



# Genocide Women Survivors Empowerment in the Rwanda Post 1994 Genocide Against Tutsi: Case Study of AVEGA-AGAHOZO Women Survivors of Nyange Sector, Ngororero District (2015-2019)

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Received: 15 Jan 2022; Received in revised form: 21 Feb 2022; Accepted: 08 Mar 2022; Available online: 15 Mar 2022  
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**Abstract**— *This research paper entitled Genocide Women Survivors Empowerment in the Rwanda Post 1994 Genocide Against Tutsi: Case study of AVEGA-AGAHOZO Women Survivors of Nyange Sector, Ngororero District (2015-2019) was aiming at answering the question such as: Did women empowerment contribute to the improvement of life conditions of women survivors of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi living in Nyange Sector of Ngororero District during the period of 2015-2019? In fact, AVEGA-AGAHOZO is a French acronym name (Association des Veuves du Genocide/Genocide Widows Association) established in 1995 to rehabilitate and to support widows, in the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda.*

*The study has used both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data have been collected from a sample of 61 respondents by using questionnaire, interview, observation as well as the desk review to track information from existing relevant researches on the topic under study. The results from the field have shown that almost 80% of the 1994 Genocide widows of AVEGA-AGAHOZO have improved their self-empowerment such as increasing household management skills and media access, health cares, capability of choice in managing life, income generating activities, self-help initiatives, existence of friendly social networks, and active participation in local community life, to name a few. As the findings have shown above, despite their pain and struggles, AVEGA members succeed well to work tirelessly, to support each other, urging themselves to consolidate and increase their gains in the matter of self-empowerment. However, one of the major challenges AVEGA widows faced was the persistent genocidal ideology within some few Rwandans. This study recommends further researches such as: to assess the impact of genocidal ideology on the women survivors of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda; and to evaluate the impact of strengthened social networks on the women survivors of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda.*

**Keywords**— *Women empowerment, 1994 Genocide widows, self-development, capability of choice, gender and development, AVEGA-AGAHOZO.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

This section includes different components such as: background of the research, specific problem in relation to the study, and objectives of the research.

### Background of the research

The causes and the current disastrous multiple consequences of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda were rooted in the history of the country dating back to colonial era in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to many researchers, there is no evidence throughout the pre-colonial Rwandan history where organized civil wars have erupted between Hutu and Tutsi- the two traditional major social groups composing the Rwandan population (Muzungu, 2009; Byanafashe, et al.2016). However, the multisectional social solidarity among Hutu and Tutsi has been strongly eroded by the Belgian colonial power since the early 1950s. As an expected result, a sharp social antagonism based on the forged ethnicity applied to Hutu and Tutsi has dramatically exacerbated during the two first Republics that ruled the country from the early 1960s up to 1994. Therefore, in April 1994, the extremist Hutu-led Government has initiated a planned large-scale genocide against Tutsi. A barbaric and a truly surreal genocide has accelerated during almost 100 days, and the results were extremely horrific: at least 1,047,017 Tutsi were slaughtered as well as tens of moderate politician Hutu (Ministry of Local Administration, MINALOC 2002). And there is a highly speaking symbol of a planned genocide: 15,593 families including 68,871 members were completely decimated all over the country (*Imiryango Yazimye*); the higher number being in Karongi District where 2,839 families comprising 13,371 persons were totally decimated (Commission Nationale de Lutte contre le Genocide, CNLG 2020). And there were 20,312 widows ;71,478 orphans ; thousands of HIV positive members due to rape in 1994 Genocide; many women survivors left homeless, disabled, traumatized, and impoverished (AVEGA Report 2011).

In such a disastrous situation, at least two crucial problems were likely to be raised like:

- 1) Were there any possibilities for women survivors of the 1994 Genocide to rehabilitate and strengthen their conditions of life?
- 2) Were there any strategic actions to cause the 1994 Genocide widows to integrate again and develop themselves into a Rwandan society severely demolished by the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi?

### Specific problem of the study

The research intended to answer the question such as: *Did women empowerment contribute to improve the conditions of life of women survivors of the 1994 Genocide against*

*Tutsi living in Nyange Sector of Ngororero District during the period of 2015-2019?* In relation to this difficult question, many social scientists have attempted to demonstrate how in different developing societies the use of women empowerment approach has succeeded to raise to some extent the standards of life in the vulnerable women.

### Objectives of the research

The paper aimed at reaching the objectives as following: to examine the nature and the major outcomes of women empowerment in women survivors of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi living in Nyange Sector of Ngororero District for the period of 2015-2019; to show the challenges related to women survivors empowerment and to their living standards in Nyange Sector; and to suggest some solutions in relation to the challenges identified above.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The study has used a qualitative method that included an analysis of individual testimonies and interpretation of the data from the field. The research has also used a quantitative method that included statistical frequencies and percentages. Ms Word and Ms Excel have been useful in processing data collected from the field. A purposive sample of 61 individuals has been drawn from 72 Genocide widows equal to the total population of AVEGA-AGAHOZO members regularly living in Nyange Sector of Ngororero District. Sixty-one respondents have been purposively selected in referring to three different criteria such as: being active member of AVEGA, ability to perform daily duties in order to have a decent life, and to be an active participant in the local community life. Primary data have been collected by using questionnaire, observation, and interviews held with some key informants like some AVEGA committee members. Both the questionnaires filled in and the data drawn from interviews were collected from the field by the researcher in March 2020. Secondary data have consisted of different researchers having already worked on the topics related to that of the present study and have included books, journals, reports, and electronic documents.

