

Access to Paid Work and Women's Empowerment in Rwanda

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Abstract

This paper explores the issue of women's empowerment in Rwanda. It sheds light specifically on the issue of women's access to paid work. In general, there is a scholarly scarcity of research that looks at the relationship between women's access to paid work and their empowerment in the context of Rwanda. In particular, this paper serves as a contribution in this regard and posits that employability of women in paid jobs is a contributor to their empowerment and societal growth. This work uses two case studies of women working in the Cooperative "Abahuzamugambi" (AKM) situated in the rural area and OCIR Café located in Kigali the capital of Rwanda. The sample constitutes of 48 respondents – namely 8 widows, 8 married women and 8 young girls from each of both cases. In order to collect empirical data, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were carried out. These data collection methods aimed at exploring perceptions, attitudes and gather individual views of these women who are mostly illiterate and are often, less inclined of having alternatives in terms of access to paid jobs. The findings of this research suggest that the majority of women working in AKM and rural area were able to fulfill their needs soon after getting their job as compared to those of their category who remained in Kigali.

Key words: Access; paid work; women's empowerment; Rwanda.

0. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of the rise of women's access to paid work on their empowerment by focusing on female casual workers in Abahuzamugambi ba Kawa ya Maraba (AKM) located in a remote area and OCIR Café situated in Kigali city, the capital of Rwanda. As stated by Petrus Engstrom, (2007, p.1) "the past two decades have seen a massive influx of women in the labor force although there are significant variations from one region to another". However, this rise has mostly been in low-skilled and low paying jobs. In Rwanda, the majority (92.97%) of women working in the paid labor force is employed as casual workers in agriculture and informal sectors where the salary is very low (RLMIS, 2006). As a result, a great number of women remain poor. The total of 61% of women in Rwanda live below the poverty line compared with 59.3% of men, (Women for Women International, 2004).

The fact that women tend to be found in such kind of jobs is related with different factors including the constraints imposed by the division of domestic labor, low levels of education and social and cultural prescriptions that not only limit their access to labor markets but restrict their occupational and social mobility (Chen, et al., 2005& DAC, 2006). Regarding the kind of work the majority of women are found in, a question is raised to know whether they are getting empowered through such employment.

Many scholars have studied and presented controversial views about the relationship between paid work and women's empowerment in different countries but no one has analyzed the relationship between the two variables in Rwanda. On one hand, researchers like Sunny (2006) have found that participation in paid work, irrespective of the type of work, is likely to enhance women's empowerment significantly. Thus, women who take-up some form of paid work are far more autonomous than those who do not do so.

On the other hand, other scholars have identified the factors that hinder women's empowerment despite their access to paid work. They have listed factors such as, such change in fundamental traditional values, kind of job, and division of labor within the households. It is in this sense that Kabeer (2005) comments that women's access to paid work may give them a greater sense of self-reliance and greater purchasing power, but if it is undertaken in conditions that erode their health and exploit their labor, its costs may outweigh its benefits.

The lack of such studies in the context of Rwandan society is the reason of the present study. This study is crucial because it fills the shortfall in literature, which put in relation women's access to paid work and their empowerment in Rwanda. It is expected that the current study will help to provide concerned actors with relevant information on how women experienced the process of empowerment through paid work in Rwanda. It will discover if women's access to paid work and their empowerment are positively correlated and will give suggestions on improving the existing policies and formulating the new ones towards women's empowerment through paid work.

The government of Rwanda considers women's inclusion in economic activities as a way of empowering them and achieving gender equality the latter being one of the three cross-cutting areas of Rwandan vision 2020. The implication for Rwanda is that women's empowerment, particularly with respect to access to employment and earnings needs to be addressed as part of an overall strategy for sustained growth (Ezemenari, 2005).

Therefore, the goal of the study is to find out whether women's incorporation into paid work is likely to lead to their empowerment in Rwanda. For that goal, the following questions will be examined:

- Do women casual workers of AKIM and OCIR Company control the use of their salary?

- Does access to paid work increase their influence over economic resources and participation in decision making within the household?
- Does access to paid work increase their mobility, interactions with other members of their group and community and their participation in political activities?
- Does access to paid work bring changes in the division of labor within the households?
- Does access to paid job bring any change in the attitude of the husband/household/community regarding their empowerment through access to this job?
- Does participation in paid work enable women to develop their knowledge, awareness and self confidence?

This paper states that women's access to paid work does lead to their empowerment materialized in terms of control of the use of the salary, access to social mobility and interaction with other members of the group, changes in division of labor within the household, and change in fundamental traditional structural values. This statement is based on the fact many of Rwandan women especially widows, with the help of their unskilled jobs, have managed to take care of their families and overcome traditional gender roles which previously confined them into household tasks.

