

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**Opération des Nations Unies au Burundi
ONUB
UNITÉ GENRE**

**BURUNDI AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION - THE ROLE OF ONUB**

THE CONTEXT

Burundi is a small landlocked country with an area of 27.834 square kilometers and an estimated population of 7.2 million of which 52.9 percent are women. The vast majority of this population lives in rural areas. According to the Human Development Index of the United Nations, Burundi is classified at the 171 position out of 175.

Besides the usual health issues such as early childhood disease, malaria, diarrhea and other infections, Burundi is currently experiencing an alarming situation regarding HIV/AIDS. A national survey of the proportion of people who are seropositive in December 2002 indicated that women were more affected by the infection than men. The prevalence ratio is respectively 13 percent for women as compared to 6.8 percent for men in urban areas and 13.7 percent against 6.8 percent in the urban-rural fringe and 2.9 percent against 2.1 percent in rural areas.

Women are the most affected by poverty, which limits the access to resources, their under-representation in employment and lack of income. Their access to the formal sector is also limited. Data from surveys conducted in 2001 on women representation by institutions supporting gender promotion showed that women with a college degree working in the public sector represent 17 percent against 83 percent of men, 27 percent against 73 percent in the para-public sector and 28 percent against 72 percent in the private sector.

Traditionally in Burundi, women and men are not equal and there are no laws on succession, matrimonial regimes and the bounties. Inheritance can only be passed from father to son. Therefore, girls are not allowed to inherit. A draft bill concerning the above mentioned areas exist but has no been adopted yet. The bill is surrounded by a lot of controversy, (the fears of losing family properties if women are allowed to inherit land).

The country signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in April 1997 and its additional protocol in November 2001. The Constitutional Act stipulates that all men are equal without any distinction of sex, origin, opinion race or religion. The newly adopted Constitution (by referendum in March 2005) establishes 30 percent quota for women's representation in decision making structures: government, parliament and senate.

However, Burundian legislation also contains discriminative and unequal provisions which are found in various acts. The non application of the law is regular especially when it comes to violence against women. The legislation on sexual violence is almost nonexistent and the traditional justice, often applied is very harmful to women's rights.

The war that has been raging in Burundi for 12 years now has brought dramatic changes in areas such as education, health and the economy. It has also intensified sexually oriented violence. The warring parties have often used rape as a weapon of war.

Following the crisis, women have and continue to play a substantial role in peace building and reconciliation. Women associations have been created, seminars, conferences, workshop, press releases, radio broadcastings and demonstrations were organized trying to peacefully solve the conflict.

However, women were not involved at the same level as men in peace process. With the support of UNIFEM project on Peace Building, they applied pressure during Arusha peace negotiations on the negotiators and the mediating team. This persistence has allowed their participation as observers. Their demands were partially met in the Arusha Peace Agreement which recognized the necessity of promoting women and enhance their role in the peace building process. A gender national policy was adopted on December 2003.

L'OPERATION DES NATIONS UNIES AU BURUNDI – ONUB

ONUB was established under the Security Council Resolution 1545 of May 21, 2004. Under chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, the mandate of ONUB is inter alia, : i) to support Burundian efforts to restore lasting peace and bring about national reconciliation as provided under the Arusha Agreement; ii) to contribute to the creation of the necessary security conditions for the provision of humanitarian assistance, and facilitate the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons; iii) to carry out the disarmament and demobilization portion of the national programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants; iv) to proceed with electoral activities; v) complete implementation of the reform of the judiciary and correction system, in accordance with the Arusha Agreement; vi) to ensure in close liaison with the OHCHR, the promotion and protection of human rights, with particular attention to women, children and vulnerable persons, and investigate human rights violations to put an end to impunity.

Within its mandate, ONUB has very specific questions related to gender. On its considerations, the resolution 1545 which gives mandate to ONUB, mentions:

1. ... **it's particular concern by the increasing incidents of rapes, including mass rapes,**
2. ... the concern at the tragic humanitarian situation of a large majority of the Burundian population, recalling that all the parties are responsible for the security of the civilian populations and **recalling in particular in this regard its resolutions 1325 (2000) on women peace and security, ...;**
3. Condemning all acts of violence, as well as human rights and international humanitarian law violations, and decides that ONUB shall provide advice and assistance [...] to ensure in close liaison with the HCHR Office, the promotion and protection of human rights, **with particular attention to women, children and**

vulnerable persons, and investigate human right violations to put an end to impunity;

4. carrying out the national *programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of combatants and members of their families*, including those coming from the territory of DRC, in liaison with the Government of this country and MONUC, and *with particular attention to the specific needs of women and children*;
5. Request the Secretary-General, through his Special Representative for Burundi, to conduct all the activities of the United Nations system in Burundi and to facilitate coordination ... while ensuring that ***ONUB's personnel give special attention to issues related to gender equality, as well as to the specific needs of children.***

The aspect of the mandate was very useful for the design and implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy of the Mission. Being a non executive mission, the accent was put in the advocacy and lobbying activities for the inclusion of gender related concerns in the ongoing programmes. ONUB came after sometime of the African Union Peacekeeping Mission that had some impact on the gender relations with the host population; the legacy of that relationship was felt by ONUB that incorporated AU forces to the UN PKF, and we had to deal with some challenging and negative perceptions on the expected behaviour of the Forces. We worked in creation awareness among the military on the UN Standards of Conduct and on the gender relationships of the host country. Very quickly a conduct and discipline unit was put in place that took over very successfully that task and till now the mission applies a zero tolerance policy for SEA¹.

