me, I even think it's good for them to choose something, not putting themselves under pressure. Because it's true that when you're a woman, you always have the need or you feel like you need to prove yourself. Especially in a new role and a senior role, you know you're gonna have to work twice than the average man. Because ideally a man will be expected to be knowing and then for you, you need to do it and every time push yourself so hard. So most of them, they look at it, and they just don't want to put themselves through that much pressure because they're already going through enough on their own. So they just don't. And some of them, for example, I've seen a lot of women when you give them a job opportunity they're like, 'You know what, I'm actually planning to get pregnant this month or in the couple of months to come and I don't want to have that shift with everything that's changing my body and a new role and everything'. So yeah, these are factors that are real. What I do like about that is whenever it actually comes from the person who's concerned, they are the ones that make the decisions for themselves. It's not an employer who thinks 'oh no I'm not promoting you because I feel like I don't want to put pressure on you'. When it's the women themselves choosing, they have the ability, they could the opportunities are there, but they just choose not to, I think that's okay. It's only bad when it's the other way. And it's either the employer or the opportunities that just push them away, because they assume that, 'No, they're not gonna do it'. But for them to choose it for themselves, I think it's quite fair.

Interviewer 37:03
Might it be that some of the reasons why they don't choose to do it is also influenced by the stereotypes and expectation towards them?



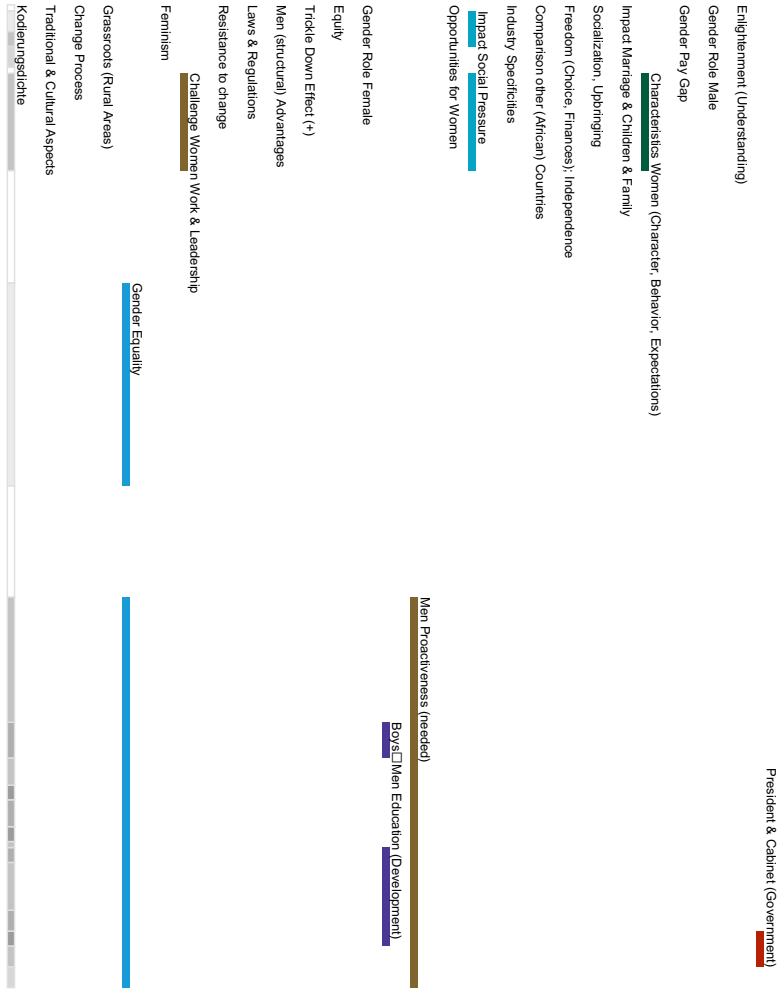
Respondent 37:11
Some of them, yes, some of them yes. But again, I'm talking from a really place of privilege, because we work with lots of corporates and people that are really open minded, there it's not much of a factor. But definitely for some roles, you'll see that people will fear certain positions, or certain jobs, because of what people think of them. And they don't want to have that image - yet. So they're like 'I'm not gonna take this leadership role, I would rather support because now I'm gonna have to be mean, or I'm gonna have to be tough and this is not what I want. It's not gonna make people see me differently'. And yes, sometimes it does, it does influence sometimes.

Interviewer 38:04
If you would need to define gender equality, how would you define it?

Respondent 38:07
Gender Equality? How would I define gender equality? It's really that... It's putting a line based on logic. So for example, I think examples will help. Gender equality, let's say at school, since success factors in school are marks, success is marks. So it means it doesn't matter whether you are a girl or a boy, whatever you get as marks, that's how. So in a home, it's all about logic. If something is misplaced and you're the one there, whether you're the man or the woman, you take care of it. If it's a child, whoever has the time right there, they're the ones to take care of the child. It has nothing to do with, you're the mother so you spend more time with it [child]. If it's a leadership position, whoever has the emotional, like the full set of leadership skills, that will make them perform in that position, then those are the ones. So for me gender equality is basing on facts, logic and actual tangible factors. So comparing people without putting a gender level on them.

Interviewer 39:43
And what do you wish or hope for in terms of gender equality in the future to happen in Rwanda?

Respondent 39:52
I wish and hope for the fight to not... Or the biggest responsibility to not be put on women. So for the oppressed party, to not be put on the biggest responsibility to fight for their own place. I would wish to see more men championing these kind of initiatives. So, for example, for us as a women-lead business it is a responsibility, and we take it full on and with pride, to include, to bring all the conversation that had been missing into all the spaces that we see what's wrong, but it shouldn't be the biggest weight on us. It should actually be the people who have been in these spaces for a very long time who have thrived by all these privileges, to now start. But it requires kind of detaching yourself from a privilege that's there for you. And saying, as much as this is for me, I know someone else should have it. So I feel like the battle, or like the struggle for gender equality should be... I would love to see more men, more Rwandan men involved. Not sitting and waiting, 'please educate us, please show us that it works. I want to see you do it. I'm gonna judge everything you do, and make sure that you are flawless so that maybe I will choose to join your struggle'. So there should be more of a proactiveness coming from the men. And more of showing the examples to the young boys as well. Because what we see is that that's gonna reflect on the next generation. If the men still are not actively involved, we're still gonna have a problem, because the boys won't have a role model to see what it looks like to have an equitable society and community where people are just working together. So seeing more men involved, some of them are, but right now they're still the exception. Even the President himself, people just label him as 'Ah the president is a feminist' and he's like the exception. So it's much more for everyone to feel this is the norm. You're not extra for doing. It should be for everybody.



Interviewer 42:08
Now, you mentioned the word feminism, maybe you can explain how you would define that? What does it mean for you?