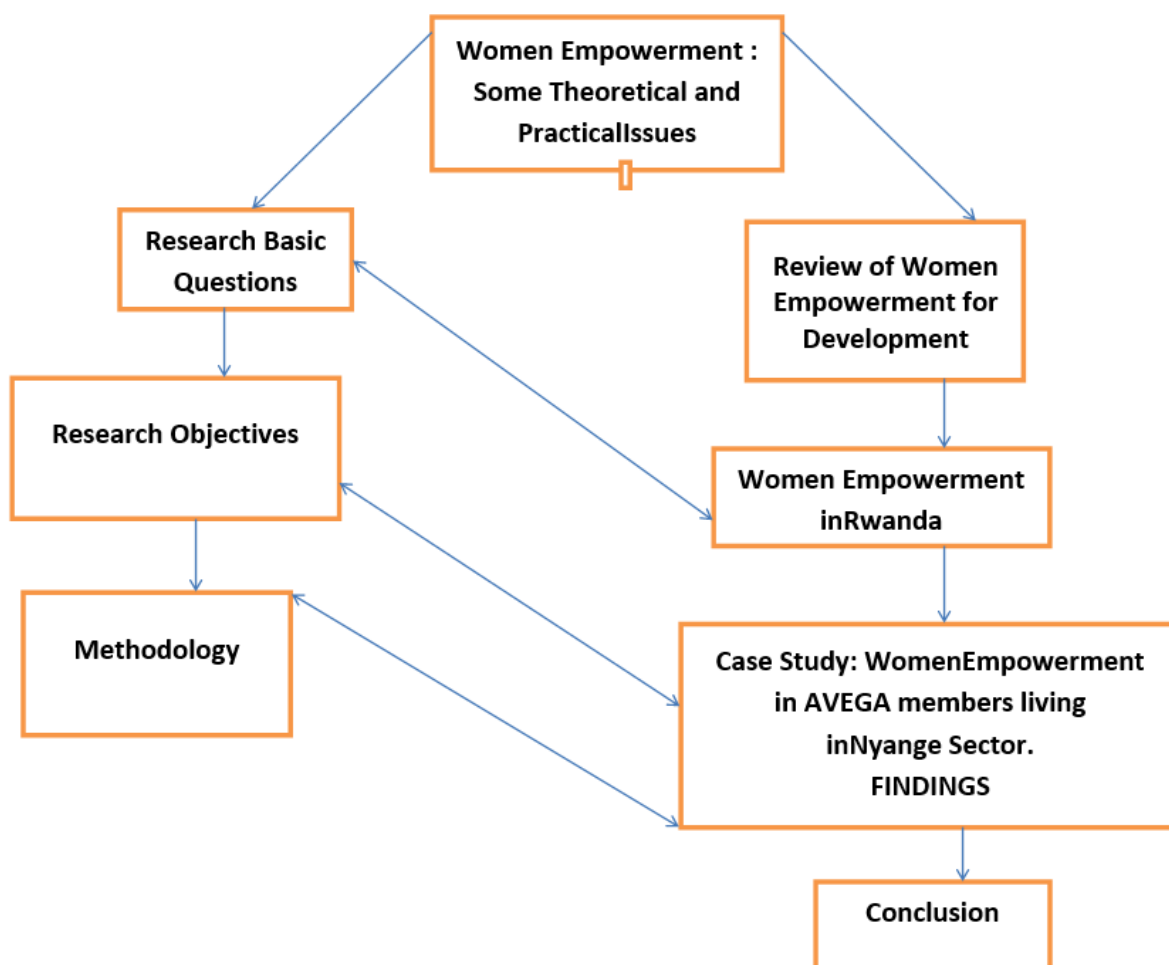
Concerning the field site, Nyange Sector (*Umurengewa Nyange*) is one of the 13 administrative Sectors composing Ngororero District (*Akarereka Ngororero*) inhabited by 333,723 people with a population density of 493 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (Rwanda General Population and Housing Census, RGPHC 2012). In considering the social and economic aspects, Nyange Sector (*Umurengewa Nyange*) is also a very populated rural area where a subsistence economy consists of raising domestic animals

(cows, pigs, rabbits, etc.) and growing mainly food crops. Since several decades until today, Nyange population has modest conditions of life and makes much effort to combat poverty. Being integrated in such a rural socio-economic environment, for some AVEGA Genocide widows living in this area the conditions of life have strongly worsened as direct consequences of the 1994 Genocide. Indeed until recently some AVEGA widows had heavy problems like: homelessness, loneliness, physical disability, trauma, HIV/AIDS positive widows due to rape used as another

weapon in Genocide, and impoverishment. However, in the present days following many interventions of different partners, in general AVEGA widows in Nyange Sector have recorded a lot of social and economic gains and their conditions of life are far better than in the past.

