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Weekly Report

Do new opportunities arise for women in post-war countries? The case of Rwanda

Violent conflict is a severe obstacle for economic development and poverty alleviation. It harms humans and destroys physical property. However, conflict may also trigger social change. This contribution discusses how women may assume new economic responsibilities in a post-conflict environment.¹ The analysis focuses on the case of Rwanda, a small landlocked nation in Central Africa that erupted into genocide in 1994. During the genocide, more men than women died, which caused a shortage of men in the post-genocide period. It is shown that the genocide affected women in different ways. Many widows became breadwinners of their household and took on new economic activities. In contrast, both wives and unmarried women conform to the traditional female gender ideal. This may be a strategy to improve their chances of getting married.

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Rwanda has a long history of violent conflict. The German colonial administration and later the Belgians (who replaced the Germans after WWI and ruled Rwanda until 1962) fueled tensions between the two largest ethnic groups, Hutu (the majority) and Tutsi (the minority). After Rwanda became independent in 1962 under a Hutu-led government, Tutsi were attacked during several outbreaks of ethnic violence. The conflict peaked in 1994, when extremist Hutu militia known as Interahamwe, the Rwandan Armed Forces and Rwandan police forces committed genocide against the Tutsi minority. To a lesser degree, moderate Hutu intellectuals were also targeted.² This was one of the most devastating violent conflicts since the end of the Cold War.

Within just 100 days, between 500,000 and 1 million individuals were massacred, approximately 10 percent of Rwanda's population.³ Moreover, more men and boys than women and girls died, which resulted in a shortage of men in the post-genocide

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I am grateful for helpful comments from Adam Lederer and Christian Schmitt.

² Desforges, A.: *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*. New York, 1999. Prunier, G.: *Rwanda: le genocide*. Paris, 1999.

³ Desforges, A.: *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*. New York, 1999. Prunier, G.: *Rwanda: le genocide*. Paris, 1999. African Rights: *Rwanda: Not so Innocent – When Women Become Killers*. Kigali 1995.

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Figure 1

Sex ratio by birth cohort in Rwanda

Sex ratios refer to the year 2002 and are shown for cohorts of different age.

Source: Census 2002; own calculations.

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There is a shortage of men in the aftermath of the genocide. Cohorts born between 1948 and 1982 appear to be most affected by targeted violence against men.

period.⁴ The sex ratio (the ratio of males to females) dropped sharply for cohorts born before 1983 (Figure 1), due to targeted violence against men. The decrease in the sex ratio of cohorts born before 1948 may indicate lower overall life expectancy of men, even prior to the genocide.

⁴ de Walque, D., Verwimp, P.: The Demographic and Socio-economic Distribution of Excess Mortality during the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda. *Journal of African Economies*, 19(2), 2010, 141-162. Ministry for Local Government: The Counting of the Genocide Victims: Final Report. Kigali, 2002.

In short, the genocide severely altered the demographic structure of Rwandan society. On the one hand, it left many women without partners. The number of widows, of unmarried, and of divorced women rose sharply in the aftermath of the genocide. Between 1992 and 2000, the proportion of female-headed households increased from 19 percent to 37 percent.⁵ On the other hand, the shortage of men has severe socio-economic implications. Many women suddenly became household head. This challenges the cultural ideal that assigns women in Rwanda the role of caregiver and men as breadwinners in households.

My research⁶ analyzes the impact of the genocide on the division of labor within households in post-genocide Rwanda. I do so by examining how men and women spend their time on domestic and income-generating activities. In other words, how did gender-specific household tasks change after the Rwandan society was struck by the genocide?⁷

Women have higher work burdens than men

The data base for this research is a large household survey, the Enquête Intégrale sur les Conditions de Vie de Ménage (EICV), collected by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda in 2005/2006. The

⁵ This figure is calculated from Rwanda Demographic and Health Surveys of 1992 and 2000. Each survey collects information on a nationally representative sample of women aged 15-49 years.

⁶ Schindler, K.: Who does what in a household after genocide? Evidence from Rwanda. DIW Discussion Paper, 1072, 2010.

⁷ Household survey data on time use was only collected after the genocide. An immediate comparison of time use and gender roles in the pre-genocide and post-genocide period is therefore not possible.