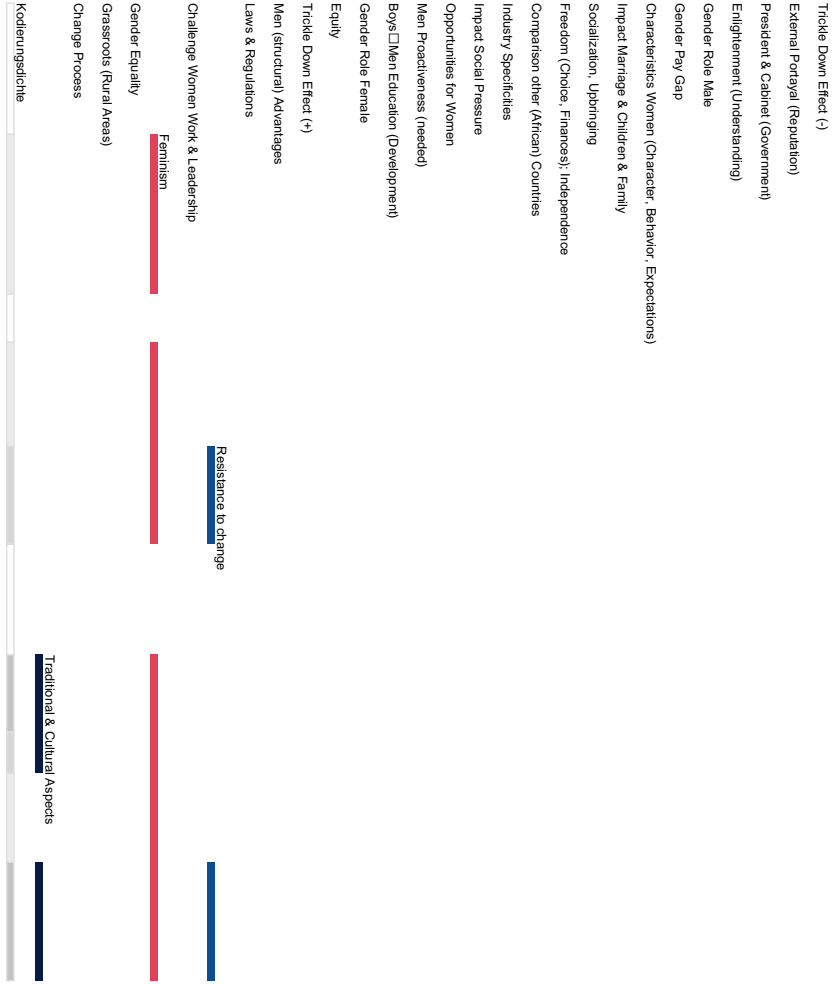
Respondent 42:16
For me, feminist... We had this discussion the other day on women's day. We had some sort of internal panel with the team and we put the guys on the hot seat and asked them, so we're talking about it. And I said, so feminism is the advocacy of equality of gender and rights. And because in the two genders, the female gender is the one that's behind, it tends to now push mostly for women rights. But feminism at its core, I believe, it advances everyone's rights. I actually feel its also advocating more for the male child, or even men who are abused, all these marginalised groups and feminist groups. So it's all about advocating for people whose rights have been missing or violated or are not respected. So that's my opinion.

Interviewer 43:14
And would you consider yourself a feminist?

Respondent 43:15
Big time! [laughs] Everybody should be a feminst. People should be ashamed to not be feminists. It's like, if someone asks you, 'Do you advocate for human rights?' And you like, ' Mh which ones?' You know. [laughs] I feel like that should be the conversation. But I know that there is some negative connotation with the word. And I don't believe in it. I feel like it's a distraction. Like you use the fact that there are some people maybe taking it to the extreme. I don't know, there's always with anything people who are taking it to the extreme, but using that as an excuse for you not to be part of something that you know is great and noble and should be, is wrong. So yeah, I'm a very, very proud feminist.

Interviewer 43:58
So you said that it has a negative connotation, maybe you can explain a bit more like how it is seen?

Respondent 44:03
Yeah, so as always, like I said, mostly anything that has to do with women rights, with equality of sexes, because traditionally, culturally and on the religious lens, this was not the case. Anything that comes in is like against. So it's seen as... The religious people see it as a pagan movement, because it's teaching the woman to be above the man. That's that's how they see in their lens. The cultural people see it as a Western import that is coming to destroy the moral fabric of the culture. So everyone sees it as a threat to whatever the status quo was. And that's how it has that negative connotation. So everyone looks at it and says... and I think a lot of people who are against feminism will say that feminism no longer has a role. Because they say now you can vote, you can work and have a bank account, the real feminist, they did the job and they're done. What you guys are still now asking for, like these small things, is just now extra. You know, like you're advancing your own agendas, you have other things on the side. But for me, it's always the negative connotation, if I was to summarise all these groups, even though these groups don't even agree with each other, but when it comes to fighting one enemy they do. So I'm like, the only thing they have in common against feminism is the change in the status quo. And that's how now everyone will paint [the picture] according to what is evil for them. So for them, they say you're trying to destroy this, you are trying to take away this you're trying to... But it's really because there's a change in the status quo and things are different. So if you were used to



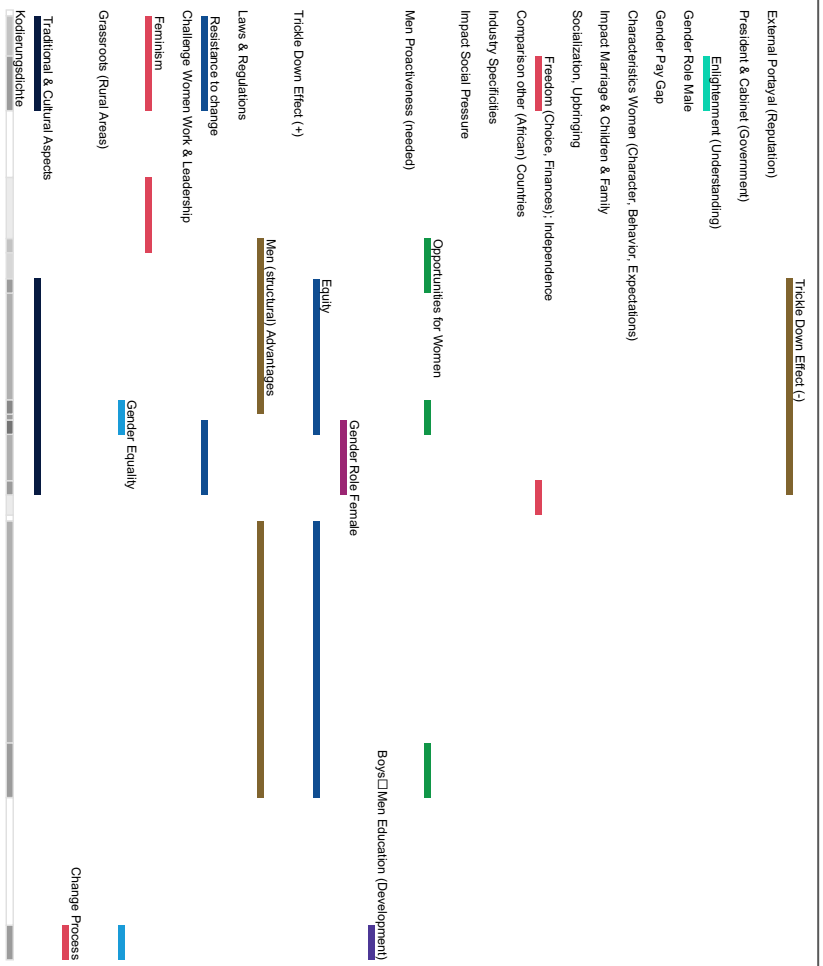
someone saying yes to everything you say, and suddenly someone is telling them, 'you know, you can actually say no', they're like, 'Oh, so you want to have an uprising, like people have an uprising, people are gonna start saying no to everybody', but it's just telling them the option. So it's really that the changing status quo makes the people that are benefiting from it feel threatened by whoever is trying to let people know that the change is actually possible.