In addition, the general structure and the different interrelated components of the research are shown in the diagram below that indicates both the direct and reciprocal linkages between the various parts of the study.

**Diagram of the study design**



**III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section attempts to explore different studies conducted by important researchers so that the reader has a deep understanding of the women empowerment approach of development. The section includes two major points like: explaining the nature and the outcomes of women empowerment; and showing the obstacles to women empowerment.

Women empowerment approach is rooted in a set of theories having worked on raising the conditions of life of women especially in the Third World countries. Since the 1960s onwards, the development theorists have worked on different approaches focusing on fighting against poverty especially in promoting the standards of life of women in poor countries of the world. In this way, three major approaches of development have been elaborated by the social scientists such as: Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development or GAD (Boserup 1970; Dusingize 2015;

**Exploring the nature of women empowerment**

Maguire 1984; Mbilinyi. 1984; Rathgeber 1989; Sen2012; Sen and Grow 1987).

The Welfare Approach (1960s), dating back to colonial and postwar era, was the earliest policy approach related to development of women in the Third World countries. Its objective was to make women participate into development as progressive mothers and wives. Its impact has been very weak as both the international and national contexts were struggling against heavy social, economic, and political challenges of the prevailing times.

The term “Women in Development” or WID came into use in the early 1970s after the publication of Ester Boserup’s work entitled *Women’s Role in Economic Development* (1970). The author has analyzed the changes that occurred in traditional agricultural practices as societies were modernizing and has examined the differential influence of those changes on the work carried out by men and women. While analyzing data and evidence already available long ago in development literature, she was the first to systematically use gender as an independent variable in her research. Boserup’s study was very interesting as it has attracted scholarly attention on the sexual division of labour and the differential impact of gender on development and modernization strategies. The WID perspective was closely linked with modernization theory, usually equated with industrialization, and exploited by international development agencies during the 1960s-1970s. Industrialization would allow an economic growth within the agrarian societies and the benefits of modernization i.e. better standards of life, wages, education, and adequate health services, etc. would spread downwards to all the segments of the society. But mistakenly modernization approach has assumed that the male experiences would be generalizable to females and that development would benefit equally as society increasingly became modernized. But by the 1970s the relative position of women has improved very little over the past two decades. In addition, WID—enthusiastically adopted by the liberal feminist theorists—solidly grounded in modernization theory failed to question systematically the sources and nature of women’s subordination and oppression and concentrated instead on more equal participation in education, employment, and other spheres of life (Mbilinyi1984; Rathgeber1989 ). Overall, WID has argued that gender relations would change of themselves as women became fully economic partners in development. Women and Development or WAD. The demarcation between the WID and the WAD perspectives is not sufficiently clear. WAD approach (late 1970s) argued that women always has been ‘Integrated’ into their societies and that their work done both inside and outside the household is central to the maintenance of the

societies, but that this integration serves firstly to sustain existing international structures of inequality. WAD presents a more critical view of women’s position than does WID but it fails to conduct a full-scale analysis of the relationships between patriarchy, differing modes of production and women’s subordination and oppression. The WAD approach implicitly assumes that women’s condition will improve if and when international structures become more equitable. In short, like WID approach did, WAD intervention strategies have tended to concentrate on the development of income-generating activities without taking into account firmly designed strategic mechanisms to cause fundamental changes in the social relations of gender (Mbilinyi, 1984; Rathgeber1989).

Gender and Development (GAD)—rooted in socialist feminism and bridging the gap left by the modernization theorists—has emerged in the 1980s as an alternative to the earlier WID focus. GAD is concerned with the social construction of gender and the assignment of specific roles, responsibilities and expectations to women and men (Young 1987). The GAD has drawn on a holistic view and treated gender relations in the totality of the complex environment of social, economic, and political structures. The GAD perspective appreciates the potential contributions of men who share a concern for issues of equity and social justice (Sen and Grown 1987). In addition, both the socialist feminist and GAD approaches concentrate on the oppression of women in the family and enter the so-called ‘private sphere’ to examine the assumptions upon which conjugal relationships are based. GAD also puts greater emphasis on the implication of the State in promoting women’s emancipation in all the sectors of private/public life. Furthermore, researchers working within GAD perspective have deeply examined both the connections among and the contradictions of gender, class, race and development (Maguire, P. 1984). GAD perspective leads inevitably to a fundamental re-examination of social structures and institutions and ultimately to the loss of power of entrenched elites which inevitably will affect some women as well as men. Not surprisingly, as frequently observed in the field, the implementation of GAD theory of development appearing to require a process of tens of years, a fully applied GAD approach is less often found in the different private/ public projects of development (Rathgeber1989; Sen and Grown 1987).