However, it is not scientific to conclude on whether, women's access to paid work leads to their empowerment or not in Rwanda without conducting a study taking into consideration Rwandan reality. To collect empirical data on a sample of 48 women chosen and key informants, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were used.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1 Women's empowerment

Empowerment has become a new buzzword in international development language but is often poorly understood (Oxal & Baden 1997). Since the mid-1980s, the term of women's empowerment has become popular in the development field (Batliwala, 1994). According to Kabeer (2005, p.13) empowerment is a process by which those who have been denied power gain power, in particular the ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. For this power to come about, three inter-related dimensions are needed: access to and control of resources; agency (the ability to use these resources to bring about new opportunities) and achievements (the attainment of new social outcomes).

To Shahra (2007, p.12) women's empowerment is "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination." Both Kabeer and

Shahra's definitions bring in, women's ability to make choices on their own life and control over resources which are among the crucial elements of women empowerment.

For Malhotra (2002) women's empowerment must be distinguished from the empowerment of other disadvantaged or socially excluded groups because, first, women are not just one among several disempowered sub-populations; instead they are a cross-cutting category of individuals that overlaps each of these other groups. Second, women's disempowerment is caused and reinforced through household and family relations much more so than is true for the disempowerment of other socially disadvantaged groups. Third, while empowerment of all disadvantaged groups requires a transformation of the power relations and hierarchies embedded in social and political institutions, empowering women requires, in particular, a focused transformation of all norms and institutions that support patriarchal structures. This author brings a useful element of change in biased traditional gender norms.

Drawn mainly from the feminist perspectives, many definitions contain the idea that a fundamental shift in perceptions, or inner transformation, is essential to the formulation of choices. The core of the meaning of women's empowerment lies in the ability of a woman to control her own destiny. It is in this line of ideas that Reeves and Baden (2000) cited in Chen, et al.,(2005) argue that empowerment is essentially a bottom-up process rather than something that can be formulated as a top-down strategy. This is a very important input, because to be empowered women must first recognize first that they have been disempowered and really show the commitment towards their empowerment, if it is not the case any attempt to empower them will fail.

1.2 Women's access to paid work

Since the 1970s, women found many opportunities in employment sector with the reform of the global economy (Standing, 1985). According to Razavi (2007) this increase in demand for women's labor has been extensively analyzed in terms of the comparative advantage of women's nimble fingers, the docility and productivity of women's work, and the resulting lower unit costs attainable with the employment of cheap female labor. Within these occupations, women are offered lower wages than men. The few women who are employed alongside men in white-collar jobs still tend to become ghettoized within traditionally female-friendly employment sectors such as education and health, rather than security or defense (Brubaker, 2006). Thus the occupations that women take up are still largely determined by popular conceptions of what is socially acceptable work for women. Social norms strongly influence men's and women's work and working environments and frequently underpin sex-segmented labor markets and activities. Highly sex-segmented labor markets typically confine women workers to low-wage, and can limit the responsiveness of labor markets to new demands for higher skilled workers (DAC 2006, p. 65)

Moreover, women who enter markets and engage in production may face different constraints than their male counterparts. Social and cultural proscriptions assign productive and reproductive roles to men and women that can limit their access to markets and restrict their occupational and sectoral mobility. The division of labor within the household affects women's ability to participate in paid employment, access to education and training and influences their choice of productive activities (DAC, 2006). The UNIFEM's (2001) report on "*Overview Progress of the World's Women 2000*" supplements this by saying that, mobility restrictions are the most important constraint to women's participation in the labor force, and the most instrumental determinant of what sort of occupation a women will choose to take up, in terms of its proximity to the home or private sphere.

By and large, development has not always brought greater freedom for women and in many cases women are expected to carry the double burden of both reproductive and productive tasks. Women's work lengthens considerably as their primary duty for the reproduction and maintenance of the household remains.

1.3 Women's paid work and empowerment: A mixed picture

The influence of paid work on women's empowerment continues to be the subject of enquiry for a growing number of empirical studies. Regarding the association of two variables- women's access to paid work and empowerment-, there are two opposing views.

One side reveals a positive correlation between the two. Umashankar (2006) and Sunny (2006) have stressed in their studies that paid employment is not only a critical to women's empowerment but also to the survival and security of poor households and an important route by which households escape poverty. In his study carried out in India, Sunny (2006) discovered that participation in paid work, irrespective of the type of work, is likely to enhance women's autonomy significantly. Thus, women who take-up some form of paid work are far more autonomous than those who do not do so.

Other studies have shown that working women have greater voice in household decisions, and are significantly more likely to participate in community and political activity. Malhotra (2004) supports this by saying that with the increasing decentralization of government and accompanying rise in participation of local communities in political decision-making, participation in work has become an important potential avenue through which women's civic participation could be enhanced.

Furthermore, Sunny (2006) argues that employed women are much more likely to have higher control over finances (more than three times), higher decision-making power (more than four times) and higher freedom of movement (nearly twice) than those who are not employed. However, according to Zamorano

(2004) the extent to which paid employment expands women's range of choices and their influence within the household is related to the type of job, level and security of pay, and other factors. A detailed study of women engaged in industrial homework in Mexico City noted that in households where women's economic contribution was critical to household survival, women had been able to negotiate a greater degree of respect (Malhotra and Mather 1997).