Interviewer 46:27
So you said some of these groups see it as if woman want to be over men now, how would you understand it? Where do women want to be in feminism?

Respondent 46:38
Women just want to be. It's like when they say that we have now more women in leadership positions, it's not that women were made now into leaders, they were leaders, they were just now given space to lead. When they talk about, because most of this discourse comes into say, 'Now you see all these opportunities are being given to women. It means men are being left backwards. No one is giving scholarships to men, no one is giving grants and businesses'. And you want to ask, so you need to look at the numbers, who were in these spaces all along. So when people say that the men are being pushed down, is because they've only been up there, and now seeing someone as close, they feel like they are going down where they left them. While it's just someone, you know, finding you where you are. So it's not... I feel like what gender equality is bringing, there's nothing that it's giving women that they didn't have, it's just opening doors for them to be in spaces they weren't at. Now for a man who was in this place, and maybe thought like women are in the kitchen and they finally see women here, they feel like 'I'm being brought to the kitchen'. They feel it as an attack. Like 'I'm the one being brought to where I thought women belong'. But it's just, you know, the woman can be in there, or they can choose not to be. So it's really that. And sometimes, of course I understand, and I think that's where the discourse comes from, is when people... To bridge the gap, you have to do extra effort. Because now if a lot of girls, because I know that they used to change the pass grade for girls, in primary school, actually, I remember that, versus boys, because they used to see that there was a drop for girls who didn't pass a certain mark, most of them would now not continue to high school. So they just increased to say you have to be at least on this level. So I think because usually it was 50% to pass, and then they put the girls as low as 45%. Because they realise that anyone below 50, the chances of them continuing to secondary was just not there. So they just increase that. Not because they want to advance the girls that don't deserve [it] but they want them to have the chance to continue to [the] next level. And then the boys will be like, 'This is unfair, because a boy who got 45% won't get a good school'. But you realise that even the boys that are under 50%, they would still continue to university, statistics would show. So the only thing that was added is increasing the chances of those that were not there in the first place. And this is used to say, 'Oh no, you just want to push the girls ahead'. So yes, they are being pushed but you are already way ahead of the line. They're just being pushed closer to you. So that's that's my view. And that's the fact.

Interviewer 49:48
You said that the men now feel like they're being pushed in the kitchen. Do you think that men should also have the opportunity to do household chores if they want to?

Respondent 49:58
They should. Household chores are for someone who lives in a house. Unless they live in caves, then they could do cave chores. [laughs] And because the changes of it is because if you see people who've



lived abroad, you go there, there's no house help. Then suddenly all the men suddenly they can cook, they can clean. So they actually could, they just didn't want to. So yeah, they should do the chores, they should, again it should be based on on logic. Do you eat? Yes, then you should cook. Do you use things? Then you should clean. Regardless.

Interviewer 50:39
Okay, as a last exercise we brought some pictures. And there is no questions attached to it. We would just like to hear what comes to your mind and what you see in these four pictures. Okay, how do you think they might be all connected?

Respondent 50:56
Okay. What do I see? [Picture 2] A happy couple. [Picture 3] A woman cooking. [Picture 4] Someone who's working but who just got distracted, or who's posing for a picture. [Picture 1] Someone who's overwhelmed by a lot of things. I think there's work, there's a baby, there's gym, a child, there's a house. And then there's money. But yeah. Well, there's a woman in each picture. And yeah, every one of them is at a different moment in their life.

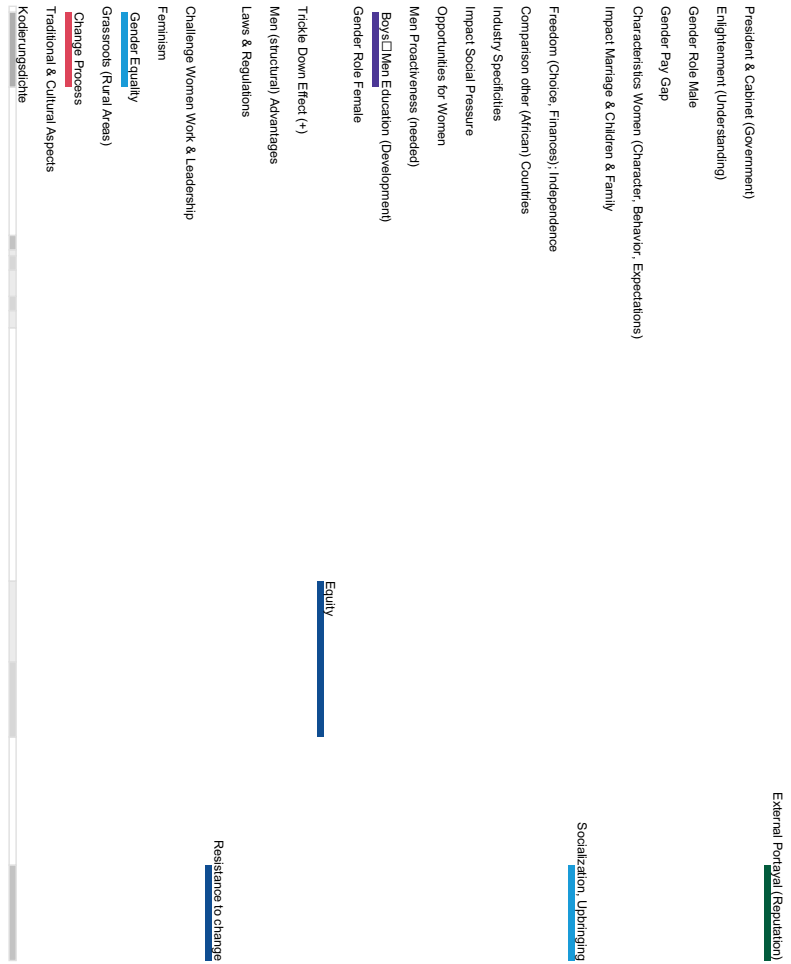
Interviewer 52:03
Okay, thank you. Is there anything that you would like to add? [Question directed at Interviewer 2]

Interviewer 2 52:16
Yes I have some questions that add on to some things you said. You gave us the example about the schools and that girls only have to reach 45% while boys need 50%. From our previous interviews, I just got thinking, what is your take on gender equity in Rwanda? We can talk about equality all day and say 'But women have the same chances'. But what if they can't reach the point to use these chances? So how have you seen the development in terms of equity?