It is also worth noting that already since the early 1960s onwards, especially in the Western developed countries, feminist approaches have systematically explored the aspects of gender inequality within family. They have argued that while for many people the family provides a vital source of comfort, harmony, and cooperation; it can

also be a place for exploitation, isolation, violence, and a profound inequality. The American feminist Betty Freidan (1965) has written on “*the problem with noname*”; Gavron (1966) has explored the situation of the “*Captive Wife*”; and Laing (1971) has studied the damaging effects of the “*suffocating*” family settings. Still during the 1980s socialist feminist perspectives have dominated most debates and researches on gender inequality within family. Furthermore, Women empowerment, created by the Third World women, is the most recent approach related to women and development. To this approach women’s subordination is perceived as a triple problem of men, of colonial, and of neocolonial oppression; and women empowerment attempts to gain power and greater self-reliance to break the relations of dependency. In other words, women empowerment approach is aiming at claiming the effective application of principles of gender equality emphasizing that both men and women enjoy, without any kind of discrimination, equal opportunity in all the spheres of life.

In addition to the women development approaches explained above, the international agency UNO (United Nations Organization) - inspired by the spirit of the 30-articled Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948- has several times operated world conferences aiming at accelerating the progress in relation to equality, peace, and development of women in the common benefits of the world, especially in the developing countries. In this way, UNO has sponsored World Conferences on Women respectively held in Mexico (1975), in Copenhagen/Denmark (1980), in Nairobi/Kenya (1985) and lastly in Beijing/China (1995).

The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (1995) has effectively adopted a Declaration and an Action Plan that has highlighted to strongly support women empowerment: “*We reaffirm our commitment to the empowerment and advancement of women, including the right of freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thus contributing to the moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs of women and men, individually or in community with others and thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realizing their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations*” (Beijing Declaration 1995, article 12).

To Duflo (2012) women’s empowerment is defined as “*improving the ability of women to access the constituents of development – in particular health, education, earning opportunities, rights and political participation*”. Furthermore, an abundant literature has discussed the issues of women empowerment. In his book *Commodities and Capabilities* (1985), Amartya Sen, 1998 Nobel Prize

winner in Economics, puts that poverty cannot be properly measured by income utility. What matters is not the things a person has or the feelings these provide but what a person is or can be and does, or can do. The author names “*functioning*” what a person does (or can do) with the commodities he/she comes to possess or control. In his book *Securing the Future We Want: Gender Equality, Economic Development, and Environmental Sustainability* (2012), A. Sen points out that “*Empowering women and girls with more choices and more freedoms is crucial to achieving a better future for all*” Women empowerment is to be understood as process of development by individuals and groups to gain power to manage their lives and the ability to set up a planned life, and free choices. Moreover, to effectively combat poverty and committedly support gender equality and/or women empowerment, UNO has respectively launched the 8-articled Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and the 17-themed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.

In addition, social scientists have identified factors very influential to support women empowerment such as: age of women, marital status, education, cultural practices, economic status, rural/urban location, etc. (Sadaq et al. 2016; Duflo 2012; Kabeer 2012). Of all these variables, education appears to be an indispensable tool for empowering women in every field of life. In fact, “*Education provides an additional probability of attaining improved perceptions and thoughtfulness. It enhances self-assurance for performing social, political, and economic actions*” (Chaudry and Rehman 2009; see also Chaudry 2007; Sadaq et al. 2016.)

### **Determining the outcomes of Women empowerment approach**

Since the 1960s until now, in order to systematically tackle the issue of gender inequality, an important body of studies has been worked out and various world programmes have been attempted. To some extent the achievements in the matter are today significant, however there is still a long way to go—even a very long one—, especially in tens of societies of the developing countries. We are going to mention below some successes in relation to women empowerment as they have been identified by social scientists and some influential international organizations.

According to Sen (2012) countries that have expanded opportunities for women and girls in education and work in recent decades have largely achieved a greater prosperity and moderated population growth while achieving social progress for all. To Sadaq et al. (2016) a study on 464 households located in both rural and urban areas in Pakistan has revealed that about 54.1% of

households had a moderate level of women empowerment ,35.9% had a low level, and merely 10% of households enjoyed a high level of women empowerment. As the results from the field have shown, women empowerment has been positively supported by a range of factors: “The positively significant factors include age, education, working status, income, access to credit, bank account possession, acquisition of assets, household investment, and awareness through mass media “(Sadaqet al. 2016). Referring to a research conducted in Colombia in 2008, Kabeer(2012) has pointed out that “In many cases, the availability of training allowed women to move from unpaid domestic into paid employment. And along with a greater likelihood of employment for women, training increased their wage and salary earnings by 18% and their formal earnings by 31% “.

Duflo(2012) has mentioned some progressive figures in relation to women empowerment as identified by the World Bank (2011):

*“In low income countries, in girls/women the primary gross enrollment rate was 67% in 1991 to 100% in 2010. The secondary gross enrollment rate for girls /women was 22% in 1991 to 34% in 2010. Labor participation for girls/women was 50% in 1998 (in contrast to 82% for boys/men) and 52% in 2010 (in contrast to 78% for boys/men). Life expectancy for girls/women was 54 years in 1991 to 59 years in 2011. Maternal mortality (per 100,000 live births): 850 in 1991 to 580 in 2011”.*

### **Women Empowerment in Rwanda**

Concerning Rwanda, significant efforts have been made towards empowering girls/women. A UN Report (2011) has pointed out that “Rwanda has made tremendous socio-economic progress and institutional transformations since the 1994 genocide (...). Overall, poverty fell from 60.5 percent in 2000/01 to 57 percent in 2005/06. There was also a decline in the levels of infant and maternal mortality, HIV infection and malaria(...). Rwanda is a leader in gender equality, surpassing all countries in the world in female representation in Parliament and in executive positions in Government, including at the ministerial level”.