The perceived centrality of paid work in improving women's position within the recent historical experience of Western gender systems has been a major reason why feminist and development theories have implied the existence of a similar relationship in non-Western societies (Malhotra & Mather, 1997). However, there is much theoretical and practical inconclusiveness as to exactly what comprises empowerment, but plans of action universally stress improved educational and employment opportunities as critical means for women to attain greater control over their lives.

For the opposite side, the relationship between paid work and empowerment should not be taken for granted. The concept of women's empowerment is the outcome of important critiques generated by the women's movements, particularly by third world's feminists (Batliwala, 1994). They clearly state that women's empowerment requires the challenging of patriarchal power relations that result in women having less control over material assets and intellectual resources. Paid work does bring certain benefits, but those benefits are far from sufficient in effecting lasting changes in women's personal spheres. In some settings, particularly where women's income may be subject to uncertainty (such as in poor rural communities where earning may be seasonal), this may not provide women with the opportunity to challenge or leave an abusive partner (Kabeer, 2005). The inability to bring lasting changes does not, however, necessarily imply that paid work is unimportant altogether.

Many obstacles remain to women enjoying a better return for their participation in the labor market and more scope for shaping the institutions and policies of the societies in which they live. A number of studies highlight the exploitative conditions of work in which women are generally found. While opportunities for women to earn an income have increased, the nature, terms, and quality of women's employment have not improved consequently. Having access to paid work is critical to family survival, but it is not sufficient for reducing poverty or empowering women.

Women's empowerment does not necessarily take place when incomes are generated or enhanced. This is because within families and households, hierarchies and structures do not alter. Access to resources is distinct from control over them, and only the latter can be considered an indicator of power (Malhotra & Mather, 1997). Given this distinction, it is worth to mention that, even though access to paid work can be considered as an important way to

empower women, it does not automatically indicate control. Many working women have always to ask permission from their husbands before taking any decision on the use of their salary. This is because men have culturally been regarded as the head of the family with the duty to take all important decisions regarding the family. This underscores the need to move away from the limited measures of access to paid work to consider also fundamental traditional structural factors which restrain women from controlling their income.

In some of the cases, women's activities -such as paid work, self employment, access to loans etc- which result in new avenues of income generation can actually accentuate tensions within households. Sunny (2006) reports that larger percentages of women earning money tend to experience domestic violence than women who do not participate in the workforce. Batliwala (1994) points out that; empowerment is not a necessary result of economic strength because rich women suffer from domestic abuse and rape, too.

Conclusively, it is not worthy to blame men or women for gender inequality but both those who suffer from and those that perpetrate inequality are victims of social structure. Consequently, the process of empowerment should involve, both women and men recognizing the ideology that legitimizes male domination and understanding how it perpetuates women's oppression.

Women's empowerment cannot be assumed to be an automatic outcome of access to financial means. Women's empowerment requires systemic transformation in most institutions, but fundamentally in those supporting patriarchal structures. This is because as long as woman is still under the domination of man, she will always have to ask permission before using her salary and she will remain forever overburdened by the combination of tiring reproductive work and productive work outside home. Another important element is that the association between paid work and women's autonomy is variable according to regions or contexts; region specific factors may influence and alter the nature and extent of the association (Sunny, 2006).

2. Brief overview of women's employment and empowerment in Rwanda

2.1 Labor market trends in Rwanda

The vast majority of economically active adults in Rwanda are subsistence farmers working on family farms. In the EICV2⁷ (2007), 71% of the working population was classified as subsistence farmers in their main job. Females are disproportionately represented in agricultural occupation in urban and rural area. In Kigali, urban area, the largest proportion of women works in the service

⁷ EICV2 is a French abbreviation meaning "Enquête Intégrée sur les Conditions de Vie des ménages au Rwanda" with the English translation of Household Living Conditions Survey 2 (HLCS2)

sector and commercial occupations. In rural area, 93% of women are found in agricultural and fishery services against 79% of men. The figures show that the proportion of women in semi-skilled operatives, senior officials and managers positions and professional positions is very low compared to men because, women access's to education has been limited or constrained by culture.

The move away from unpaid family subsistence farming is much more marked for males than for females. For women the largest numerical change in the workforce structure has been the increase in paid agricultural work (the poorest paid of all work), while for men the largest increase is in paid nonagricultural work. The employment of women in paying jobs is most often constrained by domestic chores. The findings from the report of EICV2 (2007) show that women over 21 years devote around five times the amount of time to domestic duties compared with men. Women carry out on average 20 additional hours of work in running their homes and families.

Moreover, the results suggest that women are working longer hours with lower wages. This is due to the fact that women are mostly employed in part-time work or informal sector. They tend to work in small enterprises where the salary is very low.

