



## **RD RWANDA POLICY AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

### **1. SUMMARY**

The United Nations has identified gender-based violence against women as a global health and development issue, and a host of preventive measures, public education, and action programs aimed at reducing gender-based violence have been undertaken around the world.

GBV is seen as a worldwide phenomenon disproportionately affecting women and causes harm not only to the individuals experiencing violence, but to their families, communities, and the socio-economic wellbeing of the nationals as a whole.

Violence against women is pervasive in many African countries, cultural values and norms serve to condone and reinforce abusive practices against women. In most African societies, it is considered acceptable for men to control women, the wealthy to control the poor, parents to control children through violence and threat of violence, hence considered normal and even commendable for both adults and children to use similar attitudes and methods in their communities. By being victims, perpetrators and witnesses of violence, children in Africa learn that violence is an acceptable way for the strong and aggressive to get what they want from the comparatively weak, passive or peaceful.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Definition of Gender-based Violence

There is no universal definition of gender-based violence (GBV). However, article 1 of the UN Declaration on the elimination of violence against women provides a starting point, defining violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” The General Assembly Resolution on the elimination of domestic violence against women expands the scope of violence to include “economic deprivation and isolation... [Which] may cause imminent harm to the safety, health or well-being of women”.<sup>1</sup> The definition can also be extended to include sexual abuse and harm.

With reference to what actions may be considered gender-based, gender can be seen as the allocation of roles, attitudes and values that are deemed by the community to be appropriate for each sex. These traits therefore are socially constructed and represent the perception of men and women, girls and boys in a given culture and society. These roles, which define the power relations between men and women in terms of who takes decisions and owns resources, are learned and reinforced through interactions in the home and in the community<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, gender-based violence should be seen as physical, sexual, emotional or social harm or abuse directed against a person because of his or her gender role in a given society.

<sup>1</sup>General Assembly Resolution 58/147, A/RES/58/147, 19 February 2004, para. 1(a)

<sup>2</sup>This policy adopts the principles of the definition of gender that is included in the Girls’ Education Policy of April 2008, as this definition provides a strong articulation of what “gender” means in society

Gender-based violence is defined in the Law on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-based Violence as:

“[Any] act that results in a bodily, psychological, sexual and economic harm to somebody just because they are female or male.

Such act results in the deprivation of freedom and negative consequences. This violence may be exercised within or outside the household.”

The term “just because they are female or male” should be interpreted to mean any harm based on the gender of the victim.

The Law makes it clear that harm inflicted because of a person’s biological sex or based on the perceived “appropriate” roles of individuals is illegal. Despite this law, gender-based violence continues to be a persistent problem in Rwanda. Domestic violence, sexual violence, economic violence and other types of gender-based harassment in the workplace and in institutions are all prevalent. While women and girls statistically make up the majority of cases of gender-based violence with men and boys identified as the primary perpetrators, it is important to remember that men and boys are also victims of gender-based violence and women may be perpetrators.

The Gender Monitoring Office has defined the categories of GBV as:

- Economic violence: denial of economic rights to property, succession, employment or other economic benefits;
- Physical violence: the intentional use of physical force with the potential to cause harm, injury, disability or death;
- Sexual violence: act of forcing another individual, through violence, threats, deception, cultural expectation, weapons or economic circumstances, to engage in sexual behavior against her or his will; and
- Psychological violence: trauma to the victim caused by acts, threats of acts or coercive tactics; these threats are often related to sexual or physical violence<sup>3</sup>.

### **3. CONSEQUENCES OF GBV**

The consequences of gender-based violence are numerous and far-reaching. In addition to death and suicide, GBV has serious negative health, physical and psychological effects.

Research indicates that the impact of GBV goes beyond the primary victim<sup>4</sup>. GBV has become a public health issue. GBV has a direct impact on the individual’s enjoyment of the rights to health, education, work and to freedom from torture, among others.