Respondent 53:05
Yeah, actually, everything I've been talking about was actually more equity that equality. And what I'd like is, for example, I don't think right now that primary grade is now applicable, it's no longer there. So that's like some, almost like, 15/20 years ago. Now it's no longer because now the numbers are up and have been put on place, and actually now we have more girls in high school. So it has actually now been removed. So I think, here, the country really does actually work on equity. So it's always about how do we realign things, rebalance them, and once they're balanced we just move on. So yeah, the focus is on equity. It's really on equity. We always identify, 'Where are the places where we are behind? How do we get ahead?' And once we get ahead, things just run as normal.

Interviewer 2 54:02
And then you mentioned that now there's kind of this this mindset that there's smart women and other women. Could you elaborate on that?

Respondent 54:11
Well, this is mostly for the people that are not convinced, as in generally. They are by default. So you find yourself in a society that's open minded, in a country that's open minded, so all your ideals, you just skip them. And what you do is now you find a place where you can exert your power. So and some men will have like a female boss, and they know there's absolutely nothing they can do. You know, they can't be sexist, they can't have any comment that's derogatory. But then when they have space where



they have power, where there's like a family member where there is like, a spouse or a daughter, then they get to exert all those mindsets that they've kept. Which is why I say that the journey now got to a point where you're not just oblige, but now you understand why these things have to happen, why it's actually what should be. That's the idea where it will get to that person, so even when they have the power, they will actually do the right thing, not just because there's regulations and laws and things that are keeping you from lashing out.

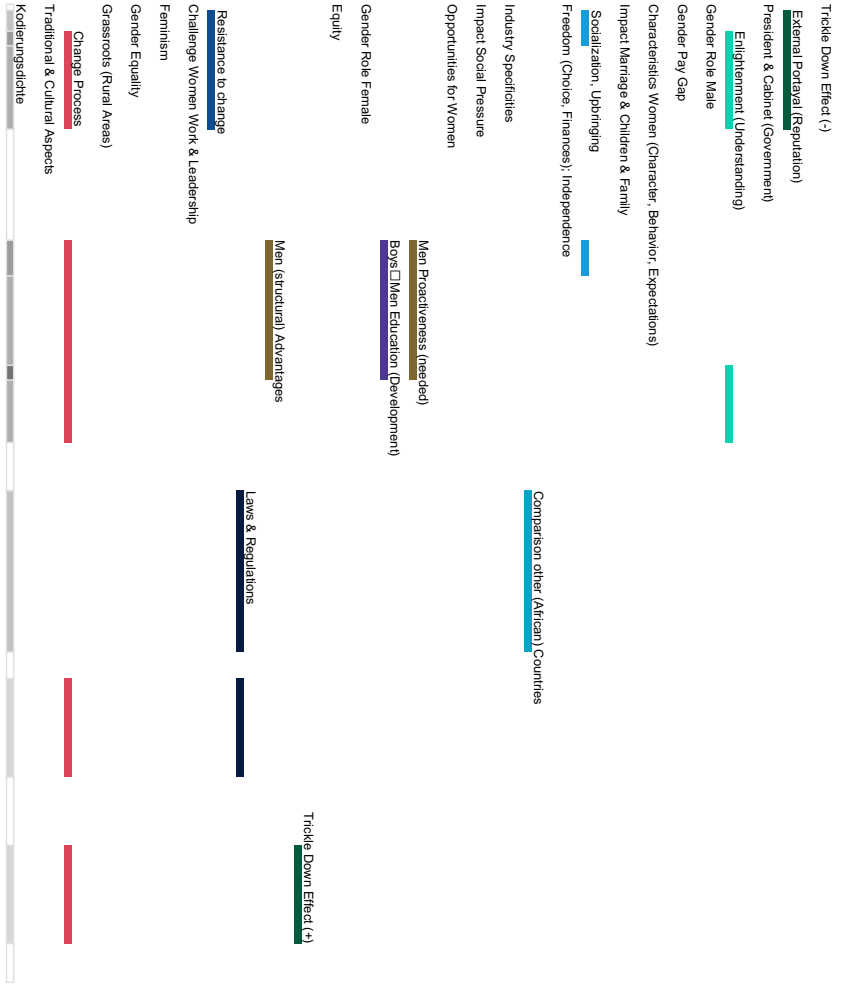
Interviewer 55:25
What do you think will help people actually understand?

Respondent 55:29
I think this really is a personal choice. And for women, for example, it's really unlearning because you are raised and taught certain things. So you think that's the norm, and even for men. The only difference is for men, there's even an added value because you also even enjoy the privileges of all those things you've been taught. Now, for you to be able to unlearn that means you have to let go that privilege. And this is something that you personally have to make the choice to say, 'Okay, it's a privilege, but I don't want it because it doesn't make any sense'. So for men it requires unlearning and then being okay with giving up on the privileges that come with being a man. For women, it will require just unlearning and just being themselves. Letting go of all the stereotypes and things you've been taught to do or not do, that you can and cannot do. Yeah, it's gonna have to be a personal decision that one you can't. That's as far as you can implement but you can't change someone's choices.

Interviewer 2 56:29
And then you've touched upon the inheritance law. I'd just like to hear from your perspective, how is this actually executed or ensured throughout the country?

Respondent 56:42
I will say this in contrast, just to give the context. Because in Rwanda, you don't even think of it. You have five kids, then all of your five kids get to inherit whatever you leave them. But I'll contrast with Congo, because I know that people from DRC when the man of the house dies, the brother comes in. So because there's no law that actually covers to say, what can be done or cannot, they go by culture. So some cultures, for example, they say that all the belongings will go to the eldest son, some cultures will say that all the belongings go to the uncle or to the brother, or to the next of kin. Things like that. So in Rwanda, we don't even think of it, it's just automatic. You know even the children that you have that are not from marriage, they are entitled to it according to the law. So it's not even something that people are gonna think about. At this point! And that's why I say it's really been so long, because at this point, people don't even think about it. It's just, it's just a fact. Definitely. Definitely. And this one, maybe I can't confirm, maybe if you speak to someone who's at the Ministry of Justice they would be able to confirm, but I remember that really back in the days, the biggest cases that were on court was about land. People were fighting over land because now they had rights. And at that time for you to fight back is because you feel like you know you're entitled, like 'Why are you even coming for this?' So I don't think right now we still have those issues anymore, like people fighting like with their sister because of a piece of land anymore. So definitely it did create that. And that's why I say that with time. It's just a matter of time. So it starts that you're obliged and you fight it, and then you don't have a choice, and then eventually it becomes such a norm that you don't even remember what it was like before.