Gender inequality in labor market can have adverse effects on economic growth. With the percentage of 52, 27, women constitute the majority of Rwandan population. The ineffective use of this force is a loss for the country in terms of productivity important source for economic growth. The implication for Rwanda is that gender equality, particularly with respect to access to employment and earnings, needs to be addressed as part of an overall strategy for sustained growth (Ezemenari, 2005). It is in this regard that the government of Rwanda has put in place the strategies to increase women's access to employment. These include measures to improve water supply, health care and home energy supplies to reduce the constraint on women's participation in the labor market and betterment of the working conditions for women within the framework of a new and revised labor code (MIFOTRA, 2006).

2.2 Efforts for women empowerment in Rwanda

Political will, promising policy, and legislative changes have supported the efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in Rwanda. The Government of Rwanda in collaboration with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) has put in place a series of policies and actions to enhance women empowerment. To mention a few, those are for example the revision of laws which were discriminatory, good strides made in formulating a National Gender Policy, elaboration of The National Gender Plan of Action (August 2000), creation of Ministry of Gender and Women in Development (MIGEPROFE), the passage of the Law of Matrimonial Regimes, Succession and Liberalities, and the mainstreaming of gender equality into national strategies, such as the

Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), (MIGEPROFE, 2002). To be empowered women have to have a say in institutions where decision are taken. Efforts in this domain are significant. Following the 2008 parliamentary elections, women secured 45 out of 80 seats (56.25%), making the Rwanda's Parliament the first in the world to have women in the majority (UNIFEM, 2008).

To increase women's economic power, women are encouraged to become entrepreneurs. Once they present a fundable project they receive small funds in different domains: agriculture, commerce, and handcraft. To increase girl's enrolment and completion, many activities have been initiated. For example, every year, award ceremonies take place throughout Rwanda for some of the best performing girls throughout Rwanda's primary and secondary schools. This kind of incentive was made possible by a partnership between UNICEF and Imbuto, a foundation led by First Lady Jeannette Kagame which has rewarded more than 2000 girls since 2004 (<http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/unifeed/d/12567.html> retrieved on January 30, 2009).

Despite the significant strides in promoting girls' education and women's empowerment, problems still persist when it comes to school completion and enrolment in post-primary institutions for many girls. Besides, there is still gender imbalance in the top echelons of the private and public sector and in the labor market generally.

3. Cases analysis, Material and Methods

3.1 Brief presentation of the cases

Abahuzamugambi ba kawa ya Maraba (AKM): Rwandans have been growing coffee since colonial time, but until 1999 the quality was very low, making it unsalable in the global markets. The farmers did not have the means to wash adequately their coffee cherries. In 1999, 220 coffee growers formed an association in the Maraba district to tackle this problem. Around 90% of women working in AKM are farmers and members of the cooperative. Many of them lost family members during the 1994 genocide of Tutsi. Others have their husbands in prison accused of participating in the killings. They named the association *Abahuzamugambi*, a Kinyarwanda word for people who work together to achieve common desired results. Membership in Maraba has grown from 300 members in 2001 to 1,568 in 2004 (Gonzalez, 2005&Goff, 2006). Daily workers earn 700Rwf that is slightly above \$1 per day.

OCIR café situated in Kigali city, the capital of Rwanda, was created in 1964 with a mission of supervising coffee related activities in the country, from production to commercialization. Since its creation, the role played by OCIR Café has resulted in comforting and perpetuating the coffee culture in Rwanda. OCIR Café does not work on its own but work closely with different companies, farmers grouped in cooperatives and private individuals. It coordinates all their activities regarding coffee production, processing and exportation. Different

cooperatives operating there are among others, SOPROCAF, SOPECAF, KCC, CDC, ENAS, CBC, and KAYCO. The number of women employed casually in OCIR Café varies between about 1500 during the slack season and 2500 during the busy season. (OCIR Café, Rwanda Café Authority <http://amis.minagri.gov.rw/fr/content/ocir-Café-rwanda-Café-authority> retrieved on December, 2008)

AKM and OCIR Café have been chosen because they employ numerous casual and low skilled women constituting the target group of this study. Additionally, AKM is located in a remote area and OCIR Café in Kigali city, the capital of Rwanda. So, analyzing the findings from distinctive areas gave useful and trustful information, as attitudes, way of living and beliefs differ according to whether one lives in rural or urban areas.

3.2 Materials and Methods

The study covers the period of 1999- 2008. The year of 1999 being the time AKM has been established, and 2008 preceding 2009, the year of the study. The universe of the study is composed by women working casually in AKM and OCIR Café. However, it is not easy to know the exact number because it always varies depending on the size of the production and the season especially in OCIR Café. Those women are constituted by married, unmarried and widows. To collect useful information all the three categories are represented in the sample of 48 respondents. A number of 24 women were chosen from each company meaning 8 married women, 8 unmarried and 8 widows. The selection of the sample was done using a purposive sampling.

Since in AKM the majority of women are members of the cooperative, the sample also included members and no-members respondents. To collect data from the respondents, I used Focus group discussions (FGDs) with the aim to openly discuss on perceptions, attitudes and views on empowerment through access to paid work. FGDs are suitable for this kind of study because some women are illiterate and collecting data using lively discussion is better than asking questions and filling questionnaires by researcher. The size of 8 women for each group discussion is drawn from the ideal size suggested by different authors (Mikkelsen, 2005).