Physically, victims may suffer bruises, broken bones or even death. Gender-based violence has been called the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world.

Accordingly, the Vienna Human Rights Conference and the Fourth World Conference on Women gave priority to this issue, which jeopardizes women's lives, bodies, psychological integrity and freedom.

3 Gender Monitoring Office, Assessment of Intervention Programs for Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response, 2010, pp. 18-23.

4See Kishor, S & K. Johnson, Profiling domestic violence. A multi-country study, Carlverton, Maryland: ORC Macro, 2004.

Violence may have profound effects – direct and indirect – on a woman's reproductive health, including:

- o Unwanted pregnancies and restricted access to family planning information and contraceptives,
- o Unsafe abortion or injuries sustained during abortion following an unwanted pregnancy
- o Sexually transmitted infections, including HIV<sup>5</sup>
- o Persistent gynecological problems
- o Psychological problems.

There is a strong link between HIV/AIDS and GBV. Children of victims may be born with health complications or low birth weight. Many have difficulties performing in school and exhibit violent or delinquent behavior<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup>Many studies have highlighted the links between GBV and HIV/AIDS. See e.g., UNFPA and UNIFEM, Combating Gender-Based Violence: A Key to Achieving the MDGS, March 2005, p. 17; Pan American Health Organization, Fact Sheet: Gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS, 2005

<sup>6</sup>E.g, Andrew R. Morrison and M.B. Orlando, The costs and impacts of gender-based violence in developing countries: Methodological considerations and new evidence, World Bank, 2004, p. 4

Both victims and those indirectly impacted by the violence often face mental health issues, such as depression, fear, low self-esteem and extreme stress. This may lead to further victimization and drug or alcohol abuse<sup>7</sup>

Gender-based violence also serves – by intention or effect – to perpetuate male power and control. It is sustained by a culture of silence and denial of the seriousness of the health consequences of

abuse. In addition to the harm exerted on the individual, these consequences also have a social cost and place a heavy and unnecessary burden on health services.

A number of studies have proven that gender-based violence both contributes to, and is exacerbated by, the economic and socio-cultural discrimination experienced by women. Women's lack of economic empowerment is reflected in the lack of access to and control over economic resources in the form of land, personal property, wages and loans<sup>8</sup>.

Gender-based violence is a complex issue that affects everyone in the society. The serious negative consequences of gender-based violence on economic development and the realization of human rights are well documented<sup>9</sup>.

GBV threatens the economic development of the country – as extensive resources must be dedicated to medical, psycho-social, law enforcement services, and as it reinforces existing inequities in society that prevent victims and those at risk from contributing to the development of the country.

Given the social, economic, physical and psychological costs associated with it, gender-based violence is a problem that must be dealt with urgently. RD Rwanda is especially supporting young mothers and girls.

7 United Nations General Assembly (UN-GA), In depth study on all forms of violence against women: Report of the Secretary-General, 2006

<sup>8</sup>See Andrew R. Morrison and M.B. Orlando, The costs and impacts of gender-based violence in developing countries: Methodological considerations and new evidence, World Bank, 2004.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid

To continue this initiative, preventing and responding to gender-based violence must be a priority at all the time.

#### **4. POSITIVE CULTURAL VALUES THAT AID IN PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TO GBV**

Culture can be seen as a set of shared beliefs, ideas, customs and ways of thinking or acting that guide the behavior of individuals in a society. Culture instills values and influences attitudes, many

of which can promote human rights and development. Culture is not static, but rather changes over time as attitudes and expectations change in society. Each organisation has its own culture.

At RD Rwanda, there are a number of values that can have a positive impact on GBV prevention and effective response.