While liaising with the existents national machineries on gender issues, internal work was developed within the mission, on a task force for the implementation of the SCR 1325, for the promotion of the full participation of Burundian women in the electoral process. That included a coordinated work between Gender Unit, Political Affairs Section, Electoral Affairs Office and the Public Information Office. Leading legislation was analyzed from a gender perspective and recommendations issued to the main stakeholders for its consideration of the new legislation and regulations under drafting.

Advocacy has been made towards the government for the inclusion of a quota for women in decision making structures and with the support of the sub-region and specially from the South African women and leaders, a 30 percent quota for women was included in the Pos Transitional Constitution for the Government, Senate and for the National Parliament positions. Further advocacy to have this figure in the electoral law for the commune and the collines didn't succeed. The electoral law provides regulation on the 30 percent women quota for the Senate but jus mentions the inclusion of gender concerns in the commune and colline councils, which is insufficient to guarantee a fair representation at this stage.

¹ Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Gender Unit worked very specifically with the Electoral Unit and trained its personnel on the inclusion of gender concerns in the electoral process, and in the gender analysis of all the legislative and other leading documents of the transitional period. The Political Section as well as the SRSG Office joined the advocacy with the decision makers and the representatives of the political parties, on the inclusion of women in all the relevant bodies for the elections (CENI and CEPI)² and for the inclusion of gender aspects on the elaboration of the new electoral code and the communal law. A big advocacy and mobilization was made for women's registration in the electoral lists at all levels and in all the country, with the help of the ONUB electoral officers and the provincial electoral bodies. Women didn't have identity documents and affidavit mechanisms had to be put in place to allow their inscription. We achieved a big turnout of women's registration after the dissemination of adequate information on their possibilities to be elected for the first time at their communities and on the existence of a network to support their participation. An Action Plan was put in place with the activities the government, the UN Agencies and the locals and international NGOs were previewing to implement to promote women's participation in the elections. First draft was made under ONUB initiative and in coordination with UNIFEM, and the Ministry of Women's Welfare. A workshop was organized by the Ministry of Women's Welfare to finalize a common strategy and to approve the proposed Action Plan. Key players were carefully included in the process, as political tensions are very important in Burundian society.

The Gender Unit funded and trained 136 women potential candidates to the elections at a Senate Parliament and Commune levels. An International consultant supported by a local consultant conducted the training in four sessions of one week each, with the objective to help women candidates to organize their campaign. The training focused mainly on: i) Gender concept and Gender Mainstreaming' ii) Women's leadership for change; iii) Communication skills; Fundraising; iv) Elaboration of an electoral programme; v) The management of an electoral campaign; vi) Time management' vii) Mediation, negotiation and advocacy skills; viii) Legislation supporting the electoral process; ix) HIV/Aids and women leadership.

32 men and women were trained as trainers in April, and a training manual produced as a support. The objective was to attain the maximum number possible of women candidates at grass root level and empower them to come forward and contest for elections in their communities. This information was made available to all partners working to promote women participation in the elections, so that they could use this new resource. These trainers were a powerful tool and they were used by local and international organizations and NGO. They were crucial on the training of local "animatrices", 35 by province, that were used to mobilize women for an informed participation in the elections, and they were also used by ONUB Public Information Office on the information campaign on the elections, throughout the country.

Local elections were held on the 23 September 2005 and it mobilized a large number of women candidates, as it has appealing characteristics that suits their gender role. They can

² CENI: National Electoral Commission
CEPI: Provincial Electoral Commission

campaign in their neighborhood, where they are known because they belong to those communities. They don't have to travel far to campaign, neither move residence to perform their duties in case of election, thus being by their family side and taking part in the management of their community life. 405 candidates to colline elections were trained by the local trainers in all the Provinces. At the moment of the colline elections, it is interesting to note that most of the trainers themselves didn't give up on building the capacity of other candidates and very actively shared their experiences and lessons learned with the colline candidates. We very much praised their contribution as a militant activity towards the inclusion of women in decision making structures at the grass root level.

Gender Unit worked very closely with the PIO, integrating gender perspectives into the video sketches to sensitize the population on women's political participation, the organization of press conferences, production of special radio and TV programmes and mobilization campaign with local NGOs. PIO also provided a very good media coverage of all gender related activities. The relations with the local journalists were facilitated not only through PIO but also in the participation to the 'Café de Press' events, organized by local women's organizations. At the invitation of the "Maison de la Presse", we had the occasion to address different journalists' seminars and brief them on Gender issues.

Gender Unit organized a reflection workshop on women's participation in the elections that gathered around 200 women, representatives of political parties and representatives of the UN Country Team. At the closure of the workshop, the Political Parties Representatives, made their pledge on how they would address the inclusion of women in their electoral lists in order to achieve the 30 percent women's quota. A personal contact strategy was put in place by the Caucus Group for women's participation in the elections, lobbying for women's position in the blocked electoral lists from the political parties. Some parties placed women as "tête de liste" and the trends were very delicate because other elements had to be taken into account, such as the power sharing agreements between Hutus and Tutsi as well as other minority's representation. CNDD-FDD one of the biggest political parties and the actual winner of the elections, made a public statement promising to give 40 percent quota to the women of the party. We followed up the women's wing of the main parties, their distribution in the lists, before their hand over to the CENI, assisting them till the last moment in bargaining for better positions.

Against this backdrop, the 2005 elections have been revolutionary, granting women their rightful place in Burundian society. In the Parliament: 36 women, out 118, a representation rate of 34.6 percent. The Head of Parliament is a woman. In the Senate 34.6 percent of the senators are women, with both Vice-Presidents being women. The government has further demonstrated its commitment to include women in decision – making processes by appointing a woman Vice-President of Socio-Economic Issues, 7 females ministers (of a total of 20, thus 35 percent women representation), and four women governors of provinces (23 percent). At the Commune level, 13 women have been elected Head of Commune, with a further 7 as Presidents and 38 as Vice-Presidents of Commune Councils.

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