I met and talked to respondents in their working place with the permission of their officials. In order to increase accuracy and capture the actual words of the person being interviewed and the whole discussion during FGDs I used a tape recorder. Word for word note taking was not possible given the depth and length of the interview and FGDs sessions. Using a tape recorder enabled me to give my full attention to the respondents, and also be reflexive in terms of framing and restructuring questions and giving clarifications in case of misunderstanding. This was done of course after receiving the interviewer's permission.

To enrich the information got through FGDs, I had semi-structured interviews with some employers who may provide additional information. By working closely with casual women and for a long time, they have been able to experience some changes in the life of their workers and may have future plan on their behalf. I talked to: the executive secretary of AKM, 2 animators of AKM, and 3 team leaders in OCIR Café in Kigali.

The interview and FGDs guides used are composed by open-ended question reflecting the following indicators on which empowerment have been measured:

- Increase influence over economic resources and participation in decision making in the households
- Increase of awareness and knowledge
- Change in the division of labor within the households
- Increased of mobility, interactions with other members of the group and community, and participation in political activities
- Change in the attitude of the husband/household/community regarding your empowerment through access to this job.

To analyze the results, the taped interviews and data from FGDs which were in Kinyarwanda were transcribed verbatim and then translated into English and typed out. I included the respondents' quotations in the empirical analysis to give some cases of women's emotions, perceptions, experiences and thoughts in direct voice.

4. Results

The interviews demonstrate how the employment opportunities have changed economically, socially and psychologically the lives of working women. Thus, empowerment of women employed at AKM and OCIR Café is analyzed by looking at six different indicators: (1) change in the overall well being, (2) control of use of salary, (3) decision making in the household level, (4) freedom of movement and access to social place (development of networks and interaction with other members), (5) division of labor within the households (between husband and wife), and (6) improvement of self-esteem. The following sections present the narratives of women about their perceptions, experiences and thoughts regarding paid work.

4.1 Fulfillment of their financial needs

The findings show that the majority of women working in AKM in the rural area filled their needs since they got the job contrary to those working in the capital of Rwanda. The latter said that this job did not help them much because the salary was very little. They only did it because there was no choice. Even if women in both areas said that the money was very little, those working in rural area highly appreciated the importance of their job. They said that they have seen their lives changed since they begun working. They have been able to solve

financial problems such as paying medical bills and school fees for their children, bought cattle and rehabilitated their houses.

Beside the salary they get, those who have coffee plantations have learned to take care of their plantations and produce better quality coffee.

“As they pay us monthly or after two weeks, we manage to make a plan of our salary instead of spending it daily. With my salary, I rehabilitated my coffee plantation. I even hired a helper to work in my plantation. Because of the care I give to my plantation, the production has doubled.” (54 year old widow)

Not only widows in AKM asserted that their lives improved due to the money they got, also married and young girls working there had the same opinion. One may think that the little salary they earn has been supplemented by the production from their plantation, for some cases yes. But non-members have also recognize the significant important of their job.

The statements are corroborated by an extensive body of research that shows that women are more likely than men to spend the income that they control on food, education, and health care for their children said Geeta (2006, p.4) citing (Guyer 1988; Thomas 1992; Haddad, Hoddinott, & Alderman 1997). Narratives of respondents revealed that Women are inclined to utilize a greater amount of their earnings on the family and domestic expenses, consequently an increase in women's income have a greater effect on family welfare. Respondents showed a high level of altruism, with the welfare of their husband, children.

The money they earned helped some of them in running and expanding small businesses. They have developed also the spirit of saving. One of the respondents said: *“We all almost are member of ‘popular rural Bank’, we have bank account and when we earn our salary we save a small amount which supports us during the slack coffee season because during the said time we do not have job.”* (60 year old widow). Due to the money earned from the job, a young respondent has managed to start a canteen and it is now running well.

The table below gives a summary of the reasons why the responses from rural and urban areas on the fulfillment of economic needs through paid work are different.

Table 1: Differences according to geographical location

| Case studies Differences | AKM in the rural area | OCIR Café in the capital of Rwanda |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Depending only on the salary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ The salary is supplemented by other means of living: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The majority has land where they produce food, others have coffee plantations. - The majority is members of AKM and due to that they can get small loans. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ They only depend on their salary especially widows with small children, Orphans headed families, and married women with jobless husband. - None has land in the town among the respondents, they buy everything. - They do not form a cooperative or association, they are individual. |
| Living costs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Living cost is moderate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They can get water for free from streams in valleys. - The majority live in their own house even if their status is not good - They can collect firewood from the forests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Living cost is very high <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They all pay for water - The majority live in rented houses. - They have to buy charcoal |
| Job stability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ The work is almost stable during the harvest: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The list of women working there is known and they have guarantee that absolutely during the season there will go to work. They all work for one Cooperative AKM. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ The work is very unstable, very casual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is no known list, every morning there is a selection of those who work for the day. This is because they are hired by different companies and private individuals carrying their activities in OCIR Café |

Source: Constructed by the author based on the views of respondents

The findings show that the way in which women's paid work has economically helped the respondents largely depends on which area they are working - rural or urban. The next section explains if the participation in the paid work has brought with it some changes in the role of women in decision making within the household. It also looks at how the decisions are taken when money is to be used.