These values, which must be supported and reinforced in the organisation, include but are not limited to:

- ❖ Working for the social good;
- ❖ Breaking the cycle of poverty: one community at a time;
- ❖ Delivery of services to the beneficiaries, customers, collaborators and partners;
- ❖ Entrepreneurial spirit;
- ❖ Collaboration and mutual partnership among stakeholders with an intention for fast-tracking its mission;
- ❖ Gender sensitive and friendly working environment for a social economic development;
- ❖ Fast service and operations;
- ❖ Listening to what you tell us;
- ❖ Transparency and honesty;
- ❖ Integrity.

## **5. CONTEXT AND JUSTIFICATION**

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to any harm perpetrated against a person's will on the basis of gender. It occurs worldwide and disproportionately affects women and girls. GBV is rooted in gender discrimination and inequality and often is a bi-product of harmful social and cultural norms. Violence or harm can manifest physically, emotionally, psychologically, sexually, financially, and socially. The types of violence include intimate partner abuse, rape, coercion, female genital cutting, and forced marriage, amongst others. GBV is exacerbated by poverty and conflict.

Underreporting of GBV is a problem worldwide, though estimates range from 33 to 70 percent of women experiencing GBV in their lifetimes and around 6 percent of men (percentages differ by country and context). GBV is often kept hidden, even when prohibited by law, due to cultural attitudes and social norms and/or weak or unsafe support services (health, legal) for survivors.

## 6. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Gender-based violence is a problem in Rwanda whose nature is fed by a number of factors. RD Rwanda as a private local Non-Governmental Organization operating in Rwanda, there is fear that its staff involved in different programs may also be influenced by these factors and abuse RD Rwanda beneficiaries, especially girl students and young mothers who are supported by RD Rwanda in different ways.

The social environment and culture in which people are brought up contribute to their ways of thinking and to their value judgments. Therefore, men and women, boys and girls are all affected by GBV and all have an important role to play in changing social attitudes and preventing GBV. Nonetheless, men and boys are often left out of the dialogue and seen as opponents rather than partners in GBV prevention.

This misunderstanding of “gender” also leads to misinformation and misunderstanding of what gender-based violence is. Many acts of gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence, are not clearly understood. Spousal rape, although defined as a crime in the Law on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence, is still not seen as such by many people. Many men and women see sexual intercourse as the husband’s conjugal right alone. Other forms of domestic violence such as beatings and physical injury of spouses, denial of property rights, verbal insults, psychological harassment, etc. are often perceived as “normal” in the family.

Many awareness raising activities are being undertaken by RD Rwanda staff towards its beneficiaries. However, there is still a challenge of insufficient resources and the organisation is still understaffed.

Even effective awareness raising campaigns take time to change social attitudes. Therefore, prevention of GBV, in the short term, requires identification of those at risk as well as targeted support to prevent them from becoming victims. Although gender-based violence can affect anyone in society, certain individuals and groups are at particular risk. The situation analysis shows that groups and individuals at high risk include, but are not limited to:

- o children without parental care, especially children who are heads of households or otherwise orphaned; they are particularly vulnerable due to their age and situation;

o children born out of rape who have to come to terms with the knowledge that their fathers are rapists and, in the case of children born out of rape during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi;

o people with disabilities who may be marginalized in society and vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, in some cases without the capacity to speak out or be heard.

Another challenge to be addressed is the establishment of a follow-up programme for RD Rwanda beneficiaries by starting small income generating activities which will allow following them closely.

RD Rwanda staff members provide services to people vulnerable to gender-based violence. These services include medical, psycho-social protection and socio-economic services and support. However, some constraints exist in the availability, accessibility and in the quality of these services. Chief among these constraints is the insufficiency of resources to provide appropriate services to GBV vulnerable people as well as the limited number of specialized services providers in terms of knowledge and skills.

## **7. MISSION, VISION AND OBJECTIVE OF THE RD RWANDA POLICY AGAINST GBV**

### **7.1. Vision of the Policy**

The overall vision of this Policy is to collaborate with other stakeholders involved in the fight against GBV to ultimately build a Rwandan society that is GBV-free and in particular to make sure that our beneficiaries are not taken advantage of by RD Rwanda staff or whoever and have an organization that can effectively and efficiently prevent and respond to GBV at work.