Interviewer 2 57:53



So is that something where we can see maybe a successful mindset change from going 'Oh, only the boy you gets something' to you don't think about it anymore? Thank you. Do you have any questions to us?

Respondent 58:52
Thank you. How about your country? How is it? Do you also have that cultural, like those stereotypes? Marriage I guess?

Interviewer 1:02:46
I would say, the cultural stereotypes, you know, become...

Respondent 1:02:51
Like the dating?

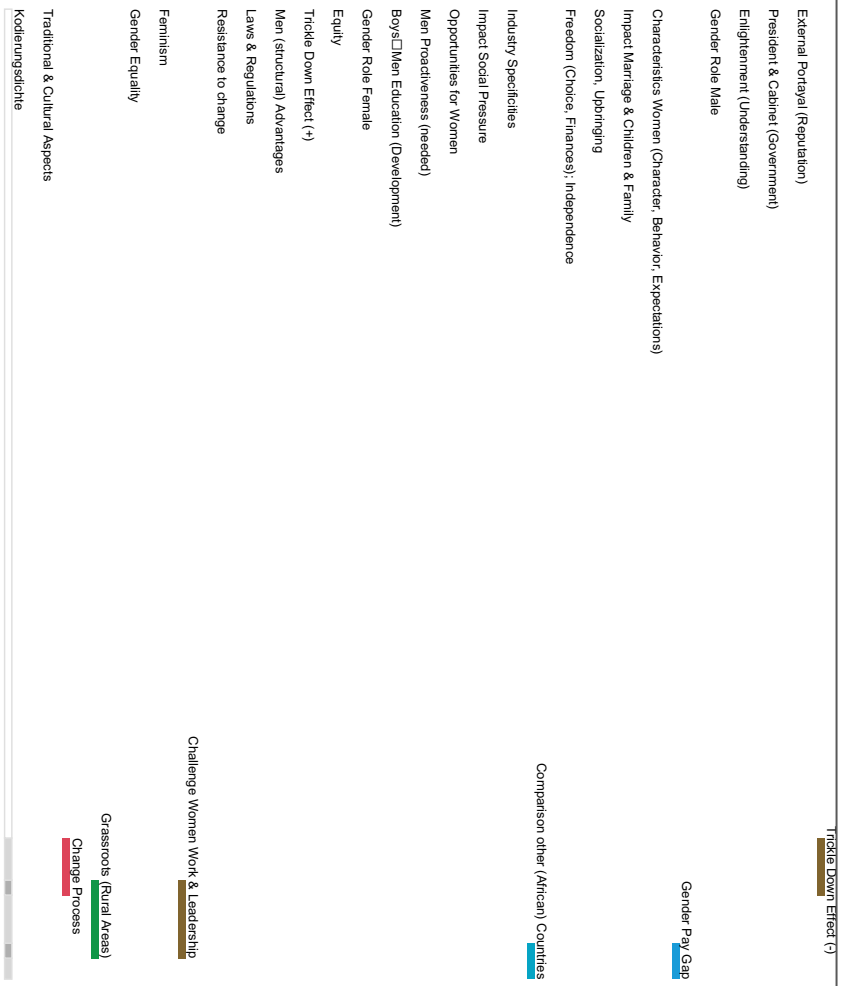
Interviewer 2 1:02:53
Well, the countries we live in, they used to be Christian countries. So I feel like a lot of these things are somewhat the same. I feel like for us today, those stereotypes are more silent. Because everyone likes to be so progressive, if you say something like that you sound very... You know, people will be like, 'Well, you can't say this'. But then unconsciously, a lot of these things, I think, still play out. Which sometimes I feel like makes it even more dangerous, because we always think, 'Oh, we're so far ahead. This isn't a problem anymore'. But then, you go and see that jobs such as nurses and caretaking jobs...

Respondent 1:03:33
There's more women.

Interviewer 2 1:03:33
Pobably 90% women, if not more. And then jobs, you know, such as banking or like IT - male dominated. I work in shipping, I look at our numbers, we don't have a single woman in senior management. Or even just the gender pay gap. And I'm like, you know, we're not as progressive as we think. So yeah, I think it's more silent but the stereotypes still play out in our lives.

Interviewer 1:03:33
Also, for instance, if you look at the debates when we had a new election for our prime minister. They would ask, we had two male candidates and one female candidate, and they were asking her different questions than they asked them, so the guys. So it was always like, 'How do you feel about balancing your responsibilities as a mom and being a female president or prime minister', and then none of them was asked as a man those questions. So I feel like those things still exist.

Respondent 1:04:35
And I think that's one of the conversations we're having is that, you know, it doesn't matter how far we are now, this shows how much work we still need to do. Like it doesn't matter how progressive or open all regulations are made if people still have the mentalities and they don't want to change them. And that's what makes, you know... We're still gonna have the same struggle at the end of the day with someone like in a very rural area, who has no access to any kind of technology and all of that. It's quite interesting to witness. And you know, funnily enough, however, I don't think we have the gender pay gap issue in Rwanda or in Africa, compared to Western countries. We don't.



Interviewer 2 1:05:18
Really?

Respondent 1:05:19
No, there's no issue. Like people are not paid differently because they're men or women.

Interviewer 1:05:26
But is it that female jobs that are mostly female dominated, like HR, caretaking etc. are those jobs paid less than IT and finances?

Respondent 1:05:35
Not really. It's mostly on on the availability of the skill. So definitely, let's say like, developers, anything in the tech, because it's new, not so many people can do it here. So they're really highly paid. But things like customer service is done by both men and women, they're all paid the same, it doesn't matter. The only time it comes in play, which is where it's actually funny, is at a higher level. You know, when people tend to like negotiate the salaries. But even then is not that high, because we have some sort of limitations. There's a percentage you can't go above when you're coming from one job to another. So yes, you'll find some men are audacious to ask for higher, but the pay gap has nothing to do with gender. Yeah, that's one of the issues that I always hear from the Global North and I'm like, 'Okay, that one we don't [have]'. But it's also because we came a bit late into the workforce and the corporates and then we adopted the latest laws. We didn't take back on whatever it was at the beginning. And because some of the companies [in the Global North] have been there for like hundreds of years, so they still have to fight on the mindset they had. Because all of us at our companies are like 50 at most. So they just came in when things have been reformed. So some challenges, for example, we don't get to face.