4.2 Control of the use of the salary, participation in decision making and division of domestic labor

Many respondents in the rural area of Maraba revealed that when they started working the neighbors and even the family members did not appreciate it. They were viewed as taking an opposite direction with the social norms. They were not able to understand how a woman can spend the whole day (almost more than 10hrs) outside home without taking care of the children and household chores. Later the neighboring community and family members of the respondents recognized the usefulness of the work done by them. Today the parents and the

husband are praying so that their daughters and wives can get the job from AKM.

Deepti (2006) points out that the improvement of women's status has led to changes in their relationship with men, with family members and with the whole community and often brings conflict that is an inevitable phase of the empowerment process. As long as women do not challenge their gender subordination and remain less powerful there is no conflict. However, once they move fast into masculine roles and masculine world, confrontations and inevitable.

The participation in paid work in AKM has changed the people's mind about the role of women. It has also allowed an equitable share of domestic responsibilities for some respondents. *"My husband and I help each other. My home is not far from here and during the break time I go home for lunch. When I reach home I find everything ok, lunch ready. He takes care of children and all needed work during my absence."*(Respondent from AKM).

Sometimes, they finish the work very late and reach home around six o'clock in the evening but they do not fight with family members because they know where they were. This has been also confirmed by the interviews with the executive secretary of AKM. He said that *"if any conflict has occurred we would have heard it/ have been informed."* Both the respondents and key informants revealed that the parents have trust in their daughters and husbands in their wives who work there because any bad behavior has been recorded since they started working. They know that when they leave home in the morning they go for work. They also know that they are busy with the work the whole day from morning to evening, no time to spend in untruthful activities.

It is shown that the majority of the respondents tend to have considerable control over their earnings. Married women jointly decide with their husband on how the little salary should be used. This is a specially the case for women working in AKM because the extent of control seems to decline within the category of married women, especially among women working in Kigali. Their husbands do not ask to share the salary; neither had they provided anything for the family saying that the wife has to meet all the need of the family as she has a paying job. But as they said, the money is very little to meet all household's needs. Widows have a full control of their salary while parents have a say on how the money their daughter earn should be spent.

The following statements illustrate that paid work brings changes in household decision making to the extent that some women recognize their increased role indecision-making. *"Earlier, my husband used to take decision alone. But now, he himself asks me my opinion when there is a debatable issue at home, He says that I should attend the meetings, go to work on time. There is a lot of change in the men's attitude."*(Respondent from AKM)

The findings show that the majority of respondents have freedom in the use of their salary especially in rural areas of Maraba. There have been changes in the division of labor and women are more consulted when the decision are to be taken. From these findings, I can say that without ignoring other intervening factors like the character, the level of education etc of the family members; it is assumed that the participation in the paid work paved a smooth road to women's empowerment. This job also opened women's mind, develop their friendship, increased self confidence as the following section give the details. Thus, beyond 600Rwf they earn for their salary, respondents recognize other non financial benefits gained.

4.3 Development of networks, interactions with others and improvement of self- esteem

Women workers confirmed that their job help them on the social side of life because they meet at work and talk about all kinds of common issues. It brings them close together than ever before. Access to job has thus helped them to realize their identity, capability, strengths and power. They also have greater self-confidence and awareness of their rights. Empowerment for women also means being able to overcome shyness, to talk and act confidently. *“Earlier when I used to stay at home, few people knew me. Now when I go out, a lot of people talk to me. I am now able to express my opinions, my feelings in public. I feel like I have value.”* (Respondent from AKM)

To the respondents from AKM, involvement in paid work has enabled them to have a voice in the local affairs of the village. Their statements illustrate that women have found a voice in community affairs in contrast to the silence which existed earlier. As Deepti (2006) mentioned in her study the most obvious illustration of the 'fault line of gender' is the split between the public male world of politics, and the private female world of the family and the household. However, women's participation in paid work has altered many of them, and these women are leaders in the local political field. *“For example, I am coordinator of girls and women in the sector. Last time I participated in one month training. So you can understand how far women working here have gone in terms of empowerment.”*(45year old respondent)

Before starting this job, the life of some women especially widows and orphans were marked out by stress, poor self-esteem, and dependency but the participation in this job has changed the situation: the women spoke of increases in levels of confidence and self-esteem, a change in perceptions, a feeling of strength and a movement away from restriction and constraints. The majority of the respondents is socially and psychologically more secure.