To recent statistics, indeed, in 2018 females make up 61.3% of the Parliament, 38.5% of the Senate, 50% of the Cabinet, and 50% of the Supreme Court judges. And Rwanda ranks sixth on the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index, highest in Africa and in contrast Germany ranks 14<sup>th</sup> ([www.newtimes.co.rw >news>rwanda- records-significant- gains...](http://www.newtimes.co.rw/news/rwanda-records-significant-gains...), Retrieved on May 20, 2020). In 2020 women were successfully heading the executive management of some important agencies like Rwanda Air,

Rwanda Development Board (RDB), Rwanda Governance Board (RGB)-a strategic branch of Ministry of Local Administration, Good Governance, and Community Development (MINALOC), and Bank of Kigali (BK)—the largest financial institution in Rwanda ([en.wikipedia.org>wiki>...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>...)).

Moreover, actions to promote women empowerment are recorded in Rwandan private organizations among them AVEGA-AGAHOZO (Association des Veuves du Genocide / Genocide Widows Association) established in 1995 to rehabilitate and to support widows, in the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda. To 2011 AVEGA report, the association was including countrywide 20,312 widows and 71,478 of their dependents mainly orphans. Among these members 5,628 widows were 58 years old and over 926 of them were childless. The global objective of the association was, and still is, to improve all over the country members’ living conditions and knowledge through education, sensitization, and provision of social, economic and health support. The global objective shows that AVEGA-AGAHOZO truly deals with women empowerment to help the women survivors of the 1994 Genocide to enhance their living standards. To implement its goals AVEGA performs four different programmes: Psycho-Social Medical Programme, Advocacy, Justice and Information Programme, Capacity Building and Self-Reliance, and Institutional Capacity Building Programme. During the period of 1995-2010, through these programmes many tens of major successes have been achieved and have importantly contributed to women empowerment in AVEGA members.

Referring to AVEGA report (2011), we mention below some of its achievements <sup>(1)</sup>:

- a) The problem of AIDS as a stigma has been significantly reduced as a result of sensitization sessions conducted countrywide by 1225 voluntary counselors. Many beneficiaries in danger in the past were healed and have already managed to work and develop themselves.
- b) 12,929 members have been helped to have a decent shelter and 1561 people under ARVs were given a nutritional support.
- c) AVEGA members were taught how to solve conflicts and informed about their rights, and on unity and reconciliation process in post-genocide Rwanda.
- d) Gacaca Courts exerted countrywide during 2005–2012 have remarkably contributed to speed up trials and judgments related to the 1994 Genocide perpetrators. Through these courts the Government of Rwanda has aimed at supporting

unity and reconciliation among the entire population. Gacaca Courts have importantly succeeded to provide a large amount of recorded eyewitness first-hand information about the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda (Ministry of Local Administration, MINALOC 2012). Many AVEGA members have participated actively in Gacaca Courts and have come to know a lot of information about the death of their closest relatives and of their friends; and thus detecting their remains and eventually to bury them in honor and dignity. *“Burial ceremonies have helped to reduce significantly trauma and depression in many Genocide survivors”*, especially within AVEGA members (Association of the 1994 Genocide survivors or IBUKA 2014).

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 (1)The researcher did not find a recent global report of AVEGA Achievements, only some current isolated elements were available at the completion of the study.

- e) 321 projects were funded countrywide by both national and international donors to improve the members’ standards of living and their self-sustenance. In addition to off-farming activities the members have been given 633 cows, 427 goats, and 90 pigs.
- f) In addition to running its own three (3) health centres and clinics, AVEGA had multi-service centres—comprising conference rooms, kitchen, restaurant, lodges, and tents—a business that gained about 30 million Rwandan francs per year.
- g) In addition to many national funders, AVEGA has been cooperating with international partners including among others: SURF (Survivors Fund, an English NGO), CAFOD (Catholic Overseas Development Agency), DFID (UK Department for International Development), and WFD (UN World Food Programme).

According to MUKABAYIRE, V. (2020)- President of AVEGA at national level - *today 25 years after its foundation in 1995, despite their pain and struggles, AVEGA members successfully continue to work tirelessly to strengthen each other, raise orphans, urging themselves to consolidate and increase their gains, and to contribute towards restoring and supporting unity and reconciliation in Rwanda.* As the Rwandan First Lady has affectionately admired in 2020 on AVEGA 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary: all these achievements remarkably reflect *“how strong willed the 1994 Genocide widows are”*. Until now, the Rwandan First Lady has added, *“AVEGA widows remain truly a highly*

*speaking example of resilience and determination”* in a post-Genocide Rwanda.

However, some important challenges to women empowerment still persist both at international and national levels.