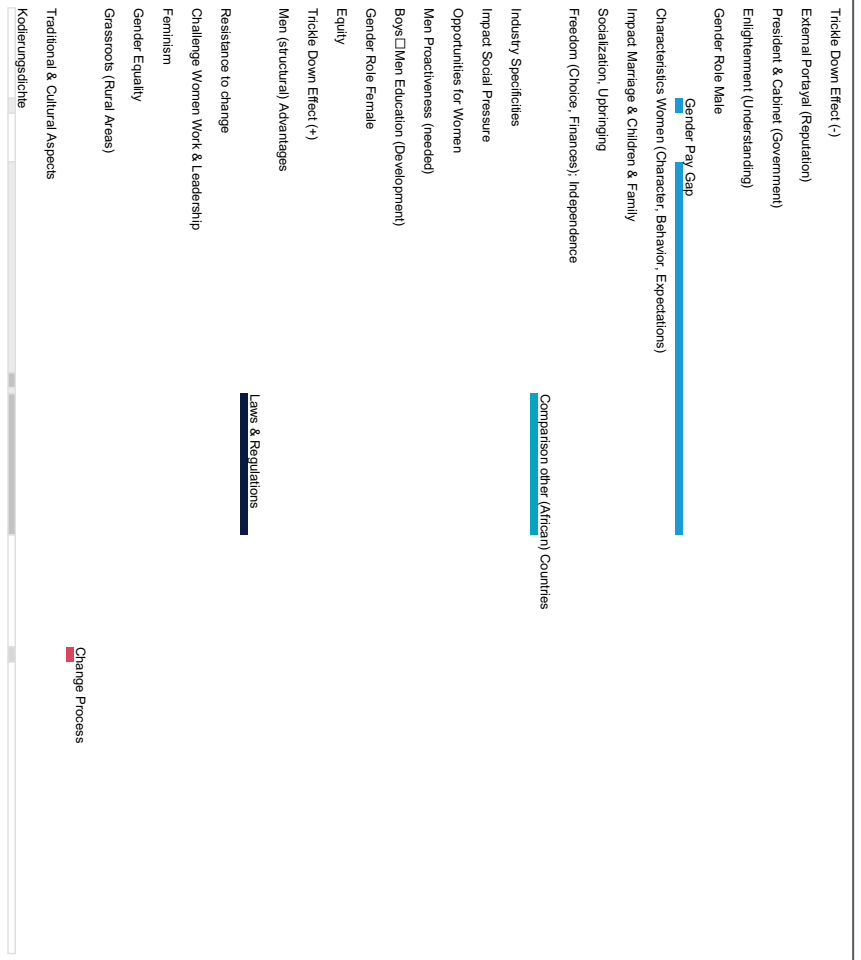
Interviewer 1:07:08
So would you say that is an advantage in some way?

Respondent 1:07:10
Yes. Sometimes being behind makes you take only the good stuff [laughs].

Interviewer 2 1:08:17
Great. Thank you so much for taking the time. I think we have asked all of our questions, is there anything else you would like to add?

Respondent 1:09:47
Thank you! I think I said all.

Interviewer 2 1:09:52
Okay, then I will stop the recording now.



Appendix E: Codebook

Open Codes

Open Codes	Code Description	Files	Reference	Corresponding Selective Codes
Female Behavior (Response Strategies)	Description of how women behave in specific settings	7	11	Behavioral Responses
Proof	Code entails indicators that show how women need to 'proof' their space in society other than men; e.g.: working harder, representing entire group —> women proofing they deserve the space they are in	11	42	Behavioral Responses
Freedom (Choice, Finances); Independence	The respondents answer touches upon freedom for girls and women in different forms (e.g.: Freedom of choice, Financial Freedom)	8	24	Change Process
Social Acceptance	Women being socially accepted; mindset change in terms of social expectations	7	12	Change Process
Change Process	Description of how life is changing/ has changed	16	86	Change Process
Future	Respondents describe if/ how they think the future will change	16	35	Change Process
Modern Success	Women's ideas of what success is now/ for them personally, diverging from the traditional idea	4	7	Change Process
New Generation	Explanations of how the younger generation in Rwanda is different from previous	13	29	Change Process
Gender Ratio Company	Gender ratios in respondents' companies or information about gender ratios in companies/ institutions in general	14	26	Company / Industry Gender Specificities
Industry Specificities	Description of male vs female dominated/ specific industries	11	32	Company / Industry Gender Specificities
Women Leadership	The effects women leaders have on other women or men; Numeric information of women in leadership positions	8	21	Company / Industry Gender Specificities

Comparison other (African) Countries	Respondent explains how being a woman in Rwanda differs from other African countries (or Western countries)	10	53	Comparison other Countries
Rwanda Ahead	Aspects in which Rwanda as a country is considered 'ahead' by respondents	6	15	Comparison other Countries
Rwanda Behind	Aspects in which Rwanda as a country is considered 'behind' by respondents	3	11	Comparison other Countries
Daily Life	Respondents describe activities or characteristics of their daily life	8	16	Daily Routine
Flexible Work	Home Office and remote work opportunities or other models that make flexible work possible/ accessible for women	4	20	Daily Routine
Help (Domestic)	Respondents describe the help women get in daily life or with their tasks at home	9	33	Daily Routine
Equity	Respondents answers point to the importance of Equity; themes evolving around equity	9	23	Empowerment Concepts
Feminism	Respondents express their views on the word/ the action of 'Feminism'	13	41	Empowerment Concepts
Gender Equality	Respondents describe what they understand as gender equality or how they think gender equality can be achieved	14	23	Empowerment Concepts
Characteristics Women (Character, Behavior, Expectations)	Expectations towards women and how they should behave in Rwanda; Characteristis	15	93	Expectations towards Women
Evaluation Women	How women's behavior or work-output is viewed or 'judged'/ evaluated	9	20	Expectations towards Women
Judgement	Women are judged by others (society, men, other women) for specific things they do or don't do	9	30	Expectations towards Women
Gender Role Female	Traditional gender roles assigned to women in family/ company, general Stereotypes	15	69	Expectations towards Women
Government (Opinion) (-)	Respondent expresses a negative/ critical opinion on the government	2	3	Government
Government (Opinion) (+)	Respondent expresses a positive opinion on the government	12	24	Government