“When my life was completely dark, when I had lost all hope, when I had no support, I found the support of the group. Despite the little salary, I gained a lot from the job. Before I was like dead, but when I got a job, I found that they have a praying group and I joined it .Since then they prayed for me and

my health begun to be relieved. I feared people but later I joined the choir in my home town. Today I am very happier, I get known in the parish in which I am an advisor in the prayers and in the choir here at OCIR Café”
(Respondant from OCIR Café)

Both respondents and key informants recognized that women have also developed more valuable habit and dropped negative ones. In AKM, the responsible told me that at the beginning women had the traditional habit of sucking the flour or leaves of tobacco. It is a very dirty habit because whoever does it, spit out very frequently and her teeth become black. So they have been told that they will never let anyone to go on with such dirty habit. Actually this habit is almost forgotten among them. Additionally they have been told to take shower every morning before work and to put on washed clothes and shoes. In rural villages of Rwanda many people used to walk with naked feet. Respondents were very proud of the outcome because they all looked clean. They said that they have acquired the habit of civilized people and they were able to teach them to the members of their family and to be the examples to their neighbors.

4.4 Means of unity and reconciliation

The job in AKM and OCIR Café brings together married women from different ethnic groups (Hutu and Tutsi): survivors widows whose husband and children have been killed during 1994 Tutsi genocide, women whose husbands, children, and relatives are in jail because of presumably participating in the 1994 Tutsi genocide. In the beginning it was not easy for the antagonistic groups to spend the whole day together, they feared each other. They feared other people's reaction when they got to know that their husbands are in jail. On other part, survivors were also reluctant to work alongside people whose relatives were accused of having killed their families. Their participation in paid work has helped them bypass their individualism and act as women with commonality of interests. They have carved out an identity above caste, age or religion. The women belonging to all castes assemble together although earlier divisive history of Rwanda has not encouraged them to do so.

The findings in both cases have showed that women recognized to have had gained other benefits than the salary. From those findings and from observation during the focus group discussion, I have realized that respondents working in OCIR Café in the capital are not very close to each other as respondents working in the rural area. The reasons include among others the fact that in OCIR Café there is no agreed list of casual workers because every morning different companies and individuals select their own workers who have to work for that day while in AKM they know each other and work together every day and most of them are members of AKM. Thus, beyond the work they have something else bringing them together

4.5 Hindrances to women empowerment, suggestions and future plans

The big challenge stated by all the respondents in two cases is the salary which is very little considering the living costs. This problem has been very much stressed by respondents especially in OCIR Café. The majority revealed that they sacrifice their lunch to be able to share the few they earn with their family's members. They all suggested that the money should be increased at least from 600Rwf to 800Rwf. They have also criticized the long hours of work considering the salary they get.

Their direct boss also recognizes the insufficiency of the salary. The executive Secretary of AKM mentioned that this particularly resulted in high competition among coffee sellers. There are a lot of coffee sellers in a small area and this keeps the salary down. They are trying to see how they can increase the salary he said.

Regarding the complaints about long working hours, the Executive Secretary of AKM said that to solve the problem of going back home very late evening which is risky, they are thinking of dividing women into two groups which should alternate. This means that one group will work in the morning and another one in the afternoon.

Additionally, women from OCIR Café complained about a total instability in their work. As we mentioned earlier in the paper, there are many companies and individuals processing their coffee in OCIR Café buildings. Due to that every morning each of them chose the workers who should work for him or for the company for one day and this is done every morning. Thus, respondents wished to have a fixed list so that they can know that these women work for that company and those ones work for another. They stated that this is very insecure, because they wake up very early in the morning and come to the OCIR Café with the probability of being not chosen.

Besides those challenges raised by the respondents, the executive secretary of AKM mentioned others. Women lack some skills due to their low level of education. Technically they do well their job but when it comes to the matter of explaining what they do to foreign visitors for example it becomes problem. He said that they had started to teach them the basic words of English but this initiative has stopped. Firstly, because of the lack of teachers. It was done by students who finish their studies and looking for job. So they did it as a part time job and when they got a full time job they left immediately.

The second reason is that the AKM is running out of money which was provided for this program. There has been a mismanagement of the Cooperative and it went bankruptcy due to that reason it was not possible to pay for those extra social activities. Additionally they are thinking on how to help women to develop entrepreneurial spirit so that they can find another business during the slack season.

5. Discussion of findings

After a careful analysis of benefits and hindrances regarding the impact of women paid work on their empowerment in both cases AKM and OCIR café, the findings confirm that the results partially stand in conformity with the statement that “*Women’s access to paid work that does lead to their empowerment*”.

On one hand, the majority of respondents from AKM affirm that they have been empowered considering all six indicators. Paid work has helped them to meet their basic economic needs and those of their families. It has changed the members of their families’ and neighboring community’s mind regarding women’s role. They have overcome traditional structural norms which used to confine them in domestic chores. For example, they are allowed by their husbands to spend several days outside their home in training when necessary. Moreover, they discuss with their husbands and family members about the use of the salary and fulfill reproductive tasks in their absence.