### Obstacles to Women Empowerment

At the international level, the issues related to gender equality, women empowerment, and poverty remain difficult to eradicate as these challenges appear to be overcome through a long process consisting of tens of years. MDGs (2000-2015) were aiming at significantly accelerate human development, especially in the developing countries. The MDGs achievements have been moderate in many deprived regions of the world, even very low in some poor countries (see for instance some African countries devastated by armed terrorist conflicts). The SDGs (2015-2030) were set up to reiterate the efforts towards speeding up human development mostly in poor countries of our planet. In relation to women empowerment, the SDGs are very expressive in Goal 5: *“Gender Equality- Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. (...) The SDGs can only be successful if women are completely integrated into each and every goal.”* Yet women empowerment has a long walk to go even in rich countries, and more especially in poor countries, as many studies have pointed out in recent years.

Globally, women earn only three-quarters as much as men, even with the same job and same education. (...) *“They make up 70 percent of the billion people living on less than a dollar a day. (...) The bottom line is that women are underutilized, underpaid, under-appreciated, and over-exploited”* (Lagarde 2014). To Sen (2012) *“economic progress in the contemporary world tends to give a much larger role to men’s needs and demands despite all the progress that has been achieved in enhancing the voices of women in the last half-century”*.

According to Duflo (2012) *“Parents have lower aspirations for their daughters than for their sons, and female teenagers themselves have lower aspirations. For each ‘missing woman’<sup>(1)</sup> there are many more women who fail to get an education, a job, or a political responsibility that they would have obtained if they have been men”*.

To support women empowerment, Rwanda has certainly achieved significant successes, as seen above. However, to a woman Rwandan official *“the path to real equality is a long and at times a difficult one. We shouldn’t forget that we still live in a patriarchal system. There are still some people who don’t have a full understanding of gender issues”* (Parliament Speaker, 2019).

Concerning women empowerment in AVEGA, some outcomes as seen above were remarkably successful. However, this non-government organization still faces today several challenges such as the persistence of Genocide ideology in some Rwandans; Genocide consequences including poverty, lack of shelter, displacement, trauma, HIV/AIDS due to rape used also as a weapon in Genocide, and many other issues which still affect Rwandans, especially Genocide widows; most beneficiaries are growing older and weaker that they need a regular moral and material assistance; and elderly childless widows are unable to look after themselves, what makes their survival very difficult among others (AVEGA Report 2011; Diefallah 2016; Mukabayire 2017).

Overall, in addition to effectively implement the SDGs, social scientists have suggested in favour of poor countries other related indispensable strategies to achieve women empowerment such as: reform of regulatory environment, promoting education, skills and training, improving infrastructures and media access, supporting gender aware social protection, strongly addressing women's care responsibilities and enhancing opportunities for organization and power of voice (Duflo 2012; Kabeer 2012; Sadaq et al. 2016)

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(1)'missing women', a concept coined by Amartya Sen in 1990 to mean women/girls who would have been alive today if they had been born male. Example: infanticide and abortion in some present societies.

#### IV. FIELD RESULTS PRESENTATION

##### NATURE AND OUTCOMES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN AVEGA WIDOWS OF NYANGE SECTOR

In analyzing the data from the field as provided by the respondents, some basic internal qualities and the outcomes of women empowerment within the 1994 Genocide widows in Nyange Sector have been identified like: ability of choice in planning life, education and training, economic status, health cares, self-help initiatives, friendly solidarity, and participation in local community life.

##### *Increasing household management skills, and media access*

85% respondents have benefited trainings in order to gain practical skills for starting and running small income generating activities. Concerning the access to information, 9% of AVEGA widows had a TV set, 13% a radio, and 83% owned a cellular phone useful to access

calls and many other services including regularly listening to different radio programmes.

##### *Health Cares*

AVEGA widows have pointed out that they were highly aware of the value of hygiene in their homes. And 100% of AVEGA widows have adhered to Mutual Health Insurance (Mutuelle de Sante', MS), a health cares scheme implemented by the Government of Rwanda since 2008.

##### *Sensitization Sessions and ability of choice in managing household life*

Eighty percent (80%) of still productive AVEGA widows, along with other citizens, have been given a series of useful information related to local development such as: hygiene, immunization for children under 5 years, preventing/combating malaria in using mosquito net, productive work in order to eradicate poverty in the household, preventing damaging family conflicts, etc. In addition, AVEGA widows, currently having been obliged to become head of family, have taken important decisions like selling/buying a plot of land, building/restoring their houses, and adopting a savings culture to meet the future needs.

##### *Income generating activities*

Thirty percent (30%) of Genocide widows raised cows. To 100% of respondents the role of livestock was of a vital importance as it was a significant source of money, milk, and manure to increase food crop production. Furthermore, their marketable food crops were also a major source of money. Ninety-three percent (93%) of AVEGA members owned a bank account in SACCO (Savings and Credit Cooperative), a micro-financial scheme implemented by the Government of Rwanda since 2007 and available countrywide in each administrative Sector. Their conditions of life have largely developed as 100% had sufficient nutritive food, 82% had clean water, 60% had their houses permanently illuminated with electricity.