Table 1

Time use by household position

	Hours per week in domestic tasks		Hours per week in income-generating activities			Hours per week in all activities	Sample size
	Inside the homestead	Outside the homestead	Farming on own land	Non-farm market work	Farm wage work		
Male head	6.5	5.7	21.6	22.2	35.3	36.1	3410
Widow head	16.6	6.5	20.7	17.8	20.2	43.8	997
Wife of head	24.3	8.0	22.4	15.7	21.7	53.9	3328
Other adult man	6.6	6.9	23.5	33.6	42.2	40.7	1356
Other adult woman	17.1	8.1	21.6	19.6	31.2	48.9	1460
Teenage boy	8.6	8.4	24.0	42.5	42.9	40.1	523
Teenage girl	17.1	10.0	20.5	18.3	34.4	46.7	533
Average	17.7	7.4	22.0	22.7	33.5	44.8	

Results are weighted. Sample: Economically active individuals aged 12 and older living in rural Rwanda. Not all individuals engage in every activity.

Source: EICV 2005/2006; own calculations.

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Women work more intensely in domestic tasks than men. Also, women have higher total work burdens.

Table 2

Time use by household type

	Hours per week in domestic tasks	Hours per week in income-generating activities	Hours in all activities	Sample size
Male head	7.7	32.2	36.1	3 413
Widow head	21.2	24.7	43.6	997
Male member in male-headed household	12.3	35.6	41.7	1 207
Male member in widow-headed household	10.0	33.5	38.4	669
Female member in male-headed household	29.4	25.9	52.6	4 592
Female member in widow-headed household	23.0	27.1	47.3	729

Results are weighted. Sample: Economically active individuals aged 12 and older living in rural Rwanda. Not all individuals engage in every activity.

Source: EICV 2005/2006; own calculations.

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Time use is different in households headed by a men and by a widow.

EICV survey comprises a sample of 6,900 households which are representative of all Rwandan provinces.⁸ Detailed information was recorded on all household members and their socio-economic characteristics, such as age, health, education, and civil status as well as household ownership of assets, economic activities, and time use.⁹

Women and men in rural Rwanda spend their time very differently (Table 1). For example, the wife of a household head works on average 24.3 hours per week in domestic tasks within the household, such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare. In contrast, a male head of household spends on average almost 18 hours per week less in these tasks than his wife. However, the opposite is true for income-earning activities. In both agricultural wage work and non-farm market work, such as civil service or trading in the local market, men are engaged more intensively than their wives. Farm labor on the household's property (mostly this relates to growing food crops for household consumption) is shared equally by wives and husbands, with each one working about 22 hours per week.

The same pattern in the division of labor—female caregivers, male breadwinners, and equal work shares in subsistence farming—is present when one compares the time use of teenage girls and teenage boys or of other adult female and adult male household members (for instance, the parents of the head of household). Importantly, wives, teenage girls, and other adult female members have greater total work burdens than their male counterparts.

Widows have a particular status

Widows¹⁰ spend their time differently, inconsistent from the gendered division of labor apparent in households consisting of a husband, a wife, and children. Compared to such “typical” households, a widow household head spends on average 13.5 hours per week more on domestic tasks than a male household head (Table 2). At the same time, she works 7.5 hours less in income-earning activities. Hence, her time use differs from a typical male household head. Yet a widow who is head of household engages in domestic tasks to a lesser extent than a wife (Table 1). In short, the time use of widows leading a household falls in-between the typical caregiver role of a wife and the breadwinner role of a male head of household. It appears as if widows perform both roles—at least to some extent—simultaneously.

Interestingly, in widow-headed households, not only is the time use of the widow head different, but also that of other household members, such as children and siblings of the head, is different (Table 2). Female household members living in widow-headed households work less in domestic tasks than those living in male-headed households. Male household members living in widow-headed households work less in income-generating activities than their counterparts living in male-headed households. This is surprising: Given that a widow head on average earns less than a male head in Rwanda, one would expect that male members would be required to help as secondary laborers.¹¹

⁸ In the following, the analysis focuses on rural areas only.