### **7.2. Mission of the Policy**

The main mission of this policy is to contribute to the socio-economic development and promotion of human rights of Rwandans in general and RD Rwanda beneficiaries in particular and through the prevention of and response to gender-based violence.

This will enhance people's ability to participate in all endeavors to end poverty and improve living conditions, without fear or threat of any form of gender-based violence.



## **7.3. Objectives**

### **7.3.1. General objective**

The overall objective of the policy is to completely eliminate gender-based violence among RD Rwanda staff and against RD Rwanda beneficiaries through the development of a preventive, protective, supportive and transformative environment.

### **7.3.2. Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives of the policy cover two main areas: Prevention and Response.

#### **7.3.2.1. Prevention**

- Foster a prevention-focused environment where gender-based violence is not tolerated;
- Reduce vulnerability of groups most at risk to GBV

#### **7.3.2.2. Response**

- Improve accountability and eliminate impunity for gender-based violence

## **8. POLICY PRINCIPLES AND STATEMENTS**

National policy against gender-based violence

RD Rwanda does not condone any acts of gender-based violence;

RD Rwanda recognizes gender based violence as a violation of human rights;

RD Rwanda strongly believes in, and promotes gender equality, equity and empowerment of women as a crucial human resource for social and economic development;

RD Rwanda is committed to using its fullest powers to fight, prevent and provide response to all forms of gender-based violence in society; and GBV interventions and responses must be conducted in all the activities of RD Rwanda.

## **9. STRATEGIES FOR REACHING GBV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE**

### **9.1. Introduction**

At RD Rwanda, there is a will and commitment to address GBV as a violation of human rights and an impediment to economic development of its beneficiaries. However, preventing and responding to gender-

based violence is rendered complex by the fact that it requires the sensitization of many stakeholders and reflects deeply rooted cultural and social practices.

Strategies for GBV prevention and response must address specific constraints for each objective and provide concrete solutions. In most cases, addressing the constraints effectively will require a combination of solutions. Additionally, many solutions will help to address multiple constraints.

## 9.2. Strategies

STRATEGIC AREA 1a: PREVENTION STRATEGIES	
STRATEGY1: FOSTER A PREVENTION-FOCUSED ENVIRONMENT WHERE GBV IS NOT TOLERATED AT RD RWANDA	
CONSTRAINTS	POLICY ACTIONS
Low understanding of the concept of gender, entrenched ideas of gender roles and negative social attitudes create an environment that fosters GBV.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote gender equality and GBV prevention at work at RD Rwanda.</li> <li>• Strengthen sensitization to promote understanding of gender and positive social norms and attitudes within the organization.</li> <li>• Actively engage men and boys in the fight against GBV.</li> <li>• Provide appropriate sensitization for parents and guardians of RD Rwanda beneficiaries and actively engage them in creating a GBV hostile family environment.</li> <li>• Educate people, especially the youth on reproductive health, specifically on sexuality and biological changes</li> </ul>
Strategy2: Reduce vulnerability of most at risk groups to GBV	
CONSTRAINTS	POLICY ACTIONS
Some individuals and groups in society are at particular risk of GBV and need specific attention, services and programs to reduce their vulnerability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put in place mechanisms at RD Rwanda to identify groups and individuals at high risk of GBV among RD Rwanda beneficiaries and new people depending on the availability of the resources.</li> <li>• Develop programs to increase the capacity of vulnerable groups to protect themselves from GBV.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce programs for economic empowerment of vulnerable groups</li> </ul>
<b>STRATEGIC AREA 2: RESPONSE STRATEGIES</b>	
<b>STRATEGY: IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY AND ELIMINATE IMPUNITY FOR GBV</b>	
<b>CONSTRAINTS</b>	<b>POLICY ACTIONS</b>
Ignorance of the law, fear or embarrassment of coming forward and anxiety about the consequences of prosecution on the family impacts on the reporting of GBV cases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve systems of identifying and reporting GBV cases in a safe and confidential environment, without unnecessarily burdening the victims;</li> <li>• Ensure that RD Rwanda conflict resolution committee continue to receive training on dealing with GBV;</li> <li>• Ensure GBV perpetrators are adequately punished with a view towards deterrence, and that sentences are widely known;</li> <li>• Provide support to RD Rwanda beneficiaries to promote understanding of gender and positive social norms and attitudes;</li> <li>• Uphold sentencing measures that hold perpetrators accountable while taking into account the best interests and social/financial needs of the victims;</li> </ul>