##### *Self-help initiatives and Group solidarity*

Along with other neighbors, 80% of AVEGA widows have organized themselves into small groups to put together money (*Ibimina*) resulting in a weekly individual contribution. Thus, a modest capital was always available for deposit and withdrawal to meet basic needs within the widows' households. Concerning group solidarity, widows have organized within themselves regular visits to combat ones of the damaging Genocide consequences like depression and loneliness. Especially for the childless AVEGA widows, "these friendly social networks were a very enjoyable opportunity to share a lot of their past/current life experiences. These continuous home visits had a true healing effect", as said the President of



AVEGA committee in Nyange Sector of Ngororero District.

### **Participation in local community life**

Eighty-three percent (83%) of physically able widows have managed to participate actively in various activities organized by the local administration and conducted in their local community and concerning different subjects such as: sensitization meetings (*Inama*) on hygiene, family planning, combating malaria, preventing/stopping school dropout in primary education, ensuring security in local settings, performing regular community works (*Umuganda*), and participating regularly in *Umugorobaw'Ababyeyi* (Parents' Sunset Meeting) in their local community. Indeed, *Umugorobaw'Ababyeyi* offers a good opportunity to discuss in the local community different issues such as: local development, security, family conflicts, teenagers' delinquency, etc. and to find adequate solutions.

### **CHALLENGES TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN AVEGA WIDOWS OF NYANGE SECTOR**

The field findings have revealed that AVEGA widows in Nyange Sector have been facing hard problems as the direct consequences of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda. There were some major challenges such as: persistent genocidal ideology in some individuals claiming hatred words and/or damaging survivors' properties and sometimes killing survivors; disturbing loneliness due to loss of many closest relatives killed in 1994 Genocide; trauma and depression as a consequence of horrific events experienced in 1994 Genocide; HIV/AIDS positive widows because of rape used also as weapon in 1994 Genocide; and finally pressing poverty in some elderly widows. During the interview with the President of AVEGA Committee in Nyange Sector, she has indicated that 11 widows (out of 72) were between 65-78 years old and most of them were unable to ensure themselves decent standards of living. Thus, they were supported by the Ministry of Local Administration (MINALOC) which gave them a modest regular direct support (*Inkungay'ingoboka*) of nearly 12 US \$ per month, as also done for other neediest citizens countrywide.

### **SUGGESTIONS TO REDUCE THE CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED**

In order to alleviate the challenges facing AVEGA widows in Nyange Sector some solutions have been proposed by the researcher. As the reality in the field has revealed, the reduction of challenges facing AVEGA members need the intervention and cooperation of different actors like: AVEGA widows themselves, AVEGA leaders at all the levels of the organization, Rwandan Government, and

national/international private partners. And to AVEGA widows still able to execute a productive work some proposed solutions should be as following: enhancing ability for self-confidence and motivation for a productive work; promoting trainings and gaining practical skills for a more productive work; being helped to engage in different small size profitable businesses; and supporting themselves profitable self-help initiatives and strengthening friendly solidarity.

And as field findings have revealed, some AVEGA widows were unable to work due either to old age or to physical disability/illness as consequences of the 1994 Genocide. AVEGA Committee at all levels has to conduct a persistent advocacy to different actors (see above) to secure better conditions of life in this category of widows. In addition, AVEGA Committee at Cell level in Nyange Sector has to remain close to these widows in order to ensure a regular material support and a continuous affectionate assistance.

## **V. FIELD RESULTS DISCUSSION**

This section attempted to reiterate some major findings in interpreting them, to evaluate their significance, and to relate them to literature review. The main findings discussed in relation to empowering the AVEGA widows of Nyange Sector have included some results such as: increasing household management skills and ability of choice in organizing the household life, engaging in income generating activities, supporting group solidarity, and participation in local community life.

### ***Increasing household management skills and ability of choice in organizing the family life***

AVEGA widows had a modest educational level as 93% of them have attended the primary education and only 7% have completed the secondary education or a 2 or 3-year vocational training. Benefiting from either formal education or different trainings has proved to be an important tool to succeed self-development initiatives. The lack of a raised educational level within AVEGA widows has been a result of a governmental discriminatory educational policy practised against Tutsi for several decades before 1994 (Muzungu 2009; Byanafashe et al. 2016). In addition, many researchers have convincingly pointed out that education in the present days is positively valued as an indispensable tool of women empowerment: “*education enhances self-assurance for performing social, political, and economic actions*” (Chaudry 2007; Chaudry and Rehman 2009) And some interested members have benefited trainings and sensitization meetings organized by either AVEGA Headquarters or the local government

agents. As a result, many Genocide widows have acquired awareness of self-development issues, how to manage the household life as a Genocide survivor widow, to gain decidedly self-confidence, trust in others, and hope in life. Furthermore, many AVEGA members had a triple stigma of being a survivor, a rape victim, and HIV positive. And within some AVEGA widows different issues like family conflicts, persistent problems of poverty, and sometimes the resurgence of the genocidal ideology in their local settings have been the factors to cause trauma (2011 AVEGA Report). In this way, many problems of stigma and trauma have been significantly reduced due to a committed action of AVEGA Headquarters conducted through thousands of voluntary counselors, and as a result many beneficiaries were, to a meaningful extent, psychologically healed and have already managed to work hard and develop themselves.