⁹ Time use is a relatively new field of research in development economics. It has recently been acknowledged that individuals can be poor in terms of income and ownership of assets, but also in terms of time. See, for instance, Blackden, M.C., Wodon, Q. (Eds): Gender, time use, and poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. World Bank Working Paper, 73, 2006.

¹⁰ The EICV survey does not record the husband's date of death or cause of death. Hence it is not possible to distinguish between war widows and other types of widows (for instance, AIDS widows). Yet, given the high conflict-related mortality of men, it is very likely that the majority of widows lost their husband during the genocide.

¹¹ There is evidence from Mexico showing that men in female-headed households work harder in order to compensate for the gender wage

Economic necessity drives women to become breadwinners

So far the evidence discussed only differentiates time use by a person's gender and position within the household. Do wives work less in the market sector than their husbands because they have less education? Are widows spending less time on domestic tasks than wives because they have fewer children to take care of? A multivariate econometric analysis¹² is conducted in order to account for the fact that persons and households differ in their endowments, such as education, age, wealth, and household size. Such an analysis allows a better grasp of the drivers behind the gendered division of labor. The econometric analysis has three key findings.

First, different factors determine who does what in different types of households. Households characterized by a traditional composition—a male head, his wife, children—stick to traditional gender roles. In these households, women engage in domestic tasks and farming, even when their education and skills are accounted for. On the contrary, in widow-headed households, gender roles matter less for the division of labor. In particular, widows engage more intensively in income-generating activities than married women. Hence, it seems that restrictive female gender roles within the household are mitigated by war-induced changes in household composition. Many widows are forced to assume the role of the breadwinner, and take over the role of the principal decision-maker in their household from their deceased husband.

Second, it may be a plausible hypothesis that a person's reputation and standing in the community is shaped by the extent that the person conforms to his or her gender role. This would imply that gender roles have a stronger impact on activities that take place in public (that is, visible to neighbors) than those carried out inside the homestead. Yet results from the econometric analysis do not support this hypothesis: Gender roles have a similar impact on activities in different spheres. Men and women comply to gender roles, both in the home (what makes cooking, for instance, a female household chore), and in activities that are performed in public (such as buying supplies in the market as a male task). The degree of visibility of an activity to community members does not influence how men and women share their work.

gap. Cunningham, W.: Breadwinner or Caregiver? How Household Role Affects Labor Choices in Mexico. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, 2743, 2001.

¹² For details on the econometric approach see Schindler, K.: Who does what in a household after genocide? Evidence from Rwanda. DIW Discussion Paper, 1072, 2010.

Third, the availability of potential partners on the marriage market has a strong impact on individuals' time use patterns.¹³ Women work more intensively in "typical" female activities if they live in a region with an extreme shortage of marriageable men of similar age. This effect is particularly strong for young, unmarried women who will eventually marry and leave the household. For these women, closely following the Rwandese female ideal of a caregiver may be a strategy to improve their standing on the marriage market.

Conclusions

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda affected and still affects women in various ways. For married women, little has changed: they continue to take care of domestic tasks in their household and subsistence farming. Young unmarried women work intensively in typical female activities. However, unmarried women face a shortage of potential partners of similar age on the marriage market. This may be a reason why these women conform more closely than other women to the ideal female role in Rwanda. Yet new economic opportunities arise to widows. They engage more intensively in income-generating activities than other women. However, from the perspective of the widows themselves, their larger economic responsibility may be driven by the necessity to replace the economic contribution of their deceased husband. From a macroeconomic perspective, the more active engagement of (at least some) women in gainful employment is beneficial to Rwanda's economy: The stock of labor, skills and talent increases.

To conclude, there is no evidence that the genocide led to a more flexible division of domestic and paid labor per se. Rather, it seems that roles and responsibilities within widow-headed households were rearranged to cope with the absence of the male breadwinner. In this regard, widows in Rwanda have much in common with *Trümmerfrauen* in Germany after WWII. It remains a topic for future research to explore the possible lasting impacts of the outlined mechanisms on gender roles in the cohort of children born after the genocide that no longer suffers from unbalanced sex ratios.

¹³ To approximate the marriage market, sex ratios in a person's potential cohort of partners in a given province are calculated from census data.

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