**10. IMPLEMENTATION TO DATE OF THE GBV POLICY**

RD Rwanda has made tremendous strides in combating GBV through a number of initiatives. On the prevention side, trainings and other services have been offered to RD Rwanda staff and its beneficiaries.

**10.1. RD Rwanda staff**

Given that fear and conflict are among the signs of GBV, RD Rwanda has put in place a conflict resolution committee to ensure that any conflict that may arise is resolved amicably. To fight the extreme jealousy among the staff, people are hired according to their competences and skills and are assigned responsibilities according to their abilities. Another sign of GBV being

unpredictability, again RD Rwanda top management has set objectives and assigned responsibilities so that almost everything is predictable. RD Rwanda has also cautioned its staff against verbal abuse. To avoid bad temper, RD Rwanda has put in place a friendly environment where people can interact as brethren. They also try to avoid extremely controlling behavior and antiquated beliefs about the roles of women and men in the society.

## **10.2. RD Rwanda beneficiaries**

Programs are being implemented to protect RD Rwanda beneficiaries against gender-based violence. These beneficiaries have benefitted many trainings on gender based violence by RD Rwanda qualified psychologists and medical staff. These young mothers, girls, boys, and groups that are vulnerable to HIV know their rights so that nobody can afford to flout them anyhow.

In addition, RD Rwanda has put in place drastic measures against its staff meant to curb the perpetration of gender-based violence. All the staff of RD Rwanda are aware that there is zero tolerance to any abuse based on the biological sex or sexual orientation of any of its beneficiaries. A suspension pending investigation shall be imposed on any staff member who will be alleged to be guilty of indulging in such ignominious practices. If found innocent as the result of the investigation he/she will be reinstated in his/her position, but if found guilty, he/she will not only be fired by the organization, he/she will also have to face the force of the law.

The commitment of RD Rwanda is to have zero tolerance to gender-based violence, and to this end, there are punitive mechanisms in place to punish the offenders. First of all, as stipulated above, there is an established Conflict Resolution Committee at RD Rwanda. If a staff of RD Rwanda is ever suspected of any involvement in GBV, the Conflict Resolution Committee will gather the information and submit a report to RD Rwanda Executive Committee. If RD Rwanda Executive Committee is convinced by the report that it is the case of GBV, there are many competent organs in the country holding the protection of a child within their ambit. RD Rwanda will bring the case to the attention of the Rwanda Investigations Bureau (RIB), or the Rwanda National Police, or One Stop Centers to investigate and establish the veracity of the case depending on the nature of the case. It can also resort to the Office of the Ombudsman of Rwanda or Access to Justice Office present in each district. All these organs help the victim of GBV to access legal aid.

Furthermore, programs are being implemented to address the economic exploitation of the groups that are particularly vulnerable including women and girls, children, older people and people living with disabilities. Community programs to economically empower poor women and families play an important role in reducing their vulnerability and in preventing GBV. RD Rwanda is involved in the education of girls as a way of empowering them because ignorance can be one of the causes of GBV; it is supporting them with school fees and scholastic materials. It is also supporting young mothers and women in different associations.