President & Cabinet (Government)	Information about Rwanda's president and Cabinet/ Government	13	32	Government
Challenging Social Norms	Women describing how/ why they challenge social norms	4	8	Grit
Mental Stamina (Individual Personality)	Mental stamina of female leaders to resist societal and cultural pressure	12	36	Grit
Work Life Balance	Respondents answers that provide information about 'Work Life Balance' (after Western understanding)	8	20	Grit
(Global) Exposure	The impact of exposure to other countries, cultures and opportunities on women's mindset and behavior	13	37	Illumination
Education	Impact/ Importance of Education	12	32	Illumination
Enlightenment (Understanding)	Gaining knowledge or learning about other ways and opportunities as part of women's enlightenment journey; Understanding of rights and opportunities; Learning and understanding laws and societal changes	11	29	Illumination
Impact Marriage & Children & Family	The impact marriage and children have on women's further career; the impact family in general has on women's lives	10	31	Impact Kinship
Impact Social Pressure	The impact of societal and cultural pressure on women and their decision making or behavior; the impact of social pressure on anyone's behavior in any particular direction	12	39	Impact Kinship
Maternity Leave; Pregnancy	Women's experience with getting pregnant/ maternity leave and the workplace	7	16	Impact Kinship
Paternity (Leave)	Information about paternity leave or changing roles/ mindsets for fathers	4	5	Impact Kinship
Sacrifice	Women explaining how they miss out or have to let go of things in terms to fulfill their career path	5	10	Institutional Influences (-)
Trickle Down Effect (-)	Negative or stagnate Impact of political changes on economy or culture	9	21	Institutional Influences (-)
Trust in Women's Abilities (-)	Negative anticipations of society and economy in women's abilities	4	10	Institutional Influences (-)

Confidence & Ambition (-)	Women lacking confidence or self-esteem; affects on their behavior	11	30	Institutional Influences (-)
Respect (-)	Women are disrespected in their workplace	8	18	Institutional Influences (-)
Respect (+)	Women are respected in their workplace	2	3	Institutional Influences (+)
Trickle Down Effect (+)	Impact of political changes on economy or culture	11	50	Institutional Influences (+)
Trust in Women's Abilities (+)	Positive impression of society and economy in women's abilities	7	10	Institutional Influences (+)
Confidence & Ambition (+)	Women being confident in their abilities and options	12	35	Institutional Influences (+)
Horizontal Oppression	Horizontal oppression = act of marginalized groups, in this case women, oppressing other members of their own group by participating in or perpetuating oppressive behaviors. In the context of women wanting other women to endure the same challenges or diminish their experiences	3	9	Intersectionality
Privilege (Respondent, Personal)	Respondent reflects upon their personal privileges and the impact/ importance of such	14	35	Intersectionality
Representation (-)	Lack of representation or identifiability with leaders	5	18	Intersectionality
Accessibility Government & Information	Quotes that indicate in how far the government and its information are or are not accessible for communities to communicate their needs	13	22	Intersectionality
Grassroots (Rural Areas)	Information about how initiatives are being perceived/ transferred to the grassroots and what differences exist to the city	14	45	Intersectionality
Socioeconomic Differences (Intersectionality)	Impact of socioeconomic differences on women; different social strata; intersectionality; factors that contribute to socioeconomic divide	11	47	Intersectionality
Two-Tier Distinction (Women)	Quotes that point to a distinction amongst women based on other further socioeconomic criteria (elite women vs other women)	6	16	Intersectionality

External Portayal (Reputation)	Respondents answer describe how individuals or companies portray themselves externally in terms of gender and diversity	5	12	Isomorphic Pressures
Global North (Development Impact)	The impact of funding or other influence from the Global North	3	9	Isomorphic Pressures
Isomorphic Behavior	Isomorphism = Forces that create similarities or homogeneity in the behavior and structure of organizations	2	4	Isomorphic Pressures
KPI for gender equality (Economy)	Code includes quotes that describe how the gender agenda is being quantified in KPIs in companies	5	11	Isomorphic Pressures
School (Prioritization, Structure)	Information about the school structure in Rwanda and about (traditional) prioritization or ability to attend	11	18	Male Hegemony
Male Domination	Quotes that show how men are still advantaged in numbers or decision making power or favored in society	8	32	Male Hegemony
Men (structural) Advantages	Structural advantages men tend to have in society due to societal expectations towards women	9	28	Male Hegemony
Men Pushed	Instances in which men are pushed (advanced) compared to women	2	2	Male Hegemony
Characteristsics Men (Character, Behavior, Expectations)	Expectations towards women and how they should behave in Rwanda; Characteristics	12	35	Male Traits
Evaluation Men	How male behavior or work output is viewed and 'judged'/ evaluated	6	8	Male Traits
Gender Role Male	Traditional idea of men's role in the family/ economy; general Stereotypes	10	29	Male Traits
Male Behavior	Description of how man behave in specific settings	8	21	Male Traits
Peer to Peer	Effect of men educating each other or women educating each other	3	6	Needed Reforms
Boys | Men Education (Development)	Quotes that describe the importance of including men in the development process and how that should happen; The impact of men having knowledge on gender changes	13	30	Needed Reforms

Men Proactiveness (needed)	Describes the notion that men need to get actively involved in promoting equality/ equity	7	10	Needed Reforms
Needed Infrastructure or Policies	Remodeling of infrastructure that is needed to allow for gender equality; Policies that are needed	7	22	Needed Reforms
Networking	Quotes highlighting the importance of a Network in Kigali/ Rwanda in terms of opportunities	6	15	Networks
Gender Pay Gap	Themes around the gender pay gap	4	9	Obstacles
Fear Women Workplace (Discomfort)	Women's fears in the workplace; women being uncomfortable in the workplace	7	14	Obstacles
Barriers	Barriers in empowering young girls/ barriers for young girls to take empowerment	8	38	Obstacles
Black Tax	Black Tax = term that refers to the financial obligation that some black people feel to support their extended families and communities financially, especially when they are successful in their careers	1	2	Obstacles
Challenge Women Work & Leadership	Internal and external challenges women in leadership positions are facing, or that are restricting them to get into leadership	11	50	Obstacles
Financial Disadvantages	Code entails quotes that show how women have been/ are financially and monetary disadvantaged	6	11	Obstacles
GBV	Gender Based Violence is mentioned	11	25	Obstacles
La Charge Mental	"La charge mentale" = term used to describe the invisible mental workload or burden that is often borne by women in managing their households, families, and personal lives. It is a term that originated in French feminist literature and has gained popularity in recent years.	3	12	Obstacles
Sexualization of Women	Women are sexualized in the workplace or in social settings	4	11	Obstacles
Picture 1	Description of Picture 1	15	19	Picture Descriptions
Picture 2	Description of Picture 2	14	18	Picture Descriptions