#### **Engaging in income generating activities**

The physically able AVEGA widows mainly have practised farming activities consisting of growing food and raising domestic animals like cows, pigs, and goats. Respondents have pointed out that they were growing older so that they didn't practise off-farm occupations like tailoring, hair cutting, and selling airtime usually conducted by young people. In rural household economy raising cows was well profitable as it was a both marketable product and a means of an improved nutritional status. The distribution of cows to AVEGA widows was ensured either by AVEGA Headquarters or by the Government of Rwanda through its "One Cow per Family" Programme ("Girinka Munyarwanda") started in 2007 and having already distributed up to now about 280,000 cows to very needy households countrywide (MINALOC 2018).

And very interestingly, as intended by the Government of Rwanda, "One Cow per Family" Programme was not only an economic source but also a big opportunity for social solidarity. Indeed, through "Girinka" programme the beneficiary of a young/adult cow gave the first offspring to another agreed recipient and the chain of sharing continued. This circular donation of livestock appeared to be a real opportunity to strengthen local social ties. Furthermore, the use of self-help funding groups (*Ibimina*) are both a beneficial tool to save/gain money for future expenses and an appreciated advantage for social solidarity in the beneficiaries. For instance, as it had been said by the President of AVEGA in Ngororero District, a member of a self-help group managed by AVEGA widows, and assisted by the Swiss non-profit organization Care International, should receive an individual credit up to 80 US\$, equal to around 80,000 RwF. According to productive AVEGA

widows, the standards of life were relatively comfortable as they met easily their basic needs. And basing on any important development, researchers have convincingly shown that economic factor was one of crucial conditions for women empowerment (Duflo 2012; Sadaqat et al. 2016).

#### **Supporting group solidarity**

Through its subordinate branches countrywide, AVEGA Headquarters has regularly implemented its Psycho-Social Medical Programme in encouraging frequent contacts and mutual assistance within AVEGA widows. One of the painful consequences of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi was the frequent loneliness experienced by AVEGA widows. Indeed, in addition to have been deprived of all their material resources, they have also lost either all or most of their closest relatives and friends. Thus, AVEGA Headquarters, through a constant cooperation with its decentralized organs countrywide, has strongly sensitized AVEGA widows to organize between them frequent home visits, especially done for the elderly widows. The existence of these friendly social networks were a remarkable opportunity to share various life experiences and to strengthen the individual psychological health in enhancing mutual trust, self-confidence, hope in life and peer support within AVEGA widows. And in order to reinforce group solidarity, in addition to regular home visits, other opportunities have been exploited such as cooperating in farming activities and borrowing/lending money in case of an urgent problem like illness.

#### **Participating regularly in local community life**

Referring to administrative map in our country, the Cell and the Sector are ones of the smaller units of the local community, that is a setting where the population has to perform their activities to support local development. Since around three decades Government of Rwanda encourages all its citizens to support *unity, hard work, and patriotism* -indeed the national motto - a strategy considered as one of the rocky pillars of the national development (Ministry of Local Administration or MINALOC 2019). According to 2011 AVEGA Report, Genocide widows aim at reaching one of the principal objectives of AVEGA-AGAHOZO referred to as "to participate in the national reconstruction and reconciliation" processes. Therefore, as other citizens did, most of productive AVEGA widows have successfully managed to gain political awareness and to support different governmental policies aiming at enhancing national unity like *NdiUmunyarwanda* (a unifying multiseccular Rwandan Identity), to participate actively in the local community life in attending regular local

community meetings (*Inama*) and to take part frequently in local community development activities (*Umuganda*).

Overall, as it has been demonstrated by different researchers, women development is nothing else than a process of national development, sometimes likely to be a long walk, where individuals/groups gain power to manage their lives and secure more ability to set up planned life and more freedoms for choice (Duflo 2012; Kabeer 2012; Lagarde 2014; Sen 2012).

## VI. CONCLUSION

Referring to the objectives of the research and in relation to self-development and consequently women empowerment, the field findings have demonstrated that most AVEGA widows have attempted to succeed significantly in securing improved conditions of life in their households. Indeed, they have been engaging in different activities to gain many benefits like: increasing household management skills, and media access; securing health cares; attending sensitization meetings and gaining power in decision-making processes; engaging in income generating activities; adhering to self-help initiatives and supporting group solidarity; and participating actively in local community life. However, in considering different challenges facing AVEGA widows living in Nyange Sector, some new areas of research have been suggested such as: to assess the impact of genocidal ideology on the women survivors of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda; and to evaluate the impact of strengthened social networks on the women survivors of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi in Rwanda.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At the completion of this study, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Marie Paul Dusingize (PhD) for her motivational support and appropriate strong criticisms that have caused this work to meet the scientific research standards. My deep thanks also go to Mr. Théoneste Nsabimana (MAEN) whose multiple assistance has allowed this work to be of a significant quality.

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