On the side of response to GBV, many important achievements have also been made. Significant steps have been taken by the organization to have dedicated staff and resources to provide services to people vulnerable to GBV and reduce impunity for GBV within the organization.

Medical and psychological assistance is provided to people vulnerable to GBV. This assistance includes, but is not limited to research on STIs and counseling. Service providers in GBV receive training on orientation and care to people vulnerable to GBV and on collaboration with other key stakeholders such as the local leaders.

The commitment of the RD Rwanda is to have zero tolerance to gender-based violence; therefore a policy to prevent and respond to gender-based violence supports the realization of overall development objectives.

Last but not least, RD Rwanda has also opted engaging men to help stop gender-based violence perpetration.

In many societies part of proving one's "masculinity" involves risky behaviors such as unprotected sex with multiple partners – which only fuels HIV infection rates. Among the staff of RD Rwanda, there are also men. Men have been described not only as predominant perpetrators of violence against women, but also their decision making roles and power in the economic and social spheres necessitate their commitment to eradicating violence against women. An important aspect of the significance of involving men in efforts to eliminate violence against women is that men are involved in different activities of RD Rwanda and there is fear that they may take advantage of the beneficiaries and exercise gender-based violence against them in different forms.

Men have the privilege of power and decision making in most communities in the world, making it crucial to garner their support and commitment in ending violence against women. Cooperation,

partnership and dialogue between women and men must be fostered in order to create alternatives to violence and foster environments that nurture peace and development. Men should also take collective action against violence against women in order to encourage other men to get involved and to show that it is a sign of strength to fight violence, instead of a sign of weakness. In addition, working with men to end violence should be viewed as part of an overall goal of achieving gender equality, meaning that working with men is complementary to empowering women and achieving gender equality as a whole.

## **11. AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE GBV POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

GBV can be in the form of economic exploitation. However, due to lack of enough resources, RD Rwanda has not been able to reach out to as many beneficiaries as possible and, of course, this situation makes it difficult for the organization to address the magnitude of the issue.

There is need to expand the activities of the organization and benefit as many people as possible. To this effect, it needs to facilitate some of its beneficiaries to run some income generating activities like carpentry, tailoring construction, poultry rearing, etc. Although the trainings and programs are in place to protect the organization beneficiaries, the follow-up still faces challenges as the beneficiaries hail from different parts of the country and meet RD Rwanda staff very rarely.

There are a number of other areas for improvement that could enhance the implementation of the policy commitments, including building capacities and resources of responsible service providers to provide quality and timely services to GBV vulnerable people, including more qualified staff at RD Rwanda, more qualified psychologists and health providers, greater efforts to rehabilitate persons who have experienced or perpetrated GBV back in the community amongst others.

## **12. CONCLUSION**

In order to achieve its vision of having a society free of gender based violence, RD Rwanda has initiated this Policy against GBV, which is in line with the country's poverty reduction strategy and complements the national policy against GBV and the National Gender Policy. Preventing and fighting against GBV should, therefore, be regarded as a contribution of RD Rwanda to the national development as well as the fulfillment of the country's human rights' obligations.

This policy calls for the involvement of many stakeholders towards the prevention of and response to all forms of gender-based violence. The policy's vision is to build an organization that is GBV-free and, in the interim to have an organization that can effectively and efficiently prevent and respond to GBV.

There are two overarching objectives of the policy: a) to prevent GBV, b) to respond effectively to instances of GBV.

The situation analysis recognizes that more work must be done to change attitudes towards gender and GBV and to increase understanding of the laws and promote positive cultural values – through public education, advocacy and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

Efficient reporting mechanisms, testing, counseling, immediate protection and other follow-up services along with appropriate preventive and punitive measures are vital. At the highest level, laws and policies must guarantee that all the citizens can be assured of their safety and security. It is a goal that is within reach of the organization, but one that will require sustained commitment and adequate human and financial resources.