On the other hand, it is not worth to assume the statement at 100% because it appears reasonably clear that paid work does not seem to be associated with all six indicators for respondents from OCIR Café. The majority of them do not see much improvement in their life resulting from paid work. They assert that they cannot be empowered through this paid work because it is considered as a pass time. The money they earn is very little to improve their well being and the work is very unstable to empower them. The life in town is very costly and the work is very unstable. Despite the insufficiency of the salary and job instability, some of them recognize that the work helped them to open their mind and to overcome stress, loneliness, and poor-self-esteem.

From this understanding, the relationship between paid work and women’s empowerment should not be taken for guaranteed. It should be considered in relative terms and not absolute ones, because many factors intervene to make it positive or negative. The findings show that the way in which the paid work empower women depends on which area they are working-rural or urban, kind of job (stable or unstable, formal or informal) and the amount of the money they earn. Women’s access to paid work empowers women only if those intervening factors are taken into consideration.

6. Conclusion, suggestions for further studies and policy recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The recent decades have been marked by an increase in women’s access to paid work due to the reforms in the global economy. This rise is remarkable in low paying and less skills jobs in informal sector because the majority of women do not have skills and level of education allowing them to secure senior positions. This is the case in Rwanda where 92.97% of women is in low skilled job in informal sector. Many scholars who have studied the relationship between

women paid work and empowerment, presented controversial views. Some studies conducted mainly in Asian countries have confirmed a positive correlation between two variables while others state that this positive relation should not be taken as guaranteed. The lack of such studies in Rwanda has been the main reason of this study. The latter focused on women working in AKM situated in rural area and OCIR Café located in the capital of Rwanda. Data were collected using focus groups discussions with 48 women and interviews with six key informants.

To measure the abstract term of empowerment, the study used six indicators: (1) change in the overall well being, (2) control of use of salary, (3) decision making in the household level, (4) freedom of movement and access to social place (development of networks and interaction with other members), (5) division of labor within the households (between husband and wife), and (6) improvement of self-esteem.

Focus group and interviews data based on above indicators helped to test the statement that “women’s paid work does lead to their empowerment”. The results of the study partially corroborated this statement. On one hand, an examination of findings showed that poor women with low literacy levels from rural area of Maraba Sector were able to take their first steps toward empowerment with the help of access to paid work in AKM, while Respondents from urban area did not see many changes in their lives brought by their access to paid work. They criticized it for being unstable with a very low salary. Due to those findings, paid work does not inevitably lead to women empowerment except when other intervening factors are taken into consideration. This study focused on low skilled women working casually in informal sector, and the results are only valid for this specific group.

6.2 Constraints encountered during the study and direction for future studies

During the data collection I encountered a number of constraints related to financial because it was a self sponsored study and technical problems. Due to those constraints I limited the area to be covered and the size of the sample to be considered. For this reason I give suggestions for further studies:

A very wide study with respondents from different corner of Rwanda is needed. The value attached to social norms and traditional beliefs regarding gender issues and women empowerment are not the same in every corner of Rwanda. That means that the experience of women working casually in the rural village of Maraba in regard to their empowerment cannot be easily replicated to all women working casually in all rural areas of the country. Similarly, the experiences of women in the city of Kigali are not a replica of what all women working casually and living in the cities experience. Another study that would include respondents from all parts of the country- Northern, southern, Eastern

and Western provinces is recommended. In this study, the views of men should be considered because the process of women's empowerment involves both men and women working together. Such study would also consider women working informally in the non agricultural sector. It should also consider other factors that may play a non negligible role in the process of empowering women such as the level of education of women, their husbands or other members of their families, employment of other family members, marital duration and the character of the husband.

6.3 Policy recommendations

Empowerment cannot be imposed from top. Rather, it is essentially a bottom up process, as women must empower themselves. However, they need assistance and facilitation from above (Deepti 2006). The first kind of assistance women need is sufficient information. Informed women are better equipped to take advantage of opportunities, access services, exercise their rights negotiate and hold state and non-state actors accountable. In Maraba women asserted that they have been educated about some topics - AIDS, poverty reduction and gender issues but this is not done in a satisfactory way. For respondents from OCIR Café those trainings are nonexistent. I urge governmental and no-governmental actors dealing with women issues to take this opportunity where women are gathered to provide some useful information necessary for empowering women.

Additionally, to improve women's bargaining power would thus need strengthening both their economic situation, and changing gendered norms and perceptions. I urge the responsible officials of AKM, and of different companies operating in OCIR café to think of increasing the salary of their casual women workers. This will give women more value and be considered as important contributors to the wellbeing of their family and to the whole neighboring community.

Also government actors should work closely with the responsible of private companies to review working condition policies. The emergence of new forms of employment contracts characterized by flexibility (part-time, temporary work, self-employment) has the potential to increase female labor force participation. However, in the view of the poor quality of many of these jobs, it is far to dream a sort of empowerment from them. In addition, very long working hours also restrict time available to dedicate to family life and efforts are necessary to reduce excessive working hours and to increase salaries.

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