Picture 3	Description of Picture 3	16	21	Picture Descriptions
Picture 4	Description of Picture 4	15	19	Picture Descriptions
Pictures (all)	Descriptions of Pictures overall	13	21	Picture Descriptions
Opportunities for Women	Quotes describe the impact, importance, existence or lack of opportunities for women (Themes surrounding opportunities)	11	39	Possibilities
Platforms for Women	Webinar's, initiatives for women, social media, conferences —> places in which women are represented or given opportunities	4	8	Possibilities
Women Pushed	Women are pushed (advanced) compared to men	8	20	Possibilities
Descriptive Representation (Numerical)	descriptive representation = the number of female representatives (mere numeric representation)	11	21	Representation
Substantive Representation (Opportunity)	Substantive Representation = effective participation that results in (policy) output or decision making opportunities —> Code includes both positive and negative quotes	8	19	Representation
Symbolic Representation(Role Models)	Symbolic Representation = points to the attitudinal and behavioral effects that female representation may confer to female citizens —> role model benefits	13	39	Representation
Rwanda Country specific Characteristics	Particular characteristics of Rwandese people	10	27	Rwanda Context
Rwanda History	Rwanda's History and resulting Trauma; Genocide; Colonialism; post-Genocide conflict	10	31	Rwanda Context
Laws & Regulations	Rwandan laws and Regulations that are mentioned or explained by respondents	8	22	Rwanda Gender Strategy
NGOs, Programmes, Civil Society	Work of NGOs and non-profits in Rwanda; Work of Social Workers, Programs and initiatives	7	23	Rwanda Gender Strategy
Political Women Agenda	Code includes interviewees speaking about Rwanda having a political agenda for women	13	37	Rwanda Gender Strategy
Economic Development (Rwanda)	Quotes on the economic development or plans for such in Rwanda	7	11	Rwanda Political Economy

Rwanda Development Plan ('One Rwanda')	Code describes Rwanda's Development Plan 'One Rwanda'	2	6	Rwanda Political Economy
Advocacy (M4W)	Men advocating for women and their rights	1	3	Support Systems
Advocacy (W4W)	Women advocating for other women and their rights	10	19	Support Systems
Empowerment Girls (Strategies)	Includes themes around the empowerment of girls; Strategies to empowerment	6	12	Support Systems
Support (other) Women (Cooperatives)	Support Women give to other Women; understanding; includes themes such as cooperatives and mutual support or start-ups by women that aim to uplift other women	9	23	Support Systems
Support Family (Social Community)	Support of family members or the immediate community around the woman	11	23	Support Systems
Support Workplace	Support the workplace can give or facilitate	8	23	Support Systems
Religion	Respondent describes religious beliefs or the impact of religion	5	8	Traditional Mindset
Resistance to change	Respondents describe scenarios in which traditional mindset hinders progress	10	29	Traditional Mindset
Bias (conscious and unconscious)	Biases in ways of thinking and expectations	4	7	Traditional Mindset
Socialization, Upbringing	How upbringing and context has influenced people in their decision making, world view and abilities	14	35	Traditional Mindset
Traditional & Cultural Aspects	Traditional Rwandan mindset, cultural aspects and expectations in the country/ community	14	92	Traditional Mindset
Traditional Success	Cultural mindset on how success for women is defined	9	22	Traditional Mindset

Axial Codes

Axial Codes	Code Description	Selective Codes
Institutional Influences (+)	Code describes positive effects institutions have on women	Advantageousness
Possibilities	Code describes respondents' examples of possibilities for women	Advantageousness
Change Process	Code points out indicators for a cultural/ societal change in terms of gendered expectations or stereotypes	Advantageousness
Comparison other Countries	Code includes examples in which Rwanda is compared to other countries	Contextual Information
Picture Descriptions	Code includes descriptions of pictures 1-4 (Appendix E)	Contextual Information
Behavioral Responses	Code points to women's behaviors in response to institutional disadvantages/ behavior used to navigate institutions	Disadvantageousness
Institutional Influences (-)	Code describes negative effects institutions have on women	Disadvantageousness
Obstacles	Code includes descriptions of obstacles women face in getting into leadership positions or in maintaining them	Disadvantageousness
Empowerment Concepts	Code entails the individual understanding our respondents have of empowerment concepts (equality, equity, feminism)	Exposure
Grit	Code entails accounts of respondents' abilities to maintain motivation and focus on a long-term goal, even when faced with setbacks, failures, and obstacles ("Grit" refers to a combination of passion, perseverance, and resilience in the face of adversity or challenging situations. The code therefore represents the ability to persist in the pursuit of a goal, despite the difficulties and challenges encountered along the way.)	Exposure
Illumination	Code yields factors that add to the illumination process of Women (illumination = gaining new insights or understandings)	Exposure
Networks	Code includes information about networking in Rwanda and ist importance for business	Exposure
Government	Code includes descriptive information about the Rwandan Government	Governance
Rwanda Context	Code entails contextual information about Rwanda	Governance

Rwanda Gender Strategy	Code contains information about gendered politics in Rwanda	Governance
Rwanda Political Economy	Code contains information about Rwanda's economic strategies	Governance
Company / Industry Gender Specificities	Code describes specific gendered dynamics within given companies/ industries	Governance
Isomorphic Pressures	Code points to the different isomorphic pressures that affect peoples' actions	Governance
Needed Reforms	Code points to actions that need to be taken/ changes that need to occur for women to better access/ succeed in Leadership positions	Recommendations
Representation	Code entails information about the representation women in government or leadership positions offer/ do not offer for other women	Representation
Male Hegemony	Code yields the social, cultural, and political dominance of men	Social Conventions
Traditional Mindset	Code includes descriptions of the traditional/ cultural believes held in Rwanda	Social Conventions
Daily Routine	Code contains descriptions of women's domestic and work lives	Social Conventions
Expectations towards Women	Code describes the overall expectations society places on women	Social Conventions
Impact Kinship	Code points to the influence family (parents, husbands, children, extended family members/ members of close community) have on the respondents actions	Social Conventions
Male Traits	Code includes descriptions of men's behavior, stereotypical characteristics and expectations towards them	Social Conventions
Support Systems	Code entails information abou the support systems women have for managing household responsibilities and work	Social Conventions
Intersectionality	Code points to the importance of considering aspects beyond gender that shape women's experiences (Intersectionality = the recognition and analysis of the ways in which multiple forms of oppression and privilege intersect and interact with one another to create unique experiences of discrimination and advantage)	Intersectionality

Selective Codes

Selective Codes	Code Description
Governance	Systems level encompassing polity, politics, and policies
Social Conventions	Unwritten rules and expectations that guide behavior, particularly within Rwandan society and culture
Exposure	Broadening of women's perspectives and understanding through opportunities for knowledge and self development, facilitating the development of new skills, competencies and confidence building
Representation	The influence of the different types of representation (descriptive, symbolic, substantive) on women in terms of reaching leadership opportunities
Advantageousness	The outcome of institutional influences as advantageous for women
Disadvantageousness	The outcome of institutional influences as disadvantageous for women
Contextual Information	Contextual information that inform the other codes
Intersectionality	Intersectionality a factor that further influence women and aggregate difference based on gender
Recommendations	Derived recommendations for necessary institutional developments to reach higher equality for women in the workplace