

Gender equality in rural Rwanda—stuck between old and modern traditions

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Judicial gender reforms have given Rwandan women public access to assets, inheritance, work opportunities and protection from domestic abuse. But many women in rural areas face disapprovals from the patriarchal community surrounding them, and are therefore reluctant to exercise their rights. Gender reforms also leave men in a limbo between old and modern traditions. Government strategies aiming at changing inequalities need to more thoroughly take into account local contexts and ordinary men's concerns in order to be efficient.

Mediatrice M. Kagaba, who has conducted the study, wanted to understand how men, women and local gender focal points staff in [rural areas](#) view gender equality laws in their daily lives. In doing so, she analysed narratives from in total 263 respondents in 32 group interviews and 12 individual interviews. Her findings show that while gender equality laws has opened up a lot of opportunities for women, the reforms also have put both women and men in difficult dilemmas.

"Many women say that they most likely would face disapproval from their husbands, in-laws, neighbours and the community in which they live - should they try to exercise their law-given rights, Mediatrice M. Kagaba says.

These women find themselves stuck between old and modern traditions and don't know whether to make a stand for their rights or not.

Likewise, the equality laws have made men feel victimized and deprived

of their power over women and other longstanding gender entitlements. Their responses paint a picture of a confused rural man who does not know which stand to take: his traditional way of life or the new gender agenda.

Both genders' experiences prevent men and women from engaging in discussions about their gender relationships, which in turn could push the equality process forward. The dilemmas they face create a gap between national gender laws and continued inequality at household level.

"If these gender equality dilemmas are not addressed, the gender equality agenda could worsen the relationship between men and women in rural households", Mediatrice M. Kagaba says.

She recommend that before designing and adapting any strategy that aims to challenge unequal power relations between men and [women](#), the government of Rwanda should work more closely with ordinary men to listen to their concerns.

"This in order to achieve long-standing gender equality without harming anyone in the household", Mediatrice M. Kagaba concludes.

More information: hdl.handle.net/2077/43335

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