

# Understanding Gender Equality in Rwanda

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The Experiences of People Living in Rural Communities

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# Abstract

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This thesis explores how men and women in rural Rwanda perceive, experience and interpret the country's gender equality agenda. It also shows how they try to negotiate gender practices and relationships when such an agenda is implemented locally. The empirical material is based on fieldwork conducted in Rwanda in 2012 and 2014 with 263 respondents in 32 group interviews and 12 individual interviews.

The findings reveal that when gender equality laws and policies that challenge power relations are implemented, both men and women experience gender equality dilemmas, worries, and fears that expand and complicate existing power inequalities at the household level. The findings reveal that in order to deal with such concerns, men and women adopt the strategy of silence in the household as one of the means to cope with the newly created gender changes. The study contributes new insights on gender relations in Rwanda's rural households and enriches the literature on gender and development (GAD) and gender mainstreaming.

The study suggests that if women's rights continue to be promoted and men's worries, complaints and fears, as identified in this study, are not heard and addressed, gender equality might not have a significant impact on both men and women's lives in rural households.

**Keywords:** gender equality, women's rights, Rwanda, experience

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